



*Sultanate of Oman
Oman Authority for
Academic Accreditation and
Quality Assurance of Education*



Programme Standards Assessment Manual

(Programme Accreditation)

February 2023

Version 1

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and Quality Assurance of Education

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FOREWORD

On behalf of the Board of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA), I have pleasure in introducing the Programme Standards Assessment Manual. OAAAQA, as established by Royal Decree 9/2021, is mandated with regulating the quality of higher education to ensure that it meets with international standards and to encourage Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to improve the quality of their provision. As part of this mandate, OAAAQA is tasked with developing and implementing a process for the accreditation of academic programmes. In this, OAAAQA builds on an expectation that was originally stated in the Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ROSQA) in 2004 (see Appendix A for a list of source materials).¹

OAAAQA implements a range of External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities that aim to ensure the quality of HEIs, the services they provide and the programmes they deliver, are of an acceptable standard. The OAAAQA's EQA activities include (see Appendix B for a list of terms and abbreviations):²

- Institutional Quality Audit (IQA)
- Institutional Standards Assessment (ISA)
- Programme Standards Assessment (PSA)
- General Foundation Programme Quality Audit (GFPQA)
- Reassessment Activities, such as Institutional Standards Reassessment (ISR) and Programme Standards Reassessment (PSR)
- Institutional and Programme Reaccreditation Activities
- Appeal Process
- International EQA (IEQA) review of applications and publication of outcomes

All OAAAQA EQAs are subject to appeal in line with national laws and the International Standards and Guidelines (ISGs) for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education as articulated by the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).³ Following the successful implementation of the Institutional Accreditation system, the HEI Sector in Oman, together with parents, students and other stakeholders, have anticipated that a similar system will be established to assess and accredit academic programmes in line with the OAAAQA's Mission in 'Guiding and supporting the education sector in Oman to meet the relevant national priorities and objectives while maintaining internationally benchmarked standards'. This manual encapsulates that system, referred to as PSA, and gives guidance in the deployment of PSA activities and the expression of accreditation outcomes, essential to ensuring that programmes and qualifications are of high quality and good repute nationally and internationally.

Institutional Accreditation is a prerequisite for Programme Accreditation while aspects of the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF) Listing and Re-Listing procedure is aligned with the PSA process and embedded within the programme standards.⁴ HEIs may feel confident, therefore, that all OAAAQA's mandatory requirements fit together as a comprehensive quality assurance system.

The purpose of this manual is to present the national system for Programme Accreditation in the context of its rationale and purpose; it also includes the programme standards and details regarding PSA implementation. All those involved in Programme Accreditation are encouraged to study this manual carefully and carry out PSA activities as per the instructions published within. I hope all involved in PSA finds the process a positive and productive experience.

HE Prof Rahma Al Mahrooqi
Board Chairperson, OAAAQA

¹ Appendix A lists source materials referred to in this document.

² Appendix B lists abbreviations, acronyms and terms used in this document.

³ See INQAAHE website: <https://www.inqaah.com>

⁴ Wherever 'Listing and Re-Listing' is referred to herein, please note this also includes the concepts of 'Alignment and Re-Alignment'.

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INTRODUCTION

This Programme Standards Assessment Manual (PSA Manual) is divided in seven distinct parts:

- **Part A:** Programme Accreditation Overview
- **Part B:** Programme Standards
- **Part C:** Accreditation Outcome and Ratings against Standards and Criteria
- **Part D:** The Self-Assessment
- **Part E:** The External Assessment
- **Part F:** Methods of Analysis
- **Part G:** Appendices

There are three targeted readerships for this manual: HEIs and their programme teams, PSA and PSR Panels, and other stakeholders. Other stakeholders may include students, the public, employers, the professions, supervising ministries, institutional affiliates, and includes OAAAQA staff and their contracted representatives. While each section is written with a particular readership in mind (see Table 1), all parts of the PSA and PSR process are included in this Manual and all those engaged in PSA and PSR are encouraged to become familiar with the content of the PSA Manual. A supplement to this manual is given to External Reviewers when invited to join a Panel, detailing roles and responsibilities.

Table 1: PSA Manual Content Summary and Key Audience

Part	Content	Readership
A	<p>Programme Accreditation Overview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section provides a summary of the Higher Education National Quality Management System's elements and frameworks. • It includes an introduction to PSA. • A timeline outlining the PSA process provides a comprehensive overview of the different stages involved. 	All stakeholders
B	<p>Programme Standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section details the three standards used for Programme Accreditation. • Each standard is related to a broad area of activity, and each consists of distinct criteria. • Some of the programme standards and/or criteria will not be applicable to all HEIs and their programmes; HEIs are required to address only those standards applicable to their context, and the characteristics of their programmes. • A list of indicators accompanies each criterion; these provide support to HEIs when preparing their PSA Application (PSAA) but they are not compulsory requirements and HEIs may choose to provide alternative evidence of how they have met each criteria. 	All stakeholders
C	<p>Accreditation Outcome and Ratings against Standards and Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section provides information on the ratings to be used when evaluating performance against the criteria and how these ratings inform both standard and accreditation outcomes. • Descriptions are provided for the expected levels of provision or practice related to each rating. • Both HEIs and PSA Panels rate the performance of a programme against all applicable criteria using these ratings. 	All stakeholders
D	<p>The Self-Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section discusses the principles underpinning the PSA. • It introduces the format of the self-assessment (PSAA) and provides information on how to complete and submit the PSAA. • Advice is also provided in this section on conducting a trial self-assessment. 	HEIs and Programme Teams

Table 1: PSA Manual Content Summary and Key Audience

Part	Content	Readership
E	<p>The External Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section outlines the PSA assessment protocols and the roles and responsibilities of various parties, including the PSA Panel Members and the OAAAQA Review Director. • It provides information on the logistical requirements for the Panel Visit, and describes the mechanism and steps required in drafting the PSA Report. • In addition, this section outlines the processes to be followed by an HEI wishing to appeal the Accreditation Outcome and the feedback mechanisms used by the OAAAQA upon completion of the PSA. 	PSA Panels, HEIs, Programme Teams
F	<p>Methods of Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section provides a description of some of the methods of analysis that PSA Panels use when examining evidence provided by HEIs. • A section on how to apply an ADRI approach to analysis is covered in this section; this is the approach used by PSA Panels to inform their assessment and HEIs are encouraged to use the same approach in their self-assessment. • Information is provided about Panel Visit interviews, particularly from the perspective of HEIs. • In addition, some advice is given on how to benchmark performance against that of similar HEIs nationally and internationally. 	PSA Panels, HEIs and Programme Teams
G	<p>Appendices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This section provides a range of information including key templates. • HEIs are provided with electronic links to data templates and forms made available on the OAAAQA website. 	HEIs, Programme Teams and PSA Panels

PART A: PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION OVERVIEW

1. The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

1.1. Royal Decree

OAAAQA was established by Royal Decree 09/2021 on 13 January 2021. OAAAQA replaced Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), established through Royal Decree 54/2010 on 3 May 2010, which in turn replaced the former Oman Academic Council (OAC). OAAAQA is an entity with legal status and financial and administrative independence which reports to the Cabinet. OAAAQA was established to continue the efforts initiated by the OAC and OAAA in the dissemination of a quality culture and accreditation of institutions and programmes in Oman as well as the development and maintenance of the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF) and the quality assurance of schools.

1.2. OAAAQA Vision, Mission and Values

OAAAQA's Vision, Mission and Values are consistent with Royal Decree 09/2021 and the Sultanate of Oman's Vision 2040.

Vision To assure the world of the quality of education in Oman

Mission Guiding and supporting the education sector in Oman to meet the relevant national priorities and objectives while maintaining internationally benchmarked standards

Values

- **Integrity** We believe in fairness, honesty and respect and we adhere to the highest standards of integrity in interacting with all stakeholders.
- **Professionalism** We apply our skills, knowledge and best judgment in order to carry out our mission effectively.
- **Transparency** We ensure all stakeholders have relevant accessibility to our processes and decisions while respecting confidentiality where applicable.
- **Reflectiveness** We employ reflection to inform continuous quality enhancement in all our processes.
- **Commitment to International Good Practices** We strive to ensure that all our work processes comply with international good practices.
- **Accountability** We believe that we are accountable to all our stakeholders in ensuring that our mandate is achieved.
- **Collaboration** We value input from all stakeholders to ensure that our work remains responsive to their needs.
- **Diversity** We respect diversity of professional opinion while encouraging innovation and creativity.

1.3. OAAAQA Structure and Organisation

Information about structure and organisation is available on the OAAAQA website,⁵ but in summary OAAAQA is comprised of three elements:

- The Board appointed by the Cabinet with governance responsibilities for OAAAQA
- The Executive Office comprised of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and technical and administrative staff who conduct OAAAQA's day-to-day activities.
- The Register of External Reviewers comprising locally-based and international appointees who have been approved by OAAAQA to participate in EQA activities.

⁵ See OAAAQA website: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/>.

2. The National Higher Education Quality Management System

2.1 Development of National Higher Education Quality Management System

The initial version of the national higher education quality management system was known as 'Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance' (ROSQA). This system contained key elements including the Oman Qualifications Framework, the Oman Classification of Institutions, Institutional and Programme Standards, and processes for Institutional and Programme Accreditation. Royal Decree 54/2010 established the OAAA further to develop the national system for assuring the quality of Oman's higher education sector while Royal Decree 09/2021 added the quality assurance of schools to the OAAAQA mandate. OAAAQA is now responsible for regulating the quality of all schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) in Oman to ensure the maintenance of a level that meets international standards and to encourage HEIs to improve their internal quality. This is currently achieved through the implementation of the OAAAQA's EQA activities which include IQA, ISA, PSA, GFPQA, Reassessment Activities and Reaccreditation Activities.⁶ Further information on all activities, together with the establishment and responsibilities of OAAAQA is available on the website.⁷

2.2 Programme Accreditation

OAAAQA is responsible for the accreditation of all higher education programmes offered in Oman through the application of internationally benchmarked national standards. The process covers all higher education programmes such as those that are locally-devised and where the awards are offered by an HEI in Oman; programmes that are devised by an international affiliate where the award is made by an HEI in Oman, and programmes that are franchised from an international affiliate which also makes the award. The process also includes programmes accredited through an International External Quality Assurance (IEQA) process. HEIs commence Programme Standards Assessment after being Institutionally Accredited through ISA and after the relevant qualification has been Listed (and subsequently Re-Listed) on the National Register of Qualifications (NRQ). Thereafter, the three assessment processes (ISA, PSA and Listing/Relisting) continue independently. PSA is repeated every five years (see Figure 1).

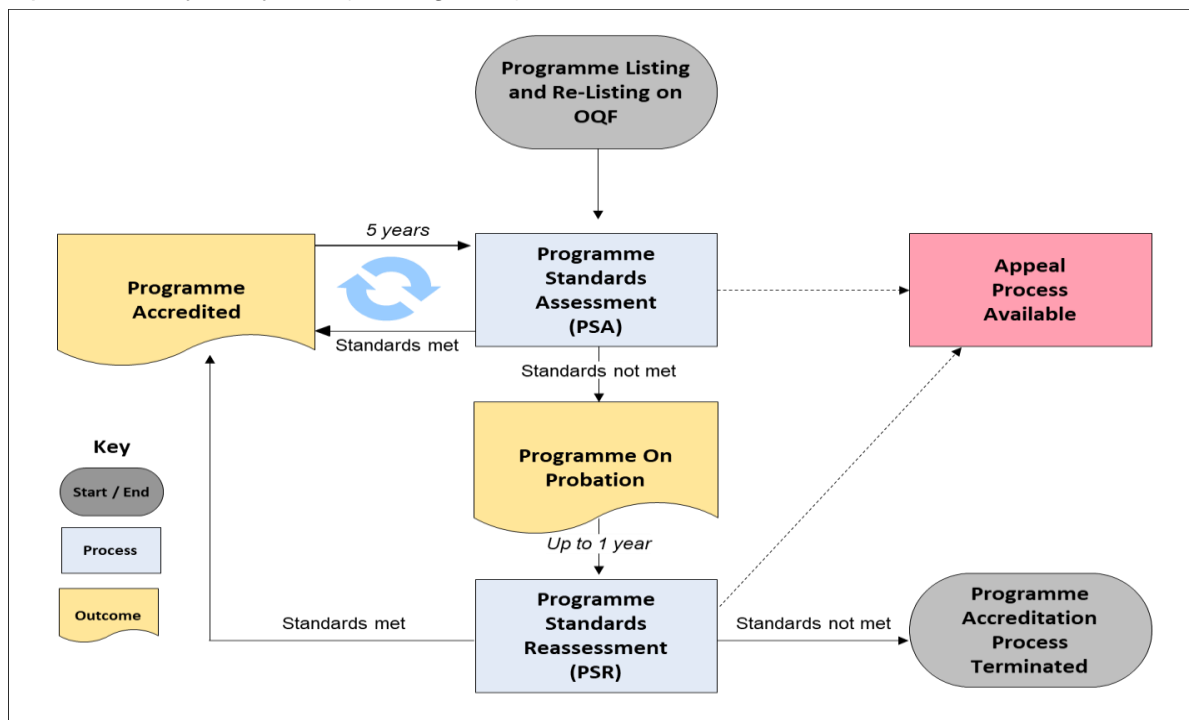


Figure 1: Programme Accreditation System

⁶ These terms are defined in the Foreword. For a full set of abbreviations, acronyms and terms, see Appendix B.

⁷ See OAAAQA website: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/>.

2.2.1 Programme Standards Assessment (PSA)

PSA is a summative process involving three standards. All programmes undergo assessment against Standard 1 and, in addition, either Standard 2 or Standard 3 depending on the nature of the programme. PSA is the process by which a programme is evaluated against the two applicable standards and their related criteria. Programmes which meet the two applicable standards are accredited. Programmes which do not meet either one or two applicable standards undergo PSR.

2.2.2 Programme Standards Reassessment (PSR)

A programme that demonstrates unsatisfactory performance against either or both of the applicable standards is placed *On Probation*. There is no *Conditionally Accredited* status in PSA. The length of the probation period is determined by the PSA Panel. This period is generally counted from the day following the date of the receipt of the Final PSA Report by the HEI and may extend up to (but not beyond) one year. After this period, a programme undergoes one attempt at PSR to demonstrate that the standards have been met. If this remains unestablished after PSR, the PSA process is terminated and the OAAAQA advises the Cabinet and the HEI's supervising Ministry (if applicable) accordingly. Further information on all aspects of PSA and PSR is given in this manual.

2.2.3 Programme Accreditation Deferral Opportunities

No opportunities for the deferral of PSA are given. An HEI must notify OAAAQA regarding any extreme circumstances that may hinder their ability to undergo PSA on time, as per the stipulations in the Major Change Notification Policy.⁸

2.3 General Foundation Programme Quality Assurance

The OAAAQA is responsible for the external review of the quality of General Foundation Programmes (GFPs). While GFPs do not lead to a higher education academic qualification or award, for many students in Oman they are an integral part of the higher education experience and formal review of GFPs has been carried out by OAAAQA through GFP Quality Audit.⁹ While OAAAQA's most recent mandate, 09/2021, removed the requirement for GFPs to undergo an accreditation process, 'pre-sessional' courses (such as GFPs) are considered as part of the assessment of entry requirements in PSA.

2.4 Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF)

Development of the OQF is encompassed by OAAAQA's mandate as established by Royal Decree 09/2021. When originally developed in 2004 as a key component of ROSQA, the OQF only comprised Academic Qualifications. In 2014 the former Education Council issued a decision authorising the OAAAQA to develop a comprehensive qualifications framework that includes qualifications resulting from academic, technological, vocational, professional and general (school) education. The resulting comprehensive qualifications framework aims to enhance quality and promote parity of esteem for all types of education and training in Oman.¹⁰

2.4.1 Relationship between Listing and PSA

While Listing and PSA fulfil different functions, each system complements the other. To this end a programme's qualification must be Listed on the NRQ before the programme can be considered for PSA, and programme standards include specific references made to the OQF within programme criteria (for example, see Criteria 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1) to assist in the validation of OQF criteria ahead of Re-Listing. Where possible these two activities are scheduled sequentially so that Listing is completed before the PSA submission date.

⁸ See OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/6ea21e12-893a-4983-9604-f71562cbf7e9/Major%20Change%20Notification.aspx?b=0>.

⁹ See OAAAQA GFPQA Manual: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/External-Quality-Assurance/General-Foundation-Programme-Accreditation>.

¹⁰ See OAAAQA OQF Manual: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/Oman-Qualifications-Framework/The-OQF-Manual>.

2.4.2 Relationship between Re-Listing and PSA

Qualifications are periodically reviewed to ensure that they have remained consistent to their original Listing on the NRQ and that they continue to meet the criteria for Listing. Re-Listing takes place after one cohort of learners has completed the qualification. A programme's qualification must be Re-Listed as a prerequisite of subsequent cycles of PSA. The requirements for Re-Listing are aligned with programme standards with specific references made to the OQF within programme criteria (for example, see Criteria 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1). These requirements are assessed as part of the PSA process contributing to the robustness of the quality assurance mechanisms of Re-Listing. The Re-Listing and PSA processes, however, are otherwise independent.

2.4.3 Re-Listing, PSA Outcomes and the Policy on Major Change Notification

In the rare circumstance where a programme's qualification is unable to meet OQF Re-Listing requirements, it may be removed from the NRQ with the following implications for PSA:

- Listing and Re-Listing are prerequisites of PSA so a programme cannot undergo PSA without rectifying any problems with listing processes.
- If a programme is Accredited, the Centre for Higher Education and Quality Assurance (CHEQA) within OAAAQA is informed that the programme qualification has not been Re-Listed and the status of the programme accreditation may be reviewed.
- If a programme is On Probation at the time when Re-Listing is due, it cannot undergo PSR until Re-Listing requirements for the programme qualification have been met.

An inability of a qualification to meet the criteria to be Re-Listed on the NRQ is considered as a major change to the programme. All major changes (either to an Accredited institution or to an Accredited programme) are reviewed through the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification.¹¹ While each major change is considered on its individual merits, any change in Listing status may result in the suspension of the Accreditation status of the programme in question. A programme that is *Not Accredited* is removed from the NQF.

2.4.4 Scheduling Alignment

While Listing, Re-Listing, PSA and PSR are distinct processes that involve different cycle lengths, they are all carried out by OAAAQA. A high degree of interaction between the two Directorate Generals responsible for these activities is maintained to coordinate scheduling of all EQA activities where possible.

2.5 Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework (OSCED)

There are several other components which make up Oman's overall Higher Education Quality Management System,¹² only one of which is germane to the PSA. OSCED defines the broad, narrow, and detailed fields of academic study as offered through HEIs in Oman.¹³ It was developed by the former Oman Accreditation Council in 2009 and has assisted with such matters as programme licensing, programme classification, enrolment statistics, and national reporting of academic offerings. As OSCED was based on international benchmarks, it has also facilitated international reporting. OSCED is currently under review but still applicable until a newly updated document is approved; it serves a useful function in providing a standard classification for categorisation of programmes and a summary of OSCED fields is provided herein (see Appendix C). This is helpful when determining which programmes may be submitted for review by a single Panel and therefore facilitates the opportunity for HEIs to submit more than one programme during a PSA submission in what is referred to herein as a 'programme cluster' (see Section 3.1.3). HEIs have an opportunity to notify OAAAQA of any programmes not listed in OSCED at least six months prior to making a PSA submission to check clustering opportunities.

¹¹ See OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/3a6ec396-2a9e-4800-abc7-704e0121768b/Major%20Change%20Notification.aspx?b=0>

¹² See ROSQA: http://www.OAAAQA.gov.om/Oman_ROSQA%20%28all%20part%20one%29.pdf

¹³ See Institutional Classifications Framework: http://www.OAAAQA.gov.om/Framework.aspx#Fm_Classification

2.6 Major Changes within an HEI

2.6.1 Notifying OAAAQA of Change

Once Accredited, HEIs have an obligation to inform the OAAAQA of any major change which occurs within the institution. It is up to OAAAQA to determine to what extent this change may be relevant to their institutional or programme accreditation submission, activities and/or status. Major change includes, for example, planned closure or merger; restructuring of an HEI's governance; financial viability; relationship with an affiliate, and the occupation of new premises. Further details can be found in the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification on the OAAAQA website.¹⁴

2.6.2 Revoking of Accreditation Status due to Major Change

The OAAAQA may revoke the Accredited status of an HEI or any of its programmes where it deems that major changes have taken place that adversely impact on an ability to meet the Institutional or Programme Standards. This may include a programme's persistent inability to be Re-Listed (see Section 2.4.3).

2.7 Appeals Process

The comprehensive OAAAQA Appeals Manual sets out the criteria and process regarding formal appeals against Final EQA Results and Accreditation Outcomes arising from OAAAQA's formal EQA activities.¹⁵ The outcome of an Appeal is final, and, by government decision, there is no recourse to legal judgement after Appeal.

3. Overview of PSA

3.1 Definitions

3.1.1 Definition of a 'Programme'

For the purpose of PSA, the OAAAQA embraces the following definition of 'programme':

A 'programme' is the coherent learning experience followed by a student, the successful completion of which qualifies them for an academic award.¹⁶ The student learning experience includes all aspects of input to the programme (for example, programme design and curriculum), as well as the programme delivery process (for example, teaching, learning and assessment).

This definition of a programme has been derived from several benchmarks. ROSQA defined a programme as 'a coherent course of study followed by students...leading to an academic award or a professional qualification'. Similar definitions are provided by other quality agencies and accrediting bodies, highlighting key features of a programme.¹⁷ These stipulate that a programme must include an approved and integrated package of courses and/or modules and activities, deliver a coherent learning experience for students, and lead to a qualification which includes a specific title. The OAAAQA definition informs the focus of the Programme Accreditation system, and the scope of the Programme Standards. It is inclusive in that it covers both taught programmes and research programmes.

¹⁴ See OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/6ea21e12-893a-4983-9604-f71562cbf7e9/Major%20Change%20Notification.aspx?b=0>.

¹⁵ See OAAAQA Appeals Manual: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/14282c21-e5b2-4e89-96fe-202e3416fe80/Appeals%20Manual.aspx?b=0>

¹⁶ OAAAQA recognises that some qualifications may rationally belong to one or more of the four Educational Pathways but for the purpose of this PSA Manual, only the academic pathway and academic awards are referenced as PSA is only concerned with academic programmes and awards.

¹⁷ Examples include NCAAA and QAA.

3.1.2 Definition of a Programme by Title

For the purpose of PSA, a programme, as the unit of PSA analysis, is defined by its title, rather than the qualification level or type. An Advanced or Higher Diploma in Accounting and a Bachelor Degree in Accounting, for example, are considered one programme for the purposes of PSA and are assessed as a single programme in one PSA since they have the same title ('Accounting'), despite leading to different types or levels of qualification. Accreditation outcomes cover all exit points of the programme. Assessment of a programme includes all the courses, modules or subjects that a student is required to study, including where these are offered by another department within the HEI and/or by another HEI.¹⁸

3.1.3 Definition of a Programme Cluster

The OAAAQA definition of 'programme cluster' is as follows:

A programme cluster is defined as up to five programmes in a cognate academic field that share the same Narrow Field specified in the Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework (OSCED) and which may be assessed through a single Programme Standards Assessment Application (PSAA).

An HEI may submit more than one programme in a cognate academic field for simultaneous assessment; this is referred to as a 'programme cluster'. For the purposes of PSA, a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts (Jewellery Design) and a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts (Fashion Design) are considered, for example, to be two distinct programmes despite both leading to Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts qualifications. Despite being distinct, these programmes may be assessed as part of a programme cluster. A programme cluster consists of up to a maximum of **five** closely related programmes and may consist of programmes submitted by different units (departments, centres or colleges) within the HEI (see Section 2.5 for details on OSCED).

Facilitating the assessment of a programme cluster during a single PSA submission is intended to avoid duplication of effort by the HEI and, in turn, by the PSA Panel, given programmes in a cluster normally share common courses and requirements. An HEI needs to submit a separate PSA Application for each programme in a cluster but make any commonalities across programmes clear. Guidance is provided herein on how common elements and features should be presented (see Section 7.1). Each programme receives an Accreditation Outcome that is independent of other programmes in the cluster.

3.1.4 Definition of a Multi-Campus Programme

Where a single programme is offered in the same form in different locations, the programme must be reviewed as a 'multi-campus programme'. PSA arrangements include a Panel Visit to all campuses involved in offering a multi-campus programme. A multi-campus PSA results in a single Accreditation Outcome. OAAAQA assesses the feasibility of offering review of a cluster of multi-campus programmes on a case-by-case basis.

3.2 General Features of Programme Accreditation

3.2.1 Purpose of Programme Accreditation

OAAAQA's purpose in establishing a national system of Programme Accreditation is to provide confidence to the public and other stakeholders, both nationally and internationally, that the quality of a programme, and the academic standards of the award or qualification arising from successful completion of that programme, are maintained at the appropriate level. Programme Accreditation covers all aspects of a programme, including 'inputs' to the programme, the programme delivery 'process', and the 'output', in other words, the resultant academic qualification.¹⁹

¹⁸ OAAAQA recognises that some HEIs may offer programmes that require case-by-case consideration prior to submission (for example, if a programme leading to a diploma is **entirely different** in content to a programme of the same name leading to a bachelors degree).

¹⁹ OAAAQA considers 'input' as covering such aspects as programme design, staffing and other resources, together with policies and procedures; 'process' includes such aspects as programme management, teaching and learning delivery and interactions,

3.2.2 Benefits of Programme Accreditation

The benefits of Programme Accreditation are well-established and identified in the literature of various accreditation bodies. Key characteristics of accreditation include verification of a programme by an authorised external organisation, and formal recognition that a programme meets minimum required standards and benchmarked criteria. Programme Accreditation also brings wider benefits in that it:

- Confirms that programmes and qualifications are of a sound standard, and can be recognised internationally, including in relation to benchmarks relating to academic disciplines and/or professional requirements
- Supports, advises and gives feedback to institutions on the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of their programmes
- Promotes quality improvement, at both programme and institutional level
- Provides independent assurance to all stakeholders regarding the performance of a programme and the maintenance of the standard of qualification
- Enables an HEI to state publicly that its programmes have undergone external verification and satisfied the requirements of that independent body

3.3 Key Features of Programme Accreditation

It is currently compulsory for all higher education programmes in Oman to undergo OAAAQA Programme Accreditation. Key features of Programme Accreditation are described below.

- **OAAAQA's Mandate:** As established through Royal Decrees 54/2010 and 9/2021, this mandate requires OAAAQA to undertake Programme Accreditation and this is reflected in OAAAQA's Mission in 'guiding and supporting the education sector in Oman to meet the relevant national priorities and objectives while maintaining internationally benchmarked standards'.
- **Licensing and PSA Link:** A strong connection exists between initial Programme Licensing by MoHERI and other supervisory bodies and the Listing of the qualification on the NRQ. A similar connection between Programme Accreditation and OQF Listing and Re-Listing (after graduation of a full cohort of students) is facilitated through processes that are transparent and compatible (see Section 2.4).
- **ISA and PSA Integration:** A productive relationship exists between OAAAQA's various EQA processes such as IQA and ISA, the reports for which are made available to PSA panels (see Section 3.6).
- **Internationally Benchmarked Programme Standards:** The provision of internationally benchmarked Programme Standards (see Part B), and the design of an appropriate and sound PSA process (see Parts D and E), are key aspects of Programme Accreditation.
- **Contextualisation:** OAAAQA recognises the wider context in which Programme Accreditation operates, including Oman's national priorities (as currently embodied by Vision 2040) and specific requirements (for example, national health and safety regulations, human rights awareness, labour market and entrepreneurship needs). The existence of foreign programmes and externally accredited programmes in Oman's higher education sector are also encompassed within the PSA context.
- **Commitment to International Best Practice:** OAAAQA's Values include a commitment to best practice and this principle underpins the Programme Accreditation system, both in that the Programme Standards and the PSA process reflect international best practice, and in that OAAAQA encourages good practice in higher education more generally.

student assessment; 'output' includes such aspects as student retention and progression, student achievement and student employability and further study.

- **HEI Responsibility for Meeting Standards:** Responsibility for meeting programme standards lies with the HEI, as consistent with international good practice.²⁰ As such, an HEI is expected to manage effectively the quality of its programmes, using those benchmarks and internal and external reference points that it considers to be appropriate for its programmes, mission and circumstances.²¹
- **Self-Assessment and Peer Review:** The PSA process is based on self-assessment (as appropriate, given the first principle above), followed by external review undertaken by peers. The PSA is built upon the understanding that the HEI conducts an effective and evidence-based self-assessment of its programme(s) and quality assurance arrangements against OAAAQA's Programme Standards.
- **Non-OAAAQA Accreditation:** The Programme Accreditation process includes affiliate programmes that may have undergone an approval and/or accreditation process through an HEI located outside Oman. Affiliate (or 'foreign') programmes are those where an HEI in Oman offers programmes in partnership with a university outside Oman and where the awards conferred are either those of the locally-based HEI or those of the affiliate.²² All programmes offered by an HEI in Oman, regardless of whether they have been accredited by an external accreditation body through an affiliate university, or by a profession, or through any other International External Quality Assurance (IEQA) agency, need to undergo PSA.
- **Replicated Evidence:** The PSA process seeks to ensure that HEIs are not overly burdened by the quantity and complexity of evidence required in a PSA submission (see Part F). As such, OAAAQA encourages the use of pre-existing evidence, including data provided for other government agencies, for IEQA agencies and for other OAAAQA EQA activities, as well as documentation that is routinely produced for the quality assurance and improvement processes within an HEI, provided that all such evidence remains relevant and current. In other words, there is no additional obligation on HEIs to develop documents and materials only for the purpose of the PSA, unless specifically requested to do so by the PSA Panel. In addition, it is expected that HEIs respect any word limits given in the PSAA template in terms of a programme self-assessment and adhere to any restrictions on the quantity and relevance of supporting materials submitted as evidence.
- **Transparent Outcomes:** Transparency is central to the PSA process. The granting of Programme Accreditation has a major impact for all stakeholders and OAAAQA understands that it is important, therefore, that the outcome of the process is clearly communicated, and that the way in which the outcome has been arrived at is transparent and based on an explicit, published approach that is applied consistently (see Parts D and E).²³
- **OAAAQA's Role in PSA:** The role of the OAAAQA is to ensure that programme quality assurance and improvement systems are in place and are effective (in other words, sustainable and not arrived at by chance) and that the outcomes of these systems meet the required standards as set out in this document (see Part B).

3.4 Eligibility of a Programme to Undergo PSA

The following prerequisites must be met before PSA can commence:

²⁰ See INQAHE ISGs: <https://www.inqahe.org/sites/default/files/INQAHE-International-Standards-and-Guidelines-ISG.pdf>

²¹ Benchmarks and reference points may include, for example, Strategic Plan, Mission and Vision; Quality Audit report, and Institutional Standards Assessment Report (internal reference points), and the Oman Qualifications Framework; Professional and Accrediting Bodies; comparable HEIs; subject benchmark statements (external reference points).

²² Cited in the Quality Plan (2006), p35: http://www.OAAAQA.gov.om/draft_quality_plan_v4.pdf

²³ Refer, for example, to ENQA (2009), European standards and guidelines for the external quality assurance of higher education (2.3 Criteria for Decisions).

- The HEI must be Institutionally Accredited through ISA (and, in future, Institutional Reaccreditation) or through ISR. HEIs with the Institutional Accreditation status of *Conditionally Accredited* or *On Probation* cannot apply for PSA.
- The programme must be licensed by MoHERI or other relevant bodies which are responsible for the supervision arrangements.
- The programme qualification must be Listed (and, in future, Re-Listed) on the NRQ.
- The programme must have at least one full cohort of graduates (in other words, graduates who have completed all the programme requirements). Where an HEI offers the same programme leading to different OQF levels of awards, it is eligible for PSA after the first cohort of students studying the highest qualification level has graduated.²⁴

If the above prerequisites are met, an HEI must submit all eligible programmes on offer at the time of obtaining Institutional Accreditation, within the scheduling guidelines determined and communicated by OAAAQA.

3.5 Relationship between Programme Licensing, Qualification Listing (and Re-Listing) and Programme Accreditation

The process of Programme Accreditation follows the licensing and approval for a programme to operate in Oman by MoHERI (for private HEIs), by other supervising ministries, or (for those authorised to offer their own programmes) through royal decree. The application process for MoHERI Programme Licensing identifies the information required when an HEI applies to launch a new programme, including through the 'modification of an existing programme'. Overall, the focus of MoHERI licensing is primarily on the feasibility and capacity of the proposed programme, and to ensure that the programme is designed to meet international good practice. The purpose of the Listing process is to ensure that the programme is designed with the appropriate OQF Credit Value to merit the award and, through Re-Listing, that the value of the award has been maintained over time. The purpose of OAAAQA Programme Accreditation is to check the lived experience of a programme to ensure that it has met the OAAAQA's published standards. It also has a role to play in the revalidation of Listed programmes. In other words, Programme Accreditation makes a judgement on the quality of a programme once it is fully operational. All three processes (licensing, Listing and PSA) therefore fulfil distinct but complementary functions. An alignment between the three processes is achieved through shared areas of scrutiny ('criteria') across the three processes, albeit without replication of criteria.

3.6 Relationship Between Institutional Accreditation and Programme Accreditation

Royal Decree 09/2021 requires that all HEIs undergo both Institutional and Programme Accreditation. While Institutional Accreditation and Programme Accreditation both concern the establishment of the status or appropriateness of an institution or programme, it is important to be clear about the difference between the two accreditation activities, each of which has a distinctive focus. Institutional Accreditation, through ISA, takes a 'global' view of an HEI's activities, including how it designs, deploys, manages and reviews programmes *in general* but it does not assess the quality of individual programmes offered by an HEI.

In contrast, Programme Accreditation, through PSA, takes a more 'local' view of individual programmes, including provision and resourcing, and takes into account the requirements of the OQF. PSA examines a particular programme, or cluster of related programmes, by assessing the different aspects of a programme in detail, thus taking a 'focused and deep' approach, compared to the 'broad and general' approach to assessing programmes in ISA.

In Institutional Accreditation, the unit of analysis is the institution as a whole. Therefore, the scope of ISA covers all aspects of the HEI including, for example, academic and organisational structures; policies and procedures; educational provision; staffing, and all

²⁴ If an HEI offers an Advanced or Higher Diploma in Accounting, and a Bachelor's degree in Accounting, for example, it is eligible for PSA after the first cohort of the Bachelor degree students has graduated, provided it meets all other eligibility criteria.

types of academic and non-academic services. The focus of ISA is the HEI's compliance with applicable standards spread across all areas of the institution. Overall, ISA confirms the legitimacy or good standing of an institution (for example, that it has met obligations to have effective systems for quality assurance and improvement).

In Programme Accreditation, the unit of analysis is a programme. PSA allows for a cluster of programmes to be assessed at the same time (see Section 3.1.3 and 7.1). The focus of PSA is the programme's compliance with generic programme standards (as presented in this document) and the Listing (and Re-Listing) requirements of the OQF, embedded within the programme standards to provide an additional quality assurance mechanism for the qualification. Overall, PSA confirms the academic standing of a programme in relation to internationally benchmarked standards. The programme is the 'lens' through which students experience the HEI and PSA involves the assessment of a small sub-set of institutional resources and services which are directly relevant and customised to the delivery of the programme.

3.7 External and Professional Programme Accreditation

3.7.1 Accreditation by an International External Quality Assurance (IEQA) Activity

External programme accreditation by entities other than OAAAQA, and/or programme accreditation by professional bodies, complement (as opposed to substitute) the national system of Programme Accreditation. Any alternative accreditation activity involving an IEQA agency (such as those listed on the OAAAQA Recognised IEQA Agencies Register, known as 'RIAR', and including professional bodies) is reviewed and endorsed by OAAAQA through the established IEQA process, as set out in the OAAAQA Policy on International External Quality Assurance Activities.²⁵ Regardless of IEQA activities, whether endorsed by OAAAQA or otherwise, all higher education programmes in Oman must undergo OAAAQA Programme Accreditation using the programme standards and PSA process presented in this manual.

3.7.2 Accreditation by a Professional Body

The OAAAQA recognises that some HEIs in Oman have obtained professional accreditation of their programmes through relevant professional bodies. Professional accreditation enhances career prospects for programme graduates by ensuring that they are professionally competent. While the OAAAQA encourages professional accreditation of a programme, this type of accreditation only represents one component of the quality assurance system of a programme and it is not, however, a substitute for national Programme Accreditation which depends on a holistic and comprehensive assessment of a programme. Professional bodies vary in their requirements and use different assessment methods, with some bodies undertaking a formal visit to the HEI, and others basing their accreditation only on the documented curriculum of the programme.

3.8 The PSA Process

PSA is an independent evaluation of the extent to which a higher education programme meets national standards. It has three key elements: self-assessment, external assessment, and an accreditation decision (see Figure 2).

²⁵ See OAAAQA Policy on IEQA Activities: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/a88b16a8-afa4-4a27-ac09-19d634852fc4/International%20External%20Quality%20Assurance%20Activitise.aspx?b=0>.

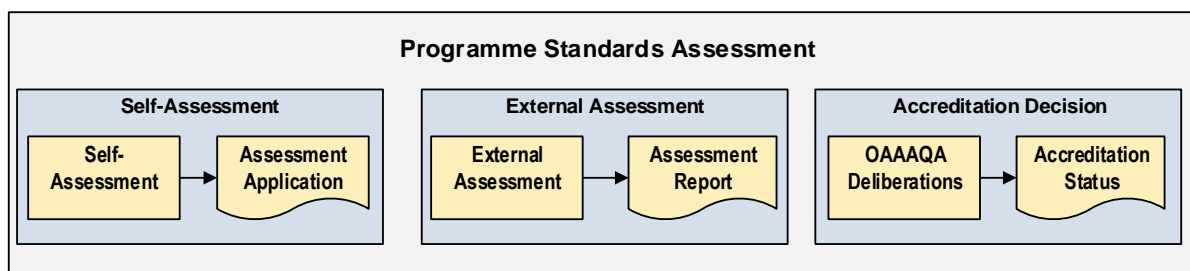


Figure 2: Programme Standards Assessment Overview

3.8.1 Self-Assessment

An HEI commences PSA by conducting a self-assessment of a programme against the programme standards and criteria. Their findings are presented in a PSA Application (PSAA) using the approach suggested in this manual (see Part D) and the template provided by OAAAQA (on request).

3.8.2 External-Assessment

An external PSA Panel, comprised of national and international peers from academia, industry and the professions, considers the PSAA and evaluates its accuracy through such means as interviews and triangulation with documentation submitted by the HEI and other information sources. This evaluation activity includes a Panel Visit to the HEI (conducted through a virtual meeting platform if circumstances beyond OAAAQA’s control dictates) to meet with staff, students and other stakeholders of the programme. A single such Panel Visit is conducted for up to five closely related programmes submitted in a programme cluster. Further information on the PSA process is set out in detail in this manual (see Part D).

3.8.3 Accreditation Decision

The PSA Panel presents its findings in a PSA Report (using a prescribed template) which includes a rating of *Met* or *Not Met* for both of the applicable programme standards, together with a rating of *Met*, *Not Met* or *Partially Met* for each of their related criteria. The report contains a brief summary paragraph to support all criteria ratings; for *Not Met* and *Partially Met* criteria, evaluative comments are included. The Report also includes an Accreditation Outcome (see Part C). A separate report is prepared for each of the programmes in a clustered submission and each programme receives its own accreditation outcome.

3.9 Summary of PSA Stages

PSA follows a similar timeline to ISA but takes less than half the time to complete (around 20 weeks compared with 43 weeks) due to the smaller number of criteria being assessed and a different reporting mechanism. The same timeline applies to a single submission or a cluster, although the length of the Panel Visit depends on the size of a submission and whether the HEI is a single- or multi-campus entity. While every effort is made to ensure that PSA activities align with the milestones shown below (see Table 2 on the next page), the timeline remains indicative only.

Table 2: PSA Indicative Timeline

Week	Task #	Task	Responsibility
Prior to PSAA Submission	1	Undertake Self-Assessment for PSA, resulting in a separate PSA Application (PSAA) for each programme (up to a total of five programmes).	HEI
	2	Appoint Review Director (RD); this may take the form of an External RD (ERD).	DG CHEQA
	3	Prepare Panel longlist, in discussion with technical members of CHEQA, from OAAAQA Register of External Reviewers and submit to the DG CHEQA for approval.	PSO, CHEQA
	4	Approve the Panel longlist (or send back to Task 3 for further attention).	DG CHEQA
	5	Send Panel longlist for HEI's consideration together with the name of the OAAAQA RD and a request for the HEI's Contact Person to be identified.	PSO
	6	Review, in confidence, whether any External Reviewers on the longlist may have a conflict of interest; return comments (via Contact Person) to the OAAAQA.	HEI
	7	Discuss and confirm key dates of PSA.	RD, HEI
	8	Invite selected External Reviewers on the longlist to form a Panel, identifying On-site and Distance Panel Members; prepare ER contracts and gain necessary signatures.	RD, PSO
	9	Announce the Panel to the HEI; publish the Panel composition on OAAAQA website.	RD, PSO
	10	Send Payment for PSA 30 days prior to PSAA submission (an Accreditation Outcome is only released upon payment of the fee).	HEI
Week 0	11	Submit PSAA (adhering to word limits) and Supporting Materials to OAAAQA using the OAAAQA PSAA template.	HEI
	12	Conduct the PSAA Completeness Check (if complete, send the PSAA and Supporting Materials to the Panel; if incomplete, resolve with the HEI) and determine the validity of any criteria rated <i>Not Applicable</i> with the Panel Chair.	RD, PSO
	13	Provide Review Comments to RD on Standard 1 and Standard 2 (or Standard 3 as applicable) of an individual programme (or allocated programme in a cluster).	On-site Panel Members
		Provide Review Comments to RD on Standard 1. Begin to form commentary on Standard 2 (or 3) of an individual programme (or allocated programme in a cluster).	Distance Panel Member
	14	Prepare Preliminary Meeting Agenda with input from the Panel Chair.	RD, PSO
Prepare and circulate to Panel Draft Report(s) v1 by collating Review Comments for each programme submitted and send Preliminary Meeting Agenda.		RD	
Week 3	15	Participate in Preliminary Meeting with On-site and Distance Panel Members.	Panel and RD
	16	Prepare and circulate to Panel Draft Report(s) v2 with notes from Preliminary Meeting.	RD
		Prepare Panel Visit schedule based on Panel suggestions.	RD, PSO
	17	List Additional Materials and Matters for Clarification based on Panel suggestions.	RD, PSO
	18	Send Planning Visit Agenda, Request for Additional Materials, Matters for Clarification and Call for Public Submissions to HEI.	RD, PSO
	19	Prepare Panel Visit questions, collated and circulated by RD.	Panel, RD
Week 6	20	Participate in Planning Visit at the HEI's location to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional Materials (AMs) • Matters for Clarification (MCs) • Draft Panel Visit Schedule • Public Submissions • Panel Visit Venue and Logistics 	PSA Panel Chair (or representative) and RD with HEI
	21	Submit Additional Materials and other information requested by Panel to OAAAQA.	HEI
	22	Circulate Call for Public Submissions within HEI and via media.	HEI, PSO
	23	Prepare Final Panel Visit Schedule and forward to Panel Members along with any Additional Materials and information received from HEI.	RD
	24	Send Final Panel Visit Schedule to HEI and request names to be added by HEI.	RD, HEI
	25	On closure of the Call for Public Submissions, assess submissions against acceptance criteria and forward to the Panel.	RD

Table 2: PSA Indicative Timeline

Week	Task #	Task	Responsibility
	26	Prepare interviewees and logistics for the Panel Visit.	HEI
	27	Prepare and circulate to Panel Draft PSA Report(s) v3.1 (including supporting text, triangulated against evidence) of Standard 1 of all programmes in submission for on-site verification.	Panel Chair
Prepare and circulate to Panel Draft PSA Report(s) v3.1 (including supporting text, triangulated against evidence) of Standard 2 (or 3) of allocated programme for on-site verification by Panel Pair (see PSA Manual Supplement).		Distance Panel Member	
Week 9	28	Participate in Panel Visit. HEI stakeholders present for interview and On-site Panel Members submit amendments to the Draft PSA Report(s) v3.1 to RD at the end of the Panel Visit.	PSA Panel Chair, Stakeholders, On-site Panel Members, RD
	29	Submit any Additional Materials requested by the Panel during the Panel Visit within one week of the final day of the Panel Visit.	HEI
	30	Prepare and circulate to Panel Draft PSA Report(s) v3.2 ; all Panel Members give feedback on Standard 1 and the Panel Pair gives feedback on Standard 2 (or 3).	RD
	31	Submit feedback on PSA Report(s) v3.2.	PSA Panel
	32	Prepare and circulate to Panel Draft PSA Report(s) v4 , ensuring consistency of text against rating, singularity of voice, grammatical accuracy and alignment with OAAAQA's House Style Manual.	RD
	33	Send draft Report(s) v4 for internal moderation; complete internal moderation.	RD, Moderator
	34	Prepare and circulate to Panel Draft PSA Report(s) v5 in response to feedback from internal moderation.	RD
Week 14	35	Send draft Report(s) v5 to HEI for comments.	RD
	36	Submit comments on draft Report(s) v5 within ten working days.	HEI
	37	Send HEI comments on draft Report(s) v5 to PSA Panel.	RD
		Respond to each of HEI's comments on draft Report(s) v5.	PSA Panel
	38	Collate and analyse Panel's Response to HEI's comments on draft Report(s) v5; add OAAAQA's action (if any) in Panel Response Report.	RD in liaison where necessary with PSA Panel
39	Prepare and circulate to Panel Draft PSA Report(s) v6 by amending the text and criteria/standard ratings and Accreditation Outcome(s) of draft Report(s) v5 as needed.		
Week 19	40	Send draft Report(s) v6 for final checks and to OAAAQA CEO for final approval.	DG CHEQA, CEO
	41	Send Final Report to OAAAQA Board for endorsement of Report, Ratings, Accreditation Outcome(s), and any probation period.	CEO's Office, Board
	42	Send endorsed PSA Report(s) to HEI under embargo with details of the OAAAQA appeals procedure.	CEO's Office
Week 20	43	Post Accreditation Outcome(s) and ratings against the standards and criteria on OAAAQA website (unless an appeal is lodged).	DG CHEQA, PSO
Post Publication of Results	44	Issue press release about the Accreditation Outcome(s).	DG CHEQA
	45	Arrange date for the awarding of the Programme Accreditation Certificate(s) with HEI or communicate date of PSR submission.	CEO's Office
	46	Send feedback form to PSA Panel for comments on all aspects of the PSA process.	PSO
	47	Seek feedback from HEI VC, Dean or CEO (or equivalent) through Contact Person about the value and effectiveness of the PSA process.	HEI
	48	Evaluate Panel Members and prepare a report on the PSA process.	RD
	49	Follow up and analyse all evaluation for enhancement of internal processes.	PSO
	50	Act on PSA feedback through improvement plan.	DG CHEQA



PART B: PROGRAMME STANDARDS

4. Introduction to Programme Standards

4.1 Underlying Principles of Programme Standards

The Programme Standards are based on the principle that the responsibility for quality assurance lies with the institution. This is in line with the INQAHE International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education which states 'The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the HEIs themselves'.²⁶

The Programme Standards are underpinned by key features (see Section 3.3) and the following broad principles:

- **Represent Minimum Standards:** The Programme Standards presented are minimum standards and reflect international expectations of threshold requirements for programmes that are academically sound and of an acceptable quality.
- **Generic in Nature:** The Programme Standards are expressed in general terms and can be applied to all higher education programmes. The use of generic Programme Standards enables the nationwide application of these standards. The generic standards include the requirement that the development of a programme is informed by relevant academic or professional reference points and advice. The generic standards, therefore, also require HEIs to identify and implement relevant discipline-specific and/or professional requirements, appropriate to their institutional vision, mission and context.

4.2 Structure of Programme Standards

The Programme Standards are organised as follows:

- **Standards:** The Programme Standards are structured around standards and a set of associated criteria. There are three Programme Standards of which only two (Standard 1 and either Standard 2 or Standard 3) are applicable to a programme.
- **Criteria:** HEIs are assessed against all applicable criteria. Some criteria may not be relevant to a specific programme within an HEI. This depends on the specific nature of the programme, and the Vision, Mission and institutional classification of the HEI.²⁷ Where an HEI considers that any criteria are not applicable to the programme, the rationale for this is set out clearly by the HEI in the PSAA. The Review Director and the Panel Chair either concurs with or rejects each *Not Applicable* claim before commencing the PSA. In the case of a rejection of any claims, the HEI is obliged to address the criterion deemed by the Review Director and the Panel Chair as applicable for review by the PSA Panel.
- **Indicators:** Under each criterion, there are a number of indicators. These have the status of guidance only and are illustrative rather than prescribed requirements. In preparing a PSAA, HEIs may address some or all of the indicators provided or use different indicators to demonstrate how each criterion has been met.

For some standards and criteria, additional guidance is provided on the circumstances in which a standard or criterion is relevant to a programme and the HEI's context (for example Criterion 2.5 Research Components of the Coursework Programme, and Criterion 3.5 Coursework Components of the Research Programme). This guidance appears in a text box immediately following a standard or criterion statement.

²⁶ See INQAHE website: <https://www.inqahe.org/sites/default/files/INQAHE-International-Standards-and-Guidelines-ISG.pdf>.

²⁷ See Institutional Classifications Framework: http://www.OAAAQA.gov.om/Framework.aspx#Fm_Classification

STANDARD 1: Programme Management and Support Services

There are clearly defined and effective arrangements for the management of the programme, including the setting and maintenance of academic standards, operational planning and management of risk (including financial risk). Student and other stakeholder feedback, together with student profile data, are used to inform programme planning and quality improvement. Student progression and employability rates are monitored and used to inform strategies to help improve the employability of the programme's graduates. Students on the programme have access to a range of academic support and student support services which are appropriate and effective in meeting their learning needs, and in helping them achieve the programme learning outcomes in alignment with the Oman Qualifications Framework. The profile of programme staff is appropriate for the effective delivery and sustainability of the programme. Staff and students adhere to a defined and effective approach to the management of academic integrity and research ethics.

Criterion 1.1: Programme Planning and Management

There are clearly defined and effective arrangements for the management of the programme, including arrangements for the setting and maintenance of programme academic standards, and the Oman Qualifications Framework Level and Credit Value. Strategic and operational planning, and relevant policies support the effective implementation, management and review of the programme in all applicable modes of delivery, and in line with the Higher Education Institution's Mission and Strategic Goals. Appropriate and relevant data sets, including student profile and feedback data, are maintained and used to inform programme planning and management, and the development of all support services and facilities that support the programme.

Indicators

- a) *Programme management arrangements are clearly and appropriately located within the HEI's management structures and strategic intent, ensuring accountability to, and effective communication with, senior levels of management.*
- b) *Programme managers have appropriate qualifications, expertise, autonomy and authority to manage the programme effectively.*
- c) *Programme managers have clearly defined responsibilities and oversight of the operational planning covering the programme and take responsibility for creating an environment conducive to academic innovation and creativity; provide effective academic leadership for the programme, and this effectiveness of academic leadership is evaluated at defined intervals.*
- d) *Financial feasibility of the programme has been established as part of programme planning.*
- e) *The academic unit in which the programme is located has an effective committee (or similar) system responsible for the deliberative management of the programme, including programme planning, implementation and review, and this system has clear and effective reporting lines within the HEI's wider committee system.*
- f) *Overall, programme management arrangements (programme managers' roles; individual academic staff roles; the work of academic unit's committees) provide academic leadership for maintaining programme academic standards based on the OQF Level and OQF Credit Value, programme quality, the alignment of the programme to the HEI's Mission and Strategic Goals, and for the effective planning and implementation of the programme.*
- g) *Where the programme is delivered in multiple locations and/or through multiple modes of delivery (including online delivery), there are appropriate resources and expertise to effectively manage the programme across these locations and different delivery modes, and to ensure consistency and parity in the delivery of the programme.²⁸*
- h) *The periodic review of the programme includes consideration of the effectiveness of the management arrangements for the programme.*
- i) *All relevant academic regulations, policies and procedures are consistently applied to the programme. In the case of a foreign programme which leads to the award of an affiliate HEI, the*

²⁸ Please note that OAAAQA must be informed of any multi-campus delivery of a programme to enable a multi-campus review to be carried out. If OAAAQA has not been informed of multi-campus delivery, the outcome of the review will be treated as a single-campus outcome and will not apply to the same programme running in any other location.

relevant academic regulations, policies and procedures of the affiliate are consistently applied to the programme.

- j) Any operational plans covering the programme are consistent with the operational plans for the academic unit and the HEI's strategic and operational plans.*
- k) Any operational plans covering the programme are implemented effectively, including through the use of annual priorities, key performance indicators, required resources, and designated responsibilities, and progress against the plans is monitored and appropriate actions are taken to address targets/objectives not yet achieved.*
- l) Programme planning and management are informed by the use of evidence, student profile data and stakeholder feedback to ensure the effectiveness of the programme and the availability of appropriate support services and facilities.*

Criterion 1.2: Programme Monitoring and Review

Systematic monitoring and reviews of the programme are undertaken in accordance with the Higher Education Institution's policies and procedures in order to implement ongoing quality improvements in the programme and to ensure programme academic standards remain consistent with the requirements of the Oman Qualifications Framework and other national and international benchmarks and expectations. Programme review includes formal arrangements for engagement with the professions, professional bodies, industry and alumni. Feedback from internal and external stakeholders and their levels of satisfaction with the programme are regularly used to inform quality improvements, and these improvements are communicated to students and other relevant stakeholders. In the case of an affiliation agreement associated with the programme, the affiliate is appropriately involved in supporting the maintenance of academic standards and quality, and in the ongoing review and improvement of the programme.

Indicators

- a) Programme monitoring and review procedures adhere to the HEI's policies and procedures for the systematic monitoring and review of its programmes, in order to ensure the ongoing quality assurance and quality improvement of the programme.*
- b) Programme monitoring and review provide an evaluation of programme effectiveness, including in relation to: academic standards; OQF Level and OQF Credit Value; currency of the curriculum; teaching and learning; assessment approaches and tools, and student support.*
- c) Programme monitoring and review draw on a range of evidence including: key performance indicators covering recent years; programme-level data on student achievement, retention, progression and completion rates; feedback from students, staff and other stakeholders, including professional bodies where relevant; employers, and external benchmarks and other external reference points. In this use of evidence, the programme is supported by the HEI's data management services and systems.*
- d) Programme monitoring and review ensure the ongoing identification of areas for improvement and consequent action planning, management and communication of changes made to relevant stakeholders, thereby supporting and promoting a culture of quality improvement.*
- e) There are formal arrangements in place for the representation of programme student views (for example, course, year or programme representatives) which provide opportunities for student views to be heard by programme staff and managers, and inform programme reviews.*
- f) There are structured opportunities for students and other stakeholders to give feedback based on their individual views on the quality of learning opportunities and student support services (for example, through student or alumni surveys, or other data collection methods).*
- g) The analysis of stakeholder feedback and levels of satisfaction is made available to relevant stakeholders and used to inform action planning and quality improvement, so that a positive and constructive climate can be maintained; programme students are informed of actions taken in response to their feedback.*
- h) For any programme delivered through an affiliation agreement with another HEI, there is a formal agreement which sets out the responsibilities of both the local HEI and its partner.*
- i) The partnership agreement and programme documentation specify the detailed quality assurance arrangements and respective responsibilities of both HEIs, including for academic*

standards, programme staffing (including the use of affiliate staff), programme quality and quality improvement, and monitoring and review.

- j) The programme affiliation agreement is regularly reviewed to ensure that both HEIs discharge their responsibilities effectively, and to evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of the affiliation agreement.*

Criterion 1.3: Risk Management

There are systematic and effective arrangements for the identification, assessment, treatment and monitoring of all academic and non-academic risks related to the programme. Financial risks and resources are effectively managed to ensure the programme is adequately funded to meet its aims and objectives, and financial resources are sufficient for the programme to operate on a sound financial basis. Health and safety risks are effectively managed to ensure a healthy and safe environment for staff and students on the programme in line with national laws and regulations.

Indicators

- a) In designing and managing the programme, the HEI demonstrates an awareness of all potential risks that may occur during the delivery of the programme, including financial risks and all other risks related to academic standards and/or quality, and institutional level risks which may affect the planning or delivery of the programme.*
- b) The HEI takes effective steps to manage, minimise and monitor risks related to the programme and, in doing so, adheres to the HEI's policy and procedures for risk management.*
- c) The systematic review of the programme includes consideration of all actual and future potential risks in the delivery of the programme, including financial risks and other risks related to academic standards and/or quality, and how effectively these are dealt with by programme management.*
- d) Programme operating balances and budget projections for the academic unit demonstrate the financial viability and sustainability of the programme; resources are sufficient for the programme to achieve its aims and objectives and to maintain programme quality; budgetary processes allow for the long-term financial planning over at least a three-year period/a programme cohort period.*
- e) The financial management of the programme is regularly reviewed for effectiveness, in order to ensure the ongoing financial viability and sustainability of the programme.*
- f) Health and safety standards at the programme level adhere to Oman's legal requirements for health and safety and to the HEI's health and safety policies and procedures.*
- g) The programme has appropriate protocols for health and safety, including those particular to the academic and/or professional field, and including designated staff responsibilities.*
- h) There is systematic review of the adequacy and effectiveness of programme arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of programme students and staff.*

Criterion 1.4: Student Induction, Academic Advising, Progression and Retention

There are appropriate programme-level induction activities to help students enter the programme successfully. There are formal academic advising arrangements in place for students once enrolled on the programme; these provide effective advice and support for students and help them to achieve the programme learning outcomes and Higher Education Institution's graduate attributes. Student progression and retention on the programme are monitored and effective mechanisms are employed to ensure that retention and progression rates for the programme are appropriate for the academic field and/or professional area in the context of national and international benchmarks and reference points.

Indicators

- a) Pre-induction and induction activities organised at the programme level are appropriate and effective, and complement and help build upon the pre-induction and induction activities organised and delivered at an institution-wide level, including through appropriate and helpful*

- programme information provided to students (for example, department and programme handbooks; academic regulations, the HEI's by-laws).*
- b) The learning outcomes of the courses/units/modules and how they contribute to the programme learning outcomes are communicated to students and staff during the induction.*
 - c) Students' academic advisors are actively involved in student induction and help facilitate students' transition to higher education.*
 - d) There are formal academic advising arrangements in place, so that there are regular opportunities for individual programme students to discuss with their advisor their programme choices and academic progress; records of these formal advising meetings are kept.*
 - e) Appropriate academic advice is provided to ensure that all students understand the requirements of their programme and receive timely, useful and regular information and advice about relevant academic requirements.*
 - f) The academic advising arrangements for the programme students are regularly reviewed, including through the use of student feedback, so as to encourage quality improvement.*
 - g) The academic progress of individual students on the programme is monitored and assistance and support is provided to those students exhibiting poor academic performance and/or students who are at risk of not progressing academically to help them complete the programme successfully.*
 - h) There are strategies embedded in the programme which help support students across the entire student lifecycle, from their transitions into the programme (induction), through the programme (academic advising), and out of the programme (progression and retention).*
 - i) Programme-level data on student achievement, retention, progression and completion rates is recorded and is used to inform programme monitoring and systematic review of the programme.*
 - j) The programme is able to demonstrate appropriate student retention, progression and completion rates; the retention, progression and completion rates for the programme are evaluated with reference to internal and external reference points, and national and international benchmarks, and there are appropriate strategies in place to improve the retention, progression and completion rates of students on the programme*

Criterion 1.5: Career Support and Graduate Employability

Students on the programme have access to a range of appropriate career and employment services which are systematically implemented and effective in preparing for employment in a field of study and in planning a career path. The employment, graduate destinations and further study rates of programme graduates are monitored, and benchmarked where possible, against national and international reference points. Such monitoring is used to inform strategies to help improve the destinations and employability of programme graduates.

Indicators

- a) The HEI implements systems and processes to effectively manage a range of career support services, including career education, information, advice and guidance available to programme students, and information on these services is provided to students at the outset of their studies.*
- b) Career and employment education, information, advice and guidance are available to programme students by appropriately qualified, experienced and skilled staff.*
- c) Programme reviews include evaluation of the effectiveness of career and employment services for programme students; the review encourages quality improvement and contributes to the HEI's wider review of career and employment services.*
- d) In setting goals for student employability and further study, the programme uses relevant internal and external reference points, and national and international benchmarks and data (e.g. employment statistics).*
- e) Data on students' post-programme employment and further study are collected, recorded, monitored and evaluated with reference to internal and external reference points, and national and international benchmarks, and this data is used to inform programme delivery, development, and reviews, in order to evaluate the programme's approach to graduate destinations and employability, and encourage quality improvement.*

Criterion 1.6: Programme Staff

The recruitment, management and development of staff, together with the staff profile (of both academic and non-academic staff) are appropriate for the effective delivery and sustainability of the programme, including in relation to the number of staff; staff qualifications, expertise and experience; staff retention, and staff language competencies in the medium of programme delivery. The profile of academic staff on the programme supports the achievement of the programme objectives and includes scholarship and research expectations in line with the programme learning outcomes and the institutional classification.

Indicators

- a) *The number, qualifications, experience and competencies of programme academic staff supports the effective implementation of the programme.*
- b) *The staff profile ensures that, overall, academic staff have appropriate expertise in the academic/professional field of study in which they are appointed to teach and/or supervise students.*
- c) *Academic staff are proficient in the language of instruction on the programme.*
- d) *Academic staff engage in research and scholarship which support and are in alignment with the programme learning outcomes and the institutional classification.*
- e) *The balance of part-time and full-time teaching staff is appropriate for the effective delivery of the programme; adheres to any stipulations of the HEI and/or policies on part-time staff, and is in accordance with national laws.*
- f) *There are sufficient, and appropriately qualified or experienced, administrative and support staff to support the effective implementation of the programme and to ensure the good management and deployment of resources.*
- g) *The profile of staff who contribute to the delivery of the programme is appropriately diverse to ensure the sustainability of the programme and the institution's Mission (for example, like qualifications, specialisations, skills, expertise, industrial experience).*
- h) *The overall staff profile of the programme is considered as part of the systematic review of the programme, in order to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.*
- i) *The HEI take steps to minimise staff turnover and to ensure that staff retention rates contribute to the sustainability and quality of the programme.*
- j) *Programme staff have the opportunity to participate in staff surveys and other feedback mechanisms, to contribute to the evaluation of the staff satisfaction and climate and to identify areas for improvement. Programme staff are informed of actions implemented in response to their feedback.*
- k) *Programme staff have the opportunity of participating in OQF workshops and events to build their capacity regarding the OQF.*

STANDARD 2: Coursework Programme Design and Delivery

Programme design is informed by the use of a range of national and international reference points, including the requirements of the Oman Qualifications Framework. The programme is characterised by well-grounded and academically sound programme aims and objectives, student learning outcomes, curricula, and teaching, learning and assessment approaches. The programme is effective in supporting students to achieve the learning outcomes and develop clearly-defined graduate attributes, and in preparing students for employment and further study.

Standard 2 applies to programmes which are mainly comprised of coursework (taught components) rather than research, but which may contain substantial research components (for example, the Honours year of a Bachelor's degree).

Criterion 2.1: Coursework Programme Design and Learning Outcomes

The overall design of the programme, including aims, objectives and learning outcomes, is academically sound and firmly based on alignment with a range of institutional, national and international reference points, including the Oman Qualifications Framework, the Higher Education Institution's Mission, Vision and Values and graduate attributes; the international expectations of the academic field or professional area, and the views of internal and external stakeholders. Programme design includes formal arrangements for engagement with the professions, professional bodies and industry. The programme has appropriate and clearly defined learning outcomes which students will be able to achieve and demonstrate on the completion of their programme; where appropriate, the design of the learning outcomes enables defined exit/qualification points within the programme. Foreign programmes align with the Oman Qualifications Framework and, if applicable, the requirements of any external validating/professional bodies.

Indicators

- a) *There is an official or definitive record (such as a programme specification document) for the programme which sets out: the aims and objectives and learning outcomes of the programme; the curricula or courses/units/modules which comprise the programme including their OQF level and OQF Credit Value, and programme delivery and assessment arrangements. This record is the key reference point for the delivery and assessment of the programme; its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records to students. The definitive record for the programme can be changed only through the HEI's process for programme approval/re-approval and development.*
- b) *The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the programme are clearly expressed and communicated to staff and students; align with the particular requirements of Oman, including the appropriate OQF level, the minimum OQF Credit Value of the award and current national requirements, and the design and delivery of the programme supports the aims of these in all respects.*
- c) *Learning outcomes take full consideration of the academic standards and general expectations in the relevant academic field(s) of study.*
- d) *The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the programme align with the HEI's Mission, Vision and Values and contribute towards students' attainment of the HEI's graduate attributes.*
- e) *The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the programme meet the international expectations of the academic field and/or professional area.*
- f) *The overall design and review of the programme has been informed by consultation with a number of internal and external stakeholders, including, for example: international peers; industry and employers; the community and civil society organisations, and staff, students and alumni.*
- g) *The programme is designed and delivered in such a way as to promote students' ability to articulate the six characteristics of the OQF namely: knowledge, skills, communication, numeracy, information and communication technology, autonomy and responsibility, employability in the relevant field, and values and learning to learn.*

- h) Student award certificates and transcripts are accurate in describing the award achieved by students, and are issued to students in a timely manner.*
- i) Where appropriate, the development of the programme learning outcomes enables defined exit awards within the programme (for example, a Diploma or Advanced Diploma within a Bachelor's qualification); there are clearly defined learning outcomes for each exit award and these learning outcomes facilitate graduates' entry into the labour market.*
- j) International and foreign programmes must meet the laws and requirements of Oman. They are aligned to the Oman Qualifications Framework in accordance with the OQF Alignment Policy.*
- k) Where the programme is based on those of the affiliate HEI, students on the programme have access to an equivalent quality of learning opportunities in order to help them achieve the learning outcomes of the programme, and courses/modules, assignments and examinations are adapted in a way appropriate to the local environment using examples and illustrations relevant to Oman.*

Criterion 2.2: Curriculum

The curriculum (namely, the subjects, courses and/or modules that make up the programme) supports achievement of the programme aims, objectives and learning outcomes, and is firmly based on national and international expectations of the academic discipline and/or field of study, together with expectations of relevant external stakeholders, including employers of the programme's graduates, professional bodies and alumni. There are defined and effective processes for the design, evaluation, review and revision of the programme curriculum which involve internal and external stakeholders, and include benchmarking.

Indicators

- a) Curriculum design is firmly based on national and international expectations of the academic discipline/field of study, and is also informed by internal and external stakeholders; subject benchmarks and other external reference points, and recognised good practice.*
- b) The curriculum supports achievement of the programme learning outcomes and is effective in facilitating: acquisition and application of the six characteristics of the OQF, namely knowledge, skills, communication, numeracy, information and communication technology, autonomy and responsibility, employability and values and learning to learn.*
- c) The curriculum is designed in such a way as to have clear curriculum pathways (majors, concentrations or specialisations), and this helps inform students' development of career pathways during their studies.*
- d) The curriculum has a coherence that ensures that the student experience has intellectual integrity, and a logic that is linked clearly to the purpose of the programme and to the achievement of its outcomes.*
- e) The curriculum meets the requirements of the OQF national policy on quality assurance, and supports the overarching aims of the OQF in all respects, including articulation, credit accumulation and transfer, and recognition of prior learning.*
- f) The design of the curriculum ensures:
 - i. Academic and intellectual progression by imposing appropriate gradation demands on the learner, over time, in terms of intellectual challenge; acquisition of knowledge and skills; the capacity for conceptualisation, and learner autonomy.*
 - ii. Appropriate balance between theoretical and practical elements; academic learning and personal development, and breadth and depth of subject material.*
 - iii. The development of student curiosity and a well-developed interest in the process of learning.**
- g) The currency of the curriculum is maintained through the ongoing monitoring and systematic review of the programme curriculum (including modules/courses), informed by a range of internal and external reference points, national and international subject benchmarks, and recognised good practice.*

Criterion 2.3: Student Entry Standards

Student entry standards for the programme are appropriate to the level of the programme, transparent, and consistently and fairly applied; programme entry standards ensure that students have adequate and appropriate prior knowledge and skills to undertake the programme successfully. Pre-sessional programmes (including the General Foundation Programme) ensure that students have adequate and appropriate prior knowledge and skills to undertake the programme successfully, provide appropriate teaching, learning and assessment of nationally identified core subjects (that is, study skills, mathematics, information technology and, (where relevant) the English language) to support academic study in the programme field, and maintain verifiable exit levels that meet the entry standards of academic programmes.

Indicators

- a) *Student entry standards for the programme are designed to secure a good match between student achievement, aptitude, skills and competencies, and the demands of the programme.*
- b) *Student recruitment, selection and admission practices for the programme are clear, efficient, explicit and fair, and in accordance with the HEI's policies and regulations.*
- c) *The admission criteria for the programme are clearly defined and documented, and communicated to all applicants and other stakeholders.*
- d) *For a programme delivered in English, students demonstrate appropriate English language proficiency prior to entry into the programme. The student entry standards reflect national or international norms for English language proficiency in similar higher education programmes that are applied nationally and internationally, as appropriate.*
- e) *Entry standards for the programme are set in the context of appropriate student support being provided at each level of the programme. Such support should include the HEI's provision of ongoing English language support for students on the programme, alongside their higher education studies, where this is required to enable effective student learning.*
- f) *Entry standards for the programme are consistent with the HEI's entry standards, including the HEI's policies and procedures covering student credit transfer, articulation and recognition of prior learning.*
- g) *Entry standards for the programme are regularly reviewed based on student performance and other relevant internal and external reference points.*
- h) *There are well-defined policies covering student mobility, transfer, articulation, recognition of prior learning, and credit accumulation and transfer, for both incoming and outgoing students, and these policies are implemented consistently and fairly and in line with the requirements of the OQF.*
- i) *Pre-sessional programmes (such as the General Foundation Programme) are well-structured, effective, regularly reviewed and improved, and specifically support a student to study within their chosen field of study.*
- j) *The exit levels of pre-sessional programmes are adequately benchmarked to ensure that they meet the entry standards of academic programmes.*

Criterion 2.4: Teaching Quality

Teaching is effective in enabling students to develop as learners and to achieve the programme learning outcomes; furthermore, it is supported by formal systems for the evaluation and ongoing improvement of teaching and learning. Teaching quality on the programme is assured across all modes of delivery through the implementation of defined and appropriate teaching and learning methods, ongoing evaluation of teaching effectiveness and the maintenance of appropriate staff-student ratios. Research and scholarly activities are used to inform teaching and student learning in the programme.

Indicators

- a) *Teaching methods are effective in conveying the curriculum content and in helping students achieve the learning outcomes of the programme.*

- b) *The breadth, depth, pace and challenge of learning and the variety of methods used, are appropriate for each mode of study and level of the programme and to the needs of students; where appropriate, opportunities are provided for students to learn from practical classes, fieldwork and placement.*
- c) *Student individual learning benefits from effective support and guidance from teaching staff on the programme.*
- d) *The programme's approach to teaching and learning enables students to develop as independent learners, to study their chosen subject(s) in depth and to develop their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. The approach reflects contemporary pedagogies and incorporates appropriate use of learning technologies.*
- e) *The programme staff-student ratio is appropriate for the subject's requirements and to deliver the stated teaching and learning approaches.*
- f) *Where applicable, teaching and learning approaches are appropriate for a programme delivered in multiple locations and one or more delivery modes.*
- g) *Effective learning is supported by formal systems of teaching quality evaluation and the professional development of teaching staff including:*
 - i. *Faculty induction and orientation.*
 - ii. *The input of educational (pedagogic) expertise to support teaching staff, and the use of external recognised good practice.*
 - iii. *Opportunities for staff development, in accordance with the HEI's staff development policy.*
 - iv. *Student feedback on teaching and learning.*
- h) *The interaction between staff scholarly activities, research and teaching is reflected in the curriculum and in teaching and learning approaches, with staff encouraged to include in the programme information about their research activities, together with other significant research developments in the field.*
- i) *The ongoing monitoring and systematic review of teaching quality on the programme helps inform the quality improvement of teaching and learning. This monitoring and review includes the use of student feedback on teaching quality, along with other evaluation mechanisms.*

Criterion 2.5: Research Components of the Coursework Programme

Where the coursework programme includes a substantial research component, student research activity is conducted ethically and is adequately supported through access to appropriate staff and to physical and other resources. There are effective arrangements for the supervision and assessment of student research output, including effective moderation and (where appropriate) independent verification.

This criterion is relevant to all coursework programmes that incorporate a *substantial* research component. Examples of research components of a coursework programme include an Honours year, graduation or research project, and these should be assessed against this criterion.

Indicators

- a) *Students undertaking research have appropriate opportunities and support to develop the necessary research skills to support their research activity.*
- b) *Students undertaking research have access to appropriate and adequate access to resources, including staff, laboratory, library and information, and information technology resources to support that research activity.*
- c) *Students undertaking a research project/dissertation have an appointed supervisor, and there is effective supervision support; the roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and students are clearly communicated to both parties.*
- d) *The criteria used to assess research components (for example, projects, dissertations) are clear and enable different levels of student achievements to be differentiated; these criteria are communicated clearly to both staff and students.*

- e) *The assessment of research components adheres to the HEI's regulations and procedures in this area, including in relation to the internal and external moderation of such components, and the independent verification of the academic standards achieved.*
- f) *Where research output arises from student group work, the criteria are effective in enabling individual students' contributions and achievements to be accurately and equitably assessed.*
- g) *The ongoing monitoring and systematic review of the programme includes consideration of the quality of the research components of the programme, and the standards of student achievement in these components; this contributes to the quality improvement of the programme.*

Criterion 2.6: Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation

Assessment (all forms and types of coursework and examinations) is deliberately linked to and consistent with learning outcomes; it is designed to enable students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes and is fair, rigorous and open to appeal. Moderation and grading of assessments ensure that academic standards are maintained. Assessment procedures for the programme adhere to the relevant assessment and security regulations for the programme. Students on the programme benefit from feedback on their assessments and such feedback is effective in helping students learn, understand their performance and achievements and improve their performance.

Indicators

- a) *Information on the programme approach to assessment (for example, assessment criteria, assessment methods, frequency, criteria, feedback on performance, the HEI's regulations) is provided to students at the outset of each unit/module/course comprising the programme.*
- b) *A variety of assessment methods are used; these are clear, effective and reliable and are informed by current good practices for the academic discipline/subject area.*
- c) *Assessment approaches and tools include both formative assessment (that aids student academic understanding and development and assists student learning) and summative assessment (which enables the evaluation and measurement of student learning at a point in time).*
- d) *Assessment criteria are clear in conveying to students the knowledge, understanding and skills that students are expected to demonstrate in an assessment; these criteria are based on the learning outcomes for the course/module and programme.*
- e) *Assessment effectively measures student achievement of the intended course and programme learning outcomes, and enables different levels of student performance and achievement to be effectively differentiated.*
- f) *There are clear and appropriate marking criteria for each grade or level of student's performance; these criteria are communicated to, and understood by, both staff and students, and are consistently applied by staff when marking student work.*
- g) *There are effective mechanisms to ensure the reliability and fairness of student assessment results, including internal and external moderation of student work and results, and the independent verification of academic standards achieved*
- h) *Assessment feedback to students is effective, constructive and timely, enabling staff and students to evaluate student progress, performance or achievement, and takes a variety of forms (including, for example: written one-to-one feedback, oral feedback, whole-class/group feedback, e-feedback, and student peer-to-peer feedback).*
- i) *Feedback to students makes reference to the assessment criteria for the assignment and, in doing so, helps students understand their performance in the assessment task.*
- j) *Student assessment results are formally confirmed/verified through the workings of the appropriate assessment boards/committees (or equivalent) of the academic unit and the HEI.*
- k) *Appropriate assessments are developed and implemented for students with special needs to ensure inclusivity.*
- l) *Any academic appeals by students on the programme are dealt with in strict accordance to the relevant student grievance processes so as to ensure that all students are treated fairly and that academic standards are maintained; this includes, for example, how, in the first instance, academic appeals by students are dealt with informally at the programme level.*

- m) *The academic security and integrity of assessment arrangements for the programme are maintained in line with the HEI's policies and procedures in relation to all aspects of academic security and invigilation.*
- n) *The programme's approach to assessment benefits from systematic review and evaluation, including through consultation with external experts, both locally and internationally.*

Criterion 2.7: Academic Integrity, Ethics and Biosafety

The programme promotes a culture of academic integrity and ethics. Academic integrity of the programme is ensured through the consistent implementation of relevant policies and processes, and through proactive steps taken to prevent and address all forms of academic misconduct by staff and students. Programme staff and students demonstrate ethical behaviour in line with the Higher Education Institution's Values and codes of conduct, and with best practice in the field. Ethical marketing ensures that all promotional activities and materials for the programme contain clear and accurate information. All teaching and research activities involving human, animal or genetic ethical considerations or biohazardous materials, where applicable, are well-managed and controlled. Any intellectual property generated through student research is managed in alignment with appropriate intellectual property policies and procedures.

Indicators

- a) *Programme design and delivery ensure that teaching, learning and assessment methods help promote appropriate academic conduct.*
- b) *Programme staff and students are aware of, and have access to, the HEI's policies and codes of practice on ethical conduct, plagiarism, cheating, copyright and conflicts of interest, as is appropriate to their needs.*
- c) *Proactive steps are taken to ensure that staff and students understand and do not engage in plagiarism, cheating, collusion and other forms of academic misconduct, including commissioning others to do their work, and students are encouraged to adopt good academic conduct in respect of assessment.*
- d) *Appropriate procedures are in place to identify and address academic misconduct by staff or students (for example clearly stated penalties for academic misconduct), and these are implemented effectively and consistently.*
- e) *Instances of academic misconduct on the programme are recorded, and this data contributes to the ongoing monitoring and systematic review of the programme, to maintain academic standards and inform quality improvement.*
- f) *Programme students are given clear and accurate advice and guidance on their rights and responsibilities, including regulations and procedures related to student behaviour (including in relation to academic integrity), as set out in the HEI's code of conduct for students and/or regulations.*
- g) *Data on breaches of student discipline and/or inappropriate student behaviour (including in relation to academic integrity) is considered as part of the systematic review of the programme, so as to enable programme managers to address any systemic ethical issues that require attention.*
- h) *Prospective students to the programme have access to objective marketing information about the programme, including the awarding body for the qualification granted on successful completion of the programme, the accreditation status of the programme, the academic environment in which they will be studying, and the support that will be made available to them.*
- i) *Programme promotional materials and activities are up-to-date, honest, accurate, clear, and relevant for prospective students, other stakeholders and the public, and do not contain any misleading information.*
- j) *Students undertaking research involving human, animal or genetic ethical considerations, or bio-safety considerations, if applicable, adhere to the relevant codes of practice, policies and procedures.*
- k) *The HEI ensures that the intellectual property ownership of any student research project outputs is clearly defined, guided by policy and are in line with the national laws and guidelines for intellectual property.*

Criterion 2.8: Student Placements

Where student work placements, including on-the-job training and internships, are a formal requirement of the programme, there are processes and arrangements in place to secure sufficient placement opportunities, to supervise, monitor and assess students on placement and to evaluate the contribution of placements to programme learning outcomes. Where placements are available to students on the programme but are not part of the programme requirements, there is appropriate oversight of these to ensure that they enrich the learning experience of students.

Indicators

- a) *Where appropriate, there are opportunities for students to learn from relevant work placement experience.*
- b) *Where student placements are part of the programme requirements, these are planned and managed as a fully-integrated component of the programme.*
- c) *Where the programme includes credit-bearing student placements, assessment of the placement is designed to enable students to demonstrate achievement of the work-based learning outcomes.*
- d) *Placement arrangements are fully documented, and this information is made available to all the relevant parties.*
- e) *Where student placements are not part of the programme requirements, but are arranged by the HEI, there are suitable strategies in place to oversee these.*
- f) *The roles and responsibilities of programme staff and the host organisation are set out in a formal agreement between the HEI and the host organisation and are communicated clearly to all the relevant stakeholders.*
- g) *There are effective arrangements to assure the quality of the student work-placement experience, including the quality of supervision, as well as processes available to manage any difficulties that might arise.*
- h) *There are effective arrangements to evaluate work placements with input sought from students, hosts and other stakeholders, including in relation to contributing to the programme goals, and this evaluation is used to inform quality improvement.*

Criterion 2.9: Academic Support Services and Resources

Students have access to appropriate academic support services and resources, aligned with programme goals and including library and learning resources; information and learning technology services; specialised software and laboratories, where applicable, and extracurricular learning support services. Academic support services are appropriate and sufficient to support student learning on the programme in all modes of delivery and are effective in helping students achieve the learning outcomes.

Indicators

- a) *There are effective mechanisms for identifying the learning needs of programme students, and for planning and delivering student learning support services, resources and activities appropriate to meet those needs and the goals of the programme.*
- b) *Library and other information services and resources, including electronic and online learning resources, are appropriate for the programme, and support the programme's approach to teaching, learning and, where appropriate, research. These resources are accessible to the students and are sufficient in quantity, quality, depth, diversity and currency to meet the needs of all staff and students on the programme and to enable students to achieve the programme learning outcomes.*
- c) *Programme students receive appropriate and adequate support to develop the skills needed to make effective use of the library facilities and learning resources. This includes support in the development of students' digital literacy, so that students can source information effectively online and in a virtual learning environment.*
- d) *Information and learning technology services are appropriate for the programme, and support the programme's approach to teaching, learning and, where appropriate, research. These*

services are sufficient to meet the needs of all programme staff and students and enable students to achieve the programme learning outcomes.

- e) Programme students receive appropriate and adequate support to develop the skills needed to make effective use of learning technology services. This includes support in the development of student digital literacy, so that students can work effectively online and in a virtual learning environment.*
- f) Programme students have support to develop their academic and learning skills (for example, numeracy; writing and referencing; research) through the provision of extra-curricular services and activities, in addition to learning support provided as part of the programme delivery.*
- g) Teaching and learning facilities (for example, classrooms, study space and equipment) are appropriate and adequate to meet the needs of the programme, including the programme's approach to teaching, learning and, where applicable, research; the facilities provide an atmosphere conducive to learning and/or professional development, and foster staff-student interaction.*
- h) Where required, there are the necessary specialist software and facilities (for example, laboratories, workshops, practice rooms) to support the delivery of the programme; specialist facilities are outfitted with adequate equipment and supplies, and supported by appropriately qualified technical staff.*
- i) Specialist teaching and learning facilities are available to support students with special needs.*
- j) Students undertaking research have appropriate opportunities and support to develop the necessary research skills to support their research activity*
- k) Programme staff ensure that, in providing learning materials to students, national copyright laws are strictly upheld through the use of licensed software and appropriate reproduction of copyrighted texts and journals.*
- l) Where the programme is delivered in multiple locations and/or through multiple modes of delivery, academic support services and resources are managed in such a way that all programme students and staff have adequate access when required.*
- m) Programme students and staff have the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of the academic support services and resources, including through the use of student and staff satisfaction feedback. This feedback contributes to the systematic reviews of the programme, leading to quality improvements of academic support services, resources and facilities.*

STANDARD 3: Research Programme Design and Delivery

The research programme is characterised by well-grounded and academically-sound programme design. Programme design is informed by the use of a range of national and international reference points, including the requirements of the Oman Qualifications Framework. The research programme arrangements ensure effective supervision and provision of other support for research students in order to enable them to achieve their research learning outcomes, adhere to relevant research ethics requirements, and prepare them for employment and further study.

Standard 3 applies to all programmes which are mainly comprised of research rather than coursework (taught components) but which may contain substantial coursework components (for example, courses or modules on research methodology).

Criterion 3.1: Research Programme Design and Learning Outcomes

The overall design of the research programme, including its aims, objectives and learning outcomes, is academically sound and aligned with a range of institutional, national and international reference points, including the Oman Qualifications Framework, the Higher Education Institution's Mission, Vision and Values and graduate attributes. The research programme design is informed by the use of external benchmarks of established good practice for research programmes, and includes formal arrangements for engagement with the professions, professional bodies and industry. The research programme has appropriate and clearly defined learning outcomes which students will be able to achieve and demonstrate on the completion of their research programme. Foreign programmes align with the Oman Qualifications Framework.

Indicators

- a) *There is an official or definitive record for the research programme (such as a programme specification document) which sets out: the aims and objectives and learning outcomes of the programme; the curricula or courses/units/modules which comprise the programme including their OQF level and OQF Credit Value, and programme delivery and assessment arrangements. This record is the key reference point for the delivery and assessment of the programme; its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records to students. The definitive record for the programme can be changed only through the HEI's process for programme approval/re-approval and development.*
- b) *The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the research programme are set at the appropriate OQF level and meet the minimum OQF Credit Value of the award, as set out in the OQF Qualification Arrangements document, and meet the expectations of the relevant academic field(s) of study, and Oman's workforce and research and development needs.*
- c) *The aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the research programme align with the HEI's Mission, Vision and Values and contribute towards students' attainment of the HEI's graduate attributes.*
- d) *The research programme design is informed by the use of national and international benchmarks of recognised good practice in research programme design to ensure the appropriate provision of policies, services, resources and supervision.*
- e) *The overall design and review of the programme has been informed by consultation with a number of internal and external stakeholders, including, for example: industry and employers; professions and professional bodies.*
- f) *The research programme design ensures that students receive training in the principles of good research in their discipline as well as in-depth advanced research training.*
- g) *The research programme design encourages students to consider the broad context of their research area, including in relation to societal, legal and ethical matters.*
- h) *There are definitive programme outcomes which are set at the correct level for the award, and clearly expressed and communicated to staff and students, so that both academic staff and learners know what is expected of them.*
- i) *Student award certificates and transcripts are accurate in describing the award achieved by students and are issued to students in a timely manner.*

- j) *International and foreign programmes meet the laws and requirements of Oman. They are aligned to the Oman Qualifications Framework in accordance with the OQF Alignment Policy.*
- k) *Where the research programme is based on those of the affiliate HEI, students on the programme have access to an equivalent quality of learning opportunities in order to help them achieve the intended outcomes of the programme, and assessments are adapted in a way appropriate to the local environment using research activities which are relevant to Oman.*

Criterion 3.2: Research Student Entry Standards

Students admitted on to the research programme are appropriately qualified and prepared. The entry standards for admission to the research programme are clear, transparent and consistently and fairly applied. The entry standards ensure that students have adequate prior knowledge and skills, including English language proficiency where relevant, to undertake the research programme successfully. Pre-sessional programmes (including the General Foundation Programme) ensure that students have adequate and appropriate prior knowledge and skills to undertake the programme successfully, provide appropriate teaching, learning and assessment of nationally identified core subjects (that is, study skills, mathematics, information technology and, (where relevant) the English language) to support academic study in the programme field, and maintain verifiable exit levels that meet the entry standards of academic programmes.

Indicators

- a) *Clear admission requirements, and a robust admissions process, are in place to attract and recruit high quality applicants who are appropriately qualified and prepared.*
- b) *The admission criteria for the research programme, including the required level of English language proficiency, are clearly defined, and established with reference to appropriate internal and external reference points, and national and international benchmarks.*
- c) *The admission criteria for the research programme are clearly communicated to all applicants and other stakeholders.*
- d) *Admission criteria for the research programme are regularly reviewed based on student performance and other relevant internal and external reference points.*
- e) *Student recruitment, selection and admission arrangements for the research programme are clear, efficient, explicit and fair, and in accordance with the HEI's policies and regulations.*
- f) *Pre-sessional programmes (such as the General Foundation Programme) are well-structured, effective, regularly reviewed and improved, and specifically support a student to study within their chosen field of study.*
- g) *The exit levels of pre-sessional programmes are adequately benchmarked to ensure that they meet the entry standards of academic programmes.*

Criterion 3.3: Research Supervision

There are effective and constructive research supervision arrangements for students on the programme which enable students to undertake research with a high level of independence and engage in research leading to knowledge creation. Supervisors have the appropriate qualifications, skills, experience and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and are active researchers in their academic discipline or field of study. There are mechanisms in place to monitor supervisor performance and effectiveness of the supervision provided to research students.

Indicators

- a) *There are defined and appropriate research supervision arrangements in place, including supervision policies and procedures, which are effectively communicated and implemented.*
- b) *A supervision handbook is made available to all research students and supervisors. The handbook includes the HEI's policies, procedures and code of practice for research and research supervision.*
- c) *Individual supervisors have sufficient time and resources to carry out their responsibilities effectively.*

- d) *Each research student has a supervisory team which includes a main supervisor who is the clearly identified point of contact and support, and one or more co-supervisors.*
- e) *The HEI's regulations and codes of practice for research programmes are readily available to all staff and students, and are written in a clear language understood by all users. These are supplemented by accessible, subject-specific guidance at the level of the academic unit.*
- f) *There are clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress and their development needs, including formal reviews of students' progress at different stages. Research students, supervisors and other relevant staff are aware of the progress monitoring mechanisms, including the importance of keeping formal records of the outcomes of progress meetings and related activities.*
- g) *The effectiveness of the student research supervision is regularly reviewed to ensure students are adequately supported to undertake independent research.*
- h) *Supervisors are appropriately qualified to undertake supervision, or have equivalent professional/research experience, and have appropriate expertise in the academic discipline/field of study.*
- i) *Academic staff who supervise research students are actively involved in research in their discipline area and have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and encourage research students, and to monitor their progress effectively.*
- j) *Supervisors receive the support and training that they need to provide high quality supervision for their students.*
- k) *There are arrangements in place to monitor the performance of supervisors, including through the use of students' feedback, in order to promote improvement in the quality of research student supervision.*

Criterion 3.4: Coursework Components of the Research Programme

Where the research programme includes a substantial coursework component, coursework activity is designed to support the research programme and includes appropriate teaching, learning and assessment activities. There are effective arrangements for the assessment of student coursework in order to maintain academic standards.

This criterion is relevant to all research programmes that incorporate a substantial coursework component. Examples of coursework components include a course or set of modules on research methodologies or subject specialisation topics, and these should be assessed against this criterion.

Indicators

- a) *The learning outcomes of coursework components, and how they contribute to the overall aims and objectives of the research programme, are clearly defined and communicated to research students and staff.*
- b) *There is appropriate academic support for research students undertaking coursework, including teaching and learning support, and appropriate learning and other physical resources.*
- c) *The criteria used to assess coursework assessments are clear and enable different levels of students' achievements and performance to be differentiated; these criteria are communicated clearly to both staff and students.*
- d) *There are sound arrangements for the assessment of students' coursework, including moderation and, where appropriate, independent verification.*
- e) *The academic security and integrity of assessment arrangements for the programme are maintained in line with the HEI's policies and procedures in relation to all aspects of academic security and invigilation.*
- f) *The ongoing monitoring and systematic review of the research programme includes consideration of the coursework components of the programme, and the standards of student achievement in these components; this contributes to the quality improvement of the programme.*

Criterion 3.5: Research Student Assessment

Assessment criteria and procedures for final and interim assessments on the research programme are implemented rigorously, fairly and consistently and ensure that students meet the academic standards for the award. Assessment is deliberately linked to and consistent with learning outcomes and designed to enable students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.

Indicators

- a) *The criteria used to assess the research programme are clear and readily available to research students, staff and examiners for all units/modules/courses.*
- b) *Assessment procedures for the research programme are clear and governed by the HEIs regulations and guidelines, which set the academic standards for the programme and are implemented rigorously, consistently and fairly.*
- c) *There are effective mechanisms to ensure the reliability and fairness of research assessment results (including, where relevant, internal and external moderation of student work and results), and the independent verification of academic standards achieved.*
- d) *Final assessment procedures for the research programme include input from an external examiner(s), as set out in the HEI's regulations and guidelines, and are carried out to a reasonable timescale.*
- e) *Student assessment results are formally confirmed/verified through the workings of the appropriate assessment boards/committees (or equivalent) of the academic unit and the HEI.*
- f) *Any academic appeals by students on the programme are dealt with in strict accordance to the HEI's student grievance procedures, in order to ensure that all students are treated fairly and that academic standards are maintained.*
- g) *Completion rates for the research programme are recorded, monitored and evaluated, and this data is used to inform the quality improvement of the research programme.*
- h) *The programme's approach to assessment benefits from systematic review and evaluation, including through consultation with external experts, both locally and internationally.*

Criterion 3.6: Academic Integrity, Research Ethics and Biosafety

The programme promotes a culture of academic integrity and ethics. Academic integrity of the programme is ensured through the consistent implementation of relevant policies and processes, and through proactive steps taken to prevent and address all forms of academic misconduct by staff and students. Programme staff and students demonstrate ethical behaviour in line with the Higher Education Institution's Values and codes of conduct, and with best practice in the field. Ethical marketing ensures that all promotional activities and materials for the programme contain clear and accurate information. The integrity of research produced by students and staff is assured through consistent and rigorous application of relevant policies and procedures relating to ethical research conduct and biosafety, as applicable. Support is provided to research students to ensure they are aware of these policies and do not engage in research misconduct. Any intellectual property generated through student research is managed in alignment with appropriate intellectual property policies and procedures.

Indicators

- a) *Programme staff and students are aware of, and have access to, the HEI's policies and codes of practice on the following: ethical conduct, plagiarism, cheating, collusion, falsification of results, intellectual property rights, copyright, and conflicts of interest.*
- b) *Proactive steps are taken to ensure that research students understand and avoid plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic misconduct, including students commissioning others to do their work; students are encouraged to adopt good academic research conduct.*
- c) *Appropriate procedures are in place to identify and address academic misconduct by staff or students, and these are implemented effectively and consistently.*
- d) *Instances of academic misconduct on the programme are recorded, and this data contributes to the ongoing monitoring and systematic review of the programme, to maintain academic standards and inform quality improvement.*

- e) *Prospective students to the programme have access to objective marketing information about the programme, including the awarding body for the qualification granted on successful completion of the programme, the accreditation status of the programme, the academic environment in which they will be studying, and the support that will be made available to them.*
- f) *Programme promotional materials and activities are up-to-date, honest, accurate, clear, and relevant for prospective students, other stakeholders and the public, and do not contain any misleading information.*
- g) *Data on breaches of student discipline and/or inappropriate student behaviour (including in relation to academic integrity) is considered as part of the systematic review of the programme, so as to enable programme managers to address any systemic ethical issues that require attention.*
- h) *Programme students are given clear and accurate advice and guidance on their rights and responsibilities, including regulations and procedures related to student behaviour (including in relation to academic integrity), as set out in the HEI's code of conduct for students and/or regulations.*
- i) *Students undertaking research involving human, animal or genetic ethical considerations, or bio-safety considerations, adhere to the relevant codes of practice, policies and procedures.*
- j) *The HEI ensures that the intellectual property ownership of any student research project outputs is clearly defined, guided by policy and are in line with the national laws and guidelines for intellectual property.*

Criterion 3.7: Research Resources and Support

Students have access to appropriate academic support services and resources, aligned with programme goals and including library and learning resources; information and learning technology services; specialised software and laboratories, where applicable, and extracurricular learning support services. Academic support services are appropriate and sufficient to support student learning on the programme in all modes of delivery and are effective in helping students achieve the learning outcomes. Students, furthermore, have access to appropriate research resources and support to undertake their research. Funding is allocated to resource research programmes adequately and students have access to appropriate study spaces and laboratories for research; research databases, journals and other information resources; equipment for conducting research; research skills training, and other relevant research facilities. Students receive support which enables them to attend relevant conferences and/or participate in scholarly activities.

Indicators

- a) *There are effective mechanisms for identifying the learning and research needs of programme students, and for planning and delivering learning and research support services, resources and activities appropriate to meet those needs and the goals of the programme.*
- b) *Library and other information services and resources, including electronic and online learning resources, are appropriate for the programme, and support the programme's approach to learning and research. These resources are accessible to research students and are sufficient in quantity, quality, depth, diversity and currency to meet the needs of all staff and students on the programme and to enable students to achieve the programme learning outcomes.*
- c) *Research students receive appropriate and adequate support to develop the skills needed to make effective use of the library facilities and learning resources. This includes support in the development of students' digital literacy, so that students can source information effectively online and in a virtual learning environment.*
- d) *Programme students have support to develop their academic, learning and research skills (for example, numeracy, writing and referencing) through the provision of extra-curricular services and activities, in addition to learning support provided as part of the programme delivery.*
- e) *Teaching and learning facilities (for example, classrooms, study space and equipment) are appropriate and adequate to meet the needs of the programme, including the programme's approach to teaching, learning and research; the facilities provide an atmosphere conducive to learning and/or professional development, and foster staff-student interaction.*

- f) *There is an adequate budget for research programme resources, training, equipment and facilities in order to fully support research students.*
- g) *Research students have appropriate access to study spaces and laboratories, library, information technology, training and other relevant resources to support their research programme activities. There are the necessary specialist software and specialist facilities (outfitted with adequate equipment and supplies, and supported by appropriately qualified technical staff) to support student research.*
- h) *Specialist teaching and learning facilities are available to support students with special needs.*
- i) *Programme staff ensure that, in providing learning materials to students, national copyright laws are strictly upheld through the use of licensed software and appropriate reproduction of copyrighted texts and journals.*
- j) *Where student research is undertaken in multiple locations and/or through multiple modes of delivery, academic support services and resources are managed in such a way that all programme students and staff have adequate access when required.*
- k) *There is support and funding available for research students to attend and present at conferences, seminars or other research events.*
- l) *Programme students and staff have the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of the academic support services and resources, including through the use of student and staff satisfaction feedback. This feedback contributes to the systematic reviews of the programme, leading to positive research outcomes through quality improvements of academic support services, resources and facilities.*

PART C: OUTCOME AND RATING AGAINST STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

5. Programme Standard Ratings

5.1 Introduction

In common with ISA, PSA accreditation outcomes are based on ratings given by a Panel to each standard. Standard ratings, in turn, are based on the ratings given to each criterion. A single rating scale is used by all PSA Panels for all programmes. HEIs contribute to the rating process during their self-assessment by self-rating each criterion. In a clustered submission, an HEI and the PSA Panel rates each individual programme. As a result, different accreditation outcomes may occur for each programme. In a multi-campus submission, an HEI and the PSA Panel rates a programme as a single entity, based on a review of the programme as offered within different locations. Details on preparing the PSAA, and the self-assessment of a programme, are provided later in this manual (see Part D). This section focuses on the mechanism of rating and the interpretation of outcomes.

5.2 Criterion Rating

5.2.1 Criterion Rating Overview

Both the HEI and the PSA Panel are required to rate criteria, using the same rating scale (see Table 3). The criteria rating determine the standard ratings and the Accreditation Outcome. The HEI is encouraged to assess a programme critically against all applicable criteria and standards in each of their PSAAs. The PSA Panel rates the programme against the expectations set out in the OAAAQA criteria and standards (see Part B).²⁹

Unlike ISA, PSA criteria ratings are non-numerical and range from *Met*, which means that **all** the applicable requirements of the criterion are being met most of the time, to *Not Met* which indicates that the HEI has not met the requirements of the criterion and performance is unsatisfactory. A rating of *Partially Met* means that the HEI has met some of the criterion requirements, but not all, at the time of the PSA. For a rating of *Partially Met* to be given, the HEI must demonstrate a material commitment to fully meeting all the criterion requirements in the future. Stating that the HEI 'plans' or 'intends' to address criteria requirements is not sufficient for a rating of *Partially Met* to be given – the HEI must give the PSA Panel confidence that it has most of the requirements in place (for example, policies and successful deployment of the approach) but requires further time or effort (for example, in acting on review findings) to ensure the effectiveness of their systems.

Table 3: Programme Criteria Ratings

Description	Rating
Provision or practice meets all the applicable requirements of the criterion most of the time. Results against the criterion are achieved through a deliberate approach and are sustainable.	<i>Met</i>
Provision or practice does not meet the requirements of the criterion. It is unlikely that, given the nature of provision or practice at present, the HEI will meet this criterion in future.	<i>Not Met</i>
Provision or practice does not currently meet all the requirements of the criterion. The HEI has demonstrated an appropriate commitment to ensuring the programme meets all requirements of the criterion in the future.	<i>Partially Met</i>
The whole criterion is not applicable to the HEI's context. The Panel agrees with the HEI that this criterion is not applicable.	<i>Not Applicable</i>
For a criterion rating to be awarded, all elements of the criterion description should normally apply. Meeting the requirements of the criterion most of the time does not mean meeting the requirements in most of the departments of a college or meeting them in most colleges of a university (and so forth).	

²⁹ Aggregated data on self-rating of programmes against criteria and standards by HEIs may be used by OAAAQA for research purposes. Outcomes of this research may be published.

5.2.2 Definition of Criterion Ratings

A rating of *Met*. This rating indicates that the HEI or PSA Panel has assessed the programme as meeting all the requirements of the criterion most of the time. The results for the programme are deliberate in that they have been planned and executed as planned, and the results are sustainable in that the performance levels are likely to be maintained for the duration of the accreditation period. A rating of *Met* is indicative of practice that meets international norms and expectations.

A rating of *Not Met*. This rating indicates that the HEI or PSA Panel has assessed the programme as not meeting the requirements of the criterion. If any applicable criterion is rated as *Not Met*, the standard is rated *Not Met*.

A rating of *Partially Met*. This rating indicates that the HEI or PSA Panel has assessed the programme as not meeting the criterion's requirements at the time of the review but the HEI or PSA Panel has assessed the programme as demonstrating a commitment to meeting all applicable requirements in the future. A standard may be rated as *Met* with up to a maximum of two criteria assessed as *Partially Met*.

A rating of *Not Applicable*. This rating indicates that the criterion is not applicable to the programme. The HEI must explain why they have rated a criterion or standard as *Not Applicable* to their context. The PSA Panel Chair verifies this rating based on the HEI's context, and the particular characteristics of the programme, in liaison with the Review Director as part of the Completeness Check process (see Section 9.3). If the criterion is deemed as applicable by the PSA Panel Chair and the Review Director, the HEI is given two weeks to submit commentary and rating to be included in their PSAA.

5.3 Standard Rating

Criteria ratings determine Programme Standard Ratings (see Table 4). A standard may be rated as *Met* or *Not Met*. In order for a standard to be rated *Met*, no more than two of the criteria are rated *Partially Met* and none of the criteria is rated *Not Met*. A *Met* rating means that the programme meets the requirements of all applicable criteria in the standard, or meets all applicable criteria except for up to two criteria which are deemed to be *Partially Met*, with a clear evidence that the HEI demonstrates commitment to meeting these criteria in the future. If more than two criteria in the Standard are rated *Partially Met*, or one or more criteria are rated *Not Met*, then the Standard is rated as *Not Met*.

As separate standards have been developed for coursework and research programmes, one standard will be rated as *Not Applicable* in each PSA. For example, if a coursework programme is being assessed, Standard 2 will apply, while Standard 3 is deemed *Not Applicable*, and vice versa for research programmes. Standard 1 applies in all cases.

Table 4: Programme Standard Ratings	
Description	Rating
<p>No more than two criteria are rated <i>Partially Met</i>, and no criterion is rated <i>Not Met</i>. The programme either meets the requirements of all the applicable criteria of a standard, or meets all the applicable criteria except for <i>up to two criteria</i> which the programme partially meets and demonstrates commitment to fully meeting in the future.</p>	<i>Met</i>
<p>More than two criteria are rated <i>Partially Met</i> and/or one criterion or more is rated <i>Not Met</i>. The programme does not meet the requirements of one or more of the applicable criteria of a standard and/or partially meets more than two of the applicable criteria.</p>	<i>Not Met</i>
<p>The standard is not applicable to the programme. The Panel agrees with the HEI that this criterion is not applicable.</p>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

5.4 Accreditation Outcomes

5.4.1 Possible Outcomes

Standard ratings determine the Programme Accreditation Outcome (see Table 5). Both applicable standards must be rated *Met* in order for the programme to be *Accredited*.³⁰ Programmes which are *Not Accredited* are placed *On Probation* and are required to undergo PSR (see Section 5.7). If after PSR the programme still does not meet the standards, it is *Not Accredited*. For any programme *On Probation* or *Not Accredited* following PSR, the HEI is required to abide by the MoHERI's regulations regarding programme termination, new student admission, and/or transfers to another HEI.

5.4.2 Impact of Programme Accreditation Outcome on Listing and Re-Listing Status

Programme Accreditation and Listing/Re-Listing of qualifications check different, albeit complementary, aspects of a programme and it is feasible for a qualification to be correctly Listed 'on paper' but the programme to which it belongs fails to meet the expectations of the applicable standards in practice. It is possible, therefore, for a qualification to remain Listed on the NQF but for the programme to be *On Probation* after PSA. A programme that is *Not Accredited* is removed from the NQF.

5.4.3 Impact of Listing and Re-Listing Outcomes on Programme Accreditation Outcome

A successful Listing Outcome is a prerequisite for commencing PSA. A programme qualification that subsequently fails to meet the requirements for Re-Listing, however, must be brought to the attention of the OAAAQA under the provisions of OAAAQA's Policy on Major Change Notification.³¹ This is the responsibility of the HEI concerned. All notifications are considered on a case-by-case basis and may result in a suspension of the Programme Accreditation outcome.

5.4.4 Impact of Listing and Re-Listing Outcome on PSR

A successful Listing and/or Re-Listing Outcome is a prerequisite for commencing PSR. If a qualification has undergone Re-Listing while the programme is *On Probation*, a successful Re-Listing Outcome is required before PSR may commence (see Section 2.4.3).

Table 5: Programme Accreditation Outcomes	
Standards Ratings	Accreditation Outcome
<p>Both applicable standards rated <i>Met</i> The programme meets the applicable national programme standards.</p>	<i>Accredited</i>
<p>One or both standards rated <i>Not Met</i> The programme does not meet one or more of the applicable national programme standards. The programme undergoes PSR following a defined period of probation of up to one year.</p>	<i>On Probation</i>
<p>One or more standard rated <i>Not Met</i> (following PSR) The programme has failed to demonstrate that it meets the applicable national programme standards. The programme has completed a period of probation and undergone PSR.</p>	<i>Not Accredited</i>

5.5 Communication of Outcome

The Accreditation Outcome is published on the OAAAQA website together with the ratings for both applicable standards and all applicable criteria. The HEI's supervising Ministry may be notified (where applicable) of the final outcome and the final report is sent to the Cabinet.

³⁰ Unlike ISA, there is no 'Conditionally Accredited' outcome in PSA as there are only two applicable standards to be met and the HEI must meet both for a programme to be Accredited.

³¹ See OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/3a6ec396-2a9e-4800-abc7-704e0121768b/Major%20Change%20Notification.aspx?b=0>

5.6 Probation

If a programme has *Not Met* one or both applicable standards, the PSA Panel recommends to the OAAAQA CEO that the programme is placed *On Probation*. The length of the probation period (up to one year) depends on whether one or both standards were *Not Met* and the amount of time that the PSA Panel considers is required for the programme to meet the standards. This probation period is approved by the OAAAQA CEO and endorsed by the OAAAQA Board. The Accreditation Outcome of *On Probation* is published on the OAAAQA website together with the programme's ratings for both standards and all criteria. The HEI's supervising Ministry (if applicable) is notified accordingly.

After the probation period, the HEI submits a PSR Application (PSRA). If, after PSR, either standard has again not been fully *Met* then the programme is deemed *Not Accredited* and the OAAAQA Programme Accreditation process terminated. The OAAAQA advises the HEI's supervising Ministry (if applicable) accordingly. This may lead to the programme license being revoked and the Listing or Re-Listing status of the qualification being withdrawn.

5.7 Programme Standards Reassessment (PSR)

5.7.1 Length of Probation and Areas of Reassessment

A programme placed On Probation is required to undergo PSR up to one year after the PSA outcomes have been endorsed by the Board. The PSA Panel, in the final PSA Report, recommends the length of time it considers the HEI needs to prepare for PSR within the maximum one-year probation period. During PSR, only the following criteria are reassessed:

- All criteria which were *Not Met* at the time of the initial PSA.
- All *Partially Met* criteria associated with standards which were *Not Met* through PSA (*Partially Met* criteria associated with *Met* standards are not reassessed).

5.7.2 Possible Outcomes of PSR

- If all the requirements of the reassessed criteria now fulfil the requirements for the standards to be *Met* (up to two criteria may still be *Partially Met*), the PSA Panel recommends to the OAAAQA CEO that the programme is *Accredited* and the outcome is endorsed by the OAAAQA Board.
- If the requirements of the reassessed criteria still do not fulfil the requirements for the standards to be *Met*, the PSA Panel recommends to the OAAAQA CEO that the programme is *Not Accredited*; the outcome is endorsed by the OAAAQA Board and the OAAAQA Programme Accreditation process is terminated. The HEI's supervising Ministry (if applicable) is notified accordingly.

5.7.3 Method of Conducting PSR

Depending on the nature and number of criteria requiring reassessment, the PSR may be undertaken by desk-top analysis or involve a PSR Visit, or both. A Reassessment Panel is convened comprising a minimum of two external reviewers; these reviewers may or may not have been involved in the initial PSA. Programmes undergoing PSR must be submitted individually: a clustered submission is inadmissible for PSR.



PART D: THE PROGRAMME SELF-ASSESSMENT

6. The Self-Assessment

6.1 Self-Assessment Principles

Self-assessment is the process of reviewing the quality of one's own performance and provision against an established set of standards. In the context of higher education quality, the term is often used interchangeably with self-evaluation and self-study.³² Self-assessment is based on the principle that the primary responsibility for the management of academic standards and quality rests with the HEI, and with the HEI's staff within their academic units and supporting services. In order to meet that primary responsibility, HEI staff must understand the concept of self-assessment and be able to undertake self-assessment activity successfully. It is expected that the HEI's self-assessment of each programme submitted for PSA, and the production of the PSAA, is undertaken primarily by a 'Programme Team' comprising key members of the HEI's staff that are associated directly with the submitted programme(s).

Self-assessment as part of PSA involves the use of evidence (both qualitative and quantitative evidence), the analysis of that evidence, and the evaluation of the programme arising from that analysis. Programme Teams are encouraged to use ADRI in the self-assessment of their programmes (see Section 18.2) and are expected to provide evidence to show the effectiveness of the systems that are in place to ensure that programmes meet the Programme Standards. Results are important in evaluating whether a standard has been *Met* or *Not Met*; equally, the presentation of evidence of the sustainability of the system underpinning the results is critical to the process.

6.2 Commencing the PSA Process

To apply for Programme Accreditation, an HEI follows the three-step process below:

6.2.1 Step 1: Determining the Type of Submission

An HEI may submit a single programme for PSA. Alternatively, it may be possible to include more than one programme for review in a submission in a process referred to herein as 'clustering' (see Section 3.1.3). Up to five programmes can be clustered in a submission providing that each shares the same narrow field according to the listings provided in OSCED (see Section 2.5 for details on OSCED and Section 7.1).

6.2.2 Step 2: Sending Letter of Intent

To undergo PSA, a programme must meet the eligibility requirements (see Section 3.4). An HEI must demonstrate that the programme (or each programme in a cluster) has met those requirements through the submission of a Letter of Intent. This letter is provided by OAAAQA as a standard template and completed by the HEI (see Appendix D). The Letter of Intent represents the HEI's commitment to undergo PSA and cannot be withdrawn once it is submitted, except where exceptional circumstances are notified to the OAAAQA under the conditions given in the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification.³³

The Letter of Intent form is submitted (within timeframes communicated by OAAAQA to Accredited HEIs through a periodically updated briefing paper) and consists of the following:

- Programme information and a checklist demonstrating that the eligibility requirements for PSA have been met
- For a programme cluster, the OSCED Narrow Field
- Details of the HEI's Contact Person for the PSA
- Signature of the HEI's President or highest representative
- The HEI's choice of Submission and Panel Visit dates within the parameters defined by the current OQF Listing and PSA Schedule Briefing Paper

³² See Harvey, L., 2004-16, Analytic Quality Glossary, *Quality Research International*: <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/>.

³³ See OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/3a6ec396-2a9e-4800-abc7-704e0121768b/Major%20Change%20Notification.aspx?b=0>

When confirming a date for the PSAA Submission with OAAAQA, the HEI should ensure that students and staff in each of the programmes submitted are available for interview during the Panel Visit. The Visit is conducted nine weeks after the submission date.

Following the receipt of the PSA Letter of Intent form, OAAAQA checks that all eligibility requirements have been met, and confirms the Panel Submission and Visit dates with the HEI. The HEI may be given a Listing or Re-Listing date for the programme's qualification at the same time. The PSA submission date is reconfirmed at least six months in advance. Upon confirmation of dates from OAAAQA, the HEI can proceed with the second step.

6.2.3 Step 3: Submitting a PSA Application (PSAA)

The HEI undertakes an evidence-based self-assessment of each programme in a submission through the completion of a PSA Application (PSAA) addressing both applicable standards and their associated criteria. The HEI is required to rate performance against each applicable criterion and explain how the programme meets the requirements of the standards, supported by documentary evidence. A PSAA template is made available to HEIs on the OAAAQA website.³⁴ Where the template differs from ISAA, however, is in the way the PSAA template explicitly breaks down each criteria into its respective subparts and in the restriction in the number of words the HEI may use to elaborate their self-assessment. The PSAA template also restricts the total number of 'Supporting Materials' (SMs) to allow a more focused and efficient review by the PSA Panel. A separate PSAA must be submitted for each programme, including each programme submitted in a cluster. The HEI should indicate areas of commonality that are replicated throughout each PSAA (for example, in the commentary supporting Standard 1).

6.3 Development of the PSAA and Project Management

There are many ways in which an HEI may manage the self-assessment for PSAA and the OAAAQA does not dictate a specific approach. It may be helpful to think about the PSAA as both a 'process' (that is, the process of undertaking self-assessment and drafting the PSAA) and as a 'product' (that is, completing the PSAA documentation). Relevant to both process and product is the gathering and use of evidence.

6.3.1 Project Managing the PSA Process

In terms of the project management of the development of the PSAA, HEIs may wish to consider the following advice:

- Establish a project or steering group ('Programme Team') to manage the development of the PSAA, or utilise an existing group, such as a programme committee. All members of the Programme Team should become familiar with this manual, especially the parts identified for the express interest of HEIs (see Table 1 under Introduction). The Programme Team should not operate in a vacuum but should draw on the assistance of other staff, where appropriate.
- Ensure senior leadership of the project; the senior leader should chair the Programme Team and oversee the development of the PSAA.
- Determine the timeframe for the development of the PSAA; working back from the confirmed PSAA submission date, allow adequate time for drafting and consultation and set milestone dates from the outset. Allow at least six months to complete the self-assessment activity.
- Utilise existing internal reference points, such as the HEI's IQA Report, ISA Report and any ISR Reports, and OQF Listing/Re-listing reports if applicable. These contain important contextual information and offer starting points in the HEI's self-assessment of each programme.
- Consult programme staff, support services staff and programme students throughout the PSAA development process. This helps develop a sense of ownership of the PSAA that will ensure a more accurate reflection of staff and student experience. Consultation also

³⁴ See PSAA Template, available on the OAAAQA Website.

allows the draft PSAA to be commented upon staff and students to ensure that it is an honest and accurate reflection of programme realities.

- Allocate the project into manageable tasks (for example, giving specific responsibilities around specific sets of criteria) to members of the Programme Team and make it clear from the outset who is responsible for drafting the PSAA and gathering evidence.
- While preparing the PSAA should involve staff members with the appropriate knowledge and expertise to carry out the task, it should not become the exclusive responsibility of only one or two individuals. Although tempting, the relegation of responsibility for PSA to the Quality Assurance Department, or to an external consultant, is likely to be unsustainable given the large number of programmes in each HEI requiring PSA review and, perhaps more importantly, is likely to be less accurate of a programme performance than a self-assessment carried out by those directly involved in the programme.
- Train all programme staff in an appropriate review model. OAAAQA uses ADRI as a tool for analysis and encourages HEIs to adopt the same approach (see Section 18.2).
- Have a clear procedure for consulting on the draft PSAA which includes responsibility for responding to feedback and gaining approval for the final draft.
- Plan for the extra workload on staff developing the PSAA and give them the necessary resources (time, information and authority) to undertake their tasks effectively.
- Involve any affiliate or partner HEI connected with the programme from the outset.
- Appoint an editor for the PSAA with the writing skills and authority to edit material wisely. The HEI may also wish to have the PSAA edited professionally; it should be noted, however, that outsourcing the writing of the PSAA is inadvisable as it is no substitute (nor guarantee of outcome) for generating this important document internally.
- Adhere to any word limits stipulated in the PSAA template. Self-assessment should focus less on description of processes, and more on evaluation of outcomes.
- Adhere to restrictions on the number of supporting materials.
- Hyperlink all references to supporting materials within the PSAA.
- Check the PSAA and supporting materials carefully for plagiarism. Any plagiarism detected by the OAAAQA in the submission results automatically in the programme being placed *On Probation*.³⁵ Any attempt deemed deliberate to defraud the process may result in the PSA being terminated.
- Ensure that the finalised PSAA has formal approval by the HEI's governing body. While the PSAA relates to a specific programme, it nevertheless belongs to the HEI, and must be approved at the highest level.

6.3.2 Collecting and Using Evidence

The ratings given to each criterion should accurately reflect the programme's performance in line with the descriptions of criterion and standard ratings herein (see Part C). It is of fundamental importance that the PSAA rates performance based on evidence. In both the process of developing the PSAA and in finalising the PSAA as an end point, the PSAA must gather and refer to evidence. Good use of evidence is characterised as follows:

- Evidence is used to justify each evaluative statement made in criterion commentaries. This should take the form of hyperlinked references to supporting materials (for example, data, reports, policies and minutes of meetings).
- Evidence is used to measure the programme's performance against a criterion and/or standard and to apply a rating.
- HEIs must justify the self-ratings given by referencing relevant supporting materials in the accompanying commentary.
- It is important to stress that a rating of '*Met*' means the HEI has achieved a level of operation that is consistent with internationally benchmarked standards. The programme should therefore be realistically rated against the criteria and standards. All claims require evidence, and impressive claims require impressive evidence!

³⁵ See OAAAQA Policy on Academic Integrity <https://oaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/54409cb1-3cae-4efa-a657-8c2f953a45a1/Academic%20Integrity%20in%20External%20Quality%20Assurance%20Submissions%20and%20other%20Related%20Documents.aspx?b=0>.

- Evidence is used to identify the strengths of the programme as well as to show that the HEI has identified areas for improvement.
- Information that already exists as part of the programme and the HEI's quality assurance activities (for example, annual programme monitoring reports, student surveys and minutes of meetings) is usually particularly effective as evidence.
- Evidence should be used selectively and only referred to where relevant. Giving too much evidence of an unfocused nature may obscure the relevant material and is likely to overburden the PSA Panel.
- Evidence must be valid, reliable and accurate and, where possible, open to triangulation.

6.3.3 Preparing the PSA Application

In preparing the final draft of the PSAA, Programme Teams may consider the following:

- The PSAA should be clearly organised, using the PSAA template.
- The PSAA must be supported by evidence, normally presented in the form of 'Supporting Materials' (known as 'SMs'). The Supporting Materials should be referred to through an indexed numbering system with references shown in parentheses in the commentary and hyperlinked throughout.
- All Supporting Materials must be hyperlinked in the PSAA and searchable electronically where possible.
- OAAAQA stipulates certain key evidence which the HEI must provide as 'Mandatory Materials' (known as 'MMs'). Relevant templates provided by OAAAQA (for example, the Programme Specification and data tables) help in presenting these Mandatory Materials.
- The PSAA should make good use of diagrams, tables, figures and charts to display evidence visually, where this would be beneficial to the Panel's understanding.
- The PSAA should have a 'clear voice', where the main points are consistent and not contradictory and lead naturally in support of the self-rating.
- The PSAA must be edited to a high standard to give the document a 'single voice' (in terms of style, tone, content and accuracy) and be free of spelling and typing errors.

6.3.4 Finalising the PSA Application before Submission

Programme Teams may wish to consider the following when finalising their submission:

- Is the PSAA 'fit for purpose' (that is, is it good enough to perform the task it is designed for, and does it meet the needs of its primary readership, namely the PSA Panel)?
- Does the PSAA demonstrate (through commentary *and* evidence) that the programme meets the Programme Standards and Criteria?
- Is the PSAA self-evaluative, based on evidence, and demonstrative of the use of ADRI?
- Does the PSAA contain a helpful balance of description and analysis (results and their interpretation, evaluation and analysis should generally outweigh description of processes – these may be better demonstrated through a hyperlink to a policy or set of procedures)?
- Is the PSAA a transparent and honest account of the strengths and limitations of the programme and plans for improvement?
- Does the PSAA avoid being 'promotional' and using language more appropriate to a prospectus or marketing tool?
- Is the PSAA useful as an internal tool (for example, as part of staff induction materials)?

6.3.5 Anticipating the Completeness Check

The Review Director undertakes a 'Completeness Check' of the PSAA at the point of submission to OAAAQA and draws the HEI's attention to any issues within the submission that may be problematic. To ensure the PSAA passes through this Completeness Check satisfactorily, Programme Teams may wish to consider the following advice and/or use the Completeness Checklist given herein (see Section 7.7.3):

- Has the HEI paid the PSA fees?
- Is the PSAA complete (for example, does the PSAA include ratings for each applicable criterion and standard and do the Supporting Materials meet OAAAQA's requirements)?

- Has the HEI used the correct templates for PSAA and Mandatory Materials?
- Have the word limits been adhered to and is the number of supporting materials (including those nested under a single file name) within the size stipulated in the PSAA Template?
- Are there working hyperlinks in the PSAA to supporting materials?
- Is there a comprehensive and logically organised index of supporting materials?
- Are supporting materials, where possible, searchable electronically?
- Have sufficient copies been provided on hard drives for distribution to all members of the Panel, as advised by OAAAQA prior to submission?

7. The PSA Application (PSAA)

7.1 The Format of the PSAA

The PSAA template can be downloaded from the OAAAQA website.³⁶ Each section of the PSAA must be completed prior to the PSAA being submitted to the OAAAQA. The template specifies the format, word limits and submission size required of each PSAA.

The HEI must submit a separate PSAA for each programme in a cluster. This enables the HEI to recognise, where applicable, that some programmes may be performing more strongly than others, and/or that some programmes may face specific opportunities or challenges. This may lead the HEI to give different ratings against the standards and criteria across a programme cluster. In assessing the programmes, PSA Panels may similarly rate individual programmes differently and arrive at different accreditation outcomes.

In asking HEI staff to submit a separate PSAA for each programme, the OAAAQA recognises that a programme cluster belonging to one academic unit (for example, a department, faculty or college) has both distinctive features and also features in common. Where there are areas of strong commonality, the HEI may wish to mirror commentary and ratings across the programme cluster and may even replicate sections where appropriate. Areas where this approach has been taken should be indicated clearly in each PSAA.

7.2 Official Declaration

The Official Declaration is signed by the HEI's most senior representative (see Appendix E). The declaration states that the information contained in the PSAA is complete and accurate, and that the HEI adheres to all applicable laws and regulations. The HEI also declares that the preparation of the PSAA conforms to all protocols as set out in this manual. The PSA process only commences upon receipt by OAAAQA of a complete PSAA submission. A separate declaration form is available for military institutions (see Appendix F and Section 8.6.5).

7.3 Overview of the HEI and the Programme

The HEI should give a brief overview of the institution to provide the Panel with a context for the programme. The PSAA Template helps as a guide to the information required and a brief history and profile of the HEI (no longer than a single page of A4) should include the HEI's Mission and Vision statements.

7.4 Rating and Commentary against each Applicable Criterion

The Programme Team is required to rate the performance of the programme against each criterion (see Part C). The commentary should objectively and succinctly explain, within given word limits, how the programme meets the requirements of the standards and criteria, and should evaluate the processes and practices that support that attainment.

³⁶ See PSAA Template, available on the OAAAQA Website.

7.4.1 Indicators

The indicators are non-mandatory and are provided under each criterion only to give guidance as to the kinds of information to give in support of a rating. The indicators are neither prescriptive nor a checklist of how to meet the criterion. Panels do not use indicators in the assessment of a programme other than to gain a broad idea of the kinds of information to expect under each criterion.

7.4.2 Commentary and Use of ADRI

Commentaries under each criterion in a PSAA should adhere to given word lengths and should include references and hyperlinks to key evidence in support of the claims made therein. The commentary should be succinct and focused on results. Items of evidence may be relevant to different criteria. Where the same information is cited under different criteria, cross references should be used to avoid unnecessary duplication.

All claims made against the criteria must be defensible, supported by evidence (either qualitative or quantitative) and based on fact and may include, for example, references to policies, procedures and guidelines; committee minutes and reports; surveys; other internal reports and papers. It is more useful to include evidence of an approach that has been put into practice (for example, completed forms rather than empty templates, action plans with deadlines, responsibilities and status updates on actions taken).

PSA Panels focus particular attention on results that have been achieved through the implementation of defined systems, processes and practices. Programme Teams are encouraged, therefore, to use ADRI as a tool to review relevant processes and evaluate their effectiveness (see Section 18.2). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'effective' as: 'Successful in producing a desired or intended result'.³⁷ The OAAAQA has adapted this definition of 'effective' in the context of Programme Accreditation to mean, where appropriate, 'successful in producing a deliberate and sustainable result that meets all the requirements of the criteria and standards'. The PSA Panel looks for evidence that results obtained by the programme against the criteria are deliberate and sustainable and are underpinned by effective systems that involve review.

In line with the ADRI approach, commentaries should include summary information relevant to each criterion in relation to:

- **Approach:** Key objectives of relevant plans, policies, and procedures
- **Deployment:** Arrangements that ensure the approach is implemented consistently across the programme and all other relevant areas of activity
- **Results:** The outcomes achieved by applying a deliberate approach
- **Improvement:** Any improvements made to the programme or HEI's approach in relation to a criterion, as a direct result of reviewing and analysing the results obtained

7.4.3 Evidence and Use of Data Templates

Commentaries should be supported with relevant evidence in the form of Mandatory Materials and other Supporting Materials, submitted with the PSAA. These materials should be sequentially labelled (see Section 7.6). The primary consideration for Programme Teams in submitting evidence is the adequacy and relevance of each item of evidence, not the quantity of evidence. A maximum number of items has been stipulated by OAAAQA to ensure that only items which have direct relevance to the criteria are included, that key information is not obscured by irrelevant information, and to avoid Panels being overwhelmed with documentation that is non-productive. This Manual includes templates, provided as tools to assist the recording and reporting of data (see Section 7.6 for references to the relevant appendices). The Programme Team may format their own data but all applicable data fields in the templates must be included.

³⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary then defines 'successful' as accomplishing a desired aim or result; 'desired' as wanting or wishing something to happen; 'intended' as planned or meant, and 'result' as a consequence or outcome: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/effective>.

7.5 Rating and Commentary against each Applicable Standard

There is no requirement to give a summary statement about either of the two applicable standards. Any comments about the standard as a whole should be made where relevant under a specific criterion. When ratings have been applied to all criteria, the summary rating table, provided at the beginning of the PSAA Template, should be completed with information about the standard rating (see Part C). This tabulated information helps the PSA Panel to identify the overall ratings and outcome an HEI has given during self-assessment. The panel completes a similar table at the front of the PSA Report to help an HEI navigate the results.

7.6 Providing Evidence

The PSAA should be submitted with supporting materials. PSA Panels look for evidence that the policies, procedures and practices referred to in the supporting materials are fully embedded in the operation of the programme(s) and that results are the result of reviewed systems. The purpose of supporting materials, then, is not just to help the PSA Panel verify claims made in the PSAA, and to facilitate its understanding of each programme, but to demonstrate that established and well-communicated systems are in place.

There are different types of materials expected to be submitted as evidence during the PSA process: (a) Mandatory Materials (MMs), (b) non-mandatory Supporting Materials (SMs) and, at the request of a PSA Panel, specific (c) Additional Materials. These are each described below.

7.6.1 Mandatory Materials (MMs)

Each PSAA must be submitted with a set of Mandatory Materials (MMs). Where a programme cluster is submitted for PSA, then the HEI should provide a set of MMs for **each** programme undergoing assessment; this is in recognition of the fact that some of these materials are likely to be unique and specific to each programme (for example, a Programme Specification for the programme; MoHERI licence; or the programme award certificates or scrolls). If MMs are common across two or more programmes in a submission, then only one set needs to be submitted. It is critical, however, that the same reference number (MM00X) should be used. In other words, an MM pertaining, for example, to Programme Bylaws and Regulations should be referred to under the same reference number in each of the PSAAs. All common materials should be included within a single folder. A list of the MMs that must be submitted together with each PSAA is given below with a reference to any available template given in the appendices (see Table 7).

MM No	RM Description
MM001	Programme specification (see Appendix G)
MM002	Specifications for each module or course that contributes to the programme (see Appendix H)
MM003	MoHERI licence for the programme (where applicable)
MM004	Formal agreement between the HEI and the programme affiliate or awarding HEI (where applicable)
MM005	Accreditation certificates or letters (where applicable, and where the programme is accredited by a professional body or bodies, or other accreditation organisation(s))
MM006	Bylaws and regulations for the programme
MM007	List of all managerial, academic and administrative staff involved in the management and delivery of the programme (names, departments, titles, roles and percentage of time devoted to the programme)
MM008	Organisational chart (or equivalent) showing the programme's location within the HEI's organisational structure and the HEI's lines of responsibility and reporting

Table 7: List of Mandatory Materials (MMs)	
MM No	RM Description
MM009	Most recent annual programme monitoring or evaluation report, which has been formally approved by the HEI or affiliate HEI (as applicable)
MM010	Current student programme handbook
MM011	Descriptors for each module or course that contributes to the programme (module or course specifications)
MM012	Module or course files for each module or course that contributes to the programme, please note: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sample of module or course files is required to be submitted in advance, alongside the PSAA (the precise contents of this sample is agreed between the HEI and the OAAAQA Review Director) A complete set of module or course files must be made available to the Panel at the outset of the site Visit, in the Main Panel Room
MM013	Examples of the certificates or scrolls for the programme, for the final and all exit awards
MM014	Campus map(s) identifying where the programme is being delivered
MM015	Descriptive data about the programme (see Appendix I Part A for programme descriptive data templates)
MM016	Entry (admission) criteria for the programme, including any transfer arrangements from another institution or programme.
MM016	Contextual information about the HEI:
	a) Decree establishing the HEI
	b) Name, title and designation of the CEO, Principal, Vice-Chancellor and/or Dean
	c) HEI contact details (postal address, physical address, telephone, fax, website)
	d) Current HEI Strategic Plan
	e) Organisational chart of the HEI, showing reporting lines
	f) Most recent HEI Annual Report
	g) Current HEI prospectus
	h) List of all programmes delivered by the HEI
	i) Descriptive data about the HEI (see Appendix I Part B for HEI descriptive data templates)
	j) OAAAQA Institutional Standards Assessment Report for the HEI (to be provided by OAAAQA)
	k) OAAAQA Quality Audit Report (to be provided by OAAAQA)

7.6.2 Supporting Materials (SMs)

While often referring in general to all evidence given by an HEI as part of their PSA submission, SMs in the context of PSA refer specifically to materials that are non-mandatory. In other words, SMs refer to any evidence the HEI chooses to give at the time of submission and are therefore distinct from either MMs or AMs.

7.6.3 Additional Materials (AMs)

Where a PSA Panel is unable to verify a claim through the MMs and SMs, a request may be made for 'Additional Materials' (AMs). These AMs are generally identified during the course of the preliminary review of materials by the PSA Panel and requests are discussed with the HEI during the Planning Visit (see Section 12.2). They are generally required before the commencement of the Panel Visit but requests for further AMs may be made during the Visit. In this instance, the HEI has up to one calendar week to supply this information after the Visit.

7.6.4 Indexing Evidence

Given the amount of evidence required during a PSA, it is imperative to maintain a clear indexing system to assist with managing the materials. It is helpful if the OAAAQA and the Programme Team use the same system to facilitate communication. All Supporting Materials, whether submitted with the PSAA or thereafter, should be indexed using the numbering system shown herein for Mandatory Materials (see Table 7), and the accepted convention (as sampled below) for all other items of evidence:

SM001 Minutes of Academic Council Meetings since 2020
SM002 Student Satisfaction Surveys since 2020
AM001 List of Newly Appointed Staff

Similarly, each Supporting Material document must be sequential and clearly named to reflect its contents so that it may be readily located by the OAAAQA and PSA Panel. It must accurately match the number and name given in the index. File names should be kept short, and nested sequences of information avoided where possible, to facilitate easy identification and access through file sharing platforms.

7.6.5 Translation of Evidence

The HEI is responsible for ensuring all MMs, SMs and AMs are made available in the language of the PSA review wherever possible. Where this is not possible, a brief synopsis of content should be given in the language of the PSA review. An HEI should be aware that it is neither the responsibility of OAAAQA to provide translation services for any PSA submission nor the role of bi-lingual PSA Panel Members to spend time translating SMs for their fellow reviewers.

7.7 Submitting a PSAA

7.7.1 Presentation and Submission Requirements

The following sets out some precise details for presentation and submission of the PSAA:

- **Submission Date:** OAAAQA notifies the HEI in advance of the due date for submission. For PSA, there is no opportunity to apply for a deferral of this date once it is confirmed by both parties. In exceptional circumstances, the HEI has recourse to OAAAQA's Policy on Major Change Notification.³⁸
- **Language Medium:** The PSAA, together with the SMs, should be written in the language of instruction for each programme (as confirmed with the OAAAQA at the outset).
- **Presentation of Document:** The PSAA should be professionally typeset and presented in pdf format using the template provided. Printed submissions are no longer required. Electronic copies should be made available on USB data stick or flash drive, or through any shared platforms considered secure by OAAAQA at the time of submission.
- **Duplicates:** E-copies of the PSAA and Supporting Materials may be required in the absence of a secure shared platform, as confirmed by the Review Director at the time of submission. These e-copies are sent to Panel Members, the Review Director and the Observer (if applicable), while one copy is reserved for the OAAAQA's official archive.
- **Supporting Materials:** All supporting materials (MMs and SMs) must be submitted together with the PSAA through the same means as the PSAA. These materials must be hyperlinked in the PSAA and be electronically searchable and printable. They must comply with the instructions for submission as described above (see Section 7.6).
- **Website References:** Where the submission refers to information or evidence on the HEI's website, the web link reference (URL) should be written in full, together with the exact location of the relevant information (for example, giving the name of the document, page number and section). The URL reference should be hyperlinked. In addition, the HEI must check that webpages are accessible to OAAAQA and the Panel; access is not hindered by internal firewall protection, and documents are downloadable and printable.

³⁸ See OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/3a6ec396-2a9e-4800-abc7-704e0121768b/Major%20Change%20Notification.aspx?b=0>

7.7.2 Editorial Requirements and Internal Circulation

It is strongly recommended that the HEI submits the PSAA to a professional editor prior to final submission. Potential problems and misunderstandings during PSA may be prevented by ensuring that each submission is accurate and coherent. The documentation should be made available to programme managers and staff; senior managers; the HEI's Board or Council, and those selected by the PSA Panel for interview.

7.7.3 Completeness Requirements

The application process is concluded with the Completeness Check (see Section 9.3), as carried out by the Review Director. If any items remain outstanding after this activity, then an HEI is expected to make these available in a timely manner before the PSAA review can commence. A checklist is provided to assist with this activity prior to making the submission (see Appendix J).

7.8 Fees

The OAAAQA operates on a cost recovery basis. The Financial Law permits OAAAQA to determine fees for activities conducted in the performance of its functions, subject to Ministry of Finance approval. The OAAAQA Policy on Fees Charged for OAAAQA External Quality Assurance Activities and Appeals Fees provides details of the current fees levied by OAAAQA.³⁹ OAAAQA issues the HEI with an invoice ahead of the scheduled submission date and the HEI must transfer the full fees to the OAAAQA. Upon receipt of the fee payment the OAAAQA issues a receipt. The OAAAQA normally expects fees to be paid in full no later than 30 days after the invoice has been issued and before the commencement of PSA. The fee for PSA is not inclusive of PSR activities.

³⁹ See OAAAQA Policy on Fees Charged for OAAAQA External Quality Assurance Activities and Appeals. <https://www.oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/05de07e5-2e58-4cf5-a974-1aa0a6d9688c/Fees%20Charged%20for%20OAAA%20External%20Quality%20Assurance%20Activities%20and%20Appeals.aspx?b=0>



PART E: THE EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

8. Standards Assessment Protocols

The PSA self-assessment is followed by external peer review undertaken by a Panel of External Reviewers. The most visible part of this process is the visit of the Panel to the HEI to interview staff and students (the Panel Visit). This is only one component, however, of a comprehensive external review. All parts of the review, including OAAAQA's protocols for ensuring the independence of External Reviewers, are described herein.

8.1 Conflicts of Interest

External Reviewers and relevant OAAAQA staff and must declare any potential conflict of interest prior to their participation in a PSA. Any such conflict of interest may prevent further involvement.

8.1.1 Personal Conflict of Interest

As per the OAAAQA Policy on Conflict of Interest,⁴⁰ a personal conflict of interest may arise if one or more of the following conditions apply to the ER involved in any capacity in an EQA:

- An immediate family member or a very close friend is on the governing body or staff of the HEI or is a student thereof.
- Animosity exists with a person on the governing body or staff of the HEI.
- A financial interest exists in the HEI, or financial interest in a going concern in association with any member of the governance and/or management or staff of the HEI.
- Bias is borne towards or against the HEI due to current or previous circumstance (including being a graduate, and/or being a current or former staff member of the HEI).

8.1.2 Professional Conflict of Interest

A professional conflict of interest may arise if the ER involved in any capacity in an EQA:

- Is currently an applicant, a candidate for a position or an employee with the HEI concerned in the EQA.
- Is currently providing, or has provided within the past five years, professional services to the HEI which may affect the EQA process (such as being an external examiner; participating in internal review processes, providing consulting services).
- Belongs to, or has an interest in, an organisation currently involved in an explicit competitive process against the HEI (as distinct from general competition within the sector).
- Holds a managerial position in an organisation currently involved in a major form of cooperation with the HEI concerned in the EQA (such as benchmarking, external examination and research collaboration).

OAAAQA prepares a longlist of appropriately qualified and experienced External Reviewers as a first step towards forming a PSA Panel. HEIs are asked to advise the OAAAQA if any proposed External Reviewers on the PSA External Reviewers longlist pose a potential conflict of interest. The HEI must detail the nature of any perceived personal or professional conflict of interest in writing. The OAAAQA responds to the HEI's claim, and if necessary, recommends an alternative appointment to the PSA External Reviewer longlist.

8.2 External Reviewer Contract

All External Reviewers involved in an activity pertaining to a PSA must complete OAAAQA's Service Provision Contract for External Quality Assurance Activities, a signed copy of which is kept by the External Reviewer and by the OAAAQA. This contract applies to all roles involved in a PSA process, including the Panel Chair, Panel Member, External Review

⁴⁰ See OAAAQA Policy on Conflict of Interest in External Quality Assurance Activities: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/3a5833f3-290a-43c8-bd19-2f377636d7d6/Conflict%20of%20Interest%20in%20EQA%20Activities.aspx?b=0>.

Director, Review Director Mentor, Backup Review Director, and Observer. The contract includes (but is not limited to) key details, conflict of interest statements, terms and conditions, and the specific terms of reference of each External Reviewer engaged in PSA and covers protocols such as confidentiality (see Appendix K for skeletal sample and conflict of interest statements).⁴¹

8.3 Declarations

8.3.1 Internal Declaration

Any personnel within CHEQA working closely with PSAs must disclose any potential conflict of interest to the Director General (DG) of CHEQA at OAAAQA at the time that they are assigned to a PSA. As a result, they may be replaced in their role.

8.3.2 External Declaration

In signing a Service Provider Contract with OAAAQA, External Reviewers (including External Review Directors) declare, through Part B of the contract, that they have no conflict of interest pertaining to their involvement in PSA. In so signing, they also undertake to abide by other OAAAQA protocols, including confidentiality, as specified within the declaration.

8.3.3 OAAAQA Board Member Declaration

As per the OAAAQA Policy on Board Conflict of Interest,⁴² Board Members must disclose any potential conflict of interest to the Board Chair, while the Chair discloses their own potential conflict to the Deputy Chair. The Board Member may be requested to absent himself or herself from any discussions at the Board relating to that particular PSA. The Conflict of Interest Form (see Appendix L) is signed by Board Members once each year, generally in December, and includes all forthcoming EQAs for the following year.

8.3.4 Observer Declaration

From time-to-time the OAAAQA provides opportunities for individuals who have a professional interest in external accreditation or quality assurance to observe an EQA process. OAAAQA staff may also observe EQAs as part of their professional development. Although observers have no influence on the PSA outcomes, they have access to information about the HEI and the programme(s) undergoing PSA. All Observers must complete, sign, and return a Declaration Form (see Appendix M) before commencement of their involvement in the PSA. If they have concerns about a possible conflict of interest, they should contact the relevant Review Director or DG of CHEQA to discuss the matter. For any given PSA, no more than one observer is permitted (see Section 10.5).

8.4 Undue Influence

It is unacceptable for an HEI to exert undue influence on the PSA Panel, OAAAQA staff or OAAAQA Board in relation to any External Quality Assurance activity, including PSA. Undue influence by the HEI (or stakeholders of the HEI) may take many forms, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Communication about the PSA with individual panel members, OAAAQA staff or OAAAQA board members during the process that are outside the communication protocols of the Panel Visit
- Explicit or implied threats made against the PSA panel, OAAAQA staff or board members
- Explicit or implied promises of benefit to the PSA panel, OAAAQA staff or board members
- Gifts and overly generous hospitality

⁴¹ Only Parts A, B and C of a sample OAAAQA Service Provision Contract for EQA Activities is shown in Appendix K. Part D replicates the information in Appendix B of this Manual, and Part E replicates the information in Section 13 of this manual. The exact content of each contract is subject to change and the sample in Appendix K is intended as a sample only.

⁴² See OAAAQA Policy on Board Member Conflict of Interest: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/19f0b5ae-e2e3-4683-a852-87ecb1246c3c/Board%20conflict%20of%20Interest%20Policy.aspx?b=0>.

In the event of undue influence occurring, it is reported to the OAAAQA Board. Excessive undue influence may require the PSA process to be cancelled and the programme(s) in question placed *On Probation*.

8.5 The Non-Attribution Rule

When conducting Standards Assessment interviews, the PSA Panel uses the information it receives without attributing that information to the person who provided it in the subsequent PSA Report(s). Similarly, the OAAAQA expects that confidentiality to be respected by all those who participate in the Standards Assessment interview process. As such:

- Interviewees are not permitted to take notes or use any form of recording device in the interview sessions.
- HEIs should not place interviewees under any pressure to disclose any responses that they or other interviewees provided to the PSA Panel.

8.6 Sensitive Information

8.6.1 Inclusion or Avoidance of Sensitive Information

OAAAQA's Royal Decree 09/2021 states that higher education institutions and other concerned parties 'shall undertake to provide Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education with the information and statistics it deems requisite for the discharge of its terms of reference' (Article 7). If an HEI claims that certain information requested by a PSA Panel is either personally, commercially, militarily or governmentally confidential, it may seek to withhold the information from the PSA Panel. Whether or not certain information should be treated as confidential is often a matter of opinion, and the PSA Panel is not obliged to agree with the HEI's assessment of that information unless stipulated otherwise by applicable Royal Decrees or official government decisions. As a general principle, however, PSA Panels avoid accessing sensitive information unless it is critical for the assessment of a particular standard or criterion. Should such a need arise, PSA Panels are required to treat the information sensitively, in strictest confidence, as stipulated in the External Reviewer contract.

8.6.2 Types and Suggested Treatment of Sensitive Information

Sensitive information can be categorised and protected in the following ways:

- Examples of information that an HEI may deem personally confidential include a staff member's appraisal report or promotion result. If the PSA Panel wishes to verify that staff performance appraisals are taking place, then samples of completed appraisal forms may be given with the staff names redacted.
- Examples of information that an HEI may deem commercially sensitive include competitive student recruitment strategies or financial records. If the PSA Panel wishes to explore the alignment of planning with resource allocation, then it may arrange with the HEI to view sensitive financial records on site rather than electronically.
- Examples of information that an HEI may deem militarily or governmentally sensitive may include information of a nationally strategic nature falling beyond the scope of a PSA.

8.6.3 Managing Sensitive Information

PSA Panels are mindful of the need to respect HEI concerns regarding sensitive information. At the same time, the HEI must acknowledge that the PSA Panel requires access to the information necessary to effectively complete its task. In most cases, mutually acceptable solutions are reached between OAAAQA and the HEI (through discussion, for example, between the Review Director and the HEI's Contact Person). Where acceptable solutions are not found, the PSA may have to be withdrawn.

8.6.4 Commitment to Confidentiality

OAAAQA External Reviewers are required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to their participation on a PSA Panel. This is embedded in the OAAAQA contract an External Reviewer must sign before undertaking any tasks related to the PSA.

8.6.5 Military HEIs

Before a military HEI undertakes PSA, a meeting between the Senior Management of the HEI and OAAAQA takes place to establish the scope of the activities. If the HEI is comfortable to continue within OAAAQA's terms of reference, the highest authority of the HEI signs a declaration to that effect (see Section 7.2). Once committed to the PSA process, there is no opportunity for the HEI to change the terms of reference nor withdraw the PSA results.

8.7 Complaints about the HEI

It is not the purpose of a PSA to hear and resolve complaints about specific issues in relation to the HEI and/or the programme(s) undergoing assessment. The PSA Panel is not a court, arbitrator or mediator. It does not have a role in resolving individual complaints or problems and does not offer a proposed resolution to specific cases. The PSA Panel may use a specific case as one source of evidence when exploring how complaints about a programme are managed but only in the context of exploring systemic problems.

9. Commencing PSA

9.1 Reconfirming the Scheduled Submission Date

At least six months prior to the date by which an HEI is scheduled for a PSA submission, the OAAAQA contacts the HEI in writing to reconfirm the Scheduled Submission Date and check that staff and students are still available during the indicative Panel Visit dates. The OAAAQA (usually through the Review Director) may also make contact with the HEI in person to commence general arrangements for the PSA.

9.2 Appointing a Contact Person

Throughout the PSA process, a single communication channel is maintained between the OAAAQA and the HEI. For OAAAQA, the point of contact is the Review Director. The Review Director may either be a member of OAAAQA's technical team in CHEQA or an experienced, officially approved External Reviewer on the OAAAQA Register of External Reviewers.

The HEI designates a Contact Person with sufficient seniority to direct or influence the HEI's involvement in the PSA. A senior member of the Quality Office, the Programme Director or Head of Department may be suitable to act as the Contact Person but the HEI's most senior academic post holder (such as Vice-Chancellor or Dean) should be avoided as the role is practical and time-consuming.

All communication between the OAAAQA and the HEI about PSA matters should be conducted through the Contact Person. No communication about the PSA process is permitted between the HEI (including its governing body, staff, students and external stakeholders) and any member of the PSA Panel or OAAAQA CEO or Board until the PSA is completed. The only exceptions to this are formal communications between the Chair of the HEI's Board of Trustees and the OAAAQA CEO. Even these communications should be limited to matters of protocol or, in the event of a serious complaint by the HEI, the conduct of the PSA.

9.3 PSAA Completeness Check

Upon receipt of a PSA submission, the OAAAQA Review Director conducts a Completeness Check (see Section 7.7.3). This may be partly facilitated through an OAAAQA Panel Support Officer (PSO) where necessary. The Review Director checks that:

- Both applicable standards and associated criteria have been addressed and self-rated by the HEI for each programme in the submission
- A justification has been provided in each case where a criteria or standard has been deemed *Not Applicable*; this is shared with the Panel Chair who, in liaison with the Review Director, either concurs with or rejects each *Not Applicable* claim
- All Supporting Materials referenced in the PSAA(s) are included with the application and hyperlinks in the commentary are in working order
- All Supporting Materials are complete documents and as described in the title
- All Supporting Materials are searchable and printable
- All Supporting Materials are clearly numbered, labelled and accurately indexed
- The PSAA(s) and Supporting Materials appear to be free from plagiarism (however, if plagiarism is detected at a later stage in the process, the OAAAQA Policy on Academic Integrity is applied)⁴³

Any issue identified by the Review Director during the completeness check is addressed on a case-by-case basis with the aim of ensuring that the PSA process continues within the indicative timeline.

10. The PSA Panel

Each PSA is carried out by a Panel of External Reviewers and steered by a Review Director who acts as OAAAQA's representative in all matters relating to the PSA. The composition and size of the Panel depends on the nature of the PSA and the number of programmes submitted. Details about the specific role of each Panel Member and the rights and responsibilities of all members of the Panel is provided in a supplementary document made available to those External Reviewers invited to form a Panel.⁴⁴ An overview of the Panel composition and the method of selection of those appointed to a Panel is given below, with a particular focus on the parts that require HEI engagement in the selection process.

10.1 Register of External Reviewers

The PSA Panel is sourced through OAAAQA's National Register of External Reviewers. This register includes eminent locally-based and international individuals who have shown leadership in their disciplines, within higher education management or in the professions and industries that engage with HEIs. The register is publicly available on the OAAAQA website.⁴⁵ All reviewers listed on the register have undergone a rigorous selection and approval process guided by the OAAAQA Policy on the Management of the National Register of External Reviewers.⁴⁶

10.2 Identifying the PSA Panel

The OAAAQA assembles a PSA Panel by selecting appropriate experts from the National Register of External Reviewers, all of whom have expertise in the broad subject area and at least one of whom has specialist knowledge of the narrow field of each programme under review. The OAAAQA reserves the sole right to determine the composition of the PSA Panel and in each case endeavours to assemble a combination of External Reviewers that is

⁴³ See OAAAQA Policy on Academic Integrity in External Quality Assurance Submissions and Other Related Documents: <https://oaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/54409cb1-3cae-4efa-a657-8c2f953a45a1/Academic%20Integrity%20in%20External%20Quality%20Assurance%20Submissions%20and%20other%20Related%20Documents.aspx?b=0>.

⁴⁴ See PSA Manual – Supplement for Panel Members. This restricted access document is made available to External Reviewers on invitation to join a PSA Panel.

⁴⁵ See ER Register on the OAAAQA website: <https://www.oaaqa.gov.om/About-the-OAAA/External-Reviewers>

⁴⁶ See OAAAQA Policy on the Management of the Management of the National Register of External Reviewers: <https://www.oaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/e1062332-7213-477b-872d-6c6dc1f9b0dd/National%20%20Register%20Of%20External%20Reviewers.aspx?b=0>.

appropriate for the programme(s) undergoing PSA. The PSA Panel is comprised of two types of reviewers: Distance Panel Members and On-site Panel Members. While only the On-Site Panel Members (at least one of whom is always an international External Reviewer) attend the PSA Visit, both types of reviewers are full members of the PSA Panel and have the same rights and responsibilities. It should be noted that being a Panel Member or previous Review Director for an EQA for a given HEI does not preclude the possibility of serving on the Panel of an EQA of the same HEI.

10.3 Appointing the Review Director (RD or ERD)

Each PSA Panel has a Review Director. This person is either a member of the OAAAQA technical staff or is appointed from the OAAAQA National Register of External Reviewers. A Review Director Mentor may occasionally be assigned as required. The HEI and the Panel is provided with the names of the Review Director and any Mentor. The OAAAQA implements mechanisms (such as training and mentoring) where necessary to support the role of the Review Director as guided by the OAAAQA Policy on Management of External Review activities. It should be noted that being a Panel Member or previous Review Director for an EQA for a given HEI does not preclude the possibility of serving as a Review Director for an EQA of the same HEI.

10.4 Forming the Panel

10.4.1 Panel Longlist

The OAAAQA draws up an initial list of names for each PSA Panel known as the 'longlist'. This list must be approved by the DG of CHEQA. The approved longlist is then submitted in strict confidence to the CEO of the HEI who is invited to comment on whether any of the longlist candidates present a conflict of interest. While this is the only grounds for objection, an HEI may raise other areas of concern. The OAAAQA is not obliged to agree with any objection from the HEI but considers all objections carefully.

10.4.2 Panel Shortlist

CHEQA technical staff at OAAAQA review the approved longlist and prepare a shortlist that is shared with the Review Director. The Review Director, assisted by CHEQA, checks the availability and willingness of each shortlisted candidate to participate in PSA and makes replacements as required until a full Panel is convened. Where additional names are required for the longlist, these are approved by the DG CHEQA and vetted by the HEI. When the Panel is finalised, the CEO and the HEI are informed, and the PSA Panel is announced on the OAAAQA website.

10.5 Observers on PSA Panels

From time to time, OAAAQA staff members are invited to observe the PSA process for the purposes of professional development. Staff from other quality assurance agencies or relevant organisations may also apply to observe an OAAAQA PSA. The practice of permitting observers is well established internationally and is an important means by which knowledge and experience regarding external quality review can be shared. The OAAAQA permits up to one external Observer for each PSA Panel. To ensure that the presence of an Observer does not in any way compromise the integrity of the PSA, however, the conditions set out below apply. Members of the public are not permitted to observe a PSA to protect the HEI's confidentiality. All observers must sign a declaration (see Section 8.3.4). Observers (excluding OAAAQA staff members) are responsible for the costs of their own meals, travel, and accommodation, although the PSO may assist with bookings. The OAAAQA is not liable for any other costs associated with the Observer's involvement with the PSA.

11. Roles and Responsibilities

11.1 Panel Members

All PSA Panel Members, including the Chair and whether appointed as a Distance or On-site Panel Member, are ambassadors for the OAAAQA. As such, they must act as follows:

- Be aware of and uphold the OAAAQA's Values (see Section 1.2).
- Act in a positive, ethical, and professional manner, and perform duties to the highest standards of honesty and diligence.
- Undertake personally all activities allocated as part of the PSA process.
- Refrain from delegating work to anyone else: PSA Panel Members are carefully selected based on their experience, expertise, and skills and all Panel Members are approved by the OAAAQA CEO prior to their invitation to be involved in a PSA; delegation of work (including the downloading of Supporting Materials by a personal assistant) therefore constitutes a breach of OAAAQA's protocols and comprises the confidentiality of the process.
- Respect OAAAQA's protocols and report any breach of protocols to the Review Director.
- Avoid direct liaison with the HEI during the PSA process, other than during interview sessions and the tour of facilities; all other liaison with the HEI is conducted through the Review Director.
- Disclose any uninvited contact with the HEI during the PSA process to the Review Director for appropriate consideration and action.
- Maintain positive and constructive relationships with other PSA Panel Members, OAAAQA staff and the HEI throughout the PSA process.
- Work towards consensus and recognise that PSA Panel Members do not have a power of veto over the final Accreditation Outcome.
- Adhere to the declaration of confidentiality (as embedded in the OAAAQA Service Provision Contract for EQA Activities contract) which states that PSA Panel Members may not publicly disclose any deliberations, discussions or materials pertaining to the PSA.

11.2 Review Director (RD or ERD)

The OAAAQA ensures that there are sufficient mechanisms in place to support the smooth and effective implementation of PSA. One major mechanism in the realisation of this objective is the appointment of a Review Director whose role, as the name implies, is to direct the process. The Review Director is either a member of OAAAQA technical staff or a member of the Register of External Reviewers and is commissioned to carry out tasks including (but not restricted to) those shown below:

- Provide direction to the PSA Panel on the process as set out in this manual and in other directives (such as policies and procedures) issued by OAAAQA.
- Provide, with OAAAQA staff, high quality administrative support to the PSA Panel.
- Be the primary point of contact between the HEI, the Panel Chair and Panel Members.
- Liaise with the Panel Chair in considering the rationale submitted by the HEI for any criteria claimed as *Not Applicable*.
- Conduct the Completeness Check of the PSA for all programmes in a submission (with the assistance of CHEQA) and resolve any issues with the HEI prior to commencement.
- Liaise with the HEI before, during and after the Planning Visit.

An HEI is notified if a Review Director Mentor has been appointed by OAAAQA to give general guidance to new Review Directors.

11.3 PSA Oversight

Neither the OAAAQA CEO nor the DG CHEQA is a member of the PSA Panel but both play an important role in overseeing the implementation of the PSA process and its overall

management and quality assurance. The roles of the CEO and DG are covered fully in the supplement to this PSA Manual; the DG's role includes (but is not limited to) intervention in the PSA process to help resolve critical process disputes and the CEO's role includes (but is not limited to) approval of the Accreditation Outcome, including any On Probation period.

The OAAAQA Board has the overall responsibility for Programme Accreditation and is approached (among other PSA related matters that are fully covered in the supplement to this manual) to endorse the Final PSA Report and Accreditation Outcome, including any *On Probation* period.

12. Before the Panel Visit

Many activities take place within the Panel before the Panel Visit, including a meeting of the whole Panel (usually conducted through virtual conferencing) known as the 'Preliminary Visit', the agenda for which is determined by the Chair and the Review Director (see Appendix N). The details of the interaction of the Panel before the Panel Visit is described in the supplement to this manual provided to Panel Members.

12.1 Requests for Matters for Clarification (MCs) and Additional Material (AMs)

PSA Panel Members may decide that there are areas that require clarification within the submission, and they list these as 'Matters for Clarification' (MCs). They may also request Additional Materials (AMs) for a better understanding of programme performance in relation to the standards and criteria.

While the Review Director may submit a request to the HEI for MCs and AMs at any time during the PSA on behalf of the Panel, it is best if the requests are reserved for only three specific points in the PSA process to minimise the burden on the HEI. The three specific points at which requests for MCs and AMs are made are as follows:

- **In the paperwork sent to the HEI regarding the Planning Visit:** Ahead of the Planning Visit, the PSA Panel Chair (or nominee) and the Review Director request MCs and AMs as part of the documentation for the PSA Planning Visit. They review these requests with the HEI as part of the agenda of the Planning Visit, to ensure the requirements are clear. The HEI is normally required to submit the requested materials several weeks prior to the Panel Visit.
- **In the Daily Liaison Meetings during the Panel Visit:** The PSA Panel may request AMs during the Panel Visit. All requests for such materials must be made through the Review Director. The HEI is usually expected to submit these AMs during the Visit.
- **Up to one week after the Panel Visit:** The Panel may request AMs up to one week after the Panel Visit.

12.2 Planning Visit

Approximately three weeks after the Preliminary Meeting, the PSA Panel Chair (or representative) and the Review Director visits the HEI to discuss the forthcoming Panel Visit and other matters pertaining to the PSA. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss and agree operational matters and, as this is a working meeting, should comprise a relatively small number of attendees. Usually, the HEI is represented by the Head of Department and Programme Leader(s) (or equivalent), the Head of any Quality Office, and the Contact Person. The HEI may involve other people as they deem necessary but should keep the meeting small so that the focus remains operational. If the HEI so wishes, time can be scheduled at the outset of the meeting for a brief courtesy meeting with the Head of the HEI.

The focus of the Planning Visit is on preparations for the Panel Visit (see Section 14.2), including any special needs of the Panel. The Planning Visit is not an opportunity for the PSA Panel delegation to conduct interviews nor for the HEI to enquire as to the PSA Panel's preliminary findings. The Planning Visit follows a prescribed agenda, covering requests for MCs and AMs, and a tour of facilities allocated for the Panel Visit (see Appendix O).

13. Public Submissions

There is only one formal submission from the HEI to the PSA process, and that is through the PSAA(s) and associated supporting materials. An important aspect of OAAAQA's public accountability, however, is to ensure that the PSA Panel, representing the interests of the public at large, can assess the programme(s) in an independent manner. This involves having access to information that has not first been vetted by the HEI.

13.1 The Public Submission Process

After the Planning Visit and approximately three weeks prior to the Panel Visit, the Review Director calls for public submissions on behalf of the PSA Panel. The method used is as described below.

- A Public Submission Notice is sent to the Contact Person for distribution within the HEI (see Appendix P).
- Public Submission Notices are made public (through appropriate means such as local newspapers and social media).
- A Public Submission Notice is posted on the OAAAQA website
- The Public Submission Notices include an OAAAQA email address to which submissions should be forwarded.

13.2 Criteria for Public Submissions

The PSA Panel may only accept unsolicited Public Submissions where they meet the following criteria (see Appendix Q):

- A submission must include the name, position, organisation (for example, HEI, workplace) and contact details of the person(s) making the submission. This information is treated in confidence. Anonymous submissions are not considered by the PSA Panel under any circumstances.
- The person(s) making the submission must be willing to participate in a telephone interview should the PSA Panel consider such a discussion necessary.
- A submission may not refer to a personal grievance or single out individual members of staff as the subject of complaint.
- The submission must contain specific evidence to support the claims or comments made. Vague allegations are not pursued by the PSA Panel.
- The submission (excluding any corroborating evidence) is restricted to 1,000 words in length (two sides of an A4 page).
- Any submission must be received within the dates stipulated in the Public Submission Notice. Any submission received after that point, however relevant, may not be used in Panel deliberations.

13.3 Use of Public Submissions by the Panel

The OAAAQA's call for public submissions does not constitute a statistically valid survey. The number of submissions received on a certain topic is not relevant. The PSA Panel may choose to investigate, or not to investigate, the matters raised based on the likely merit of the content. Where the Panel chooses to investigate, this takes place as part of the overall PSA and does not involve investigating the details of a particular complaint.

The PSA Panel does not make any response or report to the person(s) making the submission other than to confirm receipt of the submission (usually through the Review Director). The PSA Panel must triangulate any information forthcoming from public submissions before reaching a conclusion for inclusion in the PSA Report. This may include directly asking the HEI and/or programme staff about the matter, although if this occurs, the

identity of the person making the submission must remain confidential to the PSA Panel under the OAAAQA's non-attribution protocol (see Section 8.5).

14. The Panel Visit

The Panel Visit is the most visible part of the overall PSA process and typically attracts most of the attention. It is important to recognise, however, that it is only one part of the overall PSA process. Prior to the Panel Visit, the PSA Panel begins testing the accuracy of claims made in the submission through the examination of evidence provided in the Supporting Materials and three drafts of the PSA Report(s) are prepared before the Visit commences. The Visit provides the PSA Panel with a further opportunity to verify claims and triangulate information through examination of on-site files, the interviewing of a range of staff, students and other stakeholders, and a tour of facilities. A Notice for Staff, Students and Stakeholders template is provided for HEIs to display ahead of the PSA Panel Visit (see Appendix R). HEIs may also use OAAAQA's Information for Interviewees template (see Appendix S).

14.1 Nature of the Panel Visit

The Panel Visit is conducted in a positive, friendly, and professional manner as a way of enabling the PSA Panel to test the statements, descriptions, conclusions, and self-evaluations as presented in the PSA submission. The Visit also gives an opportunity for the Panel to acquire further insight into the operation of the programme(s) through first-hand investigation and personal interaction. This allows for a qualitative assessment of factors that cannot be easily documented in written form and includes the viewing of facilities. The Panel Visit is conducted in a spirit of transparency, dialogue and co-operation between the HEI staff, students and other stakeholders and the PSA Panel.

14.1.1 Purpose of the Panel Visit

The primary purpose of the Panel Visit is to verify whether each PSAA in a submission has:

- Adequately addressed all applicable standards and criteria
- Accurately and completely presented all points of fact
- Given reasonable emphasis in the commentary
- Included current information
- Reflected defensible self-ratings against criteria and standards

14.1.2 Approach of the Panel Visit

The methods the PSA Panel use to fulfil their purpose include:

- Interviewing people to compare personal experiences with claims in the submission
- Viewing resources and facilities to verify they match those described in the submission
- Considering further documentary evidence and making notes thereof

14.2 Programme of Panel Visit Activities

To ensure the equitable treatment of all HEIs in Oman's higher education sector, the OAAAQA seeks to ensure that the implementation of the PSA process is as consistent as possible across all programmes. A typical set of activities that the PSA Panel undertakes during the Visit to accomplish this, although the precise order and balance of these activities may be adapted to reflect the nature of the programme(s) under review. Within that context, each Panel Visit is unique to some extent, determined by the claims made by the HEI in each submission, and by the lines of enquiry that the PSA Panel decides to pursue. The Panel Chair and Review Director agree the programme of Visit activities with the HEI contact person in the Planning Visit, at least four weeks prior to the commencement of the Panel Visit.

14.2.1 Panel Visit Principles

The following principles underpin the arrangement of Visit activities:

- The use of the Panel Visit is optimised through the strict allocation of time for interviews, reading of supporting materials and undertaking a tour of learning resources and facilities

- The Panel Visit Schedule always includes meetings with students
- As far as possible, the Panel meets with any given interviewee once only
- Line managers and the staff they oversee are not interviewed together

14.2.2 Panel Visit Activities

Typical Panel Visit activities include the following:

- Face-to-face interviews with staff, students and other stakeholders; these include 'Random Interviews' and 'In Situ' interviews, some of which (or all of which, given specific circumstances) may be carried out through virtual conferencing means
- Telephone interviews (as required)
- Tour(s) of learning resources and facilities
- Reading of supporting materials
- Scrutiny of the assessed work of students that is best examined on-site
- Private meetings of the PSA Panel, to discuss the evidence received and to reach conclusions on the ratings for the Criteria and Standards leading to the Accreditation Outcome

14.2.3 Panel Visit Interviews

The Panel Visit always includes time for interviews. Interviews with staff, students and other stakeholders (including programme alumni, graduate employers and, where applicable, other industry or professional stakeholders) provide an important opportunity for the Panel to corroborate what they have read in the PSA submission and to triangulate what they have learned elsewhere during the Visit. Interviews are often the most efficient way of augmenting or clarifying information already provided. While some interviews may focus on a particular Programme Standard, very few interviews with groups are likely to be single-topic meetings and interviewees may, within reason, expect to be asked about anything within the scope of the PSA. The focus for each meeting is derived from the PSAA(s), the Supporting Materials and the Panel's reading and initial analysis of the PSA submission.

Some general features of interviews during the Panel Visit are as follows.

- **Number of Interviews:** The number of interviews, and the length of time devoted to interviews, is kept to the minimum necessary to complete the PSA process. Between six and ten meetings is typical for a Panel Visit but, as indicated above, each Visit is unique to some extent and depends on the size and complexity of a programme cluster.
- **Parallel Sessions:** In some cases, two or more interviews may run as parallel sessions; in this case, the PSA Panel sub-divides and groups of staff, students and other stakeholders are arranged in two rooms accordingly. Referred to as 'parallel sessions', these are agreed with the HEI before the Panel Visit, generally during the Planning Visit.

14.2.4 PSA Interviewees

Interviews with staff, students and other stakeholders may involve the following individuals or groups:

- Head of the HEI (including a brief courtesy visit)
- HEI senior management
- Head of the academic unit in which the programme(s) are located (for example, Head of Department)
- Programme Leader(s) and academic staff related to the programme(s)
- Administrative staff supporting the programme(s)
- A representative sample of current students on the programme(s), including class and/or programme representatives
- Alumni (graduates) from the programme(s)
- Industry, employer and professional body representatives with links to the programme(s)
- Key person(s) with responsibility for programme quality assurance, monitoring and review

- Support services staff with responsibility for the management and/or delivery of services used by staff and students on the programme(s)

14.2.5 Types of Panel Visit

A Panel Visit may be arranged in different ways according to the nature of the PSA Submission (see Appendix T). The main visit types are described below.

- **Single Programme Panel Visit:** This is the standard Visit type (see Appendix T, Part A).
- **Programme Cluster Panel Visit:** This involves the inclusion of one extra On-Site Panel Member for each additional programme and is generally longer than the standard Visit type (see Appendix T, Part B).
- **Back-to-back Panel Visit of Two HEIs:** This may happen where a specialist Panel is convened to carry out simultaneous PSAs (normally only for a single programme submission rather than a programme cluster submission) for similar programmes sharing the same cognate field at two separate HEIs (see Appendix T, Part C). Simultaneous PSAs are likely to be rare but may occur to facilitate the efficient and timely completion of programme review in highly specialist subjects. OAAAQA reserves the right to make decisions about the feasibility of this approach on a case-by-case basis.
- **A Multi-Campus Panel Visit:** This is where a programme (or programme cluster) is delivered on more than one campus and involves one or more PSA Panel Members visiting satellite campuses over additional Panel Visit days.

For any form of Panel Visit, the Review Director ensures that the HEI and Panel are apprised of confirmed Panel Visit details after the Planning Visit.

14.3 Panel Visit Logistics

Most logistic details for the Panel Visit are confirmed through the Planning Meeting and further followed up between the Review Director and the HEI Contact Person. These details include the number and types of rooms required and how they are supplied, and provision for various Panel activities (such as lunch and prayer) and other requirements (such as parking and washroom facilities). All these requirements are described in this section.

14.3.1 Liaison Meetings

During the Visit, attention to logistics helps to ensure that the PSA Panel is well supported in carrying out its work and that the HEI is not unduly inconvenienced. At the end of each day, the Contact Person and the Review Director meets to review arrangements for the following day. These meetings usually last only a few minutes and typically include the following:

- Potential call back interviews
- Additional Supplementary Material requested by the PSA Panel
- Logistics (including security arrangements such as locking the Panel Room)
- Any operational issues that may have arisen during the day

These daily Liaison Meetings should under no circumstances be used to exchange information about the PSA Panel's deliberations.

14.3.2 Main Panel Room

The PSA Panel has much to achieve in a short period of time and needs to work as effectively as possible. Attention to the following room and interview setup details helps ensure that the Panel Visit is conducted efficiently:

- **Convenient Location:** The main PSA Panel Room (where the Panel spends most time and where most of the interviews and Panel review sessions take place) is best located conveniently near to other facilities such as the parking area, prayer room, lunchroom and washroom facilities.
- **Prescribed Layout:** A room with good acoustics and a prominent wall clock is required to facilitate the interview sessions. A typical layout of a PSA Panel Room is given in this manual (see Appendix U, Figure U1).

- **Interview Table:** An interview table is required with enough chairs for each member of the PSA Panel and the Review Director on the Panel's side of the table and up to eight chairs on the other side of the table for the interviewees. The table needs to be large enough to accommodate the PSA Panel's requirements (such as, folders, laptops and stationery) and to allow for ample personal space between each Panel Member.
- **Comfortable Chairs:** Given the amount of time that Panel Members spend in their chairs working at the table, it is appreciated if the HEI can ensure that the chairs are of an appropriate ergonomic design.
- **Observer Desk:** If there is an Observer accompanying the PSA Panel, a small separate table or desk and chair is required. This should be in a convenient location but where it is obvious to interviewees that the Observer is not part of the Panel.
- **Power Cables:** PSA Panel Members and the Review Director usually work on their own laptops so sufficient access to a power supply is required. This may require the provision of one or more extension cables.
- **Computer, Printer, Internet Access and Projector:** On a separate table in the Panel Room, the HEI should provide at least one computer with access to the Internet and a printer with a supply of paper. Where applicable, the PSA Panel should be provided with appropriate access to the HEI's intranet or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Provision of a projector and screen is appreciated. It is likely that the Panel will require these during deliberations, particularly towards the end of the Visit.
- **Wi-Fi Access:** Access should be made available to Wi-Fi within the main Panel room.
- **Stationery:** A small supply of stationery, including a stapler and a hole punch should be provided for use by the PSA Panel.
- **Telephone:** The room should have an internally connected telephone to enable direct calls to the HEI's Contact Person.
- **Refreshments:** Panel Visits are tiring and intensive exercises so continuous access to refreshments, such as water and fresh fruit juice, tea and coffee, fruit and biscuits, is much appreciated. Ideally, these should be kept permanently in the room as the interview sessions and PSA Panel review sessions may not be interrupted. As a courtesy to interviewees, strong-smelling refreshments (such as curried snacks) should be avoided.
- **Security:** Evacuation procedures (in the event of fire or other emergency) should be informed to the Panel at the outset of the Visit. The OAAAQA Review Director requires a key to the PSA Panel Room to ensure confidentiality of the Panel's work during lunch.

14.3.3 Concurrent Interview Room and Parallel Sessions

Some interview sessions are generally scheduled simultaneously during a Panel Visit to maximise the opportunity of meeting interviewees and/or focusing on specific aspects of individual programmes within a cluster. These so-called 'parallel sessions' take place in a separate interview room, set up in a similar manner to the main Panel Room (that is, with sufficient chairs for Panel Members and up to eight chairs for interviewees). The room needs to have an easily visible and accurate wall clock, but there are no other requirements. Only one or two members of the Panel are present in each session. The Review Director accompanies one of the sessions and takes notes but does not ask questions.

14.3.4 Round-Table Interview Room

The Panel generally conducts some interviews in a round-table format (see Appendix U Figure U2). This format is used for interviews which lend themselves to a less formal setting. In these interview sessions, each PSA Panel Member interviews a group of five interviewees who sit with the PSA Panel Member around a small table. Students are typically interviewed in a round-table format, but other interviewees may also be interviewed in this way at the request of the Panel. The room in which round-table interviews are held needs to have one table for each Panel Member (for example, if the Panel has three members, four tables are required). Each table needs to have six chairs (for one Panel Member and five interviewees). There should be sufficient distance between the tables to allow the different interviews to be conducted without undue disturbance. The room for the round-table interviews should have an easily visible wall clock, but there are no other requirements. No refreshments, other than water, need to be provided during round-table interviews.

14.3.5 Facilities for Virtual Conferencing

The Panel Visit may involve meetings facilitated through a digital platform. Depending on circumstances, all interviews may be required to take place in this way where an on-site Panel Visit is unfeasible. The management of all virtual conferencing must be facilitated by the Review Director through OAAAQA's digital platform, assisted where necessary by the relevant PSO in CHEQA. Adequate audio-visual hardware is required for virtual conferencing and the HEI must also provide technical staff to support use of this equipment throughout the entire Panel Visit.

In the extreme situation of an entire Visit taking place through digital conferencing, the HEI must sign an undertaking that no recording of the proceedings will take place (See Appendix V). If evidence is forthcoming that this protocol has been breached, then the OAAAQA reserves the right to annul the PSA (with all fees retained by OAAAQA); similarly, any Appeal launched by the HEI against OAAAQA using material obtained through recording virtual Visit proceedings is instantly dismissed.

14.3.6 In-situ Interviews and Campus Tours

While full campus tours are neither required nor feasible given time constraints, a Panel Visit typically involves in-situ interviews during which PSA Panel Members conduct face-to-face interviews with relevant staff in a specific location or facility associated with the programme(s). These locations may include, for example, laboratories, the Library, or other teaching and learning areas. The in-situ interviews may involve demonstration of the use of equipment or facilities (for example, of specific software). These interviews allow the PSA Panel to view the location and facility and to verify how it supports the programme(s) in meeting the standards and criteria being considered.

While in situ interviews may involve demonstration of the use of equipment or facilities, there is no requirement for any special room-layout for the PSA Panel. PSA Panel Members ask questions while viewing the location or facility and either remain standing or may sit informally if there is already available seating. Typically, two or three in situ interviews are scheduled to run concurrently.

14.3.7 PSA Panel Lunchroom

The PSA Panel schedules a specific time for lunch during each day of the Panel Visit. An appropriate room, other than the PSA Panel Room, is required for this. It is not suitable for the PSA Panel to have lunch in the PSA Panel Room as any lingering smell of food is un conducive to a professional interview environment. The PSA Panel also appreciate a break from the PSA Panel Room and vacation of the PSA Panel Room during lunch provides an opportunity for the HEI to replenish refreshments in this room.

During formal breaks (such as lunchbreaks and campus facility visits) the PSA Panel Room is locked, and the key is generally in the sole possession of the Review Director. The Review Director may negotiate with the HEI Contact Person, however, to allow cleaning and/or catering staff to enter the room at this time to review supplies.

PSA Panel lunches are likely to be treated partly as working sessions during which discussions and deliberations about the PSA continue. The PSA Panel needs to have lunch in a room, therefore, that allows confidentiality to be maintained. For this reason, it is not appropriate for the PSA Panel to have lunch in an open cafeteria. The PSA Panel appreciates provision by the HEI of a simple lunch buffet from which the PSA Panel serve themselves. Provision of international, vegetarian and vegan options are generally appreciated and details regarding the menu, and any dietary requirements of individual Panel Members, should be discussed between the Review Director and the HEI Contact Person during the Planning Visit (see Section 12.2).

14.3.8 Prayer Facilities

Conveniently located prayer facilities for men and women should be provided.

14.3.9 Washroom Facilities and Parking

Panel Members must have access to conveniently located washroom and toilet facilities. Preferably, these should be either within or adjacent to the Main Panel Room. Ideally, they should be allocated for the sole use of the Panel during the Visit and be gender segregated. HEIs are respectfully requested to organise these facilities to be routinely inspected for cleanliness and availability of supplies (including the provision of running water, a soap dispenser, sanitiser and tissue paper).

As some locally-based Panel Members may travel to the HEI in their own transportation, car parking facilities close to the Main Panel Room are appreciated where possible. Where this is not possible, a valet service for remote parking, or collection from remote parking by HEI shuttle, is required.

14.4 Evidence Deadline

The deadline for receiving Additional Materials (AMs) from an HEI is one calendar week after the final day of the Panel Visit. No information concerning programmes that arises after the evidence deadline may be included in the PSA Panel's deliberations.

In the period following the Panel Visit, the Panel refines the PSA draft Report v4 text and confirms ratings for each standard and criteria. This is based on extensive cross-checking of preliminary findings against all the available evidence. During this time the PSA Panel may find that it requires further documentary evidence to finalise its conclusions and may therefore request Additional Materials (AMs) from the HEI for up to one week after the end of the Panel Visit. The PSA Panel ensures it only seeks information where necessary to help finalise an assessment decision. It is not appropriate for the Panel to use this time to raise new topics, because there no further opportunities remain to fully saturate or triangulate such topics. Any material or information provided to the PSA Panel in response to requests during this week must have already existed before the end of the Panel Visit.

14.5 Concluding Session

The PSA process does not allow for any preliminary feedback regarding the standards assessment outcome to be given to the HEI. The concluding session of the Panel Visit therefore allows an opportunity only for the PSA Panel to extend its thanks to the HEI for cooperation during the PSA process, and if required, participate in a photographic opportunity to commemorate the Panel Visit. Under no circumstances are any findings from the Panel Visit discussed with the HEI during this concluding session.

15. The PSA Report

15.1 Overview of the PSA Report

The OAAAQA prepares one PSA Report for each programme undergoing assessment. Where the PSA consists of a programme cluster, separate reports are generated for each programme within the cluster. The Report provides ratings against each criterion under the two applicable standards. It also gives bulleted commentary, with references to evidence, for any criteria rated other than *Met* and highlights any good practice that exceeds the standard. A brief concluding paragraph is given under each applicable criterion. The overall ratings achieved against the standards and criteria automatically determine the Accreditation Outcome and both ratings and outcomes are summarised in a table at the beginning of the Report.

Where a programme has not met the standards, the programme is placed *On Probation*. The Panel determines the length of that probation period, up to a maximum duration of one year

from publication of the results. Any probation period is part of the formal outcome of the PSA and cannot be overturned except through Appeal.⁴⁷

It may be observed that there are several differences in the format, content and size of the PSA Report in comparison with an ISA or ISR Report. This is the result of a deliberate attempt to streamline the process, to allow maximum visibility of issues where a programme is not yet meeting the standard, and to make for a more efficient and swift delivery of the results of PSA to the HEI concerned.

15.2 PSA Report Drafts

Each PSA Report undergoes a total of six drafts that includes elements of moderation and editorial refinement. A full description of each version of the draft report is included in the supplement to this Manual for the guidance of Panel Members and the Review Director. Information about PSA draft Report v5 – the version of the report that is commented upon by the HEI – and PSAF draft Report v6 is given below for the guidance of HEIs.

15.2.1 HEI's Comments on Draft Report v5

The DG of CHEQA approves Draft Report v5 for dispatch to the HEI by the Review Director who confirms the deadline for HEI comments, as guided by the Indicative Timeline (see Section 3.9). The HEI's comments on PSA draft Report v5 form a vital part of the PSA process and a template is provided to guide this submission (see Appendix W). This part of the PSA process provides HEIs with an opportunity to address any matters in the report with which it disagrees, with regard to the following:

- Factual inaccuracies
- The use of evidence; evidence used to highlight factual inaccuracies in the report must not post-date the last day of the Panel Visit; the evidence must have existed during the Panel Visit; new policies, practices, data and so forth that has been developed since the Panel Visit are not permissible at this stage
- Unfair or prejudiced judgement; all EQA activities involve elements of professional judgement and an HEI may not question professional judgement other than where a Panel has been demonstrably unfair in the assessment decision of a criterion; in this instance, evidence must be given to support any claims made
- The omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the programme(s) and results in an unfair assessment decision
- The PSA process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair and deviated from the PSA Manual in a manner that had not been agreed to between the parties.

The HEI's comments on draft Report v5 is the last opportunity for the HEI to influence the PSA Panel's rationale. Any claims must be clear and convincing and fully supported with evidence. The claims or opinions of a senior member of the HEI are unlikely, on their own, to constitute clear and convincing evidence.

To facilitate the timely completion of the PSA Report, HEIs must give their comments on draft Report v5 by the agreed deadline. Extensions to this deadline (of up to a maximum of 50% of the indicative time allowed for HEI comments) are only given in extreme circumstances beyond the control of the HEI and at the discretion of OAAAQA. Failure to return comments on draft Report v5 by the agreed deadline and without notifying OAAAQA of any extenuating circumstances leads automatically to the assumption that the HEI has no comments to make and is content with the accuracy of the Report.

15.2.2 Panel's Response to HEI's Comments on Draft Report v5

The HEI's comments on Draft Report v5 is forwarded to the PSA Panel for a response using the prescribed template (see Appendix X). All members of a PSA Panel must respond to

⁴⁷ See OAAAQA Appeals Manual: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/14282c21-e5b2-4e89-96fe-202e3416fe80/Appeals%20Manual.aspx?b=0>

each of the HEI's comments. The Panel Response Report is shared with relevant members of CHEQA and the OAAAQA CEO but is not shared with the HEI. This is to ensure that the discussion on the report is completed in a timely manner, and in recognition of the fact that the outcomes are non-negotiable.

15.2.3 Draft Report v6 and OAAAQA CEO Approval

Draft Report v6 is produced by the Review Director after factoring in the Panel's response to the HEI's comments on PSA draft Report v5. Where this involves a change of rating, the whole Panel must be consulted, and consensus gained. The DG of CHEQA ensures that a rationale for each Panel response to each of the HEI's comments has been adequately given and draft Report v6 is sent to the CEO's Office for final approval. The OAAAQA CEO determines the final Programme Accreditation Outcome and ratings against the standards and criteria, based on a review of the PSA draft Report v6 and discussion with the DG CHEQA on relevant aspects of the PSA process. The OAAAQA Programme Accreditation Outcome is final.

15.3 Final PSA Report

The Final PSA Report, including changes requested by the OAAAQA CEO (if any), is sent to the HEI under embargo for 10 days. If the HEI does not lodge an appeal against the Accreditation Outcome or ratings of standards or criteria within the 10-day embargo period, the Accreditation Outcome and ratings of standards and criteria are sent to the OAAAQA Board for endorsement, prior to being made public on the OAAAQA website. The OAAAQA Final PSA Report is not made publicly available but is circulated as a confidential document to OAAAQA Board Members, the Cabinet, the HEI's supervising ministry, if applicable, and to other government bodies on request, subject to OAAAQA CEO approval.

15.4 Public Reporting and Accountability

15.4.1 Notification of PSA Outcome

The OAAAQA website publishes the Programme Accreditation Outcome, together with the publication of ratings for each standard and its associated criteria, for each programme submitted in a PSA. The OAAAQA is committed to transparent and effective communication of programme performance to stakeholders, as realised through the PSA rating scales (see Part C). Stakeholders, such as supervising ministries, employers, students and the general public, are able to use this data in order to compare the performance of different programmes both within an HEI and between HEIs.

Rather than producing a ranking system, the OAAAQA's approach allows prospective students, their parents and other stakeholders to search against items that match their specific needs. This approach to the reporting of PSA results enables HEIs to build their own profile and make claims, which are supported by the OAAAQA, about the academic standards and quality of the programmes they deliver, and their ability to provide quality education services and experiences. It also enables students and other stakeholders to compare programmes based on their own priorities. Other information that is made publicly available on the OAAAQA website includes the following:

- Name of the institution
- HEI Classification and whether Public or Private
- Licensing Status
- Listing and Re-Listing Status
- IQA Submission Date and Quality Audit Report (until the point when this is superseded by the ISA results)
- ISA Submission Date, Ratings and Outcome and any Probation period
- ISR I and II Submission Date, Ratings and Outcome and any Probation period (following ISR First Attempt)
- Institutional Reaccreditation Submission Date, Ratings and Outcome and any Probation period

- PSA Submission Date, Ratings and Outcome and any Probation period
- PSR Submission Date, Ratings and Outcome and any Probation period
- GFPQA Submission Date and Quality Audit Report

15.4.2 PSA Certificate Ceremony

A Programme Accreditation certificate is awarded to Accredited programmes. The certificate, which is generally sent directly to the HEI as opposed to being given in person, is valid for a period of five years.

15.4.3 Media Management

Although the PSA Report is not released to the public, the Accreditation Outcome is posted on the OAAAQA website. The Chair of the OAAAQA Board and/or the CEO or DG CHEQA may make public statements on behalf of the OAAAQA, if necessary, in relation to any EQA activity. The HEI may make its own comments about the PSA but may not use the Standards Assessment Report in a misleading way or to publicly harm other HEIs. As the PSA Report is not made public, the HEI is not permitted to publish any part of the report. If the HEI publishes any part of the report, the OAAAQA will make the whole report publicly available. Any disputes about the Standards Assessment process need to be addressed through the Appeal process (see Section 16.5). Disputes should not be pursued through the media.

15.4.4 Confidentiality

On rare occasions an issue may arise during the Panel Visit which is so significant and so personally or commercially sensitive that it may need to be discussed at the highest level of the OAAAQA. In such cases, the Panel Chair and the Review Director discusses the matter with the DG CHEQA and/or OAAAQA CEO. Together, they may decide that it would be helpful for the Panel Chair and the Review Director to meet privately with the HEI senior management to discuss the matter. Such private and confidential meetings are considered only in exceptional circumstances. Their sole purpose is to allow the HEI to demonstrate that it has *Met* the requirements of a standard or criterion.

16. Disputes and Appeals

16.1 Disputes During PSA

Every attempt should be made by the HEI, Programme Team and the PSA Panel to ensure that a PSA is conducted in a positive and professional manner. Where, for whatever reason, this high standard is compromised, a complaint may arise.

16.2 Complaints by the HEI Against the PSA Panel

During the course of the PSA, and particularly during the Panel Visit, it is possible that the HEI may believe there are grounds to complain about the behaviour of the PSA Panel. Grounds for such a complaint may include:

- An unnecessarily hostile or aggressive manner
- Perceived breach of the confidentiality of particularly sensitive information
- Unreasonable demands on the HEI by the Panel
- Any other perceived breach of the PSA Protocols

16.3 Complaints by the PSA Panel against the HEI

During the course of the PSA, and particularly during the Panel Visit, it is possible that the PSA Panel may believe there are grounds to complain about the behaviour of the HEI. Grounds for such a complaint may include:

- Refusal to comply with reasonable requests for access to personnel, information and/or locations
- Perceived coaching by the HEI, designed to influence responses given by interviewees

- Perceived breach by the HEI of the confidentiality of the PSA Panel's information and deliberations
- Any other perceived breach of the PSA Protocols

16.4 Resolution of Complaints

The objective of raising such issues is to enable the PSA to proceed in a professional manner. In the first instance, the PSA Panel should try to resolve any problems with the HEI as quickly and as informally as possible through discussions between the Panel's Review Director and the Contact Person. In most cases, positive and professional discussions are sufficient to resolve disputes. In the unlikely event that this does not occur, then the Review Director may ask the DG of CHEQA or the OAAAQA CEO to intervene. Given that the OAAAQA has a legal mandate to conduct accreditation, any clear breach of the PSA Protocols or processes as set out in this PSA Manual may lead to the PSA being terminated early.

16.5 Appealing PSA Ratings and Outcome

There are many checkpoints in the PSA process designed to ensure that the Programme Accreditation Outcome is based on a fair and reasonable assessment of the HEI's programme(s) in relation to the OAAAQA standards and criteria. It is possible, however, that the HEI may still believe it has evidence to suggest that the standard and criteria ratings or Programme Accreditation Outcome are unjust and may damage unfairly the reputation of the HEI and its programmes. Only in these extreme cases, an HEI may apply for a formal appeal.

16.5.1 Grounds for Appeal

The grounds for appealing against an Accreditation Outcome are:

- Significant factual inaccuracies that the HEI has tried to correct by providing the appropriate evidence to the EQA Panel in the HEI's comments on draft Report v5
- Emphases or perspectives taken by the EQA Panel that are unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and result in unfair assessment of a standard or related criteria
- The omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and results in unfair assessment of a standard or related criteria
- The EQA process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair and deviated from the relevant EQA manual in a manner that had not been agreed by both parties
- The Accreditation Outcome and/or ratings are manifestly at odds with the Final Report

16.5.2 Review of Appeal Application

In order for the application to proceed to the Appeals Committee, the Chair of the Appeals Committee must be satisfied (without reaching a conclusion about the appeal itself):

- The matter is significant enough to have resulted in an unreasonable PSA Report and Accreditation Outcome. In other words, trivial issues are not accepted for an appeal.
- The HEI has already attempted to correct the issue by providing the PSA Panel with appropriate evidence during the normal course of the PSA. In other words, if the HEI did not provide the information in the HEI's Comments on Draft Report v5 before the deadline, then it cannot complain afterwards that the PSA Panel reached an unfair conclusion.

16.5.3 Appeal Process, Fee, and Outcome

An HEI must signal its intention to Appeal within ten working days from receipt by the HEI of the Programme Accreditation Outcome if it wishes to suspend the ratings and accreditation outcome until the end of the Appeal. Upon receipt of this application for Appeal, the OAAAQA defers publication of the Programme Accreditation Outcome until either the application has been rejected without proceeding to the Appeals Committee or, if it is accepted, until the Appeals Committee has completed its deliberations. Even after publication of the Programme Accreditation Outcome on the OAAAQA website an HEI has the right to appeal the result of the Programme Accreditation Outcome up to 60 days from the time it is notified of the Accreditation Outcome by the OAAAQA.

The formal costs of convening an Appeals Committee are structured to ensure that application for an Appeal are lodged with appropriate seriousness. The fee for lodging an Appeal is non-refundable. Detailed information about lodging an Appeal and other aspects of the Appeal process is available in the OAAAQA Appeals Manual.⁴⁸ The outcome of an Appeal is final and there is no recourse to legal action.

17. On Completion of the PSA Process

17.1 Feedback Mechanisms

The OAAAQA is committed to the continuous improvement of its own processes and routinely seeks feedback from various sources after each PSA. All post-PSA evaluations are periodically reviewed as part of OAAAQA's Internal Quality Management System. The outcomes of these reviews are treated as opportunities for improvement as reflected in amendments to the PSA Manual, indicative timelines, templates and other details of the process. The OAAAQA itself is subject to external review from time to time, in accordance with the INQAHE ISGs.⁴⁹

17.1.1 PSA Panel Member Evaluation

After the PSA Report and Programme Accreditation Outcome has been endorsed by the OAAAQA Board, the Review Director sends each PSA Panel Member an evaluation form (see Appendix Y) seeking their feedback about the PSA Manual, the PSA Report, the PSA process in general, and the support provided by OAAAQA staff.

17.1.2 HEI Representative Evaluation

After the Accreditation Outcome has been publicly released, the OAAAQA seeks feedback from HEI representatives on the PSA Manual, the PSA process and the PSA Report (see Appendix Y). This feedback is an important means for the OAAAQA to ensure PSA processes remain robust and appropriate.

17.1.3 Review Director Report

The Review Director prepares a confidential report providing an account of the PSA (see Appendix Z). The purpose of this report is to help the OAAAQA identify opportunities for improvement of the PSA process. The report includes the following:

- Suggested amendments to the PSA Manual and processes
- Comments on the effectiveness of the PSA Panel, including a review of each Panel Member's contribution and a recommendation regarding their future role, if any, in OAAAQA's EQA processes
- Comments on the interactions with the HEI

⁴⁸ See OAAAQA Appeals Manual: <https://oaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/14282c21-e5b2-4e89-96fe-202e3416fe80/Appeals%20Manual.aspx?b=0>

⁴⁹ See INQAHE ISGs: <https://www.inqahe.org/sites/default/files/INQAHE-International-Standards-and-Guidelines-ISG.pdf>, p16.



PART F: METHODS OF ANALYSIS

18. Obtaining a General Overview of a Programme

There are many ways in which an HEI can set about self-assessment of its programmes or a Panel analyses the programmes in a submission and OAAAQA does not subscribe to any single approach. That said, there are several key mechanisms which the Authority endorses that give structure and form to these activities. Some of these approaches and mechanisms are described below.

18.1 The Programme's Context within an HEI

It is important that PSA Panel Members have a sound understanding of the institutional context in which the programme(s) undergoing PSA operate. Accordingly, as part of its application, the HEI is asked to provide a range of descriptive information about the HEI as a general overview for the PSA Panel. Referred to as 'Mandatory Materials', this information covers a number of items, including the OAAAQA Quality Audit Report and Institutional Accreditation Report for the HEI, and the GFPQA Report where available. PSA Panel Members are required to become familiar with this contextual information about the HEI. PSA Panel Members are also encouraged to become familiar with the HEI's website in order to understand the key features of the institution and how the HEI and the programme(s) undergoing PSA are promoted to external entities.

18.2 ADRI

18.2.1 ADRI Approach to Self-Assessment

OAAAQA actively supports the use of ADRI (or a similar tool) to facilitate structured and systematic self-assessment and Panel review. ADRI can help establish whether or not each programme undergoing assessment has *Met* a criterion.⁵⁰ It can also be used to show that outcomes and achievements (the ability to meet a particular criterion) have resulted through sustainable systems and have not come about by chance. ADRI can be used at all levels of the HEI – institutional, department, programme or cohort and by all members of a Panel.

The HEI is expected to provide evidence to show how a programme meets the applicable criteria, and also to show how there are effective systems in place that enable those criteria to be met. Evidence of sustainability and results are important in evaluating whether all the requirements of the criteria and standards have been *Met* or *Not Met*. ADRI provides a useful tool for the HEI to assess the performance of their programme(s) against the requirements of all applicable criteria. Standards Assessment is summative; that is, it determines whether applicable criteria have been *Met* or *Not Met*. The HEI should therefore pay particular attention to providing evidence of results achieved against applicable criteria. Results are not achieved in a vacuum. They are the outcome of a purposeful approach (identifying the intended results), and actions that have been implemented (deployment) in order to achieve those results.

18.2.2 Applying an ADRI Analysis

HEIs in Oman should be familiar with ADRI as this is a tool used when preparing a Portfolio for Quality Audit and an ISA Application. Panel members also use ADRI as an analytical tool in all EQA review activities. The use of ADRI as a tool for analysis is equally relevant for PSA, for both HEIs preparing their PSAA submissions, and for PSA Panels for the analysis and assessment of a programme's performance against each individual criteria of the relevant Programme Standards. The first step in conducting PSA using ADRI analysis is for an HEI to systematically work through those criteria which are applicable to the programme in question. ADRI can be used to analyse any aspect of a programme, either applied at the micro level (that is, to specific, well-defined issues often directed by an objective or target) or at the macro level (that is, concerning over-arching systems).

⁵⁰ Derived from Deming's (1986) PDSA cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act) originally attributed to Walter Shewhart (1980).

Put simply, ADRI is a four-step cyclical model comprising consideration of Approach, Deployment, Results and Improvement. An ADRI Training Module, including a presentation and handouts, is available on the OAAAQA website.⁵¹ The ADRI model can be applied to an analysis of any given topic. It is an evidence-based method of determining the elements listed below.

- **Approach:** ‘Approach’ refers, within the context of PSA, to an HEI’s aims for the programme in relation to a criterion, and how it proposes to achieve these aims: in other words it answers the question ‘What results does the HEI intend to achieve and how, theoretically, does it propose to achieve them?’
- **Deployment:** ‘Deployment’ refers to the way in which the approach is practically being carried out: in other words it answers the question ‘Is the intended approach being followed in practice, and if not, why not?’
- **Results:** ‘Results’ refer to the evidenced outcomes of the approach and deployment and offer indications about how effective they were in achieving the intended aims: in other words it answers the question ‘Have the intended results been achieved and if so how can this be evidenced; if they haven’t been achieved, what went wrong?’
- **Improvement:** ‘Improvement’ refers to the way in which an HEI has reviewed the Approach and Deployment in order to make improvements to the programme that may lead to better Results: in other words, it answers the question ‘Have any reviews been conducted and if so, have the results been analysed and changes been implemented based on this analysis?’

While all aspects of ADRI are important (and continuous improvement is clearly good practice), PSA is primarily focused on results, and the results determine whether or not a standard has been *Met*.

18.2.3 Approach

When analysing a programme for PSA, ‘the approach’ may be thought of as the intentions that the HEI has for that programme, in relation to each criterion. It takes two forms: what the HEI is proposing to do and how it is proposing to do it. Against each criterion, an HEI should describe its approach at both a strategic and operational level. Approach statements may include:

- The HEI’s Mission and Vision statements, and how these are implemented through the operation of the programme
- The HEI’s Values, and how they are ‘lived’ through the operation of the programme
- Aims and Goals of the programme (broadly, what the programme aims to achieve)
- Objectives (a more specific definition of intended achievements)
- Targets (a measurable expression of objectives)
- Policies and procedures (rules by which the HEI operates, and how these are implemented in relation to the programme)
- Plans for the programme (identifying objectives)

The approach, or statements of intent, are found in a variety of sources and care should be taken that they do not conflict with each other. Reviewers (internal or external) undertake a wide search of such materials to ensure that a complete understanding of the intention is attained and they look for consistency to prove the effectiveness of systems. Typical source materials include:

- Strategic Plan and Operational Plans covering the programme
- Website, Prospectus and/or Catalogue
- Minutes of committees and review or decision-making groups
- Directives issued from senior institutional staff, the Head of Department, the Programme Leader
- Less formal correspondence and verbal statements from senior institutional staff, the Head of Department, Programme Leaders

⁵¹ See OAAAQA Training Materials, available through CHEQA

Against each criterion, the HEI should describe the approach taken, to ensure that the programme meets that criterion, or the approach that it is proposing, in order to meet that criterion. With statements of intent to meet all the requirements of the criterion given as a starting point, the HEI then needs to describe the methods by which these intentions are achieved. There are a number of mechanisms used for this purpose, including the following:

- Policies setting out the rules of the HEI, to be applied at the programme level
- Strategies, describing in broad terms how goals and objectives are achieved
- Operational plans, detailing what should be done, by when, by whom, to what standard and with what resources
- Manuals detailing how processes should be implemented
- Budgets detailing the allocation of resources to activities
- Staff training and development activities that improve the HEI's capability to achieve the intentions
- Guidelines of non-prescriptive advice

18.2.4 Deployment

Statements of intent remain exactly that until they are put into effect. The next step is to consider how the approach is deployed. In other words, analysing whether the approach is being carried out as expected. This is sometimes also known as implementation, 'processes' or, most simply, the 'do' part of the cycle.

There are several ways the HEI investigates deployment. One of the most effective is to hold discussions with people, such as in interviews, focus groups or departmental meetings. The idea is to explore people's 'lived experiences' to see if they align with plans, policies and manuals. Another way of investigating deployment is to check whether resources are in place as planned and are of appropriate quantity and quality.

18.2.5 Results

Assessment of a programme against the criteria cannot be determined by focusing on the goals, plans, inputs and processes only. There must be an emphasis on what is achieved – that is, on the results. In general, every goal must have a reported result (or multiple results) and, vice versa, every result should link back to a goal. It is essential that a causal relationship can be shown between the approach, the deployment and the eventual result, otherwise the result may have arisen by chance with no guarantee that the HEI can influence future results.

Results may be quantitative, qualitative, or both. It is not essential that every result be numerical, although it is essential that every result be measurable. The HEI needs to ensure that an appropriate measure of result has been ascertained for each criterion. For some goals the results presented may be aggregated from the results of component objectives. This may involve combining various different types of data. Care must be taken to ensure that such results remain valid and reliable. The most significant difference between PSA and ISA is in terms of the way in which results should be gathered and expressed: a PSA Panel needs to be sure that an HEI knows whether aims are being met at programme level and this requires gathering and analysing specific, disaggregated, programme-related data.

18.2.6 Improvement

Improvement is applicable to all criteria and all parts of ADRI tend towards improvement. Just as there's no point in having a policy that no staff are aware of or are disregarding, equally, there is no point in gathering information about results that is not subsequently used to enhance or improve student learning or experience. Improvement requires the HEI to provide evidence that processes related to a certain activity are 'effective'. The way the HEI knows whether its approach is effective or not is through review. Without evidence of review, the HEI may not know whether it is effective or not. The OAAAQA has defined 'effective' as 'successful in producing a deliberate and sustainable result that meets all the requirements of the criteria and standards'.

An HEI must reflect on its activities in order to make improvements or enhancements to each programme they offer. The 'improvement' dimension can be thought of as the quality enhancement aspect of ADRI. The fundamental assumption underpinning this dimension of ADRI is that an HEI ought to be continually reviewing its activities and looking for ways to make each programme the best it can be. Targets should be recalibrated periodically; processes should become more efficient and more effective over time; results should indicate increasing success. This requires a comprehensive system of review and action – not just an ad hoc consideration of results.

While ADRI provides a robust tool for the analysis of a programme's performance, PSA Panel Members are reminded that the focus of their deliberations must remain fixed on the requirements of the criteria and that evidence related to the four elements of ADRI should inform rather than override this. What is important is for the PSA Panel to determine that criteria are *Met* as a result of a deliberate effort by the HEI, and that the programme's performance is underpinned by systems which give the PSA Panel confidence that the criteria continues to be *Met* for the five year period for which accreditation is granted.

18.3 Benchmarking

Several of the programme criteria specifically require the HEI to provide evidence that they have benchmarked the practices,⁵² activities and outcomes of their programme against other similar programmes in the same academic field or professional area, including those from HEIs sharing a similar context.⁵³ The following are key steps in benchmarking:

- **Identify the topic to be benchmarked:** An HEI should not try to benchmark everything at the same time. It should focus on those areas where it wants to know how well a programme is performing in comparison with other similar programmes. For benchmarking to be successful, the HEI must first study its own programme provision and practices. The HEI should conduct a review of the topic in terms of ADRI (see Section 18.2). The benchmarking process may involve an exchange of materials and reciprocal visits. Joint meetings may also be required as it should not be assumed that data will be interpreted in the same way as intended.
- **Determine the goal:** As part of identifying the benchmarking goal, HEIs should consider the planned method, what happens in practice and what the intended results are.
- **Find potential benchmarking partners:** Partners can be identified from within the sector, nationally or internationally. It is best to establish partnerships with Programme Teams from the same academic field or professional area and from HEIs which are a similar size, have a similar mission, offer similar programmes or cater to a similar demographic (that is, student characteristics, location, language). A Programme Team should avoid looking for exact matches as each HEI is obviously unique. Partners ought to be similar enough, however, for comparisons to be meaningful. HEIs seeking partnership should make it clear that they understand the need for confidentiality. Benchmarking partners need not be limited to the HE sector but may also include, where relevant, industry or professional groups, thereby enabling cross-industry comparisons.
- **Establish a formal Memorandum of Understanding:** The aim of benchmarking is not to gather commercially confidential information but to share data and the learning points that the data may reveal. Any formal agreement between HEIs should outline project details such as topics, contact people, method, timeframe and cost sharing arrangements. It is also important to establish rules regarding how the information is treated, such as whether confidentiality is required, how the information is to be stored and disposed of, and how the information is used. The Programme Team needs to ensure that they have the approval of their own HEI and the benchmarking partner before entering into such agreements.

⁵² See OAAAQA Training Materials, available through CHEQA

⁵³ See, for example, Programme Standards' Criteria 2.1 Programme Aims and Objectives; 2.3 Curriculum; 2.14 Student retention and Progression; 2.15 Graduate Destinations and Employability; 3.1 Research Programme Design; 3.2 Research Student Entry Standards; 3.9 Research Student Retention and Progression, and 3.10 Research Student Graduate Destinations and Employability.

- **Identify performance gaps:** Performance gaps are identified through comparing results, using both quantitative and qualitative data and other information. It is important to ascertain from the outset a common data and information collection method, and whether established metrics or new surveys need to be designed. This then makes a genuine comparison of results between HEIs possible and allows for analysis of the best results and the methods (approach) that led to those results. The key phrase in benchmarking is '*adopt* and *adapt*'. In other words, in adopting the superior practices of a benchmarking partner, a Programme Team may need to modify the adopted practices to ensure they work in their own context.

It is anticipated that PSA will promote significant benchmarking activities throughout the HEI sector in Oman. MoHERI has established Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which can provide national comparative data in a number of areas. HEIs may wish to consider establishing informal benchmarking clubs with three or four other Programme Teams in the same academic field or professional area, and compare results against the KPI data. The purpose of these clubs is to improve upon or adopt best practice by finding and learning from others. HEIs are also encouraged to establish relationships with overseas HEIs and use these relationships to support international competitiveness.

18.4 Types of Evidence and Data Analysis

The ratings given to standards and criteria in the PSA Report are not based on whether the evidence is incontrovertible, but on the professional judgements of peers (PSA Panel Members) through careful consideration of all the available evidence. PSA does not assume that there is a single correct way in which a system should be implemented or that there is only a single correct interpretation of a particular scenario within a programme. Instead, PSA prompts the Panel to reach conclusions that are authoritative and support the ratings given to the standards and criteria.

To achieve that goal, it is helpful to consider the wide range of evidence and tools for collecting, analysing and interpreting evidence. This Manual does not intend to be fully comprehensive on these topics but presents some guidance for those involved in PSA.

18.4.1 Authority to Access Information

A PSA Panel has the authority to access any information (other than legally protected or privileged information) that it deems necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. This is stated in Royal Decree 09/2021 under which OAAAQA in its current form was established.

18.4.2 Using Statistics

One of the most powerful means for communicating information about the performance of a programme is through the use of statistics. An introduction to the use of descriptive statistics is available on the OAAAQA website (see Training Module 4 'Statistics in Reporting').⁵⁴

OAAAQA offers the following advice about presenting and interpreting statistics presented by HEIs in their PSAA:

- Statistical results should be reported against targets to assist with their interpretation.
- Statistics should be presented as trends across five years where possible as trends are obviously more reliable than single snapshots of data that may have been influenced by outlying, or non-typical, circumstances.
- Where possible, ratios or percentages should be used instead of raw numbers as the latter are difficult to interpret.
- The HEI should be prepared to defend the accuracy, validity and reliability of any statistics in the PSAA.

⁵⁴ See OAAAQA Training Materials, available through CHEQA.

18.4.3 Date Stamping Evidence

Many forms of evidence are dynamic in that they may change over time. Point-in-time assessment can therefore be challenging because the evidence may change even during the course of the PSA Panel's deliberations, meaning that findings can be disproved. It is essential, therefore, that techniques are used for confirming the date (and, sometimes, the time) when the evidence was collected. There are several techniques for this collectively known as 'date stamping'.

The form of evidence most at risk of changing during the PSA is that gathered from websites and other online items. If a PSA Panel Member finds a website that is used as reference material for a finding in the PSA Report, then this may be stored as a PDF or Microsoft Office Document Image file or similar, and saved in the Standards Assessment Folder. These electronic file formats should automatically include a date stamp in the document footer. It is conventional to refer to 'date accessed' for all material referred to on the internet.

Verbal comments made during interviews are also prone to change or mistaken memory. Accurate and comprehensive notes are therefore taken at the time (generally by the Review Director) of the Visit. As a report is the result of the Panel's perspective and judgement, the notes are taken by or on behalf of the Panel and recordings of the Visit proceedings (in any form) may not be taken by or on behalf of the HEI. The HEI has an opportunity to correct (in comments on draft Report v5) any factual errors that may occur through this process (see Section 15.2.1).

18.5 Evaluating New Processes

HEIs ought to be committed to making improvements with or without PSA but inevitably there is a human tendency to be more motivated to address problems just before the PSA occurs. While OAAAQA is supportive of an HEI using the PSA to gain additional momentum for its improvement efforts, it nonetheless recognises that this may have consequences. One such consequence is the temptation by an HEI to present new approaches, systems and procedures as standard practice when in fact they have been newly introduced and are yet to be tested through time and experience. This practice (commonly referred to as the 'wet paint syndrome') is problematic as a PSA Panel may regard it as misleading and outside the spirit of collaboration that underpins the quality assurance process.

Where HEIs are transparent about new approaches, systems and procedures, a Panel may not reach positive conclusions about Deployment or subsequent Results, as these may not yet have come into effect, but they are likely to be highly positive regarding Approach and Improvement. Furthermore, an HEI that acts upon identified opportunities for improvement demonstrates quality management in practice.

Where the PSA Panel evaluates newly introduced systems or processes that have yet to yield deliberate or sustainable results, the related criterion is likely to be rated *Partially Met*. This rating reflects, in the professional judgement of the PSA Panel, that a new system or process appears to be appropriate and capable of achieving the HEI's intended results at a later date.

18.6 Panel Visits and Observations

Most of the Panel Visit is spent conducting interviews in a designated PSA Panel Room (see Section 14.3.2) as there is only a limited amount of time during a Panel Visit and it is best spent talking with people rather than walking from venue to venue. There are some opportunities, however, for PSA Panel Members to visit locations and make observations. In each Panel Visit, one or more sessions are designated as 'interviews in situ'. In conducting 'interviews in situ', the PSA Panel has a specific and relevant plan for what they wish to see and any facilities tour is not conducted as a random visit (see Section 20.2.2).

19. Gaining a Comprehensive Picture of a Programme

Conclusions are not reached based on single items of evidence. Most issues relating to the management and content of a programme are complex and arriving at a defensible conclusion involves comprehensive consideration of the issue. Three strategies for achieving defensible conclusions are saturation, triangulation and process mapping.

19.1 Saturation

Saturation is used to show that an issue is systematic, systemic or endemic. A programme staff member who expresses satisfaction to the PSA Panel about professional development opportunities at the HEI, for example, does not constitute evidence that the majority of programme staff are satisfied with the professional development opportunities available to them.

Saturation is a method whereby a PSA Panel explores an issue until no new information about it comes to light. During the Panel Visit, this is achieved by asking the same (or similar) questions to several different groups of people until a clear theme emerges from the responses.

It is not always necessary to obtain saturation of an issue. Sometimes, the mere presence of an issue is sufficient. If an HEI claims, for example, that all classrooms used for delivery of the programme have fixed data projectors, but the PSA Panel discovers that one does not, then the HEI's claim has been disproved. To gauge whether the exception is of importance, the PSA Panel is likely to seek as much corroborating evidence as possible in order to have greater confidence in the importance of the findings.

19.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is a method whereby analysis is strengthened using a combination of the following:

- Multiple original sources of data (such as students, staff, management, external stakeholders, authoritative references and benchmarks)
- Multiple methods of data collection (such as surveys, interviews, observations, internal documents, literature and statistics)
- Different types of data (such as objective and subjective)

By using a combination of the above, it is generally possible for a PSA Panel to establish the appropriateness of a conclusion and any corresponding rating. Evidence that is cited from the PSAA alone is likely to be called out during moderation. While the PSAA is an essential form of information sharing, it is not a given that all the information therein is valid. Panel Members are therefore required to verify this information through triangulation. It is the job of the Distance Panel Member to use the PSAA to some extent at face value, albeit informed by the supporting materials, but the role of the On-Site Panel Member to check that the information is accurate through triangulation during the Visit.

19.3 Process Mapping

One way of obtaining a comprehensive overview of a complex process is to visually describe it using process mapping techniques. This can be a powerful tool for an HEI wishing to fully understand their own processes and for the PSA Panel, albeit used in simplified form, to understand key stages of a process and the relationships between these stages. Examples of process mapping are provided in the OAAAQA Training Module 8, Process Mapping.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ See OAAAQA Training Materials, available through CHEQA.

20. Conducting Interviews

Interviews are a key feature of the Panel Visit. They provide an opportunity for the PSA Panel Members to clarify issues, check for completeness and accuracy of the PSAA, as well as potential discrepancies, and pursue lines of enquiry in greater depth. They are also the key means by which a Panel, through saturation or triangulation, verifies each of the claims made in a self-assessment.

20.1 The Interviewees' Perspective

20.1.1 Before the Interview

People have many different reactions to participating in an interview session for an OAAAQA EQA. The experience can be enjoyable or stressful, interesting, or tedious, challenging or daunting. The following are some ways in which the HEI can help people prepare in a positive way for their interview experience without resorting to coaching:

- Distribute the information for Interviewees from OAAAQA (see Section 14)
- Provide a briefing on the process and what to expect
- Assure interviewees that their participation is confidential and not being monitored

20.1.2 During the Interview

The following advice regarding responding to interview questions may be shared with interviewees as part of a pre-interview briefing:

- PSA Panels are professional in nature and collaborative in spirit and Panel Members genuinely want to hear everyone's views.
- The PSA Panel Chair ensures that everybody is given an opportunity to speak.
- The interview is not a test and there is no pass or fail. As such, there is nothing wrong in not knowing the answer to a question and interviewees should feel comfortable enough to say so. This is a much better strategy than guessing.
- Panel Members are happy to give clarification about questions or explain their question if the meaning is not clear to the individual being addressed.
- It is inappropriate to seek information about the PSA Panel's preliminary views (including asking about the purpose of the question).
- If a question does not obviously fit within the area of responsibility of the interviewee, the person to whom the question is directed should state this and give any information they do have on the subject: the PSA Panel may deliberately be trying to saturate an issue or test the results of dissemination.
- Interviewees should only interject if or when a person asked a question has had an opportunity to provide a response and if obvious details appear to have been overlooked or omitted. Interjection must only take place through seeking the PSA Panel Chair's permission to provide another response.
- The interview time is limited so answers should be kept as concise as possible.
- It is not permissible to present the PSA Panel with materials. If it appears some materials may have been omitted, then this should be conveyed to the Contact Person and mentioned to the PSA Panel during the interview. Such materials may only be made available to the PSA Panel through the Contact Person in liaison with the Review Director.

20.1.3 After the Interview

It is common in external reviews for interviewees to be left with two distinct impressions after their session, both of which require discussion.

- Firstly, it is normal for interviewees to believe that they had insufficient time to speak. Panel Visits are intensive opportunities for the Panel to cover multiple topics so often a Chair will close down a subject as soon as sufficient evidence has been gathered.
- Secondly, interviewees often feel that the PSA Panel focused too much on process (that is, 'deployment') and not enough time on results. It is important for interviewees to

understand that the PSA Panel is seeking information on each topic from a variety of sources. Formal results are usually available in reports and other documentation produced by the HEI. On the other hand, what people do each day in practice as opposed to what is mentioned in approach documents is best explored by asking people about their 'lived experience'.

20.2 The PSA Panel Members' Perspective

Interviews yield primarily subjective information, described above as 'lived experience'. This kind of information is valuable in testing whether the situations described in a programme submission are generally reflected in practice.

20.2.1 Interview Sessions

Interviews may take place with only one interviewee but, more usually, interviews are conducted with groups of up to a maximum of eight interviewees per interview session. The reason the number is capped is to ensure that every participant has an opportunity to speak in the limited time available. Aspects of interview procedure are as follows:

- Interviewees are asked to wait outside the PSA Panel Room until the Review Director invites them in to avoid interrupting or overhearing a confidential discussion.
- Part of the Panel Chair's role is to ensure that no single individual dominates the session (for example, by attempting to answer all the questions on behalf of the other interviewees).
- Where practicable, interviewees meet with the PSA Panel once only. It is understood that many people hold more than one area of responsibility. The PSA Panel, however, seeks a broad range of input and by meeting people other than the most senior person for any given area of responsibility, the PSA Panel is able to explore additional topics such as internal communication, delegation of authority and teamwork.
- Line-managers and their staff are interviewed separately.
- Interview sessions are confidential, in that the PSA Panel may use the information received, but not in a manner that reveals the identity of the interviewee who gave that information. This is in line with OAAAQA's 'non-attribution rule'.
- The HEI must respect the confidentiality of the process and interviewees may not be coerced or coached in their responses. Equally, after the event, no interviewee should be expected to divulge what was said within the Panel room.
- All interviewees must display on the table in front of them their name and their programme of study (if students) or department and role (if staff and others). These name cards should be printed in a large and plain font (Arial 72 pt) and be positioned upright on the table for the benefit of the Panel.
- Interviewees may not bring mobile phones into the PSA Panel Room.
- Interviewees are not permitted to take notes or use any form of recording device in the interview session.
- If conducted remotely, interview sessions must be audible to more than one Panel member at a time and may not be recorded, digitally or otherwise, by the HEI or its representatives. While the HEI provides the equipment and IT support for remote interviews, OAAAQA is responsible for managing the virtual meeting platform and ensuring that only those invited to attend each interview session are given access to that session. This is managed through the Review Director.

20.2.2 Random Interviews

For PSA to meet the public's demanding expectations of HEI accountability, it must be able to show that the data collection methods are, in part, independent of the HEI's influence. One mechanism for achieving this is for the Panel to conduct random interviews with Programme staff and students during the Panel Visit (and *only* at that time). The way this occurs is by a PSA Panel Member at some point during the Visit (but not during interviews) encountering staff and students in their places of work and study. Given that many programmes have a 'geographical identity' (for example, the parent department in a specific building, around

which teaching and learning activities are based), PSA Panels should find it possible to meet with any relevant staff and students without intervention by the HEI. There are, however, some rules governing Random Interviews to ensure that they are conducted in a fair, safe, and professional manner, as stated below.

- All PSA Panel Members must wear name badges that clearly identify their name and Panel status.
- PSA Panel Members may only seek to speak with staff and students who have direct experience of a programme being assessed. Other staff and students, and visitors on campus, may not be interviewed.
- PSA Panel Members politely request the interview and may not pressure people into responding if they do not wish to participate.
- Attempts should be made to keep the duration of each random interview short – generally less than 15 minutes.
- Interviews should take place with individual people, where possible, and are conducted confidentially.
- Most random interviews are expected to be conducted in staff offices or in communal spaces such as the library, cafeteria, or foyers.
- PSA Panel Members may not intrude upon teaching sessions.
- PSA Panel Members may not access secure locations, such as the treasury office or anywhere requiring Personal Protective Equipment (such as laboratories, chemical storage areas or construction sites), during random interviews.
- It is not appropriate for HEI staff to accompany PSA Panel Members during the Random Interviews. PSA Panel Members use the Campus Map as a guide but may also need to ask the Contact Person (through the Review Director) for assistance in determining appropriate locations to allow for maximum opportunity to meet staff and students of the relevant programme(s).

Responses are recorded on Random Interview Worksheets. These are shared with other PSA Panel Members but are otherwise confidential. PSA Panel Members use one worksheet for each random interview. The worksheets are prepared in advance of the Panel Visit by the Review Director, using information submitted by PSA Panel Members at the Preliminary Meeting.

20.2.3 Call Back Interviews

Time is set aside after the formal scheduled interviews for the PSA Panel to meet people who, in their estimation, can assist in finalising deliberations in specific areas. Sometimes issues arise during the Visit that prevent the PSA Panel from forming a final judgement without further questions asked or further data sought. The Panel therefore asks to meet specific people at the end of the Panel Visit to assist with any such gaps in information. These 'Call Back' interviews are different from the normal interview sessions in three respects:

- The interviewees are likely to have already met the PSA Panel earlier in the Panel Visit
- The need for Call Back Interviews is only established the evening before they occur
- The interviewees are informed in advance of the general line of questioning

The Review Director meets with the Contact Person ahead of the Call Back interviews (this is typically at the end of the second day of the Visit) and discusses whom the PSA Panel wishes to meet and around which specific topics. The Contact Person then arranges, where possible, for those people to be available at the designated times. These Call Back Interviews are normally focused on a single issue and each such interview is of about 10 to 15 minutes in duration. Call Back Interviews are a very important part of the Panel Visit. It is in the HEI's best interests to ensure that the PSA Panel completes the Visit with all questions answered to ensure that the criteria and standards ratings, the Accreditation Outcome, and the final PSA Report are as accurate and fair as possible. That said, the OAAAQA understands that organising the Call Back Interviews require some flexibility on the part of the HEI and appreciates the HEI's assistance in this regard.

21. Reaching Conclusions

21.1 Wrapping Up the Visit

The PSA Panel meets on its own at regular intervals throughout the Panel Visit to discuss the information obtained through the interviews and to plan for the following interview sessions. These sessions are confidential. The Panel Visit includes an opportunity for On-Site Panel Members to revise the draft Report v3.2 (see External Reviewer Supplement to this manual). Where possible, no interviews are scheduled during this Report writing period, although it may be used as a last opportunity for call back interviews if the Visit as a whole (for example, for a single programme) is short. The Review Director may request the Contact Person to provide additional materials to assist the PSA Panel to reach an informed conclusion against the criteria and standards.

At the end of the Report writing period, the PSA Panel normally conclude the Panel Visit by meeting with the HEI's senior representatives to thank them for their cooperation. During this meeting, the PSA Panel does not provide any indication of the PSA Panel's findings, the criteria, and standard ratings, nor the Accreditation Outcome. The HEI may request a photograph with the PSA Panel at the end of the Visit, but the final session is a brief as courtesy allows to avoid temptation by all concerned to discuss the Panel's findings.

21.2 Evidence-Based Decision Making

The PSA Panel must work towards consensus (particularly within their Panel Pairs), but not necessarily unanimous agreement, on key findings and the criteria and standards' ratings. In all cases, decisions regarding whether a criterion has been *Met* or *Not Met* must be based on evidence and an HEI must ensure evidence is provided to support all claims made in the PSAA. Different types of evidence, both objective and subjective in nature, are considered to support decisions about ratings. Lack of data forthcoming from the HEI does not necessarily suggest incomplete analysis by the Panel. It is incumbent on a Panel, however, to request any Additional Materials that is required to arrive at a carefully considered rating. In cases where the HEI may be unable or unwilling to provide the type of data needed to demonstrate that all requirements of a criteria have been *Met*, Panel Members must interpret the lack of evidence as they see fit.

21.3 Rating against the Criteria and Standards

When rating each criterion, a Panel must understand the characteristics of provision or practice associated with each rating (see Table 3 in Part C) as the key reference point for determining ratings against the criteria. Once all criteria have been rated, the standard rating is automatically calculated (see Table 4 in Part C). Where in any standard one criterion is rated *Not Met*, or more than two criteria are rated *Partially Met*, the standard is rated *Not Met*. The overall Accreditation Outcome is based on the rating given to the two applicable standards (see Table 5 in Part C). For the programme to be Accredited, both applicable standards must be *Met*. When one (or more) standard is rated *Not Met*, the programme is placed *On Probation* and is required to undergo PSR.

21.4 Determining the Probation Period

In the case of a programme that has one or both standards rated *Not Met*, the programme is automatically placed *On Probation*. A programme may be placed *On Probation* for up to one year from the HEI's receipt of the accreditation outcome. The PSA Panel makes a recommendation to the OAAAQA CEO on the likely period it will take for the HEI to address standards that are *Not Met* and this constitutes the probation period (see Section 5.6). After one attempt at PSR, there is no further opportunity for reassessment and the PSA process is terminated. An HEI may appeal against the probation period if they have evidence to suggest that a shorter or longer period (up to a maximum period of two years) is warranted.



PART G: APPENDICES

Appendix A: References

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Appendix B: Terms and Abbreviations

The following terms and abbreviations are used in this manual. A full glossary of OAAAQA terms is available the OAAAQA website.

ADRI	Approach - Deployment - Results - Improvement
AM.....	Additional Materials (evidence supporting the PSAA)
BQA	Bahrian Quality Assurance Agency ⁵⁶
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHEQA	Centre for Higher Education Quality Assurance at OAAAQA
Cluster.....	Up to five programmes in a cognate academic field that share the same Narrow Field specified in the Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework (OSCED) and which may be assessed through a single PSA
Coursework Programme..	A programme mainly comprised of coursework (taught components) but which may contain substantial research components
DG CHEQA.....	Director General of CHEQA
ENQA.....	The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ⁵⁷
EQA (Activity)	External Quality Assurance (Activity)
EQAA	European Quality Assurance Agency ⁵⁸
ERD	External Review Director
FT/PT	Full-time/Part-time
GFP.....	General Foundation Programme
GFPQA	General Foundation Programme Quality Audit
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IEQA (Activity/Agency)	International External Quality Assurance (Activity/Agency)
INQAAHE.....	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education ⁵⁹
IQA.....	Institutional Quality Audit
ISA	Institutional Standards Assessment
ISAA.....	Institutional Standards Assessment Application
ISGs.....	International Standards and Guidelines provided by INQAAHE ⁶⁰
ISR.....	Institutional Standards Reassessment
International Student.....	A non-Omani national who has travelled to Oman specifically to study, as distinct from an 'expatriate student' who is a non-Omani resident in Oman but for reasons other than study (for example, because their family live and work here, or because they were born and brought up here).
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MM.....	Mandatory Materials (evidence supporting the PSAA)
MoHERI	Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation ⁶¹
NRQ	National Register of Qualifications
OAAAQA.....	Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education ⁶²
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (previous name of OAAAQA)
OAC	Oman Accreditation Council (previous name of OAAA)
OSCED	Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework ⁶³

⁵⁶ See BQA website: <https://www.bqa.gov.bh/En/Pages/Home.aspx>.

⁵⁷ See ENQA website: <https://www.engq.eu/>.

⁵⁸ See EQAA website: <http://eqaa.eu/>.

⁵⁹ See INQAAHE website: www.inqaahe.org.

⁶⁰ See INQAAHE ISGs: <https://www.inqaahe.org/sites/default/files/INQAAHE-International-Standards-and-Guidelines-ISG.pdf>.

⁶¹ See MoHERI website: <https://www.moheri.gov.om/default.aspx?culture=en>.

⁶² See OAAAQA website: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/>.

⁶³ See OSCED: <https://www.oaaaqa.gov.om/Images/OSCEDv1>.

OQF	Oman Qualifications Framework ⁶⁴
Programme Manager.....	Refers to any individual with oversight of a programme, including heads of department, section heads, and so forth, depending on the norms of each HEI
PSA.....	Programme Standards Assessment
PSAA	Programme Standards Assessment Application
PSA Manual.....	Programme Standards Assessment Manual
PSO	Panel Support Officer
PSR.....	Programme Standards Reassessment
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency (UK) ⁶⁵
RD.....	Review Director
Research Project	Refers to all research projects including but not limited to Honours year, graduation or capstone project
ROSQA	Requirements of Oman's System for Quality Assurance ⁶⁶
SM.....	Supporting Materials (evidence supporting the PSAA)

⁶⁴ See OQF Section of OAAAQA website: <https://www.oaaaqa.gov.om/Oman-Qualifications-Framework/OQF-Overview>

⁶⁵ See QAA website: qaa.ac.uk

⁶⁶ See ROSQA.

Appendix C: OSCED Subject Codes

The following broad field and narrow field codes, derived from the Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework (OSCED) should be referred to when considering whether two or more programmes may be clustered together for the purpose of PSA. Clustered programmes must share the same code as shown in Table F1 below.⁶⁷ HEIs should notify OAAAQA at least six months prior to PSAA submission to check if programmes that do not align closely with any of the subjects listed below can be considered as a cluster or not.

#	Broad Field	Code	Narrow Field
01	NATURAL AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES	0101	Mathematical Sciences
		0103	Physics and Astronomy
		0105	Chemical Sciences
		0107	Earth Sciences
		0109	Biological Sciences
		0199	Other Natural and Physical Sciences
02	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	0201	Computer Science
		0203	Information Systems
		0299	Other Information Technology
03	ENGINEERING AND RELATED TECHNOLOGIES	0301	Manufacturing Engineering and Technology
		0303	Process and Resources Engineering
		0305	Automotive Engineering and Technology
		0307	Mechanical and Industrial Engineering and Technology
		0309	Civil Engineering
		0311	Geomatic Engineering
		0313	Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Technology
		0315	Aerospace Engineering and Technology
		0317	Maritime Engineering and Technology
		0319	Rail Engineering and Technology
		0321	Agricultural Engineering and Technology
		0323	Nuclear Engineering and Technology
0399	Other Engineering and Related Technologies		
04	ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING	0401	Architecture and Urban Environment
		0403	Building
		0499	Other Architecture and Building
05	AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENTAL AND RELATED STUDIES	0501	Agriculture
		0503	Horticulture
		0505	Plant Health
		0507	Forestry Studies
		0509	Fisheries Studies
		0511	Environmental Studies
		0599	Other Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies
06	HEALTH	0601	Medical Studies
		0603	Nursing
		0605	Pharmacy
		0607	Dental Studies
		0609	Optical Science
		0611	Veterinary Studies
		0613	Public Health
		0615	Radiography
		0617	Rehabilitation Therapies
		0619	Complementary Therapies
0699	Other Health		

⁶⁷ See OSCED: <https://www.oaaaqa.gov.om/Images/OSCEDv1>.

Table C1: OSCED Subject Codes

#	Broad Field	Code	Narrow Field
07	EDUCATION	0701	Teacher Education
		0703	Curriculum and Education Studies
		0705	General Education Programs
		0707	Social Skills Programs
		0709	Employment Skills Programs
		0799	Other Education
08	MANAGEMENT AND COMMERCE	0801	Accounting
		0803	Business and Management
		0805	Sales and Marketing
		0807	Office Studies
		0809	Banking, Finance and Related Fields
		0899	Other Management and Commerce
09	SOCIETY AND CULTURE	0901	Political Science and Policy Studies
		0903	Studies in Human Society
		0905	Human Welfare Studies and Services
		0907	Behavioural Science
		0909	Law
		0911	Sharia
		0913	Justice and Law Enforcement
		0915	Defence and Security
		0917	Librarianship, Information Management and Curatorial Studies
		0919	Language and Literature
		0921	Economics and Econometrics
		0923	Sport and Recreation
		0999	Other Society and Culture
10	RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY	1001	Religious Studies
		1003	Philosophy
		1099	Other Religion and Philosophy
11	CREATIVE ARTS	1101	Performing Arts
		1103	Visual Arts and Crafts
		1105	Graphic and Design Studies
		1107	Communication and Media Studies
		1199	Other Creative Arts
12	PERSONAL SERVICES	1201	Food
		1203	Tourism and Hospitality
		1205	Personal Presentation
		1299	Other Personal Services
13	COMBINED BROAD FIELDS	1300	Where an HEI offers a range of subjects across a broad number of fields (eg SQU)
		1301	Quality Management in HE
		1303	Quality Assurance in non-HE areas
			For our database

Appendix D: Letter of Intent Form



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Sample of Letter of Intent [Subject to Change by OAAAQA]

This ‘Letter of Intent’ should be used by an HEI to submit their choice of dates for OQF Listing and PSA scheduling. The Letter of Intent represents the HEI’s commitment to undergo Listing and PSA and cannot be withdrawn once it is submitted except through formal procedures described in the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification.⁶⁸ A programme must meet the eligibility requirements (see PSA Manual Sections 3.4 and 6.2.2) in order to undergo PSA; these include Listing on the National Register of Qualifications (NRQ). In addition, in the first scheduling period after the launch of OQF Listing and PSA, HEIs must select programmes for review that have been selected within the parameters described in the briefing paper accompanying this form and by the deadline specified therein.

Table D1: PSA Letter of Intent

PART A: KEY DETAILS			
HEI		Contact Person Name	
Supervising Ministry		Contact Person Designation	
Individual PSA or Cluster PSA		Contact Person Email	
OSCED Narrow Field		Contact Person Telephone	
Name of Programme(s)	<i>(NB: Up to five programmes sharing the same OSCED narrow field may be submitted in a cluster)</i>		
PART B: SELECTED DATES			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please read the logistic and risk assessment parameters in the briefing paper attached before selecting your preferred dates for OQF Listing and PSA. First indicate your top three choices of PSA Visit dates within the scheduling period shown in the briefing paper in the table below; OAAAQA will try to accommodate your first choice where possible, but this cannot be guaranteed. Students and staff must be available for interview during normal term time during a PSA Panel Visit. Visits cannot be scheduled during Ramadan, Eid, National Day holidays, or the last week in December. A Visit may last from three to five days according to the number of programmes submitted in a cluster, as determined by OAAAQA. Please see PSA Manual for details on clustering (see Section 3.1.3) and Visit length (see Section 14.2.5). When you have determined your top three choices of PSA Visit dates, work out the corresponding OQF Listing and PSA Submission dates. The PSA Submission date is nine weeks before the PSA Visit date. The OQF Listing Submission date is six months before the PSA Submission date. Example: If you list a PSA Visit as the week commencing 25 March 2024, it follows that the PSA Submission will be in the week commencing 3 December 2023 and the OQF Listing submission will be the week commencing 5 June 2023. 			
HEI’s Preferences	OQF Submission	PSA Submission	PSA Visit
First Choice	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>
Second Choice	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>
Third Choice	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>	<i>Week commencing dd/mm/yyyy</i>

⁶⁸ See OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification, available on the OAAAQA website.

Table D1: PSA Letter of Intent

PART C: DECLARATION			
	Please tick (✓) the appropriate column for each of the following statements:	Agree	Disagree ⁶⁹
1	The HEI has obtained the status of Accreditation through ISA (or Institutional Reaccreditation in future).	<i>[give date: dd/mm/yyyy]</i>	
2	The programme is licensed by MoHERI or other relevant bodies responsible for the supervision arrangements.		
3	The programme(s) has at least one full cohort of graduates (in other words, graduates who have completed all the programme requirements).		
Declaration	As the highest authority of the HEI, I hereby declare that all the eligibility criteria for PSA have been met and that the programme has been selected according to OAAAQA parameters given for the prioritised selection of programmes.		
Signature		Date	
Name		Designation	
Please submit this form with your Scheduling Preferences to the OAAAQA CEO by scanning and sending to the CEO's Office by the deadline given in the accompanying briefing note.			

⁶⁹ If you indicate disagreement with any of the statements in the declaration above, a member of OAAAQA will be in touch with you to discuss the matter further.

Appendix E: HEI Declaration Form



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Declaration for Use by HEIs

This form should be used by an HEI when submitting a PSA Application (PSAA). This Official Declaration is signed by the HEI's most senior representative and states that the information contained in the PSAA is complete and accurate, and that the HEI adheres to all applicable laws and regulations. The HEI also declares that the preparation of the PSAA conforms to all protocols as set out in this PSA Manual. This declaration (embedded in the PSAA template available on the OAAAQA website) must be completed, signed and included with the PSAA.

Table E1: HEI Declaration

Table E1: HEI Declaration			
HEI's Senior Most Representative		HEI	
PSA Submission Date		Panel Visit Dates	
Name of Programme(s)			
Declaration	<p>As the highest authority of [HEI], I hereby declare that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the information contained in this Programme Standards Assessment Application is true and accurate at the time of submission. • [HEI] adheres to all applicable national laws and regulations. • This Programme Standards Assessment Application conforms to all stipulations as set out in the Programme Standards Assessment Manual. 		
Signature		Date	dd/mm/yyyy
Name and Title		Designation or Position	

Appendix F: Military HEI Declaration Form



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Declaration Form for Use by Military HEI

Before a military HEI undertakes PSA, a meeting between the Senior Management of the HEI and OAAAQA takes place to establish the scope of the activities. If the HEI is comfortable to continue within OAAAQA's terms of reference, the highest authority of the HEI is invited to sign the following declaration. OAAAQA will schedule the submission of the PSA Application, subject to Board approval, on receipt of this declaration. Once committed to the PSA process, there is no opportunity for the HEI to change the terms of reference nor to withdraw the results of the process except under the provisions made in the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification.⁷⁰

Table F1: Declaration by Head of Military HEI

Table F1: Declaration by Head of Military HEI			
Name			
Rank (or Designation)			
HEI			
Declaration	As the highest authority of the HEI, I hereby declare that I am in agreement with the points covered below as a condition of OAAAQA undertaking a PSA is scheduled:		
Proposed Month and Year of PSA Submission		Proposed Month and Year of Panel Visit	<i>(Note: The Visit takes place 13 weeks after submission and staff students must be available for interview at that time.)</i>
Signature		Date	

Table F2: Declaration

Table F2: Declaration			
	Please tick (✓) the appropriate column for each of the following statements:	Agree	Disagree ⁷¹
1	HEI agrees to submit evidence to OAAAQA proving that it offers academic programmes with theoretical components that constitute over 50% of the course content.		
2	HEI agrees to conform to the same protocols as any other HEI undergoing PSA; this includes conducting a self-assessment (PSAA) against the applicable Standards and submitting all Mandatory Materials (MMs), Supporting Materials (SMs) and Additional Materials (AMs) required by the Panel, as outlined in the PSA Manual and relevant policies.		
3	HEI agrees to the selection of international External Reviewers on the Panel appointed to their PSA review, and understands that it has no right to insist on the selection of any particular individuals, providing that HEI is given at least one month prior to the submission of the PSA Application to vet the names for security clearance and conflict of interest.		
4	HEI agrees to accept the PSA outcomes (including <i>On Probation</i> or <i>Not Accredited</i>), albeit subject to the same appeals process as any other HEI.		
5	HEI agrees to the distribution of the PSA Report to a limited number of government sector stakeholders, providing the results and the Report are not made public.		
Please complete, scan and submit this form to the CEO's Office at OAAAQA, with or in advance of sending a Letter of Intent for the scheduling of PSA.			

⁷⁰ See OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification, available on the OAAAQA website.

⁷¹ If you indicate disagreement with any of the statements in the declaration above, a member of OAAAQA will be in touch with you to discuss the matter further.

Appendix G: Mandatory Materials Checklist - Programme Specification (RM001)

What is Programme Specification (MM001)? Programme Specification is a concise description of the main features of a programme, the intended learning outcomes of the programme, and the means by which students are able to achieve and demonstrate these learning outcomes.⁷² Programme Specification also shows how the modules or courses which make up the programme (and their intended learning outcomes, curriculum, study and assessment methods) are combined into a whole programme, leading to a qualification. The Programme Specification should clearly describe how the programme as a whole enables students to achieve the learning outcomes and develop intended graduate attributes. The Programme Specification should not simply present the aggregation of Modules or Courses but should show how these are combined through the programme to become more than the sum of their parts. It is labelled RM001 in the index of Mandatory Materials.

What is the purpose of MM001? For the purpose of PSA, Programme Specification is the definitive information about the aims and objectives and intended learning outcomes of a programme that an HEI shares with the PSA Panel. The Programme Specification is supported by a specification for each Module or Course that contributes to the programme.

How should MM001 be presented? OAAAQA does not prescribe any particular format or style for Programme Specification. When deciding on the format or style to be used, the HEI should consider what best reflects the characteristics and needs of each programme. A Programme Specification may be presented in a number of ways, as long as the information required in the headings (set out below) is covered. Where there is a pre-existing specification for the programme, please provide this to OAAAQA, and attach any additional information required that is not contained in the existing programme specification.

What should MM001 include? Use the following checklist to ensure that each of the following items is included in the Programme Specification.

Table G1: Checklist of Items to Include in Programme Specification (MM001)		
	Items for Inclusion	✓
(a)	Teaching and delivering HEI	
(b)	Awarding HEI (if different)	
(c)	Details of any accreditation of the programme by a professional body or other accrediting organisation	
(d)	Title of final award, and titles of all other exit awards for the programme	
(e)	Level of award on the Oman Qualifications Framework	
(f)	Type of award (for example, single, minor, major, interdisciplinary)	
(g)	Programme title	
(h)	Field of study (as set out in the Oman Standard Classification of Higher Education Framework ⁷³)	
(i)	Programme structures and requirements (eg, years, levels, OQF Credit Value, exit levels, compulsory and elective modules or courses, pathways, and articulation opportunities)	
(j)	Goals, or aims and objectives, of the programme, mapped to graduate attributes	
(k)	Programme intended learning outcomes (eg, in terms of knowledge, cognitive skills and general competencies)	
(l)	Teaching, learning and assessment approach used to enable the intended learning outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated (a descriptive overview about the teaching, learning and assessment approaches used in the delivery of the programme (a short paragraph will suffice; cross-refer to (o) as necessary)	
(m)	Mode (s) of study (eg, full-time, part-time)	
(n)	Languages (s) of delivery and study	
(o)	Methods of delivery (eg, in-person, distance learning, e-learning, blended learning)	
(p)	Location(s) of delivery and/or on-line platforms used	
(q)	Current web page(s) for programme information	
(r)	Curriculum Skills Map of Programme Learning Outcomes to the Programme's constituent Modules or Courses, identifying in which Modules or Courses the individual Programme Learning Outcomes are being assessed	
(s)	Date on which the Programme Specification was written and/or revised	

⁷² The guidance on Programme Specifications made publicly available by the QAA (UK) and BQA (Bahrain) is gratefully acknowledged.

⁷³ See OSCED: <https://www.oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/6ae885aa-9861-4d3a-a7e1-9b782339dcb1/Oman%20Standard%20Classification%20of%20Education%20Framework.aspx?b=0>

Appendix H: Mandatory Materials Checklist – Module and/or Course Specification (MM002)

What is Module and/or Course Specification (MM002)? An important part of the PSA Panel's work is the examination of documentation related to the programme(s) under assessment, particularly those documents which set out the design and delivery of the programme(s)), including the assessment of students on those programme(s). This enables the Panel to assess how the academic standards for the programme(s) are being maintained and how the quality of the programmes is being managed.

What should MM002 Include? The module and/or course file materials should cover the most recent academic year for which there is a complete set of information and data on student assessment and achievement are available to the Panel. The materials in the checklist below **MUST** be provided for **EACH** module and/or course that constitutes part of the programme(s).

Should all information be repeated in every programme in a cluster? Where a programme cluster is undergoing PSAA, and where they share common modules and/or courses, the materials provided for any given module and/or course should ensure that there is sufficient evidence relating to each programme to enable the PSA Panel to carry out its work.

How should MM002 be presented? The materials should be clearly organised by module and/or course (for example, in a box file for each module and/or course). The module and/or course files should be placed in the PSA Panel room and be available for the duration of the Panel Visit.

Table H1: Checklist of Items to Include in Module and/or Course Specification (MM002)

	Items for Inclusion	✓
a)	Module and/or course handbook (it is recognised that some of the items listed below may be included in a module/course handbook)	
b)	Module and/or course title, OQF Credit Value, prerequisites and co-requisites	
c)	Module and/or course intended learning outcomes, mapped to programme goals	
d)	Module and/or course syllabus, and contents on a week-by-week basis	
e)	Timetable for the module and/or course, including the scheduling of laboratory and other non-lecture sessions, including online sessions (as applicable)	
f)	Teaching and learning methodologies, including any use of online instruction	
g)	Teaching materials and learning resources, mapped (where possible) to learning outcomes	
h)	Information on assignments and/or assessment instruments, with submission due dates; marking criteria and schemes (both coursework and examinations), and any mapping to learning outcomes	
i)	A sample of marked and moderated student coursework and examinations (including criteria, guidelines etc); the sample should cover a range of student performance and/or attainment, including failed assignments (where applicable)	
j)	A grade analysis for the module and/or course cohort, showing the distribution of marks and/or grades awarded for individual assignments and/or examinations (for example, using a data spreadsheet), and a grade analysis for the module and/or course overall	
k)	Evidence of scrutiny of students' work for plagiarism	
l)	Students' feedback and evaluation of the module and/or course, and tools used	
m)	Student attendance data for the module and/or course	
n)	Module and/or course leaders' annual monitoring reports (or equivalent), as required by the HEI and and/or or affiliate partner HEI	
o)	Module and/or course improvements, arising from feedback, evaluation and other quality assurance activities	

Appendix I: Summary Data Templates

Part A: Programme Data

Table I1: Programme Data														
Programme Title		<i>Nursing – Example</i>					Campus Location				<i>Seeb Campus</i>			
Year	Total Number of Students Enrolled in Programme	Type of Student Enrolment into Programme	Gender		Nationality			Students per Study Year				Direct Entry		Delivery
			Male	Female	Omani	Non-Omani	International	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Into Year 2	Into Year 3	In-person, Distance or Blended
Eg 2023	120	Fulltime	42	43	60	15	10	25	20	20	20	0	0	In Person
		Part-time	15	20	30	5	0	10	10	10	5	0	0	Blended
		Totals	57	63	90	20	10	35	30	30	25	0	0	N/A
20xx		Fulltime												
		Part-time												
		Totals												N/A
20xx		Fulltime												
		Part-time												
		Totals												N/A
20xx		Fulltime												
		Part-time												
		Totals												N/A
20xx		Fulltime												
		Part-time												
		Totals												N/A
20xx		Fulltime												
		Part-time												
		Totals												N/A

Table I2: Programme Attrition, Progression and Completion					
Programme Title					
Year	20__	20__	20__	20__	20__
Attrition ⁷⁴					
Progression					
Completion					

Table I3: Number of Programme Graduates over the Past Five Years					
Programme Title					
Year	20__	20__	20__	20__	20__
Number of graduates					
Number of students expected to graduate in current year (20__)					

⁷⁴ HEIs must provide details on how they have calculated student attrition, progression and completion rates.

Table I4: First Destination of Programme Graduates					
Programme Title					
	Year	20__	20__	20__	20__
Percentage of graduates that have proceeded to field-related employment					
Percentage of graduates that have proceeded to other employment					
Percentage of graduates that have proceeded to postgraduate/further study					
Percentage of graduates that have proceeded to other activities					
Percentage of unknown graduate destinations					

Table I5: Programme Academic Staff Data									
Programme Title		<i>Nursing – Example</i>		Campus Location			<i>Seeb Campus</i>		
Year	Total Nos of Programme Staff	Nos Staff with Highest Qualification		Gender		Employment Status		Nationality	
		Highest Qualification	Nos of Staff	Male	Female	Fulltime	Part-time	Omani	Expat
Eg 2022	40	Bachelor (Hons)	15	5	10	12	3	5	10
		Masters	10	6	4	8	2	7	3
		PhD	15	9	6	10	5	7	8
		Totals	40	20	20	30	10	19	21
20__		Bachelor (Hons)							
		Masters							
		PhD							
		Totals							
20__		Bachelor (Hons)							
		Masters							
		PhD							
		Totals							
20__		Bachelor (Hons)							
		Masters							
		PhD							
		Totals							
20__		Bachelor (Hons)							
		Masters							
		PhD							
		Totals							

Table I6: Rank of Programme Academic Staff					
Programme Title					
	Year	20__	20__	20__	20__
Professor					
Assistant or Associate Professor					
Senior Lecturer					
Lecturer					
Tutor					

Table I7: Programme Administrative Staff Data							
Programme Title							
Year	Number of programme administrative staff	Gender		Employment Status		Nationality	
		Male	Female	Fulltime	Part-time	Omani	Expat
Eg 2022	40	5	10	12	3	5	10
		6	4	8	2	7	3
		9	6	10	5	7	8
		20	20	30	10	19	21
20__							
20__							
20__							
20__							

Part B: HEI Data

Table I8: Number of Academic Staff by Faculty, School or Department								
Dept ⁷⁵	Status	Gender	Nationality	20__	20__	20__	20__	20__
Dept A	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
		Male	Omani					
	Expat							
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male		Omani						
	Expat							
Dept B	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
		Male	Omani					
	Expat							
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male		Omani						
	Expat							
Dept C	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
		Male	Omani					
	Expat							
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male		Omani						
	Expat							

Table I9: Number of Staff by Academic Department and Highest Qualification Held					
Academic Dept	Bachelor	Number of staff with highest qualification			Number of staff holding an additional qualification
		Bachelor (Hons) or Graduate Diploma or Postgraduate Diploma	Master of equivalent	Doctorate	
Dept A					
Dept B					
Dept C					

Table I10: Number of Administrative or Support Staff by Faculty, School or Department								
Dept	Status	Gender	Nationality	20__	20__	20__	20__	20__
Dept A	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
		Male	Omani					
	Expat							
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male		Omani						
	Expat							
Dept B	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
		Male	Omani					
	Expat							
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male		Omani						
	Expat							
Dept C	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
		Male	Omani					
	Expat							
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male		Omani						
	Expat							

⁷⁵ Includes all academic and administrative departments.

Table I11: Number of Students by Faculty, School, or Department								
Dept	Gender	Nationality	Status	20__	20__	20__	20__	20__
Dept A	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
	Male	Omani						
		Expat						
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male	Omani							
	Expat							
Dept B	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
	Male	Omani						
		Expat						
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male	Omani							
	Expat							
Dept C	Full-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
	Male	Omani						
		Expat						
	Part-time	Female	Omani					
			Expat					
Male	Omani							
	Expat							

Table I12: Number of Undergraduate, Postgraduate through Coursework, and Postgraduate through Research Students			
	Students by Programme Level		
	Undergraduate	Postgraduate - Coursework	Postgraduate - Research
Dept A			
Dept B			
Dept C			

Appendix J: PSA Submission Completeness Check



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Submission Completeness Check

OAAAQA Review Directors must ensure that the HEI PSA submission is complete. They do this through the checklist below. HEIs can use the same checklist to ensure that the information submitted is complete and appropriately presented. Once the completeness check has been conducted, and all elements of the application have been sighted by the Review Director (RD), the submission is forwarded to the EQA Panel. Where elements of the submission are missing, the RD contacts the HEI's nominated Contact Person and requests the material be submitted as soon as possible.

Table J1: HEI EQA Submission Completeness Check

Number	Item	Completed
Section 1	Official Declaration	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Section 2	HEI Details	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Section 3	HEI Overview	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Section 4	Self-Assessment Results	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Section 5	Commentary against all (relevant) [standards / scope areas]	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	[Rating against all (relevant) standards]	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	[Commentary against all relevant criteria]	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	[Rating against all relevant criteria]	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
MMs	All Mandatory Materials referenced in the self-study are included with the application	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
SMs	Current Affiliation Agreement(s) (where applicable)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
General	All electronic folders and files are accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
General	All MMs and SMs are appropriately indexed	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
General	The main submission is appropriately hyperlinked	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
I hereby declare that the [HEI EQA] submission is complete, and all electronic files are functioning.		
ERD	[Title and Name]	Date [dd/mm/yyyy]

Appendix K: Panel Conflict of Interest Declaration



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Sample Service Provision Contract for EQA Activity

[only Part A and Conflict of Interest Appendix shown]

Table K1: EQA Activity Contract: Contract Details

Date of Agreement	[dd/mm/yyyy]
First Party	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAAQA), PO Box 1255, PC 133, Al Khuwair, Sultanate of Oman, www.OAAAQA.gov.om on behalf of the Government of Oman, represented by the Chair of the OAAAQA Board.
Second Party	[name as in passport]
Parts of Contract	This contract consists of five parts: Part A: Key Details, Part B: Declaration including Conflict of Interest (see Table K2), Part C: Terms and Conditions, Part D: Glossary and Part E: List of appendices containing detailed descriptions of Second Party roles. The Second Party must read the contents of the entire contract.
Purpose of Contract	The First Party wishes to undertake the External Quality Assurance (EQA) activity specified in Part A of this contract and considering that the Second Party is capable and qualified to carry out their assigned duties in relation to this EQA activity. The Second Party agrees to do so in accordance with the terms and conditions specified in Parts B and C of this contract.

Table K2: ER Contract Appendix B: Types of Conflicts of Interest

#	Broad Types	Description
1.	Personal	<p>A personal conflict of interest arises if one or more of the following conditions apply to the individual involved in any capacity in an EQA activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An immediate family member or a very close friend is on the governing body or staff of the HEI or is a student thereof An animosity exists with a person on the governing body or staff of the HEI A financial interest exists in the HEI, or financial interest in a going concern in association with any member of the governance and/or management or staff of the HEI Bias is borne towards or against the HEI due to current or previous circumstance (including being a graduate, and/or being a current or former staff member of the HEI)
2.	Professional	<p>A professional conflict of interest arises if the individual involved in any capacity in an EQA activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is currently an applicant, a candidate for a position, or an employee with the HEI concerned in the EQA Is currently providing, or has provided within the past five years, professional services to the HEI which may affect the EQA process (such as being an external examiner; participating in internal review processes, providing consulting services) Belongs to, or has an interest in, an organisation currently involved in an explicit competitive process against the HEI (as distinct from general competition within the sector) Holds a managerial position in an organisation currently involved in a major form of cooperation with the HEI concerned in the EQA (such as benchmarking, external examination and research collaboration).

Appendix L: OAAAQA Board Conflict of Interest Form



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

OAAAQA Board Declaration Form

Potential Conflict of Interest

As per OAAAQA protocols, OAAAQA Board Members must disclose any potential conflict of interest to the OAAAQA Chair (or to the Deputy Chair if the conflict of interest lies with the Chair). The Board Member may be requested to absent himself or herself from any discussions at the Board relating to that particular External Quality Assurance (EQA) activity.

Towards the end of every year, Board Members are requested to indicate any conflicts of interest with any of the EQA activities scheduled for the coming year. For this purpose, please complete this form indicating any conflict of interest with any of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) listed and return to the OAAAQA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) within one week of receipt. Please note that the form should be signed and returned even if there are no identified conflicts of interest. The final decision on whether a Board Member is recused from an EQA process for a particular HEI rests with the Chairperson of the OAAAQA Board. The Chair may contact the Board Member to discuss these matters.

Table L1: Board Member Declaration

Board Member Name			
Board Member Declaration	I know of no conflict of interest, as set out in the relevant section of the relevant EQA Manual, which would jeopardise my participation in this EQA activity.		
Board Member Signature		Date	
Chair's Signature		Date	
Please submit this form to the OAAAQA CEO by scanning and sending to the CEO's Office before 31 December 20__			

Table L2: EQA Schedule 20__

#	EQA	NAME OF HEI <i>(for office use – this part is pre-populated by OAAAQA with the EQAs scheduled for the following year)</i>	POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST <i>(Please tick the relevant box)</i>		RECUSED?
			Financial or Governance	Professional or Personal	<i>(for Chair's use)</i>
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

Appendix M: Observer Declaration Form



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Observer Declaration Form

This form should be used only once you have received a written invitation from the OAAAQA to observe a specific Programme Standards Assessment (PSA) activity, including the work of the Panel. This completed form must be sent to OAAAQA before your participation in the PSA activity can be confirmed.

Table M1: PSA Key Details

Title and Name of Observer		Member of OAAAQA	[Yes/No]
Place of Employment		OAAAQA External Reviewer	[Yes/No]
Designation		HEI Name	
EQA Activity Type	PSA [individual/cluster]	HEI Abbreviation	
Date of PSA Submission⁷⁶		Dates of Panel Visit	
Role of Second Party	Observer	Payment/Expenses	All at Observer's expense
Tasks and Responsibilities	As per PSA Manual	Name of Review Director	[PSO to advise]

Table M2: Declaration

	Please tick (✓) the appropriate column for each of the following statements:	Agree	Disagree⁷⁷
1	I have read and understood the PSA Manual and will carry out the tasks and responsibilities assigned to the Observer as set out therein.		
2	I know of no conflict of interest, as set out in the relevant section of the PSA Manual, which would jeopardise my participation in this EQA activity.		
3	During the contract period and at any time thereafter, I will not breach the confidentiality of any information in relation to this PSA. This includes information received in written form (for example, the HEI's submission, supporting materials, public submissions, feedback from internal and/or external moderators, and/or the HEI's response to the draft OAAAQA PSA Report) as well as information received in person (for example, during a Planning Visit, interview sessions or random interviews).		
4	During the contract period and at any time thereafter, I will not divulge any information shared during PSA deliberations (for example, regarding Review Comments and/or through draft versions of the PSA Report).		
5	I will not enter into a consultancy relationship (or similar) with the HEI undergoing PSA, from the time of signing this form until one full calendar year after the public release of the PSA Outcome (or, if relevant, until I cease employment at OAAAQA).		
6	I will complete any evaluation survey and/or end-of-activity report that is required by OAAAQA at the end of an EQA Activity as part of OAAAQA's quality enhancement system.		
	Signature	Date	
	Print Name		
Please send the completed declaration to the Technical Support Section (TSS) at OAAAQA before the PSA submission date.			

⁷⁶ Please note that the dates of all EQA activities may be subject to change through unforeseen circumstances.

⁷⁷ If you indicate disagreement with any of the statements in the declaration above, a member of OAAAQA will contact you to discuss the matter further.

Appendix N: Preliminary Meeting Template



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Preliminary Meeting Agenda

Typically, only locally-based Panel Members attend the Preliminary Meeting in person but all other PSA Panel Members are required to attend via digital platform or teleconferencing. This agenda may be modified (including the duration of different activities) at the discretion of the PSA Panel Chair and on the advice of the Review Director (RD). Panel Members should read the whole PSAA prior to the meeting.

Table N1: [HEI EQA] Preliminary Meeting			
Date	[dd/mm/yyyy]	Time (Muscat Time)	[9:30am – 11:00am]
Panel Members (PMs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Give initials in brackets after name] (Chair) • [Give initials in brackets after name] • [Give initials in brackets after name] • [Give initials in brackets after name] • [Give initials in brackets after name] 	[External] Review Director (ERD)	[Give initials in brackets after name]
		Panel Support Officer (PSO)	[Give initials in brackets after name]
Meeting Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication between PMs to build a team • Sharing of Review Comments on the EQA submission • Sharing of requests for Further Evidence • Highlighting of any particular issues or common themes to explore across the submission • Opportunity to clarify requirements of the next steps in this EQA process. 		

Table N2: PSA Preliminary Meeting Agenda			
Item	Duration	Activity	Responsibility
1	[00:00-00:00] 10 minutes	Brief introductions Clarification of Preliminary Meeting objectives	Panel Chair
2	[00:00-00:00] 15 minutes	Explanation of the key features of the PSA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of the PSA, HEI and programme(s) undergoing PSA • OAAAQA approach to PSA • Standards, criteria, indicators and ratings • Role of ADRI • Evidence provided in Supporting Materials • Panel Visit expectations • Expected outcomes of the PSA and report writing • Questions raised by PSA Panel Members 	Panel Chair and/or Review Director
3	[00:00-00:00] 10 minutes	Brief general overview comments about the PSAA Any further contextual information required of the HEI by Panel Members.	Panel Chair
4	[00:00-00:00] 60 minutes	Analysis of PSAA (for each programme submitted) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining the main issues for consideration under Standard 1 • Determining the main issues for consideration under Standard 2 (or 3 as relevant) • Focus on particular criteria highlighted for discussion • Areas for clarification or contextual information • Areas of strong divergence between HEI's self-ratings and preliminary ratings 	Each Panel Member in Turn

Table N2: PSA Preliminary Meeting Agenda

Item	Duration	Activity	Responsibility
5	[00:00-00:00] 20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of task allocation decided prior to the Preliminary Meeting (particularly important in a programme cluster) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ [Chair Initials]: [list standard/criteria allocated] ○ [PM Initials]: [list standard/criteria allocated] ○ [PM Initials]: [list standard/criteria allocated] ○ [PM Initials]: [list standard/criteria allocated] ○ [PM Initials]: [list standard/criteria allocated] • All PMs should do the following for their allocated standard and criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Confirm the AMs and MCs requested through the 'Further Evidence Form' by [dd/mm/yyyy - one week prior to Planning Visit] ○ Refine potential IQs and to whom each question should be directed [dd/mm/yyyy - two weeks prior to Panel Visit] • Consideration of areas of commonality, overlap and/or further investigation (particularly important in a programme cluster in establishing what On-Site Panel Members follow up during the Panel Visit on behalf of each Distance Panel Member). • Preliminary identification of Additional Materials (AMs), Matters for Clarification (MCs) and Interviewees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deciding on any further evidence required ○ Deciding on any matters requiring HEI clarification ○ Deciding on who the PSA Panel wishes to meet and why ○ Preparing for the Planning Visit 	All Panel Members
6	[00:00-00:00] 5 minutes	Any other business	Review Director
Total	2 hours	In person at OAAAQA premises or by telephone or video conferencing.	TSS

Appendix O: Planning Visit Agenda Template



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Planning Visit Agenda

Typically, only the PSA Review Director and a representative of the Panel Chair ('OAAAQA Team') attend the Planning Meeting. This takes place in person at the HEI's premises, briefly with the HEI's CEO (or equivalent) and thereafter with the HEI's contact person and representatives for the programme(s) undergoing PSA ('HEI Team'). This agenda may be modified (including the duration of different activities) at the discretion of the PSA Panel Chair representative and on the advice of the Review Director (RD). All attendees should be familiar with the PSA Application (PSAA), the PSA Manual and the documents assembled for discussion in this meeting. Please note the following:

- **Notation:** While the OAAAQA Team may make notes during the Planning Meeting, it is the HEI Team's responsibility to send all Matters for Clarification, Additional Materials and any amendments to the Panel Visit Schedule in writing to the OAAAQA Review Director after the meeting.
- **Meeting Refreshment:** While the OAAAQA Team may appreciate light refreshment during the meeting, the Team does not generally stay to share lunch with the HEI Team.

Table O1: HEI EQA Planning Meeting – Key Details

Date	[dd/mm/yyyy]	Time (Muscat Time)	[9:30am – 11:00am]
Attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Title and Name] ([Chair / Proxy]) • [Title and Name] (ERD via MsTeams) • [Title and Name] (OAAAQA Representative) 	Venue	[HEI Premises]
		Inspection of Facilities Requested	[Two Interview Rooms, Lunch Room, Library, Labs etc]
Meeting Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of Panel requests for Further Evidence • Confirming the Panel Visit Schedule • Opportunity to clarify requirements for the Panel Visit • Inspection of facilities 		

Table O2: PSA Planning Visit Agenda

Item	Duration	Activity	Responsibility
1	[00:00-00:00] 15 minutes	Courtesy Meeting Brief meeting to welcome Planning Visit attendees with discussion limited to sector-wide issues of a very general nature	HEI CEO (or equivalent) and OAAAQA Team
2	[00:00-00:00] 30 minutes	Matters for Clarification (MCs) Clarification about each of the queries raised by the PSA Panel regarding statements in the PSAA.	HEI Team and OAAAQA Team
3	[00:00-00:00] 60 minutes	Additional Supplementary Materials (AMs) Discussion regarding the list of Additional Supplementary Materials requested by the PSA Panel.	HEI Team and OAAAQA Team
4	[00:00-00:00] 50 minutes	Draft Panel Visit Schedule Discussion of the draft Panel Visit Schedule. This may include clarifying exactly who the PSA Panel wish to interview in each Visit session.	HEI Team and OAAAQA Team

Table O2: PSA Planning Visit Agenda

Item	Duration	Activity	Responsibility
5	[00:00-00:00] 10 minutes	Stakeholder Notification and Public Submissions Printouts of the required notifications, including for public submission, are shared with the HEI for distribution in the appropriate places	HEI Team and OAAAQA Team
6	[00:00-00:00] 10 minutes	Logistics Discussion regarding details such as parking and any special needs or dietary requirements of Panel Members.	HEI Team and OAAAQA Team
7	[00:00-00:00] 30 minutes	Venue Inspection Venues to be inspected for suitability include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PSA Panel's room (in which the interviews and panel review sessions are held) including power and internet access for PSA Panel Members designated room for the Panel to meet with students (separate from the Panel room) potential facilities tour (such as of teaching and learning resources) lunchroom (separate from the Panel room) washroom facilities 	One or two representatives from the HEI Team and the OAAAQA Team
8	[00:00-00:00] 5 minutes	Any Other Business Meeting Close	As required
Total	3½ hours	In person at OAAAQA premises or by telephone or video conferencing.	TSS

Appendix P: Call for Public Submissions Template



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Call for Public Submission

Table P1: External Quality Assurance (EQA) Review Details			
Name of HEI		Type of EQA	
Notice Publication Date		Public Submission Link	
Further Information	www.oaaaqa.gov.om	OAAAQA Contact	

What is a Public Submission?

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) undertakes reviews of the activities of higher education institutions (HEIs), for all External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities under its remit. These include General Foundation Programme Quality Audit (GFPQA), Institutional Quality Audit (IQA), Institutional Standards Assessment (ISA) and Programme Standards Assessment (PSA). As part of their deliberations, the Panels undertaking these reviews invite submissions from interested parties.

Who may make a Public Submission?

Anyone with direct knowledge of the HEI under review may make a comment.

What should be commented on in a Public Submission?

Submissions may cover any issue relevant to the HEI's ongoing review by OAAAQA. The submission should address, however, aspects of activities or systems that may assist the Panel in forming conclusions about the HEI's performance. It must contain specific evidence for any claims being made as a Panel is not able to pursue vague statements or allegations.

Can a Public Submission be made at any time during an HEI's review?

Submissions may only be sent **within one month** from the date of publication of this notice.

How is a Public Submission lodged with OAAAQA?

Submissions should be sent via the link given at the top of this notice.

What information must be provided with a Public Submission?

- **Identification:** Submissions must include the name, position, organisation or workplace (if any) and the contact details of the person or group making the submission.
- **Contact:** The person or group making the submission must be willing to participate in a telephone interview with the Panel if deemed necessary.
- **Evidence:** The submission should address aspects of the [HEI's] activities and/or those of the [insert title of Programme(s)] that assist the Panel in forming conclusions about whether standards have been met. It should contain specific evidence for any claims being made. Vague statements or allegations are not pursued by the Panel.
- The submission should not refer to personal grievances or single out individual members of staff within the HEI under review as the Panel has no mandate to address grievances.
- The submission (excluding corroborating evidence) should be no more than 1,000 words.

Will the HEI know the identity of those making a Public Submission?

All submissions are confidential. This means that while Panels may use the information provided in a submission, they are not permitted to reveal the source of the comments. As information is only used in the formation of general comments on an HEI's performance, and not for the purpose of pursuing specific grievance, the Panel will not make any response or report back to those making the submission.

Appendix Q: Public Submission Form



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Public Submission Form

This form should be used for responding to the call for public submission regarding the Programme Standards Assessment (PSA) being undertaken by OAAAQA within a Higher Education Institution (HEI). The completed form should be sent to OAAAQA by the published deadline.

Table Q1: Public Submission Details			
Title and Name		HEI Name	
Place of Study/Employment		Public Submission Closing Date	
Designation		Date of this Submission	
Email Address		EQA Activity Type	PSA [individual/cluster]
Telephone Number		Length of this Submission	[Maximum 1000 words]

Table Q2: Declaration			
	Please tick (✓) the appropriate column for each of the following statements:	Agree	Disagree ⁷⁸
1	I have read and understood the PSA Call for Public Submissions information sheet.		
2	I am submitting this form as a result of my own knowledge and/or experience and not on behalf of a third party.		
3	I am willing to participate in a telephone interview should the Panel consider such a discussion to be necessary.		
4	I have supplied evidence for each of the claim I have made in this public submission.		
5	I have no personal grievance with this HEI and understand that the call for public submission does not represent an opportunity to take up personal issues against the HEI.		
6	I understand that the information I provide may be used by the PSA Panel in their Report but that I will not be identified through any use of this information.		
	Signature	Date	
	Print Name		
Please send the completed form to the Technical Support Section (TSS) at OAAAQA before the public submission deadline.			

Table Q3: Public Submission – [Add Programme Title]			
#	Claim	Suggestion	Evidence
	<i>[State the issue or claim you wish to make and add rows as necessary]</i>	<i>[Suggest what the HEI may do to resolve the issue]</i>	<i>[List the evidence you have supplied for each claim you wish to make.]</i>
1.			
2.			

⁷⁸ If you indicate disagreement with any of the statements in the declaration above, a member of OAAAQA may contact you to discuss the matter further.

Appendix R: Information for Staff, Students and Stakeholders



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

General Information for [HEI] and Staff and Students on the [Insert Title(s) of Programme(s)]

Table R1: Notification of Programme Standards Assessment			
HEI			
Panel Visit Dates		Programme(s) undergoing PSA	
Visit Venue			
Panel Chair			
Distance Panel Member(s)			
On-site Panel Member(s)			
Review Director		Further Info	www.OAAAQA.gov.om
HEI Contact Person		HEI Contact Email	

What is Programme Standards Assessment (PSA)?

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance (OAAAQA) has convened a Programme Standards Assessment (PSA) Panel to undertake a PSA of [titles(s) of programme(s)] at [name of HEI]. OAAAQA PSA evaluates whether programmes meet the OAAAQA's academic standards and criteria, which have been set to reflect international standards for academic programmes. The OAAAQA's standards, embedded in Part B of the PSA Manual, are available on the OAAAQA website (www.OAAAQA.gov.om).

What are the outcomes of PSA?

The PSA involves a comprehensive self-assessment of programme(s) by [name of the HEI], resulting in a PSA Application. This is followed by an external review by a PSA Panel. The process results in the Programme(s) being given ratings against (applicable) standards and criteria, and an overall Accreditation Outcome. The ratings and the Accreditation Outcome are then published on the OAAAQA's website.

Who are the PSA Panel Members?

The PSA Panel comprises senior academic, professional or industrial experts, resident both in Oman and internationally.

What does the PSA Panel do during a Panel Visit to an HEI?

As part of its work, the PSA Panel conducts a Visit during the dates shown above. During the Visit, the Panel will meet a wide range of people, including staff and students of the programme(s) and external stakeholders who have links to the programme(s), such as employers and external examiners. Mostly, these meetings are in formal interview sessions. Other interviews, however, are 'random' in order to help the PSA Panel Members gain a broad perspective. At some stage during the Visit, therefore, a PSA Panel Member may approach you on campus and ask whether you would be willing to spend a few minutes with them responding to some questions. All PSA Panel Members are clearly identifiable from their name badges. You are under no obligation to participate, but it is hoped that you will assist in order to help the PSA Panel gain as full an understanding of this HEI's programmes as possible. The questions will cover a range of topics focusing on your personal experiences of the programmes under assessment.

Are interview sessions (including random interviews) during the Panel Visit confidential?

All interviews are confidential in the sense that although the PSA Panel needs to be able to use the information you provide, it will not do so in a way that attributes the statements to you. In other words, the PSA Panel may reveal what was said, but not who said it. Thank you very much for your participation in this important exercise.

Appendix S: Information for Interviewees



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Information for Interviewees on the *[Insert Title(s) of Programme(s)]*

Table S1: Notification of Programme Standards Assessment			
HEI			
Panel Visit Dates		Programme(s) undergoing PSA	
Panel Names			
Panel Chair			
Distance Panel Member(s)			
On-site Panel Member(s)			
Review Director		Further Info	www.OAAAQA.gov.om
HEI Contact Person		HEI Contact Email	

What is Programme Standards Assessment (PSA)?

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAAQA) has convened a Programme Standards Assessment (PSA) Panel to undertake a PSA of *[titles(s) of programme(s)]* at *[name of HEI]*. OAAAQA PSA evaluates whether programmes meet the OAAAQA’s academic standards and criteria, which have been set to reflect international standards for academic programmes. The OAAAQA’s standards, embedded in Part B of the PSA Manual, are available on the OAAAQA website (www.OAAAQA.gov.om).

What are the outcomes of PSA?

The PSA involves a comprehensive self-assessment of programme(s) by *[name of the HEI]*, resulting in a PSA Application. This is followed by an external review by a PSA Panel. The process results in the Programme(s) being given ratings against (applicable) standards and criteria, and an overall Accreditation Outcome. The ratings and the Accreditation Outcome are then published on the OAAAQA’s website.

Who are the PSA Panel Members and what will they do during the Panel Visit?

The PSA Panel comprises the following people, who are senior academic, professional or industrial experts, resident both in Oman and internationally. As part of its work, the PSA Panel conducts a Visit during the dates shown above. During the Visit, the Panel will meet a wide range of people, including staff and students of the programme(s) and external stakeholders who have links to the programme(s), such as employers and external examiners.

How are interviewees involved?

Some staff and students have been requested to participate in interviews with the Panel. Staff may be invited to be interviewed individually or in groups of up to eight interviewees in sessions conducted in the Panel rooms. One-hour long interview sessions with students (up to five people) are conducted around tables with a single Panel Member and in a room with other student interviews taking place. Panel Members ask questions about the experience of teaching, supporting or studying a programme and may also seek comments on a broader range of matters, such as experiences at the college or university in general.

Are interview sessions during the Panel Visit confidential and should students prepare?

All interviews are confidential in the sense that although the Panel needs to be able to use the information provided, it will not do so in a way that attributes the statements to anyone in particular. The OAAAQA expects that all participants in PSA will respect this rule and will not report on what they or other people say during the interview. To prepare, interviewees may wish to read the college or university’s PSA Application. Panel questions are based on this. Interviewees may not bring pre-planned answers to the interview. Panel Members examine a wide range of supporting materials during the PSA process and use the lived experience or knowledge of interviewees about the programme(s) being assessed as part of their analysis of this information. The contact person (see table above) will inform interviewees of the time and venue of their interview.

Thank you very much for your participation in this important exercise.

Appendix T: Panel Visit Samples

Part A: Single Programme Visit

The tables below indicate a typical and an illustrative site visit schedule for the review of a single programme. The typical site visit normally commences at 09.00 on Day 0, with the Panel arriving at the OAAAQA offices or the Panel's hotel for a private Panel Briefing. Interviews with staff and students commence on Day 1. Interviews should not normally last more than 45 minutes, although student interviews may last up to one hour. Time is reserved within the schedule for private Panel meetings and for preparing for interviews and debriefing after sessions. Time is also required for Panel Members to reflect on what they have learned from interviews, to update their notes and records, read onsite evidence, discuss their findings and reach conclusions. Random interviews (where necessary) take place within whatever time is available.

Table T1: Panel and Visit Arrangements for Single Programme Submission – Overview

Panel	Details of Panel Size and Visit Duration		
Duration of Visit	3 days (inclusive of all Visit activities)	Review Director	1 ERD (international or locally based)
Total Panel Size	3 PMs (Chair + 1 distance + 1 on-site PM)	On-Site Panel Size	2 PMs (Chair + 1 on-site PM)
Minimum Panel Size	3 PMs	Panel Profile	Either 1 or 2 PMs are international
Panel Visit Day	Morning	Afternoon	
Day 0	Panel briefing (at OAAAQA or in hotel)	Panel briefing (at OAAAQA or in hotel) or Interviews (at HEI)	
Day 1	Interviews + Panel discussions (at HEI)	Interviews + Panel discussions (at HEI)	
Day 2	In-situ tour of programme facilities	Rating discussion and report refinement (at HEI)	

Table T2: Panel and Visit Arrangements for Single Programme Submission – On-Site Details

Day	Morning	Afternoon
Day 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel briefing (at OAAAQA or in hotel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel briefing (at OAAAQA or in hotel)
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courtesy Meeting: With Head of HEI (15-30 mins) Session 1: Panel interviews with Head of School or Faculty, and/or Head of Department Session 2: Panel interviews with current students Session 3: Panel interviews with Programme Leader(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Session 4: Panel interviews with programme academic staff (individually or in groups of up to eight) Session 5: Panel interviews with alumni, employers and other external stakeholders Session 6: Telephone conference interview(s) (parallel meeting, if required) Session 7: Panel interviews with representative(s) of student support services and human resources
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting 8: Call-back Interviews (if required) Tour: Tour of facilities and in situ interviews (Panel may sub-divide) Panel Discussion: Agree criteria ratings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PSA Report Refinement: Amend Report v3 in light of information received during the Visit Brief Courtesy Meeting: With Head of Department/Programme Leader/Contact person

Part B: Programme Cluster Visit

Table T3: Key Details of PSA Personnel and Visit Arrangements for a Clustered Programme Submission

	1 Programme	2 Programmes	3 Programmes	4 Programmes	5 Programmes
Review Director	1	1	1	1	1
Chair	1	1	1	1	1
Panel Size	3	5	7	9	11
On-Site Panel Size	2	3	4	5	6
Panel Profile	≥1 international	≥2 international	≥3 international	≥4 international	≥5 international
On-Site Profile	≥1 international	≥1 international	≥2 international	≥2 international	≥3 international
Visit Duration (including Day 0)	3 Days	3 Days	4 Days	4 Days	5 Days

Part C: Single or Cluster Programme Visit Back-to-Back in Two HEIs

Table T4: Panel Visit for Single Programme in Back-to-Back HEIs or Campuses				
Day	Morning	Afternoon		
	PSA at HEI #1	PSA at HEI #1		
Day 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel briefing (at OAAAQA or in hotel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel briefing (at OAAAQA or in hotel) or Interviews (at HEI) 		
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews + Panel discussions (at HEI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews + Panel discussions (at HEI) 		
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-situ tour of programme facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rating discussion and report refinement (at HEI) 		
	Panel Rest Day	Panel Rest Day		
	PSA at HEI #2	PSA at HEI #2		
Day 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel briefing (at OAAAQA or in hotel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel briefing (at OAAAQA or in hotel) or Interviews (at HEI) 		
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews + Panel discussions (at HEI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews + Panel discussions (at HEI) 		
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-situ tour of programme facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rating discussion and report refinement (at HEI) 		
Duration	3 days for each HEI; 7 days in total (inclusive of one Panel rest day)	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>On-Site Panel Size</td> <td>At least 2 Panel Members, including the Chair, depending on programme complexity</td> </tr> </table>	On-Site Panel Size	At least 2 Panel Members, including the Chair, depending on programme complexity
On-Site Panel Size	At least 2 Panel Members, including the Chair, depending on programme complexity			

Appendix U: Panel Room Layout

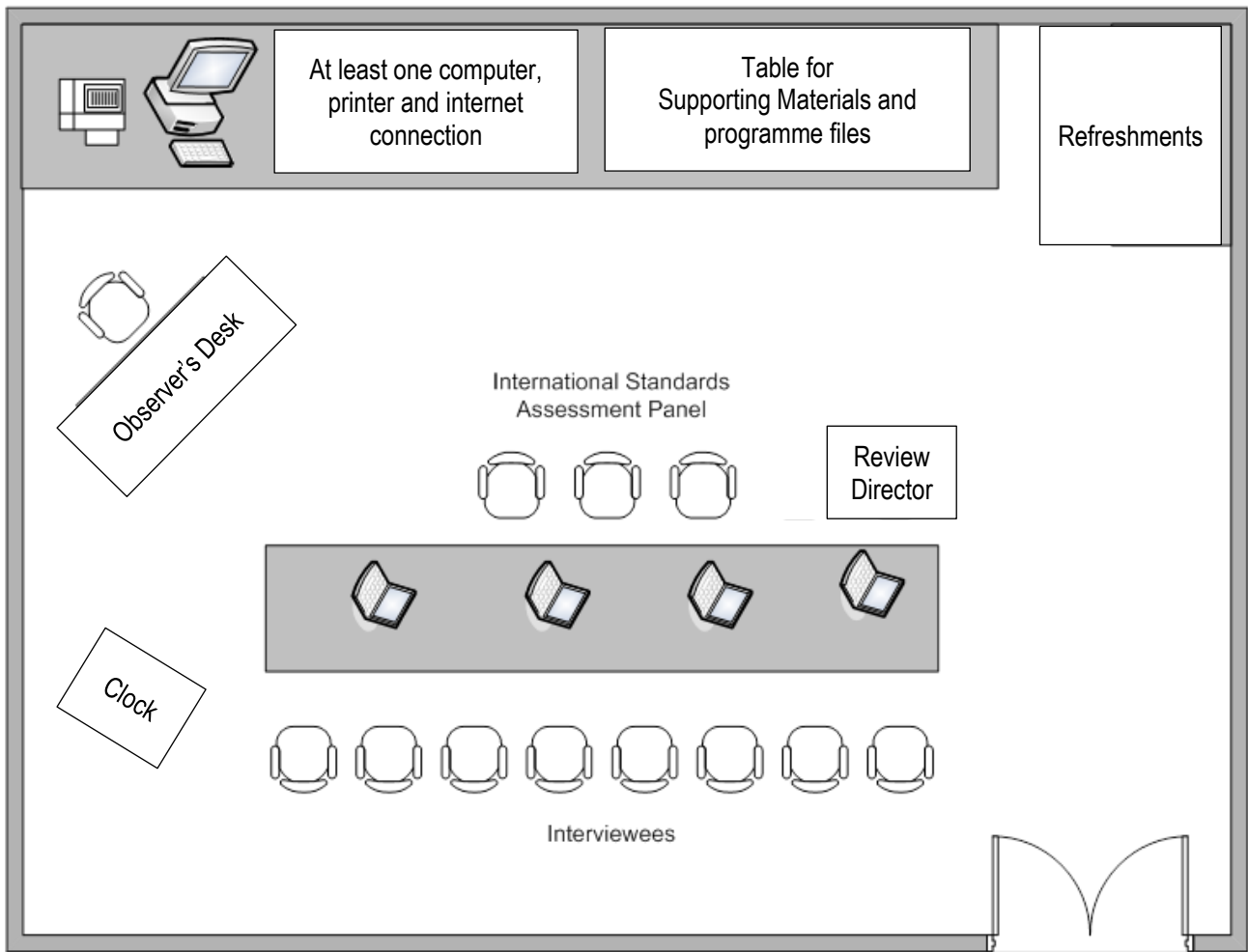


Figure U1: Main Panel Room

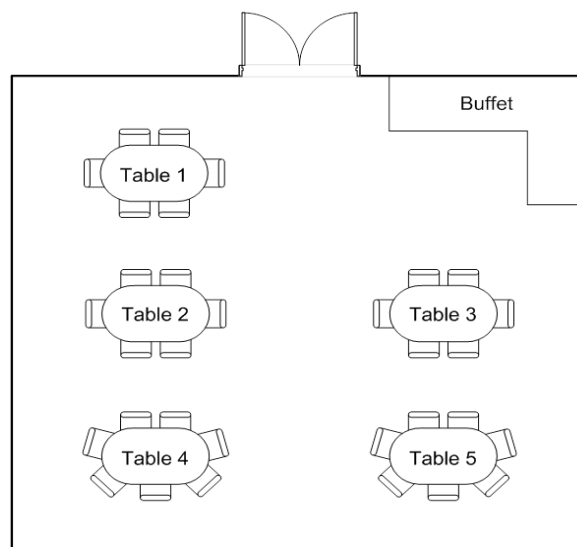


Figure U2: Round-Table Room Layout

The number of tables required is determined by the size of the PSA Panel (one table for each Panel Member).

Appendix V: HEI Declaration (Virtual Visit)



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Virtual Visit Declaration

This form should be used by an Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the event of an External Quality Assurance (EQA) Visit taking place partially or fully through digital conferencing. The HEI must sign the following undertaking that no attempt will be made by members of the HEI to gain information through unlawful means; this includes recording, listening to or accessing interviews and deliberation sessions of any proceedings associated with an EQA activity.

Table V1: HEI Declaration – Virtual Visit			
HEI's Senior Most Representative		HEI	
EQA Submission Date		EQA Visit Dates	
Type of PSA	<i>[Single/Cluster]</i> <i>[List programme(s)]</i>		
Declaration	<p>As the highest authority of [HEI], I hereby declare that, in the instance of a Virtual Visit taking place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[HEI]</i> will make no attempt to gain information through unlawful means; this includes recording, listening to or accessing interviews and deliberation sessions of any proceedings associated with an EQA activity. • <i>[HEI]</i> understands that if evidence is forthcoming that this protocol has been breached, then the Authority reserves the right to annul the EQA (with all fees retained by the Authority) and to take decisions regarding EQA outcomes accordingly. • <i>[HEI]</i> understands that if evidence is forthcoming that this protocol has been breached, then any Appeal launched by the HEI against the Authority using material obtained through unlawful means, proceedings are instantly dismissed. 		
Signature		Date	dd/mm/yyyy
Name and Title		Designation or Position	

Appendix W: HEI Comments on PSA Draft Report v5 Template



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

HEI Comments on Draft Report Version 5 (v5) of an OAAAQA EQA Report

Notes

- HEIs are invited to comment on claims made in Programme Standards Assessment (PSA) draft Report v5 or to ratings given to standards/criteria (see PSA Manual, Section 15.2.1).
- You may use this document to give your comments on PSA Draft v5.
- There is no limit to the number of claims that you can make in response to the draft Standards Outcome and ratings, but all claims **must** be supported with evidence.
- Additional evidence may be attached with this submission, numbered sequentially as Comment Supporting Material (CSM 01, 02 and so forth).
- Under the 'suggestion' column, give exact alternative wording or make other appropriate suggestions for amending the PSA Report in a manner that would resolve the issue from your HEI's perspective.
- Please modify header at the top of Page 2 (to include your HEI name and the date of your comments) if your response extends to additional pages.

Table W1: HEI Details

HEI Name			
EQA Type	Programme Standards Assessment (PSA)		
Visit Dates	[DD/MM/20YY]	Date of Submission of Comments on v5	

Table W2: [HEI's] Comments on PSA Report v5

#	Criteria	PSA Report v5 Extract	p#	Claim	Suggestion	Evidence
1	1.3	[Give citation from text]	[p.x]	[State the problem from HEI perspective]	[Suggest alternative form of words to resolve the issue]	[Number CSM01]

Appendix X: Panel Response to HEI Comments on Draft Report v5 Template



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Collated Panel Response to HEI Comments on EQA Report Version 5 (v5)

Notes *[adapt as necessary]*:

- The Panel Chair and all Panel Members provided their response to the HEI's comment on [PSA/PSR] Report v5.
- In total, HEI challenged XYZ criteria ratings in each of the XYZ standards where that they received a standard outcome lower than 'Satisfactory'. They challenged each of the XYZ criteria that received a rating less than '2' (Met) in these standards and XYZ criteria where they argued for an increase in rating from '2' to '3'. They did not challenge any criterion (whether 'Met' or otherwise) under any of the standards that were rated 'Satisfactory'.
- There is XYZ proposed change to the rating of XYZ standard. As such, XYZ does not meet XYZ out of the applicable standards.
- Key: PM1 XYZ (Chair); PM2 Dr XYZ; PM3 XYZ; PM4 XYZ; PM5 XYZ.

STANDARD 1: Programme Management and Support Services

Table X1: Panel Response to HEI's Comments on Draft Report v5			
1	1.1	Report Extract	'HEI has attempted to respond to the HEI PSA Report (2022) regarding the need for development of a clear Mission statement (PSA Report, px) but are still lacking in focus'.
		HEI Claim	Mission, vision and values went through a consultation process (ASM00X) are clear and provide necessary guidance to the college and its activities.
		HEI Suggestion	Change rating to '2'.
		PM1: Disagree	Insufficient scope within statements.
		PM2: None	There does not appear to be any information submitted by the institution to warrant a re-evaluation of this issue.
		PM3: Disagree	v5 text still valid
		PM4: Disagree	No change to v5 text. The response given by XYZ still did not fully explain the panel findings.
		PM5: Agree	Change text to reflect the following: XYZ well communicated to all stakeholders (SM0XYZ), thereby satisfying part of the recommendation arising from the PSA.
OAAAQA Action	<p>No rating change. Small addition to text:</p> <p>Draft v5: 'HEI has attempted to respond to the PSA Report (2022) regarding the need for development of a clear Mission statement' (PSA Report, px) but this is still lacking in focus and not helpful in guiding individual programmes'.</p> <p>Draft v6: 'HEI has attempted to respond to the PSA Report (2022) regarding the need for development of a clear Mission statement' (PSA Report, px) but this is still lacking in focus and not helpful in guiding individual programmes. <i>The Panel acknowledges, however, that reviewing the MVV as applicable to all levels of HEI activity is a positive development likely to lead to a more supportive statement, particularly for individual programmes, in future.'</i></p>		
Rationale	<p>HEI's Mission (M) and Vision (V) read as follows:</p> <p>Vision: <i>To attain academic excellence and be a preferred choice of students aspiring for quality learning experience</i></p> <p>Mission: <i>Contribute significantly through academic and allied engagements for developing knowledgeable and socially responsible persons</i></p> <p>The Panel has made it clear in the report that while 'HEI has attempted to respond to the recommendation in the PSA Report (2022) regarding the need for development of a clear Mission statement' (PM5 1.1), and acknowledges that the MVV were reviewed through consultation, the MVV are still lacking in focus. The report states: "XYZ" (PSA Report v XYZ, p. XYZ). Nonetheless, it is reasonable to concede that the HEI is attempting to review the MVV to be more supportive of the HEI's goals as applied at programme level. The inability of the HEI to meet the standard at present remains unchanged by the addition to the text, with the statement serving only to strengthen the current rating of '1'.</p>		

Appendix Y: PSA Feedback Forms



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

Panel Member Feedback Form

In order to support the continuous improvement of the OAAAQA and its activities, Panel Members are kindly requested to provide feedback on the various aspects of the Programme Standards Assessment (PSA) once the PSA Report and outcomes are finalised. The information provided will remain confidential to the OAAAQA. This survey has 42 questions and should take no longer than 30 minutes of your time to complete. Please complete using the digital format of this survey (sent by the TSS) or expand the space to fit your comments in the table below.

Table Y1: HEI Details

Name of Panel Member	Date of Feedback
Name of HEI	Date of EQA Submission
Broad Subject Area	Date of EQA Visit

Table Y2: Panel Feedback

Initial Stages of the PSA	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I clearly understood what was required of me during the PSA.				
2. PSA templates were clear and helpful.				
3. All necessary documents were received from the OAAAQA in a timely fashion.				
4. I was provided with enough information to allow me to write Review Comments.				
5. I was provided with the necessary information on how to rate the standards and criteria.				
6. Comments about the initial stages of the PSA:				
The Preliminary Meeting	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. The Preliminary Meeting was well-planned, well-structured and clearly focused.				
8. The Preliminary Meeting was useful.				
9. The Preliminary Meeting helped to clarify the OAAAQA's approach to PSA.				
10. I had adequate opportunity to contribute to the Preliminary Meeting discussion.				
11. Comments about the Preliminary Meeting:				
The Panel Visit – Day Zero	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. By the end of Day Zero I clearly understood my role during the Panel Visit.				
13. By the end of Day Zero the Panel was clear about which questions needed to be asked.				
14. By the end of Day Zero I had an understanding of how ADRI could be applied to PSA.				
15. By the end of Day Zero I had confidence in rating the standards and criteria.				
16. Comments about the Panel Visit – Day Zero:				

Table Y2: Panel Feedback				
The Panel Visit	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17. The Panel Visit was well organised.				
18. The balance of time across activities on site was appropriate.				
19. The Panel Visit allowed enough time to synthesise feedback from interview sessions.				
20. Comments about the Panel Visit:				
Reaching Conclusions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21. The process for rating the Programme(s) is effective.				
22. I understood the approach to reaching conclusions				
23. The Panel was able to reach consensus on appropriate ratings for criteria and standards.				
24. The Accreditation Outcome reflected evidence-based Panel decisions.				
25. Comments about reaching conclusions:				
The PSA Report	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
26. The division of labour across Panel Chair and Panel Pairs is appropriate.				
27. The Panel Visit allowed enough time to finalise Report commentary.				
28. I had confidence in writing the Report				
29. The format of the final Report is appropriate for its purpose.				
30. Comments about the PSA Report (especially any comments on writing reports in a PSA cluster submission):				
OAAAQA	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31. The Review Director provided professional guidance.				
32. The documentation (templates, agenda, reports) is supportive.				
33. The Panel Support Officer provided strong administrative support.				
34. OAAAQA staff were responsive to the Panel's requirements.				
35. The PSA was carried out in line with international practice.				
36. Comments about the OAAAQA:				
The PSA Panel	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
37. The Panel Members worked together well as a team.				
38. Panel Members behaved professionally throughout the PSA.				
39. Comments about the PSA Panel:				
Overall				
40. Does the PSA process allow the Panel to make sound judgement of the standards and criteria?				
41. Were there any aspects of the PSA that were done particularly well?				
42. Were there any aspects of the PSA that could be improved for the future?				



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)

HEI Feedback Form

In order to support the continuous improvement of the OAAAQA and its activities, HEIs are kindly requested to provide feedback on the various aspects of the Programme Standards Assessment (PSA) once the PSA Report and outcomes are finalised. The information provided will remain confidential to the OAAAQA. This survey has 42 questions and should take no longer than 30 minutes of your time to complete. Please complete using the digital format of this survey (sent by the TSS) or expand the space to fit your comments in the table below.

Table Y3: HEI Details

Name of HEI		Date of Feedback	
PSA Type	[Single or Cluster]	Date of EQA Submission	
Broad Subject Area		Date of EQA Visit	

Table Y4: HEI Feedback on PSA

About OAAAQA in General (aligning with INQAHE) ⁷⁹	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. OAAAQA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism.					
2. OAAAQA recognises that programmatic QA is primarily the responsibility of the HEI.					
3. OAAAQA strives to make PSA as time and cost effective as possible.					
4. OAAAQA takes into account the identity and goals of HEIs.					
5. OAAAQA's standards and criteria (SC) have been subject to reasonable consultation.					
6. OAAAQA's SC are generic enough to cover different modes of provision.					
7. OAAAQA's standards or criteria are specific enough to cover programme details.					
8. OAAAQA procedures specify the evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.					
9. OAAAQA provides full and clear documentation of its processes.					
10. OAAAQA decisions take into consideration the outcomes of an HEI's external review.					
11. OAAAQA's decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent.					
12. OAAAQA's decisions are reported in a clear and precise manner.					
13. OAAAQA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints.					
14. OAAAQA has clear, published procedures for managing appeals.					
Comments about OAAAQA:					

⁷⁹ Statements 1-15 are partially or wholly replicated from the INQAHE ISGs: <https://www.inqahe.org/sites/default/files/INQAHE-International-Standards-and-Guidelines-ISG.pdf>.

Table Y4: HEI Feedback on PSA

Table Y4: HEI Feedback on PSA					
Preparing the PSA Application (PSAA)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. OAAAQA provided appropriate support for the preparation of the PSAA.					
16. We felt confident supplying evidence to support claims we made in the PSAA.					
17. We felt confident in applying the range of ratings.					
18. Comments about preparing the PSAA:					
The Planning Visit	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19. The Planning Visit was well structured.					
20. The Planning Visit was professionally carried out by the OAAAQA.					
21. The Planning Visit was useful for preparing for the Panel Visit.					
22. Enough time was scheduled for the Planning Visit.					
23. Comments about the Planning Visit:					
The Panel Visit	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. The Panel Visit was well structured.					
25. Interviews were conducive to positive interaction.					
26. Requests for AMs during the Panel Visit were reasonable.					
27. Comments about the Panel Visit:					
The PSA Report	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
28. The PSA Report was easy to read.					
29. The PSA Report provided clear justification for the OAAAQA's ratings.					
30. There was appropriate opportunity to respond to the Panel's findings (at v5)					
31. The format of the PSA Report is user-friendly.					
32. Comments about the PSA Report:					
The OAAAQA Review Director	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
33. The Review Director provided useful guidance.					
34. The requests made by the Review Director were reasonable.					
35. The Review Director responded in a timely manner.					
36. Comments about the OAAAQA Review Director:					

Table Y4: HEI Feedback on PSA

The PSA Panel	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
37. The Panel Members were courteous with College Members.					<input type="checkbox"/>
38. The Panel conducted the interviews in a professional manner.					<input type="checkbox"/>
39. Comments about the PSA Panel:					
Overall					
40. Were there any aspects of the PSA that were carried out particularly well?					
41. Were there any aspects of the PSA that could be improved for the future?					

Appendix Z: External Review Director End of EQA Report Template**Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education****PROGRAMME STANDARDS ASSESSMENT (PSA)****External Review Director End of EQA Report**

This form should be used when an External Review Director (RD) has reached the end of an External Quality Assurance Activity (EQA). The purpose of the form is to streamline the purpose of reporting, as obliged by the OAAAQA Service Provision Contract, on an EQA activity and minimise the burden on the RD.

Table Z1: RD and EQA Details			
Name of RD		HEI Name	
Place of Study/Employment		PSA Type	[Single/Cluster]
Designation		Date of EQA Submission	
Email Address		Date of EQA Visit	
Signature		Date	

Table Z2: End of EQA Activity – RD Report			
Please indicate levels of satisfaction using a five-point scale where '1' represents 'not at all satisfied' and '5' represents 'very satisfied'.			
	Statement	Not Sure (✓)	Rating 1-5
1	Usefulness of External RD training or mentoring received (if relevant)		
2	Clarity of guideline documents (such as manuals)		
3	Availability of technical templates		
4	Services rendered by the Technical Support Section (TSS)		
5	Support offered by the Head of Department (for IQA/ISA/ISR, PSA/PSR or GFPQA)		
6	Responsiveness of Executive Management to queries		
7	Reliability of IT services offered by OAAAQA		
8	Helpfulness of moderation (external) comments		
9	Helpfulness of moderation (internal) comments		
10	Overall experience of being an External RD		
11	Would you be willing to undertake the role of External RD again in future		Yes/No
12	With which type of EQA (IQA/ISA/ISR, PSA or GFPQA) would you prefer to be involved		
	Please feel free to make further comments about any aspect of your experience as an External RD here (no restriction of space). In particular, it would be helpful if you are able to make a few comments on your interaction with the HEI, note any challenges you faced in the role (for example in keeping to the indicative timeline) and suggest any opportunities for improvement in OAAAQA's EQA processes. There is no need to comment on individual Panel members here – the RD Panel Evaluation survey is used for that purpose.		

Thank you for completing this form; please return a scanned copy by e-mail within one month of completing an EQA activity to the DGCHQA at OAAAQA. Your feedback will help guide improvements to our EQA processes as carried out regularly as part of our philosophy of continuous quality enhancement.

