



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

Report of an Audit of Global College of Engineering and Technology

September 2023





Quality Audit Report Number **052**

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OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) is an independent government body with the following Mission:

Guiding and supporting the education sector in Oman to meet the relevant national priorities and objectives while maintaining internationally benchmarked standards¹

Quality Audit results in a public Quality Audit Report which contains formal conclusions in the form of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations. The QARs are published on the OAAAQA website.² Standards Assessment results in a report for the Higher Education Institution (HEI), and public results in the form of ratings and criteria and an overall Accreditation Outcome. These Standards Assessment results are published on the OAAAQA website.³ When undergoing ISA for the first time, HEIs are expected to include reference to actions taken in response to the formal conclusions of their IQA in their ISA Application (ISAA).. Full details of the Institutional Quality Audit (IQA) process, including the standards and criteria, are available in the OAAAQA HEI Quality Audit Manual.⁴ The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) was established by Royal Decree No 54/2010. The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) was established by Royal Decree No 9/2021, amending the name of the OAAA. For further information, visit the OAAAQA website.⁵

This IQA Report (the 'Report') documents the findings of the IQA of the Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET). It contains a summary of the Panel's findings, together with formal Commendations where good practices have been confirmed, Affirmations where 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 the HEI.

The IQA commenced with GCET undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarised in the Quality Audit Portfolio (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to OAAAQA by the due date of 25 May 2022. OAAAQA appointed an external IQA Panel (the 'Panel'), comprising qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the IQA. For membership of the Panel, please refer to Appendix A. A list of abbreviations, acronyms and terms is available in Appendix B. The Panel met (international members by telephone)

¹ <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/About-the-OAAA/Mission-Vision-and-Values>

² <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/Media/Document-Centre>

³ <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/Reports-Results/ISA-Outcomes>

⁴ <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/c63fde93-150b-430d-a58f-9f68e6dc2390/Institutional/20Standards/20Assessment/20Manual.aspx?b=0>

⁵ <https://oaaaqa.gov.om>

on **26 July 2022** to consider the the GCET Portfolio. A representative of the Panel Chairperson, together with the Review Director and one observer, then undertook a Planning Visit to GCET on behalf of the Panel on **1 September 2022** to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel's IQA Visit. Prior to the Visit, the Panel invited submissions from the public about activities at GCET and no public submissions were received.

The IQA Visit took place from **24 – 27 October 2022**. During this time, the Panel spoke with over **110** people, including representatives of the governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. It also visited a number of venues and reviewed a range of additional Supporting Materials (SMs). While the Report makes reference to a number of these SMs, they do not provide an exhaustive list of the broad range of evidence that the Panel has considered in order in coming to conclusions. No documents created after **27 October 2022** (the last day of the IQA Visit) were taken into consideration for the purpose of the audit, other than pre-existing evidence specifically requested by the Panel in advance and/or submitted by the GCET in comments on draft Report v5. The final Report was approved for release by the OAAAQA Board on **12 September 2023**. The OAAAQA Final IQA Report is made publicly available through the OAAAQA website.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Each OAAAQA Institutional 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. 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 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 HEIs in Oman and abroad, and other audiences. Prospective students may find this Report useful because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2 and 3 below). They should still undertake their own investigations, however, when deciding which higher education institution will best serve their particular learning needs.

The focus of the IQA is formative (developmental) rather than summative in nature. In other words, although the audit addresses nine areas of activity, common to all institution, it does not measure the institution against externally set standards of performance in those nine 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. The IQA therefore recognises that each institution has a unique purpose and profile and it does not directly compare the HEI with other institutions in Oman.

For the reasons cited above, the IQA 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 HEI 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, are clearly less critical. It is neither significant nor appropriate, therefore, to compare the IQA Reports of different HEIs solely on the number of Commendations, Affirmations, and Recommendations.

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

Executive Summary of Findings

Global College of Engineering and Technology was founded in **2014** through HEI licensing from the formerly-named Ministry of Higher Education with the vision to start a college focusing on Engineering and Technology. Today, more than **1600** students are enrolled in **10** undergraduate, and two postgraduate programmes in Electronics and Telecommunication, Mechanical Engineering and Vehicle Technology, Automation and Robotics, Instrumentation and Control, Building Services Engineering, Computing Security and Forensics, Environmental Management, Urban and Regional Planning, Business Computing, Architectural Technology and Design, Engineering Management, and Data Science programmes are delivered in English. GCET has moved to its current three-building rented campus in Bowsher, Muscat. GCET's initial affiliation was with Carleton University in Canada. However, it decided in **2016** to cooperate with the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol, in the United Kingdom. UWE is the awarding body for the full provision of the **12** franchised programmes at GCET.

Since **2014**, GCET has offered Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Software Engineering programmes. However, it discontinued Software Engineering and got approved licenses for BSc (Hons) Computer Security and Forensics in **2017**, BEng (Hons) Automation and Robotics Engineering in **2018**, BEng (Hons) Instrumentation and Control Engineering in **2018**, BSc (Hons) Environmental Management and Practice **2018**, BSc (Hons) Architectural Technology and Design **2018**, BSc (Hons) Urban and Regional Planning **2018**, BSc (Hons) Business Computing **2019**, MSc Engineering Management **2019**, BEng (Hons) Building Services Engineering **2020**, and MSc Data Science **2020**. In addition, in **2021**, GCET got license approval for BSc (Hons) Architectural Technology and Design programme. There are two intakes each academic year, in September and in January. In Spring **2022**, GCET had **1603** students and **39** Fulltime faculty from different nationalities.

Overall, the Portfolio is well structured and reflects the use of the ADRI method for the self-study. It describes GCET's practices, processes, facilities, and resources and attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of its policies and procedures to allow for the identification of areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Development of the Portfolio started in **2020** under the leadership of the College Dean (Portfolio, p.7). The work was distributed among different working groups of the College staff responsible for writing the drafts of their assigned sub-scope areas and collecting evidence. A first draft of the Portfolio was presented to the Board of Trustees (BoT) before the end of AY **2021-22** and evaluated by two external accreditation experts. In May **2022**, the GCET Portfolio was submitted to OAAAQA.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The OAAAQA commends the Global College of Engineering and Technology for its extensive, systematic collaboration with the University of the West of England and the ongoing review of the relationship between the two institutions..... 20
2. The OAAAQA commends the Global College of Engineering and Technology on empowering young staff by engaging them in the development of solutions to GCET challenges..... 86

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the new system for operational planning and its associated software implementation has the potential to become an effective and efficient approach for implementing the operational plan and monitoring its progress. 22
2. The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the College's Training Unit needs to comply with all Government regulations. 28
3. The OAAAQA agrees that the Global College of Engineering and Technology needs to introduce a process to provide placement to students in the relevant field as part of the degree completion requirements to prepare them for the job market. 41
4. The OAAAQA agrees that the Global College of Engineering and Technology needs to expand the usage of the Student Statistics Dashboard to support academic and non-academic planning for better decision-making. 44
5. The OAAAQA agrees that the Global College of Engineering and Technology needs to develop a robust system to track graduate destinations and employability to inform future improvements in the design and delivery of its programmes. 45
6. The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the Intellectual Property Policy framework with the implemented system for management, monitoring and review of Intellectual Property activities are appropriate and fair. 53
7. The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that research commercialisation is in the early stages but that the initial evidence of a successfully implemented approach, deployment, and review mechanisms will lead to effective results of research commercialisation in the future. 55

8. The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the services provided by RARO be enhanced based on the findings of the student surveys and benchmarking exercises.....	70
9. The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that student profile should be utilised efficiently to review the enrollment status of the offered programmes.	79
10. The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the Staff Performance Appraisal Form is to be revised in order to ensure that the review of its staff performance is comprehensive, transparent and fair.....	92
11. The OAAAQA agrees that the Global College of Engineering and Technology needs to develop and implement a comprehensive communication policy and establish mechanisms to evaluate its effectiveness.	98

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology ensure the active and extensive involvement of all stakeholders in revisions of its Mission, Vision and Value statements.	14
2. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology institutionalises an ongoing systematic process that ensures that its Mission, Vision and Value statements are reviewed regularly and used for strategic guidance and decision-making.....	14
3. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology clearly delineate between the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Directors and Board of Trustees to eliminate any real or perceived conflict of interest.....	16
4. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees and the commitment of its members.	16
5. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology implement systematic reviews of the effectiveness of implementation of the Governance Manual and the institution's compliance with it.....	16
6. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate its management system to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability.	18
7. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the processes used to develop and implement the Strategic Plan and ensure its sustainability.....	21

8.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate the effectiveness of its financial management processes.	23
9.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the Risk Management System and comprehensiveness of the Institutional Risk Register.	24
10.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate the effectiveness of any changes implemented as part of the entity and activity review process.....	26
11.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology urgently review the effectiveness and adequacy of its health and safety arrangements.....	27
12.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology develop a formal direct mechanism to measure the students' achievements of graduates' attributes and programme learning outcomes for all programmes at all levels.	31
13.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology conduct formal benchmarking of its General Foundation Programme entry and exit standards against nationally and internationally recognised reference points to ensure the fitness for purpose of the programme.	35
14.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology revise and benchmark the plagiarism policy, procedures and use of plagiarism tools to ensure fair and consistent implementation across the College.....	40
15.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology develop a clear system for consultancy services integrated into the College's strategic research and innovation approach with clear key performance indicators allocated and reflect it in its operational plan.	52
16.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology approach professional development for research in a systematic manner by developing a Professional Development Plan for Research based on needs analysis and tailored to staff profiles with feedback and review system to ensure the approach is effective and constructive.	54
17.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology re-visit its approach to the Research-Teaching Nexus by clearly defining what is classified as research-informed teaching and implementing explicit descriptors as well as indicators for its measurement and analysis.	56
18.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology evaluate its system for fostering mutually beneficial relationships with alumni and to effectively analyse alumni survey results to identify areas for improvement in the curriculum and student experience.	65

19.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology establish a planned approach to engage with the community at large, taking into consideration the specific needs and requirements of the community, and to review the effectiveness of the chosen approach.....	66
20.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology establish an effective system for the planning, management and improvement of its academic support services.....	68
21.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review the effectiveness of the provision of Information and Learning Technology services and support to staff and students to ensure effective teaching and learning are maintained.	73
22.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review its academic advising system to evaluate its effectiveness in meeting the needs of students.	74
23.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology evaluate its laboratories in terms of adequacy of space, equipment and supplies to facilitate teaching and fulfil its Mission.....	75
24.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology expedite the process of appointing all vacant leadership positions to ensure the College has adequate resources in place to effectively manage its growth.	87
25.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology conduct a comprehensive and critical analysis of its current staffing situation to ensure its staffing numbers, profiles and staffing planning optimally meet the needs of the College.	88
26.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review its recruitment and selection approach to ensure it has a comprehensive recruitment and selection process in place with feedback sought and procedures analysed to determine that its approach is effective and constructive.....	89
27.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology implement a clear monitoring and review system for the staff induction process to ensure its induction procedure is effective and constructive.....	90
28.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology implement a robust and transparent approach to identifying professional development needs with systematic review and evaluation processes in place to ensure that the College's professional development is effective and constructive.....	91
29.	The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review its Teaching Observation Procedure to ensure it is applied in a fair, consistent, and transparent manner..	92

30. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology develop a comprehensive approach to monitoring and reviewing staff satisfaction with an action plan to address issues raised and implement improvements in order to maintain a positive organisational climate..... 95
31. The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically plan, review, and benchmark the adequacy of educational space to meet a vibrant learning, teaching, research, and student support environment. 97

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) was founded in 2014 through HEI licensing from the formerly-named Ministry of Higher Education with the vision to start a college focusing on Engineering and Technology. Today, more than 1,600 students are enrolled in 10 undergraduate and two postgraduate programmes in Automation and Robotics, Building services, Electronics and Telecommunication, Instrumentation and Control, Mechanical and Vehicle Technology, Architectural Technology and Design, Business Computing, Computer Security and Forensics, Environmental Management and Practice, Urban and Regional Planning, Data Science and Engineering Management programmes respectively are delivered in English. GCET's currently renting three-building campus in Bowshar, Muscat. GCET cooperates with the University of the West of England (UWE).

This Chapter reports on the governance and management of the HEI and includes the Panel's findings related to Vision, Mission and Values; governance and management; institutional affiliations; strategic and operational planning; financial, risk and policy management; entity and activity review systems; student grievance processes, and health and safety.

1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values*

GCET's first Mission, Vision and Values (MVV) statements were established in 2015 (PF, p8, SM027). The College states that its 'vision and mission were reviewed for continuing fit and alignment when the original institutional Strategic Plan 2016–2021 came up for review five years after the start of the College's operations in October 2015' (PF, p8, SM027). The Dean was appointed in August 2020 and presented the initial draft of the new Strategic Plan to the BOT in October 2020 [SM014]. The subsequent review involved only a limited number of stakeholders who provided minimal feedback later in development (SM023). A link between the College's Vision and Mission to Oman Vision 2040 has been established in SP 2021–26 (SM003). In addition, Aims and Objectives have been defined as well as Strategic Areas – Goals and Priorities. All these statements are part of GCET's SP 2021–26.

The Vision of the College is 'to be recognised nationally and internationally, as the leading private Higher Education College of choice for engineering and technology in the Sultanate of Oman and the wider MENA region' (SM003).

The Mission of the College is 'to provide locally accredited, and internationally recognised, higher education of quality, delivered through excellent teaching, learning, research, innovation, and community engagement, that equips graduates with the knowledge, skills, and competencies, to enable them to have fulfilling careers both locally and internationally' (SM003).

GCET's specifies nine Core Values, which include Quality and Standards 'commitment to maintaining locally and internationally benchmarked award standards and quality through internal and external quality assurance review and audit', Professionalism 'working to high-standards of service delivery for students,

staff, industry, government agencies, and other stakeholders', Integrity 'being honest, honourable, and reliable, in all dealings with students, staff, industry, government agencies, and other stakeholders', Dignity 'treating each other with respect with a commitment to fairness in all College practices, policies, procedures, and relationships', Teamwork 'working together in a synergetic, collegial, and interdisciplinary manner, to collectively solve problems and enhance provision to students, staff, industry, government agencies, and other stakeholders', Creativity 'encouraging and supporting innovation, imagination, ingenuity, resourcefulness, and vision, to solve problems and enhance provision', Openness/Respect 'being receptive to ideas, sharing knowledge, and communicating openly and respectfully with each other, and all stakeholders', Fairness/Equality 'being committed to the principle of fairness and equality of opportunity for all staff and students', and Sustainability 'practicing sustainable development—financially, socially, and environmentally—for the benefit of the sultanate of Oman and the wider World' (SM003).

The College submitted evidence of workshops for academic and administrative staff to provide feedback on draft versions of the Strategic Plan, which includes Mission, Vision and Value statements. The Panel noted, however, that there was minimal input from the Student Advisory Council (SAC) or external stakeholders (SM023). The Panel also could not find any evidence of changes made due to stakeholder feedback.

Recommendation 1

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology ensure the active and extensive involvement of all stakeholders in revisions of its Mission, Vision and Value statements.

The Panel found no evidence of a regular, systematic review of the MVV statements or progress towards their achievement prior to 2020. This was confirmed in the interviews during the Visit. However, the current SP 2021–26 now contains a set of seven Strategic Goals being addressed by the various Operational Plans of academic and non-academic units (SM003). While a detailed break-down of Strategic Goals into Action Items contributes to achieving the institution's Mission (SM040-SM044), the Panel could not find a self-reflective approach towards achieving the institution's MVV to validate the effectiveness of its approach. Overall, the Panel noticed in the interviews that students and staff have minimal awareness of the MVV statements.

Recommendation 2

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology institutionalises an ongoing systematic process that ensures that its Mission, Vision and Value statements are reviewed regularly and used for strategic guidance and decision-making.

1.2 Governance

GCET is a private Higher Education Institution (HEI) approved by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) as well as the Ministry of Commerce (MoC) (SM0001). As such, it has to comply with MoHERI rules and regulations for private Higher Education Institutions, which include the establishment and membership of the bodies governing the Institution.

The Board of Directors (BoD) consists of seven members; the shareholders and owners of the College (Portfolio p. 10, ASM371). Although this Board plays a critical and strategic function, the Panel could not find a documented definition of its role (e.g., Terms of Reference). The Governance Manual, which specifies the strategic and operational responsibilities of units and leadership personnel of the College, does not define the role of the BoD within the Institution's governance, nor does it appear in the organisational chart of the College (SM015, SM025). The Governance Manual referred to the BoD as responsible for approving the College's annual budget upon recommendation from the Board of Trustees (BoT). BoT Terms of Reference (ToR) are contained in the Governance Manual (SM025).

The College states that 'the BoT has the overall responsibility for the governance and strategic oversight of the institution' (Portfolio, p.10). The organisational chart reflects this, as the BoT is at the top of the chart, and the Dean is directly below it; the Academic Board (AB) and the Finance Committee (FC), both chaired by the Dean, also report to the BoT as reflected in the standing committees' relationship diagram (SM015, SM017). The BoT comprises nine members, including the chairperson (SM013, SM025). The Governance Manual indicates appointments of the BoT chairperson, either selected by the BoD or elected by the members of the BoT. The College Dean and two investors are ex-officio members. In addition, academic members from other HEIs in Oman and other external members are appointed. The Governance Manual also still mentions a representative from MoHERI, although this is no longer required. Appointments are typically for four years and can be renewed once.

The responsibilities of the BoT include the appointment of the Dean, honorary awards, the establishment of the organisational structure, approval of the strategic plan and monitoring of its implementation, approval of policies and procedures, as well as all financial aspects (including student fees and investments) (SM025). The Panel received evidence through meeting minutes that confirm that the BoT deliberates and makes decisions about matters that fall under its purview. (SM014). According to the Governance Manual, the Board should meet at least three times per Academic Year (AY) (SM025, p.12). However, based on the evidence provided to the Panel, the BoT typically meets only twice per AY (SM014). The Panel also noticed the consistent non-attendance of some board members, evidenced in minutes of BoT meetings (SM014), raising questions about the commitment of board members and the overall efficiency of the BoT. The Panel also noticed that the Chair of the BoT is also the Chair of the BoD, potentially obfuscating the distinct roles of the two governance bodies and potentially causing a conflict of interest. This concern is exacerbated by the lack of evidence of any BoT's self-evaluation and a lack of a formal definition of the BoD's role.

Recommendation 3

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology clearly delineate between the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Directors and Board of Trustees to eliminate any real or perceived conflict of interest.

Recommendation 4

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees and the commitment of its members.

All governance matters (except the BoD) are contained in the Governance Manual (SM025). According to the Portfolio, the first review of the original 2015 version of the Governance Manual took place in the AY 2020-21 (Portfolio, p.11, SM027). The Panel noticed the absence of a regular, systematic review of the Governance Manual, effectiveness of its implementation and the institution's compliance with it. This is particularly important as the previous non-compliance of practices with the Governance Manual went unnoticed (Portfolio, p. 11).

Recommendation 5

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology implement systematic reviews of the effectiveness of implementation of the Governance Manual and the institution's compliance with it.

1.3 Management

GCET's management structure follows the standard structure of a college (SM015). The Dean is responsible for the overall management of the College; as an ex-officio member of the BoT, he represents the critical link between the BoT as the primary governance body and the Institution. He is supported by two Deputy Deans, one responsible for academic affairs and the other for administration and resources. The Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs (DDAA) position has been vacant for almost a year before the Visit (SM204, see also Subarea 8.1 below). Department Heads and Managers of academic and administrative departments, units and offices provide additional support.

The Academic Departments reporting to the DDAA deliver the academic programmes. These include the Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (EEE), the Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME), the Department of Computing & IT (CIT), and the Department of Urban Planning and Environmental Management (UPEM). In addition, there is the Department of Foundation Studies (FS) that prepares students for entry-level into their bachelor's programmes. These departments are responsible for academic and administrative matters needed to deliver their respective programmes. The recently updated version of the organisation chart also attaches the Library and Learning Resources Centre (LLRC) to the DDAA (SM015, SM025).

The administrative units and offices under the Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources (DDAR) include the Registry, Admissions and Registration Office (RARO), the Student Support Services Office (SSSO), the Marketing, Publicity and Recruitment Office (MPRO), the ICT Support Services (ICTSS), and the Facilities Management Services (FMS). The organisation chart also attaches a Training Unit (TU) to the DDAR, although this unit is not mentioned in the Governance Manual (SM015). Each unit or office is led by a Unit Head or Manager, and the Governance Manual describes areas of responsibility for each unit except for the TU which is not mentioned in the manual (SM025).

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit which was mentioned in the 2015 Governance Manual under the DDAA was moved under the Dean and renamed to the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office (QACO) in the AY 2020-21 (Portfolio, p.9, SM016, SM025, SM027). In addition, the 2015 Governance Manual mentioned a Research and Enterprise Unit that reports to the AB and DDAA via its Research and Enterprise Committee (SM027); In AY 2021-22, this became the Research and Innovation Office (RIO) that is under the Dean and reports to QACO through its Research and Innovation Committee (RIC) (Portfolio, p.46, SM015, SM017). The Panel requested minutes of Research Committee meetings before 2020 but was informed that the Committee did not exist before December 2020 (ASM414). Moreover, the Finance Office (FO) was moved under the Dean in AY 2020-21; previously, it was under the Deputy Dean for Administration and Finance, now DDAR (SM016, SM025, p.51, SM027, p.46). Finally, the Human Resources Office (HRO), with a single staff assigned to manage the Dean's Office besides her HR duties, is also under the Dean (SM007, SM015, SM530).

The Panel received evidence that a regular review of the Institution's organisational structure by the BoT takes place (SM014).

Two boards, the AB and the Executive Management Board (EMB), are tasked with the high-level management of the College. The AB comprises the Dean of the College (Chairperson), all Deputy Deans, the Heads of all academic departments (HoDs), and various support units. In addition, the Chairperson of the SAC and another SAC officer are listed as AB members (SM025). As one of the highest academic bodies in the College, the AB is responsible for overseeing all academic aspects, including policies, regulations and academic programmes. It is also tasked with monitoring the College's progress against key performance indicators (SM025, p.16). The AB usually meets four times during an AY, although evidence provided to the Panel indicates that the AB only meets three times per AY (SM187, SM188). The Panel also noticed that although two student representatives are ex-officio members of the AB, some minutes of the meeting of the AB do not indicate these students' presence or their absence (SM187).

The EMB consists of the Dean of the College (Chairperson), all Deputy Deans, and Heads of all academic and administrative support departments. The EMB meets eight times during the AY (SM025, p.17). Although not entirely clear from the Governance Manual, the main difference between the AB and the EMB is that the former contains student representation. This significant membership overlap has occasionally

resulted in joint meetings between the AB and the EMB, raising the question about clarity of role between the two management bodies (SM189).

Through standing committees, the various units and offices work together. These committees are the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), the Learning, Teaching & Enhancement Committee (LTEC), the Research and Innovation Committee (RIC), the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC), the Academic Department Committee (ADC), the OAAA Audit and Review Monitoring Committee (OAAA), the External Advisory Boards (EAB), the Marketing and Recruitment Committee, the Finance Committee (FC), the UWE Examination Board, and the UWE-GCET Partnership Board (SM017, SM025). Each standing committee has ToR in the Governance Manual, determining its membership, periods of office, meetings, and purpose of committee, as well as its powers, responsibilities and functions (SM025). The Standing Committees Relationship Diagram shows how the committees relate to each other (SM017, SM018). Committees are typically chaired by a member of the EMB, ensuring that committee decisions are communicated to senior management. The AB, the SSLC, and the EAB all have student representation, while the EAB also includes industry participants (SM025).

In the interviews, the Panel learned that the Dean informally meets with SAC representatives on a regular basis, and actions are being taken based on their feedback.

The Panel acknowledges the extensive description of the membership and roles of responsibility of different management bodies. Although various indicators show a positive trend (e.g., increase in student enrollment, increase in indexed publications) and imply successful management, only sporadic reviews tend to occur (Portfolio, Appendix F, SM223, SM346, SM350). Although some reports refer to a trend analysis (e.g., in the Research Trend Report 2017-2022 (SM346)), no data analysis has taken place; thus, no conclusions are drawn, making evidence-based decisions difficult for management.

Overall, the Panel found no evidence of a systematic evaluation of the management system's effectiveness (especially in light of the long-term vacancy of the DDAA position), as well as the College's senior leadership.

Recommendation 6

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate its management system to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability.

1.4 *Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance*

GCET was initially affiliated with Carleton University (Canada) (Portfolio, p.4). MoHERI previously requested such an affiliation for quality assurance purposes, i.e., Carleton University was to ensure the quality of GCET's academic programmes. However, after a short period, it was mutually agreed that the agreement

be dissolved. GCET subsequently started negotiations with two universities in the UK, resulting in an agreement signed with the University of the West of England (UWE) in 2016. The agreement covers franchised and validated programmes, i.e., programmes offered by UWE in the UK and programmes specifically developed for or in collaboration with GCET but not part of the programmes offered at UWE in the UK. Both categories of degrees are awarded by UWE (SM037).

In addition to developing academic programmes, the first academic agreement (SM033) addresses student and staff exchange, research and consultancy, training and professional development, and IP. Quality assurance and programme reviews also involve UWE.

The first agreement was signed in November 2016 and, after a review, was followed by another 5-year agreement signed in February 2022. This review of the GCET – UWE relationship was extensive and detailed, providing a solid foundation for the renewal (SM037). The Agreement Review Document considered the UWE-GCET Partnership Development Plan, the GCET Institutional Strategic Plan (and related documents), and GCET's Strategic Intents (SM037). The Agreement Review Document concludes that the "relationship between the staff at the College and the UWE representatives is excellent" (SM037, p11). The resulting new agreement contains only minor changes, such as adding a Credit Recognition Agreement Schedule, clarification on IP, and Liabilities (SM033, SM034).

The affiliation agreement is supported by the UWE-GCET Strategic Development Plan 2020-23, which outlines twelve partnership objectives addressing infrastructure, academic quality, accreditation, academic programming, campus development, capacity building, and pathway agreements (SM036). In addition, an Action Plan that assigns each action a target date and a staff member from UWE and GCET is included in the document. The Panel also learned in the interviews that staff from both partner institutions are aware of the future plans for the collaboration.

UWE's International Partnerships Manager provides oversight of the collaboration (SM312). In addition, a Link Manager and subject-specific Link Tutors support the Partnership Manager. The Panel acknowledges the two institutions' extensive collaboration, evidenced by the comprehensive Annual Monitoring Reports issued by UWE (SM176, SM177). These reports are provided annually for each academic programme and contain action plans for the upcoming year and the progress of actions planned in the previous report. Topics addressed in the annual monitoring programme reports contain any issues noticed during the AY (such as lack of academic staff), student retention and progression, student results per course, commentary on student feedback, external examiner feedback, staff development, and future plans.

In the interviews, the Panel learned that UWE visits GCET several times a year to review student material, observe lectures and provide training (SM133). During the pandemic, these visits had to be replaced by online meetings; however, they have now resumed in-person.

UWE considers the courses delivered at GCET equivalent to courses taught in the UK. This is evidenced by the UWE-GCET Credit Recognition Agreement, which allows GCET students to transfer directly into year two at UWE after completing two years of study at GCET (SM035).

The Panel concludes that the affiliation agreement between UWE and GCET is effective and beneficial to GCET. The thorough evaluation of this relationship is commendable.

Commendation 1

The OAAAQA commends the Global College of Engineering and Technology for its extensive, systematic collaboration with the University of the West of England and the ongoing review of the relationship between the two institutions.

1.5 *Strategic Plan*

Shortly after its establishment, GCET developed its first Strategic Plan, which was in place from 2016 to 2021, dated November 2016 (SM020). The second Strategic Plan SP 2021-26 was approved by the BOT in November 2021 (SM003) and, as the Panel learned in the interviews, considered the direction BOT wanted to set for the College.

It is stated in SP 2016-21 that it would be evaluated and reviewed annually by AB, EMB, and BoT (SM020). The Panel, however, did not find evidence of this review taking place on an annual basis or any systematic evaluation of SP 2016-21, its implementation and progress in achieving the Vision, Mission, and core principles.

As part of SP 2021-26, Mission, Vision, aims, objectives, core areas, strategic areas, goals, and priorities, as well as a link to Oman Vision 2040, were either revised or newly developed over several months (Sept. 2020 to July 2021) (SM003, SM014). Each of the seven strategic goals has objectives and measures of success with specified key performance indicators (KPIs). Progress in achieving these KPIs is measured annually through a rolling annual Operating Plan (SM040, SM041). When compared to SP 2016-21, which included a risk assessment but no KPIs, this is an improvement. Although a considerable amount of work was put into the process of refining the College's strategy into KPIs and actions, the effectiveness of this process needs to be monitored and reviewed in its entirety because there is no data that points towards a review having taken place as of yet.

Based on MoHERI's request, GCET carried out a mapping between its SP 2021-26 and the MoHERI tenth five-year development plan for HEIs (Oman Vision 2040) (SM021). The Panel believes this was a helpful exercise to show GCET's support of Oman Vision 2040.

Although the Portfolio refers to the involvement of staff, SAC, Alumni and other external stakeholders, the Panel found limited evidence of meaningful feedback (Portfolio, p.14). The buy-in of the various

stakeholders in SP 2021-26 might, therefore, not be as high as the Institution and the BOT might assume (SM023). In addition, the Panel found no evidence that the effectiveness of the process used to develop SP 2021-26 was evaluated.

Recommendation 7

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the processes used to develop and implement the Strategic Plan and ensure its sustainability.

1.6 *Operational Planning*

In conjunction with SP 2016-21, the Operational Plan (OP) 2016-21 was developed, dated November 2016 (Portfolio, p.15, SM020, SM042). The Plan specifies for each strategy several actions, persons responsible, a rough timeline and performance indicators. However, given that responsibility is always given to groups of people, and most actions are to be carried out during each academic year, the effectiveness of OP 2016-21 is questionable. Furthermore, the Panel could not find evidence that OP 2016-21 was evaluated before the second OP was developed.

In AY 2020-21, EMB decided that operational planning should take place annually (Portfolio, p.15). The management of the OP process is being handled by QACO and monitored by AB (Portfolio, p.15, interview). The OP 2021-22 specifies several objectives for each Strategic Goal in SP 2021-26 (SM003, SM040). Each objective has action items, people responsible, KPIs, indicators and measures. Also, a target value for the current AY and a 5-year target are specified. A timeline is given, and financial implications are specified. This has resulted in very detailed, measurable OPs.

The College OP is developed by EMB and then approved by AB and BoT (SM014). This process occurs annually between August and October (Portfolio, p.15). After approval of the OP, HoDs can upload evidence to the Operational Plan Monitoring System (OPMS) for the completion of actions specified in the Plan for their department (ASM523). QAC evaluates the evidence and gives feedback if necessary (SM044). In order for an action to be completed, at least two QAC members need to agree that the action has been satisfactory (Portfolio, p.16, interviews).

The Panel appreciates the detailed operational planning, the link between OPs and SP through objectives, actions and KPIs, the extensive processes being followed, and the implementation of an online OPMS (SM040, SM041, SM043, SM044). However, the Panel noted the lack of a systematic evaluation of the planning processes, especially regarding their effectiveness and constructiveness. Given that three to four members of QAC are involved in reviewing the actions and outcomes of the OPs (Portfolio, p.16), the resources needed to document, monitor and review operational plans could potentially threaten their effectiveness. Furthermore, weekly reports (even when automated) regarding progress on annual tasks are likely counterproductive. This concern is supported by the fact that only one person appears to have

responded to a survey about the OPMS system in 2020–21, and even this person's feedback was minimal (SM313).

Affirmation 1

The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the new system for operational planning and its associated software implementation has the potential to become an effective and efficient approach for implementing the operational plan and monitoring its progress.

1.7 *Financial Management*

The Finance Office (FO) is the main unit responsible for managing GCET's finances. It reports to the Dean of the College and the BoT (SM015). According to the Governance Manual, it provides day-to-day transactional accounting and is responsible for managing cash flow, collection of student fees, payment of obligations, budget planning and forecasting (SM025). It is also involved in developing fiscal policies and monitoring fiscal compliance. Key documents that regulate GCET's finances are the Financial Regulations, Scholarships and Discounts Policy and the Vehicle and Transportation Policy (SM061, SM062, SM063).

The financial regulations document, approved by BoT, contains information on the principles of fiscal aspects of the College, such as responsibilities of people and committees, budgeting, income and banking, expenditures, salaries and wages, assets and irregularities (SM062). The Scholarships and Discounts Policy mainly specifies the performance-based discount percentages for different student groups.

The Finance Committee (FC) is above the AB and reports directly to the BoT. It is chaired by the Dean and also includes the DDAR and the Director of Finance. It is supported by a secretary (SM025).

The task of FC is to ensure effective and strategic budgeting. It regularly meets with the Human Resources Office (HRO) to discuss personnel costs (SM204, SM205). Any requests for bonuses or salary increments are discussed in HRO Meetings (SM204). If approved, changes are implemented by HR and the FO. It also decides on student fees and discounts, health insurance, investments, and other non-budgeted expenses (SM206). Student fees have to be approved by the BoT as well as MoHERI before being implemented.

The Annual Budget Plan is prepared by the Head of Finance and then discussed within the FC before being submitted to the BoT for approval (Portfolio, p.17). According to the Governance Manual, input is being sought from all academic and non-academic departments to ensure adequate operating budgets (SM025). Although this has been confirmed in interviews, the Panel has not seen any written evidence of a systematic budgeting process, apart from ad-hoc budget requests for specific events. Even though the Panel asked for detailed budget information, the provided evidence does not provide enough information to allow effective budget planning (ASM467). The Panel did also not receive information on actual expenditures.

Considering that the DDAA is not part of the FC, the College needs to ensure adequate resourcing for academic operations.

Fiscal compliance is supported through the annual financial audit by an external company. However, the Panel could not find evidence of a systematic approach to selecting external service providers (for example, External Auditors). GCET needs to enhance its system of streamlining financial and management accounting processes.

Recommendation 8

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate the effectiveness of its financial management processes.

1.8 Risk Management

The Risk Management Policy is the main document that deals with the management of institutional risks (SM030). This policy was only recently developed and approved by the BoT in November 2021. Prior to that, no formal institutional risk evaluation and management were in place (Portfolio, p.18). The policy covers risk assessment and management. An essential objective of GCET's risk management is that institutional risks are identified, reviewed and reported in a systematic manner in order to safeguard the institution from financial, organisational or human risks (Portfolio, p.18, SM030). While ultimately responsible for the overall risk management, BoT delegated much of the responsibility to the Dean and EMB.

The Risk Management Policy identifies four main categories of risks: Academic Risks, Financial Risks, Health and Safety Risks, and Infrastructure Risks. Each risk category has key risk managers associated. Twice a year, the EMB reviews the Institutional Risk Register (SM030, Portfolio p.18). A traffic light system is being used to rate the net risk score (Portfolio, p.18). Evidence has been provided that the Risk Register is being reviewed and that changes to risks are made to the Register over time (SM031, SM032).

The Panel considers the current Risk Management of GCET adequate most of the time. In interviews, the Panel learned that UWE agreed to teach-out Muscat-based students if teaching cannot continue at GCET. This addresses a significant risk for students. However, the Panels noticed the absence of some key risk areas. For instance, there is a lack of succession planning, and the low number of MoHERI-funded students is not listed in the risk register, although this was mentioned as a concern in the interviews.

Given the short period since the Risk Management Policy was introduced, no risk management evaluation has occurred. Furthermore, the Panel has not seen any plans for such an evaluation in the near future. This might be why the online sample Department Dashboard provided to the Panel onsite for the AY 2021-22

("EEE Progress Spreadsheet AY 2021-22") did not contain any data in the Risk Register of one Department.

Recommendation 9

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the Risk Management System and comprehensiveness of the Institutional Risk Register.

1.9 Policy Management

The management of policies at GCET is regulated by the Policy on Policy Development and Management, which was approved by the BoT in March 2021 (SM024). This policy is to provide consistency for developing and managing all GCET policies. Earlier, no such policy was in place.

Given that GCET's academic programmes are either franchised or validated by UWE, GCET follows UWE's academic regulations and policies to ensure UWE will issue the degree award for Muscat-based students. In several cases, guidelines were developed to contextualise UWE's policies to GCET's environment. This has been the case for, e.g., the GCET Guidance and Procedures – Assessment, and the Feedback and Appeals; which is based on UWE Academic Personal Tutoring. Similarly, the GCET Guidance and Procedures – Contract Cheating is based on the UWE Assessment Offences Policy, and GCET Guidance and Procedures – Plagiarism and Poor Academic Practice is also based on UWE's Assessment Offences Policy. The GCET Guidance and Procedures – Attendance and Engagement; also follows the UWE's approach to Attendance and Student Engagement (SM059, SM138, SM146, SM147, SM149, SM156).

The Policy on Policy Development and Management describes the procedure for developing new policies. While this procedure outlines a step-by-step process, it is unclear if the initial discussion of a possible new policy needs to happen with the executive management or at the relevant College committee (SM024). Once a draft policy has been developed in accordance with the policy template, it is approved by AB and/or EMB, depending on the relevance of the policy. Subsequently, the policy is sent to the BoT for approval. The final approved policy version is stored in a shared electronic folder, the QA-Document Management System (DMS)-Online Policy Repository, managed by QACO. The Panel learned in the interviews that a policy's existence and content is communicated by emails from the Dean or Head of QACO or through formal Standing Committees to the relevant stakeholders (Portfolio, p.20).

QACO was established in 2020 and consists of the Head of QA, a QA Officer and a Document Archiving Administrator (Portfolio p.19, interview). The office is responsible for all quality-related aspects, internal and external approval of new and modified programmes, accreditation, surveys, and external quality-assurance bodies (SM025). Similarly, benchmarking exercises are managed and overseen by QACO, as well as pre- and post-moderation assessment processes.

Adherence with policies is monitored by the Unit responsible for its implementation (SM024). Section 4 of the policy template explicitly states the department or office responsible for monitoring the policies. Non-compliance is to be reported to QACO. For instance, QACO monitors compliance with policies related to OAAAQA and MoHERI. It also ensures the effectiveness of pre- and post-moderation of assessments in academic departments (portfolio p19). On the other hand, academic departments are responsible for reporting and managing suspected plagiarism cases.

Policies are being reviewed based on a 3-year review cycle (SM024). Earlier reviews and revisions can be triggered based on various factors, such as a change in UWE or MoHERI regulations. The Panel received information on specific policy reviews (e.g., Developing New Programmes Policy, Field Trip Policy, Flexible Student Support Policy) as evidence that the policy review cycle is being followed (e.g., SM187, SM188, SM193, SM194, SM195).

The Panel is satisfied that GCET's Policy Management is fit for purpose.

1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems

Since its inception, the College has regularly reviewed its curricula, teaching, learning and other academic aspects (SM176, SM177). These reviews are carried out to a large extent by the affiliate institution UWE. This institution typically visits GCET twice a year and develops an Annual Programme Review Monitoring Report yearly for each programme area (SM 037, SM176, SM 177, interviews). These reports are very detailed and comprehensively address all academic aspects. Their purpose is to ensure equivalency of programme delivery at UWE and GCET. MoHERI also reviews academic programmes before they can be offered or during every programme change.

The first review of academic and administrative departments started in January 2021 (Portfolio, p.20, SM010). This review resulted in minor changes to the organisational structure, mainly on the administrative side. With the exception of name changes, the organisational structure of academic units has not changed based on a comparison of the organisational structure diagram from 2020-21 with that from 2021-22 (SM015, SM016). One notable change was the creation of the Research and Innovation Office (RIO) in October 2021, which was introduced by the College in effort to increase its research (Portfolio, p.46).

The Governance Manual (approved in 2021) specifies that all departments are to be reviewed every three years (SM025). The Dean develops a review schedule, which is discussed in the AB and implemented by QACO (Portfolio, p.21). These reviews resulted in reports that followed a template that included a SWOT analysis and action plans (SM 208, SM 209). QACO follows up on the implementation of the action plans (Portfolio, p.21, SM025).

During 2021, a comprehensive review of the policies and guidelines was carried out, resulting in the revision of existing policies and the creation of new policies. The Panel found extensive evidence of a recent

comprehensive review of policies and procedures. Each policy specifies a date by which the following review has to take place.

A comprehensive review of GCET is part of the review process carried out by UWE before the renewal of the affiliation agreement. This review addresses academic aspects, college management, staffing, learning resources, and future plans (SM037).

The Panel noted that although a rigorous review system is in place and has resulted in changes, no evidence for assessing the effectiveness of the changes has been provided.

Recommendation 10

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically evaluate the effectiveness of any changes implemented as part of the entity and activity review process.

1.11 Student Grievance Process

GCET's student grievance process is addressed in the Student Complaint and Grievance Policy (SM087). This policy was approved in 2022 and is implemented through the Student Support Services Office (SSSO). The policy differentiates between academic and non-academic complaints. Both categories of complaints follow a staged process. Stage 1 is the Initial Stage and refers to informal, oral complaints. If the grievance is not resolved, students can submit a formal complaint in Stage 2. The SSSO liaises between the student and the relevant department. In Stage 3, the grievance is escalated to the Deanery Level. This involves one of the Deputy Deans or the College Dean. Stage 3 complaints are managed through the SSSO.

The Student Complaint and Grievance Policy specifies deadlines so that students receive a response to their grievances in a timely manner (SM087).

The SSSO maintains a tracking log of student complaints (SM262). It is striking that all complaints are of an academic nature. The log contains information on the complaint, the person who sent the complaint, the nature of the complaint, the mode of submission (e.g., email, telephone, visit), a link to more information, the recipient of the complaint, the person in charge of handling the complaint, and the solution and the person who communicated the solution to the student. The log implies that students are aware of the process, as most complaints are submitted by email to the SSSO. However, actual communication samples show that complaints seem less coordinated than implied in the log (SM262, interviews). Also, the form required for submitting formal complaints according to the Student Complaint and Grievance Policy appears to be rarely used. Nevertheless, the Panel received evidence that grievances are being addressed in a timely manner (SM262).

The Panel is satisfied with the evidence received that the student grievance process is effective and students' concerns are being dealt with speedily.

1.12 *Health and Safety*

The College has to comply with health and safety regulations provided by the various ministries and other governmental entities, such as the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA). Based on these requirements, the College developed the Health and Safety Policy, which also contains procedures and practices (SM065). It has received approval from PACDA. Visits and inspections by these authorities have taken place.

The College also has a Health Clinic, the role of which is specified in the Health Clinic Handbook (SM064). It is licensed through the Ministry of Health and staffed by one nurse (SM280).

Health and Safety is the responsibility of a Health and Safety Officer who reports to the DDAR (SM049). The Officer's role is to ensure compliance with HSE regulations and to raise safety awareness amongst students and staff. This includes workshops offered by PACDA. While a policy is in place, the Panel noted the absence of fire drills during the last five years. Without such drills, the effectiveness of policies and procedures cannot be verified. The Health and Safety Officer also monitors the quality and hygiene of the catering services, which are outsourced (Portfolio, p.86).

The College has Health and Safety regulations for field trips. This includes a Field Trip Policy that regulates student activities outside the College (SM125). The policy describes activities to be carried out before the trip, such as obtaining permission for the trip, completing the Student Health Form and getting feedback from the College nurse regarding particular health and safety requirements. After the trip, a feedback form has to be completed.

Security on campus is provided by three male security guards and one female guard. In addition, interior and exterior areas are monitored through 70 CCTV cameras (Portfolio p.105).

However, the Panel is concerned about one of the buildings that only has one exit door that opens to the inside. In addition, safety equipment appears to be limited. Some laboratories contain machines that could potentially cause serious injuries; however, there are no warning signs, protective shielding and first aid kits in the room. Laboratories containing gas cartridges or welding equipment have no fire extinguishers. Students were not aware of assembly points (interviews).

Recommendation 11

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology urgently review the effectiveness and adequacy of its health and safety arrangements.

1.13 *Oversight of Associated Entities (e.g. owned companies)*

The Institution considers this section to be not applicable to GCET. Previously, a commercial Training Unit was part of GCET. The College indicated that this Unit was removed in November 2021 in compliance with the MoHERI directives for higher education institutions to separate and manage their commercial activities as independent entities (SM316). Nonetheless, the Training Unit is returning to operation with a Unit Head and an employed trainer with the task to adjust operations to meet government regulations (interviews).

Affirmation 2

The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the College's Training Unit needs to comply with all Government regulations.

2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMMES

GCET has five academic Departments: the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE), the Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME), the Department of Computing and Information Technology (CIT), the Department of Urban Planning and Environmental Management (UPEM), and the Department of Foundation Studies (FS) (SM015). At the time of the Visit, GCET runs 13 programmes, which are taught in English. The EEE and ME offer six programmes: BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering and Vehicle Technology, BEng (Hons) Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering, BEng (Hons) Automation and Robotics Engineering, BEng (Hons) Instrumentation and Control Engineering, BEng (Hons) Software Engineering (ASM521), and BEng (Hons) Building Services Engineering. Moreover, the Engineering Departments offer a postgraduate degree in MSc Engineering Management. The CIT offers two undergraduate programmes: BSc (Hons) in Computer Security and Forensics and BSc (Hons) in Business Computing. In addition, CIT offers a postgraduate degree in MSc Data Science. UPEM offers three programmes BSc (Hons) in Environmental Management and Practice, BSc (Hons) in Urban and Regional Planning, and BSc (Hons) in Architectural Technology and Design (SM005, SM318).

Moreover, the FS offers the General Foundation Program to prepare students for entry into their bachelor programmes in the College. All programmes at the post-Foundation level follow a credit point-based system. All Programmes offered by GCET at the time of the audit have at least **480** credit points at the Bachelor level (OQF Level 8) and **180** credit points at the Masters level (OQF Level 9), which complies with the required number of credit points set by the Oman Qualification Framework (OQF) (Portfolio, pp.29-30, SM218). At the time of the audit, the College had a population of approximately **1628** students (per the Student Statistical Dashboard accessed on 26th Oct 2022). Students are divided equally; thus, around 50% are in flexible mode, and the rest are in Fulltime mode. GCET SP 2021-26 includes the following goals of particular relevance to teaching and learning and quality education: 'To provide high quality learning, teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement, opportunities aligned to the strategic Vision 2040 of the Sultanate of Oman' and 'To produce graduates with the knowledge, critical thinking skills, and graduate attributes, that enable them to have fulfilling careers either locally or internationally'.

This Chapter reports on the Panel's findings in relation to the following: graduate attributes and student learning objectives, curriculum design, student entry standards, plagiarism, student placements, assessment methods, standards and moderation, academic security and invigilation, student retention and progression, and graduate destinations and employability.

2.1 *Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives*

The new graduate attributes (GAs) for the College were revised, developed and approved in August 2021 (SM165, SM166, SM187). GCET stated that the previous GAs developed in January 2019 were inappropriate and irrelevant in the context of the College (Portfolio, p.26, SM168). In the interviews, the Panel heard that the former GAs were generic and inappropriate for meeting GCET's new Vision and Mission. GCET states that its new GAs are now aligned with the College Mission as well as the National

Strategy for Education in Oman 2040 and Oman Vision (SM165, SM210). This was also confirmed during the interviews.

GCET has conducted an online workshop for GAs discussion with academic staff (ASM383). The Panel was provided with evidence that shows the feedback of four staff members who commented on the new GAs (SM166). During the demonstration of Moodle, the Panel noticed that the GAs are published to students to create more awareness. In addition, the GAs are presented in the Student Handbook and GCET's website (SM304). In the interviews, some students have also confirmed their awareness of the GAs, whilst others have not recognised the concept. The Panel encourages the College to increase students' awareness of the new GAs. The GAs are also embedded into the curriculum and skills that are defined under the UWE Bristol GAs Framework (Portfolio, p.25). During the interviews, affiliate representatives confirmed the consideration of the new GAs within the programmes' curricula. There is also a mapping of the GAs to the institutional strategic goals (SM166).

Each Programme has a Programme Specification that contains Programme Educational Aims (PEAs) and Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that students must achieve by the completion of the programme (SM218). The GAs that all graduates should have attained upon graduation are embedded implicitly within the PLOs. The GAs can be summarised as attaining the appropriate level of knowledge and skills in the discipline, analytical and critical thinking skills, professionalism and ethical behaviour that support graduates for life-long learning, adaptability to Omani culture to demonstrate citizenship, and empowering students with skills to research and explore to solve challenges and problem and be more innovative. In addition, it encourages graduates for creativities and entrepreneurship to contribute to Oman's economy (SM165). The Panel considered samples of module materials (ASM401) and found that there is an explicit mapping of the PLOs and Module Learning Outcomes (MOs), and these are embedded in the programme specifications (SM218).

The External Advisory Boards (EAB) in each academic department established in AY 2021-22 with members from alumni, government, industry, and business are invited to provide feedback on the necessary skills and abilities, market trends, employer needs, the currency and relevance of the curriculum, and graduate opportunities (SM199). EABs discussed the alignment of graduate attributes with current industrial needs (SM199). During their meeting in AY 2021-22, the discussion showed concerns from some EAB members on the quality of graduates with the absence of a formal placement to support the students and prepare them well for the Oman Labour market. This issue is covered more in Subarea 2.6 of this report.

GCET stated that the achievements of the GAs and the PLOs are measured annually through the Annual Programme Review (APR) for each programme and that APRs '...are used to monitor student achievement and capture feedback from students, and External Examiners (EEs) on the operation, academic standards, and comparability with the performance of students...' (Portfolio, p.26, SM176, SM177, SM221). In the interviews with the affiliate's representative, the Panel learned that the LOs are measured according to students' grades. If students score 40% or above, then this will be considered achievement. The Panel has

concerns about this approach to measuring the achievements of LOs. For example, the sample of students' assessments in the module files shows that some students scored relatively low marks on the examination (but above 40%) and failed some questions mapped to MOs, but still passed the module (ASM401). The Panel worries that some students would graduate without successfully attaining the required knowledge or skills.

Moreover, GCET has also stated that the EAB meetings and alumni and employer surveys are used to review the achievement of GAs (Portfolio, p26, SM342). These indirect survey approaches have just started last semester and have low response rates (SM342). At the time of the Visit, the graduates' number obtained from the Student Statistics Dashboard (SSD) was 823 graduates. The number of students who responded to the survey was 190 graduates for the satisfaction survey and 95 for the destination survey (SM342). The Panel found no evidence to directly measure the achievements of GAs or PLO. GCET only depends on indirect mechanisms such as surveys, meetings with industry, and students' grades to monitor students' achievements of the GAs and PLOs during their study period and before graduation. The Panel reviewed a sample of course portfolios and found no evidence of a mechanism that was used for measuring the achievements of previous graduates' attributes too. In the interviews, the Panel learned that staff has no direct mechanism to measure the achievements of GAs or PLOs.

Recommendation 12

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology develop a formal direct mechanism to measure the students' achievements of graduates' attributes and programme learning outcomes for all programmes at all levels.

2.2 Curriculum

All programmes have been licensed by the MoHERI (SM005). GCET states that the curriculum's development and review have been conducted as a collaboration between UWE and GCET since October 2016 (Portfolio, p.27-28, SM213, SM214, SM215, SM215, SM216). During the interviews with the affiliate, the Panel was informed about active collaboration between both institutions to improve the offered programmes. A team is formed between GCET and UWE to design and develop the programmes (ASM388, ASM389). On October 2016, UWE and GCET formed a Special Curriculum Approval Panel (Special CAP) that involved senior staff from GCET and UWE academics, administrative staff, representatives from QA offices, and students studying in GCET (SM213-Institutional Meeting Report).

QACO contributes to ensuring alignment with OQF (Profile, p. 27, ASM387). In the interviews, the Panel confirmed that the QACO office validates the programmes during the development of the review process to ensure alignment with OQF. The result of the CAP's meeting was to approve the affiliation relationship and start the delivery of the following programmes leading to UWE awards: BEng (Hons) Electronics and Telecommunications Engineering; Beng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering and Vehicle Technology; Beng (Hons) Software Engineering; BSc (Hons) Computing Security and Forensics. The Special CAP has

discussed all subjects related to programme delivery, including GCET Vision, Mission and strategic alignments, relationship with MoHERI, the previous relationship with Carleton University, the Organization and Administrative structure of GCET, the adequacy to support the programmes, and the learning and teaching strategy.

The Special CAP representatives from UWE also had the opportunity to meet some GCET students in Oman and explore their studying experience and entry standards. In the interviews with affiliate representatives, the Panel confirmed that UWE had met students from GCET. The Special CAP has also visited the campus and learned about the facilities, IT resources, classes and laboratory requirements. It also provided GCET with recommendations for physical resource enhancements and advice on software and hardware upgrades (SM213). Moreover, a recommendation to enrol GCET's staff into the Postgraduate Certificate for Academic Practice (PCAP) was adopted to improve academic staff skills and capabilities (SM227).

GCET programmes differ from the UWE programmes mainly in adding the GFP designed to meet UWE entry requirements for Year 1 and MoHERI requirements in Oman (SM218). Moreover, the Special CAP agreed on the arrangements made to move the 15-credit Omani Culture module to the first year owing to UWE's inability to oversee and quality assure the module's specialist requirements. This module is MoHERI required module for all programmes in the College along with the entrepreneurship module designed to build students' skills on commercialising artifacts and new concepts. These modules are not part of the UWE original curriculum. In addition, the Special CAP discussed topics related to delivery mode, programme intake, and adequacy of staffing with a proper plan developed for staff recruitment (SM214, SM215, SM216, SM217). In the interviews with affiliate representatives, the Panel learned that UWE reviews the applicants' CVs before joining GCET to ensure they are fit-for-purpose. GCET revisits the Programme and Module specifications to consider the feedback received during the Special CAP as a matter of priority (SM218, SM221).

In line with UWE regulations, the Programme Specifications include Programme Aims, Learning Outcomes, Entry Requirements, Modular Structure, Mapping Learning Outcomes, and Learning and Teaching approach (SM218). Associated Module Specifications include syllabus, Module Learning Outcomes, Assessment Strategy and contents (SM221). In addition, the members of GCET and UWE submitted several supporting documents to complete the Special CAP approval process, such as the Programme Specifications, the Module Specifications, the Programme Design and Development Report, the External Academic Advisor Report, the Staffing Plan, the GCET Resources / Facilities list, the Operational and Delivery Plan, the Assessment Calendar, the Programme Business Case, Market Research Report, the Mapping Documentation, the Assessment Plan, and the Staff CV's Similar procedure applied for all other programmes (SM214, SM215, SM216, SM217).

GCET conducts Annual Programme Reviews (APRs) for all programmes independently (SM176, SM177). The programme review report covers aspects related to: progress in actions approved on the last review,

assessment of the retention and progression rate, and evaluation of student performance in each module. The APRs team also looks into the programme operation and resources, which include validation of PLOs, MOs, and adequacy of resources (including staff, laboratories, and learning materials). The APRs team reviews the assessment and moderation outcomes and ensures that the implementation aligns with the assessment framework (SM110). The review identifies staff training and development needs and proposes activities to cover this gap. The reviews concluded with a list of actions, distributed the responsibilities, and defined the timeline for each action. GCET states that students' feedback on the curriculum is collected during the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meetings and through module reports preparations conducted annually to evaluate students' satisfaction with the delivery of a specific module (SM198, SM321). In addition, there is feedback from the External Examiner where comments are incorporated into the action plan following the completion of the APRs (SM232).

UWE conducts another annual review of the current portfolio of programmes offered at GCET and prepares Partnership Lead Reports (SM219). In the interviews, the Panel learned that the Partnership report is prepared as collaborative reflections that overarch the entire programmes' portfolio offered by GCET and identifies improvements, good practice, and challenges that may have emerged through the year, mainly through APRs. The Panel found that this partnership review is a good opportunity to perform reflection on the partnership and to review the future improvements of the relationship. In addition, a periodic report is prepared by both institutes called UWE-GCET Strategic Development Plan 2020-2023 to identify possible improvements and enhancements to programme provision (SM036). The Strategic Report makes all necessary alignments to the UWE Bristol Strategy 2030 and the GCET Strategy 2021-26 (aligned to the Oman Strategy 2040) in terms of the production of work-ready and career skills-enabled graduates.

In AY 2021-22, GCET established the Developing New Programme Policy to ensure a systematic curriculum design process involving all internal and external stakeholders (Portfolio, p.27, SM135). According to GCET, this policy was approved by AB in May 2021 and BoT in November 2021 but has not been implemented by the time of the Audit Visit on any new programme (SM014, SM188). The Panel is satisfied with the policy to guide the implementation of the new programme's curriculum and modules. The Developing New Programmes Policy is aligned to UWE policies for programme design, development, validation, and approval and embedded in the SP 2021-26 (SM003, SM010-3, SM135, SM136). The Policy scope covers three categories: franchised (this serves the existing relationship with UWE), validated (programmes developed by GCET and approved by UWE), and GCET programme with its own awarding power. The development process begins with needs justification by HoDs through AB (SM187, SM188). The process includes programme outcomes and specifications, content and delivery, benchmarking, and market analysis. In the interviews, the Panel learned that compliance with this policy and review are the responsibility of QACO.

In the interviews, the Panel heard that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the College moved to online delivery during the year. GCET used online classes, class recordings and virtual labs to enable students to engage in experimental work where face-to-face delivery was prohibited (Portfolio, p.31). In addition, GCET

adapted examinations and coursework assignments in-line with UWE practice to facilitate the completion of assessments (Portfolio, p.40, SM096). In the interviews with staff and affiliate representatives, the Panel learned that the UWE team was moderating the adoption of an e-learning approach to ensure academic standards were met. Students informed the Panel that different Learning management tools, such as Moodle and Blackboard, were available to access module materials and attend online classes. The Panel is pleased with the formal mechanism in place to review and improve the curriculum and the active collaboration with the UWE to enhance the programmes' delivery.

2.3 *Student Entry Standards*

The management of applications and admissions to the programmes is managed by the College's Registry, Admissions and Registration Office (RARO) (Portfolio, p.29). There is an admission policy to ensure fair and transparent formal arrangements are in place to enrol applicants to study at GCET (SM066). In the interviews with students, the Panel learned that students were aware of the admission policy and criteria and believed it was fair. Students have access to these criteria through the College websites and Student Handbooks (SM083, SM084). In the interviews with staff, the Panel learned that RARO is responsible for implementing the policy, reviewing its effectiveness, and suggesting policy changes to AB for approval. For example, the changes conducted to the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) process are explained further in this Subarea below (SM224).

GCET states that the admission policy is developed with consideration of MoHERI requirements and with alignments to UWE Academic Framework requirements (Portfolio, p. 29). The Panel reviewed the admission policy and acknowledges that it has clearly defined the criterion to accept applicants into GCET's programmes. The minimum entry requirement for the undergraduate programmes is a pass in the Omani General Education Diploma (or equivalent) with a minimum overall average of 65%, a minimum of 60% in Mathematics (applied or pure), and a minimum of 55% in the English Language. Moreover, the policy states any additional criterion for programmes that has special requirements. For example, applicants pursuing a degree programme in Engineering are required to achieve a minimum score of 60% in Physics and Pure Mathematics. These admission criteria are applied to all applicants, private or sponsored. All accepted applicants are then required to score 60 % and above in the General Foundation Programme (GFP) placement test in order to be exempted from the GFP programme or complete the GFP stage 3 with a score above 60 % in English, Mathematics and ICT for science degrees or Physics for engineering's degrees (SM304). According to applicants' performance in the placement tests, the new GFP students are placed in Stages 1, 2 or 3 of English, Mathematics and ICT.

The OAAAQA Audit report of the GFP for GCET has raised concern about the absence of a benchmark for the entry and exit standards against internationally recognised standards or references (SM305). Therefore, GCET conducted a comparison exercise to address the GFP's recommendation (SM326). For English, GCET adopted the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages. The Framework is a standard pathway to describe the language proficiency of a learner in general. CEFR uses six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2) to align learners' achievement in all areas of English (Listening, Reading,

Speaking, Writing) with the required standard proficiency of each level. GCET is exploring adopting the entry level of A1 and Exit level of B2 (SM326).

Moreover, the GFP Mathematics is compared to the first year Mathematics (UFMFBG-30-0), which UWE offers and taught at GCET in Level 0 (out of 4 levels; 0, 1, 2, and 3) of undergraduate (UG) programmes. GCET aligned the learning outcomes of the revised GFP Mathematics modules to prepare students to solve problems of undergraduates' Mathematics as they will be familiar with the topics, delivery and assessments at undergraduate level 0 Mathematics (SM326). The ICT modules are compared to the "Internet and Computing Core Certification" (IC3) developed by Certiport Incorporation; it is a global standard certification programme for basic computing skills. In addition, GCET proposed the use of GMetrix exams because it is aligned with IC3 learning outcomes. The GMetrix exams are now GFP students' final and exit exams in GCET.

The Panel is not convinced about the benchmark approach used. The benchmark has not covered all the programme and modules learning outcomes of the English, Mathematics and ICT within the GFP programmes against selected institutes or reference organisations with the aim to identify the gaps and similarities. Furthermore, the benchmark exercise has not considered benchmarking the assessments that include, for example, the level of complexity for the assessments or tests delivered to identify entry stages and exit requirements. For example, the CEFR describes language levels and outcomes for each level but does not align these to scores. Therefore, the basis for selecting level B2 for exit is not comparable to IELTS 5.0 or 6.0 required by other HEIs in Oman. The benchmark exercise must ensure that similar academic standards within the assessments are met with the benchmarked institutes or organisations. Moreover, comparing a sample of students' achievements in both benchmarked institutes will provide evidence of attaining similar academic standards with the other institutions or organisations.

Recommendation 13

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology conduct formal benchmarking of its General Foundation Programme entry and exit standards against nationally and internationally recognised reference points to ensure the fitness for purpose of the programme.

GCET's admission policy, in alignment with UWE's Academic Regulations, allowed applicants to apply for prior learning credits and reduce the workload required for graduation. GCET developed a policy for APL to recognise the knowledge and skills that students gained through certificated learning (SM112). However, the maximum credit limit that can be approved through an APL process is 62% of the total credit required for completing the degree (SM112). The APL claim form and supporting evidence are submitted to the relevant Programme Leader (PL) within six semester weeks from the point of registration. The PL or a nominated academic will then conduct the assessment and sign the form, with endorsement by the PL and the HoD. The form is then sent to the UWE APL Committee for final decision. The approved APL credits are then

recorded in the student records and can be viewed through Blackboard or at GCET Student Record System (SRS) (SM324).

The process of APL is monitored throughout the year by the AB in GCET (SM112). All departments are required to produce reports on APL activities, challenges and practices to the QAC who formally incorporate this into the annual monitoring cycle. For example, during 2016-20, GCET received many applications for APL, which increased the load on academics and impacted the commitment of GCET's response time to applicants (SM223). Therefore, UWE and GCET conducted a significant mapping exercise to review the learning outcomes, academic levels and content of local qualifications against those of the GCET programmes and develop a pre-defined mapping model to support academics during the assessment of APL claims (SM224). An agreement is then signed between UWE and GCET to streamline the process of approving APL applications, thus improving the process's effectiveness for both students and staff (SM035). Moreover, further qualifications will be assessed and included in the exemption lists as part of GCET's OP 2021-22 (SM040-2.1a.1). In the interviews, students expressed their appreciation for the APL process that it saved them from losing completed attained credit and repeating similar modules. The Panel is pleased with the formal arrangements in place of the APL policy and the monitoring of the effectiveness of the process implementation (See also Sub-scope area 6.2).

Moreover, the GCET's Admission Policy supports students with special needs with formal arrangements, starting by identifying their needs in the standard Application Form available at RARO to consider their requirements during the admission process (SM066). During interviews, the Panel noticed that the RARO indicates the nature of the special needs on the form and, if necessary, asks for a certified verification of any special needs from the applicant and then coordinates with the academic departments as well as the supporting units to evaluate the appropriate support required for the applicants with special needs.

For postgraduate programmes, GCET is aligned with MoHERI and UWE regulations; thus, the admissions of applicants to the postgraduate programmes at GCET is reviewed and approved by the Postgraduate Admissions Committee (PAC) (Portfolio, p.30). This Committee is a sub-committee of the AB and is chaired by the Dean of GCET. The Committee verifies both the UWE and MoHERI requirements; thus, the applicant must have completed a bachelor's with an overall grade not less than 'Good' or equivalent or with a grade of 'Acceptable' but with work experience not less than two years in the programme (SM067, SM327). Furthermore, for English-taught programmes, the applicants must have an IELTS score of 6 or equivalent from other international tests. In addition, UWE requires applicants to have a bachelor's degree with a minimum GPA of 2.7 or a lower GPA but relevant work experience and an overall score of 6.5 in IELTS with 5.5 in each component. In the interviews, the Panel confirmed this with postgraduate students who expressed that these criteria were fair to them.

2.4 *Teaching Quality*

GCET's Mission is 'to provide locally accredited, and internationally recognised, higher education of quality, delivered through excellent teaching, learning, research, innovation, and community engagement, that

equips graduates with the knowledge, skills, and competencies, to enable them to have fulfilling careers both locally and internationally' (SM003). This is explicitly indicated in the first strategic objective within the Strategic Plan document as '1.4.1 to provide high-quality learning, teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement, opportunities aligned to the strategic Vision 2040 of the Sultanate of Oman'. This provides a clear indicator of the commitment of the senior leadership to providing high-quality teaching.

GCET states that all programmes have been developed within UWE's Enhancement Framework (Portfolio, p.31). The framework encourages the faculty members to use a range of teaching methods such as lectures, classroom discussions, case studies, practical activities, group work, laboratory sessions, tutorial sessions, experimental methods, and presentations, as the Panel observed from the provided module specifications (ASM401).

The teaching mode is primarily the standard method that depends on face-to-face interactions; however, GCET uses the online platform, Moodle, to provide supplementary learning materials (Portfolio, p.32, ASM401). The Panel found that Moodle was valued by those students who were interviewed, and the online learning satisfaction survey results showed an overall high satisfaction rate with Moodle (72%) (SM239). Furthermore, students are satisfied with the online methods for assignment submissions and access to recorded classes and electronic materials (Portfolio, p.32). In addition, the students appreciated Moodle's usefulness during the pandemic when there was a complete lockdown in the country. Moreover, GCET uses different tools, such as MATLAB, to conduct virtual labs during the pandemic to continue delivering practical sessions to students (SM274).

The Panel also acknowledges the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) training programme, which is made available to faculty members to enhance their knowledge and skills in teaching and learning pedagogies. PCAP is also aligned with the UK Higher Education Academy Fellowship (Portfolio, P.31). Since AY 2017-18, all full-time academic staff have been required to take the PCAP except those who had taken a similar programme (SM257, see also Subarea 8.5 below). The Programme is delivered by UWE lecturers and continued online during the pandemic.

A range of workshops on topics related to higher education is conducted at the College level, and all faculty participate in these (SM228). Topics covered include Moodle training, moderation practices, assessment methods, and interactive learning methods. In addition, evidence was provided on a range of quality assurance workshops offered by QACO, such as the OAAA Audit Portfolio Workshop (SM228). The Panel acknowledges that GCET is supporting faculty members to improve teaching quality. The Panel, however, is concerned about staff obligation for PCAP, research, committees membership and other administrative commitments that might significantly impact their teaching duties and the level of personal attention and support that students receive, considering the current student-staff ratio of about 38:1 with only 42 academic staff and around 1600 students (Portfolio, p92). The Panel, therefore, urges GCET to pay close attention to this matter (see also Subareas 6.5 and 8.2).

The College's Survey and Analysis Policy evaluates GCET practices through feedback collection from students, staff, and external stakeholders (SM074). For example, Students complete the 'End Module Survey' and 'Online Learning Satisfaction' every semester (SM321, SM239). The feedback is then used to inform the APR process and develop an action plan to perform the required changes (Portfolio, p.32). In addition, a Staff-Student Liaison Committee conducts meetings each semester at the departmental level to discuss student feedback and inform the APR process (SM176, SM177, SM198). Moreover, GCET collects feedback from faculty members through the "Online Teaching Satisfaction Survey" (SM239).

Moreover, GCET has formal arrangements for peer observation documented in the College's Policy and Procedure on Teaching Observation to provide an opportunity for faculty to enhance teaching through disseminating good practice amongst the College (SM132). The frequency of the observation process is twice a year, except for newly joined academics, which occurs twice a semester as it is used to evaluate the faculty member during the probation period. The Panel was provided with supporting evidence that illustrates the implementation of the observation process and the approach used to analyse and reflect on the outcomes collected (SM133). GCET is also incorporating teaching quality as part of the appraisal system to ensure the delivery of quality teaching. GCET and UWE module leaders share best practices where GCET lecturers granted access to the UWE learning management system Blackboard with examples of teaching materials and assessments of identical modules (SM050). In addition, there are face-to-face and online meetings and joint activities between GCET and UWE to share best practices that improve teaching quality (SM133). During interviews, the Panel confirmed that faculty members are performing peer observations, and in some instances, it resulted in improvements to teaching practices, such as improving teaching materials and methods (ASM401). The Panel is pleased to see that GCET has a system for monitoring modules and teaching quality using student evaluations, the liaison committee, staff surveys, and peer observation and acts in response to student and staff feedback as part of the APR process.

2.5 Plagiarism

One of GCET's core Values is integrity, which is guided by principles of 'honest, honourable, and reliable, in all dealings with students, staff, industry, government agencies, and other stakeholders' (SM003). GCET has formal guidance and procedure based on UWE Assessment Offences Policy that has information on avoiding, detecting and monitoring plagiarism as well as investigating plagiarism cases and the penalties involved (SM147). The Programmes' Handbooks and Modules' Handbooks also have information and guidance on forms of plagiarism and penalties, and the modules' coursework assessment specification includes a clear statement regarding anti-plagiarism rules (SM153, SM169, SM170, SM171, SM172, ASM401). During interviews, the Panel learned that students are also made aware of plagiarism and academic offences during the induction. In addition, the College has a core module, Professional and Academic Skills, for undergraduates, which clearly explains the process and importance of in-text citation and referencing (SM310).

Moreover, in the interviews with PG students, the Panel learned that there are workshops and recorded videos in the library for PG applicants during induction to teach them about similar practices related to

professional and academic skills specially in the areas of citation. Furthermore, faculty members cover various aspects during the PCAP programme related to academic integrity, producing course materials with adequate reference to the used sources and assessment authenticity (Portfolio, p.34).

In the interviews, the Panel learned that the HoD forms an Academic Misconduct Committee to investigate the cases and make proper recommendations based on the offences policy (SM149, SM329). The report is then submitted to UWE's Assessment Offence Advisor to review it and ensure fairness of the process before reporting it to the Award Board (Portfolio, p.34). The Panel was provided with sample cases of academic misconduct (SM150).

During Interviews, the Panel found that students were aware of the policy and consequences of plagiarism. Students stated that they were repeatedly informed about them by the teaching staff, which was confirmed by interviewed staff. GCET uses three anti-plagiarism software to identify cases of plagiarism on students' submitted works. SafeAssign is used with Blackboard by faculty and students for UG and PG works. Unicheck is used by students and faculty with Moodle, and Turnitin is used only by faculty through UWE (Matter for Clarification, item 15). The Panel has concerns about the difference in similarity results among these tools. The Panel heard that when students submit their works to faculty, it usually generates different results because faculty use a different tool than the one used by students. The Panel encourages the College to unify the tools used to ensure fair treatment for students.

Furthermore, the Panel noticed an inconsistency in the understanding of acceptable similarity. Although faculty stated that the acceptable similarity is 15%, during Interviews, the Panel noticed that each student has a different understanding; thus, some reported 7%, and others reported 12%. Therefore, the Panel believes that the anti-plagiarism tools' results must be reviewed and treated individually with an aim to eliminate any plagiarism in the contents and ensure originality of the text regardless of similarity rates that might emerge from unified templates or quoted statements. Moreover, the Panel reviewed some staff works and found evidence of an instance of poor academic practice in the submission of a project proposal that may be construed as plagiarism due to lack of citations and references (ASM426).

In the interviews, the Panel learned that QACO checks policies and guidelines, yet the teaching materials and staff works are checked by the staff members themselves. The Panel is concerned about these individual cases and urges the College to revise the plagiarism policy and procedures to ensure that all academic and non-academic works are checked against plagiarism to protect the academic integrity of the College. Furthermore, the Panel is of the view that the College adheres to the GCET's objectives within SP 2021-26, where it is stated that GCET needs 'To align to national and international quality assurance standards and benchmarks; and continuously improve, and enhance, the College's policies, procedures, and practices' (SM003). Therefore, GCET needs to benchmark the plagiarism policy with national and international institutes to ensure alignment with best practices.

Recommendation 14

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology revise and benchmark the plagiarism policy, procedures and use of plagiarism tools to ensure fair and consistent implementation across the College.

2.6 Student Placements

In SP 2016-21, GCET has its Strategic Aim 5 'to produce able and ready to work graduates', and one of the listed actions to achieve this is 'To encourage students' placement and carrying out visits to local, regional and international industries' (SM020). Furthermore, one of the main aspirations of GCET in its SP 2021-26 is alignment to Oman Vision 2040, and one of the 2020-23 UWE-GCET collaborative vision and mission is 'the production of work-ready and career skills-enabled graduates' (Portfolio, p.25, SM003, SM036). GCET emphasized the need for students' preparation for employment that is related to career advice, employment and developing solid relationships with graduates (Portfolio, p.35). This has also been discussed during the meetings with EAB members (SM199). The discussion shows concerns from EAB's members on achieving the required GAs and PLOs with the absence of a formal placement to support the students and prepare them well for the Oman labour market. GCET stated that there is a discussion with MoHERI to introduce industry placement and internships into the curriculum (Portfolio, p. 35). This is because, at UWE, students are required to take a year in industry placement. In the interviews, the Panel heard that adding a placement year will increase the duration of degrees to a total of five years, including the foundation year, which may decrease the willingness to join the programmes in GCET compared with other higher education institutes (HEIs). The Panel also heard that GCET had joined the EIDAAD programme in Oman to provide students with the opportunity to apply for Internships within the industrial and business sectors in Oman. Moreover, the College provided evidence of students joining MoHERI endorsed programme EIDAAD (SM358).

During the interviews, the Panel learned that the Recruitment and Public Relations Office facilitates with organisations in Oman to support students in finding an appropriate placement for training. The Panel was also provided with evidence that shows GCET's efforts to request places on Oman government agencies, telecommunication companies, banks, and petroleum and oil companies in Oman (ASM525). The submitted evidence shows that in 2022, 30 students joined different organisations for training from the CIT Department, 48 from EEE Department, 11 from ME Department, and 20 from UPEM Department. In addition, GCET stated that currently, the College programmes include laboratory, practice-based sessions and group work to improve the practical experience (SM171, SM172).

Moreover, there is a capstone project in the final year, which may include industry-based work. The Panel reviewed some module files and confirmed that some capstone projects involve engagement with industry to complete the requirements, particularly the engineering programmes (SM401). In interviews with students, the Panel heard that despite these efforts performed by the College to fill the gaps, they need a mandatory industrial training opportunity to ensure students understand the application of theory and

become aware of professional practice within their discipline. The Panel encourages the College to expedite the work in progress to introduce placement arrangements in the curriculum.

Affirmation 3

The OAAAQA agrees that the Global College of Engineering and Technology needs to introduce a process to provide placement to students in the relevant field as part of the degree completion requirements to prepare them for the job market.

2.7 *Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation*

GCET assessment strategies are aligned with the UWE Academic Regulations and Procedures and the UWE Assessment and Feedback Policy and Operational Guide (SM059, SM060, SM110, SM337). These assessment policies and procedures govern the design, administration, and review of assessment activities across all programmes; these include the examination regulations, assessment design, moderation, external examination, invigilation, and student feedback. These regulations stipulate using summative and formative tools, including examinations, projects, case studies, quizzes and presentations, to assess students' achievements. During the Visit, the Panel reviewed samples of the modules' files and confirmed that these assessment policies and procedures are consistently implemented in all programmes (ASM401).

In addition, faculty members are using a variety of assessment tools, as evidenced by the modules' files (ASM401). The Panel noticed that the assessment policies are adequately disseminated to stakeholders via the College website, College publications, modules' specifications, and the induction programme as reported by students during interviews (SM131, SM169, SM170, SM171, SM172). A review of a selection of modules' files confirmed that the assessment methods of each category of the MOs are clearly identified and that all assessments have clear criteria for marking (ASM401). It was also evident to the Panel, from site visit interviews, that the staff and students are adequately aware of the assessment policies and related procedures. Moreover, the assessment strategies implemented in GCET emphasize the importance of alignment of students' assessments with the module learning outcomes to ensure the programme's academic standards (Portfolio, p.36).

Furthermore, students are provided with feedback on the assessments either verbally or through written feedback (SM171, SM172). The Panel gathered from the interviews that students' work is returned to them after marking with some notes so that students might benefit from feedback on their performance (SM153). However, an examination of students' classwork revealed that some of their work had not received feedback (ASM401). The Panel encourages the College to ensure that constructive feedback is provided to all students in their marked assessments.

GCET has a formal moderation system for students' work with a pre-moderation and post-moderation process for assessments (SM314). The pre-moderation process involved a faculty member from GCET and a faculty member from UWE in reviewing the assessment tool. The primary purpose of the pre-

moderation is to ensure compliance with assessment policies and procedures, alignment of questions to MOs, appropriate timing to complete the examination, and the level of complexity required to achieve the required academic standards (ASM401). Moreover, the post-moderation process is conducted by a faculty member from UWE and an External Examiner (EE) (ASM401). GCET provides a sample of graded works with different performance levels (high, medium, and low) to align the outcomes to UK standards and ensure that the grading process is aligned to the defined marking criteria to ensure fairness of the process (Portfolio, p.38).

The Panel reviewed the moderation reports received from UWE and found it constructive to improve the assessments in GCET (ASM401). In the interviews, the Panel learned that all teaching staff had attended workshops to learn about applying UWE Examination and Coursework Moderation Procedures and Practices (SM228). During the Visit, the Panel learned that the faculty of GCET found the moderation process supportive for improving the quality of the assessment process. In the interviews with students, the Panel heard that the assessment process is transparent and fair and that all faculty members explain the assessment requirements at the beginning of each semester during the first lecture.

The EE is appointed by UWE, as confirmed during the interview with the affiliate's representatives, to provide feedback on the graded students' work to improve the quality of the assessments (SM314, ASM401). EEs are often appointed from other UK higher education institutes to ensure the standard of achievement is comparable to other UK institutes (SM232, SM110). During the Visit, the Panel noted that the EE visits GCET twice a year and provides EE Reports every AY (SM314, SM232). Moreover, EEs meet with GCET PLs and discuss the provided feedback with them. This has been confirmed by staff in the interviews.

Post-assessment moderations are presented in the Examination Boards which include both Field Boards and Award Boards (SM233). The Field Board is responsible for ensuring that all Field assessments are aligned with the assessments policies and that the marking criteria have no issues. In addition, the Field Boards tackle all aspects related to assessments and review the reports of moderations and external examiners to make necessary improvements and take necessary actions. The Award Boards, in contrast, are responsible for ensuring compliance of students' performance to UWE Academic Regulations and Procedures before awarding the degree and handling any academic offences during assessments that may affect the awarding process (SM335).

The Panel reviewed samples of the minutes of meetings, agenda and outcomes of these boards and is pleased with the formal arrangements in place to ensure transparency and fairness to students (SM233). There is also a review process in place to review the assessment methods as part of the APR and Periodic Enhancement Review (PER) process every five years (SM033, SM034, SM176, SM177). There are also the Module Evaluation Questionnaires and Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) Meetings to collect student feedback about assessments (SM321, SM239, SM198).

2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation

The College has a set of procedures to maintain the academic security of assessments that is described in the Examination and Invigilation Rules and Regulations Manual (SM122). The manual is aligned with UWE's academic regulations as stated in the GCET's submitted Portfolio (Portfolio, p.39, SM110, SM117). GCET uses the SharePoint platform managed by UWE to manage the pre and post-moderation process and exchange assessment scripts. In interviews with staff, the Panel learned that access to SharePoint is governed by access rights and permissions allocated to authorized people only (Portfolio, p.39, SM234).

The execution of the assessment event at GCET has an Examination and Invigilation Officer (EIO) independent of academic departments (Portfolio, p.39). The officer prints, manages, and handles exam papers, coordinates with RARO for the invigilation timetable, and maintains all copies of marked examinations as per the procedure stated in the manual (SM122). During the Visit, the Panel learned that all examination papers are printed within the Examination Office. Staff bring their electronic file on USB flash drive and print them within the office. The office is locked, and keys are always kept in Dean's office (Portfolio, p.39). The room is only accessible by Invigilation Officers, and there is evidence of tracking mechanisms for examination papers that were officially requested by staff (ASM532). This process is overseen and monitored by QACo to ensure compliance and effectiveness of the implementation (Portfolio, p.39).

There is evidence provided of the recent revision to the invigilation manual based on faculty feedback during the preparation for the OAAAQA audit (SM306, SM195, SM187). Thus, instead of three invigilators assigned to 70 students, now three invigilators will be assigned to 50 students to improve the effectiveness of the invigilation process. During online assessments practised during the COVID-19 pandemic, the College followed the UWE approach to 24-hours assessments as guided and instructed by UWE (SM238). During the Visit, the Panel learned that efforts were put into the assessment design by the College and moderated by UWE to maintain the academic standards while implementing the open-source assessments. These arrangements include increasing the difficulty level, removing Multiple Choice questions, and making the questions more analytical and less dependent on repeating theory (SM173). In the interviews with staff and students, the Panel confirmed that these arrangements are implemented consistently for all virtual assessments.

There are defined procedures in the Academic Appeals Policy for students to appeal their awarded grades for any of their modules (SM154). The appeal goes to the head of QACo within ten days of the mark's release to review and reassess the student's submitted work. In the interviews, the Panel learned that changes in grades are only permitted for senior RARO staff. Therefore, after completing the appeal process, an official communication goes to the head of RARO to perform the changes. At the time of the Visit, no change grades were submitted as a result of an appeal request (Portfolio, p.40). The Panel is pleased with the arrangements in place to ensure the security of assessment tools to protect them against any leakage.

2.9 Student Retention and Progression

Heads of Departments and Programme Leaders conduct periodic student retention and progression analysis at the end of each academic year to determine appropriate actions for students (Portfolio, p.41). The retention and progression data analysis is conducted as part of the APR cycle (SM176, SM177). Module Leaders evaluate the Module reports to interpret findings and identify any variations in the data analysed compared to UWE outcomes (SM220). The Examination Boards discuss and analyse the problematic modules, with action plans built into the Module Reports for the next cohort delivery of the module (SM233). The EEs are involved in the analysis of student results in every module, comparing student achievement to the delivery of similar programmes in the UK. GCET developed a Student Statistics Dashboard (SSD) through which PLs, HoDs, and the Dean can easily monitor and track student retention data (SM223). The retention rate has climbed significantly since 2017, reaching 90% in AY 2020-21.

In the interviews, GCET affirms that its progression rate for the cohort AY 2020-21 meets academically expected performance and is higher than satisfactory. However, GCET has not conducted benchmarks with other national and international institutes to compare the outcomes with similar institutes. This issue needs to be addressed. During the Visit, the Panel was granted access to the SSD and noticed that around 21% (348) of students withdrew from the programmes. In the interviews, staff indicated that withdrawal cases are rarely associated with academic failure but rather for personal and financial reasons, which often happens at the beginning of the semester. Other reasons were the requests for transfer to other institutions, mainly by MoHERI's sponsored students.

The Panel heard, during interviews, that the College supports student retention through the Academic Personal Tutoring (APT) programme designed by UWE to prevent or reduce the withdrawal rate in the College. The APT has a mechanism to support students' progression and achievements to complete the programme (SM139). The Panel, however, believes that GCET needs to put a system in place to monitor the effectiveness of this programme and opportunities for improvements. Moreover, the Panel encourages the College to expand SSD usage to support the revision of the admission criteria, planning for facilities, planning for resources, and marketing for international intakes.

Affirmation 4

The OAAAQA agrees that the Global College of Engineering and Technology needs to expand the usage of the Student Statistics Dashboard to support academic and non-academic planning for better decision-making.

2.10 Graduate Destinations and Employability

Full market research reports are commissioned from a business bureau before designing and developing a new programme to determine if there is a market for the proposed programmes (portfolio, p.42). The College has established EABs in each academic department in AY 2021-22 comprising members from business, industry, government, and alumni to evaluate trends in employment in the different areas of its

provision and discuss emerging trends in different industry sectors covered by the College's programmes (SM199).

GCET has recently implemented the Graduate Destination Survey, Employer Survey, and Alumni Satisfaction Survey, which are planned to be conducted annually to evaluate the destination of the College graduates and how satisfied they are with the programmes supporting their graduate expectations (SM342, SM343). The Surveys were introduced in AY 2021-22 and conducted for the first time in December 2021 (Portfolio, p.43). However, the response rate is low; thus, for the Destination Survey, only 11% graduates participated, and for Satisfaction Survey, only 23% graduates participated. Moreover, GCET needs to seek more employers to participate in the Employer Survey because 26 participants is relatively low. Therefore, the Panel encourages the College to explore alternative approaches to attract more participants to improve the response rate (SM342, SM343).

In the interviews, the Panel learned that GCET has recently started creating an Alumni Database to track graduates' destinations (SM344, ASM 526). The Panel encourages the College to enrich the Database with more information related to contact information to facilitate future communication. The Panel reviewed the results obtained from the surveys and found that 72% of the graduates were not able to secure employment, 14% were employed after three months of graduation, 8% gained employment after 3 to 6 months, and 6% were successful in finding a job after more than six months. The Survey shows that only 42% said that GCET prepared them well to attain their goal of finding a job, and only 40% stated that their current job is directly related to their field of study at GCET. In addition, 25% were very satisfied with their achievements after graduation, and 48 % were satisfied, however, over 25% are not satisfied with post-graduation accomplishments. On the other hand, there is over 90% satisfaction from the alumni survey with regards to learning outcomes achievements such as knowledge acquisition, skills development, working in a team, critical thinking and written and communication skills (SM342, See also Subarea 5.5).

Affirmation 5

The OAAAQA agrees that the Global College of Engineering and Technology needs to develop a robust system to track graduate destinations and employability to inform future improvements in the design and delivery of its programmes.

3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

At the time of the Institutional Quality Audit, the Global College of Engineering and Technology did not offer research programmes *per se*, so the OAAAQA has determined that Area 3 is not applicable to the GCET Institutional Quality Audit.

4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

GCET stipulates that research and innovation are still in their initial stages, and the College aims to promote a culture of research and innovation amongst its staff and students. It foresees becoming a Centre of Excellence in research in the future with a focus on theoretical and applied research in the focus areas: Computing, Electronics and Communication, Mechanical Engineering, Environment and Building, Education and Community (Portfolio, p.45, SM178, interviews).

The Panel acknowledges that since the AY 2020–21, the College has undertaken an impressive effort to enhance research and innovation within the College and has implemented the necessary framework that will foster research and innovation in the future and supports the College's ambition to become a University.

This Chapter reports on the planning and management of staff research and consultancy activities and describes the Panel's findings with regard to research planning and management; research performance and funding schemes; consultancy activities; ethics and biosafety; intellectual property arrangements; professional development of research; research commercialisation and the research-teaching nexus.

4.1 *Research Planning and Management*

The Panel found evidence on research conducted prior to AY 2020–21; however, it was an individual endeavour of lecturers without a strategic approach or policy framework (Portfolio, p.48, SM346, interviews).

Since the AY 2020–21, the College has implemented a transparent, systematic approach to its research activities. This comprises a comprehensive Institutional Research Strategy 2021–26 (IRS), Research Policy (September 2021), Research Ethics Policy (February 2022) and Intellectual Property Policy (February 2022) (SM178, SM179, SM180, SM181).

Research and Innovation at GCET are clearly stated in GCET's Mission and articulated in SP 2021–26, encapsulated in Strategic Goal 4 – Research and Innovation (SM003). The Director of Research and Innovation was appointed in December 2020 (SM049). He chairs the Research and Innovation Committee (RIC), which was established in 2021, with further members being Deputy Deans, one representative Head of the Academic Department, one staff member of each Academic Department, Heads of Research Groups, the Head of the Library and Learning Resources Centre (LLRC), and the Secretary/Clerk to the Committee (SM025). As stated in the Governance Manual, the purpose of the RIC as the College's research management and implementation body is to advise the GCET on research, develop policies and procedures to build the research environment of the College, support the development and dissemination of research activities to academic and non-academic staff, and encourage research project bids (SM025). The Director of Research and Innovation is also the Head of the Research and Innovation Office (RIO), with one further staff member to oversee all aspects of research and innovation on behalf of the College.

executive strategic management (Portfolio, p.46, SM025, ASM491). IRS was developed along with the SP 2021-26 and included the involvement of internal and external stakeholders (SM178, SM345, Interviews). AB approved IRS in November 2021; however, the College is yet to obtain BoT's approval (SM187, ASM533). The Panel verified that staff were involved in developing the IRS through their departmental representatives in the RIC. The IRS states eight main objectives with clear KPIs, and it is aligned with MoHERI requirements and the Oman Vision 2040 (Portfolio, p.45, SM021).

GCET's main eight objectives outlined in its IRS are: 'enhancing the research and innovation infrastructure and resourcing; ensuring and developing the research environment, capacity and capability; encouraging and evidencing the Research Teaching Nexus; addressing community needs and industry challenges and transfer students into entrepreneurs; supporting research that is aligned with the National Innovation Strategy and Oman Vision 2040; ensuring full participation with MoHERI funding division; encouraging research collaboration and consultancy; and increasing research and innovation output from all academic staff to support aims and objectives of Oman Vision 2040' (SM021).

The Research Policy serves as the guideline for the management, support, and development of these objectives and it stipulates that RIO is the College's research management body, which is operated by the Director of Research and Innovation and RIC (SM179). RIO is supported by an External Advisor contracted in 2021 for two years to review the ISR, advise and guide RIC members in research-related activities, attend RIC meetings, deliver talks and webinars, and help with conference and journal formulation (ASM539; interviews). The Panel heard that staff considered the support offered by the External Advisor to be helpful.

RIC meets four times per year (or as required in between), and its role is to oversee, manage and organise research and its funding with the annual OP and its electronic tracking system (OPMS) used for monitoring (ASM523). Yearly tasks and actions have due dates and are tracked regularly by QACO, which sends follow-up reminders for any delayed tasks and actions (SM101; interviews). In case of non-achievement, tasks are transferred to the next AY (interviews). For the AY 2021-22, the OPMS stated that 89% of the allocated tasks of RIC were achieved; however, due to the system being newly implemented, the Panel was not able to attest a completed cycle, which means the transfer of the remaining 11% into the 2022-23 Research and Innovation operational plan.

Furthermore, Annual Research Reports (ARR) are issued by RIO at the end of the AY (SM350; SM346). The procedures outlined in the reports stipulate that academic staff provide details of their research output to their Academic Departments or RIC representatives, which are cumulated by the HoDs and forwarded to RIO for discussion in RIC meetings (SM196, SM197, SM350, interviews). For the AY 2020-21, the Panel was able to verify a brief discussion of the ARR in a RIC meeting where actions on improvements were decided, but it was not clear to the Panel how these were monitored, followed-up and results fed back to RIC and RIO to support research planning and management (SM196).

The Panel also noticed that the committees' relationship diagram indicates that RIC reports via QAC to AB (SM018). The meeting minutes of AB, however, show a direct reporting system of HoDs to AB (SM187). Although the Panel was assured that reporting to AB was guaranteed through the overlap of committee members in the RIC and QAC, the Panel noticed that whilst the ISR and RIC meeting minutes include the participation of the Head of QACO, the Governance Manual does not list QAC or the Head of QACO as members in RIC or, vice versa, RIC membership in QAC (ASM536, SM178, SM197, SM025).

A further need for clearer communication structures is evident at the College management level. For example, during the Visit, the Panel heard that the College aimed to emphasize on research related to Solar Energy; however, the Panel was not able to determine at what level the decision was made and at how far the Director of Research and Innovation was involved as he is not a member of AB or EMB. Hence, a comprehensible communication cycle is not clearly discernable.

Since 2020 GCET has developed a comprehensive research and innovation approach with policies, procedures and incentives in place to develop a research culture within the College. The Panel was able to identify a monitoring system through QACO and the OPMS with feedback mechanisms implemented at the committee and department levels. At the time of the Visit, however, the Panel found the communication structures and reporting procedures between the individual committees not fully detectable.

In retrospect, the Panel came to know that the Governance Manual was faulty at the time in content, and QACO is indeed a permanent member of RIC, and the Director of RIO is a member of AB and EMB.

4.2 *Research Performance*

The Research Policy includes clear guidelines for research funding and incentives to encourage staff to perform research, such as monetary incentives, staff appraisal and promotion (SM045, SM050). The research incentives and monetary rewards for research output were benchmarked with A'Sharqiyah University (ASM425).

As the primary entity for research oversight, RIC meets regularly to discuss research development with members, including one staff representative from each academic department, indicating an inclusive approach. The Panel, however, noticed irregular attendance among the RIC members and inconsistency in maintaining attendance record for these meetings (SM196, SM197). Considering the RIC is the decisive entity for the promotion of research activities, the Panel encourages the College to ensure that enough time is planned for meetings and that their documentation is accurate and comprehensible for internal and external stakeholders.

The improvement and enhancement in the research and innovation environment after the implementation of the current Research Strategy are evident in the rise of quantity and quality (SCOPUS) output of publications conducted by staff (ASM422, interviews). There is, for example, evidence of an increase in SCOPUS Q1 journal-indexed publications as to lower or non-indexed publications in previous years

(SM346). In addition, the College was able to secure two block funding research awards by MoHERI, and two from the Research Council (TRC) funded research grants (SM182, SM183, ASM423). Furthermore, seven interdisciplinary research groups were established in the AY 2021-22, and a faculty member from Engineering who received logistical support from GCET secured three patents (SM349, ASM432, interviews). The College is also in the process of establishing research collaboration with national and international HEIs, and the Panel was pleased to hear that research collaboration with some HEIs had already begun and was commented positively upon (SM002, ASM431, interviews).

Academic staff confirmed that they were aware of the new strategic approach to research and the implemented procedures with the KPIs and that the incentives encouraged them to conduct more research and seek research funding (interviews). They were satisfied with their workload/research balance, and felt the College gave them the necessary freedom to do research and supported them through resources, time, and acknowledgement (interviews). The Panel heard that some joint research activities were conducted with UWE in the field of computing, and a road map was developed for applying for joint funding. However, due to the pandemic, this was put on hold (interviews). Not all academic staff seem to be aware of these activities as they explicitly expressed their desire towards joint research with UWE (interviews). The Panel encourages the College to ensure research activities with UWE are communicated between the departments to ensure transparency.

The formulation of interdisciplinary research groups was considered a positive incentive by staff to share ideas with others and diversify research areas (Portfolio, p.49, interviews). The Panel favourably acknowledged that two of the research groups, Renewable Energy and Automation and Robotics Research Group, received MoHERI Block Funding awards and included postgraduate students (ASM423).

The IRS also includes strengthening the Research Teaching Nexus (see Subarea 4.9.) and encouraging and supporting students to transform their ideas into start-ups. Also, clear KPIs have been set via the College's incubation centre regarding SCOPUS-indexed published research to be developed from postgraduate dissertations and undergraduate students' graduation projects presented in symposiums and conferences (Portfolio, p.57, SM178, ASM428, ASM542).

Research performance has been collected in a research repository as a central database since the establishment of the College, which is also accessible through GCET's website (SM349, <http://gcet.edu.om/en/research-enterprise>). Changes were made in the AY 2020-21 by the Director and ICTSS office (Portfolio, p.48, SM349). Though the Panel found the research repository to be informative for internal and external stakeholders, it is still a work in progress.

The Panel acknowledges that GCET's conventional approach and deployment of its IRS 2021-26 and Research Policy in the AY 2020-21 have led to increased research activity with the first tangible results.

4.3 *Research Funding Schemes*

Research funding is outlined in the IRS, and details on the internal funding scheme are provided in the Research Policy (SM178, SM179). The College set an annual budget of OMR 12,000 for the AY 2020-21 and OMR 15,000 for the AY 2021-22 for research activities (ASM467). The Panel was informed that the College established one "Showcase Laboratory" for each department dedicated to research (SM040, visited on-site). Individual staff funding opportunities are tied to the above-mentioned five focus areas of research at GCET, and the details on criteria and procedures are provided in the Research Policy. The Panel was pleased to find that the College was responding to current societal demands by focusing on a research area, for example, on climate change and the effectiveness of solar panels. It found staff eager to support these aspirations; however, they, at the same time, were restricted from doing research in their subject areas (interviews). The Panel encourages the College to be more flexible and interdisciplinary in this respect to ensure it fully utilises its research potential within the College.

The individual staff rewards are based on research type (basic/theoretical or applied). Undergraduate and postgraduate students undertaking research are also awarded a fixed amount if they do research. However, the College has only started to implement this approach, but the Panel heard during the Visit that one UG and one PG student had recently been selected for funding (SM197, SM350, ASM420, interviews). Additional funding is possible at the discretion of the RIC and the Director of Research and Innovation (Portfolio, p.50).

The Research Policy (SM179) explains how staff apply for funds. The Panel was able to confirm that staff had received funding and that a systematic approval process for Internal Research Grants is established and conducted by the RIC ((SM496, interviews). Funding is subject to budget availability, RIC recommendations, and its chair's approval (Portfolio, p.50). The distribution of the research budget is published in the Annual Research Report; however, the Panel could not determine that the ARR was analysed and used to help inform the College in defining the budget allocation for the next AY (Portfolio, p.50, SM350).

The IRS mentions external funding available via MoHERI, EJAAD (a membership-based virtual collaboration platform that enables interaction and participation in energy-related research and innovation activities between business, academia, and government)⁶, and international research grants, and the College was able to secure two Block Fundings through the MoHERI in 2021. The Panel positively acknowledged that the College has actively begun to submit EJAAD expression of interest proposals in the AY 2021-22 (ASM424). Although there is evidence of a few workshops conducted on proposal writing for external funding, the Panel found no evidence of systematically planned activities in its OP to guide staff

⁶ <https://www.ejaad.om/>

and students towards external funding opportunities through workshops on how to apply for external funds. Hence, the Panel encourages the College to include this in its operational planning (SM 040, SM350)

4.4 Consultancy Activities

Consultancy is embedded in GCET's Vision and set out in SP 2021-26 as an Objective under Strategic Goal 4 – 'Research and Innovation' and is addressed within IRS under 4.7 'encouraging research collaboration and consultancy with other higher education institutions and research bodies, both locally and internationally, as well as business and industry research collaboration' (SM003, SM178). The Panel noticed, however, that consultancy has not been incorporated into Objective 4.7 in OP 2021-22, where "consultancy" is omitted (SM040). It instead can be found as a KPI in Goal 6.5, 'Community and Business Engagement' of SP 2021-26, and Objective 6.4. of the corresponding OP 2021-22. Additionally, the ARR does not report on consultancy activities (SM350).

The Panel is under the impression that GCET has not yet clearly defined "consultancy" and considers any form of externally related research activity an act of consultancy, which means addressing community needs and industry challenges; transforming students into entrepreneurs; and through incubation centre activities (Portfolio, p.51). The Panel confirmed this broad approach in Interviews and recommends that GCET establishes a clear, well-defined approach to consultancy through research outlined in the Institutional Strategic Plan and reflects it in the corresponding Operational Plan.

Recommendation 15

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology develop a clear system for consultancy services integrated into the College's strategic research and innovation approach with clear key performance indicators allocated and reflect it in its operational plan.

4.5 Ethics and Biosafety

The Research Ethics Policy was developed, including feedback from internal and external stakeholders and was approved by AB in February 2022 and by the BoT in March 2022 (SM180, SM196).

The Policy was benchmarked and referenced to policies available at UWE and A'Sharqiyah University (ASM425). It applies to all academic staff and students at every level and location (Portfolio, p.53). The Research Ethics Policy covers all relevant aspects of research conducted within the College or with external stakeholders. An application template provided considers if staff or students are conducting the research, and forms are attached, including a checklist, participant information sheet, consent form, and risk form. The first approval was issued in February 2022, and the Panel was able to consider further evidence of submitted forms upon request (SM351, ASM426). In one of the examples provided, it, however, found that a lack of attention had been paid to the adherence to ethical standards (referencing) in proposal writing (this

has been addressed in Subarea 2.5). The RIC oversees and approves the research proposals, while the RIO records and monitors the approved proposals. The Policy is reviewed every two years.

The Panel notes that the GCET's current academic programmes do not involve experimental research on humans, animals, living tissues or genetic material; hence, biosafety is not a concern.

4.6 *Intellectual Property*

The Intellectual Property (IP) Policy was approved by AB and it came into effect in February 2022. It is referenced in the IRS (SM178, SM181, ASM540). GCET stated the policy to be based on World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) guidelines and benchmarked with UWE and Gulf College (Portfolio, p.54, SM181, ASM427). The policy adheres to the Sultanate of Oman's legal rules and regulations framework, which means Royal Decrees: Law on Industrial Property Rights, Royal Decree 67/2008: 'Promulgating the Law on Industrial Property Rights'; Royal Decree No. 37/2000: 'Promulgating the Law on the Protection of Copyrights and Neighbouring Rights'; and Royal Decree No. 82/2000: 'Promulgating the Patent Law (SM181, SM352-2).

The policy articulates that contractual confidentiality, privacy, or obligations entered into with respect to the IP are observed by all GCET staff and students; and IP arising out of research is protected; and any financial agreements on the distribution of income from IP activity and ownership are abided by (Portfolio, p.53). The policy has a template for Research/Project Initialisation and IP Disclosure Forms for staff, students and external third parties. At the time of the Visit, no IP forms had been filled as no requests had yet been made (ASM541). The Panel found IP maintained in staff work (ASM428). Internal and external workshops do not explicitly include IP (SM181, 353).

The Director of Research and Innovation is responsible for implementing and monitoring the IP policy, and a review is foreseen every two years involving the Director of Research and Innovation and the Head of QACO (SM181).

Before AY 2020-21, GCET had no active Intellectual Property activities or projects (Portfolio, p.53). However, based on the provided evidence, GCET had its first member of staff registering two IP patents in 2020-21 and one in 2021-22 (SM349).

Affirmation 6

The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the Intellectual Property Policy framework with the implemented system for management, monitoring and review of Intellectual Property activities are appropriate and fair.

4.7 Professional Development for Research

The Panel found some evidence of workshops and seminars having been conducted for research in the AYs 2020-22 and was pleased to see a significant increase in academic staff attending conferences in 2022 (compared to previous years) – where academic staff enrich their skills and knowledge as a form of professional development (SM353, ASM422). The Panel furthermore endorses GCET's deliberate attempt to form research groups with junior and senior researchers as a form of professional development to help junior researchers develop their research skills and capabilities (Portfolio, p.54, ASM429, interviews). This is supported by an Internal Research Working Paper Series following GCET's Research Policy (SM179, KPI 15.1.4, ASM430). These research groups were commended by involved academic staff (interviews).

However, the Panel could not identify a comprehensive approach to professional development for research based on a precise needs analysis, the College's research strategy and research staff requests. Workshops provided as evidence for the Quality Audit Portfolio indicates that the College does not differentiate between professional development and professional development for research (SM228). Furthermore, the College does not seek formal written feedback on the attended workshops and currently relies on informal verbal feedback (interviews). An increase in research activities is evident despite the small number of staff; however, the professional development of its academic staff is pertinent to uphold this increase. Also, formal written feedback ensures that the effectiveness of sessions is evaluated and necessary improvements are made accordingly (see also Area 8).

Recommendation 16

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology approach professional development for research in a systematic manner by developing a Professional Development Plan for Research based on needs analysis and tailored to staff profiles with feedback and review system to ensure the approach is effective and constructive.

4.8 Research Commercialisation

Research commercialisation at GCET is still limited; however, the Panel was able to identify appropriate consideration given by the College to further develop this area in the future. Although SP 2021-26 and the IRS do not explicitly mention commercialisation, the College's focus on promoting student entrepreneurial leadership is stated in the GAs; the SP 2021-26, Goal 4 Objective 4.4. 'Addressing community needs and industry challenges, transform students into entrepreneurs by supporting creativity and innovation through incubation centre' with a five-year business plan which the Panel was able to view during its Visit; and KPI 8.4. of the IRS 'Encouraging and supporting students to transform their innovative ideas to startups' (SM165, SM178, ASM542). Furthermore, research commercialisation is considered in the IP Policy, and

several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and partnerships have been signed with commercial institutions and organisations (SM002, SM181, SM244).

In the AY 2020-21, the College allocated OMR 10,000 for developing an Incubator Space to help turn students into entrepreneurs; however, the student initiatives had not started before or during the audit (ASM542).

Affirmation 7

The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that research commercialisation is in the early stages but that the initial evidence of a successfully implemented approach, deployment, and review mechanisms will lead to effective results of research commercialisation in the future.

4.9 *Research-Teaching Nexus*

The Research-Teaching Nexus (RTN) is stated as a clear objective in the SP 2021-26, Goal 4 and the IRS with KPIs to monitor and assess research-informed teaching activities based on curriculum and assessments incorporating research, publications of postgraduate students and participation of undergraduate students at conferences/symposiums with their graduation projects (SM003, SM178, Objective 8.8). The Research Policy does not elaborate on RTN; however, it includes a Research Teaching Nexus form to be filled in by module leaders documenting research that has been included in the curriculum and assessments (SM179). The results of incorporating research and scholarly activities are monitored through the RIO and reported in the ARR (SM350). GCET states that their review found that 75% of assessments and module delivery approaches incorporated RTN in the AY 2021-22 (PF, p. 58, ASM434; interviews).

The module leaders are responsible for designing and delivering research-informed teaching in the curriculum, learning and teaching delivery and assessment, which the HoDs approve. The College considers that the PCAP/ Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LTHE) certificates help staff map between research, scholarly activities, and education to inform their current teaching and other activities, such as workshops (SM227, SM353). The Panel found only one workshop dedicated to RTN in the AY 2021-22. During interviews, academic staff members confirmed that they use their research in class to inform their teaching; nonetheless, upon reviewing the RTN evidence forms presented to the Panel, it was found that the research-informed teaching at GCET primarily involves project assignments. This does not align with the Panel's understanding of integrating the College's relevant current research and/or publications into the curriculum (SM356).

Although the Panel identified an approach and deployment as well as a documentary of results through the ARR Reports for the RTN, it gives the impression that the College has not ensured that all staff are aware

of what is considered RTN/Research-Informed Teaching. Furthermore, the Panel found no indication of a discussion or an analysis of the results, which the College considers the evidence for RTN.

Recommendation 17

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology revisit its approach to the Research-Teaching Nexus by clearly defining what is classified as research-informed teaching and implementing explicit descriptors as well as indicators for its measurement and analysis.

5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This Chapter refers to different types of communities external to the GCET, with which it has, or ought to have, a relationship. It reports on industry and community engagement planning and management; relationships with industry and employers; relationship with professions; other education providers; alumni; and the community at large.

5.1 *Industry and Community Engagement Planning and Management*

Industry and community engagement are incorporated in SP 2021-26 through a dedicated Goal 6, which aims at 'Enhancing the College's relationship with government, industry, and the community'. The plan outlines five key objectives and seven measures of success in the industry and community engagement (SM003). The OP 2021-22 details the actions to be taken in line with the SP 2021-26, with identified KPIs for short (1 year) and medium (5 years) terms, with completion dates and accountable persons for the implementation of the various community and business activities under each strategic objective (SM040, SM041). The Governance Manual, reviewed by GCET and approved in November 2021, further emphasised the importance of community and social engagement and the commitment of GCET to ensure the College is committed to engaging with and empowering the community to achieve their individual and collective goals (SM025, p.8).

GCET stated that since its establishment in 2014, it had been involved in industry and community activities; however, it also stated that these were not systematically planned, organised, documented and assessed for effectiveness (Portfolio, p.60). SP 20221-26 aims to define the approach to industry and community engagement and to better align the objectives of the College to international expectations, best practices and to the national strategies of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Panel found that following departmental reviews conducted in December 2020 and January 2021, the reports of the Review Panels of GCET recommended that, although community engagement events and activities were being conducted in partnership with the Student Support Services Office (SSSO), the area of Community Engagement should have a department as well as a college perspective (SM209). Departments were required to establish their approach to Community Engagement to be articulated through each Department's strategic and operational plans (SM209). Thus, the deployment of industry and community engagement objectives and the responsibilities to achieve the KPIs are delegated to the academic and non-academic departments – the SSSO and Marketing, Publicity and Recruitment Office (MPRO). These departments have the authority to propose and plan the industry and community engagement activities and also have the responsibility to report, through the HoDs, on the success of the activities through their respective OPMS and Progress Report (Portfolio, p.60, SM043, SM044).

The Governance Manual provides the powers, responsibilities and functions of the Marketing and Recruitment Committee (MRC), and one of the functions is to organise and promote 'social welfare activities and public awareness programs which can indirectly add to the positive image of the College'. In addition,

the SSSO is responsible for overseeing all community engagement activities in the College and leading and managing social and cultural activities to support students (SM025). The Manual, however, does not explicitly attribute any industry and community engagement responsibilities to the Academic Department Committee.

A Community Engagement Calendar of Events developed by the Head of SSSO regroups all institutional activities related to community engagement (Portfolio, p.60, SM076). The Panel noted that this document is the plan of work of SSSO rather than a dedicated plan for community engagement activities over the year. Activities include induction day, a sea trip for students and staff, and Omani Teachers' Day. Many of these events planned for 2021 relate to internal College activities rather than engagement with the external communities (SM076).

The Portfolio provides a classification of the community engagement activities and events. The Panel was pleased to find that the GCET community is involved in many extracurricular activities visible in the Newsletters. The Panel, however, is of the view that since this Area reports on engagement with the external community, GCET must review its definition of community engagement and its classification approach to differentiate clearly between different types of community engagements and the expected outcomes and outputs (Portfolio, p.60, SM058, SM080, ASM 439). Formal assessments of all such community engagements should also be systematically collected for improvement and impact analysis. There is a system in place to monitor the progress of community engagement activities through the OP; however, the effectiveness of the evaluation of activities needs to be more explicit. The Panel found that few surveys were conducted on activities, with very few responses (SM079). However, as previously mentioned, not all of these activities fall under industry and community engagement.

At the level of Departments, formal Industry and Community Engagement Status Reports were developed in January 2022, which were discussed, reviewed, and analysed for development at AB and EMB with the aim to review the approach, deployment and volume of industry and community engagement activity during the AY 2021-22 (SM085, SM187, SM190). The Panel was pleased to note that academic departments have in place an industry and community engagement planning and management system (SM085). For instance, it is reported that at CIT Department, community events are planned using the Department's operational calendar, which lists all the possible events in a particular AY, and those are mapped to College engagement events and activities. The possible activities and events are discussed in the department meetings, and staff members are allocated to organise the events (SM085, p.3). This was also confirmed during interviews with the academic staff. Other academic departments have similar planning systems in place, and the list of events conducted by each department is well documented (SM085).

The Panel found evidence of multiple and diverse activities undertaken by the four departments. Activities include seminar series, invited speakers, webinars, field trips, site visits, and community engagement events (SM085). The reports showed that departments effectively establish links with the industry through the various activities they have conducted in the past years. However, a separate plan for external

engagement of departments focusing on the external community, including industry, should be in place. These activities should also be assessed for impact and to determine the need of both the industry and community. The activities should be further systematically evaluated for feedback from participants.

The Panel also found through interviews that the academic departments work with the MPRO to recruit students. Visits are made to schools in Oman to inform them of the programmes at GCET. Departments also conducted GCET Engineering Awareness Program for School Career Advisors (SM357).

The departments' progress in undertaking their identified activities is followed through the OPMS Dashboard. The completion rate of activities is input by the HoDs in the OP, and QACO is responsible for overseeing and monitoring compliance with the OP by assessing evidence of completion uploaded by the departments (SM043, SM044). The monitoring process was confirmed through the email exchanges between the Head of QACO and staff on updating progress in the OPMS (SM043). However, the system does not measure how constructive or effective the engagements were in enabling relationships with key stakeholders. As per KPIs identified for Strategic Objective 6.5.1 to 'Promote the College in different platforms and signing MOUs with the industry to build a good relationship with them', the target for AY 2021-22 was to set up two formal collaborations/MoUs/or partnerships, and as per the OPMS dashboard, this aim was achieved. The Panel believes that the effectiveness of these collaborations has to be evaluated (ASM523).

The Panel acknowledges that various engagement activities with external stakeholders are taking place, as reported by the Newsletters, the staff, and the Departmental Reports. Nevertheless, the Panel urges the College to set up a planning and management system and a policy for industry and community engagement at the institutional level and to evaluate the effectiveness of its various collaborations with external communities to ensure that the College is meeting their needs and to determine the impact of activities and linkages.

5.2 Relationships with Industry and Employers

GCET uses various approaches to develop relationships with industry and employers. For instance, links with employers and industry are established through visits by academic staff to companies engaged in their particular fields of study; each academic department has a plan of activities and events to bring industry experience to the student body; through student industrial visits; internal and external talks by industry; the use of external business and industry competitions; and through the EAB (Portfolio, p.61, SM085, SM357).

In the AY 2020-21, GCET established a new platform to engage with external advisors, the External Advisory Boards (SM199). This board 'draws its membership from representatives from alumni, business, industry and government who understand the importance of the academic subject domain to the community and the Sultanate of Oman' and has the purpose to 'provide business, industry, and government experience that adds value to the College and its Academic Departments' (SM199).

The EAB also acts 'as a mechanism for the Academic Departments to be more market-focused in the development, and provision of programs and courses that meet the needs of business, industry and/or Government' (SM199). The EAB meetings are held annually and support the College in 'inform[ing] graduate attributes and employability expectation and outcomes in business and industry' (Portfolio, p.62). The Panel noted that, at most, two meetings had been held for each department since the establishment of the EABs; therefore, this structure is still in the infancy stage. Moreover, the EABs only meet once per year. Therefore, the effectiveness of EABs is yet to be assessed. However, these departmental EABs would allow GCET and its academic staff to interact formally with industry and employers, ensure curricula relevancy, and gather feedback from the external community on future initiatives (Notes of Meetings EAB, SM199). The Panel met with some EAB members from the industry and other higher education institutions, and they were happy with the opportunity to share their expertise with GCET.

As per the Portfolio, the College and Departments also engaged with industry and employers through a range of activities, such as employability events, including external industry speakers, field trips, industrial visits, CV and interview workshops, employer recruitment events and other industry-led activities that develop the skills and competencies necessary to be 'work-ready' after graduation (Portfolio, p.62, SM085, SM357, SM080). The setting up of a few activities on CV writing and interview workshops were evidenced through the exchange of emails; however, these were not documented or assessed through formal surveys (ASM442, ASM437). Academic departments also approached different companies in Oman based on the types of programmes they offer to build possible collaborations (SM357). The Panel is pleased to see that GCET is also partnering with organisations to set up platforms for ICT training and competitions (SM224).

GCET has also joined the MoHERI-endorsed internship programme EIDAAD which provides a one-year paid student experience in the industry (see Subarea 2.6 above). The programme also 'provides a platform that facilitates and promotes partnership and intellectual exchange between academia and industry'.⁷ The Panel understands, however, that this is still under discussion and that students are concerned that undertaking this internship would lengthen their study duration (SM187, SM358).

To meet the needs of employers, GCET states that it undertakes the Employer Satisfaction Survey and the Alumni Destination Surveys (SM343, SM342). The first cohort of students graduated in 2019, and the first survey of 26 employers, all in the field of engineering, was conducted for AY 2021-22. Assessment of the survey showed that the employers were satisfied with the skills and knowledge of the employees – comprising a majority of returning graduates (flexible students) – and would hire graduates from GCET in the future. This was also confirmed by employers interviewed by the Panel during the visit. The Panel encourages GCET to systematically conduct employer surveys to further identify their specific needs to plan

⁷ <https://eidaad.trc.gov.om/>

the future offer of programmes at GCET and to seek their input in curriculum design and review to improve the curricula.

The Panel found evidence that GCET supports students in finding supervised industry training during their studies and after graduation in different industries. All departments provide generic letters to employers to help students seek training opportunities (SM358). The Panel was provided with a database of students from different departments who have requested training, are in training, or have completed short terms training during the AY 2021-22 in relevant industries in Oman (ASM525, see Subarea 2.6 above). GCET is encouraged to undertake comprehensive surveys of both students and employers post-training to identify areas for curriculum improvement.

5.3 Relationships with Professions

GCET offers validated and franchised programmes of UWE, and thus 'works within the validation and approval constraints of the awarding body ... regarding professional body accreditation' (Portfolio, p.62). The Panel heard that the franchised programmes do not have the same professional accreditation level when delivered in the Sultanate of Oman due to the professional body's restrictions (Portfolio, p.62, interviews). GCET and UWE will further seek opportunities for GCET programmes to receive equal professional recognition from the UK professional bodies as the UWE programmes, in line with the UWE-GCET Strategic Development Plan 2020-23 (Portfolio, p.62, SM036, Interviews). GCET aims 'To develop a portfolio of internationally and professionally recognised awards supported by international standard facilities, academic infrastructure, and learning and teaching environment' (SM036, p.2).

Nevertheless, the Panel noted that GCET has, since AY 2020-21, started developing links with professional bodies (SM086), which aligns with SP 2021-26 Objective 1.4 of Goal 1- 'Develop further recognition and affiliation by professional and statutory bodies' (SM003). The Panel thus noted that Management, academic staff and around 30 students are members of different professional bodies and associations supported by GCET, which cover the membership fees (SM443, SM444, interviews). Some of the professional bodies include the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE, USA), the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET, UK), the Professional Management Institute, Engineers Australia, the International Association of Engineers (IAE), and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE), amongst others (SM086).

Furthermore, the Department of Computing and IT has established institutional membership with the British Computer Society, and a BCS Student Chapter was set up in 2021 (Portfolio, p.63). The IET also approved the GCET Student Chapter in 2021 (SM086). These Chapters are by students for students, but with support from the professional bodies who assist with organising events, marketing, and funding. The Student Chapter conducted several IET On-Campus Activities, including participation in the international competition 'IET Present-In 10' event, five Webinar series on "Towards Future Trends in Technology", a 3-day Professional Workshop & Certification course for potential learners of school as community service (SM086). These activities are well-publicised in the GCET Newsletters (SM081). The panel believes that

relationships with diverse professional bodies will provide opportunities for the staff and students to enhance their skills, acquire various certifications, and promote the employability of future graduates.

The Panel was pleased to hear that IET has recently granted several academic staff from different departments the Chartered Engineer status, and some are members of multiple professional bodies (ASM 443). The Panel found through interviews with academic staff that they are very keen to pursue and acquire these professional memberships that provide them with several benefits. The Panel understood that this is also one of the educational requirements for the UWE programmes offered at GCET to be accredited by the relevant professional bodies in the UK. Although the professional bodies are not directly involved in program design and review, the Panel heard during interviews that being a member of these professional bodies enabled the academic staff further insight into their professions and subjects when they review programmes, in line with the standards of these bodies.

The Panel found that GCET is committed to supporting its staff and students in engaging with professional bodies and, therefore, further urges GCET to seek accreditation with the professional bodies in the UK for the franchised and validated engineering programmes awarded by UWE in Oman. Students also formulated such a wish for recognition purposes of their UK degrees.

5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers

Beyond its partnership with UWE, GCET claims several strong relationships with local higher education institutions, which are formally established through Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and other formal contract agreements. As per the list of active collaborations with education providers, GCET has two agreements with Majan University College (MUC) and one with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) mainly for benchmarking purposes but also for collaborative research, sharing knowledge, understanding of the Higher Education environment of the Sultanate of Oman and providing opportunities for staff to exchange experience and practices (Portfolio, p. 64, SM002, SM244). GCET stands guided by its Benchmarking Policy, which aims to ensure that the programs offered by the College are comparable to national and international standards through the systematic use of benchmarking activities (SM128, SM129).

The Panel noted that a few benchmarking activities started with MUC in February 2022, in line with the MoU signed in November 2021, with visits undertaken to discuss different processes in place at the two institutions. It was reported that processes were similar as both MUC and GCET programmes are based on the UK educational system. The benchmarking exercise with MUC was focused on 'professional/non-academic support practices and processes and staff development', including the admission and registration process and systems, Quality Assurance, IT Support, and Student Support. The systems and processes in those departments were compared and contrasted. As an example, the Benchmarking Report for IT services highlighted some good features and functionalities in the registration system at MUC to handle students' records and produce statistics efficiently. Such functionalities could be adopted and adapted by GCET as per its needs (SM129). The Panel noted, during interviews, that IT and RARO staff at GCET are aware of these SRS improvement areas; however, these have yet to be addressed. The Panel, therefore,

encourages GCET to establish a benchmarking-driven improvement action plan following benchmarking exercises.

The Portfolio also reported a second recent MoU between GCET and MUC dated May 2022 (p. 64, SM002) for collaboration in research and scholarly activities and for benchmarking purposes. Similarly, a GCET collaboration with SQU for benchmarking activities to enhance the General Foundation Program (GFP) at both institutions was signed in May 2022 (Portfolio, p.64, SM002).

The Panel noted that as per Strategic Objective 6.1.3 of the SP, which is to 'Seek partnership opportunities with industries/companies relevant to College programme to support the College activities', GCET has as a target to set up two formal collaborations/MoUs and/or partnerships by August 2022. Although the College has achieved its target for 2022, these collaborations are newly established and have not been leveraged; thus, the relationships of GCET with other education providers are yet to be effective and constructive. The Panel urges GCET to establish a systematic approach to benchmark its activities with its collaborators, share good practices, and take action to improve its services and operations accordingly.

5.5 *Relationships with Alumni*

GCET has maintained a yearly alumni database since AY 2019-20 that comprises about 650 graduates (the SSD at the time of the Visit indicates the number of GCET graduates to be 823) (SM344). The College stated that it systematically and formally engages with its alumni, obtains their feedback on the curriculum's relevance to the industry, and identifies areas for improvement through EABs (Portfolio, p.65).

GCET has as Strategic Objective 6.2 'Strengthening engagement with alumni to foster long-lasting relationships and interaction with the College' with two actions identified to achieve this objective. These are to 'Conduct first GCET alumni gathering and select some alumni to be a part of External Advisory committee' and to 'Encourage alumni to use library facilities'. The MPRO is the responsible department for the management, oversight, and promotion of alumni relations. As per OP 2021-22, GCET has as its target to register 70% of its alumni with GCET/UWE by 2022 and to achieve an 80% Alumni registration rate with GCET/UWE and 10% of Alumni contributing funding to the College in the five years (SM040). The Panel read from the OPMS and Progress Report 2022-23 of MPRO that 48% of the alumni database has been contacted, starting in Summer 2022, with the intent to interact and plan events with alumni (ASM523). The target of 70% of the registration rate of alumni with GCET/UWE has yet to be achieved, as indicated in the progress report of MPRO. An alumni gathering is also planned for AY 2022-23, as per the OPMS. However, the Panel did not find any evidence of activities conducted with or by alumni at GCET until October 2022, indicating that alumni engagement through events and workshops is still in progress. This was further confirmed through monitoring of the progress of OP 2021-22 of the Marketing and Publicity Unit, which indicated that this activity was supposed to be held in December 2021 and was, therefore, behind schedule (SM043).

As per the Portfolio, alumni have also been invited to form part of the EABs at the departmental level to provide input to the curriculum (Portfolio, p.66). The Panel found that each EAB includes two alumni, and each department held a meeting in November- December 2021, where some alumni members contributed to academic discussions (SM199). For instance, one EEE EAB alumni member suggested linking students' learning outcomes with industry through internships. He added that he noticed that 'some trainees lacked the basic understanding of machines' and another alumni member in the ME EAB proposed 'to recommend students' internships'. The Panel believes that alumni participation in EABs assists GCET in identifying the areas for improvement, and they can proactively recommend changes as graduates from the College. Therefore, the Panel encourages GCET to set up a system at the institutional level to document actions taken following recommendations made by EABs after the meetings.

The Panel has noted that since the AY 2021-22, GCET has initiated the practice of gathering feedback from its alumni through two surveys undertaken by MPRO in collaboration with QACO: the Graduate Destination Survey and the Alumni Destination and Satisfaction Survey (SM342). The Alumni Destination Survey 2021-22, which had 95 respondents, showed that 71% of students are satisfied with how GCET prepared them to achieve their goals: to either get a job, get a promotion, or pursue further studies (SM342). However, the survey also showed that 72% of the alumni surveyed had yet to achieve their goals, and 41% were still unemployed. Statistics revealed that 190 alumni took the Satisfaction Survey 2021-22, most of whom graduated in 2020 and 2021, and results indicated that overall, alumni are satisfied with their teaching and learning experience at GCET and with the knowledge and skills acquired through their studies (SM342). However, it is also noted that 52% of the alumni are unemployed at the time of the survey. The Panel also found that 20% of alumni disagreed that they acquired the technical skills they need for their jobs, and 17% responded that the programme of study at GCET had not prepared them well for their career life. The survey also provided alumni with an opportunity to provide their feedback, and a few comments expressed the need for internship and training, for job preparations, for practical work, amongst others, which also aligned with the suggestions of alumni members of EABs. The survey findings, including the high unemployment rate, are a cause for concern that has to be addressed by GCET to ensure that future graduates are equipped with the relevant technical skills to support them in finding jobs. MPRO prepared a Reflection Report following the surveys, and the report focused on the positive feedback, and although the dissatisfaction rate for some areas of the surveys was relatively high, no action was recommended to address this matter of concern and the less positive comments made by students (SM342). The Panel also believes that with the growing number of graduate students, GCET could consider surveying flexible and full-time graduates separately to collect disaggregated data to better assess satisfaction for the two modes of studies.

During interviews, the Panel found that alumni were pleased with their experience at GCET, although it was discussed that it was unfortunate that during Covid, students missed the opportunity to physically undertake the practical component of some programmes. Students praised GCET for offering the opportunity to employed students to pursue studies through the flexible mode. During student interviews, two alumni indicated that they were pursuing higher studies at GCET, one was employed at the College, and one was

employed in the industry. The alumni indicated they were regularly informed of the events at GCET through emails but had not yet been invited to participate in any alumni activities. They were also not aware of the establishment of EAB with alumni members.

The Panel encourages GCET to pursue the developing work to strengthen its budding engagement with alumni to foster long-term relationships and to further identify and plan yearly activities in line with its strategic objective that will benefit both GCET and the alumni. The Panel understands from the interviews that the HoD of MPRO was appointed earlier this year; thus, the work has been initiated to meet KPIs as per the OP.

Recommendation 18

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology evaluate its system for fostering mutually beneficial relationships with alumni and to effectively analyse alumni survey results to identify areas for improvement in the curriculum and student experience.

5.6 Relationships with the Community at Large

GCET states that it 'takes its approach to social and cultural responsibility to the local and national community at large seriously' and has engaged through 'a series of events in the past 5 academic years aimed at promoting the agendas of the Government and Ministries of the Sultanate of Oman, and the aims and ambitions of the College as articulated in its Institutional Strategic Plan 2021-2026' (Portfolio, p.66).

At GCET, community engagement agendas include volunteering activities by staff and students, community awareness and cultural events, and organising and promoting Government and Ministry led celebrations, such as Oman National Day and Omani Women's Day (SM076, SM077). As mentioned in Subarea 5.1, a Calendar of Community Engagement Events is developed by the Head of the SSSO. Notes of the AB meeting held on 11 November 2021 confirmed that the calendar of events was approved at the level of the AB (SM187). MRPO works with the SSSO to develop, organise and conduct community engagement events and activities. As mentioned in Subarea 5.1, GCET must review its definition of community engagement and establish a plan to focus on activities that focus on engagement with the external community at large. As per the Portfolio, staff members of the SSSO and MRPO departments have a 50% contract in both these departments, and this arrangement streamlines activities conducted by SSSO and MRPO (Portfolio, p. 67, interviews).

Although the Panel took note that GCET has developed, approved and conducted a series of activities at the College, as noted from the Newsletters, the Panel was not provided with evidence to be convinced that GCET has established a constructive relationship with the community at large through either the provision of relevant activities or access to its resources (SM056, SM057). With the appointment of the HoD of MPRO, who has the responsibility of 'Organising and promoting social welfare activities and public awareness

programmes that can indirectly add to the positive image of the College' (SM027), the Panel is of the view that GCET should identify the needs of the wider community and prioritise the development of a mutually advantageous partnership for community engagement, in line with its mission.

Recommendation 19

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology establish a planned approach to engage with the community at large, taking into consideration the specific needs and requirements of the community, and to review the effectiveness of the chosen approach.

6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

This Chapter presents the findings of the Panel on the planning and the management of academic support services, registry and library, information and learning technology services, academic advising, student learning support, and teaching resources.

6.1 *Academic Support Services Planning and Management*

GCET provides academic support services to its staff and students through different academic and non-academic departments, including the RARO, the LLRC, and the ICTSS. These departments fall under the purview of the Deputy Dean (Administration and Resources). GCET states that its approach towards planning and management of academic support services is guided by its SP 2021-26 and deployed through Annual OPs. Each department has its yearly OP derived from the SP 2021-26, and the Panel found that the KPIs align with the SP and are measurable (SM040).

The Panel also found evidence that before each AY, departments determine the teaching and learning resources requirements including staffing and equipment/systems, which are collated and submitted for approval at AB and EMB (SM229). Data such as student intake, student profiles and programmes and modules on offer are used to determine the need for academic student resources for the AY and to plan accordingly (Portfolio, p.68). Such information is provided by RARO and is also obtained from the College's Student Record System (SRS) from AY 2020-21. Unavailable resources are identified through regular audits and inventory of the teaching and learning resources by RARO and ICTSSO for information and learning technology infrastructure (SM104, SM253). Moreover, academic planning is conducted at the academic department level and includes modules to be offered each semester, staff-module allocation, and teaching and learning resources needed. Requests for resources are assessed by the Support Services Departments, which will initiate the procurement process.

In addition to the teaching and learning resources that support student learning at GCET, the College also has in place the Academic Personal Tutoring System to guide students to the relevant support services (SM137, SM138).

The Panel was pleased to note that GCET conducts yearly surveys to collect feedback on the effectiveness of its support services, including on the induction process (SM074, SM075, SM175). Student feedback is generally positive, and negative reviews are considered in the OP of the different departments leading to improvement of the support services. For instance, library space was increased to include two additional study spaces. The Panel also acknowledges that GCET has identified areas for improvements, such as the APT system, the upgrading of the Wi-Fi connection on campus following the 2021 staff satisfaction survey, and the need for additional resources at ICT Support Services Office (ICTSSO) (Portfolio, p74-75, SM365). The Panel is, however, not convinced that all the academic support services at GCET are effectively monitored through the surveys (SM261, SM365). The Panel noted that the academic advising system was assessed during Covid 19 in 2020-21 through staff or student surveys when remote learning was in place.

The College stated that it had identified several areas for improvement of the APT system, but the Panel did not find evidence of a review of the system following feedback collected from staff and students to determine its appropriateness and how the improvements were identified (Portfolio, p.75). In addition, the sufficiency of space and availability of relevant facilities in all engineering laboratories are also not addressed in the surveys. Moreover, survey results of May 2022 showed that some students (25%) were not satisfied with Wi-Fi connection and (21%) of the students were dissatisfied with laboratory space or equipment (ASM453).

The Panel also noted that the College had undertaken a benchmarking exercise for its academic support services with MUC in February 2022. However, the Panel did not find any follow-up plan to integrate the areas of good practices identified. The Panel encourages QACO, which has oversight of the monitoring of the OP, to ensure that staff and students surveys are revised to include additional areas for assessment and that findings from the evaluation and benchmarking exercises are used to systematically plan and manage the academic support services and to inform improvement actions in the OPs (SM261, SM365, SM187).

Recommendation 20

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology establish an effective system for the planning, management and improvement of its academic support services.

6.2 Registry (*Enrolment and Student Records*)

The responsibility for the registry services falls under the purview of the Registry, Admissions and Registration Office (RARO), which manages applications and admissions to the programmes according to the processes and procedures defined in the Admissions Policy and RARO Manual (SM066, SM072, SM073). RARO also has custody of the Student Record System (SRS), the in-house system developed by the ICTSSO to capture student admission, registration and academic performance data. The staff roles are provided in the job description, and the department is guided by a range of policies and procedures, including Guidance Notes for SRS; Admissions Policy; Policy of Accreditation of Prior Learning; Surveys and Analysis Policy; and Scholarship and Discount Policy; and in-development SRS and SSD (SM049, SM070, SM066, SM112, SM074, SM061, SM223). The Panel found these documents comprehensive, and information is available on the GCET website, such as the Accreditation of Prior Learning and the Scholarship and Discount Policy under the Admission section.

The Portfolio states that RARO has efficient, fair, clear, and effective admissions and registration processes in place (Portfolio, p.70). The Panel noted that since 2021, GCET has had an online registration. The Panel heard during interviews that students are satisfied with the services provided by RARO and found the recently introduced online registration system (2021) is easy to use. Students also mentioned that RARO dealt with timetable clashes, and students could join different cohorts. The induction survey conducted for the enrolment in AY 2021-22 indicated that 52% of students were satisfied with the online registration system, 14% were dissatisfied, and 34% registered at College. Student satisfaction surveys conducted for

the past three AYs on RARO services showed that overall, students are satisfied with registration services (SM261); it was, however, noted that 23% of students found that RARO staff were not supportive and did not reply to emails or phone calls (ASM453). Panel urges GCET to address those areas where students have reported low satisfaction with the admission and registration services has been reported through the student surveys.

RARO staff are responsible for the assessment of student applications. Applications for Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) are assessed by the programme leader or Head of the relevant Academic Department and confirmed by the APL Committee at GCET. Prior to 2020, staff faced a heavy workload due to the increasing number of APL applications; however, a Credit Recognition and Student Articulation Agreement was developed with UWE and approved in July 2021 to streamline the APL process, decreasing assessment of application time (Portfolio, p.30, SM035, See also Subarea 2.3).

Once students are accepted based on either the placement test or the APL applications, an offer letter is issued, and upon acceptance, they are registered with GCET, and the data is input manually into the SRS. GCET administrative staff, faculty members and students are granted selective access to the SRS through individual accounts (SM071). The Panel found, for instance, that students have access through the SRS to information regarding their study programme, including module registration, timetable, study plan, transcript, and fee summary (SM071). The Learning Management Systems (LMS), Moodle, is also linked to the SRS. During the site visit at the College, the Panel observed that data is stored in the server at GCET, and can be accessed by the Head of ICTSSO and another administrative staff. The data is also backed-up weekly in an external server. Hard copies of student records are kept in a secure place by the Head of RARO.

During the audit visit, the Panel was led through a demonstration of the newly established Student Statistical Dashboard, a live student data dashboard developed by the E-learning Resources and Technology Integration Leader. The dashboard gathers data automatically from the SRS and provides the viewer with a snapshot of student statistics, metrics and trends on the following: enrolment, profile, APL, progress and graduation (SM223). The Panel was pleased to see that the College had introduced this operational analysis tool that can be used by academic and administrative staff to follow students' progress and to identify emerging trends for informed decision-making. The Panel appreciated that GCET assessed this system for improvement prior to implementation (SM251). However, the Panel noted that the dashboards are stored on a personal Google Drive – that of the developer. GCET is encouraged to ensure that an institutional, secured access Drive is in place to store student information in accordance with the Records Management and Data Protection Policy of GCET regarding the security and integrity of Records and Data (SM105).

GCET benchmarked its admission and registration process with similar services at another HEI in February 2022. Several areas to improve the practices at the RARO of GCET were identified in the benchmarking report, including to 'have a defined role for admission and registration officers and to increase the human

resources of RARO and to develop a robust and effective automated system to support the office'(SM129). GCET is encouraged to implement these identified good practices to improve its services.

Affirmation 8

The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the services provided by RARO be enhanced based on the findings of the student surveys and benchmarking exercises.

6.3 Library

The Library and Learning Resources Centre (LLRC) has three staff members and is responsible for the library and other information services and resources. As per the Portfolio, GCET stands guided by Strategic Goal 3 and Objective 3.2 of SP 2021-26, 'ensuring provision of an effective student support environment, that engages and empowers students to reach their full potential and to support all staff to deliver a quality-driven educational experience' (Portfolio, p.71, SM003).

To achieve this objective and to support the teaching and learning at GCET, policies, procedures, handbooks, and guidelines are in place at the LLRC. These are the LLRC Handbook; Guidance Tutorial Videos; Survey and Analysis Policy, and annually approved Library Guide (SM095, 093, 094, SM074). Prior to each semester, the librarian emails all HoDs to fill in the form for recommended textbooks. The College states that a Library Committee is responsible for approving the recommendations of HoDs for library resources to be ordered in line with the requirements of each department's programmes (Portfolio, p.78). The Panel read, however, in the Governance Manual, that the Library Committee has been replaced by the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTEC), which is the responsible committee for 'matters supporting learning, teaching, pedagogic enhancement, student support, and student engagement' (SM025). LTEC comprises the heads of the different support services departments, the head of QACO, the quality assurance officers of the academic department, the Chairperson of the Research and Innovation Committee and is chaired by the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs). However, the Panel is aware that GCET has not appointed a Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs) yet (see also Subareas 1.3 and 8.1). The LLRC is responsible for recommending purchasing teaching and learning resources, including library resources. A Department Resource Request Form is available for that purpose (SM229).

Resources are also purchased as per the UWE Reading lists and as per the availability of new resources in the annual Local Book Fair (Portfolio, p.78). Acquisitions are made by the Purchase Committee in line with the approved budget (SM102). The Panel was informed during the Visit to the LLRC that there are presently more than 3000 hard copies and e-books available, and staff and students also have access to the UWE library, which would give access to more than 100,000 e-resources.

Students can access the library between 8.30 a.m to 8.00 p.m during the semester and until 10.00 p.m. during examination periods (Portfolio, p.72). Students learn about the LLRC services during induction, and

the Library Guide has information on how to use the online catalogue, use the UWE Library search, use referencing and avoid plagiarism, amongst others (Portfolio, p.72, SM095, SM097, SM099, SM148). Workshops and video tutorials are also available to guide staff and students on accessing Oman Virtual Science Library (Masadar) and using Moodle and Blackboard. This was confirmed through interviews with students and alumni.

The Panel was pleased to note, through staff and student interviews, that the LLRC is appropriately resourced to support the delivery of programmes at GCET and to support research activities through the provision of academic journals. The LLRC also monitors the utilization of the library in terms of the number of resource borrowers per category – academic staff and students of GFP and undergraduate programmes and non-academic staff (SM100). The Panel also noted from the progress spreadsheet of the LLRC that three alumni are using the library services regularly; however, the annual target (2-5% of alumni) has not been reached (ASM523). During the site visit, the Panel was informed that LLRC utilization is calculated daily through a sensor and that the library is not yet open to the wider community.

The services of the LLRC are assessed through staff and student satisfaction surveys. The level of satisfaction has improved over the past years (Portfolio, p.72). Survey results indicated that overall, students are satisfied with the LLRC staff and resources; however, a significant number of students found that the space is insufficient to accommodate the growing number of students. In AY 2020-21, student feedback indicated a need for more quiet study spaces, and the Panel noted that GCET created two additional study spaces at the LLRC (Portfolio, p.72, SM261, interviews). Still, student feedback collected in May 2022 showed that the adequacy of space at LLRC has to be addressed by GCET, as 30% of students on all modes of the study responded that the library space was not adequate, and this figure included 35% of students on the full-time normal mode of study (ASM453). As per the progress spreadsheet of LLRC OP, this feedback was noted for consideration, and the action to be taken was to ensure that the library expansion matched the growth of student numbers. The Panel noted that an LLRC expansion plan, with the aim to meet the need of students, was uploaded to the OP Dashboard as evidence of the completion of this KPI (ASM523).

6.4 *Information and Learning Technology Services*

The Portfolio states that GCET has well-established and well-organised information technology services available to students, staff and other stakeholders, which is guided by SP 2021-26 Goal 5 and Strategic Objective 5.3, which aims to 'support all staff with technology and systems to improve learning, teaching, research, and student support' (p.73, SM003, SM103, SM158). The ICTSSO has two staff and is responsible for handling the network infrastructure, including hardware and software, as well as cloud security (SM049). Several policies guide the ICTSSO in undertaking its functions: the ICT Learning Resources Policy; Lab Usage Policy; Student Handbook on Online Teaching, Learning and Assessment; and the Surveys and Analysis Policy (SM104, SM106, SM162, SM074). The OP 2021-22 of ICTSSO has a list of action plans completed in August 2022 (ASM 523).

The Panel learned that the ICTSSO has multiple critical responsibilities. It has developed the SRS and the Virtual Learning Management Systems (LMS), Moodle. The Panel noted that GCET migrated from using the LMS of UWE, Blackboard, to its own developed system on Moodle, which best suited its needs. GCET Moodle also has features linking students to UWE resources, such as the e-library. During interviews, students expressed that the new LMS of GCET was easier to navigate and was more relevant to their needs than the UWE Blackboard. A majority of students (92%) further agreed that 'Features of Moodle are useful and support me in my online and regular learning' as per feedback collected on the online learning satisfaction survey in AY 2021-22 (SM239).

During the Visit, the Panel was informed that SRS and Moodle maintenance had been delegated to the E-learning Resources and Technology Integration Leader, who reports to QACO. The ICTSSO oversees and manages the College's Website and Intranet and the associated internet connectivity and wireless connection. ICTSSO is also responsible for the weekly manual back-ups of SRS and the management of software licenses, ICT related hardware, such as computers, servers and, printers, access points, telephones, and CCTV cameras (SM248). Staff and students are provided with workshops and training to use Moodle, SRS and other IT related (SM103, SM158, SM331). Before the start of each academic semester, the ICTSSO will inspect and audit the computers and other IT facilities to ensure that the IT resources available for teaching are appropriately set up and accessible (SM104). In summary, the Panel learned that ICTSSO oversees all the ICT hardware maintenance and procurement, except for the engineering laboratory equipment.

Interviews with some students and staff indicated that they are satisfied with the ICT hardware and the Wi-Fi connection at GCET. A few students even informed the Panel that the PCs at GCET are high-performance and appropriate for running projects requiring large memory usage. A guided visit to the facilities showed the presence of such equipment. However, the Panel also heard from some students that the computer laboratory did not have sufficient space and equipment to seat all students. In addition, some PCs were deemed to be 'old'. Although student surveys showed that the majority of students were satisfied in general with the ICT at GCET, similar complaints were also noted from feedback gathered in May 2022, where 21% of students were not happy with the computing and CAD laboratory, and 25% found that the internet connection was weak (ASM453). The Panel noted similar findings from student feedback collected in AY 2020-21 and that the College has undertaken a series of ICT improvements and enhancements in the AY 2020-21, including heavy installation of computers and wireless infrastructure and the expansion of ICT facilities to the three Buildings in the Campus in the summer of 2020-21 (Portfolio, p.74, SM249, SM250). Given that the students reported the same issues following the upgrading of ICT facilities, the Panel urges GCET to re-assess the effectiveness of its ICT resources and services and to include improvement actions in the OP 2022-23 of ICTSSO. The Panel also took note that SP 2021-26 does not refer to the provision of technology-related support to students.

Results of student survey further showed that 13% believed it was challenging to get help from IT staff, although a Helpdesk system is in place to support staff and students on IT resources and IT-related matters

(ASM453). ICTSSO also responds to drop-in requests for support, which are input manually in the logbook (ASM538). The Panel noted that, in 2022, on average, 6-7 requests were logged daily; however, on some days, ICTSSO received 16 requests. Interventions range from attending to printer issues, Moodle access or installation of software, amongst others (ASM538). The Panel believes that the ICTSSO is understaffed to manage the variety and high volume of tasks and services that fall under its purview. GCET acknowledges this in the Portfolio, stating that 'ICTSSO is in its initial stages with more need for additional resourcing in the AY 2022-23' (Portfolio, p.74).

Recommendation 21

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review the effectiveness of the provision of Information and Learning Technology services and support to staff and students to ensure effective teaching and learning are maintained.

6.5 Academic Advising

The system in place at GCET for academic advising has recently been aligned, as of September 2020, with the UWE's policies and practices and is now referred to as Academic Personal Tutoring (APT) (SM137). A number of policies and procedures govern academic advising, including the GCET Guidance and Procedures - Academic Personal Tutoring, Surveys and Analysis Policy and the UWE APT Policies and Guidance following the QAA Advice and Guidance on Student Engagement (SM137, SM074, SM157).

The academic advising function at GCET is delegated to all academic staff, and students are assigned to the dedicated staff member who acts as the Academic Personal Tutor APT by the RARO, depending on their programmes. The assigned tutor is provided with a list of students before the start of the semester, and this assignment is visible on the SRS access of students (SM071, SM141). The role of the tutor is to provide general academic guidance, assist students during registration, monitor student progression and motivate them (Portfolio, p.75). The APT system is also the support mechanism at GCET for at-risk students (Portfolio, p.42). The role of tutors is explained in APT: Guidance and Procedures for implementing UWE Policies and Regulations (SM137). At the start of each semester, tutors reach out to their advisee to guide them through the registration process (SM288). Students are then responsible for seeking support from the APT through meetings and emails. Tutors have access to the assigned students' academic records through the SRS for monitoring progress. Tutors use a paper-based form to record APT meetings, and evidence of sample meetings was provided (SM139, SM140). It is noted that students' administrative, academic and personal issues are discussed during these meetings, and the Panel is of the view that academic staff should be appropriately trained for issues that fall under their scope of duty (SM140). The Panel established through interviews with students and alumni that they are aware of the APT system and found this was helpful in general. The Panel also took note that GCET operates with 42 academic staff and has a student enrolment of more than 1600 in AY 2022-23, which lead to a high ratio of students to an academic advisor (about 38:1) (Portfolio, p.62, SSD). Such ratio could potentially negatively impact the quality of the academic advising system and overburden academic staff. Additionally, the Panel found no

evidence of monitoring the academic advising system in place at GCET through either staff or student surveys to evaluate the system's effectiveness.

The College stated that it had identified several areas for improvement of the APT system, but the Panel did not find evidence of a review of the system to determine its appropriateness and the needed improvements (Portfolio, p.75). The Panel agrees, however, that the SRS could be used with the APT system, for instance, to trace students at risk and their progress.

Recommendation 22

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review its academic advising system to evaluate its effectiveness in meeting the needs of students.

6.6 *Student Learning Support*

GCET states that its student learning support activities are conducted through coordination between the LLRC, other Support Departments, and the Academic Departments to provide support for the different modes of study at the College (full-time and flexible students) at the foundation studies UG and PG levels (Portfolio, p.76). The system is guided by several policies, such as the Laboratory Usage Policy, Field Trip Policy, Student Handbook, Student Induction and Orientation, Student Handbook on Online Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and the Flexible Students Support Policy (SM106, SM125, SM125, SM162, SM164).

The SSSO is responsible for planning and conducting workshops, seminars, and training opportunities for students to ensure that they are appropriately assisted in their learning (SM077, SM078). The induction program is conducted in coordination with academic and academic supporting departments providing students with general information on the College departments and services. Live online induction sessions were conducted in 2021, and record sessions were made available to students (SM090, SM091). Academic departments plan extracurricular events such as field trips, workshops, seminars, competitions, and other activities that support students' learning experiences outside the standard classrooms (SM126). These activities are also reported in the College Newsletters (SM057, SM058). Some students confirmed during interviews that they participated in national debates.

GFP runs the Student Peer Teaching Assistant session (SPTA) as per the Student Peer Teaching Assistants Policy (SM144, SM145, SM252). As of March 2022, the SPTA has been extended to the EEE department, and the support mechanism was implemented as of April 2022 (SM252). The Panel found during the interviews with students that one of them was an SPTA providing support to GFP students. The Portfolio also mentioned other support centres, such as the Maths support centre and the English support centre, and evidence of SPTA appointments as well as records of student attendance to support sessions were provided (SM361). These are run by tutors or SPTA. The Panel was of the view that this support

service is underreported in the Portfolio, although the records indicate that students are making use of these facilities (SM361). The Panel encourages GCET to extend the SPTA to all departments and urges the College to review its Student Learning Support system to determine that students' extracurricular learning support requirements are being effectively met.

6.7 *Teaching Resources*

GCET states that the different departments provide and maintain teaching and learning resources based on the programmes' requirements (Portfolio, p.77). GCET stands guided by various policies and guidance documents governing teaching resources, including statistics on classrooms, labs, support centre activities, LLRC and lab usage, Programme and Module Handbooks, and student class timetables (SM106, SM169, SM131, SM 170, SM 171, SM172). The Deputy Dean (Administration and Resources) is responsible for keeping and maintaining a list of all resources in the different departments, which RARO disseminates through the SRS (SM 253).

The HODs identify, from their academic staff, the teaching and learning resources required for their departments; these include laboratory equipment, IT equipment, books and other teaching and learning resources. These resources are communicated to Deputy Dean (Administration and Resources) as per the Resources Requirement form for approval (SM242). Books are ordered as mentioned in Subarea 6.3 through LTEC. Laboratory equipment are serviced by the lab technicians or the maintenance is outsourced when required. ICT equipment are serviced and maintained by ICTSSO (See Subarea 6.4).

GCET conducts staff and student surveys to determine the level of satisfaction of these stakeholders with the teaching and learning resources, and the findings are used to plan the improvement of the facilities. As per the Portfolio, areas identified for improvement are upgrading some of the technical laboratories, workshops for the mechanical laboratories and enhancing the space for students to work on their projects (Portfolio, p.78, SM261). Interviews with some students indicated that space in the laboratory was indeed an issue, and one EAB member recommended that additional space should be provided for laboratory work, and the College should consider setting up a robotics lab to showcase the work of students as well as a workshop for final year students.

During the sit-visit, the Panel noted the lack of adequate space in the laboratories to manoeuvre and engage in hands-on experiments.

Recommendation 23

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology evaluate its laboratories in terms of adequacy of space, equipment and supplies to facilitate teaching and fulfil its Mission.

In addition, the Panel was concerned that adequate safety, such as shields, were not in place for the use of some equipment. Furthermore, the labs were not equipped with first aid kits and fire extinguishers (see Subarea 1.12). With the growing number of students, GCET should review the allocation of space and the health and safety requirements in the laboratory.

7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

This Chapter presents the findings of the Panel on the planning and management of students and student support services, student profile, student satisfaction and climate, student behaviour, career and employment services, student finances, accommodation, catering and transportation, medical and counselling facilities, international student services, and social and recreational services and facilities.

7.1 *Students and Student Support Services Planning and Management*

The College states that its strategic approach to planning and managing non-academic student support services is aligned with its mission (Portfolio, p. 79). It is incorporated in its SP 2021-26 strategic goals 2 Objective 2.4: 'ensuring the facilities and infrastructure are modernized and developed to foster a vibrant learning environment to attract and support new students' and strategic goal 3 Objective 3.2: 'ensuring provision of an effective student support environment, that engages and empowers students to reach their full potential and to support all staff to deliver a quality-driven educational experience' (SM003, SM040, SM044). To this point, the College conducted a significant review and restructuring of all its administrative departments, including the SSSO office in AY 2020-21, where the role of the Office was aligned with the College Mission and its strategic plan (SM209). The review indicated a need for the SSSO to evaluate and document the effectiveness of its activities and events in a more systematic manner (SM209).

The College informs its planning for student support services and management through the SRS, SSD, SAC, SSLC and students' feedback on support services via the College Services Annual Student Satisfaction Survey (Portfolio, p80, SM198, SM223, SM261). For example, it utilises the SSD data to inform its planning with regard to student gender requirements, students studying in full-time mode, and flexible mode (SM223, see Subarea 7.2). Furthermore, the Panel heard that SAC involvement in services planning is also through direct feedback to the SSSO. The College also utilizes students' feedback to monitor and evaluate student support services for enhancement (SM261).

The services provided to students by the SSSO include transportation, accommodation, health clinic, employability advice, counselling services, food services, mail services, and bookstore services (SM049). In addition, SSSO supports student participation in clubs and societies, organises extracurricular activities, provides students with career and employment counselling, and offers guidance on finding appropriate accommodation and transportation (Portfolio, p.79, SM286). In addition, the SSSO creates an annual events calendar determining the type of events/activities, responsible individuals, and required resources (SM076, See also Subarea 5.1).

GCET dedicated part of its annual budget to student support services (Portfolio, p.79, SM467). However, the Annual Operating Budget Report does not expound the allocated amount to non-academic support services (SM467, See also Subarea 1.7). Nonetheless, students generally expressed satisfaction with these services. The College ensures that the range of services meets students' needs through its annual

satisfaction surveys, monitored and followed up by QACO (SM261, SM075). Results of the annual surveys are presented to AB for review and approval (Portfolio, p.80, SM187, SM188, SM189).

Overall, the Panel concludes that GCET has deployed an acceptable approach to the planning and management of non-academic student support services through the SSSO. The services are informed by the students' feedback through structure surveys and followed up by QACO and are adequately resourced. The Panel, however, urges the College to effectively monitor the implementation of the non-academic support services resulting from the recent major review that was conducted in the AY 2020-21.

7.2 *Student Profile*

The College recruits students in three categories: direct entry from higher secondary school diploma, Accredited Prior Learning (APL) entry for eligible students from other HEIs, and postgraduate admissions. The College has an Admission Policy to govern and guide student recruitment for undergraduate and postgraduate studies (SM066, See also Subarea 2.3).

GCET utilises its student profile to inform its decision-making, longer-term planning and development of student support services and facilities (Portfolio, p.80). Through an in-house developed system (SRS), RARO maintains and monitors students' data and profiles in support of other relevant departments (SM223). The SSSO and academic departments use the SRS data to inform their activities (interviews). The Head of RARO is responsible for entering student details in the SRS and ensuring the maintenance of the data (Portfolio, p.80, SM071). In addition, the SRS is used to record students' personal and academic details. Students, HoDs, and faculty can access SRS data relevant to their areas. Students, for instance, can view their programme details, timetable, and transcript. PL can use the SRS to assign faculty tasks, endorse grads, and generate quantitative reports. Faculty can upload timetables and send announcements to their students (SM071, SM141). Other data relevant to the MoHERI, such as invoices, are also viewed via the SRS (SM071).

For the AY 2021-22, the College has approximately 1628 enrolled students, of which Omani students are accounted for approximately 93%, and the remaining 7% are non-Omani students, mainly from the Middle East and Asian region (Portfolio, P. 81, SM223, SSD-Dashboard). The student population is predominantly male (around 65%). The enrolled students studying in full-time flexible mode are relatively similar to those studying in full-time mode (AM223).

The Panel sought evidence and examples of how the data in SSD was being used by AB, EMB, departmental meetings, and other departments to inform their decision-making and long-term planning of non-academic support services. As a result, the College extended the working hours of the library, computer labs, and cafeteria to 8:00 pm from Sunday to Wednesday (portfolio, p.1, site-visit, Interviews). As the female students mainly attend morning classes, and most flexible mode students are males and prefer evening classes, the College has reserved female washrooms on each floor at Blocks B and C. The MPRO and SSSO use the SSD data to plan and arrange student recruitment services (SM257, SM201, SM202). In addition, ADC accesses student progression data to plan their activities (SM299, SM300,

SM301, SM302). The College also uses the Student Discount total through the SSD to inform its decisions related to providing grants and scholarships (SM061, SM223).

The Panel observed that during AY 2021-22, BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering and Vehicle Technology has the highest enrollment rate (28%), followed by BSC (Hons) Computer Security and Forensics (19%), BEng (Hons) Instrumentation and Control Engineering (14%), and BEng (Hons) Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering (12%). Comparatively lower numbers were noticed in BEng (Hons) Automation and Robotics Engineering (02%), BSC (Hons) Environmental Management and Practice (04%), and BSC (Hons) Urban and Regional Planning (04%). In contrast, only four students were enrolled in the BSC (Hons) Business Computing programme since it started in 2017-18 (Portfolio, Appendix F). The Panel, therefore, encourages GCET to review and consider the low enrollment status of these programmes in its long-term planning for student recruitment.

Affirmation 9

The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that student profile should be utilised efficiently to review the enrollment status of the offered programmes.

7.3 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

The College's approach to evaluating student satisfaction and climate is facilitated through the College Services Annual Student Satisfaction Survey, student representation at different committees, and SAC (Portfolio, p.81, SM261). In addition, the College implements Student Complaint and Grievance Policy to encourage students to raise their concerns through the SSSO (SM087). The SSSO maintains an Excel Log to record and track students' complaints, which is archiving in nature (SM262). The recorded students' concerns in the log are exclusively academic, and no cases/issues pertaining to student support services were found (See also Subarea 1.11). The College deploys different mechanisms to maintain and support student satisfaction and climate. The two mechanisms are mainly student surveys and student representation in committees through the SAC (Portfolio, p.81, interview).

The College utilises the Services Annual Student Satisfaction Survey to measure student satisfaction with the learning experience, including students' learning experience during the Covid-19 pandemic, management support, learning resources and facilities (SM261). Students responding to the survey are asked to indicate their study programme and mode of study. The current version of the satisfaction survey was reviewed and updated by the QAC and approved by AB AY 2020-21 (SM193). The survey encompasses student satisfaction with the LLRC facilities and activities, ICTSSO activities and services, RARO services, and SSSO activities and services (SM261). The Panel appreciates the College's initiative in reviewing and developing the annual satisfaction survey to be inclusive, assessing relevant student support services. The Panel noted, however, that the response rate to the surveys conducted in the last three years was relatively low, given the number of students enrolled in the College. For instance, the number of responses to the survey conducted in AY 2019-20 was only 267. About 27% of the respondents

were neutral in their answers, and these were excluded from the analysis. Likewise, the responses to the annual satisfaction survey conducted in AY 2021-22 were 199, of which 60 were studying in a full-time, flexible mode. The College would need to ensure a maximum response rate to the disseminated surveys to have a valid representation of the student body and ultimately inform improvements on all areas/domains of concerns covered by the survey.

The SAC is a significant player in ensuring and maintaining a positive and constructive climate for students. Members of the SAC are elected annually in line with MoHERI regulations, and a total of six members are chosen through an open forum (SM052, SM053). The SAC reports directly to SSSO and is also monitored by them (interviews). The SSSO conducts regular formal and informal meetings with the SAC (interviews). The Panel learned that the SAC could also approach the Dean's Office directly for matters for clarification and/or to be addressed urgently. Furthermore, students are represented in the SSLC of all academic departments via the Head of SSSO (SM198). The College informs students about changes and improvements that have been made through the SSSO.

The level of students' satisfaction with the support services provided over the last three years has increased gradually. The result of the survey conducted in AY 2019-20 showed a moderate level of students' satisfaction with the appropriateness of teaching classrooms (51%), catering facilities (43%), praying room appropriateness (41%), and a relatively low level of satisfaction with the overall facility to relax in the College (36%). This level of satisfaction has slightly increased, as shown by the result of the survey conducted in AY 2020-21, where students expressed a moderate level of satisfaction with the recreational facilities-playing area-(56.78%), medical services (55.48%), catering facilities (57.42%), and College support in finding transportation/accommodation (52.26%). Likewise, the result of the annual satisfaction survey conducted in AY 2021-22 supported this trend of results (ASM453). The College has conducted a significant refurbishment in 2021, taking into consideration students' feedback; for example, the parking area was paved, shades were added, and the library space improved.

Few students, however, expressed concerns regarding the limited space of the Library, appropriateness of the praying room, and cafeteria services (interviews). The Panel, therefore, urges the College to benefit from the survey's results to systematically inform improvements in all areas of concerns involved.

7.4 *Student Behaviour*

The College's approach to student behaviour is through the Student Code of Conduct and Student Complaint and Grievance Policy (SM087, SM088). These documents are communicated to the student on the induction day and made readily accessible via the College Website and Student Handbook (SM083, SM084, SM307). The context of the documents provides behavioural guidance and direction to students within the campus as well as covers the students' code of conduct for field visits. The College has assigned the SSSO to register and manage student misconduct cases. SSSO records and logs student misconduct cases into an Excel sheet (SM264). The SSO staff strategy in handling misconduct is to keep the first-time misconduct informal and counsel the student on proper behaviour (Portfolio, p.83).

The misconduct record maintained by the SSSO shows a smaller number of reported cases, which the College justified, owing to remote study during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the minutes of the Student Disciplinary and Misconduct Panel showed effective handling of misconduct cases reported to the Disciplinary Panel (SM264). The Panel noted, however, that the Student Complaint and Grievance Policy was developed in AY 2018-19, updated in 2021, and approved by AB in March 2022 (SM087). Likewise, the ToR of the Student Disciplinary and Misconduct Panel was approved by AB on 8 May 2022 (SM263). The Panel, therefore, urges the College to monitor the effectiveness of implementing the recently updated policies/guidelines governing student behaviour.

7.5 *Career and Employment Services*

The College's approach to career and employment services is articulated in its SP 2021-26, Objective 3.3b: 'Ensuring graduate attributes and graduate outcomes are of an internationally recognized and locally verified standard to prepare graduates for satisfying and rewarding careers' (SM003). The College's plans on providing career and employment guidance opportunities are organised through the SSSO and relevant Academic Departments (Portfolio, p.84). Activities pertinent to career events and employment preparation are delivered by the SSSO, through seminars, CV writing workshops, and providing placement letters (Portfolio, p.84, interviews). In addition, RARO provides graduating students with required referral letters to support their quest to find placement/internship during summer (Portfolio, p.84, also see Subarea 2.6). Moreover, the College has deployed a strategy of having EABs at each academic department to provide and establish links with industry and potential employers and to create a forum where the departments are informed on the trends, needs, and requirements of the industry and employers (SM199).

The College has recently appointed a dedicated staff to support and provide students with career guidance and employability-related training (SM528, interviews). The Panel appreciates this move to assist students in preparing for employment and planning their future careers.

The College has recently started monitoring and measuring graduate employability in AY 2021-22 through the Alumni Destination and Satisfaction Survey and Employer Survey (SM342). The Alumni Destination Survey included responses from students who graduated in 2018 to 2021 and revealed that 52% of the alumni could not find a job despite most of them believing that the College prepared them well for their career life (SM342). It is worth noting that the total number of respondents to the Alumni Satisfaction Survey was 190 out of 646 graduates (SSD at the time of Visit showed a total number of 823 graduates), while the Alumni Destination Survey had only 95 respondents (SM344, see also Subarea 5.5 above). The Panel, therefore, encourages the College to find means to increase the number of respondents to both Surveys so that results can effectively be utilised in enhancing career and employment services. Likewise, the Panel urges GCET to integrate the results of these surveys into its academic activities and programme reviews and development. It was also noted that graduates expressed a need for practical placement prior to their graduation (see also Subarea 2.6 above)— a comment that was emphasised by the interviewed alumni.

7.6 *Student Finances*

The College has a Scholarship and Discount Policy to govern the student financial support that was developed in 2021 and approved by AB and BoT (Portfolio, p.85, SM061). Students are made aware of relevant financial information through the College website (SM268), RARO (SM269), and Student Handbook (SM083, SM084). The finance information is made accessible to students through the SRS or direct contact with the Finance Officer in the RARO Office. Student can pay their fees through bank transfer and/or by cash, credit card, cheques, or debit card (Portfolio, p.85). The College also attempted to initiate an agreement with a local bank to facilitate a study loan for the students seeking this service (Portfolio, p.85).

The College tuition fees are set based on the MoHERI regulations and the signed agreement (SM271). Students having financial challenges are identified and recorded and therefore supported financially under the Scholarship and Discounts Policy (SM061). The Policy streamlines the procedure for offering scholarships and discounts to only new self-funded students. The Policy specifies the maximum number of scholarships per semester offered to Omani and international students who achieve 90% and above in their General Diploma. Students eligible for the discount are high achievers, international students, students with special needs and students with low income or social security status, unemployed students, and first-degree relatives. Depending on its business and financial status, the College considers discounts to private flexible students and organizations with business links with the College. The Policy specifies the programmes involved and the terms of the discount. This is manifested through the total discount table provided in the Student Dashboard that includes 34 fully sponsored students, 41 students with 70% discounts, 86 students with 50% discounts, and 135 students with 20% discounts (SM223). The Panel verified this policy's implementation by meeting students who have received scholarships and discounts.

The Panel was pleased to know that the College has recently developed its SRS to include facilities for students to view their fees and registration details online. Moreover, the students are also given an instalment provision to pay their fees in four instalments, which is 25% of total fees monthly (SM269).

7.7 *Accommodation, Catering and Transport*

The College does not own or operate accommodation facilities and transportation; instead, guidance and assistance are provided to newly admitted students on how and where to access these services (Portfolio, p.86). The SSSO assists students in finding suitable accommodation through the contacts of Estate Agents within Muscat and advises on the terms and conditions of the tenancy agreement (GCET Services website, interviews). Likewise, for transportation services, the SSSO, besides assisting students in finding appropriate transport agents, facilitates student mobility to field visits, off-campus recreational activities, and medical escorts to local hospitals for students who need secondary medical care (GCET Services website, interviews). Though the College does not directly operate the accommodation and transportation services, the Panel have heard that the SSSO follows up with tenants and transport agents on the quality of services. It is advisable that the College considers developing a policy and/or guidelines that streamline

these aspects to ensure students' safety and security and evaluate its effectiveness through the annual satisfaction survey.

The College provides catering services through an outsourced registered cafeteria (Portfolio, p.86). It provides a variety of food and beverages throughout the day to accommodate students on different study modes. The cafeteria that provides catering services is registered in the Commercial Registration Office, offers a variety of meals and prices, has experience in other universities and colleges, and fulfils the national legal HSE requirements (Portfolio, p.86, site-visit, interviews). The criteria, however, do not include conditions related to health and food hygiene (SM275). The quality of food and hygiene of the place and staff are monitored by the College Health and Safety Officer (SM049). During the on-site visit, the Panel found recent inspection reports on cafeteria carried out by the SSSO and reported to the Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources. The effectiveness of catering service is assessed through the College Services Annual Student Satisfaction Survey (SM261), in which one of the recent and most common comments raised by students is about the expensive food price. The Panel encourages the College to monitor this aspect with regard to enhancing students' experience and convenience.

7.8 *Medical and Counselling Facilities*

Medical and counselling services at the College are provided on-campus through a certified Clinic by the Ministry of Health (SM280). The permit of the Ministry of Health obtained in February 2021 classified the Clinic as a first aid clinic in which it provides initial health assessment and primary intervention to its attendants (SM280). In addition, the Clinic arranges and delivers proactive healthcare programmes and workshops such as awareness-raising through lectures and awareness workshops on diabetes, breast cancer, healthy eating, yoga, meditation and first aid workshop, amongst others. Furthermore, as the clinic facilitates engagement with the local community through the participation in health awareness events related to effects of smoking, and the importance of physical activity (Portfolio, p.87, SM282). One female nurse, licenced by the Ministry of Health, is running the Clinic (SM280). During the site visit, the Panel observed that the Clinic is quite spacious and has a waiting area as well as a private examination area with essential equipment. Shelf medications are available in accordance with the Ministry of Health guidelines. The Clinic uses Student's Health Form to collect and evaluate students' health to plan their care and determine the required counselling services (SM279, SM480). Students requiring further medical attention are referred to an outside healthcare service (SM481). Medically stable cases are referred to hospitals using domestic transportation as no ambulance service is available in the College. However, the national ambulance service is used for critical and emergency cases. First aid boxes are available in different locations on the campus (Portfolio, p.86).

Regarding counselling services, the Panel did not observe any counselling facilities nor a counselling specialist on campus. Counselling sessions for students usually take place in the Clinic and are managed by the nurse; where necessary, the College refers students to an outside service (Portfolio, p.86). The College stated an intention to appoint a psychological Counsellor to support students and staff and provide

individual and group counselling (Portfolio, p.87). The Panel encourages the College to benchmark its medical and counselling services with other HEIs to enhance the provided medical and counselling services.

The medical and counselling services are evaluated through the College Services Annual Student Satisfaction Surveys 2020-21 and event surveys (Portfolio, p.87, SM261). The result of the Annual Satisfaction Survey indicated that 55.48% of clinic attendants were satisfied with provided services, whereas 18.71% were unsatisfied.

Upon consideration of the evidence, interviews, and site-visit, the Panel concluded that medical and counselling services are sufficient for the current College needs. However, the Panel encourages the College to consider benchmarking its medical and counselling services as a method of future enhancement.

7.9 *International Student Services*

The College stated that its approach to attracting international students' services is outlined in its SP 2021-26, Goal 2: Student Recruitment (Portfolio, p.87, SM003). SP 2021-26 explicitly mentions international students only in KPI-1 and KPI-4 of Goal 2: Student Recruitment. Both KPIs are about meeting and increasing the recruitment of international students towards a target of 10%. Currently, the College has only two enrolled international students who arrive in Oman with the sole intention of gaining a higher education qualification in Oman (Portfolio, p.87)). The two international students represent less than 1% of the total student population, whereas the other non-Omani students living in Oman (Expatriate Students) represent 7% of the total student body and belong to different nationalities: Egyptian, Jordanian, Iranian, Syrian, Sudanese, Iraqi, Algerian, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Lebanese (SM246). The College supports international and expatriate students through the SSSO on services such as visa application procedures, medical insurance, travel arrangements, and advice and guidance on transportation and accommodation (SM283). Furthermore, students are encouraged to participate in events and activities organised by the SSSO and SAC. Some of these activities cater to international students' needs (SM076).

The College's support to international and expatriate students is deemed sufficient (SM283). However, there is no separate formal evaluation mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the services provided to these students; the College Services Annual Student Satisfaction Survey evaluates the effectiveness of the provided services targeting all students with no specification to international students (SM261). During Interviews with international students, they expressed satisfaction with the provided services. Nevertheless, the Panel urges the College to implement a formal mechanism for evaluating its support to international students considering its 5-year target to increase the percentage of international students to 10% (Portfolio, p.87).

7.10 *Social and Recreational Services and Facilities*

The College states that its approach to social and recreational services and facilities is integrated into its Strategic Plan Objective 3.5: 'Raising student awareness of the value of education, citizenship, Government

positive trends, and volunteering' (SM003). The services are governed and guided by the Club, Societies, and Recreational Activities Policy developed and approved by BoT in November 2021 (SM092). The Policy governs and streamlines the principles and process of initiating Clubs and Society and provides the necessary forms of Club/Society Applications. The Panel learned that before this policy, social and recreational activities were organised and implemented through the SSSO and/or other departments without a formal follow-up evaluation (College's Comment on the additional SMs list related to Standard 7.10-SM485). Prior to the policy development, the evaluation and improvements were based on a generic student annual satisfaction survey (SM485).

Activities pertaining to social and recreational activities are managed by the SSSO in coordination with SAC (Portfolio, p.88). The SSSO creates an annual calendar approved by AB of social and recreational activities and events. Seven different Clubs with mixed gender are registered with the SSSO, including Public Speaking Club, Art Club, Media Club, English Language Club, Music Club, Sports Club, and Volunteer Club (SM286). The Panel noted that social events and some recreational activities are conducted on campus, such as table tennis and Chess game, whereas other recreational facilities are off campus due to the current landscaping and structure of GCET's rented campus (Portfolio, p.89, site-visit). To manage the social and club activities, the College assigns a Coordinator and Club or Society Advisor (Portfolio, p.89). The College stated that it is allocating an annual budget for social and recreational activities; however, the budget reports do not specify an item or outline the allotted amount for this aspect (Portfolio, p.89, SM287).

The effectiveness of the social and recreational services and facilities was initially evaluated through a generic survey conducted in AY 2019-20. The College enhanced the monitoring of social and recreational services through the development of the College Services Annual Student Satisfaction Survey, which was initially conducted in 2020-21 and 2021-22 (SM261). The analysis of both the generic survey and the College Services Annual Student Satisfaction Survey revealed a steady improvement in the level of student satisfaction with recreational services. However, the Panel was informed that the available recreational facilities on campus, such as table tennis, billiard, and baby-foot games, are primarily relevant to and dominated by male students (interviews). The Panel urges the College to integrate the Social and Recreational Services in its OP with a clear set of KPIs looking into expanding its recreational facilities and ensuring their appropriateness and equity to meet the needs of both male and female students.

8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

GCET's main strategic goal for Human Resources (HR) is 'to empower and engage staff to deliver excellence in all services and activities' - Goal 5 of SP 2021-26 and to attract and retain well-qualified staff (Portfolio, p.89). This is aligned with the College's MVV and refers to the requirements of the Ministry of Labour and MoHERI in the Sultanate of Oman, as well as UWE as the awarding body of the College (SM047). The Panel was impressed by the initiatives young staff had taken to develop solutions to GCET administration challenges, such as the OPMS, which was developed and demonstrated to the Panel by a young staff member as an internal online tracking tool to ensure the KPIs of the annual OPs of each department were monitored and followed-up transparently and timely, and the initiative's efforts of the HOD of the Library to develop a spreadsheet system to improve access to the multitude of materials available through the UWE library system (ASM 523, site-visit). The Panel had the impression that the College was supportive in allowing them to create solutions demonstrating their engagement and empowerment within the College. The Panel found this to reflect a commendable approach, which nurtures young staff member's sense of ownership for the College's achievements and their motivation to deliver excellence in all services and activities as stated as GCET's main strategic goal for HR. It also reflects best practice for all staff at the College

Commendation 2

The OAAAQA commends the Global College of Engineering and Technology on empowering young staff by engaging them in the development of solutions to GCET challenges.

This Chapter considers the staff and staff support services at ITS and reports on the Panel findings on HR planning and management, staff profile, recruitment and selection, induction, professional development, performance planning review, promotion and other incentives, severance, staff organisational climate and retention, and Omanisation.

8.1 Human Resources Planning & Management

The approach to human resources was addressed by the current Dean in coordination with the Deputy Dean for administration and Resources (Portfolio, p.90). As a result, changes were made, including updating the Human Resources (HR) Manual and its compliance with the Ministry of Labour (MoL) regulations, the design of the GCET Academic Staff Workload Model, and changes at the senior management level (HoDs) (SM046, SM047). These included converting acting-up positions into permanent contracts, updating their involvement in the standing committee structures and allocating designated departmental areas in the Teaching and Learning Building (SM014). The Panel found the HR Manual to be comprehensive in including all relevant information on management, guidelines, and policies.

The Dean and Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources are responsible for the deployment of the HR approach as documented in OP 2021-22, with the Dean reporting to the BoT (Portfolio, p.91, SM014,

SM040). The staffing budget is approved at the BoT level at the beginning of each AY (SM014). At present, GCET has no formal HR committee due to the small size of the College, and the Dean conducts and chairs HR meetings and selective meetings as deemed necessary (Portfolio, p.90, SM204, SM205). The EMB acts as the main body where matters concerning HR are discussed and decided upon (SM190, SM191).

The Panel found the post of HR Head of Office and other leadership positions to be vacant and the responsible HR Manager merely in a part-time position (SM026, ASM530, see also Subarea 1.3). In addition, the Panel noticed that a number of HR responsibilities in OP 2021-22 were delegated to others in the College, and the OPMS tracking system showed only four tasks assigned to the HR Office (SM040). Considering that the College is currently in the process of growing, the absence of a clearly committed HR Head of Office could prove critical. An indication that attention needed to be paid more clearly to HR management is that although GCET has a Staff Workload Model and individual academic staff confirmed that attention was being paid to their workload when taking on extra responsibilities, the Panel noticed that the workload of individual staff was unbalanced in ranging from minus 200 (downtime) to plus 200 (overtime) hours and a matter actually discussed in EMB meetings (SM046, SM190, ASM392).

Although the Panel acknowledges the positive changes made to HR planning and management, it in fact doubts that the College presently has sufficient oversight over its HR approach as clear governing structures, such as an acting Head for HR and supporting entities, are missing to ensure a comprehensive deployment process and systematic review of all HR procedures are in place. The Panel acknowledged that the College has announced some of the leadership positions and was ensured that interviews were being conducted at the time of the Visit; however, it feels obliged to emphasize that the process should be expedited (ASM530).

Recommendation 24

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology expedite the process of appointing all vacant leadership positions to ensure the College has adequate resources in place to effectively manage its growth.

8.2 Staff Profile

GCET has a total of 67 full-time staff, three part-time staff and 11 externally contracted staff, with an overall staffing budget of 81 employees, of which 42 are academics (Portfolio, p.92, ASM491, ASM493). The College employs a diverse staff population with mixed nationalities and a balanced male and female distribution. Qualifications range from Secondary School to PhDs and are aligned with the respective positions.

The Panel initially received a staff profile overview with limited data on numbers and variables (Portfolio, Appendix F). Although further data is available and was provided upon request, the data shows mainly to be collected by the HR Manager to provide information on the staff profile internally to the Dean and Deputy

Dean for Administration and Resources and externally to the MoL and MoHERI (Portfolio, p.103, ASM491). There was no evidence of an informative or evaluative analysis of the data and how the staffing profile is optimally aligned with the capability requirements in its Institutional Strategic Plan and the College's future aspirations. The approach to identifying staffing needs is articulated in the HR Manual and merely based on the Staff Performance Appraisal Scheme and yearly requests by the HoDs (SM047). As pointed out in Subarea 2.4, the student-staff ratio is very high at about 38:1, which GCET does not acknowledge within its Portfolio and does not consider an area of concern for teaching quality. However, the Panel acknowledges that in addition to such a high student-staff ratio, academic staff are obliged to attend PCAP training, do research and publish, as well as participate in committees. The Panel highlighted the unbalanced workload in Subarea 8.1. Hence, the Panel urges GCET to comprehensively analyse and evaluate its current staffing situation, staffing profile, staffing planning and its alignment with the College's Vision and Mission.

Recommendation 25

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology conduct a comprehensive and critical analysis of its current staffing situation to ensure its staffing numbers, profiles and staffing planning optimally meet the needs of the College.

8.3 *Recruitment and Selection*

The approach to recruitment and selection is articulated in the HR Manual and aligned to the requirements and expectations of the MoL and MoHERI (SM047). The College also has a Staff Recruitment and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Plan 2021-26 owned by the HR Manager and approved by AB and BoT in November 2021, with more details provided on the stages in the staff selection and recruitment process (SM028). However, the Panel found possibly misleading information between the two described procedures; hence only the HR Manual points out that academic staff are subject to final approval by the affiliated university UWE (Portfolio, p.94, SM047). The Panel urges the College to ensure it communicates its approach consistently.

Staff needs are identified and presented by HoDs to the Dean and Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources in Budget and Resources Meetings, who again inform AB and/or EMB (ASM543). The recruitment and selection process includes 'defining job descriptions; advertising positions; scrutinizing CVs and shortlisting candidates; interviewing candidates by interview Panel; and selecting, contracting and inducting staff into the College' (Portfolio, p.93, SM047).

As per the HR Manual, vacancies are advertised nationally and internationally through acknowledged employment announcement websites and recruitment agencies. The Panel was able to confirm that posts were advertised on the College website and in local newspapers (ASM 530). Upon review of the evidence provided, the Panel found that the interview panels sufficiently represent the relevant College stakeholders, that is, the Dean, HoDs, staff and HR Manager (ASM530). The College states that the interview panel may

include internal/external members of the College, if necessary, and in the case of the UWE involvement for academic staff, feedback is sought via email (SM029, SM047). Once an appropriate candidate has been selected, an employment offer will be made (SM047). The College implements a three-Month probationary period for all new staff. Once an appointee progresses through probation, the College then places the staff member on the annual Staff Performance Appraisal Scheme that monitors annual performance (SM127). GCET seeks feedback on the recruitment and selection and staff after the probationary period in the form of a questionnaire (Portfolio, p.94, SM051).

The College points out that it will freeze and re-announce a position should the appropriate candidate not be found (Portfolio, p.94, interviews). Referring to the above-mentioned questionnaire, the Panel could not detect an approach to evaluating the collected data on the recruitment and selection process (SM051). In view of the above-mentioned vacant positions (Subarea 8.1), this however could be relevant in ensuring that the recruitment and selection process is appropriate for finding the right candidates.

Recommendation 26

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review its recruitment and selection approach to ensure it has a comprehensive recruitment and selection process in place with feedback sought and procedures analysed to determine that its approach is effective and constructive.

8.4 *Induction*

The College's approach to induction for all newly appointed staff is documented in the HR Manual, the Staff Induction Policy and the associated Induction Checklist (SM047, SM048, SM051). All procedures were newly introduced in 2021. As per Staff Induction Policy, the induction programme is delivered by the Dean; the HR Manager; the relevant Head of Department; the Heads of Units; and the Head of QACO. The monitoring of induction standards and satisfaction is conducted through the Induction Checklist given to newly appointed staff on arrival and an Induction Satisfaction Questionnaire for completion by newly appointed staff (SM051). At the end of the probation period, the head of the relevant department will review the performance of the new staff and send the report to HR Manager with a recommendation for continued employment (SM127). New staff will be invited to workshops on College technology and information management system, for example, Moodle (SM331).

The Panel recognizes that GCET has begun implementing a comprehensive approach to staff induction with the necessary policies clearly outlined in the HR Manual and procedures established to help staff integrate into GCET comfortably and understand their duties and responsibilities. The Induction Checklist enables GCET to know if staff are receiving a full induction; however, the Panel found it challenging to determine a clear monitoring and review system for the staff induction procedure (SM051).

Recommendation 27

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology implement a clear monitoring and review system for the staff induction process to ensure its induction procedure is effective and constructive.

8.5 Professional Development

Professional Development (PD) is articulated in the HR Manual and Staff Recruitment and Continuing Professional Development Plan and is subject to the annual budget approval (SM047, SM028, ASM496). PD is supported by the College at an individual and collective level with support provided through: 'financial contributions and time allowance for individual staff to undertake academic qualifications, such as PhD, Masters or professional teaching qualifications; external conference and workshop participation; internal workshop participation; and ad-hoc requests throughout the academic year' (ASM422, ASM496-ASM499).

The College explains PD to be offered according to the needs identified in the annual Staff Performance Appraisal meetings and by the mutual understanding of the Dean and Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources, resulting in an annual Staff Development Plan (Portfolio, p.96, ASM487). The annual Staff Development Plan outlines the strategic approach and schedule of workshops, and the Panel acknowledged that UWE also holds workshops with staff on-site and virtually (SM228, ASM487). Furthermore, the College plans to develop its in-house and young administration staff and is in the process of formalizing benchmarking agreements and MoUs with other HEIs in Oman to liaise, which also include professional development (Portfolio, p.97, SM128, SM129, SM244). The Panel welcomes these initiatives.

GCET offers a PD programme to all new academic staff. The Postgraduate Certificate Practice (PCAP/LTHE) is a teaching qualification programme, which is provided by UWE as a pass/fail course, and all new staff are required to enrol on it if they do not have an equivalent qualification (SM227, SM047). The programme is financed by the academic staff member who pays **70%** (**1200 OMR**) of the tuition fees, whilst GCET covers the remaining **30%** (**500 OMR**). Payments are made in monthly instalments. The Panel requested but did not receive documentation of formal feedback provided by academic staff on PCAP/LTHE and randomly found evidence showing that the costs of the programme are of concern to staff (ASM505). Considering that academic staff are paying for the programme and are required to participate, the Panel urges GCET to regularly seek feedback from its participating staff to ensure a win-win situation for both staff and the College. The Panel found the program to be of good quality and well-recognised (ASM544).

GCET uses a Performance Appraisal Form to review PD conducted in the past academic year and includes a section for forthcoming staff development requirements and activities for the next academic year (SM050, ASM487). The Panel also found a section in the Teaching Observation Forms which addresses PD requirements (ASM501). However, the Panel found that these sections had not been considered sufficiently in both forms and that in exit surveys, staff had commented on missing PD opportunities (SM204, ASM505).

The Panel found all PD activities (with the exception of PCAP/LTHE) to be collected in one template divided by AYs (SM228). Further evidence provided by the College shows that individual staff are attending internal and external PD workshops, and ad-hoc requests by staff are considered by the College (ASM496, ASM498, ASM499). The Panel, however, could not recognise a systematic approach to collecting data and meaningful feedback on PD in alignment with GCET's specific objectives, that is, to offer general, research-related, or young administrative staff training. Furthermore, the inconsistency in obtaining PD requirements in the annual Staff Appraisal Forms is concerning.

The College has established a convincing approach with appropriate policies and procedures for deploying its PD activities. It, however, needs to ensure that a robust data collection and transparent review process is implemented, which is informed by feedback from staff and analysed so the College knows that its PD approach is maintaining and advancing the skills of its staff.

Recommendation 28

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology implement a robust and transparent approach to identifying professional development needs with systematic review and evaluation processes in place to ensure that the College's professional development is effective and constructive.

8.6 *Performance Planning and Review*

The forms and approach to the annual Staff Performance Appraisal are updated in AY 2020-21. The Dean monitors the use and effectiveness of the Staff Performance Appraisal Scheme through annual post-appraisal scheme meetings with HoDs to receive their feedback regarding their staff and to evaluate and review the performance of individual staff in each academic and administrative support department (SM204, SM 205).

HoDs are responsible for monitoring their departmental staff and evaluating their performance in line with the individual staff's job description (ASM487). Performance monitoring for new staff is conducted through a report on the completed probationary period to the HR Manager, and the annual Staff Performance Appraisal template is conducted for all staff (SM127, SM050, ASM487). The head of the department will conduct one-to-one meetings in which the staff appraisal criteria are jointly discussed and the form filled (interviews). The Staff Performance Appraisal template includes KPIs aligned to the College's strategic goals and annual objectives for each staff member. The Panel noticed that the staff appraisal form covers 24 pages. In the examples provided, the Panel found sections to be incomplete and was able to identify that these were, possibly, due to sections not applicable either to the academic or the administrative staff appraised, questioning the efficiency of the new system (ASM487). The Panel, however, also found evidence of negligence by the appraiser with applicable sections not correctly completed. The Panel was pleased to hear upon its Visit that the College, which had implemented the new scheme with the intention

to be more consistent, structured and fairer, had already acknowledged that it had "over-engineered" the staff appraisal form and was in the process of revising it (Portfolio, p.99). The Panel would like to remark that whilst it considers the alignment of staff performance to GCET's strategic goals and KPIs laudable, it questions whether the Staff Performance Appraisal Form is the correct tool to use considering its lengthy format and the expectation that staff are appraised on their ability to collect and provide the information and evidence required to measure strategic intent.

Affirmation 10

The OAAAQA agrees with the Global College of Engineering and Technology that the Staff Performance Appraisal Form is to be revised in order to ensure that the review of its staff performance is comprehensive, transparent and fair.

The Panel acknowledged that new academic staff are observed three times in class in the first year and, from then on, twice per AY. There is an OPMS tracking system, and monitoring which is part of QACO' responsibility (ASM501). The HR Manual lists peer-to-peer and manager review under staff development as well as assessment of staff performance, and the Teaching Observation Procedure Policy clearly states that teaching observations are developmental and judgmental (SM047, SM132). The Panel found that the teaching observation procedure encouraged staff to reflect on their teaching practice. However, the Panel noticed inconsistencies in the number of observations staff members experience and the extent to which the Teaching Observation Forms are completed. Considering that teaching observation is rated and used in the Staff Appraisal Scheme, the Panel urges the College to ensure a consistent approach.

Recommendation 29

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology review its Teaching Observation Procedure to ensure it is applied in a fair, consistent, and transparent manner.

8.7 *Promotion and Other Incentives*

The approach to promotions and other incentives is outlined in the HR Manual and the Academic Staff Promotions Policy, which were both reviewed in the AY 2020-21 and approved by BoT (SM014, SM045, SM047). Staff bonuses and incentives are based on the Staff Performance Appraisal Scheme and discussed in formal meetings between the HoDs, the Dean and the Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources to ensure that any increments and bonuses agreed upon are transparently, fairly, and consistently applied in each department (Portfolio, p.99, SM204, SM205). The Panel noticed that staff commented positively on the bonuses they received as a form of appreciation for their extra work (interviews). Decisions are communicated to the Finance Office Manager for action (SM204). Incentive changes to staff contracts lead to the HR Manager issuing a new contract (Portfolio, p.99).

The Staff Promotion Policy clearly outlines the academic staff promotion criteria and process (SM045). The Policy foresees an Academic Staff Promotion Panel to be responsible for any decision on academic staff promotion and an external independent reviewer to provide independent judgement in assessing academic promotion applications (SM045). However, the Panel could not thoroughly verify the approach's transparency and fairness due to incomplete documentation of the decision process in the case of an example provided (ASM502).

The College indicated that revision of its academic promotion scheme included aligning it to MoHERI requirements by providing a transparent directive for academic staff through the conversion of previously UK-oriented academic titles (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Professor) to academic titles common to the Oman HEI domain (Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor) and setting clear academic grades provided with explicit route and criteria according to qualifications, experience, duties and responsibilities (Portfolio, p.99, SM045, SM047, SM188). The reviews were approved by AB and BoT and are to be reviewed every three years (SM188, SM191). Administrative staff may only be promoted if a more senior position is vacant; however, the Panel noticed a vibrant and empowered young staff activity and the College's support in supporting their further education (Portfolio, p.100, ASM497, interviews).

8.8 *Severance*

The HR Manual, as the overall document for human resources governance, addresses GCET's approach, deployment and implementation of severance terms and conditions - under employment contract & grievance - and these are also articulated in the Contracts of Employment signed by each staff member and the Dean of College on appointment (SM047, ASM 506). Every staff member receives a 3-month probationary period, and should they receive a negative probationary report by the head of the department; then their contract is terminated.

All administrative support staff are required to be citizens of Oman, and their employment and severance conditions are protected after one year of employment. All academic staff, both citizens of Oman and residents, are typically offered a 1-year or 2-year contract, which is renewable (ASM506). For citizens of Oman, a renewal would be for an indefinite period, whilst non-Omani staff receive a further fixed period contract. The termination or extension of contracts would (usually) be discussed in staff performance appraisal meetings, and in the case of extension, the head of the department would inform the HR Manager, and the Dean would authorise and sign the new contract. If severance occurs, the staff member receives a severance pay-off.

All staff leaving the College are offered the opportunity of an exit survey which is distributed and analysed by the HR Manager (SM245, ASM503). Staff exit survey results are discussed in HR Meetings (ASM505).

GCET's severance process is comprehensive and in line with the Employment Laws of the Sultanate of Oman (Portfolio, p.100). The Panel was able to confirm that severance procedures are implemented effectively and fairly, with attention being paid to issues raised by leaving staff (SM204).

8.9 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention

GCET relates its staff organisational climate to its SP 20211-26, Goal 5, which aims to 'empower staff to deliver excellence in all services and activities' (SM003). With the appointment of the new Dean, the College underwent many changes in the AY 2020-21. The College considers these to be opportunities for improvement that are pursued and deployed in a collegiate style and participative approach to decision-making (Portfolio, p.101). Amongst others, the College lists these as changing the standing committee structures to include more staff; enabling regular contact and discussions with HoDs on an individual or collective basis; converting acting-up into permanent positions; publishing certificates and financial awards to staff for achievements; introducing a tri-annual GCET Newsletter to share news collegiately; implementing the annual staff performance review scheme; and updating the staff satisfaction survey (Portfolio, p.101-102). The Panel found all guidelines, procedures, and policies relating to GCET staff sufficiently outlined in the HR Manual, including procedures for staff grievance and code of conduct (SM047).

The College has implemented several activities to promote a positive cultural climate, such as published certificates and financial awards, a tri-annual newsletter to share news and enhance staff engagement in College activities, and the College Dean will now host an annual beginning-of-the-year lunch for all staff to welcome newly appointed staff (Portfolio, p. 95, SM057, SM058). The College considers the decline in staff turnover rates an improved staff organisation climate indicator. Statistics for the years 2019 –22 show that staff retention has increased in both academic and administrative departments (SM029). Staff retention is monitored by the HR Manager and reported to the Dean.

Staff satisfaction is regularly surveyed through a staff satisfaction questionnaire at the end of each academic year (SM365). The survey was updated in AY 2020-21 and covered areas of GCET that concern satisfaction with the overall College approach at the departmental level and with some but not all services. The Panel was not able to fully scrutinize the staff satisfaction trend of the past three years because the analysis was not available prior to or at the time of the Visit (ASM508, ASM532). It, however, noticed that the percentage of feedback provided in the latest survey was 25% which the Panel considers to be very low (ASM507). The Panel found results of the AY 2020-21 discussed in an HR Meeting where some but not all apparent issues were addressed (ASM505). The agreement stated in the meeting was that the QACO analyses results and action plans were requested by each HoD to address issues raised by staff (Portfolio, p.101, ASM505). The Panel, however, could not find any evidence of action plans developed at QACO or HoDs level with follow-up procedures implemented.

Due to the low response numbers of staff in the staff satisfaction surveys and lack of other possible forms of College evaluation, for example, through documented feedback on workshops, the Panel could not identify that staff feedback is comprehensively sought and monitored and improvements made based on a clear review process.

Recommendation 30

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology develop a comprehensive approach to monitoring and reviewing staff satisfaction with an action plan to address issues raised and implement improvements in order to maintain a positive organisational climate.

8.10 Omanisation

The HR Manager oversees all aspects of human resources and maintains, manages, and updates data relating to the staff profiles, including data on Omanisation. The Dean and/or Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources monitor and review the profile data, which is also regularly sent to the relevant ministries for verification of compliance with Omanisation requirements (SM004, SM029).

The College employs an overall rate of 53% of citizens of Oman (Portfolio, Appendix F, SM029). It has 81 employees, of which 67 are fully contracted staff. Additionally, 27% of academic staff are Omani, and the overall percentage of citizens of Oman employed at the College is 45% (ASM492).

The Panel noticed that the College addresses Omanisation in Goal 5, Objective 5.4 of its SP 2021-22 and OP 2021-22 (SM003, SM040), however, it merely states to ensure that regulations regarding Omanisation are followed and falls short of an explicit strategy to recruit Omani staff. In interviews, the Panel learned that the College was beginning to recruit its own graduates and believes this and the College's approach to supporting junior academics through joint research activities with senior researchers and promoting from within the College junior and early career staff to senior positions reflect an approach, which in the long-term can impact and stabilise the retention rates of Omani employees and encourages GCET to include its efforts in a decisive strategy.

9. GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

This Chapter reports on the planning and management of the general support services and facilities in relation to public relations and marketing, communication services and facilities management.

9.1 *General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management*

The SP 2021-26 emphasises the importance of facility management through Goal 2 as stated in Objective 2.4: 'Ensuring the facilities and infrastructure are modernised and developed to foster a vibrant learning environment to attract and support new students' and Goal 7 as stated in Objective 7.4: 'Improving College facilities and infrastructure to foster a vibrant learning, teaching, research and student support environment'. This area of operation is managed by the Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources with the help of the Facility Management Services Unit (Portfolio, p.104). In the Interviews, the Panel learned that the Unit interacts closely with the departments in charge of finance and procurement for the planning and maintenance of the entire campus.

The College provides the following general support services and facilities to its students and staff: car parking, security facilities, health and safety, catering facilities, prayers, and common rooms, study and meeting rooms, offices for staff, transportation for staff, and printing facilities (Portfolio, p.104). The Panel also heard with appreciation that the College had secured a plot of land from the government for a permanent campus of the College to be constructed. All operations are expected to move to the permanent location by 2030 (Portfolio, p.110).

During the Visit, the Panel learned that the management of facilities is governed by a range of policies, including the Health and Safety Policy, Evacuation Plan, and Vehicle and Transportation Policy (SM065, SM294, SM063). The Staff Satisfaction Survey conducted on AY 2021-22 shows high satisfaction with IT and Library resources and facilities (SM365). The Panel also reviewed the results obtained from the Student Satisfaction Surveys about the facilities for the last three years and found that the satisfaction rate is not exceeding 50% for the appropriateness of teaching rooms, catering, prayer, and entertainment facilities (SM261). In the Interviews, the Panel heard that the female students were not satisfied with the adequacy of the facilities available for them, such as the prayer and common rooms. Moreover, the students complained about the limited space available in some classrooms and laboratories during some lectures.

Furthermore, the Panel noticed that the administration buildings (Block A) have no lift services to facilitate the movements of disabled students or staff (SM012). The Panel is concerned with the effectiveness of the management and planning approach for the general support services and facilities and urges the College to develop an effective management and planning mechanism to review the adequacy of educational and common space to meet vibrant learning, teaching, research, and students support environment. The Panel encourages the College to utilize the SSD to make informed decisions that reflect students' needs (see Subarea 2.9). The Panel also encourages the College to conduct a benchmark for the general services and

facilities with other national, regional and international institutes to explore opportunities to improve the services and establish a conducive, supportive, and safe environment for students.

Recommendation 31

The OAAAQA recommends that the Global College of Engineering and Technology systematically plan, review, and benchmark the adequacy of educational space to meet a vibrant learning, teaching, research, and student support environment.

9.2 *Public Relations and Marketing*

The Marketing, Publicity and Recruitment Office (MPRO) is the operational entity in charge of internal and external communication, including media events, press releases, hosting of community engagement activities, social media of GCET, noticeboard and College digital media system, and advertising on digital billboards, and LED screens (Portfolio, p.107). GCET stands guided by its Strategic Goal 2: 'ensuring institutional growth through increased student recruitment and admissions' of SP 2021-26 (SM003).

The College has established the Marketing and Recruitment Committee (MRC) to discuss marketing and publicity matters and a range of alumni, community, and business engagement issues (SM201, SM202, SM203). The committee is also responsible for approving the College's marketing plan and following up on the implementation and outcomes of this plan (Portfolio, p.107). The MRC is chaired by the Deputy Dean of Administration and Resources, and its members consist of HoDs, PLs and other relevant staff from across the College. The MRC meets bi-monthly to discuss the marketing plan prepared by MPRO and coordinate the activities between the departments and the MPRO. MPRO held several marketing events inside and outside of Oman (SM201), such as, school visits, industrial visits to build good relations with industry, visits to community clubs, and visits to embassies, and government entities (SM201, SM202).

Moreover, MPRO participates in events, such as seminars and workshops, and academic and non-academic exhibitions held in the Sultanate of Oman and overseas, such as participating in Expo Dubai (SM201, SM258). During the interviews, the Panel noted with appreciation that the MPRO team utilises the SSD to plan for the marketing campaigns and support graduates in finding jobs (SM339, ASM526). GCET stated that the marketing plan's effectiveness is measured by the increase in the number of applicants applying for the College (Portfolio, p.107). In the interviews, the Panel heard that most students joined the College because of recommendations from the existing students studying in the College. The Panel encourages the College to develop a mechanism to evaluate the marketing plan's effectiveness by collecting feedback from students and benchmarking the marketing plan with other institutes.

9.3 *Communication Services*

GCET operates with a communication protocol empowered by Strategic Goal 5 that strengthens staff support, development, and communication and encourages a collegiate working environment (SM003). AB

and EAB discussed and approved the communication protocol (SM187, SM188, SM189, SM190, SM191). GCET's communication mechanisms aim to ensure a timely and precise exchange of information and decisions; hence, it uses several appropriate communication channels (Portfolio, p.87). The College's communication services rely on a range of media like websites, emails, telephone lines using Voice over IP (VoIP), social media, newsletter, noticeboard, and College digital media system. All staff and students are provided with a College email account and access to software applications. The College publishes a tri-annual GCET Newsletter to communicate with internal and external stakeholders the staff and students' activities, share news, and encourage greater staff engagement in the activities of the College (SM057, SM058). During the Visit, the Panel reviewed these newsletters and found them useful and informative with regard to the activities happening on GCET.

In terms of the language of communication, GCET provided some documents in Arabic and some in English. The Panel found that GCET has no formal policy to determine the language of communication; GCET is therefore urged to develop a formal policy on the language of communication. During preparation for the QA audit, the College was developing a Communication Policy by integrating communication protocols, services and guidance into one document. The Panel agrees with this direction. During the interviews, the Panel heard that the staff and students are satisfied with the communication services in place and have no issue with it. The Panel, however, encourages the College to conduct a formal feedback collection on the communication services on a regular basis and benchmark it with other institutes to ensure the quality of the services.

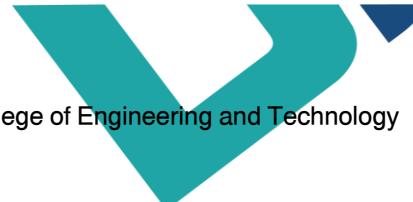
Affirmation 11

The OAAAQA agrees that the Global College of Engineering and Technology needs to develop and implement a comprehensive communication policy and establish mechanisms to evaluate its effectiveness.

9.4 Facilities Management

GCET governs the quality of the campus facilities by several policies and practices, including a Health and Safety Policy, Fire Drill and Evacuation Plan, and contract arrangements to provide a standard of service (SM294, SM065, SM293, SM292). A dedicated unit, Facilities Management Services Unit, is responsible for maintaining the facilities, fixing or repairing issues, managing the outsourced work and ensuring a safe and secure working environment within the campus. The unit handles these through outsourced contracts to ensure that all services meet the standards (SM292). However, the landlord takes care of some services since the College operates from a rented building. Thus, some of the maintenance and repair works are carried out by the building owner, such as the maintenance of air conditions, fire and safety equipment, and water pumps (SM295). During the Visit, the Panel learned that the Unit performs a regular check for the services provided by the landlord and outsourced contractors to ensure the condition of the services (ASM531). The Unit goes through a pre-agreed services level agreement documented in the contract to ensure the effectiveness of delivered services; thus, the College will penalise any service level breach.

The campus now contains three buildings: Administration Building (Block A), the Teaching and Learning Building (Block B), and Student Hub (Block C). The College has enhanced and improved its provision by opening up the new student-centric Student Hub Building (SM012). Both Block A and Block B have undergone a major refurbishment, with a library expansion, incorporation of an English Language Lab, a new area for RARO and SSSO opened-up in the grand reception area on Block B to be convenient to staff, students and external visitors (SM012, SM265). The level of student and staff satisfaction with the College's general facilities and services has improved over the past three years due to the effort of the College to enhance its facilities and services and due to the shift from operating from one building to having a three buildings campus with extended facilities and services (SM261). The Panel is of the view that the College needs to expedite the process of moving to the new campus, given the growth in the number of students and the limitation in the space with the current facilities.



APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AUDIT PANEL

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Oman

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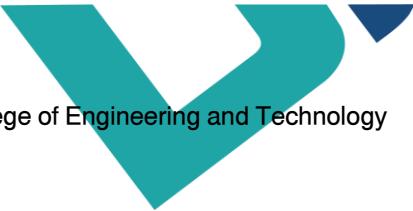
APPENDIX B: ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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

AB	Academic Board
ADC	Academic Department Committee
ADRI	Review Approach (Approach, Deployment, Results, Improvement)
APL	Accredited Prior Learning
APR.....	Annual Programme Review
APT	Academic Personal Tutoring
ARR	Annual Research Report
AY	Academic Year
BoD	Board of Directors
BoT	Board of Trustees
CAP.....	Curriculum Approval Panel
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CEFR.....	Common European Framework of Reference
CPD.....	Continuing Professional Development
DDAA.....	Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs
DDAR.....	Deputy Dean for Administration and Resources
DMS	Document Management System
EAB.....	External Advisory Board
EE	External Examiner
EEE.....	Electrical and Electronics Engineering
EMB	Executive Management Board
FC	Finance Committee
FMS	Facilities Management Services
FO.....	Finance Office
FS	Foundation Studies
GA(s).....	Graduate Attribute(s)
GCET	Global College of Engineering and Technology

GFP.....	General Foundation Programme
H&S	Health and Safety
HEI(s).....	Higher Education Institution(s)
HoD(s).....	Head(s) of Department
HR.....	Human Resources
HRO.....	Human Resources Office
ICTSS	ICT Support Services
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IET	Institution of Engineering and Technology
ICTSSO.....	ICT Support Services Office
IP.....	Intellectual Property
IRS	Institutional Research Strategy
ISA	Institutional Standards Assessment
ISAA.....	Institutional Standards Assessment Application
IT	Information Technology
KPI(s)	Key Performance Indicator(s)
LO(s)	Learning Outcome(s)
LLRC.....	Library and Learning Resource Centre
LMS.....	Learning Management System
LTEC.....	Learning, Teaching & Enhancement Committee
LTHE.....	Learning and Teaching in Higher Education
ME.....	Mechanical Engineering
MOs	Module Learning Outcomes
MoHERI	Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Information
MoL.....	Ministry of Labour
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPRO	Marketing, Publicity and Recruitment Office
MRC.....	Marketing and Recruitment Committee
MUC.....	Majan University College
MVV.....	Mission, Vision and Values

OAAAQA.....	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority and Quality Assurance of Education
OQF	Oman Qualification Framework
OP	Operation Plan
OPMS.....	Operation Plan Monitoring System
PAC.....	Postgraduate Admissions Committee
PACDA.....	Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance
PCAP	Postgraduate Certificate for Academic Practice
PER.....	Periodic Enhancement Review
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PL.....	Programme Leader
PLO	Programme Learning Outcomes
QACO	Quality Assurance and Compliance Office
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
QAR	Quality Audit Report, 2018
RARO.....	Registry, Admissions and Registration Office
RIC.....	Research and Innovation Committee
RIO.....	Research and Innovation Office
ROP	Royal Oman Police
RTN.....	Research-Teaching Nexus
SAC.....	Student Advisory Council
SM.....	Supporting Material
SP	Strategic Plan
SPTA.....	Student Peer Teaching Assistant
SRS.....	Student Record System
SSD.....	Student Statistical Dashboard
SSLC.....	Staff Student Liaison Committee
SSSO	Student Support Services Office
ToR	Terms of Reference
TRC.....	The Research Council



TU Training Unit
UK United Kingdom
UPEM Urban Planning and Environment ...
USA United States of America
UWE University of the West of England

NOTES

