



Oman Academic
Accreditation Authority

**Report of a General
Foundation Programme
Quality Audit of
Scientific College of Design**

July 2018

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OVERVIEW OF THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This General Foundation Programme (GFP) Quality Audit Report (the 'Report') documents the findings of a GFP Quality Audit by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) of Scientific College of Design (SCD).

The GFP Quality Audit follows a similar process to the Institutional Accreditation Stage 1: Quality Audit (which Scientific College of Design underwent in 2009) as outlined in the OAAA's *Quality Audit Manual*¹. The scope outlined in the *General Foundation Programme Quality Audit Manual (v1)*² provided the basis for the areas explored during the GFP Quality Audit.

The GFP Quality Audit commenced with SCD undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems in relation to the GFP. The results were summarised in the *GFP Portfolio* (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the agreed date of 31 May 2017.

The OAAA appointed an external GFP Audit Panel (the 'Panel'), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the GFP Quality Audit. For membership of the Panel see Appendix A. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 20 July 2017 to consider SCD's GFP Portfolio. Following this, a representative of the Panel Chairperson and the Review Director undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to SCD on 18 September 2017 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel's audit visit.

The GFP Quality Audit visit took place over the period 30 October - 2 November 2017. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 65 people, including the Dean, Head of Department of English Language, Basic Sciences & Humanities, GFP Coordinator, GFP teaching staff, GFP students, teaching staff on post-foundation and/or degree programmes, post-foundation (GFP alumni) students, academic and student support services staff, college administrative staff, and library and information technology staff. The Panel also spoke with a representative from the Lebanese American University (by telephone), visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

The Report contains a summary of the Panel's findings on the foundation programme offered by SCD, together with formal Commendations where good practices have been confirmed, Affirmations where SCD's ongoing quality improvement efforts merit support, and Recommendations where there are significant opportunities for improvement not yet being adequately addressed. The Report aims to provide a balanced set of observations, but does not comment on every GFP system in place at SCD.

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. No documents created after 2 November 2017 (the last day of the audit visit) were taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit. This Report was approved by the OAAA Board on 3 July 2018.

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree No. 54/2010 to replace the Oman Accreditation Council. Its responsibilities include conducting quality audits of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman. For further information, visit the OAAA website (<http://www.oaaa.gov.om>).

¹http://www.oaaa.gov.om/QAM_2008_FINAL2.pdf

²<http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/To%20upload-FINAL-GFP%20Quality%20Audit%20Manual%2025%20April%202017.pdf>

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Each OAAA GFP Quality Audit Report is written primarily for the institution being audited. The Report is specifically designed to provide feedback to help that institution better understand the strengths and opportunities for improvement for its GFP. The feedback is structured according to four broad areas of activity and presented as formal Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations, or as informal suggestions, each accompanied with explanatory paragraphs. It is expected that the institution will act upon this feedback as part of its continuous efforts to provide the best possible education to students.

The Report is made public because it also may be of interest to students and potential students, their families, employers, government, other higher education institutions in Oman and abroad, and other audiences. Students, in particular, may find this Report useful because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2 and 3 below). Prospective students, however, should still undertake their own investigations when deciding which higher education institution will best serve their particular learning needs.

The focus of the GFP Quality Audit is formative (developmental) rather than summative. In other words, although the audit addresses four areas of activity which are common to all GFPs, it does not measure the programme against externally set standards of performance in those four areas. Instead, it considers how well the institution is attending to those areas in accordance with its own Mission and Vision, in the context of relevant legal regulations, and guided by the current GFP Standards as an external reference point. The GFP Quality Audit therefore recognises that each institution and its GFP have a unique purpose and profile; it does not directly compare one institution's GFP with those at any other HEI in Oman.

For the reasons stated above, a GFP Quality Audit does not result in a pass or fail, nor does it provide any sort of grade or score. It should also be noted that the precise number of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations that the GFP receives in its Audit Report is not as important as the substance of those conclusions. Some Recommendations, for example, may focus on critical issues such as assessment of student learning, whereas others may focus on issues such as the maintenance of teaching equipment in classrooms which, while important, is clearly less critical. It is neither significant nor appropriate, therefore, to compare the GFP Audit Reports of different HEIs solely on the numbers of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations.³

This Report contains a number of references to source evidence considered by the Audit Panel. These references are for the HEI's benefit in further addressing the issues raised. In most cases this evidence is not in the public domain.

³ For more information on Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education please visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings of the GFPQA and lists the resulting Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations. They are presented in the order in which they appear in the Report, and are not prioritised. It should be noted that other favourable comments and suggestions for improvement are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Executive Summary of Findings

Scientific College of Design (SCD) is a private college established in 2004 and licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) in the Sultanate of Oman. It has five academic departments: Graphic Design, Architecture and Interior Design, Fine Arts, Fashion Design, English Language, Basic Sciences and Humanities (ELBS&H), which together offer seven programmes. All programmes are delivered in English, in affiliation with the Lebanese American University (LAU), Lebanon, apart from Fashion Design, which is delivered in Arabic and offered in affiliation with the Higher Institution of Applied Arts (HIAA), Egypt. At the time of the GFP Quality Audit, there were 1,373 students studying at the college, supported by 61 faculty members and 18 administrative staff.

The General Foundation Program (GFP) is run by the ELBS&H Department. The programme covers English language, Study Skills, Maths and Computing, and these are offered at three levels. In Fall of Academic Year 2016-2017, there were 231 students enrolled on the GFP.

Overall, the Panel found SCD's self-study Portfolio was well structured and clear. The GFP addressed the main scope areas satisfactorily and provided evidence in most cases for its claims. However, while the Panel found the self-study to be strong on the descriptions of processes and systems, services and resources, the self-study lacked evidence on the impact of these activities. The Panel established that a steering committee was formed by the college to drive the self-study and that the process was guided by the Head of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QA&E) Unit. It was evident that the GFP played a pivotal role in the development of the Portfolio.

Regarding the Mission and Vision guiding the GFP, the Panel concluded that the Mission of the ELBS&H Department is well aligned with the Mission and Vision of SCD. The Panel, however, did not find evidence in documentation or from interviews with staff and students of any student involvement in the development of the Mission and the college is urged to seek student input into future revisions of the Mission. The Panel also found that the Portfolio was silent on the six Values of the college and how the GFP is aligned to these. The Panel concluded that these values needed to be embedded and disseminated within the GFP.

The Panel confirmed the inclusive manner in which the GFP is integrated into the structures and functions of SCD. It is evident that the GFP is an integral part of the governance and management of SCD and that there are sufficient lines of communication between the GFP staff and senior staff of SCD. In addition, the Panel concluded that there is good and cooperative relationship with the affiliate, LAU, with continuous support and guidance being offered. This has contributed positively to maintaining and enhancing the quality of the GFP and its constituent courses.

As far as operational planning (OP) is concerned, the Panel noted that alignment between the OP of the ELBS&H Department and the college Strategic Plan needed to be strengthened. The ELBS&H Department does not show appropriate alignment of its OP with the Strategic Plan or with the Action Plan contained within the Strategic Plan of the college. This needs to be addressed. Furthermore, no evidence was found that monitoring of the OP implementation is carried out throughout the year. The Panel concluded that a regular monitoring system needed to be put in place with mechanisms so that interventions can be made during the plan's life cycle when targets are in danger of not being met.

Regarding financial management and risk management, the Panel found that the inclusive bottom-up approach taken to budgeting ensures that there are sufficient financial resources to deliver a quality GFP

programme. However, while there is a policy and process in place for risk management, the risk register does not cover high level risks - for instance in the areas of finance, human resources, and health and safety - which could have a deleterious impact on the GFP. Action needs to be taken to address this.

Concerning monitoring and review, the Panel found that the Department has a continuous and multi-pronged approach to monitoring and review of the GFP, including monitoring of grades by the course coordinator, monitoring of the programme curriculum, and verification of assessment. The Panel concluded that there is a clear review process of the GFP with recommendations being used for improvement.

The Panel noted that there was not a formally constituted grievance committee or body and is concerned about students having to approach individuals to resolve their grievances. The Panel concluded that the grievance procedure needed to be reviewed so that a formal process is introduced, involving the formation of an independent body to consider both academic and non-academic grievances of the GFP students.

Regarding health and safety arrangements of the college, SCD has implemented Health and Safety Plan and Policy. The Panel confirmed during interviews with students and staff that the health services provided are sufficient and the requirements of students are adequately met.

The Panel reviewed GFP student learning outcomes and compared them with the learning outcomes set by the OAAA, and issued by MoHE, for the four study areas; it concluded that the GFP follows the guidelines closely and meets all the required learning outcome standards as an external reference point. The Panel also found that the learning outcomes set out by the GFP in the various courses are well-aligned to achieve the programme outcomes. The Panel particularly concurs with the GFP on the importance of benchmarking its programme and supports the GFP's initiative to formalise benchmarking networks with other HE GFP providers. While the Panel agrees that GFP makes a concerted effort to seek external feedback from LAU, the Panel concluded that more effort is needed to formalise external review processes, such as the one undertaken with MEC, rather than just using them in an advising capacity.

As far as student entry and exit standards are concerned, the Panel established that GFP students undergo placement tests to ascertain their level for English, Maths and IT. Benchmarking of SCD entry tests with the Middle East College (MEC) is a good initiative. The Panel, however, is not convinced that entry and exit tests should be identical, as there is a chance this will not provide the GFP with a clear indication of the progress made by students during their studies. The Panel also found that there was no benchmarking of the GFP's English exit test with IELTS or TOEFL tests, or other internationally recognised language tests, to establish the equivalency of the GFP exit standards for English.

Regarding teaching quality, the Panel established that teaching at the GFP is supportive and the teachers are highly valued for their commitment to the student learning process. Multiple tools are used to gauge teaching effectiveness, such as peer observations, students' evaluation of teaching and evaluation by the HoD. The Panel also found that there were incentives given for good performance. The Panel believes that, if such a reward system is to continue, in order to maintain transparency in the process and achieve fairness between GFP staff, it needs to be made formal and enhanced with clear selection procedures that are well-documented, properly communicated to all staff and implemented consistently.

The Panel found evidence of a number of positive initiatives to raise awareness of academic integrity amongst the student population. However, the Panel concluded that an all-encompassing academic integrity policy, binding for both GFP staff and students, needed to be developed and effectively implemented with some urgency.

Regarding assessment of student achievement, the Panel observed that there was heavy reliance on paper-based exams and summative assessment. The Panel recommended that a more diverse assessment regime was needed to ensure that formative and ongoing assessment methods and tools are incorporated into the teaching practice in the GFP. The Panel also found that there were internal verification measures put in place to monitor the quality of assessment tools deployed in the GFP. However, while the Panel acknowledges the value of this initiative, there was no clear indication that formal moderation processes

(pre and/or post moderation) were undertaken. Despite these shortcomings, the Panel was satisfied with the process for giving feedback to students on assessment in the GFP and established that the system is adequate and supports student learning. The Panel understands that SCD in general adheres to appropriate examination and invigilation processes. However, it was evident that further work is needed to ensure that these processes are carefully communicated and consistently implemented across all GFP subjects.

The Panel acknowledges the introduction of a third level in the GFP. The Panel noted, however, the high pass rate in the GFP and concluded that certain progression measures implemented in the GFP, namely the “grace mark” rule, may have contributed to this high pass rate. The Panel urges the GFP to develop and maintain rigorous progression criteria and result approval processes in order to ensure that appropriate assessment standards are upheld.

The Panel was impressed with how the Department and in particular the GFP has cultivated a positive and active relationship with its GFP alumni. The Panel concluded that this positive and inclusive relationship with GFP alumni has benefited both current and former GFP students and helped promote a mutually beneficial interaction between the two groups.

The Admission and Registration Department collects a wide range of data about students, such as pass, retention and progression rates, to inform its approach to academic and student support services. The Panel found that while there is some evidence that some of the data collected is being used for planning, more could be achieved so that data is not only analysed and reported upon but also systematically used for planning to strengthen the GFP. As far as the registry is concerned, overall, the registry services are working well and the management system is secure.

It was pleasing to see that the induction process for GFP students is working well. The Panel appreciates the initiative of providing an extended orientation for GFP students as well as the college orientation day.

The Panel was given a tour of the facilities for teaching and learning resources and found these to be appropriate. While e-learning is a good initiative, the take-up rate by faculty members is still low. The Panel concluded that a system needed to be implemented to enhance the participation of all GFP courses in the E-learning Module. This system needs to be subject to regular monitoring and review. The Panel also confirmed during the visit the range of IT services offered to students and concluded that information and learning technology services are operating satisfactorily.

There is an academic advisory procedure in place in the GFP. Guidelines for academic advising are contained in the Student Manual and these are made clear to students during orientation. The Panel concluded that a number of measures and procedures have been put in place by SCD to provide advising services to GFP students, and urged the college to systematically seek, and act upon, feedback collected from students on these measures and procedures. There are a number of different forms of learning support available to GFP students, including counselling, extracurricular activity clubs, remedial classes and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The Panel noted that the GFP has put in place measures to support students who are academically weak, mainly through the provision of remedial classes. However, the Panel is concerned that students at risk are only identified after the mid-term test and these remedial measures are activated after week eight, which is quite late in the semester to be effective. The Panel found that the planning and frequency of meetings of the three student clubs and the activities undertaken needed to be reviewed and revised to ensure that the philosophy underpinning the establishment and deployment of these clubs meets the learning objectives of the GFP.

In order to determine student satisfaction with facilities and services provided to them, student and climate surveys are regularly carried out and the results are analysed and recommendations for improvement are made. The Panel concludes that the college has taken important steps in regularly seeking to gauge students’ satisfaction with the services and facilities provided to them and in using the outcomes to inform further improvements. The Panel, however, urges SCD to develop an overarching system or policy for collecting feedback from students, which for example, would stipulate the data collection tools, frequency of deployment, the parties involved, and how data would be analysed, reported and acted upon.

The Panel confirmed in interviews that students are aware of the Code of Conduct and related penalties as well as the appeal process. The Panel concluded that violations of this code are managed satisfactorily and acknowledges that appeals can be made against decisions of the College Council.

SCD has a number of non-academic support services offered to GFP students, including health services and counselling, hostel accommodation, and catering. The Panel concluded that non-academic student support services and facilities are adequate to meet the needs of GFP students.

Regarding external engagement, the Panel noted the external engagement activities undertaken by the GFP and found these to be limited in scope. From interviews with a range of staff, the Panel found that there was not a clear shared understanding of external engagement or the communities that the college wishes to serve. The Panel concluded that there was a need for a college-wide discussion to develop a shared understanding amongst staff and students on the concept of external engagement, and to identify the communities with which the college wishes to engage. Furthermore, a coherent plan needs to be developed with measurable targets which are regularly monitored and reviewed.

A staffing needs analysis is conducted annually based on the projected student enrolment and faculty resignations. To ensure the recruitment of appropriate and qualified staff, SCD developed a human resources plan. As part of the selection process, a teaching demonstration is required from candidates residing in the Sultanate while telephone interviews are conducted for international candidates. The Panel suggests that having a comparable recruitment process for locally-based and international applicants would enhance the transparency and fairness of the process and ensure equal treatment to all applicants.

The staff induction process at SCD takes place over the course of three months from the date of appointment. Effectiveness of staff induction is measured annually through the staff induction questionnaire. The Panel established during interviews with GFP staff that they are generally satisfied with the induction given to them.

In order to support the professional growth of its faculty, SCD developed a Professional Development Policy. While the Panel acknowledges the level of commitment SCD has assigned to the area of professional development, it was not clear how the professional development activities undertaken by the college are linked to the results of staff appraisal. Furthermore, it was not clear what targets the college was trying to achieve through the professional development of its GFP faculty.

The Panel appreciates the implementation of a multifaceted performance review in the GFP at SCD. It is apparent that the college is keen to review and assure the effectiveness of faculty performance. However, the Panel concluded that the performance review in the GFP needed to be forward-looking and lead to performance enhancement and not performance assessment only. It is also crucial to show how these review tools work together as part of an overarching system for performance review of GFP staff.

SCD has in place various measures to ensure a positive organisational climate. The Panel views this with appreciation and believes that these initiatives, coupled with continuous improvement efforts and enhanced transparency, will positively affect and improve the work environment in the GFP at SCD.

Regarding Omanisation of GFP staff, SCD is committed to implementing the Omanisation policy it has developed. The college recognises, however, that it is facing difficulties in both hiring and retaining Omani staff. One of the reasons cited was that there is strong competition from the government sector. The Panel understands the existence of such difficulties, but it urges the college to be more creative in its pursuit to employ Omani faculty to join its GFP.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Scientific College of Design for its range of mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of high quality teaching in the General Foundation Programme.23
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Scientific College of Design for maintaining a positive and inclusive relationship with General Foundation Programme alumni.....31
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Scientific College of Design for its induction process including providing an extended orientation for General Foundation Programme students.34

Summary of Affirmations

A formal Affirmation recognises an instance in which SCD has accurately identified a significant opportunity for improvement and has demonstrated appropriate commitment to addressing the matter.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Scientific College of Design needs to formalise existing benchmarking agreements with other HEIs offering General Foundation Programme and supports its efforts to do so by seeking to sign formal agreements with its benchmarking partners.20

Summary of Recommendations

A formal Recommendation draws attention to a significant opportunity for improvement that SCD has either not yet accurately identified or to which it is not yet adequately attending.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design include students in future reviews of the Mission of the General Foundation Programme.13
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design take steps to embed the college Values within the General Foundation Programme and ensure these are properly disseminated.14
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design review its approach to operational planning to ensure appropriate alignment of the General Foundation Programme operations with the strategic plan of the college.15
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design implement a regular monitoring process of the operational plan of the English, Basic Sciences and Humanities Department.....16
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design revisit the risk register to ensure that college-wide risks affecting the safe running of the General Foundation Programme are identified, mitigated and monitored on a regular basis.17
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design review its General Foundation Programme grievance procedure so that it incorporates the establishment of an independent body to deal with all student grievances.18

7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design formalise and expand relationships with external General Foundation Programme reviewers and examiners.....20
8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design review and better align their General Foundation Programme English exit standards with internationally recognised English language proficiency tests, to ensure that General Foundation Programme graduates are adequately prepared for their degree programmes.23
9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design consider making formal its system for rewards and incentives to recognise innovative and excellent teaching practices in the General Foundation Programme and enhancing it with clear selection procedures that are well documented, properly communicated to all staff and implemented consistently.....24
10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement an Academic Integrity Policy that is binding for both General Foundation Programme staff and students.25
11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design consider diversifying its assessment regime in the General Foundation Programme, especially in the English component of the programme, to lessen the dependency on mid-term and final exams and paper-based exams and tests.....26
12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement a robust moderation process to ensure the integrity, relevance, consistency, accuracy and reliability of General Foundation Programme assessment.27
13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and follow a formal process to ensure the integrity and security of General Foundation Programme examinations in all subjects.....29
14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design follow robust and rigorous progression criteria and result approval processes to ensure that appropriate assessment and progression standards are maintained in the General Foundation Programme.30
15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design ensure that data collected is analysed, consolidated and systematically used for planning to strengthen the General Foundation Programme.32
16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design ensure that the E-learning Module of the General Foundation Programme be fully utilised and that it put in place structures to ensure this occurs and which are subject to regular monitoring and review.35
17. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement a mechanism to identify and support students at risk from the outset of the General Foundation Programme.37
18. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design ensure that its philosophy underpinning the establishment and deployment of student clubs meets the learning objectives of the General Foundation Programme.....37
19. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design conceptualise General Foundation Programme external engagement and develop a cohesive plan with measurable targets and which is regularly monitored and reviewed.....39

20. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement a unified recruitment process for both locally-based and international General Foundation Programme academic staff.41

21. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design evaluate its professional development arrangements for the General Foundation Programme staff to include clear goals and targets and alignment with the outcomes of staff appraisal and training needs analysis.42

22. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement innovative strategies to attract and retain Omani General Foundation Programme staff.45

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Scientific College of Design (SCD) was established in 2004 and licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman. It has five academic departments: Graphic Design, Architecture and Interior Design, Fine Arts, Fashion Design, English Language, Basic Sciences and Humanities (ELBS&H), which together offer seven programmes. All programmes are delivered in English, in affiliation with the Lebanese American University (LAU), Lebanon, apart from Fashion Design, which is delivered in Arabic and offered in affiliation with the Higher Institution of Applied Arts (HIAA), Egypt. At the time of the GFP Quality Audit, there were 1,373 students studying at the college, supported by 61 faculty members and 18 administrative staff.

To support its students in achieving success in the academic programmes, a General Foundation Programme (GFP) is offered within the ELBS&H Department. SCD is governed by the Board of Trustees and has a non-executive function. The College Council is the highest executive body within the college. The governance and management of this programme falls within the ambit of the governance and management arrangements of SCD. The programme covers English language, Study Skills, Maths and Computing, and these are offered at three levels. In Fall of Academic Year 2016-2017, there were 231 students enrolled on the GFP.

This section of the report addresses SCD Mission, Vision and Values and the strategic plan and how these are translated into the Mission of the GFP and the operational plan. The governance and management arrangements such as operational planning, risk and financial management, student grievances, and health and safety for the GFP are considered as well as the role of LAU with respect to the GFP.

1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values*

SCD has an approved strategic plan 2016-2020 within which the revised Mission, Vision and Values of the institution are contained (Portfolio, p.9). The Vision is:

Scientific College of Design aspires to occupy a preeminent position among leading art and design institutions and shape a generation of leading artists and designers who value personal integrity, moral responsibility, and civic pride. (<http://scd.edu.om/about/#vision>)

from which the Mission is derived:

Scientific College of Design is committed to academic excellence, student centeredness, and offers art and design education through practical and theoretical knowledge in an engaging environment. (<http://scd.edu.om/about/#vision>)

The Panel found that the Mission statement sets out how this Vision is to be achieved.

The ELBS&H Department's Mission is derived from SCD Mission and this revised Mission of the department was considered by the College Council in 2016 (Portfolio, p.9). The Mission is:

to prepare students achieve success in the main academic programmes at SCD by providing supportive and comprehensive educational programmes to enhance students' performance in their prospective fields of study (Portfolio, p.9).

The Mission was developed and underwent various drafts in a transparent and inclusive manner with respect to faculty and its partner institution, LAU (Portfolio, p.9).

The Panel found the ELBS&H Department's Mission to be well aligned with SCD Mission and Vision. The department's Mission is supportive of the college Mission and Vision. This is evidenced in its intent 'to prepare students to achieve academic success in the main academic programmes' through the provision of 'supportive and comprehensive educational programmes'.

The Panel concludes that the Mission of the GFP is well aligned with the Mission and Vision of SCD and generally was developed in an inclusive and transparent manner. The Panel, however, did not find evidence in documentation or from interviews with staff and students of any student involvement in the development of the Mission. The Panel urges the institution to consider including student input in the development of future revisions of the Mission.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design include students in future reviews of the Mission of the General Foundation Programme.

Flowing from the Mission, the ELBS&H Department developed five Objectives. These are:

1. Support students' educational growth through application of critical thinking skills in a variety of contexts.
2. Improve students' level of understanding of the academic environment through learner-centred education.
3. Facilitate students' integration into main stream [*sic*] study by providing opportunities to promote creativity.
4. To improve students' active knowledge of humanities, basic sciences, English language, mathematics, study skills and computing.
5. Enhance students' personal development and enable them to perform more confidently (Portfolio, pp.9-10).

The Portfolio stated and the Panel confirmed during the site visit that the Mission and Objectives are widely disseminated to both internal and external stakeholders. This is achieved in a number of ways including: the physical placement of posters containing the Mission and Objectives in the college; the student manual; and SCD website, which the Panel confirmed through observation and documentation.

The Mission is achieved through the implementation of course delivery in the four core areas of study that are stipulated in Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes (OASGFP). The Mission is also fulfilled through the conduct of placement tests and the English exit examination. To measure the extent to which these are successful in meeting the Mission and Objectives, the results of each of these tests are analysed (Portfolio, p. 10). A decision was taken in 2016 to include Mathematics and Computer Skills in the exit exam (Portfolio, p.10). The Panel acknowledges the inclusion of these two important components in the GFP exit exam.

Another measure through which SCD determines the extent to which it is meeting the Mission and Vision of the institution and thereby that of the ELBS&H Department Mission is through a number of surveys (Portfolio, p.10). The Panel confirmed through the perusal of documentation and interviews that these are conducted with students who have exited the foundation programme. It also learned from post-foundation faculty that these provide feedback on areas of strength and weakness in the GFP so that improvements can be made. Student progression rates, departmental meetings, feedback from faculty and annual review of the programme are other mechanisms employed to assess the programme's fitness.

The Panel found during interviews with staff and students that the results of such monitoring mechanisms are used to implement improvements and are useful tools in achieving the Mission and Objectives of the Department.

SCD has a set of Values which guides the institution in ‘conducting its daily activities and in planning future activities’ (<http://scd.edu.om/about/>). These Values are excellence, integrity, ethical and moral responsibility (fostering a “community of artists and designers”), lifelong learning and transparency.

The Portfolio was silent on the five Values of the college. During a range of interviews, the Panel found that the five Values of SCD are not addressed, nor how the programme is aligned with these Values. The Panel noted that the Values are not displayed in the college although they are available on SCD website. Furthermore, in interviews with management there was found little understanding about how to make the Values pertinent to the culture of the college and students in the GFP.

The Panel concludes that SCD Values need to be embedded and disseminated within the GFP.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design take steps to embed the college Values within the General Foundation Programme and ensure these are properly disseminated.

1.2 Governance and Management Arrangements

Responsibility for management of the GFP lies with the Head of Department (HoD) of the ELBS&H Department. This involves providing academic leadership and managing the administration of the GFP (Portfolio, p.11). The governance and management of the GFP is integrated into the college organisational structure. The HoD reports to the Dean of the college and is a member of the College Council. The GFP coordinator and a student representative are also members of the College Council (Portfolio, p. 11).

Apart from the College Council, there are a number of committees which manage the different aspects of SCD’s programme offerings, which includes the GFP (Portfolio, p.11). ELBS&H faculty members serve on the various institutional committees, such as the budgeting committee and the college examination committee. The roles of the HoD, the coordinators and course coordinators are clearly set out (Portfolio, p.60). There is vertical and horizontal coordination of the GFP (Portfolio, p.12). The Panel found from documentation and interviews that there is a clear organisational structure to support the delivery of the GFP.

The annual programme evaluation report is prepared by the HoD and submitted to the Dean and Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QA&E) Unit for their consideration. In addition, performance evaluation of SCD staff, including GFP staff members, is carried out and provides another check on the integration of governance and management arrangements for the delivery of the GFP (Portfolio, p.12, see 4.5 of this Report for further details).

During interviews with staff the Panel confirmed the inclusive manner in which the GFP and staff are integrated into the structures and functions of SCD. In addition, the interviews confirmed that GFP staff are subject to the same performance appraisal and staff development opportunities as the academic staff (this is addressed in more detail in Part 4 of this report). The Panel concludes that the GFP is an integral part of the governance and management of SCD and that there are sufficient lines of communication between the GFP staff and senior staff of SCD.

1.3 Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance

The delivery of the GFP is supported by LAU to which SCD is affiliated (Portfolio, p.12). This entails reviewing the programme, class visits and capacity building activities in the form of workshops and presentations to staff. The Panel confirmed that LAU is active in contributing to the quality of the curriculum including supporting the delivery of the programme. The Panel learned from a perusal of documentation and during interviews that one of the recommendations made to enhance the quality of the programme delivery was to add a third level to the GFP courses. An application was made to the MoHE and after receiving approval this was implemented.

In addition, a decision was taken following recommendations to enhance the support offered by LAU to SCD through increasing the number of visits. The Panel learned from different interviews that this has been implemented (Portfolio, p.12). There are now two support visits which take place during the Fall and Spring semesters and there is an Assessment visit in the Summer semester.

The Panel concludes that there is a working and cooperative relationship with the affiliate with continuous support and guidance being offered by LAU. This contributes to maintaining and enhancing the quality of the GFP and its constituent courses.

1.4 Operational Planning

The ELBS&H Department has a 2016-17 Operational Plan (OP) (Portfolio, p.13). The OP is a departmental plan which includes all the course/programme offerings including that of the GFP. The Department OP uses the same template as the academic departments, which is further evidence of integration of the GFP within the governance and management of SCD. After the OP is developed it is forwarded to the Dean and the QA&E Unit for review and approval.

The Panel noted that the OP consists of seven strategies, with measures and indicators being provided to guide the GFP. However, the strategies, measures and indicators need to be considerably sharpened, as currently they are too vague to guide the department and the link between the OP and the Strategic Plan is not obvious. It is not clear, for example, how the strategies contained in the ELBS&H Department OP are aligned to SCD's strategic plan goals. Furthermore, the link between ELBS&H Department OP strategies and college strategies outlined in the Action Plan of Strategic Goals is not clear and open to many assumptions. Nevertheless, the budget, responsible persons and timeframes are clearly set out. The results column is blank despite the OP being for 2016-2017 Academic Year hence the Panel could not judge whether the targets set in the OP were achieved.

The Panel concludes that alignment between the OP of the ELBS&H Department and the college Strategic Plan needs to be strengthened. The ELBS&H Department does not show appropriate alignment of the OP to the Strategic Plan or to the Action Plan contained within the Strategic Plan. This needs to be addressed, in order to ensure the GFP is providing an appropriate foundation not just for SCD's programmes of study but also to help set the course of achievement towards the college's goals in general.

Recommendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design review its approach to operational planning to ensure appropriate alignment of the General Foundation Programme operations with the strategic plan of the college.

The Portfolio states that monitoring of the OP takes place annually with areas of improvement being identified (Portfolio, p. 13). No evidence was found that monitoring is carried out throughout the year. Given that the OP is an annual plan, it is not sufficient to monitor it annually. If conducted at this time, it is in effect a review.

The Panel concludes that a regular monitoring system needs to be put in place with mechanisms so that interventions can be made during the OP's life cycle when targets are in danger of not being met.

Recommendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design implement a regular monitoring process of the operational plan of the English, Basic Sciences and Humanities Department.

1.5 Financial Management

SCD has a bottom up approach to budgeting (Portfolio, p.13). This ensures that the needs of every aspect of the GFP are taken into account in order to support the effective delivery of the GFP. The budget for the GFP is embedded within the budget requests of the other programmes and courses offered within the ELBS&H Department. Each faculty member prepares his or her input. The HoD along with a member of the Budget Committee consolidates the input, which is then forwarded to the Budget Committee Head who prepares a consolidated budget in agreement with the Dean of SCD. This is presented at the College Council (Portfolio, p.13). Once approved, it is forwarded to the BoT and then the Board of Directors for final approval.

The Panel found from documentation and interviews with staff that the process is followed and that there is an inclusive bottom-up budgeting approach taken by SCD. Furthermore, the Panel heard during interviews with staff that the approved budgets have provided adequate resources for the delivery of a quality GFP. It was confirmed in interviews with the management of the college that, so far, the GFP has not witnessed any unexpected cuts to the budget. There is also room for flexibility where budget requests are entertained during the academic year.

The Panel concludes that the inclusive bottom-up approach taken to budgeting ensures that there are sufficient financial resources to deliver a quality GFP programme.

1.6 Risk Management

A risk management policy was developed and approved during 2016-2017 Academic Year (Portfolio, p.14). A college risk management plan has also been in place since 2013-2014 and a register is kept that includes the risks of the ELBS&H Department (Portfolio, p.14). Risk management is approached in the same way as the budgeting process at SCD with the involvement of every faculty member in the identification of risks (Portfolio, p.14). The risks identified are placed on the risk register and are graded from low to extreme (Portfolio, p.14).

The risks identified by the ELBS&H Department along with those from other departments are consolidated by the QA&E Unit (Portfolio, p.14). The consolidated risk register is screened and finalised by the Dean and the QA&E Unit. SCD claims that the College Council reviews the risks each academic year (Portfolio, p.15), but the Panel did not find evidence of this.

The Panel learned in interviews with senior management that the QA&E Unit is responsible for the oversight of the risk register. The Panel received confirmation in interviews that the Risk Register

is used by faculty and students to report health and safety risks for action to be undertaken. However, while there is a policy and process in place for risk management, generally the type of risks identified are of a minor nature with many not needing to be on a risk register and which could, in some cases, be dealt with through, for example, the helpdesk.

The Panel concludes that the risk register does not cover a range of high level risks - for instance in the areas of finance, human resources, and health and safety - which could have a deleterious impact on the GFP and this is a concern. Action needs to be taken to address this.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design revisit the risk register to ensure that college-wide risks affecting the safe running of the General Foundation Programme are identified, mitigated and monitored on a regular basis.

1.7 Monitoring and Review

There is a multi-pronged approach to monitoring and review of the GFP. The Department has a continuous process of monitoring and review of the programme (Portfolio, p. 15). This includes the monitoring of grades by the course co-ordinator, monitoring of the programme curriculum, and verification of assessment (Portfolio, p.15). The Panel confirmed from documentation and from interviews that these aspects constitute an annual review.

Feedback is also sought from former GFP students and from faculty teaching on the academic programmes (Portfolio, p.15). This results in a review report which provides information regarding the result of the monitoring and review of the GFP. The Panel confirmed from documentation and interviews with staff that improvements are made as a consequence of the review findings.

A two-phase programme review was carried out in 2015-16 Academic Year that involved both internal and external stakeholders (Portfolio, p. 16). The former involves faculty members of the post-GFP programmes. The review process resulted in a number of recommendations being made. The Panel heard during interviews with staff that the recommendations were implemented. For example, more emphasis is now placed on the speaking component of the GFP in response to feedback from the degree programmes.

The Panel concludes that there is a clear review process of the GFP with recommendations being used for improvement.

1.8 Student Grievance Process

There is a Student Manual 2016-2017 which clearly sets out the grievance procedures that students should follow (Portfolio, p.16). This is also contained in the Manual for Academic Rules and Procedures. There is a separate process for academic grievance and non-academic grievance (Portfolio, pp.16-17). There are different forms used for different types of grievances and issues are recorded in an advising log.

If a student has a grievance, the first step for the student is to try to resolve it informally by approaching the teacher, academic adviser or HoD. If the matter is not resolved, the student may take the grievance to the office of the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs. If the grievance is not resolved, then the student can contact the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs, who issues a decision within 10 working days of receiving the required documentation. In cases where the grievant is

requesting a change of grade, the request is considered by the instructor, the HoD and the college Dean, whose decision is final. The Panel confirmed the grievance process that a student needs to follow from documentation and interviews. Furthermore, the Panel confirmed in interviews with students that they are well aware of the grievance process.

The Panel notes that there is not a formally constituted grievance committee/body and is concerned about students having to approach individuals to resolve their matter. The inherent unequal power relations constitute a barrier for student grievances and confidence in a fair outcome.

The Panel concludes that the grievance procedure needs to be reviewed so that a formal process is introduced, including the establishment of an independent body, and which applies to both academic and non-academic matters of the GFP.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design review its General Foundation Programme grievance procedure so that it incorporates the establishment of an independent body to deal with all student grievances.

1.9 Health and Safety

SCD has an implemented Health and Safety Plan which was put in place in 2012-2013 and reviewed in the Fall of 2016; thereafter the Health and Safety Policy was developed (Portfolio, p.17). The Plan was reviewed by the Administration and Human Resource Manager (AHRM) and the college nurse who developed the Health and Safety Policy. Health and Safety Audits are carried out by the Civil Defence. SCD has a current certificate issued by the Civil Defence which is valid for two years and states that SCD is meeting Oman's health and safety requirements. There is an annual health and safety review of the college facilities under the auspices of the QA&E Unit. According to SCD's Health and Safety Policy, the AHRM also acts as a Health and Safety Manager in the college. The Panel learned from interviews that one of the QA&E Unit's responsibilities is to check that the GFP meets all relevant national requirements. Regular meetings with the GFP staff and the ELBS&H HoD are held and one of the QA&E Unit members is from the GFP. The Panel was told that the QA&E Unit found this helpful in coordinating with the ELBS&H Department and in disseminating information in departmental meetings.

The Panel noted through observations and documentation the health and safety arrangements of the college. There is a health clinic that is run by a full-time nurse to provide support to students with health issues (Portfolio, p.18). Incidents are reported to the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs for any relevant action to be taken.

The Panel learned during interviews that the nurse refers students to a doctor as required. Emergency cases are taken to hospital. The Panel also heard from students that frequent emails are sent by the nurse to students regarding health matters to support healthy living. External speakers are invited during the course of the academic year to give presentations to students on vital health matters (Portfolio, p.18). The nurse is also responsible for the health of students living in hostel and is on call (further discussion on the hostel is contained in 3.10 of this Report). The Panel confirmed during interviews with students and staff that the health services provided are sufficient and the requirements of students are adequately met.

2 GFP STUDENT LEARNING

Scientific College of Design (SCD) offers seven undergraduate programmes in the area of art and design. In addition, the college offers a Foundation Programme, which supports students in the acquisition of English language, skills in Mathematics, Information Technology (IT) as well as general study skills. The GFP is an integral part of SCD providing students with the appropriate academic skills to be able to succeed in the undergraduate programme of their choice.

The GFP offers a programme at three English language levels to cater for students with different learning needs. The GFP level three programme was introduced in 2016 to accommodate students with English language knowledge who were still below levels one or two.

This chapter reports on the Panel's finding in relation to the following: GFP aims and learning outcomes, curriculum, student entry and exit standards, teaching quality, academic integrity, assessment and student achievement, feedback on student assessment, academic security and invigilation, student retention and progression and, relationship with GFP alumni.

2.1 GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes

In line with its Mission, the GFP has a strategic goal to prepare students to achieve success in the main academic programmes at SCD (Portfolio, p.19). SCD initiated their GFP in 2009 following the decision by the MoHE which required all HEIs in Oman to adopt the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes (OASGFP) (Portfolio, p.19). To that end, the GFP equips students with the necessary English, Maths, IT and General Study Skills to succeed in their post-foundation studies.

SCD identified eight objectives for their GFP. These are:

1. Develop proficiency in the English language skills;
2. Articulate clearly organised ideas in conversation with supporting evidence using appropriate vocabulary;
3. Make a standard oral presentation which informs and/or persuades the audience;
4. Understand and discuss ideas delivered in academic lectures;
5. Read texts to identify main ideas, extract specific and detailed information and answer questions, produce written texts and reports showing a control in organization, sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary;
6. Exhibit evidence of summarizing and research skills;
7. Gain basic understanding of applied mathematics and,
8. Learn the use of Microsoft Office applications such as Word, Excel, Power point, Access, etc.

The GFP objectives and learning outcomes align to the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes (OASGFP) and meet OAAA's minimum requirements.

Under LAU guidance, the GFP at SCD initiated a review of programme course descriptions and learning outcomes during Fall 2014-2015. Later, in Fall 2015-2016, the department's Mission and GFP Objectives were revised. The Panel was also informed that, in order to align GFP's learning outcomes with the newly revised department's Mission and GFP Objectives, student learning outcomes were reviewed again in Spring 2016-2017 and finalised under the guidance of LAU's representative.

The Panel compared the GFP learning outcomes with those set by the OAAA for the four study areas and concluded that the GFP follows the guidelines closely and meets all the required learning outcome standards. Based on these requirements, SCD had initially developed a foundation programme at two entry levels, GFP001 and GFP002 but on GFP's assessment of student academic

capability, SCD obtained permission from MoHE in 2015 -2016 to introduce a third level for students entering the programme at a lower level of language competence. The Panel acknowledges the efforts made by the GFP to provide a more appropriate and diverse study path for students needing additional academic support and more time to transition into degree programmes.

After consulting the course documents, the Panel concluded that the learning outcomes set out by the GFP in the various courses are well aligned to achieve the course outcomes. Students are provided with a syllabus for each course, which clearly outlines the course aims, learning outcomes and assessment tasks, including rubrics and the assessment plans.

The Panel supports the initiative by the GFP to introduce an additional course (Research) to prepare students better for their future studies. In addition, the introduction of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is further proof that the GFP is committed to providing students with a quality programme. CALL supports students in enhancing and developing their English language skills, such as vocabulary, reading, grammar and listening. In addition, CALL provides students with the opportunity to engage in independent online learning activities.

The Panel learned that curriculum is reviewed every two years to see whether GFP learning outcomes are attained (See section 2.2 below). In addition, there are general skill coordinators whose job is to ensure “vertical and horizontal coordination” for the courses in each level and skills across levels and monitor the gradation and achievement of GFP learning outcomes (Portfolio, p.11). The Panel particularly concurs with the GFP about the importance of benchmarking of its programme and supports the GFP’s initiative to formalise benchmarking networks with other HE GFP providers (Portfolio, p20). Over the past two years, the GFP has engaged in some informal benchmarking activities with a number of other GFP providers, namely Middle East College (MEC), and Arab Open University (AOU). The GFP has started the process to formalise this relationship.

Affirmation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Scientific College of Design needs to formalise existing benchmarking agreements with other HEIs offering General Foundation Programme and supports its efforts to do so by seeking to sign formal agreements with its benchmarking partners.

While the Panel agrees that GFP makes a concerted effort to seek external feedback from the affiliate, i.e. Lebanese American University (LAU), it concluded it would be advantageous for the GFP in order to maintain accuracy and quality to formalise external review processes, such as the one undertaken with MEC, rather than just using them in an advising capacity. Currently mid-term tests and exams go through a verification process undertaken by an internal general skills coordinator. However, to ensure and enhance validity of exams they should also go through an external verification and validation process. This was also identified by the LAU visiting team who recommended engaging external reviewers.

Recommendation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design formalise and expand relationships with external General Foundation Programme reviewers and examiners.

2.2 Curriculum

SCD's GFP curriculum follows a structured study programme with the aim of preparing students for their future degree studies. As highlighted with the learning outcomes described under section 2.1, the GFP follows the guidelines set by OASGFP closely in order to meet the OAAA's minimum requirements (Portfolio, p.21). The GFP consists of three levels which span a three-semester academic year (Fall, Spring and Summer). The Fall and Spring semesters consist of 15 teaching weeks each, with the final exams in week 16. The weekly contact hours in these two semesters are 16 for level one and 22 for levels two and three. The Summer semester, however, is considerably shorter and lasts for eight weeks only, with 24 weekly contact hours for level one and 30 for levels two and three.

Listening and Speaking, Reading, and Writing Skills are taught in all levels. Maths and Computer are taught in levels two and three only. Level three also introduces students to CALL and Research. Study Skills, on the other hand, are included and formatively assessed in level two curriculum, but marks do not contribute towards the final grade in this level. In response to a clarification by the Panel, SCD indicated that Study Skills is a "supporting course", which is "offered to enhance student performance in the other 3 components of the GFP" (SCD response to Matters for Clarifications, point 6, p.2).

There is a GFP Guidebook (2016-17), which outlines all aspects of the GFP, including programme objectives, learning outcomes, syllabi, assessment strategy, passing criteria and progression regulations. In response to a clarification, however, the Panel was told that this guide is only for staff and there is no Arabic version of it available for students.

In Academic Year 2015-16, GFP at SCD reviewed its curriculum in two phases (Portfolio, pp.21-22). In the first phase, the programme was internally reviewed by faculty members and the HoD. Proposed improvements, such as revising the department Mission and GFP objectives, allocating 20% of the total mark for formative assessment and seeking permission from McGraw Hill to use their English placement test were agreed. In the second phase, in which two GFP alumni, an academic from MEC, head of department and faculty were involved, review mainly covered areas such as assessment methods, extracurricular activities, and feedback to students. This phase, too, stressed the importance of allocating more weightage to formative assessment. The resulting curriculum review report was shared with the LAU representative for further consultation and proposed changes were raised to the College Council. It is worth noting at this point, however, that while the visiting reviewer from LAU declared their inability to "clearly assess the curriculum, as it is not of their expertise" (LAU Report), they did recommend that SCD assign external reviewers for a full curriculum review of the GFP. In response to a clarification by the Panel whether the LAU representative in this visit was a GFP specialist, SCD advised that the LAU representative for the assessment visit in 2016 was an audit specialist, not a GFP specialist. However, support visits in Fall and Spring were undertaken by the person in charge of the Intensive English Programme at LAU. Interview with the LAU representative confirmed that, although LAU has not fully assessed the GFP and their input is mainly on the English component of the programme, the affiliate believes that SCD has a solid GFP with good gradation.

The Panel established that the GFP curricula were initially developed through the affiliation with LAU. However, over the years the programme has become more autonomous, with LAU moving to a more advisory role in curriculum development and review. Staff members at SCD have contextualised the GFP to the needs of the Omani students, ensuring proper alignment with the OASGFP requirements. LAU still maintains an active role in the GFP through annual visits and by providing professional development sessions to GFP staff. This was confirmed in interviews with GFP staff and the LAU representative.

Modules and course outlines are well published and made available to students from the outset of their study in the college. GFP faculty members are expected to maintain a course file for every

module they teach. The course file includes information about the syllabus, textbook table of contents, assignments, assessment instruments with rubrics, sample answer scripts, attendance records and grade analysis (Portfolio, p. 67). These files are periodically reviewed by the HoD and are archived by the QA&E Unit (Portfolio, p. 25). A sample of the course files was reviewed by the Panel and it concurs that these files are a good initiative as they provide staff and all those concerned with a comprehensive overview of the course and its requirements.

The GFP introduced independent study to their programme (Research and CALL) for students in level 3. The Panel supports the initiative taken by the GFP to further support and encourage students in their studies by introducing a computer assisted language-learning course (CALL) and research strategies and techniques at level three. Both additions are seen to contribute positively in providing valuable learning opportunities for students through active involvement in online learning and effective use of information sources. Starting from Fall 2017, e-learning was introduced at all levels, in order to give students an additional option for learning outside the normal classroom hours (Portfolio, p. 22). It is encouraging to note that SCD in general and GFP in particular are aware of the importance of introducing information technology in the teaching and learning process today and hence are introducing more e-learning resources for students (for more details, see section 3.5).

2.3 *Student Entry and Exit Standards*

Entry requirements for the GFP are published on SCD website and are available in the Student Handbook. In addition, students undergo placement tests to ascertain their level for English, Maths and IT. Based on the results, students are then placed in either GFP1, 2 or 3.

Benchmarking of SCD entry tests with the MEC was to confirm that the criteria applied in the GFP are at a comparable level to other HE providers in Oman. To this end, in Fall 2016 the GFP sent 18 mixed ability students from the three levels to MEC to sit their placement test. The results were reported to be relatively positive as the majority of SCD students were placed at the same level at MEC as they were at SCD. It was not clear to the Panel from the evidence provided, however, whether the placement criteria used by both HEIs to stream students into levels were comparable. Concern was also expressed in a LAU review report of June 2016 that SCD needed to develop a clear set of admission criteria in order to continue to maintain good academic standards.

In June 2015, the GFP undertook some further benchmarking of its exit English test against an internationally recognised standardised test, namely IELTS. Six students from SCD were sent to take IELTS at Hawthorn English Language Centre, Muscat. The results of two students only were provided, showing an overall Band of 5. No further evidence of benchmarking with IELTS could be obtained. The justification given by SCD was that in 2016-17, the college was given permission to use McGraw Hill placement exam as their placement/exit exam.

The Panel is, however, sceptical that entry and exit tests should be identical, as there is a chance it will not provide the GFP with a clear indication of the progress made by students during their studies. While the GFP maintains that the McGraw Hill textbooks being used by the programme are closely aligned with TOEFL standards (Portfolio, p.24), benchmarking with, for example, TOEFL and/or IELTS test at the end of GFP would give a more definite and internationally recognised indication that students have indeed reached the required English language standards to succeed in their degree studies (IELTS 5.0, TOEFL 500 as minimum).

Despite English language being identified to the Panel as a major challenge to students succeeding in higher degree programmes, few minor changes have been made to the programme itself. Feedback gathered from faculty and students in the degree programmes in 2015-16 raised some concern about the English language standards of GFP students, particularly in reading reference materials, exam-taking and submitting well-written assignments. During interviews, post-

foundation staff were generally satisfied with the level of degree students in mathematics and computing. Interviews also showed that most faculty on degree programmes thought that students generally joined their post-foundation studies with a good understanding of academic integrity (see section 2.5) and satisfactory presentation skills, compared to direct entry students.

Drawing from the evidence cited above, and interviews, the concern remains that there is no benchmarking of the GFP's English exit test to ensure it aligns with IELTS or TOEFL or other internationally recognised tests. At this stage SCD is not entertaining any modifications to the exit testing, despite some feedback from an external review.

Recommendation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design review and better align their General Foundation Programme English exit standards with internationally recognised English language proficiency tests, to ensure that General Foundation Programme graduates are adequately prepared for their degree programmes.

2.4 Teaching Quality

SCD's Mission clearly articulates the college's commitment to academic excellence and student centeredness. The first goal in the college's Strategic Plan 2016-2020 is "Academic excellence for a more diverse student population through high quality teaching/learning in an optimal educational environment" (Strategic Plan 2016-2020, p.10). In its GFP Guidebook 2016-17, SCD also very briefly outlines its "teaching and learning strategy", which emphasises diversity in teaching methods and learning techniques; the creation of collaborative and interactive environment; independent learning, and constructive assessment and feedback.

The GFP has introduced a number of measures that are verified by internal and external moderation of teaching quality (Portfolio, pp.24-25). These include: peer evaluation, online course and/or instructor evaluation by students, faculty evaluation by the HoD, HoD evaluation by faculty and the Dean, self-appraisal and class visitation by LAU representatives (see section 4.5 of this Report). At the beginning of each academic year, the professional development team prepares the peer evaluation schedule and the HoD approves it. Each lecturer undergoes a number of peer observation sessions during the year. In addition, all courses for each instructor are evaluated by students every semester. If a GFP faculty member scores less than 70% for two consecutive semesters in a given course, they will no longer be allowed to teach this course, before they have had an opportunity to enhance their teaching skill for the subject (Portfolio, p.26). Faculty meetings with the HoD to discuss course files are minuted and recorded on a pre-set form. During visits by the affiliate, LAU representatives also visit classrooms and put forward their suggestions for improvements. These mechanisms were confirmed in interviews with GFP management and staff. The Panel also learned through interviews that the GFP staff use a number of teaching methods that clearly focus on building student confidence and instilling practises of independent learning.

Student feedback, either through formal surveys or through interviews, established that teaching at the GFP is supportive and the teachers are highly valued for their commitment to the student learning process.

Commendtion 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Scientific College of Design for its range of mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of high quality teaching in the General Foundation Programme.

In 2016, SCD introduced a Language Policy to ensure that English language is used as a medium of instruction and communication (Portfolio p.25). The college believes this will ultimately help enhance students' communication skills and assist both GFP staff and students to adopt a communicative approach to teaching and learning and, in turn, move gradually to a more student-centred approach (Portfolio, p.25). The Panel established through the interviewing process and referring to external reports that the GFP at SCD has taken concrete steps towards establishing a more objective-driven and outcome-based approach to teaching. However, no clear evidence was presented to conclude that there is an overarching pedagogical framework for the GFP. The Panel recognises that teachers work together closely and display a strong team spirit, however, that does not translate into a clear and consistent teaching philosophy.

Consequently, and supported by course outlines provided to the Panel, it is evident that teaching methods used in the GFP are still limited in their scope. The Panel believes, and this is supported by an external reviewer, that it would be advantageous to improve the student learning process if the GFP developed and agreed on a common teaching philosophy.

SCD recognises good performance and employee contribution to the Department (Portfolio, p.63). The Panel established from documentary evidence and during the interview process that incentives for good teaching practice are offered at the GFP. The Panel learned that most teachers received incentives, such as thank you letters and bonuses, for good teaching last academic year. Additional supporting material provided to the Panel in response to draft five of the Report also showed that a system is in place to recognise good performance of staff which identifies a number of evaluation criteria and is based on the ratings received in different types of appraisal, such as "student instructor evaluation" and "supervisor evaluation". It remains unclear to the Panel, however, how different types of appraisal ratings are factored in, in deciding on the eligibility/non-eligibility of staff for incentives. None of the supporting materials presented to the Panel before, during or after the visit shows whether student instructor evaluation and supervisor evaluation, for example, are allocated the same or different weightage. Furthermore, while employee participation in activities also seems to be taken into consideration by the Dean and Chairman of the Board of Directors in identifying deserving cases, the documents presented to the Panel are silent about the parameters against which this participation is evaluated in terms of value or effectiveness.

The Panel acknowledges SCD management's efforts to communicate the Performance Analysis Summary and Action Plan to the college faculty and staff through email. The Panel is concerned, however, that key SCD documents, such as the Quality Manual and Faculty Handbook do not provide any information on formal systems for rewards and incentives. The Panel believes that, if such a reward system is to continue, in order to maintain transparency in the process and achieve fairness between GFP staff, it needs to be made formal and enhanced with fully developed and clear selection procedures that are well documented, properly communicated to all staff and implemented consistently.

Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design consider making formal its system for rewards and incentives to recognise innovative and excellent teaching practices in the General Foundation Programme and enhancing it with clear selection procedures that are well documented, properly communicated to all staff and implemented consistently.

2.5 *Academic Integrity*

Upholding the principles of academic integrity, including fairness, accountability and honesty is one of SCD's Values. SCD has developed a Copyright and Patent Policy as well as a Verification Policy for exams. These policies are published in the Quality Manual. The Copyright and Patent Policy as well as a Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy, which was developed in Fall 2016, are published in the Student Manual. The Student Code of Conduct contained in the Student Manual also identifies breaching intellectual property rights as a conduct that may result in a disciplinary action.

The GFP recognises the importance of teaching students research and referencing skills from an early stage. Both in the General Study Skills Course offered in Level 2 and the Research and Information Literacy Skills course offered in Level 3, referencing styles and plagiarism are covered. Further training in research is provided to degree students through the Learning Research Techniques. There is also evidence that awareness-raising activities about preventing plagiarism have been organised for GFP students. This was confirmed during interviews with the GFP management, staff and students.

The Panel learned that Library staff members participate in informing students about copyright. To this end, and in line with the evidence cited above, students interviewed confirmed that they were well aware of the expectations of academic integrity and they were equally aware of the consequences and penalties imposed in case of any misconduct committed.

As for GFP staff, two teachers attended a workshop on research practices organised by the Arab Open University in December 2016. However, the Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy is not published in any other documentation, other than the Student Manual, which lead to the conclusion that the policy only applies to students but not staff. This is further confirmed by the fact that the current policy statement and purpose clearly limit the scope of the policy to plagiarism in student assessment.

The Panel learned that the plagiarism detection software "Turnitin" is now available to both staff and students, and workshops on how to use the software were held. Staff and students confirmed that they now have access to the software.

Irrespective of some positive initiatives to raise awareness of academic integrity amongst the student population, the Panel concluded that an all-encompassing academic integrity policy, binding for both GFP staff and students, needed to be developed and implemented effectively and with some urgency.

Recommendation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement an Academic Integrity Policy that is binding for both General Foundation Programme staff and students.

2.6 *Assessment of Student Achievement*

The GFP at SCD recognises the importance of fair, equitable and reliable assessment procedures (Portfolio, pp.27-28). In order to ensure alignment between the programme objectives and learning outcomes and assessment activities, ELBS&H Department developed an assessment plan for the four GFP learning areas, English, Maths, IT and Study Skills (Portfolio, p.27). According to this plan, a number of assessment methods are used, including mid-term and final examinations, quizzes, in-class activities and assignments.

As per SCD's definition of formative and summative assessment, the distribution of marks between formative assessment (in-class activities, quizzes and assignments) and summative assessment (mid-term and final exams) for the three levels is 40% for formative assessment and 60% for summative assessment in the English subjects. The exception here is Listening and Speaking Skills, where formative assessment takes only 20% of the mark in levels one and two, and 30% in level three. For Mathematics and Computing, the division is 30% for formative assessment and 70% for summative assessment.

While the Panel acknowledges the steps taken by SCD so far to lessen the dependency on summative assessments and paper-based exams in some courses, such as the reduction of weightage of summative assessment in speaking and listening skills and the introduction of class activity and assignments in the assessment of listening and speaking and writing skills, the Panel found that reliance on paper-based exams and summative assessment to ascertain student progression and achievement of learning outcomes continues to be onerous. This echoes concerns raised by the external reviewer in reports and meetings with the GFP staff. In his report on the assessment of GFP modules at SCD, p.4, the external reviewer from MEC wrote:

The number of paper-based assessments should be reduced. In each module, there are 2 quizzes, 2 tests, 1 midterm, and 1 final. This means that each module has 6 paper-based assessments. In each level of English, a student will take 36 standardised assessments. Isn't that too much for them?

As was indicated by an external reviewer from LAU, the GFP should consider revisiting its delivery and classroom methods within "feasible and practical formative assessment techniques" (LAU Team Report, December 2016, p.2). To this end, the Panel is of the view that a more diverse assessment regime needs to be adopted by the GFP at SCD to ensure that formative and ongoing assessment methods and tools are incorporated into their teaching practice.

Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design consider diversifying its assessment regime in the General Foundation Programme, especially in the English component of the programme, to lessen the dependency on mid-term and final exams and paper-based exams and tests.

The GFP initiated some informal benchmarking activities for its assessment process with MEC. As pointed out above (see 2.3), SCD invited an external reviewer from MEC to review assessment in the GFP modules. Some GFP staff also attended a knowledge sharing seminar at AOU in May 2015 in a joint benchmarking exercise. While the Panel views this as a positive move, it is the Panel's opinion that if value were to be gained from these exercises, they should be sustained and formalised with clear terms of reference (see section 2.1).

Following the curriculum review in 2016 (Portfolio, p.27) the GFP acknowledged that more robust control mechanisms needed to be introduced in order to guarantee validity, relevance and appropriate gradation in their exams. Now, formative assessments are prepared and conducted by course instructors, in coordination with the respective course coordinators (Portfolio, p. 27). As for summative assessments (mid-term and final exams), starting from Fall 2016-2017, a general skills coordinator was tasked with overseeing the process and review of all exams of the three levels to ascertain proper gradation, validity and accuracy of the exams, as well as alignment with the specified learning outcomes for each course and level before internal verification by the HoD (Portfolio, p.28).

Further measures to ensure a smooth examination process were introduced and a departmental examination committee was formed to administer the examination process in coordination with the college Examination Committee (Portfolio, p.28). The GFP is represented on this committee by two faculty members. The process at the college level and the roles and responsibilities of the committee are outlined in the Exam Rules and Regulations Manual. In line with this, the departmental examination committee prepares the exam, invigilation and marking schedules for the mid-term and final exams. This was confirmed by the Panel during interviews.

The GFP has also started to undertake some double and blind marking to ensure increased reliability in their grade distribution. Blind marking of samples of the mid-term and final writing skills exam papers was started in Academic Year 2015-2016. Cross marking of final exam papers was also introduced (Portfolio, p.28). This was verified in interviews with GFP staff.

While the Panel acknowledges the validity of the positive initiatives described above, there was no clear indication that formal moderation processes (pre- and/or post-moderation) were undertaken. The Panel clearly established through examination of evidence and interviewing staff of the GFP that there was no clear understanding amongst staff as to what a formal moderation process entails. The process is often confused with internal validation by the HoD and blind and cross marking, but there is no evidence of any formal and systematic moderation of exams by internal or external moderators to, for instance, ensure that marking guidelines and rubrics have been accurately and consistently applied.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement a robust moderation process to ensure the integrity, relevance, consistency, accuracy and reliability of General Foundation Programme assessment.

2.7 *Feedback to Students on Assessment*

SCD has implemented a number of measures to support appropriate feedback on student work including the recent introduction of an Assessment Feedback Policy that clearly outlines expectations from faculty members concerning constructive and timely feedback. The Manual for Academic Rules and Procedures also stipulates that graded assessment should be returned to students within one week highlighting mistakes and that enough time should be dedicated in class to discuss the correct answers for exams and quizzes. As part of the assessment process, SCD and the GFP developed assessment rubrics for individual assessment tasks for English language skills, particularly writing and speaking skills, and research. These rubrics describe the expected levels of performance against which the students will be assessed. The rubrics are made available to students with their assessment tasks (Portfolio, p.29). As far as Maths and Computing are concerned, the Panel could not find evidence of grading rubrics in use for these two subjects. Upon requesting additional evidence, the Panel was presented with a sample of answer keys instead. To ensure that GFP staff understood the importance of rubrics, a workshop was delivered by LAU representatives as part of a staff development event. The Panel was informed that the rubrics will undergo regular reviews to make sure they continue to align with the assessment tasks.

Feedback to students on assessment in the GFP takes various forms. Written feedback is provided on exams and tests, but faculty members often discuss common mistakes during class time and office hours (Portfolio, pp.29-30). Students are also required to sign on mid-term exam papers as proof of receiving feedback (Portfolio, p.30).

As an opportunity for improvement in this area, the GFP's external reviewer from MEC suggested that the type of feedback provided to students on exams and its timeliness be highlighted in the GFP course outlines, syllabus and the student's handbook. He also suggested that coordinators needed to collect samples of students' written work to ensure that proper and timely feedback is given to them.

In the Students' Perception of the GFP Survey 2016-2017, students expressed a moderate satisfaction with the timeliness of feedback on exams and gave a rating of 3.5 on a five-point scale. The Panel established through interviews with students that they were provided with feedback on quizzes in writing and orally. Students also confirmed that feedback provided by their tutors was helpful and constructive and helped them avoid similar mistakes in subsequent assignments.

Overall the Panel was satisfied that the feedback process in the GFP is adequate and supports student learning and urges the GFP to continue seeking students' feedback on the process for continuous improvement

2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation

SCD very briefly, and only in general terms, outlines its Examination Procedures in the Manual for Academic Rules and Procedures. More details pertaining to academic security and invigilation, scheduling of final exams, responsibilities of the Examination Committee, and guidelines for invigilators and students, however, are included in the Exam Rules and Regulations Manual.

It was difficult for the Panel to comment on this section of the Portfolio as the GFP did not address this section well. In its Portfolio submission, the GFP writes mainly about the preparation of exam scripts, rather than measures in place to guarantee the academic security and integrity of assessment in the GFP and the safe storage of mid-term and final exams (Portfolio, pp. 30-31). In response to a clarification by the Panel, the college provided more relevant details about the procedures in place in this regard.

Following verification by the HoD, mid-term and final exam papers are handed over to the course coordinators for photocopying. Three versions of every mid-term and final exam paper are made, where versions A and B are used in the exam and version C is used for exams for students who miss the regular exam for legitimate reasons (Portfolio, p.30). Course coordinators, in turn, submit photocopied exam papers in sealed envelopes to the departmental Examination Committee, which stores the exams in a secure place in the department. Invigilators then collect the exam papers from the Head of the Examination Committee shortly before the exam and open the envelopes only in the exam hall.

There are appropriate invigilation processes in place to ensure the safe conduct of exams. Invigilators are provided with clear guidelines of examination protocols sent by the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs before the commencement of exams and these are included in the Exam Rules and Regulations Manual. Emails by the HoD outlining procedures pertaining to invigilation schedules, marking of exams and approval of marks are also sent to staff. Randomly selected samples of mid-term and final exams are blind marked before the commencement of correction and all papers for these two types of assessment are cross and double marked following a pre-set exam marking schedule (Portfolio, p.31).

Following the marking process, the results are presented to the departmental Examination Board, which reviews and approves them. The results are then uploaded on the portal and verified by the instructors and the HoD respectively. Following analysis by the Admission and Registration Department of the whole cohort, the results are then forwarded to the College Council for final approval before announcing the results to students (SCD response to matters for clarification, point 18, p.4).

The Panel established when talking to students that they are made aware of exam regulations, consequences of cheating and/or dishonest conduct during the exams. During interviews with staff, too, the role of instructors in blind marking and cross marking was confirmed. The Panel heard, however, that Maths papers are not double marked and are corrected by individual instructors only. It was also observed by the Panel that in some examination schedules in 2016-2017, single invigilators were assigned to exam rooms for various GFP subjects. This can have serious implications on the integrity of the process and can limit GFP's ability to effectively enforce the exam code of conduct. Furthermore, the Panel observed an instance of discrepancy between policy provisions in the Manual for Academic Rules and Procedures and those in the Exam Rules and Regulations Manual pertaining to the maximum number of final exams a student may be required to take in a single day. In the former, the maximum number of exams is three, while in the latter it is two. This obviously can confuse all parties and lead to inconsistency in practice.

While the Panel understands that SCD in general adheres to appropriate examination and invigilation processes, it was evident that further work is needed to ensure that these processes are carefully communicated and consistently implemented across all GFP subjects.

Recommendation 13

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and follow a formal process to ensure the integrity and security of General Foundation Programme examinations in all subjects.

2.9 Student Retention and Progression

The GFP collects student progression and success data on a regular basis (Portfolio, p.32). The Panel was provided with statistical data of student success and progression over the past five years (Portfolio, Appendix C). The data shows very high success and progression rates; while this can be considered positive, it can also raise a number of questions about the appropriateness of exam and assessment standards. When this question was raised with the GFP staff and management, there was unanimous agreement that the high progression and success rates were due to good teaching and appropriate support of student learning. In addition, the Panel was provided with evidence of external programme review processes, where assessment of GFP modules is also considered. However, there are currently no ToR for external examiners available at SCD, which makes it difficult to establish whether the external examiners' remit include consideration and analysis of progression rates in the GFP.

In the period between Academic Year 2010-2011 and Academic Year 2015-2016, the average pass rate in the GFP was 90.5% in Fall, 91.4% in Spring and 90.5% in Summer. Approximately, 90.9% of GFP students progressed onto their degree programmes in 2015-2016, with 0% drop out (Portfolio, p.32). As pointed out above, the high success rates were explained to the Panel as a result of, in part, the identification of students at risk after the mid-term test and the provision of remedial student support (Portfolio, p.32) (Refer to the Recommendation in section 3.7). On examination of the evidence provided, however, the Panel noticed a very high absenteeism rate from remedial classes. In Fall 2016, out of eight students enrolled in remedial classes, two students attended only one or two classes of the five classes scheduled, and one student never attended. The problem was exacerbated in Spring 2017 and out of 11 students initially registered for remedial classes, five students attended only two or three classes out of nine classes on offer. In fact, the problem of high absenteeism in remedial classes was highlighted in one of GFP reports which concluded that "very few students showed [...] improvement after attending remedial classes" and recommended that "Attendance [...] be made mandatory for [...] remedial classes (Remedial Class Report, p.1). Clearly, it is difficult to draw a causal relationship between remedial classes and the high pass rates in the GFP.

SCD also claims that the introduction of a third level for underperforming students has contributed to the high progression and retention rates in the GFP (Portfolio, p.32). The Panel acknowledges that the introduction of a third level in the GFP could have positively contributed to progression and success rates. Drawing from the evidence, and the outcomes of interviews, however, this high pass rate in the GFP could also have been affected by certain progression measures implemented in the GFP. The ELBS&H Department implements a “grace mark” rule, by which borderline cases requiring up to three marks (or vaguely stated as “few marks” in some documents) to pass are granted the “grace mark” and passed. Contrary to what the Panel heard during interviews that only 1-2% of GFP students benefit from this rule, and according to the minutes of meetings of the Assessment Board in the department, in Fall 2016, in Level two, out of 21 failures, 11 students were granted a “few grace marks” and passed. In Level three, out of 13 failures, 12 students were given a “few grace marks” and passed, ultimately leaving one failure only. In Spring 2017, out of 11 failures in Level two, nine students were passed with two grace marks each. In level three, out of seven failures, five students were passed with three grace marks each. The rise in “grace marks” from two marks in Level two to three in Level three was attributed by the Assessment Board to the fact that Level three is “more challenging”.

The Panel concluded that the GFP needs to develop and maintain rigorous progression criteria and result approval processes in order to ensure appropriate assessment standards are kept for students to succeed in their post GFP studies.

Recommendation 14

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design follow robust and rigorous progression criteria and result approval processes to ensure that appropriate assessment and progression standards are maintained in the General Foundation Programme.

2.10 Relationships with GFP Alumni

The Portfolio listed a number of GFP initiatives to support and maintain positive and ongoing relationships with their former students (Portfolio, pp.33-34). It does so through a set of activities in which alumni feedback and participation is sought, ranging from student orientation through to alumni surveys, alumni participation in External Advisory Committees and their involvement in extra-curricular activities.

The GFP deploys an alumni survey to collect feedback from alumni on their GFP experience and the results were used to inform improvements during the curriculum review. GFP alumni are also actively involved in the orientation of new GFP students, where degree level students share their experience of the GFP with new entrants. The Panel confirmed this in interviews with staff and students. Graduates of the GFP are also consulted in the review of the programme through the External Advisory Committee, which comprises an external reviewer along with a number of GFP staff. In addition, GFP alumni are also active participants in the extracurricular activities organised by the GFP English Club. In these activities, former GFP students play a significant role in encouraging and supporting current GFP students, as well as in feeding back to the college on the effectiveness of such activities and ways to improve them. Overall, students confirmed that they are satisfied with the ongoing relationship with the GFP.

The Panel was impressed with how the GFP has cultivated a positive and active relationship with its GFP alumni. The Panel concluded that this positive and inclusive relationship with GFP alumni has benefited both current and former GFP students and helped promote a mutually beneficial interaction between the two groups, as evident in GFP student orientation and extracurricular activities, for example.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Scientific College of Design for maintaining a positive and inclusive relationship with General Foundation Programme alumni.

3 ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

This section of the report considers the extent to which the range of activities within Academic and Student Support Services of the college supports the needs of staff and students of the GFP. These services include enrolment and student records, learning resources, information and learning technologies, academic advising, student learning support, non-academic support and external engagement.

3.1 *Student Profile*

The Admission and Registration Department collects a wide range of data about students, such as pass, retention and progression rates, which after analysis by the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs and the Dean, is submitted to the ELBS&H Department. The Panel confirmed that this data is used to develop parts of the Department's OP and to track five-year trends in students' progress, which, as noted in section 1 above, resulted in the introduction of the third-level GFP (Portfolio, p.35).

The data is analysed by the Admission and Registration Department, which prepares grade analysis, progression, retention and withdrawal rates (Portfolio, p.35, Portfolio, Appendices C, D, and F). The Panel learned that this data set is shared with the College Council on request and used to enhance the learning experience of GFP students and improve services and facilities provided to them. It is also used in SCD's annual programme evaluation report as well as in the production of a Facts Book. However, there is no information about GFP students in the Fact Book 2015-2016. The Panel is of the view that ready-to-hand data is crucial for academic and various resources decision-making. This needs to be addressed.

The Panel concludes that while there is some evidence that some of the data collected is being used for planning, further initiatives are required. Data needs not only to be analysed and reported upon, but systematically used for planning to strengthen the GFP.

Recommendation 15

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design ensure that data collected is analysed, consolidated and systematically used for planning to strengthen the General Foundation Programme.

3.2 *Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)*

The Admission and Registration Department is responsible for registry services (Portfolio, p.36). Pre-enrolment and enrolment fall under the auspices of the Admission and Registration Department (Portfolio, p.39). There are two types of students: those sponsored by the government or companies, and private students. SCD provides an application form. The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) regulates admission of general diploma students to HEIs in terms of its remit (Royal Decree 10/4 2005) and student preferences and secondary school grades (Portfolio, p.36).

SCD prospectus and the website contain the admissions criteria and procedures, information about the academic programmes, fees and details about the placement tests (Portfolio, p.37; www.scd.edu.om/page/40/21). Once the student has been selected by the MoHE for admission to the programme, the student completes the enrolment process directly with SCD. This includes taking the Placement Tests. During interviews with a range of staff and students, the Panel confirmed these arrangements, and found the admission process to be working well with adequate information being provided to students about entry requirements.

A student satisfaction survey is carried out to determine the effectiveness of the services provided to students (Portfolio, p.37). A section of this survey measures satisfaction with services provided by the Admission and Registration Department, including admission, registration, student portal, advising and course equivalency. In the 2016-2017 survey, students awarded ratings ranging from 3.3 to 3.4 on a five-point scale to the various services provided by the Admission and Registration Department. The exception, however, was the course equivalency procedure, where students rated the process 2.1 out of five. The Department is evaluated by the LAU at the end of the academic year (Portfolio, p.37). The MoHE conducts regular evaluations of the college, including the Admission and Registration Department (Portfolio, p. 37).

The Panel found that both sets of evaluations were generally positive. During interviews with staff, the Panel learned enhancements were identified and improvements have been implemented; for instance, the current registration system is in the process of being upgraded. The Panel acknowledges the positive outcome of the reviews and the culture of continuous improvement.

There is a Staff and Student Disability Policy (Portfolio, p. 38). Students indicate their special needs (physical disability, medical conditions or learning needs) on the Admission Form. The Panel learned during interviews that students are reluctant to put a learning need on the form, which typically takes the form of mild hearing loss. As a result, the issue is only discovered after admission when students are in class. When such a learning need is discovered, appropriate steps are taken to support the student with reasonable adjustments being made, such as changing seating positions in class. These students are referred to their academic advisor and the nurse for assistance.

Class attendance is mandatory as the GFP staff members are of the view there is a direct correlation between attendance and success (Portfolio, p.37). Nevertheless, 15% absence of the total hours is permitted during a semester subject to adequate documentation being provided. Any student exceeding this percentage is refused permission to sit the final examination and fails the course and/or is required to withdraw from the course. The rules about attendance are explained to students at orientation and are available in the Student Manual and the Manual for Academic Rules and Procedures. There is a college management system in which student data is captured, including recording of attendance and grades. Student attendance is recorded on the password-protected portal on the University Management System (UMS) to which students have access.

Student grades are entered by the relevant faculty member, approved by the departmental head and after the grades awarded receive approval from the assessment boards the grades are finalised with no further changes being allowed. Students can access their grades online.

The Panel confirmed during a range of interviews that student records are kept electronically in a password protected environment in which there is a hierarchy of privileges regarding, for example, admissions, attendance and marks. The Panel was pleased to learn that there have not been any breaches of security. Back-ups of data are taken three times daily with the third being stored on the Cloud. There is also a weekly back-up. A further protection for student records is that there is a direct link between the server of the MoHE and that of the college.

The Panel concludes that the registry services are working well and that the management system is secure.

3.3 Student Induction

There is an SCD student orientation programme for all new students in which students are acquainted with, *inter alia*, the Mission and Vision of the institution, rules and regulations, programmes, academic advising, and key people in SCD (Portfolio, p.39). This information is also

provided in the comprehensive Student Manual and the Manual for Academic Rules and Procedures 2016-2017.

From Fall 2015, the ELBS&H Department has hosted an Orientation Day for GFP students in which presentations are made about the GFP (Portfolio, p.39); this includes information about the department, academic advising, extra-curricular activities and students' grievances and complaints. During interviews the Panel confirmed the orientation process and heard that it is well-received and beneficial.

The Department carries out surveys on student satisfaction with the Orientation Day. In Academic Year 2015-2016 GFP orientation survey, students gave a satisfaction rate of 4.5 on a five-point scale with the information on the GFP they received. In Academic Year 2016-2017, a common online student orientation survey was introduced targeting all freshman students in the college (Portfolio, p.40); this also showed a high level of satisfaction with the information provided to students during the GFP. There is also evidence that analysis of the survey resulted in a number of improvements being made to the Orientation Day Programme and activities (Portfolio, p.40). The Panel confirmed during interviews with staff and students the improvements made resulting from the surveys, such as extending the induction process to cover a three-month period, where induction sessions are held every Sunday in the first semester of the GFP.

The Panel concludes that the induction process for GFP students is working well and appreciates the initiative of providing an extended orientation for GFP students as well as the college orientation day.

Commendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Scientific College of Design for its induction process including providing an extended orientation for General Foundation Programme students.

3.4 Teaching and Learning Resources

SCD has a purpose-built campus, which was developed in 2007-2008 (Portfolio, p.41). It comprises a number of classrooms, English laboratory, computer laboratories, studios and relevant IT equipment.

The library is staffed by a librarian and assistant librarian. The number of learning resources has steadily increased over the past five years from 3,774 books, 568 periodicals and 222 CDs in 2012-2013 to 5,864 books, 673 periodicals and 622 CDS in 2016-2017 (Portfolio, p.42). At present, there are no subscriptions to databases although the Panel heard that this is being considered.

A Study Skills course for Level two students and a Research and Information Literacy Course for Level three students are offered (Portfolio, p.42). The ELBS&H Department uses the Interaction Series to support the coursework of students in the GFP.

The ELBS&H Department relies on student surveys to determine efficiency and effectiveness of the library and services offered (Portfolio, p.42). There is also a GFP students' representative who attends departmental meetings and gives feedback on student needs and views to the department. While the Panel notes that student satisfaction is generally good in this area, it would be useful for the college to benchmark its library holdings and teaching and learning resources for the GFP programme with other GFPs. This would provide an objective measure of sufficiency.

The E-learning Module was introduced for faculty and students during September 2016 in which learning material can be uploaded to enhance student learning and which caters for different

learning styles (Portfolio, p. 43). In the student satisfaction survey of 2016-2017, however, students expressed a low level of satisfaction with the e-learning system. An overall rating of 1.9 out of five was given for this area. This was coupled with a low overall satisfaction rate with other services provided by the IT department, such as internet, Wi-Fi and printing (see section 3.5). The Panel had a demonstration of the e-learning platform. However, it found that, after a close examination of the lists of uploaded materials, subject and teacher-wise, the number of uploaded courses remains small and below expectations after over a year of activity. While the e-learning is a good initiative, the take-up rate by faculty members is low and the anticipated use of this facility is primarily as a learning repository.

The Panel had a tour of the facilities for teaching and learning resources and found these to be appropriate. The Panel concludes that e-learning needs to be fully utilised and that SCD put in place structures to ensure this occurs. These need to be subject to regular monitoring and review. A mechanism is required to ensure that e-learning becomes more than just a repository for learning materials.

Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design ensure that the E-learning Module of the General Foundation Programme be fully utilised and that it put in place structures to ensure this occurs and which are subject to regular monitoring and review.

3.5 Information and Learning Technology Services

There is an IT Unit which has qualified staff (Portfolio, p.42). The unit provides services to both staff and students, including a range of services through a helpdesk (Portfolio, p.42). An open Wi-Fi network, which the Panel found to be in working order, is provided.

The Panel toured the IT facilities and noted there is a language laboratory for the sole use of GFP students; this is equipped with computers, internet, smartboard and projector. The computer laboratories are equipped with good quality hardware and appropriate software.

Online placement tests have been introduced using McGraw Hill Publishers. A student survey is carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the IT services (Portfolio, p.43). A number of weaknesses were identified from an analysis of results. For example, the 2016-2017 survey results pointed to a low satisfaction rate among students towards the internet, Wi-Fi, printing and e-learning. An overall satisfaction rate of 2.8 out of five was given by students for these IT services. The Panel learned the IT unit is working to improve these weaknesses and it is anticipated that the in-house IT developer hired in 2016 will help address these issues.

The Panel learned during interviews that all students are provided with usernames and passwords to access the different functions of the student portal. There is a helpdesk which provides students with a range of IT-related services (Portfolio, p.42). IT services provided to GFP students and staff include the provision of induction sessions, guidance on using the IT system, assistance with any IT technical issues and the use of e-learning (Portfolio, p.42). Ongoing support is provided as required by students. This was confirmed during interviews with staff and students.

The Panel confirmed during interviews with IT helpdesk staff of the range of services offered to students and received confirmation in interviews with students that the helpdesk staff are supportive and that the helpdesk fulfils its function. The Panel concludes that information and learning technology services are operating satisfactorily.

3.6 Academic Advising

There is an academic advisory procedure in place. Guidelines for academic advising are contained in the Student Manual (Portfolio, p.44). These are made clear to students during the Orientation Day by the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs (Portfolio, p.44).

There is a Students Advising Procedure. Academic Advisors are assigned by the HoD to students at the start of each semester. Academic advising is carried out by teachers. Meetings are held between the advisor and advisee and these are logged and signed with the log being submitted to the HoD for academic matters and the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs for non-academic matters for further action as necessary (Portfolio, p.44). Academic Advisors report to the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs. A psychologist, who is a staff member of SCD, assists students with matters of a personal nature. The Panel notes that SCD makes a distinction between academic advising and counselling. Nevertheless, the Panel did not find evidence of tailored individual academic support being offered, rather support typically involves students attending extra classes, which are offered twice weekly (see section 3.7 below).

The Panel found from documentation and interviews with students and staff that faculty members offer four office hours weekly; these are posted on the office doors of staff members and are indicated in the syllabus. A student representative takes part in departmental meetings ensuring that students are involved in decision-making processes. The Panel heard that students are comfortable with the academic advising process and that their concerns are addressed in a timely manner.

To assess the effectiveness of academic advising in the GFP, meetings are logged, and the extent to which problems are resolved is analysed by SCD each year (Portfolio, p.44). The Panel suggests that consideration be given to gaining student input into the evaluation of the academic advising system, as the current student satisfaction survey covers only the support given by the academic advisor during registration.

The Panel notes with appreciation that there is a transition programme for students who are going on to study in academic programmes at SCD; this is designed to brief them about the courses they will be studying in their respective majors and explain related registration procedures. This was commenced in Academic Year 2014-2015 and takes place in the Spring each year; it involves the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs meeting with the students to guide them on the process (Portfolio, p.40).

The Panel concludes that a number of measures and procedures have been put in place by SCD to provide advising services to GFP students. For continuous improvement, the Panel urges SCD to systematically seek, and act upon, student feedback on these measures and procedures.

3.7 Student Learning Support

There are a number of different forms of learning support available to GFP students. These include: counselling, extracurricular activity clubs, remedial classes and CALL (Portfolio, p.45). Counselling is provided by a member of SCD faculty who is a specialist in psychology (Portfolio, p.45). She provides this service in addition to her teaching duties. The Panel learned that lectures and awareness raising sessions are conducted for students twice a month on personal and social matters. SMS messages are also used to support this effort.

The GFP has put in place measures to support students who are academically weak. To identify students at risk of failure, the student mid-term examination results are used (Portfolio, p.44). The Panel learned during interviews that faculty members in the GFP are requested to identify students who failed the examination and to develop a remedial plan. This typically involves attendance at one-hour remedial classes twice per week during lunch break and student progress is monitored.

The Panel learned during interviews with faculty that student progress is assessed in Quiz 3. It was apparent to the Panel that the GFP faculty work collaboratively regarding the delivery of the programme and assisting at-risk students. However, students at risk and needing additional academic support are only identified after the mid-term test and these remedial measures are put in place after week eight, hence half way through the semester, which is quite late in the semester to be effective. Given the GFP assessment structure at SCD, student performance in formative assessment and classroom activities prior to the mid-term test, for example, can provide useful indicators to help identify these cases.

Recommendation 17

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement a mechanism to identify and support students at risk from the outset of the General Foundation Programme.

A CALL programme was implemented in the Spring of 2016 for GFP Level three students which further supports the development of English language skills and encourages independent learning using the language laboratory (Portfolio, p.45) (see section 3.5 about the language laboratory). Generic tasks are assigned to students in three of the four language skills (listening, reading, and writing) from their course book, *Interactions Book II*, and selected websites. It is scheduled for Level 3 students for two hours per week.

There are also clubs in English, Maths, and Computer in which the activities are designed to support the formal teaching and learning process (Portfolio, p.45). While the three clubs (English, Maths and Computer) are a good initiative and have the potential to support learning for students, the Panel learned during interviews with staff that in practice these clubs are not always meeting the desired aims, particularly in English. Participation of students is poor and the clubs do not meet frequently. The Panel is of the view that this needs to be considered, given that the aim of the clubs is to meet the learning objectives of the three streams within the GFP.

The Panel concludes that the planning and frequency of meetings of the three clubs and the activities undertaken need to be reviewed and revised to ensure that the philosophy underpinning the establishment and deployment of student clubs meets the learning objectives of the GFP.

Recommendation 18

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design ensure that its philosophy underpinning the establishment and deployment of student clubs meets the learning objectives of the General Foundation Programme.

3.8 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

Student support services at SCD are overseen by the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs (Portfolio, p.46). Under his supervision, the Student Affairs Unit develops an annual OP in line with SCD Strategic Plan (Portfolio, p.46). In order to determine student satisfaction with facilities and services provided to them, student and climate surveys are regularly carried out. The results are analysed and recommendations for improvement are made. A separate survey for the GFP students was administered in Spring 2016 to gauge satisfaction with facilities and services provided to students by various units in the college. Fifteen facilities, ranging from the library to the toilets, and 13 services, ranging from the internet to the Student Council, were rated. An overall rating of 2.79

out of five was given by students. The library received the highest rating of 3.69, while the prayer room received the lowest rating of 2.18 out of five. There is also a suggestion box.

The Panel confirmed through documentary evidence and in interviews that in many cases improvements are made as a result of the analysis and that actions taken for improvement in this regard are shared with students via e-mail. However, the information collected and the results used from such data are not consolidated and are not part of an overarching system with formal and well-documented monitoring and review processes.

The Panel concludes that the college has taken important steps in regularly seeking to obtain feedback from students on the services and facilities provided to them and in using the results to inform improvements. SCD, however, would benefit greatly from developing an overarching system or policy for collecting feedback from students, which for example, would stipulate the data collection tools, frequency of deployment, the parties involved, and how data would be analysed, reported and acted upon.

3.9 *Student Behaviour*

The Student Code of Conduct is contained in the Student Manual which all students receive at orientation (Portfolio, p.47). The manual clearly states what is expected from students in terms of behaviour, their rights and responsibilities, sanctions and penalties and appeal procedures. During orientation, students are made aware of the student code of conduct and consequences of breaches of the code.

An *ad hoc* Disciplinary and Investigative Committee is established at the beginning of every academic year to deal with any alleged violations of student conduct (Portfolio, p.47). Violations, such as cheating in exams and misbehaviour, are considered by the committee and decisions are made and communicated to students accordingly. The committee is chaired by the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs (Portfolio, p.47) and reports to the College Council. However, these meetings are not minuted; the committee is urged to take minutes in the future. During the Spring of 2017 the QA&E Unit held a meeting to review and revise the code of conduct based on past violations.

The Panel confirmed in interviews that students are aware of the Code of Conduct and penalties that can accrue as well as the appeal process. It also concluded that violations of the Code of Conduct are managed satisfactorily and acknowledges that appeals can be made against decisions of the College Council.

3.10 *Non-Academic Student Support Services and Facilities*

SCD has a number of non-academic support services. Services provided to GFP students include health services and counselling in which a certified counsellor and a nurse are available to students (Portfolio, p.48, see section 3.7). Hostel accommodation is available for female students. Catering services are also provided (Portfolio, p.48). The Panel learned during interviews with students that they appreciate these support services. The activities undertaken by the clinic are considered in section 1.9 of this report.

There is a fully-furnished and equipped female student hostel which is run by a hostel manager who reports to the Dean (Portfolio, p.48). The manager is supported by supervisors who mentor and support the students in their care. The Panel also learned from interviews that some extracurricular activities take place. A minibus is provided to take students for shopping (Portfolio, p.48). In interviews with students the Panel learned that this is limited to typically once per month.

Other activities include celebrations at special times of the year, such as *Iftaar*. Generally, female students interviewed by the Panel were satisfied with the hostel.

The facilities are monitored by the Administration and Human Resource Manager with a survey being conducted annually to gain student feedback on the facilities. As a result of the findings of the survey a number of improvements have been made, such as expanding the restaurant and improving wireless internet speed, and students were notified of the actions taken by email; this was confirmed by the Panel.

The Panel concludes that non-academic student support services and facilities are adequate to meet the needs of GFP students.

3.11 External Engagement

In the past three years the ELBS&H Department has collaborated with the Arab Open University (AOU) and MEC. In Academic Year 2014-2015 SCD participated in an AOU seminar whilst in the Fall of 2015 a joint seminar with MEC was held on pedagogy (Portfolio, p.49). There is an annual symposium in which SCD invites all other Omani HEIs to attend and present papers (Portfolio, p.49). The ELBS&H Department has informal external relationships with other higher education institutions which includes sharing of teaching experiences and benchmarking discussions. These activities were confirmed by the Panel from a study of documentation and in interviews with staff. However, the activities are undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis and the GFP would benefit from formalising the arrangements (see section 2.1).

During interviews with staff the Panel learned that GFP staff members participate in visits to schools. Information was also provided about the college providing examination support for government entities. Other community engagement activities with respect to students include an annual SPELL Bee competition in which students from other institutions compete, and blood donations take place every semester (Portfolio, p.49).

Whilst the Panel notes the external engagement activities taking place, it found these to be limited in scope. From interviews with a range of staff the Panel found that there is not a clear shared understanding of external engagement or the communities that the college wishes to serve or engage with.

The Panel concludes that there needs to be a college-wide discussion to develop a shared understanding amongst staff and students on the nature of external engagement, and to identify the communities with which the college wishes to engage. This will lead to external engagement being conceptualised appropriately for the institution as a whole and for the GFP in particular. Furthermore, a cohesive plan needs to be developed with measurable targets and which has an allocated budget. The implementation of the plan needs to be regularly monitored and reviewed.

Recommendation 19

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design conceptualise General Foundation Programme external engagement and develop a cohesive plan with measurable targets and which is regularly monitored and reviewed.

4 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

SCD believes that having an appropriate pool of staff for all its departments is vital for attaining the college's Mission, Vision and Values (Portfolio, p.50). This section covers areas pertaining to the college staff and the type of support offered to ensure that future goals of the college are met. The section covers the areas of staff profile, recruitment and selection, staff induction, professional development, performance planning and review, staff organisational climate and retention, and Omanisation.

4.1 *Staff Profile*

SCD states that faculty members have a direct impact on their students. Therefore it believes in the significance of having an appropriate staffing profile that supports its Mission, Vision and Values. Key variables considered in achieving this are the number of faculty, staff retention plans and staff hiring methods (Portfolio, p.50).

The staffing needs analysis is conducted annually, specifically in the Spring Semester, based on the projected student enrolment and faculty resignations (Portfolio, p.50). Staff members are approached in one of the monthly departmental meetings in this semester and also via email to indicate their interest in contract renewal (Portfolio, p.50).

The college has a three-member recruitment team consisting of the HoD, General Coordinator and a senior member of staff (Portfolio, p.50). Once the needs have been identified by the recruitment team and approved by the College Council, the hiring process is commenced.

Currently the ELBS&H Department has 14 faculty in its GFP. Seventy nine percent (79%) of the faculty hold a master's degree in the field they teach and 21% have a bachelor's degree. Most of the teachers have more than 15 years of teaching experience (Portfolio, p.51). This, in general, satisfies the staffing requirements stipulated in the OASGFP. SCD attributes importance to cultural diversity among its staff. Currently, their staff come from Oman, Lebanon, Sudan, Palestine, Jordan and India. Forty two percent of the staff in the department have been in service since 2009 which, according to the Portfolio, is indicative of job satisfaction. During interviews, the college management acknowledged the importance of recruiting Omanis. Currently there are three Omanis who have been recruited as part-timers. SCD is also in the process of hiring a full-time Omani faculty member (Portfolio, p.52).

4.2 *Recruitment and Selection*

To ensure the recruitment of appropriate and qualified staff, SCD has developed a Human Resources Plan (HRP) which is included in the Quality Manual. The procedures for selection and recruitment are stipulated in the HRP and the Faculty Handbook. After the needs analysis is conducted (see section 4.1 above), the ELBS&H Department commences the selection and recruitment of instructors (Portfolio, p.52).

The recruitment process consists of two stages: the pre-selection stage and the selection and decision-making stage (Portfolio, pp.52-53). The pre-selection stage involves identifying CVs of potential candidates by the HoD and a panel from faculty from SCD's database. If such CVs are not available, then an advertisement is posted on the college website inviting interested candidates who meet the recruitment requirements to apply (Portfolio, p.52). SCD requires its GFP faculty to hold an MA or a BA in English language, Literature, Education or Linguistics. In the case of candidates holding a bachelor's degree, a certificate such as a CELTA or a TEFL certificate is compulsory. Having a minimum of three years of teaching experience is a requirement (Portfolio, p.52). All of these requirements align well with the OASGFP stipulation as minimum standards.

A teaching demonstration is also required from candidates residing in the Sultanate (Portfolio, p. 53). Telephone interviews are conducted for international candidates. Teaching demonstrations are not required by SCD in the case of these candidates. Locally-based candidates who complete the teaching demonstration successfully are then called for an interview (portfolio, p.52). The interview is conducted by the HoD and the members of the recruitment committee. An interview assessment form is used to rate the candidate during the interview and successful candidates are offered a one-year contract (Portfolio, p.53). New recruits are required to undergo a three-month probationary period. Upon successful completion of this period, the new staff member receives a letter from the Administration and Human Resource Manager notifying them of this (Portfolio, p.53). The selection and recruitment process was confirmed in interviews with the GFP management and staff.

While the Panel understands the likely difficulties associated with requesting teaching demonstrations from international candidates, waiving this requirement may have an impact on the quality of teachers recruited. Furthermore, having a comparable recruitment process for locally-based and international applicants would enhance the transparency and fairness of the process and ensure equal treatment to all applicants.

Recommendation 20

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement a unified recruitment process for both locally-based and international General Foundation Programme academic staff.

4.3 Staff Induction

In 2013-2014, and as part of the HRP, SCD introduced a formal induction procedure that includes an Induction Checklist and an Induction Questionnaire (Portfolio, p.54). In 2015-2016 a new Induction Questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions to provide staff with the opportunity to express their opinions and suggestions was developed. Effectiveness of staff induction is measured annually through this questionnaire. In Academic Year 2015-2016, staff gave an overall rating of 4.2 on a five-point scale. The Panel also established during interviews with GFP staff that they are satisfied with the induction given to them.

The induction process at SCD takes place over a course of three months from the date of appointment (Portfolio, p.54). As part of the induction programme, the new staff member is assigned a workstation and receives IT services such as an e-mail account, portal ID and password. They also receive course-related information such as course files, the schedule, handouts and examples of students' work. New recruits are then introduced to members of the Department, the Chairman and Dean of the college and taken on a tour of the institution. As part of the induction programme, the Dean conducts the general faculty meeting at the beginning of the semester, where copies of key SCD documents, such as the Faculty Handbook and the Manual for Academic Rules and Procedures, are issued to staff (Portfolio, p.54).

In order to help new faculty adapt to the new work environment more smoothly, new staff members are assigned no duties beyond teaching and assessment in their first semester (Portfolio, p.54). It is the responsibility of the HoD to ensure that the Induction Checklist is completed, signed and shared with the Staff Affairs Committee for analysis (Portfolio, p.54). The Panel views these efforts with appreciation.

4.4 Professional Development

In order to support the professional growth of its faculty inside and outside the college, SCD has developed a Professional Development Policy. The Policy states that “SCD is committed to promote and support professional development activities for all employees”.

Representatives from the affiliate university, LAU, have regularly been involved in assessing and conducting professional development activities. In 2014-2015 a joint decision by SCD management and LAU representative was made to offer workshops to faculty. Subject experts from LAU visit the college every semester and give workshops on various topics to faculty members teaching on the GFP. The subjects of these workshops are decided on by the HoD and also through soliciting feedback from the staff themselves.

Peer observation is used in SCD as a form of “collaborative professional development” (Portfolio, p.59). Instructors are required to invite two colleagues to visit their classroom every academic year. They then meet to identify areas of strength and to share ideas.

SCD initiated budget planning through creating a budget template that faculty can use to express their wish to conduct or attend workshops, publish papers or to organise exhibitions. Through the use of this template, SCD can decide on resources required for employees’ professional development activities. The college has also developed a Faculty Development Agreement Form which binds faculty to give their services to the college for a period of two years from the date of completing the professional development activity they have attended. Failing to do so, the faculty would be required to pay back the cost of the programme they have attended.

In 2014-2015, SCD initiated a Self-appraisal Form to allow its faculty the opportunity to evaluate and plan their involvement in professional development activities. During the Audit visit, the Panel heard that professional development needs are informed by staff evaluations conducted by the HoD and also through staff self-appraisal. Staff are then allocated to different professional development activities through discussion and agreement among staff members with the approval of the HoD.

While the Panel acknowledges the level of commitment SCD has assigned to the area of professional development, it is not clear how SCD established the need for, and relevance of, professional development activities highlighted in the Portfolio (pp.56-59) to the outcomes of staff appraisal. When requested by the Panel to present evidence of deliberate linkage between training needs analysis and professional development activities, SCD indicated that such evidence was not available. Furthermore, it is not clear what targets the college is trying to achieve with regards to the professional development of its GFP faculty.

Recommendation 21

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design evaluate its professional development arrangements for the General Foundation Programme staff to include clear goals and targets and alignment with the outcomes of staff appraisal and training needs analysis.

4.5 Performance Planning and Review

The roles and responsibilities of SCD HoDs, faculty and coordinators are set out in the Faculty Handbook (Portfolio, p.60). The Faculty Handbook stipulates that “The primary duty of all faculty members is to educate and serve students without any discrimination, and to uphold the highest academic standards in their discipline”.

SCD employs different tools to plan and review the performance of its GFP staff (see section 2.4). An annual Performance Analysis Plan is approved by the Dean and Chairman of the Board of Directors. This includes peer evaluation, evaluation by students, evaluation of faculty by the HoD, evaluation of the HoD by faculty and the Dean, self-appraisal, as well as assessment by LAU. Peer evaluation is considered by the college a critical component of performance review in the GFP (Portfolio, p.60). The Panel heard that the Professional Development Team prepares the peer evaluation plan and assigns each faculty two colleagues to observe them (Portfolio, p.60). A post-observation discussion is required to encourage sharing of ideas among faculty members (Portfolio, p.60). A Peer Evaluation Form is completed, discussed and filed. The Dean and HoD occasionally send emails to staff reminding them of the importance of peer evaluation. The Panel was informed, however, that there was no written policy on peer review. Furthermore, it was not clear to the Panel from the evidence presented how the outcomes of peer review were used to inform professional development activities (see section 4.4).

Another tool used by SCD in its review of performance is the students' evaluation of instructors (Portfolio, p.60). The evaluation is conducted every semester, a week before the final exams, when the Deputy Dean for Student Affairs sends an email to all students explaining the rationale of the exercise and its uses (Portfolio, p.60). All courses for each instructor are evaluated and the process is overseen by the Admission and Registration Department and QA&E Unit. In the sample of forms presented to the Panel from Academic Year 2016-2017, the lowest course and instructor overall rating was 3.7 on a five-point scale or 75% of the total score. As mentioned under section 2.4, if a GFP instructor scores less than 70% for two consecutive semesters in a GFP course, they will no longer be allowed to teach this course, before they have had an opportunity to improve their teaching practices (Portfolio, p.26). The Panel, however, could not establish how instructors are assisted in improving their teaching skills and in reaching the targets set in this regard. In Fall 2016, the survey was revised and feedback from teachers on the form was sought by the Dean.

LAU representatives are also involved in assessing course work and professional development activities (Portfolio, p.61). They visit the college every semester, conduct workshops, and give input towards the revision of course syllabi.

The HoD also evaluates faculty using a faculty evaluation form, where various aspects of an instructor's performance, such as teaching effectiveness, course files, and assessments, are evaluated. Following discussion with the concerned faculty, the HoD forwards the form to the Dean's office. The HoD himself is evaluated by both the Dean and the faculty members using a special form, where areas for improvement are highlighted.

SCD also uses a Self-appraisal Form on which each instructor comments on their position, duties, skills, training, research, challenges and overall contribution to the department and the college. (Portfolio, p.61). This form was reviewed in December 2015 upon invitation by the Dean. In response to a request by the Panel for evidence of GFP staff feedback on the performance planning and review process itself, the Panel was informed that this was not available.

The Panel appreciates the implementation of a multifaceted performance review at SCD. It is apparent that the college is committed to reviewing and assuring the effectiveness of faculty performance. However, the Panel is of the view that the performance review should adopt a forward-looking perspective. In other words, the review processes in place should eventually lead to performance enhancement and not performance assessment only. Teachers should view these tools positively and believe that they are there to help them become better teachers. It is also crucial to show how these review tools work together as part of an overarching system for performance review of GFP staff.

4.6 *Staff Organisational Climate and Retention*

SCD acknowledges that the most effective way to improve teaching and learning processes is by creating a positive work environment in which staff feel encouraged and motivated to do their best (Portfolio, p.62). Maintaining a healthy and positive organisational climate is a responsibility shared between the college management, HoDs and the Administration and Human Resource Manager through proper implementation of the HRP (Portfolio, p.62).

A Staff Satisfaction Survey is conducted every academic year (Portfolio, p.62). This survey allows staff to express their opinions regarding salary and benefits, the attitude of HoDs towards faculty, involvement in departmental decision-making, college facilities, college Mission and Vision and administrative procedures. In the satisfaction survey of Academic Year 2016-2017, staff expressed an overall satisfaction rate of 3.8 on a five-point scale. Among the lowest ratings given was staff satisfaction with the salary, compared to job tasks and responsibilities, where a rating of only 2.9 was averaged. Based on feedback, SCD has introduced a number of improvements in the past few years, such as upgrading the insurance facility offered to staff to provide more options and a wider coverage of health services (Portfolio, p.62). The Panel saw evidence and heard in interviews that the college has occasionally used the results of the survey to inform improvements in services and facilities provided to staff. For example, the hourly rate compensation for overtime duties was reviewed in Academic Year 2016-2017 in response to staff satisfaction survey findings.

SCD also organises social events in order to create a sense of belonging and engagement. The Panel learned that these included *Iftaar* get-togethers, farewell parties and celebrations of special occasions (Portfolio, p.63).

Staff in the department are given the opportunity to give their feedback during the monthly departmental meetings, meetings with GFP Coordinator and in the various College Council committees (Portfolio, p.63). The Dean also sends e-mails asking for staff feedback on new policies and plans.

SCD encourages staff through incentives. The feedback gathered from the staff appraisal tools (see section 4.5 above), in addition to the contributions of individuals to the department are used to determine the eligibility to receiving an incentive (Portfolio, p.63). The Panel confirmed during interviews the existence of incentives as a way to reward good performance. However, the Panel did not find evidence of documented selection criteria against which deserving cases are identified (see section 2.4).

SCD has developed an Employee Grievance Process and Form. In response to a request by the Panel for evidence on how these grievances are processed, it was indicated that no grievances have been received so far from GFP staff. This has raised the question among the Panel members about concerns GFP staff may have about the objectivity and independence of the process, considering the small size of the ELBS&H Department. While having a grievance form and a procedure are indisputably important, implementing additional measures to assure staff of the objectivity and independence of the process will help make the faculty feel more secure about voicing their issues.

SCD initiated an exit survey in order to gain insights into the work environment from those who may decide to leave the college. While the Panel accepts that, due to high staff retention, the exit survey has not yet been put to the test much, it is nonetheless a good initiative to gather feedback from staff who are leaving in order to find opportunities for improvement.

It is clear that SCD has in place various measures that help establish a positive staff climate and provide opportunities for review and enhancements to that climate. The Panel views this with appreciation and believes that these initiatives, coupled with continuous improvement efforts and enhanced transparency, will positively affect and improve the work environment in the GFP at SCD.

4.7 Omanisation

SCD initiated an Omanisation Plan in 2013-2014. The plan was then revised during Fall 2016 (Portfolio, p. 64).

The Panel is aware that, as per the regulations stipulated by the Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Manpower, it is required that 17% of the total number of staff in the college are Omanis. In order to employ Omanis for the GFP, SCD contacts other HEIs that offer a bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) to try to recruit fresh graduates of these programmes as trainee instructors (Portfolio, p.64). SCD offers these graduates the opportunity to take a CELTA course and to undergo professional development and peer evaluation (Portfolio, p.64).

Four Omanis were recruited as trainee instructors in 2013-2014. However, they all resigned within a year from their appointment (Portfolio, p.64). This was verified during interviews. In 2015-2016, SCD recruited three Omani instructors. As mentioned above in section 4.1, SCD is in the process of employing a full-time Omani faculty member. The Panel also learnt during interviews that SCD plans to recruit two more Omanis next year.

While SCD has shown commitment to implementing the Omanisation policy, there is no denying that it is facing difficulties in both recruiting and retaining Omani staff. One of the reasons cited was that there is a strong competition from the government sector that seems to be preferred by Omani graduates. The Panel understands the existence of such difficulties but it encourages the college to be more creative in its pursuit to employ Omani faculty to join the GFP.

Recommendation 22

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Scientific College of Design develop and implement innovative strategies to attract and retain Omani General Foundation Programme staff.

APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

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APPENDIX B. ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

The following abbreviations, acronyms and terms are used in this Report. As necessary, they are explained in context. In some cases, URLs are provided to facilitate further enquiries about these acronyms and terms.

ADRI	Approach→Deployment→Results→Improvement
Approach	The first dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on evaluating what a HEI aims to achieve for a given topic and how it proposes to achieve it
CALL.....	Computer Assisted Language Learning
Deployment	The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a HEI's plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not
ELBS&H	English Language, Basic Sciences and Humanities
External Reviewer	A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of the OAAA's various external review Panels
FP.....	Foundation Programme
GFP.....	General Foundation Programme
HEAC	Higher Education Admissions Center (www.heac.gov.om)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
Improvement	The fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how effectively an organisation is improving its <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i> for any given topic in order to achieve better <i>results</i>
IT	Information Technology
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
OAAA.....	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (http://www.oaaa.gov.om/ar/Default.aspx)
OAAA Board.....	The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OASGFP.....	Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes
OP	Operational Plan
Panel Chairperson.....	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel
Panel Member.....	An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel
Quality Assurance.....	The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that state intentions are met
Quality Audit	An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its Mission and Vision
GFP Quality Audit Report	A public report published by the OAAA which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel's External Review of a HEI's General Foundation Programme
Results	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i>
Review Director.....	An individual assigned to an Audit Panel by the OAAA to provide professional guidance and support

SCD	Scientific College of Design
Sic	Indicates that the preceding segment of the quote was copied faithfully, in spite of a mistake
SM	Supporting Materials
SP.....	Strategic Plan
System	In this Report, <i>system</i> refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose

