



Ministry of Higher Education
& Oman Accreditation Council

Training Module 15 v1

Quality Audit

The next stage in Oman Higher Education Quality Assurance

Workshop Handout

© Martin Carroll
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Training Module Version Control Table

Version	Author	Date	Summary of Main Changes
1	M Carroll	18-12-2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Training Module Handout.
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This Training Module is part of the Training Program open to staff of public and private higher education institutions, the Oman Accreditation Council, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Manpower. The Training Program is a joint initiative of the Directorate General, Private Universities and Colleges and the Oman Accreditation Council. It aims to raise the capacity and capability of the higher education sector in issues and practices related to assuring and improving quality.

1 MODULE AIMS

1.1 *Intended Participants*

This Training Module is for HEP managers and staff who will be involved in preparing for Quality Audit, and for Government officials and staff who need to understand the Quality Audit process and how it may impact on current supervisory arrangements.

1.2 *Learning Outcomes*

Documents are an essential tool in higher education and higher education management. By the end of this module, participants should:

- Understand and convey to others in their HEP the dual purpose of Quality Audits;
- Know the main stages of the Quality Audit Process;
- Form a considered set of principles with which to manage Quality Audit;
- Prepare for the Quality Audit with confidence;
- Appreciate the benefits of Quality Audit.



1.3 *Caveat*

The Quality Audit system of the Oman Accreditation Council is still under development. While this training module is based on the proposal, it is possible that there will be amendments prior to finalisation. The OAC will release an official Audit Manual early in 2007, which will provide definitive details about the quality audit purposes, policies and process.

2 MODULE SLIDES

2.1 Summary of the Presentation

Note that a version designed for use in presentations is available online and free of charge (www.oac.gov.om/enhancement/training). It contains slides that are not included in this printed version (such as model answers to the workshop questions).

<p style="text-align: center;">Session Outline</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is Quality Audit?2. The Audit Process3. The HEP Portfolio4. External Reviewers5. The Audit Visit6. Honest Review vs. Public Relations7. The Audit Report8. Media9. Follow-up10. The Value Chain11. The Plan for Oman12. Workshops	<p style="text-align: center;">1. What is Quality Audit?</p>  
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Slide 2

What is a Quality Audit?

- A method of public accountability.
- A formative evaluation, which can be used to help set a Quality Improvement Plan for the HEP.
- A combination of 'fitness of purpose' and of 'fitness for purpose' (in Oman – may be different in other countries).
- Based on a self study by the HEP (resulting in a Portfolio), which is then checked via external review by an independent panel of experts (resulting in a public report).
- Scope encompasses all the HEP's activities.

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What is a Quality Audit?

- In the Sultanate of Oman, a Quality Audit is a systematic determination of whether:
- A HEP's goals and objectives are based on appropriate regulations, standards and benchmarks;
 - Its planned arrangements are suitable to achieve those goals (i.e. check the overall approach);
 - Its actual practice conforms to the planned arrangements (i.e. check the deployment);
 - The arrangements achieve the desired results;
 - The organisation is learning from a self-evaluation of its approach, deployment and results, and can demonstrate improvements.

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Quality Audit and ADRI



  Internal ADRI Review of the whole Institution
 Followed by External Review of the Institution 

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What a Quality Audit is Not

- Secret (although some of the information and deliberations will be confidential).
- An 'accreditation' (does not result in a pass/fail).
- A measurement of performance against each OAC HEP standard (like accreditation), but audit does use those standards to help define the scope.
- A summative assessment (it does not result in a grade).
- A strategic review (it is focused on how well a HEP is doing, not what future direction it should head in).

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A Note on Accountability

- Accountability is a set of relationships with multiple stakeholders, each of which has its own reasons for wanting to know how good you are.
- Quality Audit, when resulting in a public report, is an internationally accepted and practiced method of accountability in higher education (in some countries it is the primary method) because it satisfies many different needs.
- Even though it does not have a pass/fail outcome, participation in a Quality Audit system is looked upon favorably by the higher education and professional accreditation systems of many other countries.

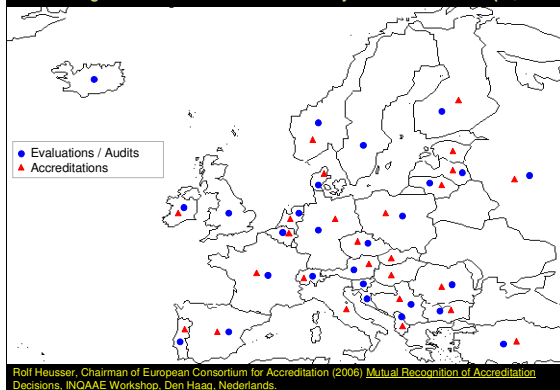
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So Who Does Quality Audits?

- Many countries. Some examples are:
- Australia (The Australian Universities Quality Agency, www.auqa.edu.au)
 - New Zealand (The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit, www.aau.ac.nz)
 - United Kingdom (The Quality Assurance Agency, www.qaa.ac.uk)
 - And as for the rest of Europe...

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National Agencies for Accreditation & Quality Assurance in Europe, 2005

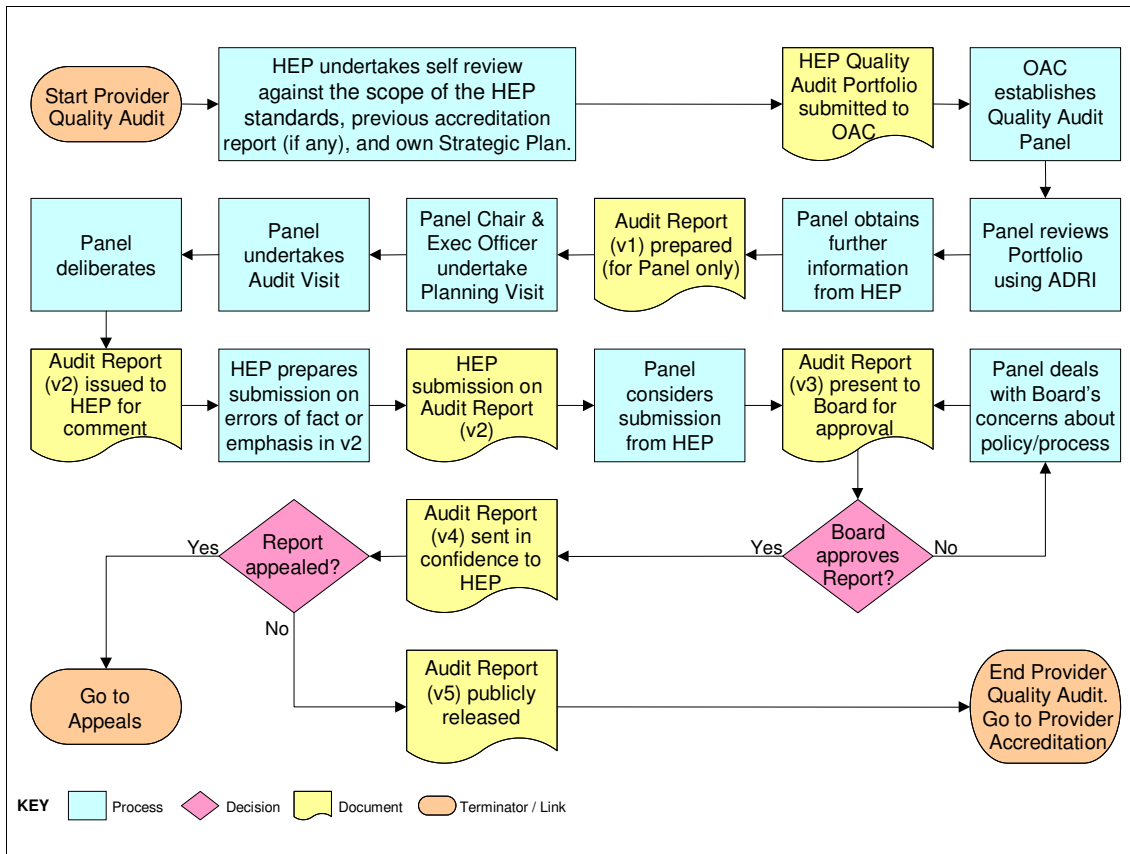


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2. The Audit Process

(from a HEP's perspective)

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Approximate Quality Audit Time Line

Task	Responsibility	Time
Prepare Portfolio	HEP	6-9 months
Panel Established and Dates Fixed	OAC	
Preparation of Report v1	Panel	8 weeks
Preparation of Audit Visit	Panel and HEP	
Audit Visit	Panel and HEP	1 week (incl travel etc.)
Preparation of Report v2	Panel	4 weeks
Comments prepared on Report v2	HEP	2 weeks
Preparation of Report v3	Panel	2 weeks
Approval of Report	OAC Board	2 weeks
Report v4 and Embargo Period	Panel and HEP	2 weeks
Public Release of Report v5	OAC	1 day

A more detailed time line will be provided in the Audit Manual.

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3. The HEP Portfolio



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The HEP Portfolio

- A document summarising the HEP's self study.
- Covers all major aspects of the HEP.
- 'Descriptive' AND 'evaluative'.
- Structured according to the OAC's HEP Standards, but could be modified to reflect the HEP's own Strategic Plan.
- Identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- Maximum 30,000 words; 100 pages (including appendices).
- See Training Module #6 Preparing a Self-Study Portfolio (www.oac.gov.om/enhancement/training).

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4. External Reviewers



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Register of External Reviewers

- The OAC is assembling a Register of External Reviewers. It has sought nominations. All decisions are made by the OAC Board.
- Includes national and international leaders in academia, higher education management, professional bodies and industry.
- Membership lasts for 2yrs, and may be renewed.
- The External Reviewers will receive thorough training and an Auditor Manual.
- Only External Reviewers in the approved Register may be used for Quality Audits (and the various types of accreditation panels).

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Quality Audit Panel Membership

- Membership will be assembled approximately as follows:
 - two or three academics or senior administrative managers from HEPs in Oman (one of who will chair the Panel);
 - one or two international members from a HEP, quality agency or professional body; and
 - one member from outside academia.
- Plus an Executive Officer from the OAC.
- Will not include MoHE or OAC officials or persons with a conflict of interest.

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Choosing Quality Panels

- For each audit, the OAC staff will select a long list, which will be approved by the Board Chair.
- The HEP VC/Dean/Director will be invited, in confidence, to challenge any Reviewers who may have a conflict of interest (criteria apply – simply being from another provider will NOT constitute a conflict of interest).
- The Panel will deliberate with autonomy, but will be guided by OAC policies (including a confidentiality agreement) and processes, and will be supported by the Executive Officer.
- All communication between the HEP and Panel will be STRICTLY via the Executive Officer.

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5. The Audit Visit



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About the Audit Visit

- Typically gets all the attention, but it is ONLY ONE PART of the overall quality audit process.
- A chance for the Audit Panel to test the accuracy and completeness of the Portfolio.
- May be 2+1 or 3+1 days, depending on the size and complexity of the HEP.
- Highly professional, but also conducted in a positive and friendly manner.

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TIME	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3
0900-0945	Interview 1 Dean	Interview 7 Council Members	Callback interviews (if required)
1000-1045	Interview 2 Heads of Department	Interview 8 Administrative Heads	
1100-1130	Panel Review	Panel Review	Panel deliberations and report drafting
1130-1215	Interview 3 Academic Staff	Interview 9 Academic Staff	
1230-1345	Interview 4 (lunch) Students (UG)	Interview 10 (lunch) Students (PG)	
1400-1500	Panel Review	Panel Review	
1500-1545	Interview 5 External Stakeholders	Interview 11 Student Services	
1600-1715	Interview 6 (on site) Laboratories	Interview 12 (on site) Library & IT	Verbal Feedback to HEP
1730-1830	Panel Review	Panel Review	

Example of a typical 2+1 Audit Visit program. Precise details will vary for each Audit.

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Interview Sessions

- Reviewers want to know the real, day to day 'lived experience' of staff and students.
- Answer only the question that is asked, even if it seems odd to you (they will have a plan behind their questioning).
- It is an exploration, not a test! It is OK to say you don't know the answer to a question.
- Reviewers will be trained to be friendly, but also to be probing in their approach.
- Please do NOT try to trick them or deliver rehearsed answers. This will not help your HEP.

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Interview Session Logistics

- Unless otherwise arranged:
 - Maximum 8 interviewees per session.
 - All people will be selected by the Panel.
 - People should meet with the Panel once only.
 - Managers & staff will be interviewed separately.
- The sessions are confidential, in that the Panel may use the information received, but may not reveal the identity of the provider.
- HEPs are also expected to respect the confidentiality of the process and may not coerce interviewees to say certain things or to divulge what was said.

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6. Honest Review or Public Relations?




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		HEP		
		Aware of OFI and reports it honestly	Aware of OFI but does not report it fully or honestly	Not aware of OFI and therefore does not report it
OAC	Aware of OFI	Report may acknowledge that the HEP is improvement-conscious	Incorrect reality may be perpetuated with unhelpful consequences	Report may add value by constructively drawing the issue to the HEP's attention
	Disagrees with HEP	Report may offer an alternative view of the issue	Report may charge the HEP with misrepresentation	
	Not aware of OFI	N/A	Issue not reported. Incorrect reality may be perpetuated with unhelpful consequences	Issue will not be reported and no value will be added

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7. The Audit Report



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About the Audit Report

- A text report of about 40 pages.
- Based on an analysis of all the evidence.
- Public (posted on OAC website).
- Does not include a pass/fail or a grade.
- Does include Recommendations, Affirmations and Commendations (but not every topic considered will result in a Rec, Aff or Com).
- Will not include every issue that was touched on during the audit, but will attempt to provide a balanced view of the HEP.

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Audit Report Table of Contents

- Overview of Audit Process
- Executive Summary of Findings
- Summary of Recommendations
- Summary of Affirmations
- Summary of Commendations
- Chapters (mirroring the HEP's Portfolio, but OAC could modify if required)
- Appendix A: Audit Panel
- Appendix B: Abbreviations & Terms

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Recommendations

- The OAC found an opportunity for improvement (OFI) that the HEP either did not accurately identify, or to which it is not responding satisfactorily.
- The Panel identifies the OFI, NOT the solution. Therefore, the Rec will state what needs to be done, but not how (at least, not in prescriptive detail).
- Recommendations will not be prioritised but the OAC may add emphasis words like "strongly recommends" or urgency words like "immediately".

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Recommendation Examples

- "The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Hogwarts College implement a systematic approach to analysing and acting upon the feedback it receives from its student surveys."
- "The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that the Hogwarts College Council develop strategies to ensure it is able to inform and balance its fiduciary governance responsibilities with its academic governance responsibilities."

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Affirmations

- Sometimes the Panel will find an OFI that the HEP has already identified through its self review process AND has made a clear commitment to addressing.
- While this is still an OFI, it is also evidence of a self review system that works, and therefore should not be treated like other Recommendations.

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Affirmation Examples

- "The Oman Accreditation Council affirms that Hogwarts College has accurately identified, and is responding to, the need for a comprehensive risk management system."
- "The Oman Accreditation Council affirms that Hogwarts College has accurately identified, and is responding to, the need to redesign its research funding scheme in order to achieve desired results."

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Commendations

- The Panel will pursue strengths as much as it will pursue OFI.
- Where the Panel finds an example of an effective process resulting in positive results, this may lead to a Commendation.
- Especially if it is unusual, recent, or something that the rest of the sector could benefit from knowing about.

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Commendation Examples

- “The Oman Accreditation Council commends Hogwarts College for developing a framework for performance indicators that is demonstrably aiding the management and planning processes.”
- “The Oman Accreditation Council commends Hogwarts College for successfully implementing a peer mentoring for academic staff system that has resulted in improved student satisfaction.”

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8. Media





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Media

- Panel Members and the Executive Officer will not be entitled to make public comments about the audit.
- The Audit Report is the OAC’s public comment on the audit.
- The OAC Chair or Executive Director may make further public statements if necessary.
- The HEP may make its own comments about the audit, but should not use its Audit Results to publicly harm other HEPs.
- Any disputes will be settled via the Appeals process.

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9. Follow-up

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HEP Follow up

- The HEP may post a reply (max 10 pages) to its Audit Report on the OAC website (certain conditions will apply - tba).
- It is the responsibility of the HEP to then respond appropriately to its Audit Report (not the OAC, which will not micro manage follow up activities).
- All Recommendations and Affirmations should be added into the HEP’s planning process.
- The subsequent HEP Accreditation will include consideration of what the HEP has done in response to the Recommendations and Affirmations.

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OAC Follow up

- The OAC is also using ADRI! It wants to ensure that it is constantly improving in its Quality Audit activities.
- It will seek confidential feedback on the quality audit process from the HEP and those staff and students who participated in the process.
- The precise feedback system has not yet been developed.

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10. The Value Chain




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The Value Chain

There are 4 main value-adding (i.e. improvement) opportunities with the Quality Audit process:

1. Self Evaluation (a valuable process of discovery)
2. The Audit Report (useful recommendations, affirmations and commendations)
3. Follow-up Actions (leveraging from the Audit Report to get things done!)
4. Access to Good Practices (from other HEPs, e.g. via the AUQA Good Practice Database).

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11. The Plan for Oman



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The Plan for Oman

- Two HEPs will undergo a confidential pilot in the first half of 2007.
- Real audits will commence in the second half of 2007. These will be public.
- All HEPs will be audited within 6 years.
- HEPs will soon be invited to nominate when they wish to be audited, but the final schedule will be decided by the OAC.
- The OAC will abide by the INQAAHE Guidelines for Good Practice.

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Next Steps

- External Reviewers are currently in the process of being selected.
- A manual is currently being prepared by the OAC and should be ready in January.
- A 2 day training program will be held for External Reviewers in January or February.
- Do not wait for your audit – get active now!
- Remember this module when it comes close to your audit – it may prove useful.

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Quality Audit


The next stage in Oman Higher Education Quality Assurance

Thank you and congratulations on completing this training module!



2.2 Workshop Activity


The following slide outlines the workshop activity. For further information on the workshop, see the online PowerPoint presentation for this Training Module (<http://www.oac.gov.om/enhancement/training/08/>).





Workshop Activity


Instructions


1. Form into groups.
2. Discuss the questions assigned to your group.
3. One person will record the group's responses.
4. One person will report back to the full workshop.
5. There are 25 minutes for this activity and 25 minutes for the feedback session


Group 1 Questions


Group 2 Questions


Group 3 Questions



Group 4 Questions



Workshop Activity

Questions for Group 1


1. How should we prepare interviewees for their meeting with the Audit Panel?
2. What use can we make of Commendations in our report?
3. What organisational structure should we use within our HEP to prepare for Quality Audit?
4. What are some of the negative consequences of Quality Audit?



Workshop Activity

Questions for Group 2


1. How do we manage the expectations of our staff and students before, during and after the Audit?
2. What should we do when we get the draft Audit Report?
3. How should we present ourselves to the Panel when our HEP is always changing?
4. How do we ensure that staff and students say the right thing to the Panel?



Workshop Activity

Questions for Group 3

1. Given the effort this will take, how do we maximise the benefits from Quality Audit?
2. If our audit is 5 years away, what do we do in the meantime?
3. What strategies should we apply to managing the release of the final Audit Report?
4. Why should Audit Reports not be used in the media in a manner that harms other HEPs?



Workshop Activity

Questions for Group 4

1. What are three ways in which HEP Quality Audit is different from HEP Accreditation?
2. Why would OAC not normally make substantive media statements about Audit Reports?
3. What should we do if we get negative publicity from a critical Audit Report?
4. What principles/values should we promote within our HEP regarding Quality Audit?

3 ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

These additional references are supplied for general educative purposes only. Their inclusion here does not imply any endorsement or warranty by the authors of this training module.

Note that web references provided below may not remain active for long! If you want to check them out, it is better to do so quickly!

If you intend to search flowcharting on the web, note that spelling varies between 'flow chart' and 'flowchart'.

3.1 External Quality Agencies

The following websites from external quality assurance agencies include Audit Manuals, Audit Reports and many other resources relating to quality assurance and quality enhancement.

- The Quality Assurance Agency for higher Education (QAA), <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/>.
- Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), <http://www.auqa.edu.au>. This website has AUQA's Audit Manual and Audit Reports (as well as many other resources) freely available for downloading.
- The Australian Universities Quality Forum (<http://www.auqa.edu.au/quqf/>) is an international refereed forum held each year to discuss Quality Audit and related matters. The papers from this forum are available at the website.
- New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU), <http://www.aau.ac.nz>.
- The International network for Quality Assurance Agencies In Higher Education (INQAAHE) is the global network of quality assurance agencies. At their website (<http://www.inqaahe.org/>) you will find the Guidelines for Good Practice for external quality assurance agencies.

3.2 Discussion Board Details

The online discussion board for this Training Module is available at <http://www.oac.gov.om/enhancement/training>. This is a site where you may post questions, answer and comments about the module. Note that questions posted are for anyone to answer – not just the module presenter.