



Oman Academic Accreditation Authority



Report of a General Foundation Programme Quality Audit of Oman College of Management and Technology

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Confidential

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OVERVIEW OF THE GFP 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 Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET). The GFP Quality Audit followed the process of audit as outlined in OAAA's *General Foundation Programme Quality Audit Manual*.¹ The GFP Quality Audit also used the *Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes* ('GFP Standards') as an external reference point.²

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 the Oman College of Management and Technology (OCMT) conducted in the year 2019. The Quality Audit process followed those prescribed in the GFP Quality Audit Manual of the OAAA with due consideration of the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes ('GFP Standards') as external reference.

The GFP Quality Audit commenced with OCMT undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems in relation to the GFP. The results were summarised in the Quality Audit (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the agreed revised date of July 21, 2019.

The OAAA appointed an external GFP Quality Audit Panel (the 'Panel'), consisting of appropriately 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 28 August 2019 to consider OCMT's GFP Portfolio. Following this, a representative of the Panel Chairperson representative and the Review Director undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to OCMT on 24 September 2019 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and arrange for the Panel's Audit Visit. Prior to the Audit Visit, the Panel formally invited submissions from the public about the quality of OCMT's activities in relation to the GFP. No public submissions were received using this process.

The GFP Quality Audit Visit took place from 11 to 14 November 2019. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 70 people, including current and former GFP students, GFP and post-GFP faculty, GFP support staff, OCMT senior management and administrative staff. The Panel also visited a selection of venues

This Report contains a summary of the Panel's findings together with formal Commendations where good practices have been confirmed, Affirmations where OCMT'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 system in place at OCMT.

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. No documents created after 14 November 2019 (the last day of the Audit Visit) were taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit other than pre-existing evidence specifically requested by the Panel in advance and/or submitted by the HEI in response to the GFPQA draft Report v5. This Report was approved by the OAAA Board on 17 November 2020.

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree No 54/2010. For further information, visit the OAAA website.³

¹ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/To%20upload-FINAL-GFP%20Quality%20Audit%20Manual%20April.pdf>

² <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/GFP%20Standards%20FINAL.pdf>

³ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om>

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 the 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 (HEIs) in Oman and abroad, and other audiences. Students, in particular, may find this Report useful because it provides some independent comments on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2 and 3 below). Prospective students should still undertake their own investigations, however, 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 nature. In other words, although the audit addresses four areas of activity, 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 has a unique purpose and profile; it does not directly compare the GFP of one institution with that of other institutions in Oman.

For the reasons cited 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 the 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 Quality Audit Reports of different HEIs solely on the number of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations.

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.

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the overall conclusions and findings of the GFP Quality Audit conducted on behalf of the OAAA and based on the findings of the Audit Panel constituted for the purpose. Specific Commendations, Affirmations, and Recommendations to the Oman College of Management and Technology (OCMT) are listed in the order in which they occur within the report and are not prioritised. Moreover, the favourable comments and suggestions for improvement occur throughout the text of this report.

Executive Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The Oman College of Management and Technology (OCMT) was established in the year 2004 as a private higher education institution (HEI) by due process of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Government of Oman. Since inception, it has conducted its General Foundation Programme (GFP). During the time of the GFP Quality Audit, there were 770 students registered in the college of whom 203 were in the GFP (Portfolio, p7). The OCMT moved to its built-for-purpose campus located in Halban, Muscat in 2018. The College is affiliated with the Yarmouk University (YU), Jordan. But this affiliation does not cover the GFP. The OCMT commenced operations with five diploma and bachelors programmes, namely: Business Administration, Accounting, Banking and Financial Sciences, Marketing and Electronic Commerce, Computer Science and Interior Design. In the Academic Year (AY) 2006 - 2007, a sixth programme in Management Information System commenced (SM002).

In preparation for this General Foundation Programme Quality Audit (GFPQA), the OCMT constituted a special committee Chaired by the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA), with representation from the GFP and the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) which was tasked with the preparation and production of the GFPQA Portfolio. The GFP Faculty participated in this process. The OCMT requested an extension of the Portfolio submission date which was granted by the OAAA until 21 July 2019, the end of GFPD Semester 1 of AY 2019-20. The Portfolio was well -structured, precise, and easy to read. Matters that lacked clarity were addressed by the OCMT during the GFPQA Planning Visit. There was also evidence of using the Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement (ADRI) process in the preparation of the Portfolio.

The OCMT has well defined Mission, Vision, and Value (MVV) statements included in its Strategic Plan 2015-2020. The GFP has its own five-point mission. Both the college's and GFP's MVV are communicated via the GFP Manual, and electronic media. The GFP Departmental (GFPD) MVV were informally in practice but formalised only after moving to the new campus. The OCMT had prepared its Strategic Plan 2015-2020 by an outsourcing arrangement which included inputs from a limited number of stakeholders.

The OCMT's Board of Directors oversees the governance of the college whereas the Board of Trustees oversees its academic matters. The College Dean is the executive head of the institution. The ADAA, and the Assistant Dean for Administration and Finance (ADAF) report to the Dean. The GFP Department head (HoD) reports to the ADAA. The OCMT's college-wide plans and policies apply to the GFPD as well. Whilst the GFPD has attempted operational planning for some areas of work, there is no holistic GFPD operational plan. Such a piecemeal approach has affected plan implementation. The OCMT would benefit from reviewing its approach to its operational planning including distinct measurable outcomes. The OCMT has a centralised financial system; however, the GFPD provides input to budgeting. Approved budgets are sent to the GFPD and funds are allocated in consultation with the HoD. The Panel is satisfied with the GFPD financial arrangements. The OCMT's Strategic Planning and Risk Management Committee (SPRMC) is responsible for risk management, and it oversees policy implementation. The Panel found that the GFPD risks lacked appropriate prioritisation, and it would benefit from review.

The GFP provision and operations are monitored and reviewed periodically with feedback from stakeholders. The OCMT's college-wide policies, procedures and regulations including student grievance and appeals mechanism are appropriately communicated using technology, Student Handbook, manuals, and events starting from student orientation and staff induction. The Supply and Services Department (SSD)

is responsible for Health and Safety services which are well organised and appreciated by stakeholders (ASM 003).

The GFP comprises three levels across three semesters with a total of 840 teaching hours. The GFP staff teach post-foundation English courses as well. The GFP curriculum currently in practice is aligned with its aims. The Learning Outcomes (LOs) of GFP components, English, Mathematics, Computing, and General Study Skills, are aligned with the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes (OASGFP) in that these are for a major part verbatim listing of the OASGFP standards, which by themselves do not constitute a comprehensive GFP curriculum (see Section 2.2). There is a scope for improvement of assessment of specific LOs and their mapping in the context of progression from lower to higher levels, and transition to undergraduate studies. The GFP requires a detailed curriculum. Course materials include standard textbooks, and in-house material; however, there is no mechanism of quality assurance of in-house material. The GFP benchmarking activities with external partners have been partially operationalised.

Students with 50% score in the General Education Diploma (GED) of Oman are admitted to the OCMT-GFP. There are currently no international students. Procedures for exempting students from one or more components of the GFP exist. Students are placed in one of the three levels of GFP based on a Computer Based Placement Test (CBPT) in English, Mathematics, and Computing. The CBPT is prepared with reference to international tests; however, exit standards are not similarly benchmarked. The GFPD acknowledges that 'poor' English language skills of the students upon entry to the GFP is a matter of concern. The college would gain from addressing this issue through effective monitoring and review of student progression. The GFP follows a skill-based approach to ensure achievement of LOs. Diverse methods, media and technology are used in teaching and learning.

The GFPD has commenced seeking post-foundation students and staff feedback on GFP activities from the AY 2018-19. OCMT also conducts satisfaction surveys. Although survey feedback on various aspects of the programme is generally positive, the GFPD response rates to these surveys are low. A number of college-wide plans, reports, and surveys do not appropriately disaggregate GFP-specific data to inform programme improvement. The OCMT's academic integrity policies include a Plagiarism Policy that applies to the GFPD. Staff and students are aware of the procedures, and penalties for misconduct. Whilst OCMT uses 'Plagiarism' software to detect plagiarism, the similarity index applied is inconsistent. To monitor teaching quality, the GFPD conducts peer observation, student evaluation of teachers, and courses, as well as professional development activities.

The OCMT's Assessment Policy and procedures apply to the GFP. There is a need, however, to widening the scope of such policy and procedures to address unacceptable behaviour in examination halls. There are internal and external moderation processes of assessments, although there is no overarching policy to inform these practices. Though there is evidence of linking these assessments to the LOs, closer attention is required to ensure matching levels of difficulty of multiple assessment instruments of each particular level. The GFPD faculty provide constructive and timely assessment feedback to students. This provision would benefit from the introduction of evaluation processes to determine the effectiveness of such feedback. The OCMT is shifting from using 'Google Classrooms', to the 'Microsoft TEAMS' (MS TEAMS) that includes a yet-to-be activated provision for electronic feedback. Students have the right of appeal against assessment results. Transmission of finalised question papers by email, along with the inconsistencies that exist in the actual practice of examination invigilation, require immediate corrective intervention to enhance the security and rigour of assessments.

The OCMT's Student profile analysis is limited to gender distribution and student location, and as a consequence, its utilisation is narrowed. The Admission and Registration Department (ARD) is responsible for identifying students with special needs (Portfolio, p35), based upon student disclosure. The OCMT's Admission Policy and online registration system apply to the GFPD. The OCMT e-portal; 'Edugate' facilitates GFP student attendance monitoring and related communication. Quality Assurance Department (QAD) conducts a freshmen survey to improve the admission and registration process. Post-foundation

students are involved in the orientation programme for GFP students, and in an informal peer assistance programme. The GFP student attrition rates are higher than the other departments and the reasons for this have not been clearly assessed. The College should urgently address this issue.

The OCMT has a Library and Learning Resources Committee (LLRC) with GFP representation. The library has qualified librarians, and library services include access to 'Proquest' e-resources. The GFP staff and students' library utilisation data is unavailable. Systematic evaluation of library services utilisation by the GFPD would inform GFP improvement. The OCMT has open access computer laboratories for all students including those in the GFP. Starting with orientation, GFP students and staff are periodically trained on the use of library and learning resources. The OCMT provides diverse and sufficient information technology (IT) resources to the GFPD, which is satisfactory.

There is a college-wide Academic Advising Policy which applies to the GFP. Academic advisors are identified during staff induction and trained and assigned during the orientation week. The GFPD uses online academic advising as well. At-risk students are identified and supported after mid-term examinations. The GFP would benefit from adopting a proactive approach to ensure early detection of at-risk students and taking timely remedial action. The QAD monitors and evaluates the academic advising process; however, GFP student participation in this evaluation is low for some AYs, and even absent for one. Hence, widening the scope of evaluation of the academic advising process and reviewing GFP student participation in its evaluation would inform improvements in academic advising.

The OCMT conducts annual satisfaction surveys on its facilities and support services to inform support services planning, however, effective utilisation of survey feedback is limited. There is evidence of student satisfaction regarding some areas of the GFP support services such as career guidance, campus clinic, hostels, and availability of information on study plan, and syllabi. Though membership regulations of the Students' Council (SC) exclude the GFP, a student nominated by the GFPD attends its meetings, as well as the pertinent sessions of the GFP Department Council (GFPDC) meetings. The OCMT has a well-defined student Disciplinary Policy and GFP staff and students are conversant with the disciplinary procedures and sanctions. The college provides non-academic support services such as catering, transportation, medical services, and accommodation, some of which are outsourced. Responsibility for outsourced services is under the SSD. However, transportation is under the Student Affairs Department (SAD). SC and SAD together organise social and recreational activities in which GFP students take part sometimes. The GFPD and SAD together organise community engagement, co-curricular and extracurricular activities. There are GFP student clubs, sports events and activities which are largely for male students. Sports facilities, and activities are currently scarce for female students, which the college needs to review. The GFP student participation in such events is low and the OCMT is urged to identify the causes and take required corrective actions. The OCMT has Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with external agencies for community engagement but, sustained implementation of such MoU is not evident. The GFPD intends to revive English courses that it used to offer to external agencies in the past.

A number of GFP instructors have Masters degrees with Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA). The GFPD has a satisfactory diversity in staff profile. There are concerns, however, about staff timely availability, retention, and adequacy of numbers. The OCMT has a college-wide Staff Recruitment Policy, the review of which does not include staff input on the recruitment process. A planned review of the process including staff input would contribute to the resolution of these concerns.

The QAD and Scientific Research and Staff Development Unit (SRSDU) plan the induction programme and professional development activities, which are mostly internal and are subject to approval by the College Council (CC). The GFP staff communicate professional development needs using an e-form; however, their response rate is low. The OCMT supports participation in external seminars with time and funding. Precise and specific information on such support to the GFP staff is lacking. The OCMT's Staff Performance Appraisal Policy guides the GFP faculty performance evaluation. The process includes self-assessment and HoD's review. There are special forms used for this purpose; however, the staff survey analysis report does not collect information on staff professional development. Renewal of employment contract and promotion opportunities are based on exceptional performance. The OCMT is encouraged to

review its approach to GFP staff professional development and promotions in the context of staff retention. The GFP staff's right to appeal performance evaluation decisions is not sufficiently evidenced.

The OCMT has several policies and procedures contributing to the maintenance of a supportive organisational culture and environment. There appears to be some dissatisfaction regarding response to staff feedback on staff support services. The GFP staff have opportunities to express their views in the GFPDC, and college committees. There are a Handbook of Code of Practice and a Disciplinary Policy to address staff misconduct, although, no staff misconduct cases have been reported as yet. The OCMT has an Exit Interview process. The Panel heard that the reasons for GFP staff attrition, particularly with regard to mid-semester resignations, appear to be workload, financial compensation, lack of research opportunities and lack of promotions. The GFPD is represented in various committees by staff and in the CC by the HoD. The OCMT prioritises recruitment of Omanis to the GFPD, and some improvement is evident during the AY 2018-19. There are special incentives for Omani staff for pursuing higher education.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the Oman College of Management and Technology for enhancing the processes and procedures followed in the General Foundation Programme student admission, enrolment, and registration which are received positively by students.31
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the Oman College of Management and Technology for the provision of effective information technology resources which enhance the provision of the General Foundation Programme.....33
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the Oman College of Management and Technology for organising an effective induction programme for the General Foundation Programme staff.....40

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the Oman College of Management and Technology on its decision to benchmark the exit standards for English component of the General Foundation Programme in collaboration with an external partner, and supports the College's effort in this regard.23
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the Oman College of Management and Technology that feedback collection from the General Foundation Programme alumni needs to be improved, and supports its effort to introduce formal mechanisms in this regard.....29

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology review the effectiveness of the current governance and management of the General Foundation Programme, particularly with regard to the committee system to ensure effective oversight of the Programme13
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology develop a comprehensive system of operational planning in the General Foundation Programme and implement a departmental operational plan with measurable indicators to ensure effective delivery of the programme.15
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Oman College of Management and Technology review its existing risk management arrangements to ensure that the risks related to the General Foundation Programme are identified and categorised appropriately to be mitigated effectively.16
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology ensure that its feedback collection and response analysis system consider the General Foundation Programme as a distinct entity to inform the monitoring and review processes of the programme.....16
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology take necessary actions to implement its existing agreements with external partners to improve the General Foundation Programme benchmarking to inform the benchmarking activities of the programme.....20
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum with clear and distinct programme and course learning outcomes for each level of the General Foundation Programme to ensure its fitness for purpose.....21
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology takes immediate actions to ensure that its General Foundation Programme exemption and exit regulations are aligned with the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes.....22
8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology benchmark student exit standards for Mathematics and Information Technology components of the General Foundation Programme with internationally recognised reference points to ensure that students are fully prepared for their undergraduate studies.23
9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology address the workload of General Foundation Programme academic staff to enhance focus on teaching quality and facilitate closer attention to student learning needs.24
10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology widen the scope of General Foundation Programme assessment mapping to ensure that level-specific learning outcomes are distinctly mapped to corresponding assessments.26
11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology ensure that assessments are of similar level of difficulty across the General Foundation Programme student cohorts.....26

12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology review the arrangements of examination preparation in the General Foundation Programme to ensure common understanding and consistent implementation of these arrangements, secured transmission of examination material and robust invigilation practice.28
13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Oman College of Management and Technology establish and implement a comprehensive system to collect and analyse data on the General Foundation Programme student retention and progression and utilise the results to improve the progression and retention rates in the programme.....28
14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology expand the scope of student profile data collection and ensure effective utilisation of the collected data to support the diverse needs of the General Foundation Programme students.....30
15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology review its General Foundation Programme Student induction programme for its consistent implementation and ensure that those who miss the orientation programme are provided with adequate and appropriate information to facilitate their smooth transition into the College.....32
16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology ensure that the General Foundation Programme students are provided with academic advising in a timely manner and explores and addresses the low level of their participation in the academic advising survey to ensure effective provision of this service as a matter of priority.34
17. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology develop and implement a formal mechanism to collect feedback from the General Foundation Programme staff on the overall recruitment process for its improvement and effectiveness.39
18. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology ensure that its professional development planning consider opportunities aligned to the unique nature of the General Foundation Programme and the distinct professional needs of its staff.....41
19. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology review its staff appraisal system to ensure that the General Foundation Programme staff performance is acknowledged and their professional development needs are identified.42

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The OCMT was established as a private higher education provider on 17 December 2003 (SM001). In October 2004-05, OCMT started offering five programmes at the Bachelor and Diploma levels: Business Administration, Accounting, Banking and Financial Sciences, Marketing and Electronic Commerce, Computer Science and Interior Design (SM002). In 2006-07, the Management Information Systems programme was added (SM002).

Since January 2018, the OCMT has been relocated in Halban, near Mabela; the new campus consists of three buildings namely: Administration Building, Academic Building and Services and Supplies Building. The OCMT is affiliated to Yarmouk University in Jordan and the degrees awarded to graduates of OCMT are awarded jointly with the affiliate (Portfolio, p7, SM004). The GFP offered by OCMT through its GFPD is not affiliated with Yarmouk University

This chapter reports on the Governance and Management of the OCMT based on the evidence submitted by the college and the Panel's findings. It covers the areas of Mission, Vision, and Values, Governance and Management Arrangements, Operational Planning, Financial Management, Risk Management, Monitoring and Review, Students Grievance Processes, and Health and Safety.

1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values:*

The OCMT has well defined MVV statements as mentioned in its Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020 (SM 006). The Vision statement clarifies the institution's commitment to the public; it is available on the OCMT website and reads as follows:

OCMT aspires to become a leading institution of higher education nationally and regionally, where quality and excellence are maintained in line with international standards, to produce top caliber graduates with knowledge, skills and attitude.

The OCMT's Mission statement is as follows:

OCMT strives to provide the local community an environment which is conducive for effective teaching-learning process by well qualified professionals supported by latest technological facilities. We also seek to provide the society, graduates who exhibit sound knowledge and skills required to meet the challenges of a dynamic modern society. (SM006, p15)

Furthermore, the OCMT has eight core values which were developed as a 'help guide for the members of an organisation'. These core values were developed as the result of several workshops conducted with all the OCMT's internal stakeholders (SM006, p14). It is expected that these values guide the behaviours of all members of the College including the GFP staff. OCMT states further that 'The GFPD is also committed to imparting and inculcating the values adopted by the college' to its students (Portfolio p12).

The OCMT departments formalised their own Mission in 2018 with reference to actual practice (Portfolio p12, SM008, p7, SM025). The Panel heard that the GFPD formalised its own Mission with regard to its overall purpose in discussion with academic staff, but without student input (interviews). The GFPD consulted with the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) prior to approval of its Mission by the CC. The GFPD Mission is as follows:

1. *Providing the students with an open and equal opportunity learning environment conducive for improving their English Language proficiency,*

- proper training in general and academic English, personal and professional development and creating a regional, and global cultural awareness.*
2. *Providing the students with the necessary basic theoretical and operational skills in mathematics so as to prepare them for the academic diploma and degree programmes.*
 3. *Providing the students with basic knowledge on information technology and thoroughly train them in input, processing and analysing skills necessary in various higher education programmes.*
 4. *Providing the students with basic study and academic skills necessary for higher education programmes.*
 5. *Providing the right environment for students to develop sound practical and critical analytic skills that will help them in their more advanced studies at OCMT. (SM007, p5)*

Furthermore, the GFP has its specific objectives (SM025) as follows:

1. *Developing oral and written communication skills in English among the students to facilitate their effective learning in the chosen field of academic studies.*
2. *Providing a broad spectrum of knowledge and skills in various disciplines to enrich the employability of the graduates.*
3. *Ensuring the culture of quality in all aspects through continuous process for improvement.*
4. *Inculcating among the students the social and ethical values to make them responsible citizens of the nation. (SM025, p5)*

The Panel noted that both the GFP Mission and Objectives as well as the College Mission, Vision, and Values (MVV) are communicated to staff via the GFP Manual (SM007), posters and electronic boards across campus. The OCMT states that the GFP's Mission and Objectives are closely aligned with the college MVV with regard to producing graduates who are capable of meeting 'the challenges of a dynamic modern society' (Portfolio, p12). The Panel confirmed this alignment in terms of learning environment, professional practice, and 'global cultural awareness'.

1.2 GFP Governance and Management Arrangements

The OCMT organisational structure is posted on its website and is available in the evidence provided (ASM003). The Dean oversees all the OCMT departments aided by the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA) and the Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs (ADAF) who report to him. The GFPD head reports to the ADAA. The Dean, in turn, reports to the Board of Trustees (BoT) and to the Board of Directors (BoD) (ASM003). Before the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the Panel was informed that the ADAFA had resigned a few weeks previously. At the time of the GFP Quality Audit Visit the Head of the Financial Affairs Department (HFAD) was supervising all financial matters.

The OCMT has organisational bylaws which are in Arabic and dated 2016-17 (SM011). Its Financial bylaws (ASM005) and Student Council bylaws (SM130), both dated 2017-18, are also in Arabic. However, excerpts from the OCMT Personnel bylaws (SM0157) and Student Affairs bylaws (SM031) were provided to the Panel in English. The Panel is concerned about communication of the bylaws to non-Arabic speaking members of the OCMT community.

When asked for a GFP specific organogram, the Panel was informed that due to its small size and the fact that the GFPD head (HoD) is in constant communication with staff, there was no such GFPD specific organisation chart. However, the GFPD has a Departmental Council (GFPDC) to oversee its operations, and it 'is represented in the top decision-making body of the College – College Council –

by the HoD' (Portfolio, p13, SM014), which was confirmed by the Panel during the GFP Quality Audit Visit.

The OCMT oversees its constituent entities and interacts by means of a committee and council structure. There are four councils representing academic departments including the GFPD. The 19 committees are classified as either academic or non-academic or administrative and all of them report to the College Council (SM014). The Panel noted that the GFPD is well represented in the committees relevant to the nature and scope of its operations (SM014). The HoD is a member of four OCMT key committees such as Quality Assurance Committee (QAC); Strategic Planning and Risk Management Committee (SPRMC) which is a unified committee created by merging what were previously separate Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) and Risk Management Committee (RMC); Academic Affairs Committee (AAC); IT Facilities Committee (ITFC), and in addition participates in Appointment Committee (AC) and Promotion Committee for Administrative Staff (PCAF) when relevant to the GFPD. Moreover, a representative from GFPD participates in other college-level committees including Student Affairs and Alumni Committee (SAAC), Library and Learning Resources Committee (LLRC), Health and Safety Committee (HSC) and Graduation Ceremony Committee (GCC). The Panel was informed that committee meetings are scheduled after 2:30 PM to facilitate participation of staff. Furthermore, staff have the option to choose committees in which they wish to participate by submitting an application form (ASM058). They are required to indicate a minimum choice of five committees in the form. Thereafter, the QAC assigns members from among the staff of the college including the GFPD to different college committees subject to approval by the CC. However, despite the requirement of five choices to be indicated, the GFP staff assigned to serve in not more than two committees each (SM014, interviews). This arrangement aims to facilitate and enhance GFPD's communication with other departments. The Panel acknowledges the clear Terms of Reference (ToRs) available for each of these committees (ASM037).

The evaluation of effectiveness of the committee system in supporting the GFPD was not evident to the Panel. The Panel asked for documentary evidence of committee performance such as minutes of meetings for the past two AYs and was informed that such evidence was unavailable. When it was to how performance of committees with regard to supporting GFPD was evaluated, the GFP Annual reports were cited in evidence. But the cited evidence did not clarify the issue (ASM009- 2018-2019, SM025-2017-2018). The Panel urges the OCMT to conduct periodic review of the current governance and management of the GFP to ensure effective oversight of the programme.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology review the effectiveness of the current governance and management of the General Foundation Programme, particularly with regard to the committee system to ensure effective oversight of the Programme

1.3 Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance

Not applicable as OCMT does not offer the GFP in affiliation with any external entity.

1.4 Operational Planning

The OCMT has a centralised planning system that applies to all departments including the GFPD. The HoD provides input to the CC as a member. The Panel heard that all OCMT entities meet and prepare their operational plans (interviews). The OCMT's Strategic Plan (2015-2020) (SM006) consists of five themes: Teaching and Learning, Academic Support Services, Governance Structure, Transparency and

Accountability, Research, and Image and Marketing. The OCMT's centralised Operational Plan is derived from its Strategic Plan. The QAC, QAD, and the SPRMC in which the HoD is a member scrutinise and approve the operational plans. Then the CC ratifies submitted operational plans at the beginning of the academic year. Departmental financial plan outlay for all departments including the GFPD is discussed separately by the CC. The top management monitors resources allocation, and usage (Portfolio, p14). All departments follow the finalised and approved OCMT Institutional Strategic Plan and work collaboratively to achieve the unified OCMT Operational Plan.

Operational plans are finalised at the dedicated annual planning meeting of the SPRMC at the end of the year in coordination with the QAD and QAC. The HoD representing the GFPD participates in the meeting as a member of the SPRMC. The QAD, SPRMC and the CC are involved in the approval process; the finalised plan is ratified by the CC. The SPRMC analyses and evaluates targets and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The OCMT states that 'The committee also verifies the themes and goals of the strategic plan and makes sure that they are incorporated into the department operational plans' (Portfolio, p14, SM015). The Panel was informed that the GFP staff meet with the HoD to check and set the targets (interviews). However, there is limited reference to the GFPD's role in preparing, monitoring, and evaluating departmental operational plans in the evidence provided (SM015).

The CC approved the College operational plan and had called for departmental operational plans to be submitted in a standardised format 'as soon as possible' at its meeting held in October 2017 (SM016). Hence, the Panel requested a GFPD specific operational plan, but was informed that the GFPD does not have its own operational plan as it is embedded within the college-wide plan. However, there is inconsistent information in this regard as some GFPD documents refer to the department's operational plans; for instance, the Panel was provided with a document dated 2018-2019 in a file titled 'GFP Operational Plan' (ASM050) which appeared to be an excerpt of pages from the centralised college operational plan, and not a GFPD operational plan as indicated by the submitted evidence (SM016). Hence, the Panel could not conclusively verify the GFPD operational planning and approval process. Moreover, the Portfolio indicates that the GFPD 'prepares an operational plan at the beginning of every academic year to support students learning and to improve students' skills' (Portfolio, p39), and the supporting document is an incomplete 'Department Annual Plan 2017-2018' which includes a section titled operational plan, with six subsections of which five are blank. The operational plan section has targets for co-curricular activities, problem-based learning (PBL) and workshops, some of which are identified as KPI in a subsequent section (SM 125).

The Panel also heard that the GFPD documents plan-based actions for monitoring and review. The Panel reviewed the submitted evidence and observed that the three plans included in the GFP Annual Report were limited in scope as these referred only to co-curricular activities, reviewing assessments, invigilation mechanism and including PBL activities (ASM009, p14). However, nothing was about people responsible or involved, time frame, percentage of achievement, resources, target, etc. The Panel noted that the operational plan mentioned in the GFP Annual Report 2017-2018 (SM025, p13) is nearly the same as that for 2018-19, with the only difference being the number of courses using PBL activities which is 12 in 2018-19, compared to nine in 2017-18.

Whilst the Panel heard that the GFPD does not have a departmental operational plan, in the evidence provided there appear to be some operational plan elements included in its action plans for some selected areas. Such incomplete action plans demonstrate the lack of a holistic planning system for the GFPD and pose an adverse risk to the quality of programme delivery. In the Panel's view, a clear GFP specific operational plan will help resolve the issues of inconsistency seen in such a piecemeal approach to the GFPD operational planning process and facilitate enhancement of the quality of GFP's delivery and the department's operations. The Panel finds this an opportunity for improvement that the OCMT is advised to address as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology develop a comprehensive system of operational planning in the General Foundation Programme and implement a departmental operational plan with measurable indicators to ensure effective delivery of the programme.

1.5 Financial Management

As with planning, the OCMT has a centralised financial system that caters for financing all of its entities including the GFPD (ASM005). However, the GFPD budgeting has a bottom-up approach which allows the GFPDC to submit its requirements to the Finance Department before the end of an AY in the month of May (Portfolio, p15, SM019, ASM004). The HoD calls for inputs from staff with regard to resources including staffing, activities, and infrastructure (interviews); thereafter the identified requirements are submitted by the HoD to the Finance Department (FD) which presents the requirements for the consideration of the Budget Committee (BC) headed by the Dean. The HoD represents GFPD in this committee. The BC grants approval in principle subject to final approval by the BOD (SM020). Subsequently, The GFP is provided with the departmental budget document approved by the BOD.

The Panel heard that the main source of the GFPD revenue depends on sponsored student enrolment. Budget planning for the upcoming year in the GFPD is based on cost of the department's human resources, extra-curricular activities, procurement of learning material, purchase as well as maintenance of IT resources, and staff professional development. The Panel heard that currently the OCMT is able to finance GFPD from revenue, but concern was expressed with regard to the potential risk of reducing intake of students with the OCMT depending heavily on scholarships from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) (interviews). The OCMT has taken steps to improve the intake of students to the GFPD as the current campus has excess capacity (see Section 1.6). The Panel was informed that if and when contingencies arise, the Dean secures additional funding from the BOD to meet GFPD requirements. For instance, although it was an out-of-cycle decision by the GFPD to request purchase of newly identified textbooks, these were discussed in the CC meeting held in June 2019 (ASM001) and provided on time by the OCMT after due process just as all other approved requirements are provided on time (interviews). The Panel is satisfied that financial arrangements which OCMT has put in place adequately meet GFP provision needs (SM019).

1.6 Risk Management

The OCMT has an Institutional Risk Management Policy which was approved in 2017 to enable the college to know how to 'overcome, minimise and eliminate' various risks (SM021). It clarifies the OCMT's approach to risks by differentiating between risk management and risk control. The SPRMC is responsible to oversee risk management planning and management for all the OCMT academic and non-academic departments including the GFPD (Portfolio, p16, SM021, SM023). The QAD is responsible for policy monitoring and compliance (SM021).

From the OCMT electronic Risk Register (RR) provided (SM022), the Panel noted that risks pertinent to academic departments including the GFPD relate to both academic and non-academic matters such as student enrolment, shortage of staff, student discipline in classes, staff development activities, internet connection, availability of water in students housing, power outage, and loss of information and data. The RR includes an Academic Risk Plan and an Administrative Risk Plan. Risks are ranked using a 10-point scale. Moreover, risks are categorised as high, medium, low or insignificant; colour

coding is used for each category (SM022). Each risk is assigned a risk owner and owner's manager to ensure follow up and implementation.

Although the Panel acknowledges that the OCMT has identified diverse risks for the entire college and has developed plans to address these, it is concerned that in the context of risks applicable to the GFPD risk categorisation, the system of according priority to these requires improvement. For example, in the Academic Risk Plan (ARP) for AY 2017-18 'Resignation of A faculty member During teaching period' is categorised as 'medium-4.8' (SM022). The Panel heard that such sudden resignations of GFP staff did occur in the past, and more recently during mid-semester, a few weeks prior to the current GFP Quality Audit Visit necessitating staff substitution (interviews, see Section 4.6). The Panel noted that internet interruption for a week is also categorised as 4.8. Considering the diverse information technology tools being used in the GFPD for programme delivery (see Section 3.5) such categorisation needs closer scrutiny. Therefore, the OCMT is advised to review its existing risk management approach to ensure that the GFP related risks are identified clearly and addressed effectively.

Recommendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Oman College of Management and Technology review its existing risk management arrangements to ensure that the risks related to the General Foundation Programme are identified and categorised appropriately to be mitigated effectively.

1.7 Monitoring and Review

The College has a Programme Development and Review Policy (ASM008) that applies to all its departments including the GFPD. Reviews are scheduled at different times during an AY depending on purpose (SM024). At the beginning of an AY, GFPD faculty members review curriculum content, Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), but examinations and assessment tools are reviewed by the end of the AY. The GFPD and its academic operations are subject to annual review in collaboration with the QAD (Portfolio, p16). These reviews cover several activities such as benchmarking, academic advising, student progression and retention, department club activities, and staff professional development at the end of the AY with the exception of student orientation and induction programme which is reviewed every semester. In addition, the GFPD risk management is reviewed throughout the AY. The Dean and HoD review staff performance at the end of the AY (SM024). Furthermore, GFPD conducts its programme review every six years in accordance with the policy (ASM008). The Panel noted that the staff of the GFPD were aware of the review schedule (interviews). The OCMT, furthermore, has Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the Sur University College (SUC) (SM054) and the Al Zahara College (ZCW) (SM141) to benchmark the GFP; however, benchmarking arrangements are in their nascent stage of implementation; only external assessment moderation has been carried out thus far (see Section 2.1)

The OCMT conducts a number of college-wide surveys to elicit feedback on its operations, facilities, and infrastructure from staff and students including those of the GFPD, and produces reports (SM 009, SM010, ASM015). However, the Panel noted that such survey reports lacked information specifically related to the GFP. The Panel heard that GFPD response to such surveys is generally low (interviews, SM010, ASM015). The Panel is of the view that the monitoring and review processes of GFP would benefit from targeted surveys capturing GFP-specific feedback and data to enhance its provision.

Recommendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology ensure that its feedback collection and response analysis system consider the General

Foundation Programme as a distinct entity to inform the monitoring and review processes of the programme.

The Panel noted that the GFP conducts student evaluation of teachers through surveys at the end of each semester (SM029, ASM012). The Panel was informed that survey results are analysed by Reviewing and Evaluation Committee (REC) and the results are shared with the GFPD (ASM 037, interviews.). Recently, post-foundation teacher feedback was elicited by a brief feedback survey comprising 8 items related to GFP content, delivery, language skills, student support, student competence at exit, quality assurance, scope for improvement, and mission, vision accomplishment (SM046, p4-6). The survey results were discussed with the GFP staff. The average programme satisfaction rate from the survey is 67.6% with the lowest score of 63% awarded to English language skills of GFP graduates and the highest score of 75% awarded to scope for changes to be introduced to enhance student readiness for transition to undergraduate programmes. The Panel noted that there is inconsistent information on response to changes recommended to the GFP (interviews)

The GFPD has started collecting post-foundation student feedback on the programme to facilitate effective teaching and learning; their average rate of satisfaction is reported as 78.4% (ASM017, p3). In response to the January 2019 meeting with post-foundation staff and feedback survey, GFP faculty members introduced some improvements in the English component of the GFP to ensure smoother transition of students into their undergraduate programmes (SM028, SM046, SM061, ASM065). Post-foundation staff were able to give input any time informally, although changes made in response to such feedback were not formally communicated (interviews). The Panel is of the view that this area would benefit from a formal system to collect and analyse post-foundation student feedback on various aspects of their GFP experience (see Section 2.10)

1.8 Student Grievance Processes

The OCMT has an overarching Student Grievance System for all its entities including the GFPD. It includes a set of grievance regulations provided in the Student Affairs Bylaws (SM031) and is disseminated to students in both English and Arabic via the Student Handbook (SM032), as well as the OCMT website. Moreover, a Disciplinary Policy is in place to tackle non-academic issues which states:

Where staff and students experience or observe unprofessional behavior they have the right to make a complaint. Staff and/or students should complain about any misbehavior to the authorised person within the college. (SM033, p3)

The GFP staff and students were aware of the student grievance processes. The GFP staff are informed on how to deal with student behavioural issues during the induction programme and via the OCMT 'Handbook of Code of Practice' (SM183). Students are also made aware of disciplinary regulations and appeal processes including the timeline for grievance responses via the Student Handbook (SM032), and during orientation (interviews). The log of students' grievances during 2016-17 provided to the Panel included 39 instances of appeals against academic grades and 6 administrative complaints (SM035). The log, however, refers to all the OCMT entities and the GFP student appeal data was not disaggregated.

According to the OCMT Student Affairs Bylaws (SM031), students have the right to appeal, and there is a detailed Appeals Policy. The policy for student appeals is presented in the Student Handbook (SM0032), and the Panel confirmed that both GFP students and teachers have a clear understanding of the practice (interviews). Student appeals are made using different forms (SM037, SM036, ASM013). There is a 'Student Exam Appeal Form' to be used by students if they are unsatisfied with their examination results (SM037, ASM013). There is also a form intended to provide feedback to students on Mid-term GFP assessment performance (ASM028) (see Section 2.7).

The GFP students expressed their satisfaction towards the open-door policy practiced by staff and easy access to the offices of the OCMT authorities; all GFP students and the GFP staff are encouraged to

approach Student Affairs Department (SAD), the HoD, or the Dean as needed to discuss student concerns. GFP students can approach the concerned teacher, and academic advisors first, if the matter is not resolved then it is referred to the HoD. Most matters are resolved at the teacher and academic advisor levels. They approach the SAD only if needed and the SAD takes up the matter with the faculty concerned, and finally the Dean if a solution is not found by SAD (interviews). Cases of cheating in GFP examinations are handled by the GFPD Department Committee, and no such cases were escalated to the SAD in the current AY (interviews). The Panel heard that strict confidentiality is maintained with regard to student complaints and grievance redress (SM031, interviews). The Panel is satisfied that the College has proper procedures in place for GFP student grievance along with strict confidentiality duly maintained.

1.9 *Health and Safety*

The OCMT has a Health and Safety Policy which was last revised in 2016 (SM039). This policy, which is followed by GFPD, aims to ensure the security, health and safety of the college staff, students and visitors. The OCMT Organisation Bylaws clarify that the SSD is responsible for health and safety measures across campus and it reports to the ADAFA (ASM003). While the Panel heard that Health and Safety policy awareness is provided to the OCMT community the Panel did not see evidence of such policy awareness among students (interviews).

The Panel learnt that the OCMT invites Civil Defence Authority to conduct workshops and regular safety checks to ensure its compliance with its rules and regulations (SM041). Fire drills are conducted at both the college campus and hostels (interviews). However, the Panel noted that the evidence provided regarding fire drills is outdated (SM040). The OCMT invites guest speakers to speak on health issues as well (ASM040, p10, ASM074). Furthermore, the College has established a HSC to enhance services (ASM 037). A GFP instructor represents the department as a member in the HSC (SM014). Since 2015, a Health and Safety Officer has been appointed to ensure the execution of the Health and Safety Policy (SM042); and all the OCMT infrastructure is insured by different types of insurance policies.

The Panel learnt that primary medical care by a First Aid certified nurse is offered during working hours for all the OCMT departments including GFP students and GFP staff through its on-campus clinic (Portfolio, p18). In the event of urgent need for health care, students are referred to the nearest hospital and transported. A college vehicle and a driver are available 24/7 for this service. The GFP staff members are provided with medical insurance in compliance with Oman Labour Law (see Section 4.6). The Panel noted a high student and staff satisfaction rating with the clinic services (82% for students and 81% for staff) in the college-wide survey for AY 2018-19. The numbers of GFP student and staff responses were not clearly disaggregated with regard to Health and Safety (ASM 015). For instance, the GFP students rated medical services at 72% satisfaction for AY 2017-18 (SM010, p27) and at 63.8% for AY 2018-19 (ASM 015,). Overall, the Panel acknowledges that there are sufficient health and safety arrangements for all OCMT staff and students, including those in the GFP.

2 ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The GFP at the OCMT has undergone changes which have particularly impacted the area of student learning. The major changes are the OCMT's relocation at a permanent campus, the replacement of the two-semester system with a three-semester system and increasing the number of teaching hours.

This Chapter considers GFP student learning at the OCMT, in terms of GFP aims and learning outcome standards, curriculum; student entry and exit standards; teaching quality; assessment of student achievement; academic integrity; feedback to students on assessment; academic security and invigilation; student retention and progression; and relationships with GFP alumni.

2.1 *GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes*

The OCMT states that the aim of its GFP is based on the programme Mission and Vision to 'train its students effectively in all skills of learning for Higher Education studies' (Portfolio, p21). In this context the programme aims are drawn from GFP's five-point mission statement. The GFP aims refer to improving students' English language skill; training in general, academic English, personal, and professional development, promoting regional and global cultural awareness, theoretical and operational skills in Mathematics, providing basic knowledge and training in information technology, study and academic skills as well as sound practical and analytic skills. Each of these aims is further detailed as a set of learning outcomes which are verbatim copies of the OASGFP learning outcome standards (SM007).

The OCMT states that the GFP structure is internally benchmarked (Portfolio, p24). The Panel did not see any reference to such internal benchmarking in the evidence provided (SM044). Moreover, GFP structure, and level descriptions in the evidence provided contain little reference to the Mathematics, Computing, and General Study Skills (GSS) components of the GFP (SM005, SM007), except to indicate that GSS is embedded in Level 3 of English language component (SM005). The OCMT has initiated efforts to benchmark both its GFP curriculum and assessment with external partners (SM044, SM054, SM141). The OCMT held a meeting in 2018 with SUC to renew its GFP benchmarking MoU including curriculum benchmarking which was originally signed in 2016 (SM054, ASM071). The report of the meeting indicates that no GFP benchmarking activities were implemented under the original agreement although there is a reference to outputs under the original MOU (ASM071). Though the OCMT has Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with external partners for benchmarking, very little progress has been made in implementing such MoUs.

The Panel found that programme comparison activities were conducted with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) with regard to the GFP. The comparison exercise was unhelpful due to GFP structural differences between the institutions (interviews). Moreover, the reference to Al Zahara College in the submitted evidence is limited to similarity of entry and exit examinations (SM044). However, the Panel did not see evidence as to whether any changes have been made as a result of such benchmarking (SM141). The Panel learnt of further plan of the OCMT to work with the Mazoon College (Portfolio, p22), but the plan has not yet been implemented by the time of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. The Panel heard further that a plan to invite external experts for consultations to give inputs to the GFP has not yet been implemented (ASM066). The OCMT recognises external engagement for benchmarking of GFP as an opportunity for improvement (Portfolio, p22). The Panel concurs with the OCMT that the implementation of existing agreements with external partners for benchmarking have to be implemented, monitored, and evaluated. Hence, it urges the College to take necessary actions for implementing its plans in this regard.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology take necessary actions to implement its existing agreements with external partners to improve the General Foundation Programme benchmarking to inform the benchmarking activities of the programme.

2.2 Curriculum

The GFP was established to prepare students to join undergraduate programmes. It offers three levels in English and Mathematics compared to one level only in Computing, and General Study Skills (SM005). The GFP students are obliged to successfully complete a total of 840 contact hours in three semesters to get a non-credited certificate that enables them to join OCMT degrees (SM005). During the GFP Quality Audit Visit, 770 students were enrolled in the college of which 203 belong to the GFP. The academic year is divided into three semesters for GFP: September to December, mid-January to mid-April and the end of April to mid-July. Each level of GFP provides tuition for 21 hours a week over forty weeks. The GFPD also offers post-foundation English language courses.

The GFP 'Course Descriptions (CD) and the Lecture Delivery Plan (LDP) are designed and graded in a progressive manner' (Portfolio, p24, SM027). The CD and LDP are revised at the beginning of an AY (SM024). In the AY 2018-19 changes were made in five modules in response to such revision (SM051). Furthermore, OCMT states that 'The GFP Curriculum is outlined in the Lecture Delivery Plan (LDP)', including the Course Syllabi delineating all the programme skills (Portfolio, p22). The evidence provided as LDP for Level 1 of the GFP is a pacing schedule which does not include any reference to the learning outcomes (SM027). The Panel did not see evidence of how the LDP is linked to clear and distinct course learning outcomes of the GFP modules (See Section 2.2). However, the sample Course Portfolio (CP) submitted in evidence includes Course Description (CD), LOs and LO statements (SM068) which are aligned with the LDP. The Panel is concerned that a pacing schedule is being considered as curriculum. The GFP review schedule submitted in evidence includes a reference to PLOs (SM024). The Panel did not see PLO statements or any other reference to PLOs in the other evidence documents provided.

The OCMT states that the GFP course contents are designed to meet the LOs specified in OAAA guidelines (Portfolio, p7), and that its GFP is in alignment with the OASGFP (Portfolio, p21). The LOs in the submitted evidence are verbatim copies of Learning Outcome Standards for each GFP component in the OASGFP (SM007). The Panel noted that the GFP standards are merely minimum requirements prescribed in the OASGFP. Moreover, OASGFP standards by themselves are not curricula (OASGFP, p4) and, these do not reflect progression from entry to exit standards, especially in terms of the English language component. Furthermore, the OCMT refers to the GFP Study Plan as curriculum (Portfolio, p24, SM064). The Panel advises the OCMT to design, develop and implement its own comprehensive GFP curriculum in consideration of the standards, and the aims of its GFP so as to ensure that GFP students meet appropriate exit standards in all areas.

The Panel noted that the language courses are skills-based, with a greater focus on IELTS. The GFP uses Oxford and Cambridge course books as a resource to support curriculum delivery (SM007). Textbooks are reviewed by the GFP staff at the end of the AY. The last review resulted in updating the textbooks. The Panel was given conflicting reasons for the decision to change textbooks with one reason being that the change was suggested by a former staff member who felt the previous material was outdated, and another that the change was suggested during feedback from GFP staff who were involved in the review and that the two criteria considered were cultural appropriateness and locally relevant topics. Moreover, the GFP students felt the books were interesting and appropriate (interviews). Selected international textbooks are used for English and for IT (SM007, SM051) whereas

in-house prepared materials along with relevant references are utilised for Mathematics and General Study Skills (see Section 3.4).

The OCMT states that the GFPDC discusses curriculum improvement issues and takes decisions for implementation in the subsequent semesters and AYs. The introduction of a number of PBL activities is mentioned as an outcome of last such review (Portfolio, p16). PBL activities such as book review, mini book review, and group activities linked to external student trips, are now part of the curriculum (SM027). However, the evidence provided for implementation of PBL activities was limited to a set of questions related to referencing and citations in articles, and an accompanying illustration with no explanation of purpose (SM075). The Panel found that the GFP teaching staff had understanding of PBL and this was being incorporated into the GFP, including Mathematics (interviews). Moreover, the Panel heard that there were mixed opinions regarding students' critical thinking and independent learning ability once they begin their post-foundation studies. The Panel noted that since the increase in PBL activities has been introduced in the current AY 2019-20 the impact of these activities in improving the students' critical thinking, and problem solving abilities can be assessed only after they complete their courses including PBL activities.

The College states that the 'Curriculum is reviewed with the commencement of every new year' (Portfolio, p24). However, the Panel noted that this is a course review rather than a curriculum review (interviews). As part of its effort to obtain stakeholder feedback the GFPD surveyed students exiting the GFP (SM060). Out of 50 students 79.2% said the 'foundation programme' helped them to prepare for their academic studies. Survey results of post-foundation staff suggest that students' speaking and writing skills need improvement, although there is mention of students' low level upon joining the GFP (SM046). Feedback from post-foundation teachers indicate that 75% of those surveyed recommend implementation of changes suggested to improve the GFP (SM061). There is some evidence that changes have been partially implemented, with the introduction of a specialised vocabulary component for Level 3 students, which was viewed positively by both post-foundation staff and students (see Section 1.7). The Panel suggests that the GFPD widens its scope for seeking feedback from all its stakeholders on the programme, monitors and reports the effectiveness of implemented changes (see Sections 1.7 and 2.9).

The OCMT states that it plans to solicit feedback on its GFP from experts in the field to assess the effectiveness of its curriculum in the coming year and introduce more rigorous feedback from students and other stakeholders (Portfolio, p23). The CC had discussed the proposal to invite external experts to review the GFP at its meeting held in November 2019 and approved the proposal (ASM066). There is evidence of some discussion with SUC on aspects of the curriculum other than examination (Portfolio, p22) during one visit in December 2018 (ASM071).

Whilst the Panel acknowledges these initiatives, it encourages the College to take them further than intentions to develop and implements a comprehensive framework that embraces all components of the GFP with clearly identified learning outcomes at the programme as well as the course levels.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum with clear and distinct programme and course learning outcomes for each level of the General Foundation Programme to ensure its fitness for purpose.

2.3 Student Entry and Exit Standards

Students applying to the OCMT need a minimum score of 50% in their General Education Diploma (GED). The GFPD administers Computer Based Placement Tests (CBPT) in English, Mathematics, and

Computing (SM045, SM056, SM063). The CBPT is administered during the orientation week in order to register students in an appropriate level of the GFP based on the CBPT scores. According to the OCMT, the CBPT was developed in consultation with its affiliate, the Yarmouk University, which is a certified centre for Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in Jordan (ASM064, p3).. The Panel noted that writing and speaking skills are assessed by pen and paper and orally respectively (SM063), whereas Mathematics and IT components are assessed by computer-based form of testing. The Panel noted student satisfaction with this form of testing (interviews). The Mathematics component of CBPT is based on the pattern of the National Talent Test of India (NTTI). The IT component is based on the first three modules of International Computer Driving License (ICDL) which are computer essentials, using the computer and managing files, and word processing (ASM064).

The OCMT clearly states possible exemptions from the three levels of the English component of its GFP programme in its Regulations for GFP (ASM064). For English, this includes International English Language Testing System (IELTS) 5.0 or above with no minimum score specified in the four individual components, TOEFL score of 500, and Michigan Test Score of 50 out of 100. The prescribed IELTS score is partially in line with the OASGFP. Since the OASGFP requires that the score in each individual skill should not be below IELTS 4.5 and the overall score should be less than 5.0 as the entry standard (OASGFP, p12), the Panel urges the OCMT to align with the prescribed standards.

Recommendation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology takes immediate actions to ensure that its General Foundation Programme exemption and exit regulations are aligned with the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes.

A score of 65 and above on a CBPT also results in an exemption from the GFP English component. The Panel noted that the students exempted from the Level 3 English component of the GFP are required to study Mathematics and GSS during the first semester of their undergraduate year (ASM064, p3. See also undergraduate study plans on college website). For Mathematics and IT, there is no exemption mentioned other than a pass mark of 65% and above in the respective placement tests. There is also no information on how the CBPT score of 65% was benchmarked against the IELTS Band 5 or TOEFL 500, and Michigan Test 50/100. The OCMT does not have any international students at present. Hence the Panel did not see any entry level criteria to determine equivalence of other secondary school leaving qualifications with the GED.

Students exiting the GFP need to pass an English Exit Test (SM057) in addition to Level 3 examinations. The College claims that 'The Exit Exam (SM057) is IELTS-based – edited open source material - which is tailored according to students' level of language acquisition' (Portfolio, p24). However, students exiting the Mathematics and IT components only need to score 50% on the Level 3 and Level 2 examinations respectively. With regard to the English language component of the GFP a writing rubric gives much more detailed guidance for teachers than the exit test speaking rubric (SM048, SM049). OCMT states that 'Improvement in Students' performance is also evaluated by comparing their entry and exit exam results especially in writing (SM050)' (Portfolio, p24), which was substantiated during the GFP Quality Audit Visit (interviews). However, the evidence provided does not clarify how such comparison information is used (SM050). The Panel did not see any evidence of similar evaluation of progression for the Mathematics, and Computing components of the GFP. The Panel was informed several times about students' low levels, especially in language upon entry to the GFP (interviews). The Panel suggests that the GFPD needs to consider enhancing the scope of progression evaluation against entry standards for all GFP components and use the findings to improve student preparedness to enter undergraduate studies.

Recommendation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology benchmark student exit standards for Mathematics and Information Technology components of the General Foundation Programme with internationally recognised reference points to ensure that students are fully prepared for their undergraduate studies.

In response to an affirmation in the OCMT Quality Audit Report with regard to benchmarking the performance of graduates from the GFP, the OCMT has encouraged students to take IELTS examinations (Portfolio, p24). The Panel reviewed IELTS results dated 2018 and 2019 for three students submitted in evidence and found that two had scored 5 overall and one scored 3.5. There is no evidence of similar exit standard benchmarking for Mathematics and Information Technology.

The OCMT has a MoU with International Education Specialists (IDP) so students can ‘check their skills in-house’ (Portfolio, p24) and funding for this has been allocated for the AY 2019-20. Students completing the English component of GFP would be selected to take the examinations with IDP Education after the exit examination (Portfolio, p24, SM053). The Panel supports the OCMT’s effort to benchmark exit standards for the English language component of the GFP with an external partner.

Affirmation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the Oman College of Management and Technology on its decision to benchmark the exit standards for English component of the General Foundation Programme in collaboration with an external partner, and supports the College’s effort in this regard.

2.4 Teaching Quality

The OCMT’s Mission seeks to provide the society with graduates ‘who exhibit sound knowledge and skills required to meet the challenges of a dynamic modern society’ (SM006, p15). Consequently, the GFPD applies due diligence to provide the students with a skill-based approach in order to achieve the LOs of each module (Portfolio, pp24-25).

There are a range of teaching methodologies with technology being an integral part of classroom instruction. The extensive use of technology through Google Classrooms (SM066) and through Microsoft TEAMS was verified (see Section 3.5) and confirmed (interviews). To refine teaching methods ‘a pedagogical framework is reflected in each study plan, according to the three levels (SM007)’ (Portfolio, p24). The Panel did not find such pedagogical frameworks in the provided study plans although there is evidence of the implementation of frameworks such as PBL in the LDP (SM027). The GFPD instructors apply a variety of teaching methods such as Power Point presentations, in-class activities, group and project work and PBL (interviews). Homework and revision sessions are coordinated skill-wise (Portfolio, p24). Course portfolios are maintained for each subject or skill (SM068). The Panel also noted that the library contains a good range and number of English books and there was evidence that assignments made use of these resources (ASM075). The Panel noted a wide selection of graded readers that are mostly appropriate for lower-level students (see Section 3.4)

The Panel noted that peer observation has been carried out since 2016-17 to enhance the quality of teaching (ASM24). The peer observation schedule for the current academic year indicates that staff have regular opportunity to observe several of their colleagues, including the teaching sessions conducted by the HoD (ASM062). However, on examining samples of the feedback of these observations, the Panel found that the feedback form is judgmental in nature (scored on a three-point scale of Poor, Good and Excellent) rather than developmental in that there was no provision to

recommend specific actions to be taken to improve performance (SM069). The Panel did not find evidence to show how such feedback contributed to future teaching quality improvement, and how the GFPD team may wish to explore ways to use pre- and post-feedback discussion of these reports effectively.

GFP student evaluation of teaching is carried out at the end of each semester by means of an online survey (SM029). Students in all three levels participate in evaluating their GFPD instructors as well (ASM12). The OCMT has taken steps to obtain post-foundation student feedback from the AY 2018-19 (SM061, ASM017) (see Section 2.10). The feedback on modules and teachers is generally positive (see Section 4.5).

The GFP instructors have office hour timetables for two hours each week (SM070), and they are accessible to students (Portfolio, p.25, interviews). The Panel noted that some instructors could be teaching up to seven different classes (SM114), and that although the average staff to students ratio was given as 1:26, 13 of 19 classes had 30 or more students, with one of these having over 40 students. The Annual Plan for AY 2017-18 showed that some instructors were teaching up to 9 different classes in the year 2017, and 12 of the classes had 40 students or more. The average GFP staff to student ratio for Semester 1 was 1:31 and for semester 2 it was 1:30 (SM125). Although the average ratio appears to have fallen since AY 2016-17, the Panel received conflicting information in the reported ratio for the first semester of AY 2018-19 between 1:26 (SM114) and 1:28 (ASM063). The Panel believes that these densely populated classes could have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and student learning opportunities considering the overall workload of the GFPD faculty. Furthermore, the Panel confirmed that the GFP staff have membership in some college-level committees (see Section 1.2), though it might be useful to ensure a GFP voice within the OCMT, it might have negative impacts on their workloads (interviews). The GFP faculty manage Post-foundation courses as well (Portfolio, p13). In view of the small size of the GFP, GFP staff teacher involvement in Post-foundation courses and committees, mid-semester resignations, and the large GFP class sizes the Panel urges OCMT to review its GFP faculty workload (see Sections 1.6, and 4.2).

Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology address the workload of General Foundation Programme academic staff to enhance focus on teaching quality and facilitate closer attention to student learning needs.

2.5 Academic Integrity

The OCMT states that the GFPD has well-designed procedures to ensure that students and staff are aware of academic integrity issues (Portfolio, p25). The GFP has clear policies to deal with cheating in examinations and the Panel confirmed students' awareness of these policies (interviews). A Plagiarism Policy (ASM019) is available on Microsoft TEAMS. 'Guidelines on Plagiarism' are included in the 'Handbook of Code of Practice' (SM183). Academic misconduct is addressed in the week-long Student Orientation Programme through a presentation given by IT staff (SM071) and in the Student Handbook (SM032), which all students receive on a flash drive as part of the orientation programme (Portfolio, p25, interviews). The Panel was informed that the topic of plagiarism is also mentioned by academic advisors during their sessions with the advisees and by teachers in classes frequently. The GFP students seemed aware of these procedures with regard to how their work is checked and how many times it can be done but indicated that students may need more guidance in the mechanics of referencing (interviews). Furthermore, academic integrity awareness is promoted via the GSS courses (interviews)

The GFPD uses 'Plagiarism' software to detect Plagiarism and the Panel confirmed that this software is being used (interviews, ASM026). The Panel, however, noted a discrepancy between the Plagiarism Policy statement that indicated that the permissible plagiarism percentage increase in from 20% to 25% during the AY 2017-18 (ASM019), but the Panel heard that the 20% is the permitted similarity index (interviews). Evidence was found that GFP students' work is checked for plagiarism (ASM026), although no example of plagiarism cases or actions that were taken against them were provided. There is however, evidence that staff are aware of academic integrity when developing materials (SM072) and such awareness was substantiated during interviews. Academic integrity is dealt with during staff induction (ASM045), although there was no information on how this would be dealt with if staff missed the induction programme.

The Panel noted that the arrangements to deal with plagiarism in the GFP and staff and student awareness of these arrangements are satisfactory.

2.6 *Assessment of Student Achievement*

The OCMT states that the GFP summative assessments include mid-term and final written examinations (SM047) except for speaking skills which are assessed by presentations, and interviews based on IELTS (SM048). Formative assessments are diverse and include 'problem-based learning, assignments, quizzes, class activities, research projects, oral presentations, skits, debates and laboratory exercises (SM075)' (Portfolio, p26).

The Panel learnt that the GFP has changed the distribution of its assessment scores in response to the GFPDC decision (Portfolio, p26, SM080). The Panel heard conflicting accounts about the reasons behind the change, with one being the need to assess PBL activities, and the other being faculty feedback via surveys (interviews).

The Panel was informed that Learning Outcomes (LOs) are aligned with course material based on course plans. The GFP coordinators verify alignment which is reflected in the LDP (interviews). The Panel saw evidence of linking LOs to assessments for English, Computing, and Mathematics (Portfolio, p26, SM079, ASM027). The English exit examination also shows the learning outcomes linked to the assessment (SM057). No evidence was found on similar alignment in the GSS. Considering that the LOs for English are themselves not clearly distinguished across the three levels, the mapping between assessment methods and LOs appeared to be the same for all three levels. The internal and external moderation reports, moreover, use the same template for all levels. For Mathematics, the higher level LOs are covered in the final examination of Mathematics Level 3 (SM079).

Formative assessment is utilised for assessing PBL, assignments, quizzes, class activities, research projects, oral presentations, skits, debates and laboratory exercises (Portfolio p26, SM075). However, the Panel did not see from the evidence provided how exactly such work is assessed (SM075). OCMT states that 'Summative assessments such as the midterm and final exams are set by the skills coordinator(s) or the subject teacher assigned, based on the learning outcomes' (Portfolio, p28). The Panel did not see evidence of double-blind marking. The GFPD may benefit from widening the scope of its examination marking procedures.

The Panel acknowledges the efforts of the OCMT to align its GFP course LOs with assessments to ensure that student achievement of the LOs is being assessed effectively. However, there is no evidence of mapping the individual level-specific LOs with their respective assessments to show progression, particularly those of the English component, considering that current course LOs do not show progression from lower to higher levels. Hence, the Panel is of the view that a distinct and level-specific approach to mapping of LOs to their assessments, along with rubrics that reflect different expectations

across the three GFP levels, is required to ensure achievement of exit standards of each level and progression from one GFP level to the next.

Recommendation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology widen the scope of General Foundation Programme assessment mapping to ensure that level-specific learning outcomes are distinctly mapped to corresponding assessments.

Internal and external moderation of GFP examinations are conducted in compliance with the OCMT Assessment Policy, which was developed and implemented in the AY 2014-15 and the first revision was conducted in 2018 (ASM010, p2). The policy defines moderation as an internal or external review of assessment instruments by peers within the same specialisation. Internal moderation is conducted to ensure that assessment tools cover the module LOs prior to administering the examinations (SM079). A list of GFP internal moderators was provided to the Panel (SM077). The Panel, however, did not find evidence of how internal moderators are selected. Furthermore, the Panel did not find evidence of a policy or guidelines for conducting internal moderation or addressing the outcomes of such moderation. Post moderation is conducted by checking samples of the examination papers and answer sheets by external or internal reviewer to ensure examination quality (ASM010). The evidence provided for external moderation by the SUC and (ZCW) showed that suggestions for improvement were given by the external moderators (SM078, ASM027, ASM059). However, there was no evidence that these suggestions have been addressed.

The GFP has procedures to standardise examinations based on skills and subjects involved in each level (SM76, SM77). The Panel, however, learnt that the level of difficulty of each examination could be adjusted according to 'the ability of the student cohort', or that a final examination could be made easier if marks for midterm examinations were low (interviews). In the Panel's opinion this practice indicates that students rather than the LOs are being assessed and that the complexity and difficulty of assessments for each cohort may vary on interpretation of cohort profile. The Panel urges the GFPD to ensure that the LOs are appropriately assessed, and the complexity and difficulty level of assessments are similar across different GFP student cohorts.

Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology ensure that assessments are of similar level of difficulty across the General Foundation Programme student cohorts.

2.7 Feedback to Students on Assessment

The GFP students have opportunity to see and discuss their assessed work both in class and in office meetings, with the exception of final examinations. The OCMT Handbook of Code of Practice emphasises feedback to students stating that the assessment feedback must be sufficient and in a manner that supports student learning and help them improve their intellectual skills (SM183). Students are informed of examination grades within 48 hours of taking an examination, as laid out in the Student Handbook (SM32). Marked examinations are shown and discussed in class. The Panel reviewed a sample of these marked works and noted students are sometimes given general feedback on their answer scripts (ASM028). However, the Panel did not see evidence to show that such assessment feedback

extends to performance in individual learning outcomes. The Panel learnt that the GFP instructors discuss the examination results and that students are aware of appeal procedures (interviews).

The Panel did not find any guidelines on the kind of feedback that students should receive on their submitted work. The GFP students can give online feedback on assessment methods (Portfolio, p28). In the college-wide Survey Analysis Report for AY 2018-19 (ASM015, p26), 67.5% of the 17 GFP respondents found the 'distribution of exam timetable' satisfactory and 56.3% found 'solving discrepancy in exams timetable' satisfactory.

The OCMT has recently switched to the Microsoft TEAMS (MS-TEAMS) platform which has provision for feedback on continuous assessments to GFP students in the future. However, the Panel was unable to verify this as the GFP students were not yet exposed to the new on-line assessment feedback system at the time of the GFP Quality Audit Visit.

Overall, the Panel concluded that GFP students are given feedback on their assessment performance; however, the College does not have clear guidelines on how this feedback is provided nor a mechanism to measure the effectiveness of this feedback. The College is encouraged to consider addressing these requirements.

2.8 *Academic Security and Invigilation*

The OCMT describes examination procedures in detail (Portfolio, p28). The College has an Assessment Policy that applies to the GFP (ASM010). The evidence provided suggests that procedures for conducting examinations are clear and that staff are given clear information about their roles in examination preparation (SM077). The Panel, however, noted that no guidance is provided to staff on how to deal with unacceptable behaviour in examination halls; even the instructions on the material which are not allowed in the examination (ASM010) were inconsistently implemented (interviews). It was not clear to the Panel how breaches or issues of infringement during invigilation could be identified and addressed (interviews). All cheating cases should be reported to the HoD as well as to the SAD along with Exam Cheating Report Form (SM073).

The OCMT states that 'Multiple sets' of summative examinations are prepared (Portfolio, p28) to prevent cheating. The Panel, however, was informed that two versions of examination papers are produced for each examination (interviews) (SM076, SM084). Regardless of the number of examination versions produced, the Panel did not find evidence on how the level of complexity of the multiple versions of summative examination question papers is equated, maintained and standardised. The internal and external moderation processes did not refer to such standardisation either (SM079, ASM027). The final versions of examination papers are sent by the faculty members to the HoD by email for approval (Portfolio, p28). This practice was also confirmed during interviews. In the Panel's view, this use of email to transmit finalised question papers represents a potential risk to examination security.

The GFP examination schedule shows that examinations are invigilated by one teacher with no reference to the number of students to be attended by each invigilator (SM090). The Panel heard that the HoD acts as corridor monitor (interviews). The Academic Risk Plan mentions a yet-to-be-implemented solution to avoid cheating in examinations, namely the use of multiple invigilators in classes with more than 30 students (ASM007). The Panel heard conflicting views with reference to invigilators being able to manage exigencies during invigilation (interviews). The Panel suggests that the OCMT reviews its GFP existing examination preparation and related arrangements to ensure assessment security.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology review the arrangements of examination preparation in the General Foundation Programme to ensure common understanding and consistent implementation of these arrangements, secured transmission of examination material and robust invigilation practice.

2.9 Student Retention and Progression

The GFP student progression and retention data is collected and assessed from the College system by the GFPD. The Panel noted that around 60 students had left the GFP in the first semester of AY 2016-17 (Portfolio, p29). In the same year, there was no intake or exit in the 3rd semester. The data analysis report for the AY 2016-17 shows a progression rate of 28.35%, retention rate of 82.66% and attrition rate of 8.72%. The attrition rate for GFP was higher than the rates for other OCMT academic departments (SM091). The subsequent AY 2017-18 showed marginal improvement in the intake numbers. The data of GFP student progression and retention from AY 2016-17 to 2017-18 is provided as real numbers in a tabular form (SM091). The OCMT lists the programme completion rates for all its academic departments except those of the GFP. The GFP students failing a course are allowed to repeat that course without special remedial effort except routine academic advising. The analysis of GFP examination results is limited to the number of failing candidates based on gender distribution (SM092). The Panel inquired about the rationale of this choice but it did not get a satisfactory reply (interviews).

The progression rate is also 'scrutinised by the analysis of the results of the Exit Exam from the previous years' (Portfolio, p29). The Panel requested additional supplementary material containing statistics on cohort analysis for each level of GFP for the last three years, but this information was unavailable. There was no evidence, moreover, that the College is working on addressing the paucity of this significant information.

At-risk students are identified after mid-term and referred to their academic advisors (SM085). However, there was no evidence of evaluating the effectiveness of academic advising in the GFPD (see Section 3.6). The Panel urges OCMT to improve GFP student retention and progression data collection and monitor these rates regularly to inform improvement actions in the programme.

Recommendation 13

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Oman College of Management and Technology establish and implement a comprehensive system to collect and analyse data on the General Foundation Programme student retention and progression and utilise the results to improve the progression and retention rates in the programme.

2.10 Relationships with GFP Alumni

The OCMT has initiated a formal system to obtain post-foundation student feedback on GFP recently, i.e. in AY 2018-19. The Panel found evidence of data collection on the experience of GFP graduates on several aspects of the programme such as teaching and learning, learning resources, suitability of the curriculum, teaching aids, academic advising, examination and co-curricular, and extracurricular activities surveys (SM060, ASM017). Satisfaction rates given by the 50 students who participated in the survey ranged from 75.2% for 'Student's performance is monitored continuously' to 81.6% for

'Faculty members were knowledgeable and helpful'. The overall programme satisfaction rate was 78.4% (ASM017).

The OCMT states that the GFP alumni and especially the Student Council members are involved with the orientation and induction programmes conducted for new GFP students (Portfolio, p30). The Panel, however, heard contradictory information about the scope of this participation (interviews).

The GFP alumni interact with GFP students in an informal peer assistance scheme, especially two weeks before final examinations. This informal *ad hoc* activity is arranged either at the recommendation of a teacher or at the request of the GFP students (Portfolio, p39). Students expressed their positive feelings about this initiative (interviews). There was no evidence of how this initiative impacted GFP student performance or if the GFPD is working on formalising it. The Panel, however, found evidence that the department is considering ways to improve the currently low post-foundation student participation in the aforementioned survey on their GFP experience (SM098). The Panel concurs that surveying a larger sample of post-GFP students would enhance the reliability of the data collected (SM098). The Panel agrees with the OCMT on the need to enhance the role of GFP alumni in improving the learning experience of the GFP students and supports it to achieve this aim.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the Oman College of Management and Technology that feedback collection from the General Foundation Programme alumni needs to be improved, and supports its effort to introduce formal mechanisms in this regard.

3 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

The OCMT's relocation to its permanent campus has expanded both facilities and support services for staff and students of the College including the GFP.

This section focuses on reporting the Panel's review and findings in relation to student profile, registry, student induction, teaching and learning resources, information and learning technologies, academic advising, student learning support, student satisfaction and climate, student behaviour, non-academic support services and facilities, and external engagement.

3.1 *Student Profile*

The Admission and Registration Department (ARD) at OCMT is responsible for student admission and registration services in compliance with the college Admission Policy and maintains communication with the Higher Education Admission Center (HEAC) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The electronic system of admission and registration in the College facilitates the generation of diverse student profile information including gender, age and nationality, which, in turn helps the GFPD to collect, analyse, interpret the information to support student learning and provide required operational decision making information to the GFPD (Portfolio, p33, ASM020). Female students comprise the majority of student population in the GFP. The GFP student application form for enrolment at the OCMT includes a declaration of physical disability (ASM031). The ARD is vested with the responsibility to identify students with special needs, and the College claims that there have been no cases of special needs so far (Portfolio, p35, ASM021). The Panel, however, learnt that there have been a few identified past cases of students with disabilities and that support was extended to them, and that when such cases were identified due confidentiality of information was ensured (interviews).

The Panel was informed about the practice of discussing the student profile information in the GFPDC for maintaining gender distribution ratios in courses (SM097), and for organising extra-curricular activities especially for female students (interviews). The OCMT states that the GFPD's club activities are designed by referencing trend statistics and student profile (SM098). Information on gender, and whether a student is a hostel resident or non-resident is used for planning club activities and other non-academic support services (Portfolio, p33, ASM048).

The OCMT has identified the need for improvement in GFP student profile information analysis and utilisation (Portfolio, p 34). The Panel, however, did not find details of envisaged statistical reports in the evidence provided (ASM021). There was evidence that current student profile information was part of the e-portal Edugate that is used for organising instruction and class management. The Panel reviewed the evidence submitted and noted that the GFP student profile information pertains to gender distribution, location information, nationality, grades, date and place of birth (ASM021). Both the documentary evidence provided (SM095, SM096, SM099) and the interviews confirmed that use of the student profile data was limited to gender distribution. There is no evidence that the GFP student profile information is discussed or utilised for further purposes (ASM020, interviews). Moreover, the evidence provided do not show how student profile analysis contributes to support services planning, extracurricular activities, and support for students with disability. Considering that the information system resources are available with the ARD, the Panel is of the view that there is an opportunity for improving the current practice of GFP student profile data collection, analysis, and utilisation.

Recommendation 14

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology expand the scope of student profile data collection and ensure effective utilisation of the collected data to support the diverse needs of the General Foundation Programme students.

3.2 *Registration and Student Records*

The OCMT states that it maintains and manages an effective electronic student registration and records system to enable staff and students to access, analyse and manage GFP student data (Portfolio, p34) The Panel, furthermore, heard that the College has deployed a registration system that is technically supported and well-received by both staff members and students (interviews).

The GFPD allocates the GFP subjects to students in coordination with the ARD (Portfolio, p34). The Panel was told that GFP students are assigned their advisors for academic advising on enrolment in the appropriate courses (interviews, SM099, SM118). The College portal Edugate is used for course management such as monitoring student attendance and recording academic advising notes for individual students as well as whole cohorts (Portfolio, p35, interviews). The portal users have their own user profiles that allow communication between different stakeholders; academic advisors communicate with advisees using secure emails (SM088). The Panel heard that all student information are kept confidential; access to student data is only through the ARD and teachers can access the data related to student progression only for the purpose of academic advising (interviews).

The OCMT states that the QAD ensures proper operation of registry and its review (Portfolio, p35). The QAD also conducts a GFP Freshmen Survey to evaluate the effectiveness of enrolment and registration. Feedback from Freshmen Surveys of AY 2018-19, and 51 students in AY 2019-20 is largely positive. This was also confirmed in the interviews. The Panel noted that the results of the Freshmen Survey 2019-20 were discussed at a CC meeting (ASM066). The students gave highly positive rating of 85.6% to accessibility; enrolment and registration (SM106) which indicates significant improvement from the 67% rating for admission and registration procedures in AY 2017-18 (SM010). The Panel appreciates the OCMT's good practices with regard to student admission, enrolment, and registration linked to a feedback mechanism to assess student satisfaction.

Commendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the Oman College of Management and Technology for enhancing the processes and procedures followed in the General Foundation Programme student admission, enrolment, and registration which are received positively by students.

3.3 *Student Induction*

The OCMT states that it provides an orientation programme (SM071) for new students to familiarise them with the GFP structure, various GFP activities, and college support (Portfolio, p35). The Panel found that students are informed about the orientation programme sufficiently in advance through the College website and other communication media (Portfolio, p35). A College brochure is also distributed to these students (SM108). All support services departments take part in the orientation programme which lasts for a week for totally new GFP students and three days for those moving from one level of the GFP to another (ASM025).

Students are given a GFP pamphlet during the orientation week which includes introductory information regarding college officials, the GFP staff and an overview of the level specific courses (SM109). A copy of the Student Handbook, which provides further details about studying in the OCMT (SM032), is also distributed to these students, who are also required to acknowledge receipt with their signatures (interviews). The College states that a campus tour is organised by SAD as part of this orientation programme (Portfolio, p35). The Panel, however, heard conflicting information ranging between confirmation and denial of its conduct (interviews).

The QAD reviews the induction process using an e-survey (Portfolio, p 36, ASM034). Students who attended the week-long orientation programme of previous AYs were highly satisfied with it and expressed that they received essential information about studying in GFP (SM106). The Freshmen Survey results for AY 2017-18 show that student reception received a score of 80.8%, and enrolment and registration received a rating of 85.6%. The Panel, however, reviewed the list of participants in the week-long student orientation programme for the last two AYs and noted the very low attendance of newly admitted GFP students (SM110). Furthermore, the student orientation for the AY 2018-19 lasted six days including the CBPT schedule, whereas the programme for AY 2019-20 was only for four days which included two days for CBPT and one day for declaration of results. In effect, the orientation activities for AY 2019-20 lasted for a single day. Moreover, there is no alternative process of orientation for students who miss the scheduled orientation programme (ASM020). The Panel was informed that a student who misses the orientation programme can find necessary information in the relevant documents or contact either their academic advisor or SAD (interviews). Hence, the Panel urges the OCMT to ensure consistent implementation of its student orientation programme for the newly admitted GFP students and introduce an alternative mechanism for those who miss it.

Recommendation 15

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology review its General Foundation Programme Student induction programme for its consistent implementation and ensure that those who miss the orientation programme are provided with adequate and appropriate information to facilitate their smooth transition into the College.

3.4 Teaching and Learning Resources

The OCMT GFP course material includes textbooks and in-house material (Portfolio, p23). There is a Course Portfolio for each course which also includes components downloaded from the internet but referred to as 'In House Teaching Resources' (SM068). The Panel reviewed a sample of course portfolios and noted with concern the quality of the in-house materials in terms of appropriateness and criteria of selection, especially in the absence of proper benchmarking activities and the internal revision of such materials.

There is a Library and Learning Resources Committee (LLRC) that has representatives from all the OCMT departments including the GFP (SM111). The Library has an annual plan which guides its work, services, and takes into consideration QAD review inputs and survey results. The Panel found some evidence of action taken as a result of such reviews (SM111). The GFP students have had access to a spacious library which is run by qualified staff and provides dedicated places for self-study, student group work, and a room for conducting training sessions. The number of qualified librarians has increased from 2 in AY 2017-18 to 3 and also the library holdings have increased in compliance with the library operational plan (SM111, ASM042). The Panel, however, heard some concern about the librarians' availability when needed (interviews). Furthermore, both staff and students rated proficiency of the library staff at 52.7% and 48.4% respectively (SM010). ProQuest e-book has been recently introduced to facilitate student access to e-library (SM112). During the orientation programme, the librarian conducts an awareness session on the use of library facilities (interviews). The library keeps record of utilisation data for the entire College (ASM042) with no reference to any specific group or department such as GFP students and staff (see Section 1.7).

The OCMT provides open access laboratories for the GFP students to use internet resources for learning when these venues are free (Portfolio, p36). The GFP student satisfaction survey results for access to laboratories and related services has a rating of 63.8% for the AY 2018-19 (17 GFP respondents) (ASM015) and 73% (19 GFP respondents) for the AY 2017-18.

The OCMT campus has functional and updated facilities, e.g. well-equipped classrooms, for students and staff members (SM113) and that was confirmed during the Panel campus tour. In the AY 2017-18, the GFP staff satisfaction with the teaching and learning resources is over 82.5%, and for the library 75% (SM010). It reflects improvement from the previous AY 2016-17 when the corresponding rating was 60% and 54% respectively (SM009). Compared to GFP staff, the 19 GFP students of AY 2017-18 gave lower ratings for classroom equipment and library services: (76% for classroom equipment and 63.8% for library services respectively (SM010); the 17 GFP students of AY 2018-19 (ASM015) gave even lower ratings for the same items, namely: 65% and 62.5% respectively.

Whilst the Panel acknowledges the effort that OCMT has made to ensure adequate teaching and learning support resources for the GFP, it encourages the College to monitor the GFP student satisfaction rates carefully, explore the reason behind the decrease in these rates and mitigate them.

3.5 *Information and Learning Technology Services*

In line with its Mission, the OCMT strives to provide a learning environment with the latest technological facilities for enhancing teaching and learning in GFP (Portfolio, p37, SM007). Some actions have been taken to provide sufficient information and learning technology in teaching and learning in line with this intention (ASM055). In the AY 2018-19, the College took a decision to shift to Microsoft One Note system that allows the use of Microsoft TEAMS as a tool for secure communication and technology mediation in the GFP to facilitate academic activities such as organising and managing the course work (Portfolio, p38). The GFP instructors used Google classroom in their course delivery previously, and a smooth transition to the new environment is in progress in this regard as well (SM116, SM117). During the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the Panel was introduced to the new IT environment and its use which confirmed how well the transition has been achieved thus far and received by the stakeholders. The GFP appears to have an array of effective IT resources to support GFP teaching and student learning. These include the continued use of the Google Classroom as part of the Electronic Learning Management System (ELMS) (ASM042, ASM055), together with the use of the e-portal, Edugate, and Microsoft TEAMS. The Panel also confirmed that all GFP students and instructors apply the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) facility through desktops available on campus or their own devices (interviews). The use of Microsoft 365 Office system allows the College to bring together communication channels like chat and email, course material delivery, and management using a single software package. Both staff members and students have been introduced to using technological tools during their own induction programmes (ASM025, ASM045, SM119). The Panel also heard that students get guidance on applying Microsoft One Note in their studies during the academic advising day and from their course teachers (interviews).

The OCMT provides a learning environment with a flexible access to computer laboratories in addition to free and secure Wi-Fi access to the internet. The Panel heard that the system is available and accessible without major breakdowns or interruption while sufficient IT support services are available on- and-off campus. The Panel found evidence of satisfaction among GFP users (interviews). The consistently effective performance of IT resources was confirmed by student satisfaction survey according to which the GFP student satisfaction rate has risen to 61.3% for AY 2018-19 (ASM015) compared to 45.4% for the AY 2016-17 (SM009). The Panel appreciates the provision of effective technology equipment and support for GFP students and faculty members evidenced by increasing level of satisfaction with these services.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the Oman College of Management and Technology for the provision of effective information technology resources which enhance the provision of the General Foundation Programme.

3.6 *Academic Advising*

The OCMT has an Academic Advising Policy stipulating that each student, including GFP students, are assigned to an academic advisor at the beginning of the semester. The HoD is responsible for assigning academic advisors in compliance with the policy (SM081). The GFP students are assigned to their course instructors who serve as their academic advisors (Portfolio, p38, SM099). There are clear instructions for students and faculty members about the academic advising process, which are also communicated through the Student Handbook (SM032). Academic advisors are assigned during staff induction (SM119) and trained on academic advising (SM120). Moreover, an academic advising day is organised in each semester in addition to the regular weekly office hours.

The students at risk are detected only after the mid-term examinations, and it is the advisors' responsibility to monitor their academic performance and assist them overcome their learning difficulties and achieve the intended LOs (Portfolio, p38, SM032, SM122, SM123). Personalised support for individual advisees when required (ASM029). The Panel is of the view that this practice will benefit from a proactive approach for identifying students with academic difficulties prior to mid-term-examination and provide necessary support to them through a consistent procedure before they become at risk. Apart from the academic advising day, students meet their academic advisors only if they have problems with their academic progress (SM025). Records of these meetings are kept and maintained by the academic advisors themselves (SM092, ASM029). The Panel noted that the GFPD has also applied online advising service (SM088, SM121) to enable advisor communication with their advisees and it is also used to transfer academic advising records to successive advisors (Portfolio, p38). The Panel found that students were aware of online advising (interviews).

The QAD states that it monitors and evaluates the academic advising process to ensure its effectiveness (SM122, SM123). The academic advising practices appear to be well received by those who responded to the student satisfaction of academic advising survey 2017-18 (SM010, ASM017). The average satisfaction score across the five areas surveyed was 70.2%. However, the low percentage of GFP student response (ie 14%) to this survey compromises the value of this result (SM010). Moreover, there was no GFP student participation in the satisfaction survey of AY 2018-19 (ASM015). The Panel urges the OCMT to explore the reasons behind the low level of GFP student participation in the academic advising survey and address them as a matter of urgency to inform effective provision of this essential academic service.

Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology ensure that the General Foundation Programme students are provided with academic advising in a timely manner and explores and addresses the low level of their participation in the academic advising survey to ensure effective provision of this service as a matter of priority.

3.7 *Student Learning Support*

The GFPD organises co-curricular and extracurricular activities, such as workshops on special technical skills, personality development, writing, public speaking, and 'math genius', in collaboration with SAD, (SM025, SM124, ASM042). The GFPD develops an operational plan at the beginning of every AY to support student learning and to improve their individual skills, through Club Activities (Portfolio, p39, SM124, ASM050). These activities also appear in SAD annual report which captures these activities at the college level (ASM038) but the annual report does not make specific reference to those of the GFPD (ASM042, p34). The Panel heard that GFP students are informed about these activities and services but

there were mixed responses from students with regard to their usefulness. Students also expressed dissatisfaction with the type of co-curricular and extracurricular activities (interviews). Moreover, a concern was expressed about low GFP student participation in these activities (interviews). The Panel encourages the College to explore the reasons behind this low GFP student satisfaction with these activities and address them and also to encourage more GFP student participation in them.

Student learning support services are linked with academic advising to improve student participation in extracurricular activities in the context of holistic development with focus on students who need encouragement (SM032). The GFPD has initiated an informal peer assistance scheme involving post-foundation students, which took place two weeks before final examinations (see Section 2.10) and the Panel heard that it was well-received by the students (interviews). In the Panel's view, formalising such a process would help the GFPD adopt a multipronged approach including student collaboration to strengthen student learning support.

3.8 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

The College states that it pays attention to the student involvement in various support services planning and management by communicating with the students and seeking feedback from them on these services (Portfolio, p40, SM010). The College has policies and guidelines for handling student appeals and grievances and reviewing student participation rates in the various activities and events (SM031, SM034, SM036).

In addition to the Freshmen Survey, the OCMT conducts a number of college-wide surveys annually for measuring student satisfaction with these activities and discusses the outcomes to improve the organisational climate. The GFPD has a student evaluation form for each module, which is used to elicit student satisfaction and feedback on the delivery of course modules before the end of the semester. The surveys of GFP student satisfaction starts with the Freshmen Survey. The results of other student satisfaction surveys for all departments are combined, summarised, and then presented in the annual survey reports (SM009, SM010, ASM015, ASM042). That GFP students are given the opportunity to evaluate college academic, administrative and support services. The Panel noted that the GFP student participation in college-wide surveys is very low: only 19 respondents out of 201 in AY 2017-18 (SM010), and 17 out of 203 in AY 2018-19 (ASM015). The OCMT also conducts an annual survey of post-foundation students to gather feedback on the GFP (ASM017).

The HoD conducts meetings with the students and the feedback from the GFP students is conveyed to the CC for necessary follow up action (SM028, ASM011). The SAD also conducts meetings with GFP students and relays the feedback to the HoD through the CC (Portfolio, p17). The GFPDC meetings discuss programme review matters and quality improvement (SM026). The OCMT states that such discussions have resulted in positive outcomes, for example, the inclusion of a number of PBL activities in the curriculum (Portfolio, p16). The Panel acknowledges that the GFP students have opportunities for communication and providing inputs to decision making. The Panel also confirmed that GFP student concerns are discussed in the HoD and staff meetings (ASM011).

3.9 *Student Behaviour*

The OCMT has a Disciplinary Policy applicable to the GFP students and a Disciplinary Committee that handles behavioural misconduct with GFP representation (SM033, ASM061, ASM037). The terms of reference (ToRs) of the Disciplinary Committee are also introduced to students via the Student Handbook (SM032), as well as the Handbook of Code of Practice (SM183). The OCMT clearly describes different types of unacceptable behavior and conveys responsibilities of staff members for dealing with disciplinary issues ((SM033, ASM036, SM183). Student behavioural issues related to academic integrity are outlined in the Plagiarism Policy (ASM 019) and in the Handbook of Code of Practice (SM183). The

Student Handbook (SM032) provides a list of different types of violations and their penalties. Attendance monitoring is carried out online while issues of low class attendance are reported via Edugate.

Students can appeal against disciplinary decisions according to Disciplinary Policy and this right is stipulated in the Student Handbook (SM032). The Panel heard that the OCMT disciplinary committee meets as and when required (interviews), and its decisions are reported to the Dean (ASM073). It was emphasised that all the student disciplinary cases are handled carefully while maintaining due confidentiality. The Panel was informed that students' behavioural issues are very rare; there were only 4 such cases in AY 2018-19 (interviews).

The Panel found that GFP students and staff were conversant with the disciplinary procedures, and the consequences of misconduct. The GFP staff and students were familiar with the mechanism of managing misconduct and other behavioural issues (interviews). There was evidence to show that behavioural issues are addressed by the OCMT in accordance with its policies and regulations (ASM073).

The Panel acknowledges that the OCMT has policies and procedures for managing student behaviour, which are properly communicated to staff and students. The Panel found the policy framework, procedures, and communication with GFP staff and students on matters relating to student behavior are satisfactory.

3.10 Non-Academic Support Services and Facilities

The OCMT provides various non-academic support services such as student accommodation, catering, transportation, and medical services for the GFP students benefit (Portfolio, p42). Some of the non-academic support services such as catering have been outsourced to third parties. Students have the opportunity to provide feedback on non-academic support services by means of surveys (SM010, ASM015).

There is a Tenders Committee which is responsible for organising and monitoring the catering services in terms of variety and quality of food (ASM037). The OCMT also has an in-house cafeteria available to students and staff. The catering service provider was replaced recently with a new provider in response to students' feedback on the quality of this service with average satisfaction rate around 50% (ASM015, interviews). In addition, the OCMT has a kiosk that is open during the working hours.

A good number of GFP students are accommodated in seven hostels that are all selected and monitored by SAD and HSC (SM136, ASM 037, ASM 038, ASM 042, ASM051). The Panel heard that OCMT has paid special attention to students who are in hostels (interviews). Transportation is arranged by SAD and GFP students are made aware of safe use of vehicles. GFP student satisfaction of transport services is rated at 66% for AY 2017-18 and 56.3% for AY 2018-19 (SM010).

The OCMT has a clear Health and Safety Policy (ASM039). The Panel noted that College health and safety services, and the related information are accessible to the GFP students. Health awareness activities are also organised (SM137, ASM074). The OCMT drivers are provided with safe-driving guidelines (ASM067). The OCMT's HSC meets regularly to review the effectiveness of medical services rendered to the students (SM138). The Panel heard that some of the staff members and the college nurse had First Aid training (interviews). Staff and students are aware of the procedures to handle First Aid situations. The OCMT, furthermore, has psychosocial counselling services available to the students (Portfolio, p42). The Panel noted that students are referred for psychosocial intervention when needed (ASM073). The counselling services received a student satisfaction rating of 66.3% from the GFP students in AY 2018-19 (ASM015).

The SAD plans and implements social and recreational activities in coordination with the SC (SM13, SM140), and monitors the implementation of the original plans (ASM038). The annual report of SAD summarises various student activities. There is a range of sport and social activities, although the sport

activities are held mainly to meet the requirements of male students. Students are informed about these activities by email and the college's website (Portfolio, p42). The Panel, however, noted that the number of activities specifically designed for GFP students is limited. The 17 GFP students who responded to the student satisfaction survey for AY 2018-19 rated cultural activities at 60%, and club activities at 55%. The effectiveness of the Student Council obtained a rating of 58.8% (ASM015). The OCMT is aware of the need to develop further and expand the provision of these activities, such as. encouraging female students to participate in sport activities (SM028, SM046). The Panel encourages the OCMT to expedite its effort in this regard and ensure wider GFP student participation in these activities.

3.11 *External Engagement*

The OCMT states that it 'encourages the staff and students to improve external engagement. It maintains a cordial relationship with other education providers locally' (Portfolio, p43). The GFPD arranges community engagement activities in cooperation with the SAD; such as sports events, competitions and charity activities (ASM038, ASM042, SM140). The GFP Students take part in different competitions arranged by local education providers every year; for example, the Spell Bee competition conducted by the Scientific College of Design (SM127). The OCMT has established collaboration with the SUC to share good practices related to QA management system (SM127) (see Section 2.1). The College also had an agreement with the Omani Women's Association Barka in 2016 (SM 142). However, there was no evidence of the continuation of this collaboration.

The Panel noted that the GFPD is about to revive free English training courses to local community as part of its community outreach initiatives (Portfolio, p43). The Panel also heard that the GFPD intends to invite external experts to review its curriculum (interviews). There was evidence that the proposal was discussed at the CC (ASM066). The OCMT also has a proposal to send top ranking students from all its departments, including GFP, on an exposure visit to its affiliate, the Yarmouk University in Jordan (ASM066). The Panel acknowledges the OCMT's efforts to widen the scope of its external engagement to support the development and delivery of the GFP.

4 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

The OCMT focuses on hiring qualified staff to accomplish the GFP's Mission and strategic objectives. It is evident that the GFP academic staff have multiple responsibilities in addition to core academic tasks. The move to the permanent campus has expanded support facilities and services for the GFP staff.

This section deals with the Panel's review and findings in relation to several aspects of OCMT's staff and staff support services, which include staff profile, recruitment and selection, staff induction, professional development, performance planning and review, staff organisational climate and retention and Omanisation.

4.1 *Staff profile*

The OCMT claims that its GFP staff profile aims to assist the College in achieving its Mission and strategic objectives (Portfolio, p46). All expatriate GFP teachers are Master degree holders with many years of relevant teaching experience (SM025). Due to the small size of the GFP in terms of student intake and number of academic staff, the GFPD depends on the OCMT's administrative and support staff to run its administrative activities (ASM042, p40).

At the time of this GFP Quality Audit, the GFPD had seven academic staff in total but dropped to five due to two mid-semester resignations. The Panel reviewed the current staff profile and found that four English teachers hold CELTA certificates. There is evidence of diversity in terms of countries from which the GFP staff obtained their academic qualifications and their nationality (SM025). The OCMT conducts a staff needs analysis and the GFP staff requirements are discussed and approved by the CC (SM143, SM150). The Panel, however, did not see evidence of how GFP faculty requirement is determined based on data analysis, for example, ratio of teachers to students and workload for the subsequent AY. In addition to their assigned teaching load, the GFP staff perform other tasks such as office hours for student consultation, academic advising, committee membership and organising club activities. The Panel, however, noted that the OCMT has an adequate academic staff profile with regard to its current mixture of different nationalities and diverse academic backgrounds for the delivery of the GFP.

4.2 *Recruitment and Selection*

The GFP academic staff recruitment is carried out as per the OCMT's Staff Recruitment Policy (SM144). The OCMT Staff Manual includes comprehensive information about the recruitment process (SM159) which commences with the GFPD identifying its human resources needs at the end of the second semester (SM150, interviews). Once identified, the vacancies are posted on the OCMT's website (SM153) along with an application form to be filled by the interested candidates. When CVs of candidates are received, they are forwarded to the HoD to check the credentials of the candidates and discuss the applications in the GFPDC meeting. The applications of shortlisted candidates are forwarded to the Appointment Committee (SM154) which works in coordination with HRD and the GFPD. The committee studies the applications and recommends the successful candidates for employment to the CC (SM155) which, through the Dean, refers the matter to the BoD for approval. The Panel also learnt that the recruitment process includes an interview by a panel (in person with a demonstration lesson for locally based applicants) with the head of the department as a member (SM156). The Panel heard that expatriate candidates are given a one-year contract that is renewable if there is positive teacher evaluation by students in addition to formal performance appraisal by the HoD (interviews).

New recruits go through a probation period of three months (SM157) as per the OCMT's regulations. The Panel was informed that a mentor is assigned to each new recruit to facilitate integration and smooth transition into the GFPD, and the College (SM164, interview). The HoD prepares a mentoring mechanism report (SM163) (see also Section 4.3).

Although the GFP staff are generally satisfied with the recruitment process, the Panel heard a concern voiced about the paucity of time for new faculty to settle down, and the need to improve the recruitment schedule in this context (interviews). The Panel, moreover, was informed that timely availability of staff at the beginning of an AY could be compromised by external processes, such as visa processing by immigration authorities. The OCMT may wish to consider earlier commencement of the recruitment process instead of the current practice of starting at the end of the AY to overcome this issue and ensure timely availability of the newly recruited GFP staff on campus.

The Panel found evidence that the provisions of the OCMT's Recruitment Policy have been reviewed recently and it was found that some information in the policy is inconsistent with the personnel bylaw. A decision has been taken to rectify the inconsistency (SM148). This action, however, seems an *ad hoc* initiative and there is no evidence that such actions are based on a feedback collection mechanism in place to collect input from staff specifically on the recruitment process. The Panel reviewed staff satisfaction surveys of AY 2017-18 (SM010) and AY 2018-19 (ASM015) to which all the eight GFP staff responded and concluded that does not include any item on the process. The Panel advises the OCMT to ensure that GFP staff feedback on their recruitment process is sought and their concerns are addressed.

Recommendation 17

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology develop and implement a formal mechanism to collect feedback from the General Foundation Programme staff on the overall recruitment process for its improvement and effectiveness.

4.3 Staff Induction

The OCMT has an induction programme for all its new academic and administrative recruits that is applicable to all its departments including the GFPD. This induction is organised in collaboration between QAD and SRSDU and is subject to approval by the CC (SM165). Normally, the comprehensive three-day staff induction programme is conducted for OCMT academic and non-academic staff with separate schedules at the beginning of each AY (SM166, ASM045, ASM119), and the practice of offering such a college-wide induction programme has been ongoing for several years (SM158, ASM047). The Panel noted that the induction programme is conducted regularly. All the new staff are required to participate in the staff induction programme (SM159, ASM047). The Panel was informed, however, that the duration of the programme varies from one year to another; the one organised in the AY 2019-20, for example, lasted for two days whereas the AY 2018-19 programme was for three days (interviews, SM119). The OCMT attributes this variation in the duration of the induction programme to consistent improvement in the programme due to the associated review process (Portfolio, p48, SM158, SM160).

A copy of the Staff Manual which documents all the information related to rules and regulations of the OCMT is distributed during staff induction days (SM159). Moreover, all the OCMT policies and procedures are available to staff online on OneDrive (SM161, SM162). Staff can approach their HoD for any further clarification, and guidance. A system of staff mentorship is in place at the GFPD (ASM047) (see Section 4.2). A mentor is assigned for each new recruit employed on full-time or part-

time basis (SM163, SM164) with a session on this system being conducted during staff induction programme (ASM045).

The Panel confirmed that training sessions are conducted for the new recruits on the use of e-learning, ELMS, along with a specific session on assessment methods. The QAC reviews the process of staff induction (Portfolio, p49, SM024) to introduce improvements, an example of which is the introduction of the training sessions on e-learning (interviews). The GFP staff feedback on the induction programme is sought on the conclusion of programme; their rating for each of the 3 days of staff induction in the AY 2018-19 was 84.40%, 81.05% and 82.73% respectively (ASM045). The staff induction programme was appreciated by both academic and non-academic staff members (interviews) The Panel concluded that the GFP Staff Induction is conducted satisfactorily and effectively.

Commendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the Oman College of Management and Technology for organising an effective induction programme for the General Foundation Programme staff.

4.4 Professional Development

The OCMT has professional development mechanisms for both academic and non-academic staff members which are documented in its Professional Development Policy (SM166, SM171). The policy refers to internally organised QA seminars and presentations by the college staff. An electronic form is sent to all the faculty members including those in the GFPD at the beginning of each AY to elicit information on their professional development needs. Staff are required to respond within two weeks of receipt of the form (interviews). The OCMT states that it plans to improve professional development and scholarly activities for its staff (Portfolio, p25).

The SRSDU is responsible for developing the academic staff professional development plan which is prepared at the beginning of each AY, whereas the non-academic professional development activities are handled by the HRD (SM067). The Panel saw evidence of a list of internal activities planned for the AY 2018-19, which were to be conducted by the staff of the academic departments and QAD. There are workshops for GFP staff as part of a staff professional development plan for AY 2018-19 (SM067, SM167). There is evidence of staff attending external training sessions being requested by the GFPDC (SM168). The SRSDU and HRD are involved in the planning and implementation of these activities with the QAD acting as the communication channel to the CC for review and approval (Portfolio, p49, SM167). The College also provides a budget allocation for conferences and research (SM169).

There is evidence of participation by the GFP staff in some of the college-wide seminars (SM171). The Panel, however, heard that the GFP staff take-up of opportunities to present during these events was low, which was attributed to heavy workload (interviews). The Panel was informed that the QAD has designated every Thursday to be professional development day to address the issue (interviews). The evidence provided was the QA seminar series on quality assurance (SM134, SM166). The Panel did not see evidence of seminars conducted to address specific GFP-related topics and needs.

The Panel noted that staff peer observation is practised to enhance sharing of good practices amongst GFP staff (see Section 4.6). The Panel was provided with a peer observation schedule (ASM062) along with samples of peer observation forms (ASM024). The Panel was informed that the GFP staff share peer observation comments and suggestions in a cordial and informal manner (interviews). There was

no evidence, however, on how the outcomes or collated feedback are utilised formally to enhance GFP teaching practices.

The Panel noted instances of the GFP staff being encouraged to attend local off-campus seminars in the AY 2013-14 and AY 2016-17 (SM074, SM120). There is evidence of financial support provided to staff (interviews). The SRSDU annual report for the AY 2018-19 refers to one internal seminar conducted by the GFP staff and one local external event attended by the Mathematics teacher (ASM046).

The OCMT evaluates the effectiveness of the professional development activities it provides for its staff. The average of GFP staff satisfaction with these professional development activities provided to them, as it is reported in the AY 2017-18 survey, is 80% (SM010).

While the Panel acknowledges the efforts of the OCMT in this regard, it advises the College to consider the unique nature of the GFP and provide more internal and external professional development opportunities that are aligned with the GFP staff needs.

Recommendation 18

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology ensure that its professional development planning consider opportunities aligned to the unique nature of the General Foundation Programme and the distinct professional needs of its staff.

4.5 Performance Planning and Review

The OCMT has a college-wide Staff Evaluation Policy revised in 2017. It is applicable to the GFP staff and documents staff self-evaluation and HoD's appraisal procedure (SM173). The QAD conducts sessions on performance appraisal during staff induction days to communicate this evaluation process. According to the policy and as confirmed during interviews, the performance appraisal process begins by asking each GFP staff member to fill in a 'Self-Evaluation Form' (SM173). The completed form is used by the HoD in preparing a Faculty Performance Evaluation Form (FPEF) (SM176). The HoD communicates the results of his appraisal to the staff in compliance with the Staff Evaluation Policy and the OCMT Communication Policy (SM174).

The Panel was informed that the HoD discusses staff evaluation with the staff concerned at the end of the AY to ensure if any further improvement is needed (Portfolio, p51). The Panel was informed that GFP staff can appeal to the Dean if they were unsatisfied with their performance evaluation (interviews). Evidence of any cases of GFP staff appeal against their performance evaluation, however, was not available even when requested by the Panel. In some documents such as the Staff Manual (SM159) and personnel Bylaws (ASM044), the reference to appeal was limited to the context of staff disciplinary issues and associated sanctions. In the Panel's opinion, the process could benefit from a clear procedure for the staff to appeal against the decisions of their performance evaluation. The Panel, furthermore, noted that the process does not include staff professional development needs identification by those who evaluate them, although staff themselves can convey their professional development needs through other channels (see Section 4.4).

The Panel reviewed two consecutive Survey Analysis Reports for AY 2017-18 and AY 2018-19 (SM010, ASM015) and noted that there is no assessment of staff satisfaction towards the staff performance evaluation system. The OCMT is advised to consider the introduction of a staff feedback collection mechanism to enhance its current GFP staff performance evaluation system by including staff input on professional development needs, and ensure that this system is linked to the planning of staff professional development (see Section 4.4).

The OCMT faculty members including those of the GFP ought to 'do their best in their work' in order to be rewarded with benefits such as renewal of contract or promotion (Portfolio, p52, SM177). The Panel reviewed the OCMT's Regulations for the Promotion of Faculty Members (SM180) and noted that it deals with academic promotions for PhD holders in the rank of Assistant Professor and above. This obviously does not include the GFP staff as none of them is a PhD holder at the time of this GFP Quality Audit. The OCMT is advised to review its current appraisal system to ensure that GFP staff are evaluated and recognised appropriately and to link their appraisal to the identification of their professional development needs.

Recommendation 19

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the Oman College of Management and Technology review its staff appraisal system to ensure that the General Foundation Programme staff performance is acknowledged and their professional development needs are identified.

4.6 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention

The OCMT states that 'The College creates and maintains a positive organizational climate' by various interventions to 'attract and retain qualified staff members' (Portfolio, p52). In line with this statement, the OCMT has put in place several policies and procedures to enhance its work and social environment. These policies and procedures are included in the Staff Manual (SM159) provided to them and electronically via One Drive.

The College has a centralised induction programme for all its new staff including the GFPD recruits (see Section 4.3). Furthermore, there is a system of mentorship for each new recruit (SM163, SM164) that lasts for one month to facilitate integration and understanding of the OCMT's organisational culture and environment. The Panel noted that GFP staff were generally satisfied with the support they receive from the College, especially the mentorship system (see Section 4.3) which they found very supportive in helping them settle down (interviews).

The OCMT has a Handbook of Code of Practice (SM183) supported by a Disciplinary Policy (SM033) for all its students and staff. The Disciplinary Policy is communicated to staff as part of the induction programme (ASM045). No evidence was found on GFP staff misconduct cases and the Panel was informed that this is due to the conducive organisational environment in the College and the cordial and respectful professional practice of staff (interviews).

The OCMT has a detailed Retention Policy in place to 'enable the college to attract experienced and qualified staff and retain those who are already specialist in their key roles' (SM149). The College, furthermore, offers several incentives for its expatriate GFP staff including medical insurance and annual return airfare (Portfolio, p18, SM159). The Panel noted the high though fluctuating, rate of GFP staff retention across the AYs 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18, i.e 90%, 78%, and 88% respectively (SM179). There is an Employee Exit Survey Form (SM185) and an Exit Interview process (SM159, p27, SM185, interviews).

The OCMT has a staff representative election mechanism that is common to all departments including the GFP; one academic, and one non-academic staff are elected annually to the CC (Portfolio, p53, SM182). The GFP staff members are encouraged to voice their opinion in the GFPDC meetings and by joining at least two committees that suit their interests (see Section 1. 2). This, in turn, enables them to exchange their ideas and suggest improvements at both the department and the college levels. To ensure

that GFP staff concerns are addressed, the HoD represents the department in the CC (SM150, SM 182). There is evidence of staff social activities such as annual lunch for all the OCMT staff including those in the GFP (SM 181). Furthermore, the College measures the staff satisfaction with the overall aspects of the organisational climate by an annual survey which covers all units and departments in the College. The Panel reviewed the Survey Analysis Report for the AY 2017-18 (SM010) and noted the high average (79.5%) of satisfaction level of GFP staff with 19 items of the survey dealing with various aspects of organisational climate in the College. The Panel is satisfied that the overall current organisational climate at the OCMT is conducive and supportive for the GFP staff.

4.7 *Omanisation*

The OCMT states that it prioritises the recruitment of qualified Omani candidates, giving serious attention to compliance with the ‘Omanisation Policy of the Government of Oman and therefore strives to recruit as many Omani nationals’ as possible (Portfolio, p54). The OCMT announces GFP staff vacancies and prioritises the recruitment of suitable Omani candidates. Consequently, the percentage of Omani academic staff in the GFPD has increased drastically over the years and reached 22.2% in 2018-19 unlike previous AYs (2016-17 and 2017-18) when it was zero (SM188). To further enhance the number of 2 Omanis out of a total of 8 in AY 2018-19 the GFPD has recruited 5 more Omanis to the GFP in AY 2019-20 (ASM049).

There were seven Omani academic staff out of a total of 11 working at the GFP at the time of GFPQA Audit Portfolio submission (ASM049) with 29 Omani administrative and support staff out of 35 (82.8%) who cater to the needs of the GFPD as well (ASM042, p40). There were eight GFP teaching staff prior to the Audit Visit. The Panel, however, heard that two Omanis resigned from the GFP prior to the visit (see Section 4.6). The Panel heard that these resignations were due to financial and remuneration considerations (interviews). However, the Panel noted that there are arrangements to retain Omanis such as professional development opportunities; for example, the possibility of adjusting their class schedule when they opt to continue their part-time studies and sponsorship to pursue PhD degrees for Master degree holders. Considering existing college-level strategies for Omanisation, the Panel encourages the OCMT to continue its effort to attract and retain Omani academic staff in its GFP as part of its overall Omanisation plan.

APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL**Dr Hala Obaid** (Chair)

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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.

AAC	Academic Affairs Committee
AC	Appointment Committee
ADAA	Assistant Dean for Administrative Affairs
ADAF	Assistant dean for Administration and Finance
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.
ASM	Additional Supporting Material
ARD	Admission and Registration Department/Registration Department
ARP	Academic Risk Plan
AY	Academic Year
BC	Budget Committee
BoD	Board of Directors
BoT	Board of Trustees
CC	College Council
CD	Course Description
CELTA	Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults
CLO	Course Learning Outcome
CP	Course Portfolio
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.
DC	Department Council
Edugate	College e-portal
ELMS	Electronic Learning Management System
External Reviewer	A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of OAAA's various external review Panels.
FD	Finance Department
FPEF	Faculty Performance Evaluation Forms
GED	General Education Diploma
GFP	General Foundation Program
GFPQA	GFP Quality Audit
GSS	General Study Skills
HEA	Higher Education Admissions Centre ⁴
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HRD	Human Resources Department
HSC	Health and Safety Committee
IDP	IDP Education (international Education Specialists)
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
Improvement	The fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how effectively an organisation is improving its approach and deployment for any given topic in order to achieve better results.
IT	Information Technology
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LDP	Lecture Delivery Plan
LLRC	Library and Learning Resources Committee
LO	Learning Outcomes
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education

OAAA Board	The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OASGFP.....	Oman Academic Standards for GFP
OCMT	Oman College of Management and Technology
Panel Chair	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member	An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
PFAC	Promotion Committee for Administrative Staff
PLO	Programme Learning Outcome
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
QAD	Quality Assurance Department
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.
Quality Enhancement.....	The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing approach, deployment and results.
REC	Reviewing and Evaluation Committee
Results	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's approach and deployment.
Review Director	An individual assigned to an Audit Panel by the OAAA to provide professional guidance and support.
RR	Risk Register
SAAC	Student Affairs and Alumni Committee
SAD	Student Affairs Department
SC	Student Council
SM	Supporting Materials
SPRMC.....	Strategic Planning and Risk Management Committee
SRSDC.....	Scientific Research and Staff Development Committee
SRSDU.....	Scientific Research and Staff Development Unit
System	In this Report, system refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.
SUC	Sur University College
TOEFL.....	Test of English as a Foreign Language
VDI	Virtual Desktop Infrastructure

