CONTENTS

Overview of the Quality Audit Process .................................................. 3
How to Read This Report ........................................................................ 4
Conclusions ............................................................................................. 5

Executive Summary of Findings ............................................................... 5
Summary of Commendations ................................................................... 7
Summary of Affirmations ......................................................................... 7
Summary of Recommendations ............................................................... 7

1 Governance and Management ............................................................... 10
  1.1 Mission, Vision and Values .............................................................. 10
  1.2 Governance .................................................................................. 11
  1.3 Management ................................................................................ 12
  1.4 Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance .............. 14
  1.5 Strategic Planning ......................................................................... 14
  1.6 Operational Planning ..................................................................... 15
  1.7 Financial Management .................................................................. 16
  1.8 Risk Management ......................................................................... 17
  1.9 Policy Management ....................................................................... 18
  1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems ............................................... 19
  1.11 Student Grievance Process .......................................................... 20
  1.12 Health and Safety ....................................................................... 21
  1.13 Oversight of Associated Entities (e.g. owned companies) ................... 21

2 Student Learning by Coursework Programs .......................................... 22
  2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives ....................... 22
  2.2 Curriculum .................................................................................... 23
  2.3 Student Entry Standards .................................................................. 24
  2.4 Teaching Quality ........................................................................... 24
  2.5 Plagiarism ...................................................................................... 25
  2.6 Student Placements ....................................................................... 26
  2.7 Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation .............................. 27
  2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation ................................................ 28
  2.9 Student Retention and Progression .................................................. 28
  2.10 Graduate Destinations and Employability ....................................... 28

3 Student Learning by Research Programs ............................................. 30

4 Staff Research and Consultancy ........................................................... 31
  4.1 Research Planning and Management ............................................... 31
  4.2 Research Performance ................................................................... 32
  4.3 Research Funding Schemes ............................................................ 32
  4.4 Consultancy Activities .................................................................... 33
  4.5 Ethics and Biosafety ....................................................................... 33
  4.6 Intellectual Property ....................................................................... 33
  4.7 Professional Development for Research .......................................... 34
  4.8 Research Commercialization .......................................................... 34
  4.9 Research – Teaching Nexus .............................................................. 34
5 Industry and Community Engagement .................................................................................................................. 35
  5.1 Industry and Community Engagement Planning and Management ................................................................. 35
  5.2 Relationships with Industry and Employers .................................................................................................. 35
  5.3 Relationships with Professions ...................................................................................................................... 36
  5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers ............................................................................................ 36
  5.5 Relationships with Alumni .......................................................................................................................... 37
  5.6 Relationships with the Community at Large .................................................................................................. 37

6 Academic Support Services .................................................................................................................................. 38
  6.1 Academic Support Services Planning and Management .................................................................................. 38
  6.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records) ................................................................................................... 38
  6.3 Library ........................................................................................................................................................... 39
  6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services ............................................................................................ 40
  6.5 Academic Advising ......................................................................................................................................... 41
  6.6 Student Learning Support .............................................................................................................................. 41
  6.7 Teaching Resources ........................................................................................................................................ 42

7 Students and Student Support Services ........................................................................................................... 44
  7.1 Students and Student Support Services Planning and Management ............................................................... 44
  7.2 Student Profile ................................................................................................................................................ 44
  7.3 Student Satisfaction and Climate .................................................................................................................. 45
  7.4 Student Behavior ........................................................................................................................................... 45
  7.5 Career and Employment Services ................................................................................................................ 46
  7.6 Student Finances ............................................................................................................................................ 46
  7.7 Accommodation, Catering and Transport .................................................................................................... 47
  7.8 Medical and Counselling Facilities ................................................................................................................ 47
  7.9 International Student Services ....................................................................................................................... 47
  7.10 Social and Recreational Services and Facilities .......................................................................................... 47

8 Staff and Staff Support Services ....................................................................................................................... 48
  8.1 Human Resources Planning and Management ................................................................................................. 48
  8.2 Staff Profile ...................................................................................................................................................... 48
  8.3 Recruitment and Selection ............................................................................................................................... 49
  8.4 Induction .......................................................................................................................................................... 49
  8.5 Professional Development ............................................................................................................................... 49
  8.6 Performance Planning and Review .................................................................................................................. 50
  8.7 Severance ....................................................................................................................................................... 50
  8.8 Staff Organizational Climate and Retention .................................................................................................. 50
  8.9 Omanization .................................................................................................................................................... 51

9 General Support Services and Facilities ........................................................................................................... 52
  9.1 General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management ............................................................... 52
  9.2 Public Relations and Marketing ..................................................................................................................... 52
  9.3 Communication Services ................................................................................................................................ 53
  9.4 Facilities Management .................................................................................................................................... 53

Appendix A. Audit Panel ............................................................................................................................................ 54

Appendix B. Evidence of Plagiarism in ASU Materials .......................................................................................... 55

Appendix C. Abbreviations, Acronyms and Terms ............................................................................................... 56
OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This Quality Audit Report (the ‘Report’) documents the findings of a Quality Audit by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) of A’Sharqiyah University (ASU). It comments on ASU’s Mission and Vision, and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its systems for achieving that Mission and Vision. Quality Audit is the first stage in Oman’s institutional accreditation process. It is designed to provide a level of assurance to the public about the quality of ASU’s activities and to give constructive feedback to the University to assist with its ongoing improvement initiatives.

The Quality Audit commenced with ASU undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarized in its Quality Audit Portfolio (the ‘Portfolio’). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the due date of 27 December 2016.

The OAAA appointed an external Audit Panel (the ‘Panel’), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the Quality Audit. For membership of the Panel see Appendix A. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 9 February 2017 to consider ASU’s Portfolio. Following this, a representative of the Audit Panel Chairperson and the Review Director undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to ASU on 6 March 2017 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel’s Audit Visit.

Prior to the Audit Visit, the Panel invited submissions from the public about the quality of ASU’s activities. One submission was received and considered by the Panel.

The Audit Visit took place between 1- 4 May 2017. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 130 people, including governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. They also visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

No information provided after 4 May 2017 (the last day of the Audit Visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit, other than pre-existing evidence specifically requested by the Panel in advance and/or submitted by the institution in response to Quality Audit Report v5.

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

The Panel’s audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. This Report was approved for release by the OAAA Board on 3 May 2018.

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree No. 54/2010. Its responsibilities include conducting quality audits of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman. For further information, visit the OAAA website (http://www.oaaa.gov.om). Full details of the quality audit process are available in OAAA’s HEI Quality Audit Manual (available from http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Quality ).
HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

The Report is made public because it also may be of interest to students and potential students, their families, employers, government, other higher education institutions in Oman and abroad, and other audiences. Students, in particular, may find this Report useful because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2, 6 and 7 below). However, prospective students should still undertake their own investigations when deciding which higher education institution will best serve their particular learning needs.

Quality Audit is the first stage in Oman’s two-stage process for institutional accreditation. Its focus is formative (developmental) rather than summative. In other words, although the audit addresses nine areas of activity which are common to all institutions, 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 and in the context of relevant legal regulations. Therefore, Quality Audit recognizes that each institution has a unique purpose and profile; it does not directly compare one institution with all the other institutions in Oman.

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

The second stage in the institutional accreditation process is Standards Assessment. Unlike the Quality Audit, this stage, which will take place about four years after the Quality Audit, does provide a summative assessment against external standards in the same nine areas of activity. It should be noted that Oman also operates a system of accreditation/recognition for academic programs, separately from the institutional accreditation process. For more information on Oman’s System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education please visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

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

This section summarizes the main findings and lists the Commandations, Affirmations and Recommendations. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report, and are not prioritized. It should be noted that other favorable comments and suggestions for improvement are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Executive Summary of Findings

A’Sharqiyah University (ASU) was established in 2009 as a private university. It is based in the A’Sharqiyah North Governorate of Sultanate of Oman, in the town of Ibra around 150 km south of Muscat. It was established in 2009 by a Ministerial Decision issued by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The first student intake was in the academic year (AY) 2010-2011. At the time of the Audit Visit, ASU had around 2,900 students of whom 748 students were on the General Foundation Program. Around 85% of the total students were female.

ASU has three Colleges offering 10 undergraduate programs. The College of Engineering offers Diploma and Bachelors programs in Environmental Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electronics and Communication Engineering and Construction Project Management. The College of Applied Sciences offers Diploma and Bachelors programs in Food Science and Human Nutrition and in Marine Sciences and Fisheries. The College of Business Administration offers Diploma and Bachelors programs in Management, Accounting and Finance, Management Information Systems and Records and Archives Management. The Records and Archives Management program is offered in Arabic. All other programs are offered in English. All programs have exit awards at Diploma and bachelors level. ASU has no institutional affiliations for any of its existing programs.

The self-study exercise that resulted in a Portfolio was conducted by the Quality Audit Steering Committee (QASC) which had nine supporting sub-committees. While some aspects of this exercise were limited by a lack of systematic data collection and analysis, staff across the University were broadly aware of the self-study process and the resulting Portfolio.

ASU has developed Mission and Vision statements that are appropriate to the region and its needs. The Mission statement states that ASU aims to advance knowledge through innovative learning and applied research. In order to achieve its Mission, ASU needs to prepare broader strategies that will ensure innovative approaches are embedded across the spectrum of University activities, covering innovation in teaching and learning and ensuring also an emphasis on innovation in research and consultancy.

In terms of governance and management, a clear distinction of these two functions is maintained. The ASU governance structure as a whole is well designed and there are processes in place to ensure decisions made are appropriate. In particular, the linking mechanism between the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors, facilitated by the Executive Office, is a particular strength, ensuring that the BoD and BoT are working productively towards shared goals. The Executive Office, furthermore, in ensuring that time-sensitive decisions can be made efficiently, has enabled the progression of crucial developments beneficial to the University.

ASU developed a comprehensive Strategic Plan (SP 2014-2020) with staff engagement. This was revised in-house in 2016 with training workshops conducted by consultants who endeavoured to make the SP compatible with a Balance Scorecard (BSC) approach. While this was a welcome initiative, there was some confusion among staff regarding the current status of the SP and there has been limited engagement of staff in the SP review process. To ensure ownership of the SP, ASU needs to engage all stakeholders during the review of the plan. The SP is supported by Operational Plans (OP). Each College and each department has their own OPs. Some departments also have their own SPs. It was not clear how these SPs align with the University SP. Operational Plans have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets. In some of the OPs, the KPIs were difficult to measure. ASU needs to have a clear and consistent approach to strategic and operational planning. While there is a useful Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook and while a number
of policies and procedures have been developed to guide the activities of the University, it was observed that some of the content of these documents draws on publicly available material without acknowledgement of the sources. ASU is encouraged to ensure that all documentation is referenced appropriately and contextualized to be fit for purpose. Data has been collected and analyzed in some areas at the institutional level; the University now needs to disaggregate this data at the College level in order to make informed decisions pertaining to the specific operations of each College.

ASU’s graduate attributes are aligned to the Mission and Vision statements and these indicate that teaching and learning is the core activity of the University. All ASU’s programs are developed internally and are subject to Annual Program Review. These reviews result in Program Review and Development Plans. Action plans are developed and a cycle of quality improvement is in place. While the institution has systems for program development, validation and review, these systems were not consistently robust. ASU needs to ensure that it has quality assurance systems in place to ensure the validity of all processes and to help embed a culture of staff integrity (a current area of concern).

Student entry standards require some attention. The University needs to ensure that students have the required proficiencies (particularly in the English language where applicable) before they progress on to the higher education programs. ASU has made efforts to incorporate innovative teaching methods using smart technology tools and ASU is encouraged to continue to explore and adopt innovative teaching initiatives appropriate to its programs.

Students are provided with some opportunity for internship, but ASU needs to be consistent in its documentation and ensure that implementation in this area is carried out as approved in program specifications. While ASU monitors graduate destinations and employability, it is noted that although very few students have yet graduated, the employability rate is quite low. ASU needs to enhance systems to follow up on graduate destinations and employability and to assist students in finding jobs.

ASU has strategic intent with respect to applied research. With the intended relocation to the new campus, the University needs to put more efforts in creating a research culture by providing adequate research infrastructure such as laboratories and books in the library. Currently, not all academic staff are research active and ASU needs to provide professional development for staff to encourage research.

ASU’s relationship with the industry and the community was an evident area of strength and academic staff provide professional development and training to the community. ASU has an Industry Advisory Council to seek industry input into the curriculum and ASU has an encouraging, albeit nascent and as yet not fully structured, relationship with alumni.

In terms of academic support services, ASU is planning to implement an integrated Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to integrate systems such as admission and registration, finance and academic advising and to streamline and standardise processes across the institution. While students were generally satisfied with teaching and learning resources and are given the opportunity of financial support in certain circumstances, ASU needs to improve some facilities such the library and laboratories required for engineering programs.

ASU has HR policies and procedures in place, as articulated in a manual, to guide human resources operations. There are challenges with staff recruitment and retention, however, due to the University’s location. The University will benefit from developing strategies to attract and retain staff.

Many ASU documents such as minutes of meetings and some surveys are collected and summarized in Arabic. The award certificates are also presented in Arabic. As the ASU staff and student population comprises both Arabic and Non-Arabic speakers, the University needs to ensure equal access to and engagement with relevant documentation by all stakeholders.

ASU plans to relocate to a new campus in July 2017. The new campus will enhance library and laboratory facilities and is expected to provide sufficient physical space to accommodate student growth.
Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognizes an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends A’Sharqiyah University for its governance arrangements, in particular the effective liaison arrangements between the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors which ensure a high degree of coherence in the overall leadership of the University.

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with A’Sharqiyah University that it needs to identify and manage risks and supports its efforts in implementing a new risk management framework incorporating contingency planning.

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with A’Sharqiyah University that it needs to map graduate attributes to teaching and learning strategies as well as to learning outcomes and supports its efforts in this regard.

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with A’Sharqiyah University that it needs to enhance the efficiency of management information systems and supports the installing of the intended integrated ERP system.

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with A’Sharqiyah University regarding the need to expand campus facilities and supports the relocation to a larger and well-equipped campus to better serve students, staff and all stakeholders.

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement strategies that will embed a culture of innovation across all activities of the University in line with its Vision statement with the aim of achieving its aspirations to become an innovative university.

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University ensure that all stakeholders are engaged in its ongoing strategic planning processes and ensure that College Strategic Plans are developed in alignment with the overarching University Strategic Plan and progress is appropriately monitored.

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University attend to outlining and disseminating the principles on which annual budgets are framed with an emphasis on making the necessary linkages between the seven themes in the Strategic Plan and the allocation of resources for the achievement of the objectives of the Plan.

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a comprehensive system for developing and managing all institutional documents to ensure that they are consistent and fit for purpose.
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University develop and implement a schedule of regular reviews of individual academic and non-academic units to complement its existing approach to reviews.

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends A’sharqiyah University review its approach to internal data collection by disaggregating college level data and institutional data to ensure that these facilitate multi-level analysis and may be used effectively to inform improvements and tracking of progress.

7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University strengthen quality assurance mechanisms for the development, approval and review of all program specifications to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University review program development at diploma level to ensure that students have covered an appropriate amount of subject specific learning outcomes in order to exit with a qualification that is fit for purpose.

9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University ensure that students exit the General Foundation Program (GFP) with an appropriate level of English language proficiency to undertake their higher education studies successfully.

10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University review the workload policy to reflect activities undertaken by faculty to assure the quality of teaching and support staff research and to monitor the implementation of this policy to ensure effectiveness.

11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University, as a matter of urgency, develop and implement a system that ensures that academic integrity is upheld by all staff and students.

12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University review program specifications to ensure that internship is offered in line with the Internship Policy.

13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University develop and implement a mechanism to ensure copies of student work such as assignments and tests are stored for moderation and quality assurance purposes.

14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University review and strengthen its assessment practices through, for example, considering introducing an external moderation system to support the maintenance of academic standards.

15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University develop appropriate systems to track and monitor graduate destinations and employability.

16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University develop and implement a comprehensive research strategy aligned to the University Strategic Plan. Furthermore, it needs to develop and implement an Operational Plan that supports research funding, research performance, intellectual property, professional development, research commercialization and the research-teaching nexus, and ensure that the plan is systematically reviewed.

17. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’sharqiyah University develop and implement systems that align planning, managing and reporting College-level activities with the University’s overall Strategic objectives for industry and community engagement, while monitoring them for effectiveness.
18. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a systematic approach to establishing relationships with professions that supports the relevance of its qualifications; these relationships should be monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness. .................................................................36

19. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop a comprehensive and consistent approach to the planning and management of its academic support services that meet the needs of students and staff at individual Colleges and as a University. ..................................................................................................38

20. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends A’Sharqiyah University strengthen student registration by developing a functional system that is efficient for the University community.................................................................39

21. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends A’Sharqiyah University develop systems to review the effectiveness of IT provision for staff and students to ensure that academic and research aims are met at the individual College as well as at the University level. ......................................................................................................................40

22. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University provide appropriate laboratory facilities to serve the needs of all programs, particularly in the fields of Science and Engineering........................................................................43

23. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a comprehensive HR plan for the University that identifies and supports the HR requirements of the individual Colleges and ensures that it aligns with the University Mission and strategic priorities. ..............................................................48

24. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a transparent system for promotion and incentives that is clearly communicated to both academic and non-academic staff.................................................................50

25. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy that covers the use of Arabic and English languages to ensure that it meets the needs of diverse stakeholders; this strategy needs to be monitored for effectiveness. ........................................................................................................53
1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) was established as a private university in 2009 and is based in the A'Sharqiyah North Governorate of Oman, around 150 km south of Muscat in the town of Ibra. The first student intake at ASU was in Academic Year (AY) 2010/2011. ASU seeks to support the development of the region’s industries through the preparation of graduates who meet the workforce requirements of industry and businesses in the area.

The University has three discipline-based colleges: College of Applied Sciences (CAS); College of Engineering (CoE); and College of Business Administration (CoBA), offering 12 undergraduate programs. A General Foundation Program is provided through the Centre for Language and Foundation Studies (CLFS). Two further colleges are under development: Arts and Humanities, and Law. There are also plans to establish a College of Postgraduate Studies. ASU anticipates that student enrolment will be around 7000 when plans, including campus expansion, are realized with the commissioning of a new campus. This was being built at the time of the Audit Visit.

This Chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to overall governance and management at ASU and covers: Mission, Vision and Values; governance and management; institutional affiliations; strategic and operational planning; financial, risk and policy management; activity review systems; student grievance processes, and health and safety.

1.1 Mission, Vision and Values

ASU aspires to be a leading higher education institution in Oman that promotes authentic values, innovation and socio-economic development (Portfolio, p.1).

The Mission of ASU is stated as being to:
advance knowledge through innovative learning and applied research that will contribute to the economic and social development of the [A'Sharqiyah] Governorate by providing a conducive environment enhanced by international collaboration (Portfolio, p.1).

The Panel noted that the University Mission statement is well-attuned to regional needs and that there is a stated intention to provide a broad spectrum of professional programs, along with a number of more specialist programs (building on the recent introduction of the Marine Science program) to attract students from wider markets (Portfolio, p.II).

The Vision for ASU, as a new University, was developed in collaboration with stakeholders including the Board of Trustees (BoT), Board of Directors (BoD) and an Industry Advisory Council (IAC) with entirely external membership. The most recent iteration of the Strategic Plan picks up the emphasis in the Mission on innovation by setting out a Vision for ASU that the University will utilize the flexibility of blended learning approaches to deliver its programs to students at the Ibra campus as well as other locations. The development of student’s entrepreneurial skills will be a feature of ASU programs. The Values espoused by ASU encompass endeavor, respect, openness and trust, integrity and accountability (Portfolio, p.1).

The emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship in the Mission and Strategic Plan are noteworthy. The University of Tampere Team Entrepreneurship Program (Portfolio, p.4) is intended as a flagship project and is cited as a good initiative in this respect (see Section 5.4). The Panel heard during interviews that ASU hoped to learn about innovative teaching methods through this program but was of the opinion that further initiatives are needed to transform ASU into an innovative higher education provider. In order to achieve its Mission, the University needs to prepare broader strategies that will ensure innovative approaches are embedded across the spectrum of university activities, covering innovation in teaching and learning and ensuring, furthermore, an emphasis on innovation in research and consultancy.
The planned move to the new premises in the second half of 2017 will provide a good opportunity for ASU to consider how it might exploit the potential of the new space for the introduction of innovative strategies while additionally providing opportunities for re-purposing the existing buildings to support innovation. Consideration will be needed, however, as to how the University can embed a culture of innovation in all aspects of its work. This is a more long-term and sustainable project that will require strong policy and strategic leadership from the highest levels of ASU governance and management. The Panel recommends that the University as a whole reflect the ambitions of the Mission and Vision across the core functions of teaching and research.

**Recommendation 1**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A'Sharqiyah University develop and implement strategies that will embed a culture of innovation across all activities of the University in line with its Vision statement with the aim of achieving its aspirations to become an innovative university.

### 1.2 Governance

ASU is registered as a company with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and, as a private higher education institution, it is subject to the requirements of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). Institutional policies and procedures at ASU are framed within the parameters set by the MoHE which establishes regulations for all private higher education institutions that include the approval of BoT membership and the licensing of programs. In addition, according to ASU, there are other key bodies impacting on the University operations, such as the Capital Market Authority (CMA) (Portfolio, p.2).

Three decision-making boards are described as pivotal to ASU’s governance: the BoD, BoT and the University Academic Board (UAB) that reports to the BoT (Portfolio, p.2). The BoD represents the shareholders and has fiduciary responsibilities, ensuring requirements of the CMA are met. It meets four times each year and its work is assisted by committees such as the Internal Audit Committee and the Executive Committee that is authorized to make some decisions on behalf of the BoD (Portfolio, p.2). According to its terms of reference, responsibilities of the BoD are centered on adopting financial policies; approving budgets and reviewing regular financial statements submitted by senior management; developing, reviewing and updating policies; compiling an annual report indicating the ability of the University to sustain itself financially; and investing financial resources on behalf of the University. In addition, the BoD is responsible for the initial approval of BoT members and nominates the potential members to the MoHE for final approval (Portfolio, p.2).

The BoT has eleven members, including a representative of the MoHE, and is elected every three years. It is responsible for institutional management within the parameters of the Private University Ordinance of the MoHE as well as the mandate of the BoD. The main functions of the BoT are to adopt plans for the development of the University; approve the organizational structure; propose financial policies and developmental budgets; approve regulations, internal processes and policies, and make decisions to ensure the efficient functioning of the University. It also has duties related to appointments of members of the UAB (formerly the University Council) and members of the senior leadership team including the appointment and evaluation of the VC.

The BoT has a sub-committee called the ‘Academic Committee’ which comprises BoT members who are tasked to consider policies, reports from the VC and other academic matters before they are presented to the BoT. This Committee is conceptualized as a sub-committee that should apply a high level of technical academic knowledge to advice given to the BoT before the Board makes decisions on academic matters, including matters sent to the BoT by the UAB. Examples of recent policies approved by the BoT include the Academic Advising Policy, Academic Promotions Policy,
and the Faculty Workload Policy. In the past, the BoT has also considered matters such as organizational structure, budgeting processes and salary scales (Portfolio, p.3).

The BoD and BoT meet regularly to liaise and coordinate their activities through an Executive Office. The Executive Office considers matters such as development of the campus, finances and strategic initiatives. It involves three BoT and three BoD members who work with formal terms of reference and keep records of decisions made collectively on behalf of the other BoD and BoT members and from which they have delegated authority. The main goal of establishing the Executive Office is to ensure that time-sensitive decisions can be made so there is no delay in progressing crucial developments. The Panel considered this linking mechanism between the BoT and BoD, facilitated by the Executive Office, to be a particular strength as this ensures that BoD and BoT are working productively towards shared goals.

The Panel confirmed (through examination of documentary evidence and meetings with stakeholders in various governance arenas) that the governance structure is fully operational and furthermore that it is well-constructed and appropriate for the University. Through interviews, the Panel was able to confirm that the substance of business addressed was relevant, and that papers are circulated in advance of meetings. A range of papers and minutes examined demonstrated that the various governance bodies work to appropriate terms of reference and that records of meetings and decisions are properly documented.

The Panel concluded that the ASU governance structure as a whole is well-designed and that there are processes in place to ensure decisions are made in the appropriate arena. The links to the management structure are also considered effective as shown through examination of a selection of meeting papers and minutes. The Panel also concluded that the overall governance structure provides an effective mechanism for oversight of the University as it matures into the next decade, adding colleges, increasing research activity and growing student numbers.

**Commendation 1**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends A'Sharqiyah University for its governance arrangements, in particular the effective liaison arrangements between the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors which ensure a high degree of coherence in the overall leadership of the University.

### 1.3 Management

The overall responsibility for management of ASU rests with the Vice Chancellor (VC) who is an ex-officio member of the BoT. The VC reports to the BoT on academic matters and to the BoD for financial and administrative matters. An annual report from the VC to the BoT incorporates information from the portfolio areas of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) and Assistant Vice-Chancellor (AVC), covering both academic and administrative matters.

The VC chairs the weekly Executive Management Committee meeting comprising the VC, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) who is responsible for academic aspects of the University, and the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance (AVC). The terms of reference for the Committee focus on provision of strategic and operational oversight for all activities of the University. The University also states that the VC meets regularly with the DVC, AVC, Deans, CLFS Director, Quality Assurance, Admissions and Registration, and Student Affairs (Portfolio, p.3).

The three Colleges at the University are each headed by a Dean. The Centre for Language and Foundation Studies (CLFS) is led by a Director. The Deans meet regularly as a group with the VC and other senior managers to exchange information and to discuss management matters. Each College has a College Management Committee, a College Research and Enterprise Committee and
a College Learning and Teaching Committee. The CLFS has representation from three foundation areas, namely English, Mathematics and IT. Departments are responsible for delivery of their programs and regular department meetings cover academic and administrative matters relevant to this responsibility.

The main administrative departments are Admissions & Registration (A&R), Student Affairs (DSA), IT, Library, Human Resources, Facilities and Stores, and Public Relations and Marketing. Each of the administrative departments has a director in the leadership role. The Panel was informed that the Quality Assurance Office and its Acting Director work closely with the VC to foster a culture of self-review and continuous improvement aimed at safeguarding academic standards and enhancing the student experience.

The UAB is described as the highest academic body at ASU. UAB meets four times per year and has clear terms of reference and procedures such as voting and the establishment of quorums. Membership of UAB includes all Deans and Heads of academic and non-academic departments. Ex-officio membership is augmented by elected members and student representatives with specialist meeting support staff in attendance. There is capacity to invite professional or academic staff where additional expertise might be required. The Panel noted that minutes of meetings and decisions of the UAB are well maintained. The UAB has a range of committees that also have formal terms of reference: Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), University Research and Enterprise Committee (UREC), University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC), and an Academic Promotion Committee. In addition, there are three College Academic Boards and the Academic Board of the Centre for Language and Foundation Studies (CLFS) (Portfolio, p.2).

The three Colleges and CLFS academic boards are important arenas to initiate or provide input to policy formation, academic matters and strategic planning. Examples of topics covered at the College Academic Boards include approval of program development and operational plans for the year as well as general administrative and academic matters related to the delivery of programs such as the introduction of Moodle and students’ English language levels. The CLFS Academic Board also deals with program related academic issues (such as course descriptors) and acts as an arena for sharing information on general University developments and opportunities. The Panel found that students are represented on key UAB bodies such as College Academic Boards and the QAC.

The Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook 2016/2017 provides an overall quality assurance framework and procedures for policy approval and management, new program approval and management, program annual monitoring and review, and institutional review which is closely linked to OAAA’s approach to accreditation processes. The QAC has representatives from colleges, CLFS, Admissions and Registration and the Student Advisory Council, and is supported by the Quality Assurance Office.

The Panel examined a wide range of documents generated through ASU committees and management activities and also held discussions with managers and staff members with regard to managerial leadership at ASU. The Panel confirmed the description of management structure and processes provided (Portfolio, p.3). Reporting processes were also examined, including examples of annual reports submitted by the Deans using a template that covers areas such as student and staff data, research, accreditation of programs, action plans and progress reports, and recommendations for attention by the Dean. Reports are also submitted by non-academic departments, such as the Quality Assurance Office.

The Panel had no issue with the parameters and functions of the different elements of the management structure as set out by ASU but was concerned that the structure may be too elaborate for the current scale of the institution. With the relatively small number of staff in the institution, there was a concern that the complexity of the structure has the potential to place a heavy burden...
on those who currently operate the institution, particularly in light of the heavy teaching loads carried by academic staff (see Section 2.4).

In brief, the Panel considered there was scope for some streamlining of the management structure. For example, there is both a Strategic Planning Review Committee and a Strategy Execution Committee even though the Strategic Planning Review Committee has a strong focus on analysis of data outputs generated through the Balance Scorecard (BSC) processes while the Strategy Execution Committee is more concerned about implementation issues and how to solve them. Both committees are chaired by the VC and there is overlap in membership.

The Panel concluded that the management structure and processes, while complex for an institution at an early stage of development, are laying a good foundation on which growth and development can occur and are unlikely to require radical re-design as the institution matures to accommodate more students, staff and programs. In the meantime, however, ASU needs to monitor the appropriateness and demands of its management structure to ensure that these are providing returns on efforts during the early growth period of the University.

1.4 Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance

The Mission of ASU states that it seeks to offer innovative learning and applied research, enhanced by international collaboration (Portfolio, p.1). During the initial establishment of ASU, assistance in developing undergraduate curricula came from Oklahoma State University (OSU), USA, and Texas Tech University (TTU), USA, both of which provided drafts of program specifications and course specifications to develop undergraduate programs in the Colleges of Business Administration, Applied Sciences and Engineering. These drafts were modified and contextualized for delivery at ASU.

The Panel concluded that ASU has no institutional affiliations for any of its programs.

1.5 Strategic Planning

The ASU Strategic Plan (SP) covers the period 2014 to 2020 and is seen as a roadmap for the University’s development. Work on the SP commenced in 2013 with the planning process led by the Vice Chancellor. The project involved consultations with a wide range of stakeholders prior to submission of the SP for approval to the BoT and BoD. The SP lists seven themes: Governance and Management, Learning and Teaching, Research and Innovation, Community Engagement, Student Experience and Support, People and Performance, and Facilities Systems and Infrastructure.

Quarterly monitoring commenced in 2015/2016 with the formation of the Strategic Review Committee and Strategic Execution Committee to monitor progress on the Strategic Plan and unit plans and produce quarterly highlight reports (Portfolio, p.5). The University has recently introduced the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach for the development and implementation of the SP. Implementation of the SP is facilitated by a set of tools including a Strategy Map, GANTT charts that specify owners of the various initiatives within each Objective, and the template for a Performance Highlight Report.

Apart from the University level plan, all strategic units, namely the Colleges, CLFS, UREC, Quality Assurance and Marketing departments develop their own Strategic Plans. Academic departments contribute to the relevant College-level plans.

During interviews, the Panel was informed that ASU had developed a revised Strategic Plan in 2016 as ASU had difficulties with implementation of the original SP. On further investigation, the Panel was informed that the format of the original SP did not readily accommodate measuring the achievement of goals. Consultants were engaged to assist in revising aspects of the implementation
of the SP and, following a two-day workshop, the decision was made to introduce the BSC methodology which ASU considered to be more helpful in tracking progress. The Strategic Planning Officer appointed in 2016 works with the University’s strategic planning consultancy team and is responsible for the development and monitoring of the execution of College and departmental Strategic Plans, as well as ensuring that Operational Plans are aligned to the ASU SP (Portfolio, p.5).

Subsequently, the University reframed and re-presented the Strategic Plan in a format that is more compatible for use with the BSC. The revised version retains the original priorities but describes them as themes. The revised SP was approved by the BoT and BoD in late 2016. Essentially ASU retained the substance of its original SP but found an alternative framework that was more compatible with an implementation strategy that makes measurement of progress more effective. Each theme has a small number of objectives with an indication of data sources for the measurement of progress against KPIs.

Prior to the Audit Visit in May 2017, ASU had submitted the original SP but the Panel was later provided with the revised version on request during the Audit Visit. The Panel also reviewed the most recent College Strategic Plans available at the time of the Audit Visit and noted that these were not yet structured to reflect the framework of the revised ASU SP or the BSC approach. The Panel noted during interviews that there was some confusion as to whether the current SP was new or revised.

In summary, the Panel noted that the University has developed a sophisticated approach to strategic planning and, in responding to difficulties with implementation in the early years of the original SP, devised an approach that allows better tracking of progress than previously. While there is still some work to be done, there is evidence that ASU is working diligently to ensure that the high level frameworks trickle through to the departmental level of the University and engage all stakeholders in planning processes. The SP needs to reflect the interests of all stakeholders at all levels in ASU to ensure there is a sense of ownership. With the introduction of the new implementation systems, the University is urged to find ways to facilitate more direct input from a wider range of stakeholders from all levels of the University to embed the SP as a fundamental planning tool. ASU needs to ensure that all stakeholders are clear about the status of the revised SP and that the approach to monitoring progress is consistently implemented.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiya University ensure that all stakeholders are engaged in its ongoing strategic planning processes and ensure that College Strategic Plans are developed in alignment with the overarching University Strategic Plan and progress is appropriately monitored.

1.6 Operational Planning

ASU stated that it was at an early stage of introducing an operational planning system that is integrated with its strategic planning (Portfolio, p.6) and the Panel was informed that ASU reviewed its implementation to find an optimum way to implement a seamless operational planning system. By the time of the Audit Visit, however, these difficulties appeared to have been largely resolved and a suite of Operational Plans for the academic year 2016/2017 was in place.

The Panel noted that there was an overarching University Operational Plan for AY 2016-17 as well as a document entitled “University Strategic Plan – Operationalization Alignment Plan” forming the link between the University’s Strategic Plan and University Operational Plan 2016/2017. The structure of this document is based on the seven strategic themes of the current revised SP and for each theme there is an indication of goals, initiatives and alignment to an operational source (or organizational unit) responsible for taking action. ASU cited some 15 plans for administrative and
academic units, as well as a plan for one of the committees of the University Academic Board, flowing from this Alignment Plan. The Panel found that these plans are consistently structured with detailed objectives and allocated weightings; name of initiative, actions and weightings, and targets or milestones with associated measures. Those responsible for implementing each part of each plan are also listed. Each College has an annual Operational Plan to support the implementation of the College’s Strategic Plan. The Panel found that neither the Strategic nor the Operational Plans had resource allocations and urges ASU to ensure alignment of plans with resource allocations (see Recommendation 3).

During interviews, the Panel heard that monthly reports are submitted by organizational units using the BSC methodology with dashboards that indicate red, green and amber ratings giving a snapshot of progress towards objectives. Heads of units indicated that these monthly reports are easy to compile and provide useful data. Plans overall are monitored by the Strategic Planning Officer and are subject to review twice per year (Portfolio, p.6).

The Panel found that ASU has an approach in place for its Operational Planning, however the Panel did not find systematic alignment of the Operational Plan AY 2016-17 to the revised Strategic Plan. For example, ASU’s Operational Plan AY 2016-17 document did not mention Strategic Themes 5, Student Experience and Support and Strategic and Theme 6, People and Performance. In addition, it was not clear how the goals of IT Operational Plan, PDCL Operational Plan or the Quality Assurance Operational Plan aligned with the objectives of the revised Strategic Plan.

The Panel considered that the operational planning and reporting mechanism being used for the first time in the AY 2016/2017 is a good initiative. ASU is encouraged to review the effectiveness of the mechanism at the end of the first cycle to ensure that it provides a return on effort and facilitates achievement of the themes in the Strategic Plan as expected. The Panel urges ASU to ensure that all its Operational Plans are systematically and clearly aligned to its revised SP that uses the BSC methodology.

1.7 Financial Management

The main source of revenue for ASU is tuition fees, although the University is actively seeking to diversify its income through activities such as consulting and professional continuing education. The University has large land holdings and is looking to capitalize on the potential for establishing businesses that will bring on-going revenue to ASU. There is also active consideration of broadening the range of programs to attract students not only from the region but also internationally.

The annual budget is prepared by the Finance Department with input from different organizational units, including the Colleges, which submit proposals and channel departmental requests. The BoD approves the budget and the Finance Director then oversees the management of the budget as the year progresses. Indicators of financial performance, position and liquidity are provided for reference in the quarterly reviews sent to the BoD (Portfolio, p.6). The externally audited financial reports are included in the published ASU annual report.

The University is in the early stages of implementing an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system for streamlining financial and management accounting processes (Portfolio, p.6). The Internal Audit Department works on behalf of the BoD through the Audit and Risk Committee in ensuring proper implementation and accountability for all transactions. The Panel learned that the Internal Auditor has reviewed financial matters such as bank reconciliations and invoicing. It also noted that the Accounting Manual followed for financial operations is marked as a ‘DRAFT’ and dated April 2016. This Manual needs to be finalized and formally approved through the University channels, including the BoD.
The Panel noted in discussions during the Site Visit that there was little understanding among other than the senior staff about budget processes or the principles on which University budgets are built. While financial detail incorporated in the budget needs to be limited to the executive, and those involved in compiling data while the budget is under preparation, there is no benefit to be gained from limiting access to information about budget processes as a whole. The Panel noted a degree of frustration among less-senior staff who expressed their concerns that they are not privy to the general principles on which resources are allocated. There is much to be gained in any HEI from transparency and sharing information about principles used in institutional resource allocations and the processes by which decisions are made. If individuals understand how budgets are constructed they are much more likely to have a feeling they are part of the enterprise and to accept the outcomes of budgetary processes as fair, particularly when they have not been funded as they might have hoped.

Furthermore, in terms of how the budget is structured it was not clear how the direction of the University, as expressed through the seven themes in the Strategic Plan, are taken into account in framing the ASU annual budget. The Panel concluded that there is a need for development of policies and procedures that would ensure there are observable linkages between the seven themes and associated priorities articulated in the Strategic Plan and the decisions made in the allocation of resources. In summary, ASU needs to be able to show that budgetary strategy is directed towards the achievement of the themes and priorities established in the Strategic Plan.

**Recommendation 3**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University attend to outlining and disseminating the principles on which annual budgets are framed with an emphasis on making the necessary linkages between the seven themes in the Strategic Plan and the allocation of resources for the achievement of the objectives of the Plan.

### 1.8 Risk Management

As a new private university, ASU is facing a number of challenges in establishing itself as a sustainable institution. It relies heavily on the allocation of scholarships from the Omani government and on building a reputation that will attract students from beyond the immediate catchment area of Ibra as well as motivating well-qualified academic staff to take up employment at ASU. The Panel heard from senior leaders and stakeholders about the risks they perceive as well as some of the strategies being pursued in relation to matters where the University believes it can influence outcomes.

The Audit and Risk Committee, a sub-committee of the BoD, is focused on oversight of risk management. According to the terms of reference, this committee takes responsibility for financial and administrative reporting processes, systems for internal accounting and controls, and internal audit and legal compliance including a Code of Business Conduct.

ASU is subject to legal obligations established by the Ministry of Manpower (MoM) in relation to occupational safety and health for organizations that are subject to Oman Labour Law. The University has insurance policies that cover essentials such as buildings, contents and accidents.

At the broader level, ASU established a risk register in 2015 that identifies major sources of risk as well as potential risk mitigation strategies. Each risk area is rated in terms of severity of consequences and responsible entities indicated in each case. The register refers to broad-based reputational and political risk but the emphasis is more on operational matters such as IT, health and safety, and contract risk.

The evidence viewed by the Panel in relation to mitigation of risk confirmed that high-level risk was not being systematically addressed by the University. It was noted that the emphasis on efforts
to mitigate risks was apparent mainly at the operational level (for example the introduction of an induction program for staff to guard against non-compliance). At the time of the Audit Visit, however, the University indicated that it was developing an overarching risk management system to build on the foundation of the register. As part of this endeavor, a business continuity plan was also under development to ensure that key operations such as teaching and learning could continue in the event of a catastrophic event such as a fire or earthquake. The oversight of this new risk management system for ASU as a whole is being overseen by two BoD members with the Audit and Risk Committee taking up the responsibility more generally for steering the project. In addition, ASU recently appointed a Risk Compliance Specialist. Staff awareness activities including more workshops are planned and the new system is intended to include regular review processes.

The Panel concluded that a good start has been made in relation to management of risk but that it was important for ASU, as a new university, to give high priority to completing the implementation of the new risk management system and business contingency plans.

**Affirmation 1**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with A’Sharqiyyah University that it needs to identify and manage risks and supports its efforts in implementing a new risk management framework incorporating contingency planning.

### 1.9 Policy Management

The University indicated that policy development is normally carried out by committees in consultation with stakeholders (Portfolio, p.7) and follows the ASU step-by-step Policy Management Policy. The Policy Management Policy covers definitions, purpose, scope, the nature of a policy statement and how it should be labelled; responsibilities of stakeholders; and definition of the necessary procedures document to accompany a policy. A flowchart covers the steps for formation, approval and review of policies.

The flowchart outlines how new academic policies and amendments are submitted for approval by UAB. It is also clear how policies relating to management and governance which, if supported, may be recommended to the BoT or BoD, as appropriate, for final approval. The Panel confirmed through interviews and examination of minutes of governance and management committees that staff may indeed initiate the development of policies where they note a gap. There was also evidence that the approval procedures are followed with appropriate recording of outcomes of decisions by the various committees.

The Policy Management Policy also requires an indication of accountability for maintaining and reviewing the policy and a timeframe for review. ASU policies and procedures are accessible on a shared drive with the three-year policy review cycle managed by the Quality Assurance Office (Portfolio, p.8).

A policy gap analysis was undertaken in 2016 to identify shortfalls in policy coverage relative to the OAAA Quality Audit Scope Areas as a first step in action towards the goal of meeting these requirements (Portfolio, p.8). The Panel learnt during the Audit Visit that the University has employed a number of methods for developing policies including engaging consultants who have provided drafts for consideration by the relevant governance and management groups at ASU. For example, the Panel was informed that the Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) Manual was provided from an external consultant in a draft form and was amended through internal discussions before subsequent approval by ASU. In April 2017, the UAB commenced a comprehensive Policy Review relative to OAAA standards, informed by the findings of the Policy Gap Analysis.

It was noted, however, that a large number of the policies and procedures provided to the Panel were heavily based on policies and documents from other institutions, mostly international, but also
a few local sources (see Appendix B). These policies occur in areas including health and safety, academic integrity, student internships, assessment policy, internal grant processes, consultancy, annual planning, library and human resources strategic planning, and academic advising. The overlap with non-ASU sources varies from rephrased sections; to the inclusion of word-for-word elements, and, in a few cases, policies that can be described as entirely copied from external sources.

The Panel holds that while it is desirable for institutions to build policy with reference to benchmarks and established good practice in peer institutions, it is not necessary for every higher education institution to build policy from first principles. Consultants may be very helpful in relation to policy formation but ultimately the institution is responsible for ensuring that external sources used in policy drafting are unambiguously acknowledged. This is particularly important in the higher education sector where academic integrity is the bedrock of its intellectual endeavors. The University needs to remedy this situation as a matter of high priority and review its suite of policies for instances of overlap with external sources. ASU needs to ensure that the sources used to build its policies are appropriately and unambiguously acknowledged in their policies and benchmarked policies need to be contextualized to be fit for purpose. Acknowledging source of policies is critical to the academic integrity of the University (see Recommendation 11).

Whereas formal policy documents in ASU follow the policy template, the Panel found that a range of other institutional documents (for example, committee terms of reference (ToR) and feedback forms) are not appropriately presented. These documents appear to be standalone documents with no ASU logo, title or review dates (for example, the Community Engagement Group ToR). The Panel recommends that ASU implement a comprehensive system for developing and managing all institutional documentation to ensure consistency.

Recommendation 4
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a comprehensive system for developing and managing all institutional documents to ensure that they are consistent and fit for purpose.

1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems
The ASU Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook AY 2016/2017 sets out processes for new program development and approval and annual program monitoring and review; it also has a section dealing with institutional review. This review is closely aligned to the OAAA accreditation processes and sets out the ToR for the Quality Audit Steering Committee which was the group involved in the self-study for this OAAA Quality Audit.

In general, review activities at ASU tend to be embedded in strategic planning, program and specialized on-going review and monitoring cycles in the context of implementation of the BSC approach to strategic planning. Outcomes of these reviews are considered in various arenas such as the Strategic Planning Review Committee and, from an implementation perspective, the Strategy Execution Committee. Research activity is reviewed through UREC with a report submitted to UAB.

The Panel viewed a list of stand-alone reviews described as an extract from the QAC minutes of December 2016. One set of reviews had been carried out in the period 2015-2016 by the ASU Internal Audit Department and covered administrative and support departments and procedures. The Panel was informed that the Head of Internal Audit uses an Authority Manual and generally carries out four audits per year with reports of non-compliance sent to the VC. The second set of reviews in the QAC extract examined by the Panel referred to quality assurance processes conducted during the same timeframe. ASU, however, does not have a system to evaluate its Colleges, Departments and the services it provides. The University needs to develop a schedule for
a cycle of reviews that ensures that individual academic and non-academic units are regularly examined within an agreed timeframe. This is a gap that needs attention.

**Recommendation 5**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a schedule of regular reviews of individual academic and non-academic units to complement its existing approach to reviews.

The Panel found that ASU summarizes its data as a University primarily at the institutional level and noted that this approach does not take into account the individual and specific aspects of each program relating to individual colleges. Nor was there evidence of explicit analyzes of data that can help to identify strengths and opportunities for improvements at department, college and unit levels. The Panel urges ASU to review its approach to data collection and reporting to ensure that it addresses the different requirements of programs, units, departments and colleges.

**Recommendation 6**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends A’Sharqiyah University review its approach to internal data collection by disaggregating college level data and institutional data to ensure that these facilitate multi-level analysis and may be used effectively to inform improvements and tracking of progress.

1.11 **Student Grievance Process**

The ASU Procedures for Student Complaints and Grievances cover academic and non-academic grievances. The scope covers complaints related to general services offered in the University; complaints about misbehavior or harassment; appeals against final examination grades; complaints from faculty or staff members against students, either in relation to learning and teaching or general behavior and/or misbehavior.

The principles for handling the range of matters covered by the procedure are sound and move from informal to formal processes with opportunities for appeals against decisions up to the level of VC. On the other hand, the procedure is confusing in the use of nomenclature and layout and would be enhanced, by a split into discrete categories distinguishing academic and non-academic matters.

The Panel noted several posters outlining the key features of the policy on display at the ASU campus and noted that care had been taken to disentangle the elements of the procedure and present these in graphic form for the benefit of students. ASU is encouraged to separate out a different procedure, if feasible, for complaints brought by staff members against students.

Students can appeal to the VC’s office if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the action taken for their complaint. ASU submitted data of complaints and grievances over the past three years. The data submitted showed that the number of complaints has decreased. This data, however, did not disaggregate the information by individual College. It is not clear, therefore, how the data will help identify opportunities for improvement. ASU is encouraged to collect data at College level and use that data to inform improvements (see Recommendation 6). ASU may consider allowing appeals to be channeled to the BoT where appellants are not satisfied with the outcomes determined by the VC.

The current ‘Procedures for Student Complaints and Grievances’ is publicized during orientation, by email, in the Student Guide and on noticeboards. The Department of Student Affairs is responsible for processing complaints as well as explaining the procedure and processes to student groups. The department has moved to an electronic system for the lodging of complaints and
grievances. An analysis of the 38 student complaints received since late 2012 showed a range of reasons for complaints with the majority of complaints categorized as relating to student services. All but a few are marked as solved or transferred for resolution to a department of the University.

In addition to submitting a complaint, the students may attend the weekly open session conducted by the VC to forward their opinions and concerns. This forum allows the student voice to be heard and was reported as decreasing the number of complaints currently being received. Student comments on these sessions and the procedures were generally positive. The Panel encourages ASU, however, to review the Procedures for Student Complaints and Grievances and as necessary reformulate the procedures to clarify the different purposes and processes for different categories of complaints initiated by students; complaints initiated of staff members; and appeals against final examination grades.

1.12 **Health and Safety**

The University is subject to local and regional rules and regulations on health, safety and environment (HSE) including directives from Civil Defence, the Municipality, MoHE, MoM, and the Ministry of the Environment. The relevant HSE policies and procedures are included in a HSE Manual, dated September 2016 and prepared by external consultants. This covers basic safety, personal protective equipment, road and fire safety, and emergency response and management. In addition, the College of Engineering and the College of Applied Sciences have developed laboratory safety procedures. The Panel found the HSE Policy to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5). ASU needs to contextualize its policies to meet the needs of its stakeholders.

ASU states that the importance of HSE is promoted to staff by various means including induction of new staff and students and publication of relevant information in the Student Guide and other sources from AY 2016-2017. Preventative measures such as fire drills, inspections and maintenance checks are implemented. Buses and ASU vehicles are maintained regularly and are subject to safety checks. ASU works with the Municipality to coordinate cleaning, pest control and general hygiene in the various food service areas (Portfolio, p.9). During interviews, students confirmed that they have attended fire drills. Students also confirmed that they undergo safety training related to laboratories.

Campus security is maintained through CCTV and employment of security guards. The University plans to upgrade its regime for ensuring health and safety when it moves to the new campus and plans, for example, to install more surveillance cameras. The Panel encourages ASU to review the effectiveness of its Health and Safety provision in order to continue to provide a safe and healthy environment for all its stakeholders.

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

This section is not applicable to A’Sharqiyah University.
2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMS

At the time of the Quality Audit, ASU had a population of 2,932 students (79% female and 21% male) and employed 259 staff, including 99 faculty and 160 administrative staff. The University offers 10 undergraduate programs through its three Colleges. Two more programs, a Bachelor of Team Entrepreneurship and a Bachelor of Law, have been approved by MoHE but are not yet being offered. The College of Engineering offers both Diploma and Bachelor programs in Environmental Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electronics and Communication Engineering and Construction Project Management. The College of Applied Sciences offers both Diploma and Bachelor programs in Food Science and Human Nutrition, Marine Sciences and Fisheries. The College of Business Administration offers both Diploma and Bachelor programs in Management, Accounting and Finance, Management Information Systems, and Records and Archives Management. The Records and Archives Management program is offered in Arabic. The largest number of students registered on academic programs is in the College of Business Administration (CoBA) with 1054 students, followed by College of Applied Sciences (CAS) with 705 students and the College of Engineering with 425 students (CoE). A total of 748 students were enrolled on the General Foundation Program (Portfolio, pp. II - III).

This Chapter reports on the Audit 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

In order to produce outstanding graduates who become sought-after in the job market for being innovative and adaptable learners, able to make a positive contribution to industry and society, ASU identified five graduate attributes which are aligned to the University’s Mission and strategic goals (Portfolio, p.10). ASU’s graduate attributes are listed as:

- Knowledge of a discipline
- Commitment to national development and Omani ethical values
- Innovative spirit
- Global insight
- Adaptability to changing environments (Portfolio, p.10).

The graduate attributes were presented in the ASU Portfolio but they do not feature in the Student Guide, Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook nor in program specification documents. ASU states that these graduate attributes were developed in consultation with students and industry (Portfolio, p.10); while the latter, however, was confirmed in the minutes of the first two meetings of the Industry Advisory Council (IAC), in interviews some students were not familiar with ASU’s graduate attributes. The University is in the process of mapping graduate attributes to learning and teaching strategies and the Panel was provided with an example for a program offered in the CoBA, although this was a standalone document (see Recommendation 4). While the Panel supports this mapping exercise, the University is encouraged to promote greater awareness of graduate attributes among staff and students and to monitor its achievement to support graduate employability.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with A’Sharqiyyah University that it needs to map graduate attributes to teaching and learning strategies as well as to learning outcomes and supports its efforts in this regard.
Each program has a set of learning outcomes which are included in the program specifications at Diploma and Bachelor levels. The Panel reviewed a sample of the program specifications from the three Colleges and, while there were examples of good practice, such as the Diploma and B.Sc. in Construction Project Management, it found that not all program specifications were as comprehensive, as exemplified by the Diploma and Bachelor in Management. The Panel also found that subject specific skills of B.Eng. Electronics and Communication Engineering 2016/2017 and Bachelor of Engineering in Environmental Engineering 2016/2017 are all related to the Civil Engineering program. This raises concerns about how the program specification documentation is quality assured during development and review.

**Recommendation 7**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University strengthen quality assurance mechanisms for the development, approval and review of all program specifications to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

The Panel found examples of text in program documentation that had been taken from other sources without acknowledgment (See Appendix B and Section 2.5 for details). The University is encouraged to ensure that benchmarks are used appropriately (see Recommendation 11).

### 2.2 Curriculum

One of ASU’s strategic priorities for teaching and learning states that curricula at ASU should be continually assessed, developed and improved. Initially ASU developed curricula with the assistance of Oklahoma State University (OSU) and Texas Tech University (TTU). Drafts of program and course specifications were provided by these two universities to develop undergraduate programs in the Colleges of Business Administration, Applied Sciences and Engineering. The drafts were modified and contextualized for delivery at ASU. The affiliations with these two universities was not renewed thereafter. Currently, ASU has no affiliations and has its own procedures to develop and review curriculum. The Panel found some course syllabi to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5). ASU needs to provide acceptable referencing and to contextualized benchmarked materials to meet student needs.

The procedures for the development and approval of new program curricula are set out in the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook. The process for the development of a program includes the analysis of local market needs, feasibility, text and reference selection, benchmarking, and alignment to the Requirements for the Oman System of Quality Assurance (ROSQA) and other regulatory requirements (Portfolio, p.11). According to the procedures for new program development and approval, before the program proposals are presented to the MoHE for approval and licensing, the proposal is approved by the College Academic Board. It is then submitted to a Validation Panel, which includes internal and external subject experts or practitioners, for review. The responsibility of the Validation Panel is to ensure that the program is coherent and well-structured with clear learning, teaching and assessment strategies and to ensure that the learning outcomes are appropriate.

On consideration of approved program specifications, it was found that the learning outcomes for some diploma-level programs were not clearly defined and that the mapping of assessments against learning outcomes did not indicate how the achievement of learning outcomes was being measured. There is also an issue with students covering an insufficient amount of subject level content at Diploma level. The curriculum design of the Diploma in Civil Engineering, for example, has 21 credit hours as University requirements; 35 credit hours as College requirements; and 21 credit hours as program requirements. The program requirements have seven courses related to Civil Engineering (Statics, Dynamics, Surveying, Engineering Geology, Civil Engineering Materials, Mechanics of Materials and Transportation Engineering) out of a total of 28 courses (21 out of a total 77 credit hours). As a significant number of ASU students graduate at diploma level (Table 6,
Portfolio, p.23), this is an area the University needs to address in order to ensure that students exit with qualifications that are fit for purpose.

Recommendation 8
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University review program development at diploma level to ensure that students have covered an appropriate amount of subject specific learning outcomes in order to exit with a qualification that is fit for purpose.

All ASU programs are subject to Annual Program Review which is carried out by the Head of Department and is based on student feedback and course evaluation reports. These reviews result in Program Review and Development Plans; samples of these showed that clear action plans are developed and a cycle of quality improvement is in place.

2.3 Student Entry Standards
ASU has a General Foundation Program (GFP) designed for students who are weak in English, mathematics and IT skills to ensure that they meet the undergraduate entry requirements. The GFP has three levels – elementary, intermediate and advanced. Students are placed in one of these levels, based on the results of the placement tests conducted before entry into the GFP. The College of Business Administration offers Records and Archives Management Program in Arabic. Students entering higher education courses that are offered in Arabic are required to take only mathematics and IT in the GFP.

ASU states that currently 95% of students are assigned and funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, and admitted via the Higher Education Admissions Centre (HEAC) (Portfolio, p.13). All Omani students must successfully complete the Certificate of General Education Diploma with the required grades for their chosen program of study. Admission requirements are College-based, and in line with the requirements of MoHE and other private universities. Non-Omani students are admitted if their General Secondary Certificate is equivalent to the Omani Certificate of General Education Diploma, and after receiving approval from the MoHE (Portfolio, p.13). The University also has a system of credit transfer for students’ prior learning. These entry standards are mentioned in the ASU Academic Regulations Handbook. While the Handbook states that the minimum English entry requirement is IELTS 5.0, which is in line with the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs, the Panel was informed that the required English skill at exit of GFP is IELTS 4.0. Post-GFP teaching staff stated that the general standard of proficiency in English was low in the undergraduate programs and this was highlighted in one of the Program Review and Development Plans. ASU needs to ensure that GFP students exit with an appropriate English language level that prepares them for entry into higher education and that the exit level of English is monitored and benchmarked.

Recommendation 9
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University ensure that students exit the General Foundation Program (GFP) with an appropriate level of English language proficiency to undertake their higher education studies successfully.

2.4 Teaching Quality
ASU monitors teaching and learning quality through the University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC). This committee is chaired by the DVC and monitors teaching quality, teaching loads and learning materials. Minutes of ULTC meetings indicate that workshop topics such as graduate attributes and learning outcomes are discussed as well as subjects such as teaching and learning styles and plagiarism. ASU states that it delivers professional development programs to
provide regular pedagogical training for faculty to improve the quality of program development and delivery and ultimately enhance the student learning experience. ASU also states that it is developing a series of learning and teaching workshops, seminars, and an annual learning and teaching week (Portfolio, p.15).

Teaching quality in ASU is monitored through student course evaluation and peer observation. Faculty members develop course files that help to monitor the quality of teaching delivery. ASU’s annual program monitoring and review process also evaluates the quality of the curricula and delivery including teaching and learning.

In terms of teaching methodology, the Panel heard that academic staff utilize smart-technology tools on tablets and laptops for presentations and classroom delivery. Software, such as Model Muse for Simulation Modeling, Moodle and Blackboard, are incorporated into teaching to support student-centered learning. ASU states that it strives to use innovative methods in teaching to enhance student learning. CAS piloted a tutoring approach in mathematics which was confirmed by teaching staff; CoBA uses field-based teaching aligned to course contents, and CoE has advanced laboratory equipment with integrated software (Portfolio, pp.15-16). The Panel had some concerns regarding the lack of laboratory equipment (see Section 6.7) and while acknowledging the initiatives to date, it encourages ASU to continue to explore and adopt innovative teaching initiatives appropriate to its programs. The Panel also encourages ASU to find opportunities for sharing these initiatives across all Colleges while monitoring their effectiveness.

The current staff student ratio is 1:25 (Portfolio, p.15). ASU has a workload policy for faculty that outlines faculty teaching and research hours; this states that faculty should teach around 15 to 16 hours per week. The Panel was informed, however, that faculty are sometimes expected to teach more hours. During interviews, academic staff expressed their concerns about the impact of the workload on research. The Panel is of the view that this compromises the quality of teaching. ASU is urged to review the workload policy to reflect the different needs of the individual Colleges and to regularly monitor the policy’s implementation to ensure effectiveness.

**Recommendation 10**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University review the workload policy to reflect activities undertaken by faculty to assure the quality of teaching and support staff research and to monitor the implementation of this policy to ensure effectiveness.

2.5 **Plagiarism**

ASU recognizes the need to educate students about the different forms of plagiarism and steps they could take to avoid it. ASU’s policies on Academic Integrity, Plagiarism and Research Ethics inform faculty and students about the University’s stance towards plagiarism and unethical academic behavior and the procedures outlining the consequences of engaging in such practices. According to ASU, these measures safeguard the reputation of the University (Portfolio, p.16). While the Student Guide makes reference to student violations and penalties in general, plagiarism is not specifically referred to. Despite this, ASU expects students to take responsibility for plagiarism in their work (Portfolio, p.17) and the University displays posters and notices about plagiarism on noticeboards. During interviews with students, the Panel found that staff and students were aware of plagiarism and its consequences.

As ASU only collects and stores final exams, it was not possible to see examples of marked student assignments (see Section 2.7) or evidence of ASU’s approach to the implementation of its plagiarism policy. The issue of cheating in examinations is addressed elsewhere in this Report (See Section 2.8).
The University uses plagiarism detection software, Turnitin, and reports are generated to identify instances of plagiarism. Faculty submitting research for publication are expected to attach a Turnitin report with their work (Portfolio, p.17).

Despite the stated position regarding academic integrity, instances of plagiarism were found in a number of documents submitted by ASU, such as the Policy on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism (see Appendix B for the full list of plagiarized submissions). ASU needs to give urgent attention to ensuring that all sources are fully acknowledged and that documentation is appropriately contextualized for the needs of ASU and its stakeholders. The Panel has grave concerns about the lack of academic integrity of some staff in identifying and addressing plagiarism in University documents, as this may have an impact on the maintenance of academic standards in the institution. The Panel concluded that the systems ASU has put in place to detect and avoid plagiarism are inadequate for its own documentation. ASU is urged to develop a culture of staff and student academic integrity in order to maintain academic standards and safeguard the reputation of the institution, in line with the University’s values.

**Recommendation 11**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University, as a matter of urgency, develop and implement a system that ensures that academic integrity is upheld by all staff and students.

### 2.6 Student Placements

Preparation for employment is emphasized in the University’s SP which has goals that relate to career advice, employment and developing strong relationships with graduates (Portfolio, p.17). The Career Guidance Division manages student placements which consist of both compulsory and voluntary internship opportunities for students whether credit-bearing or not. ASU claims that a three-credit internship is part of all programs (Portfolio, p.11). ASU also claims that it requires all Bachelor degree students to undertake an internship program, which is credit-bearing in CoBA and CAS (Portfolio, p.17). ASU has developed a Student Handbook on internship that provides guidelines for students; the Panel found this Handbook to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5).

The CoBA Internship Handbook indicates how students are graded, based on a final report and a presentation. External stakeholders informed the Panel that hosting companies and ministries complete and send a confidential evaluation form of the trainee. The Department of Student Affairs (DSA) also provides internship opportunities for Diploma students. The Panel supports ASU’s efforts in this area.

On verification of program specifications documentation, the Panel found that not all programs in ASU have a three-credit internship course as stated in its Portfolio (p.11). While the BBA in Accounting and Finance and the BBA in Management have a three-credit internship course, for example, Team Entrepreneurship Program offered by CoBA does not offer a three-credit internship course. Similarly, programs offered by CoE do not mention internship as part of their program specifications. ASU needs to be accurate in its documentation and ensure that internship is offered in line with its stated intent.

**Recommendation 12**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University review program specifications to ensure that internship is offered in line with the Internship Policy.

Student feedback on satisfaction with placement arrangements and opportunities is gathered through a survey conducted by the Student Services Department. This survey was conducted and
summarized in Arabic. The survey questions focused on satisfaction in training for job search; on a workshop on job search and CV development, and on a visit to job fairs. There were only 15 respondents to this survey, although most of these expressed their satisfaction with the services provided by DSA. The Panel encourages ASU to continue its efforts in this area. The Panel also encourages ASU to put mechanisms in place to disseminate the results of feedback to both the Arabic and non-Arabic speaking stakeholders (see Recommendation 25).

2.7 **Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation**

ASU has policies and procedures to govern all aspects of assessment, including assessment methods, grading, moderation and student feedback (Portfolio, p.19). The Panel reviewed the Academic Assessment and Moderation Policy which explains the purpose and the expected processes that faculty must follow for assessment and moderation. Staff indicated that in different subjects, learning outcomes are assessed in different ways and confirmed that the policy is being implemented. The Panel found that the Academic Assessment and Moderation Policy was plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.6). The Panel urges ASU to ensure that it has effective quality assurance systems in place to avoid plagiarism in documents and to ensure that all documents are fit for purpose.

ASU states that it offers a range of assessment instruments that are used as appropriate for the level and type of assessment and how it is being conducted. Student work is assessed against the learning outcomes by formative and/or summative methods (Portfolio, p.19). The Panel noted the variety of assessment methods such as quizzes, midterm tests, course assignments, laboratory assignments (which include simulated assignments), practical exams and presentations. Assessment criteria are distributed to students at the beginning of the semester, together with course descriptors and course syllabi. This information is also available on the shared drive. During interviews, however, some students stated that they were not aware of the assessment criteria.

The Panel saw examples of marking criteria for assignments and exams, but no sample answer scripts of assignments or tests, as only the final examinations were stored and all other answer scripts were returned to students. The Panel has concerns about this practice, as there is no opportunity to monitor the quality of assessed student work for specific cohorts. ASU is urged to ensure records of student coursework, including samples of assignments and tests, are maintained for a specific period of time.

**Recommendation 13**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a mechanism to ensure copies of student work such as assignments and tests are stored for moderation and quality assurance purposes.

In the Portfolio, ASU noted that faculty members provide feedback to students on all assessed work, either by means of providing written comments on student work or verbally (Portfolio, p.20). During interviews, the Panel heard that students do not always receive timely, or even in some cases, any feedback on their work and only see a final mark. The University is encouraged to monitor feedback to students on assessment and evaluate the effectiveness of this feedback.

Overall student performance is considered by the relevant College Assessment Review Committee (Portfolio, p.19), after which the results of the final examinations are announced. The Academic Assessment and Moderation Policy provides procedures for internal moderation of examination papers prior to assessment being carried out. It also includes procedures for post moderation of assessment through double marking. The Dean’s Report 2015/2016 raises the issue of quality of assessment and moderation and while the implementation of the Policy is identified as a means of addressing this, ASU is urged to review the effectiveness of its assessment and moderation system.
and to consider the introduction of external moderation in supporting the maintenance of academic standards.

**Recommendation 14**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University review and strengthen its assessment practices through, for example, considering introducing an external moderation system to support the maintenance of academic standards.

### 2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation

The University's policies and procedural guidelines aim to ensure academic security, integrity of examinations, invigilation, assessment, and moderation. These include procedures for security of assessment materials in order to minimize risks in the assessment, examination and invigilation processes (Portfolio, p.20). Examination papers are sealed in envelopes after they are printed and kept secure either in the Dean’s office or with the course coordinator until thirty minutes prior to the commencement of the examination, at which point the chief invigilator collects the papers (Portfolio, p.20). This procedure was confirmed by the Panel during interviews. ASU submitted evidence where cases of student cheating had been considered and students confirmed that the University implements strict guidelines on examination conduct and consequences of cheating.

The Invigilation of Examinations Policy explains the process and responsibilities of invigilation. The cover page of examination papers makes it explicit that “copying, cheating and any kind of malpractices during the examination are strictly prohibited, and subjected to severe action if reported”. The Panel concluded that ASU manages examinations in accordance with the relevant policy.

### 2.9 Student Retention and Progression

There are a number of processes in place to support and ensure student retention and progression (Portfolio, p.21). These areas are monitored through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in annual reporting and are analyzed as part of the annual monitoring process. The Panel recognizes the acknowledgement of high-achieving students by ASU through the Dean’s Honor Roll initiative. This has proved to be a motivational event that encourages a competitive spirit and a desire to excel among students.

The Panel heard, during interviews, that the institution supports student retention through counselling, decreasing the number of courses, and by providing them with support plans. ASU needs to put a system in place to monitor the effectiveness of these efforts.

The Panel found that a number of students enrolled in higher education programs are on academic probation especially in Year one of the program. For example, students on academic probation in CoBA ranged from 45% to 75%. (45.5% of Year One students in the Diploma and BBA (Accounting and Finance) and 75% of Year One students in the Diploma and BBA (Management Information System) were on academic probation). This is an area which ASU needs to improve on. The Panel found that the progression and retention rates of students exiting the GFP are not analyzed. Allocated faculty are responsible for identifying the ‘at-risk’ students and to take necessary action, or recommend action, to assist students to succeed. The Panel encourages that ASU explores the possibility of using the new ERP system for this purpose (see Affirmation 3).

### 2.10 Graduate Destinations and Employability

ASU’s academic programs are intended to provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable them to find employment in their discipline and/or pursue a higher degree in a related field (Portfolio, p.23). The Panel noted the University's awareness of the importance to
maintain data on the destination of its graduates and that the Department of Student Affairs maintains a graduate database. According to the data provided, only an average of 1% of the graduates during the years 2013 to 2016 were employed (Portfolio, p.23). The Panel also noted that this data represents the graduate output of the University as a whole and does not show the graduate destinations and employability rates pertaining to the graduate output of each College. The Panel also found that more than 50% of students exit with a Diploma.

The Panel learned that the Career Guidance Section supports students by coordinating visits for students to attend job fairs. Conducting job fairs on campus, as planned by ASU, might give more students the opportunity for participation. Considering the high proportion of female students, ASU needs to develop systems that generate comprehensive student data (including gender) to monitor graduate employability. The Panel believes that the area of graduate destinations and employability is an area that requires greater institutional attention and urges ASU to address it.

**Recommendation 15**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop appropriate systems to track and monitor graduate destinations and employability.
3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMS

At the time of the Quality Audit, A’Sharqiyah University did not offer research programs per se so this section is not addressed in this Report.
4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

ASU recognizes research as an integral component of its activities and Strategic Priority (Number Three) states that the University should “contribute to knowledge and innovation through applied research” (Portfolio, p.25). ASU is classified as a University and, according to the Requirements of Oman Standards for Quality Assurance (ROSQA), a university must have a significant research component.

This Chapter reports on the planning and management of staff research and consultancy activities at ASU, and describes the Panel’s findings with regards to research planning and management; research performance and funding schemes; consultancy activities; ethics and biosafety; intellectual property arrangements; professional development for research; research commercialization, and the research-teaching nexus.

4.1 Research Planning and Management

ASU identified a need and articulated a clear approach to research and innovation in a Strategic Priority (Number Three) which states the University’s aim to contribute to knowledge and innovation through applied research (Portfolio, p.25). The Panel noted and supports ASU’s planning to establish specialized research centres in energy, entrepreneurship and public welfare and to establish a College of Postgraduate Studies.

To improve research activities and to achieve the University’s goals, ASU established a University Research Committee (URC) which was renamed as the University Research and Enterprise Committee (UREC) in June 2016. The original URC initiated and developed a number of policies and regulations that are readily accessible through a shared folder and also communicated research objectives to faculty and staff through the URC pages on the University website, as well as during various workshops (Portfolio, p.25). The URC/UREC submits a yearly report on research activity to the UAB. Each College in ASU has a College Research Committee (CRC), renamed College Research and Enterprise Committee (CREC). It was not clear, however, how CREC activities are monitored and evaluated by the UREC.

The Panel acknowledges the regulatory work to establish and articulate a variety of policies and research arrangements, but found that these policies do not always follow the guidelines required by ASU’s Policy on Policy. ASU’s Consultancy Policy, for example, follows the policy template whereas the Policies and Procedures for Internal Grant, Rules and Regulation for Operation and Utilization of Research Funds and Policy for Conference Support Funding do not have approval dates, review dates, nor do they follow the policy template. The Panel urges ASU to ensure consistency in all its documentation (see Recommendation 5). The Panel also found the Policy and Procedure for internal grants to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5).

UREC has developed a first Annual Operational Plan covering the period 2016 to 2017 (Portfolio, p.25). On reviewing the UREC Operational Plan, the Panel found that some of the measures and targets in the OP state that the targets have already been achieved, making it unclear which targets the UREC Operational Plan is aiming to achieve in the future. The OP includes institutional targets, but it does not set research targets that are contextualized to each individual. ASU needs to review its OPs to ensure that it sets targets that are aspirational, achievable and measurable. Though ASU’s planning of research activities is consistent with the University’s Strategic Mission, the Panel came to the conclusion that this planning is not yet an institutional catalyst for research. There is still a need for an institutional research strategy that will facilitate an institution-wide approach and decrease reliance on individual effort to fulfill the ASU mandate for research. The Panel recommends that ASU develop a comprehensive research strategy that meets the needs of the individual Colleges and ensure that it is regularly reviewed for effectiveness.
Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a comprehensive research strategy aligned to the University Strategic Plan. Furthermore, it needs to develop and implement an Operational Plan that supports research funding, research performance, intellectual property, professional development, research commercialization and the research-teaching nexus, and ensure that the plan is systematically reviewed.

4.2 Research Performance

The development of academic staff research capacity and capability is set as the third goal in Strategic Priority (Number Three) of the ASU Strategic Plan. ASU confirms in its research policy documents that all University academic staff are expected to engage in research and scholarly activities. ASU sees these activities as essential for both the intellectual advancement of their disciplines and for promoting research-led teaching (Faculty Work Load Policy, 2017, p.8). Furthermore, the institution stipulated in the newly-approved Faculty Work Load Policy that the required time for research and service expected from all faculty members varied from 43% to 59% of the total workload hours assigned for the different ranks of academics. During interviews, the Panel found that most of the lecturers are under the impression that the institution does not expect them to do any research. The Panel considers the required arrangement as indicated in the Faculty Work Load Policy to be in line with the international standard expected of academic staff and encourages ASU to clearly communicate its expectations that academic staff engage in scholarly activities. This will also support faculty in keeping up-to-date with the latest developments in their subject disciplines.

ASU monitors research performance by tracking faculty research activities, using indicators such as publications, citations, research projects, conference presentations, collaborative research visits and collaborative projects (Portfolio, p.27). The Research Operational Plan has set targets such as research publication, conference presentations and establishment of laboratories; it is not contextualized, however, to the needs of individual Colleges. The Panel noted a gradual improvement in the overall research activities at ASU as a result of implementation of various policies related to research, leading to an increase of 18% in research publications during the past four years (Portfolio, p. 26, Figure 2). As an incentive for encouraging research, the University introduced a Best Researcher Award in 2016. ASU succeeded in getting four Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research Award Program (FURAP) projects in 2016-2017 from The Research Council (TRC) in Oman (Portfolio, p.27). The Panel supports this achievement, but notes that these activities are through individual efforts and not through an institutional approach. The Panel considers that there is more work to be done to improve research performance. While the Panel supports the development of Faculty Work Load Policy that requires all academic staff to engage in research and scholarly activities, ASU needs to disseminate and implement the Policy consistently to increase the research activities of staff and to increase the institutional research output. ASU also needs to ensure that its research performance meets the ROSQA requirements through, for example, establishing KPIs and international benchmarks for research performance, development of interdisciplinary approaches to research and providing regular reports in the implementation of the University’s research strategy (ROSQA, B Part One, Chapter 1, Section v(a)). ASU is urged to address these areas (see Recommendation 16).

4.3 Research Funding Schemes

The University offers faculty a range of schemes which enable access to the University’s internal research fund, such as ASU’s Faculty Seed Fund for Research (ASU-FSFR), funds for international collaborative research visits, and funds for conference participation and presentations. ASU’s external funding is through Open Research Grants, and FURAP grants from TRC (Portfolio p.28).
During interviews, the Panel found research-active faculty to be generally satisfied with the research funding schemes available.

In 2015, five staff were awarded internal research grants totaling 9500 OMR. External funding was received through 12 FURAP projects and one Open Research Grant from TRC. In addition, one staff member worked with a research group in the University of Bath, UK, and another staff member worked on a research project at the University of Tennessee, USA. The Panel encourages and supports these individual initiatives; it was found, however, that these were based on the staff member’s own initiative rather than a University-wide approach to source external funding. The Panel does not regard these individual research activities as a sustainable source of external funding.

ASU has clearly demonstrated that it has mechanisms to source external funding and has been successful in receiving funding from TRC and funds for other individual research projects. Given a current reduction in TRC funding, however, and given the University’s obligation to engage in research, the Panel urges ASU to have systems in place for University-wide external funding sources for research in addition to TRC to ensure that it meets the requirements of its institutional classification as a University as outlined in ROSQA (see Recommendation 16).

4.4 Consultancy Activities

ASU recognizes in its Strategic Plan the potential of consultancy activities to advance the institution’s contribution to knowledge, society and community services. The University aims to take a leading role in enhancing the regional community and its economy while supporting the enterprising and innovative spirit of the campus population (Portfolio, p.29). ASU consultancy activities are closely aligned with its Strategic Mission and a Strategic Priority (Number Four). The Consultancy Policy sets out clear and detailed roles, responsibilities and procedures for the different types of consultancy activities and services that ASU engages in. The Panel found this Policy to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5). During the Audit Visit, the Panel heard that some not-for-profit consultancies had been carried out for the community. The Panel supports and encourages these activities.

Although ASU’s consultancy activity is still nascent, steps have been taken towards developing this service, for example through liaisons with the local business community and through the Industry Advisory Council. The Panel noted that the UREC Operational Plan has set a target of one consultancy activity per year in CoBA and COE. While the Panel supports this initiative, it also encourages ASU to set consultancy activities in line with the ROSQA requirements and ensure that they are monitored for effectiveness.

4.5 Ethics and Biosafety

A Research Ethics Policy for conducting research with human, animal and natural life has recently been developed. This Policy aligns with national and international standards. ASU is also in the process of establishing a Research Ethics Sub-committee to ensure implementation of this Policy (Portfolio, p.29). ASU has identified the need to create awareness of ethics and biosafety for all staff. To this end, it plans to establish a Research Ethics Sub-committee and intends to conduct awareness workshops and seminars on ethics and biosafety. The Panel encourages ASU to align the approach to research ethics within the overarching strategic approach to research.

4.6 Intellectual Property

ASU’s Strategic Priority (Number Three) aims to protect intellectual property to facilitate research and ensure quality processes. ASU currently does not have any policy or guidelines on intellectual property. In order to address ownership, agreements, terms of references, disputes, and to cover any issues that occur relating to the work of students and/or staff, the Panel urges the institution to
develop and implement a policy on intellectual property. Furthermore, the ASU needs to develop a clear approach to ensure that academics are effectively informed about research and are guided and supported in ensuring that the integrity of these activities is respected (see Recommendation 16).

4.7 Professional Development for Research

ASU’s Strategic Priority (Number Six) aims to provide professional development opportunities for staff in a broad range of areas. There is no mention, however, of professional development opportunities for staff in the UREC Operational Plan. The Panel urges ASU to align the Strategic Plan with the UREC Operational Plan to ensure capacity building of staff for research.

During interviews, staff stated that they are given opportunities to attend workshops and conferences and this was supported by evidence showing staff participation in such forums. Omani staff are supported to pursue higher degrees. While the Panel recognizes that there are opportunities for professional development for research, these need to be aligned to the University’s research strategy. Currently, these activities are not part of the UREC Operational Plan. ASU is urged to review the UREC Operational Plan to ensure that it covers all research activities of the University, as required by ROSQA.

4.8 Research Commercialization

ASU states that it is a young university and it is currently focusing on quality teaching and research (Portfolio, p.30). ASU plans to commercialize research in the future and currently has no commercial research activities. As ASU develops and implements its research strategy, it is encouraged to consider the role of research commercialization and how it can be managed effectively.

4.9 Research – Teaching Nexus

The University aims to help staff to develop their research capacity and capability and encourages faculty to incorporate their research findings into their teaching and learning to allow students to see real-life applications of the theory and fundamentals they are learning in the classroom (Portfolio, p.30). ASU incorporates research into student learning through FURAP projects and capstone design projects carried out by the College of Engineering. In the College of Business Administration (CoBA), some faculty adopted research-based teaching methodologies to equip students with field-based teaching aligned to course content (Portfolio, p.16). ASU has a Research Project Course Descriptor to guide research courses. The Panel found this Course Descriptor to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5).

During interviews, there was an uneven understanding of the research-teaching nexus among staff with very few research-active staff incorporating research into teaching. The Panel identified this as an important area for staff development to ensure that staff link their research and scholarly findings in the classroom irrespective of whether or not the staff member is an active researcher. ASU is urged to develop and implement a formal approach to enhance the link between research and teaching in all Colleges (see Recommendation 16).
5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A’Sharqiyah University Strategic Priority (Number Four) states that it aims “to play a leading role in engaging and supporting the community in the A’Sharqiyah region” (Strategic Plan, p.66). This strategic priority has been addressed with four goals and a specific set of indicators.

This Chapter focuses on industry and community engagement planning and management; relationships with industry and employers, and relationships with professions, other education providers, alumni and the community at large.

5.1 Industry and Community Engagement Planning and Management

ASU is committed to providing continuing professional development and support relevant to the region’s industries, professions, and communities (Portfolio, p.31). The Centre for Professional Development and Continuous Learning (PDCL) was formed to cater for the training and professional development needs of the community. PDCL has an Annual Plan. The Panel found this Plan has been drawn from different Internet sources but lacks referencing (see Appendix B and Section 2.5 Plagiarism). ASU also has a Community Engagement Committee (CEC) that facilitates its communication with the community. The CEC comprises the Deans, the Director of Student Affairs and the Senior Librarian and is chaired by the DVC. The Committee has terms of reference (ToR) but the Panel found that these are not comprehensive. The ToR appears to be a standalone document that outlines the basic roles but does not, for example, include whom the Committee reports to, nor how often it meets. It did not bear the University logo (see Recommendation 5). During interviews, the Panel found that some faculty members were not aware of the role of the CEC. There is an overlap between the roles of the PDCL and the CEC and ASU is encouraged to clarify the roles and responsibilities of these entities and monitor the effectiveness of their industry and community engagement activities.

PDCL has an Operational Plan and offers the community courses in English as a Second Language, Arabic as a Foreign Language, Soft Skills Training, Summer School Programs and other specialized courses (Portfolio, p.31). The PDCL operational plan AY 2016-17 has targets and measures. ASU has produced a standalone document named ‘List of PDCL activities conducted in the past three years, but the Panel found that this list is not comprehensive. PDCL conducted six activities in 2015, four activities in 2016 and four in 2017 and one activity is scheduled for 2018. The Panel could not find a link between the PDCL operational plan AY 2016-17 and PDCL activities. Some community engagement efforts are documented in the Deans’ Reports but the Panel found an overall lack of planning in this area.

The Panel recognizes ASU’s efforts to engage with industry and the community; the Panel, however, urges ASU to ensure that these efforts are formally planned, monitored and evaluated, in line with institutional strategic objectives.

Recommendation 17

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement systems that align planning, managing and reporting College-level activities with the University’s overall Strategic objectives for industry and community engagement, while monitoring them for effectiveness.

5.2 Relationships with Industry and Employers

ASU has a strong commitment to building relationships with industry. The Industry Advisory Council (IAC) was established in 2015 to seek input from industry to ensure programs are aligned to employers’ needs (Portfolio, p.31). ASU claims that it maintains a relationship with industry by including industry representatives on College Academic Boards to provide input to program and
curriculum development (Portfolio, p.31). While CoBA has included industry members in their ToR, the other two Colleges, CAS and CoE, have not. In addition, the Panel did not find evidence to support this claim in sample meeting minutes of College Academic Boards.

ASU has an Industry Advisory Council (IAC) that has representatives from industry. The IAC discussed Graduate Attributes in discussions regarding soft skills, entrepreneurship, and innovation. While the Panel supports these industrial liaisons, ASU is encouraged to contextualize industry relations to the needs of each individual College. ASU offers the industry training and professional development activities and collects feedback on activities conducted. The Panel viewed samples of the feedback forms. ASU needs to prepare action plans, based on the feedback received to ensure satisfactory implementation that is monitored for effectiveness.

5.3 Relationships with Professions

ASU has initiated relationships with professional bodies in order to raise the standard of its courses (Portfolio, p.33). CoBA is a member of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). While the Panel encourages this initiative, it was not clear how this membership improved the standards of the courses in CoBA. The Panel also found evidence of professional membership in CoE with the Institute for Civil Engineering (ICE). ASU claims that a number of staff have links with professional bodies. The Panel views such links as individual staff effort and urges ASU to implement an effective system to establish a more robust relationship with professions at an institutional level. ASU is urged to seek and maintain effective relationships with professional bodies in relation to its programs in all Colleges in light of the Vision to be an innovative University and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these relationships.

Recommendation 18

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyyah University develop and implement a systematic approach to establishing relationships with professions that supports the relevance of its qualifications; these relationships should be monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness.

5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers

ASU acknowledges the value of local collaboration and is involved in a forum with senior leaders and owners of other private universities in Oman (Portfolio, p.33). ASU has established relationships and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with several international universities, selected on the basis of reputation and similarities with regard to areas such as entrepreneurship, innovation, faculty development and research focus.

The Panel learned of a number of arrangements being pursued at the time of the Quality Audit and examined evidence of outputs. This included work with Vrije University, Amsterdam, for collaborative action including a proposal for ASU MBA students to spend one week at Vrije University as part of their ASU program (Portfolio, p.4). MoUs have also been signed with several universities for professional development – namely, two Chinese universities, Beijing Foreign Students University and Ningxia Medical University, as well as Vilnius University in Lithuania – but there was no evidence that these have progressed beyond preliminary stages. The Panel encourages ASU to pursue these agreements to ensure they move beyond the stage of exchange of MOUs or contracts in order that these relationships benefit ASU in achieving its strategic goals.

The relationship with the University of Tampere (UoT), Finland, is in a more advanced state of development and the UoT Team Entrepreneurship program being implemented through this relationship is nearing fruition (Portfolio, p.4). Two ASU staff members have been trained to deliver this program locally as part of the ASU outreach program and it is hoped it will be a role model for the University in terms of innovative delivery. This is a good initiative and has the potential to distinguish the ASU profile in the Omani community as well as support ASU ambitions
to achieve its Mission as an innovative University directly. Despite this being a good initiative, the Panel had concerns about its implementation, emanating from the fact that this program is dependent on the expertise of the two staff trained. In view of the importance of this flagship program in establishing the University’s Vision, the University is encouraged to ensure that it has sufficient personnel trained to deliver the Team Entrepreneurship program and is not at risk of losing key expertise and hence have the capacity to continue delivering the program indefinitely. This will require efforts to increase the number of staff qualified to deliver the Tampere program as well as provision of appropriate support to ensure retention of currently qualified staff responsible for the program at ASU. The Panel encourages ASU to mitigate this risk.

Regarding other Omani universities or institutions, ASU is currently exploring the possibility of links with a number of local institutions such as the Islamic Sciences College for provision of access to ASU computer laboratories and other facilities (Portfolio, p.34). While the Panel acknowledges the links with international institutions, ASU is encouraged to pursue plans more actively for interactions with local institutions. These exchanges can lead to valuable collaborations in specialist areas and lay the foundations for formal benchmarking between institutions.

### 5.5 Relationships with Alumni

ASU is committed to developing and maintaining a strong relationship with alumni, as stated in one of its Strategic Priorities (Number Five). Currently ASU has 360 alumni registered in its database out of 411 students who have graduated. ASU has a Career Guidance Section that guides its alumni activities and elicits feedback from alumni on their satisfaction with alumni services. During interviews, alumni said they are given guidance on job opportunities.

ASU states that it is planning to conduct a Career Fair that will include alumni and it is also planning to collect industry feedback on alumni in future (Portfolio, p.34). The Panel supports ASU in activating a relationship with its alumni, encouraging graduates to register on the alumni database and plans to conduct a number of activities involving alumni. ASU is encouraged to continue efforts in this area.

### 5.6 Relationships with the Community at Large

ASU is actively seeking to build community partnerships by providing professional development and support for the region’s industry, professions and community (Portfolio, p.35). ASU has given access to facilities such as the library and teaching halls to members of the local community. It also meets local schools to spread awareness of the University. The Panel found that there are pockets of some good initiatives and supports these activities. ASU is encouraged, however, to have a planned approach to its relationships with the community at large and to review the effectiveness of this approach.
6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

ASU Strategic Plan 2014-2020 states that academic support services planning and management is guided by a Strategic Priority (Number Seven) which strives to develop facilities, systems, and infrastructure to achieve the Vision of the University (Portfolio p.35).

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

Academic support services in ASU are covered by three departments, namely the Admission and Registration Department (A&R), the Library and the Information Technology Department (IT) (Portfolio, p.35). Each department has either a Strategic Plan (SP) or an Operational Plan (OP). The A&R and IT have their own OP; the Library has its own SP. The Panel did not find this a consistent approach to planning and management of academic support services. While the plans of the A&R, IT and Library confirmed the approach to planning in these areas, the KPIs were in some cases vague and unmeasurable. The OP for the A&R for the AY 2016-2017, for example, included KPIs such as ‘same SMS sent to many students’ or ‘waiting for IT department to install server’ or ‘need administration approval’. The Library has a five-year SP for 2014-2019 and measurable KPIs such as ‘50,000 volumes of books’ to be acquired by 2019, although it was not clear how the books are to be allocated across the three Colleges. There was no clear action plan or breakdown to show the individual requirements for each College or how this will be achieved over a period of five years. The Library Collection Development Plan submitted was a standalone document that showed the breakdown for five years and was not based on the needs or requirements of the individual Colleges or ASU’s programs. The OP for IT was provided for the AY 2016-2017 and had measurable KPIs. The OP had an additional column for weightage which was not defined, nor was it clear as to how the numbers were arrived at. As the OPs for A&R and IT were only recently developed, it is too early to comment on the extent to which the achievements are monitored. ASU is encouraged to adopt a consistent approach to operational areas in academic support services and ensure areas such as academic advising and teaching resources are included as part of academic support services.

Although ASU has SP or OP for the main areas of academic support services, there were a number of inconsistencies in the approach to planning in this area and clear and measurable KPIs should be developed in order to monitor achievements. The Panel urges ASU to consider a more comprehensive and consistent approach to planning and managing its academic support services that covers all areas of this operation to ensure that strategic priorities are achieved.

Recommendation 19

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop a comprehensive and consistent approach to the planning and management of its academic support services that meet the needs of students and staff at individual Colleges and as a University.

6.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)

The A&R works in collaboration with the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) and the MoHE, via the VC’s office (Portfolio, p.36). A&R handles student admission and registration along with other activities such as dealing with students ‘at risk’ and on probation, examination scheduling, issuing of transcripts and production of timetables (Portfolio, p.36). ASU has admission procedures that detail the admission process both in Arabic and English. While the Panel supports ASU’s efforts in this area, as with many other ASU documents, this was a standalone document. The Panel found that the admissions procedure for new students was in Arabic. It is not clear to the
Panel how international stakeholders will be able to understand the process if the procedures are only in Arabic (see section 9.3). A student satisfaction survey conducted for new students showed that students were satisfied with the services provided by the A&amp;R. There were no demographics, however, to indicate from which College the data came. The Panel was informed that suggestions and feedback from the survey will be addressed through the new ERP system to make it more efficient for students to access. The Panel supports this initiative.

During the registration period, faculty advisors meet with their advisees to help them select their courses (Portfolio, p.38). The Panel was told that the deployment of faculty in student registration activities has led to an increase in faculty workload; these staff members claim neither to have the experience in registration nor time to do this administrative job for the University. The Panel agrees with the faculty and urges ASU to find an appropriate solution for this issue and enable academic staff to use their expertise and time in supporting students in academic issues and in conducting research.

**Recommendation 20**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends A’Sharqiyah University strengthen student registration by developing a functional system that is efficient for the University community.

### 6.3 Library

The library is committed to providing information services for teaching and learning as per Strategic Priority (Number Seven) (Portfolio, p.36). The library has a five-year SP. The Panel found parts of this SP to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5). The library policies and procedures and the Library Handbook set out the guidelines for staff and student users. The Senior Librarian is supported by three full-time employees and is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the library (Portfolio, p.39).

The Library is further supported by a nine-member Library Committee consisting of the Senior Librarian (as chair), a student representative from each College and CLFS, and an academic from each of the Colleges and CLFS. The Library Committee is a sub-committee of the University Learning and Teaching Committee that oversees the development of the library and its policies and procedures, and produces an annual report on library-related activities (Portfolio, p.39). The library report gives details of the library activities and incorporates suggestions and feedback. While the Panel appreciates the development of the annual report, it found that the report does not provide information on the performance or requirements of different Colleges. It states, for example, that 1,168 books were added to the library. While there may be books that are common to all Colleges, there is no indication of the division by specialization or details of books requested and processed for each College. The Library Collection Development Plan also does not show the division by specialization or the requirements based on the individual Colleges.

The library conducted a survey to gauge users' satisfaction with the collection and services. The results of the latest survey, conducted between December 2015 and January 2016, show that a majority of users are satisfied with the library resources. The library satisfaction survey had an overall response rate of 40%, with the College of Business having the lowest response rate of just 20% (Portfolio, p.40). As a result of the survey, working hours of the library were extended from 4 pm to 6 pm and the library is increasing its collection. The library is also in the process of hiring new staff and ASU proposes to start an evening shift from January 2017. While the survey had demographics based on the College profile, the results were not based on the College profile. There was no indication of the satisfaction rates of the individual Colleges or how results informed improvements or identified opportunities for improvement at department, College or program level (see Recommendation 6).
The library supports students and staff by providing books and e-book facilities through an arrangement with Sultan Qaboos University library. During interviews, the Panel heard from staff that the library is not adequate; they claim it is noisy, small and needs more seating. Students said that library is not a good place for studying and does not have enough books and there are only 16 seats for male students. The Panel heard that the library budget is integrated within the University budget. Anticipating the growing needs of the University, ASU has a detailed budget prepared for the next seven years based on the projected number of students. The Panel believes that the volume of books currently available in the library is not sufficient for the University to support research activities.

The Panel had a tour of the new campus and noted that it offers more physical space. The Panel acknowledges ASU’s efforts to improve library services and is confident that the move to a bigger library in the new campus will improve library facilities.

### 6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services

A Strategic Priority (Number Seven) states that the University aims to provide an enhanced technological infrastructure. The IT Department has the responsibility for developing short and long-term IT Strategic Plans that include IT risks and has an IT OP (Portfolio, p.41). ASU has 485 desktops, 43 laptops, 35 printers, seven photocopyers, and four scanners (Portfolio, p.41). ASU signed an agreement with Omantel through Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN) in 2016. The Panel noted that this is very recent and encourages ASU to monitor the effectiveness of this network in enhancing research activities. The Panel was informed that IT laboratories are maintained by six staff and are open from 8 am to 4 pm, but open later if there are evening classes or on request. The opening hours are extended if requested. The IT Department provides students and staff training and induction. Staff confirmed that they are provided with opportunities to attend conferences or training for new products. The budget of the IT Department is integrated within the University budget.

ASU plans to use Moodle for teaching and learning purposes and this was confirmed by staff during interviews. The IT Department conducted a satisfaction survey for staff to obtain feedback on services and support. The results show that the satisfaction rate varied from 60% to 90%. The IT Department has identified improvement in the areas of IT infrastructure, training and website. However, there were no clear action plans detailing how improvements in these areas can be achieved. The survey data had no demographics regarding the year or number of respondents, nor did it show details of satisfaction rates based on each College. It is not clear to the Panel, therefore, how the survey will assist the IT Department in monitoring and supporting the requirements for each College and its departments. It was also not clear to the Panel how the individual needs of each College is addressed and how it feeds into the University system as a whole in order to make informed decisions (see Recommendation 6).

During interviews students informed the Panel that the internet speed is very slow on campus and in the hostel. Students also said that it was difficult to print assignments during the assignment submission date because of the large number of students using the printers. Students also said that WiFi is available only in the library and the laboratories and that they do not have full access to all IT facilities. The Panel was informed that YouTube was blocked due to student misuse. While the Panel understands ASU’s decision on student IT usage, the Panel urges ASU to ensure that students and staff have the necessary support and facilities to perform academic and research activities.

#### Recommendation 21

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends A’Sharqiyah University develop systems to review the effectiveness of IT provision for staff and students to ensure that academic and research aims are met at the individual College as well as at the University level.
To meet the current challenges for sustaining competitiveness in the market, as well as to move towards excellence in governance and enhance the efficiency of people and processes, ASU is in the course of replacing discrete systems with an integrated Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution to automate, integrate, streamline and standardize processes across the University. A tender to acquire an ERP was issued in 2016, and is still being evaluated (Portfolio, p.42). The Panel was informed that this ERP system would be in operation by 2018. The ERP will integrate all functions of the University such as admission and registration, finance and academic advising. The system will undergo many phases of implementation commencing in September 2017. The Panel agrees with ASU on the need for an integrated ERP.

**Affirmation 3**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with A'Sharqiyah University that it needs to enhance the efficiency of management information systems and supports the installing of the intended integrated ERP system.

### 6.5 Academic Advising

Faculty in ASU play a major role in supporting students through academic advising (Portfolio, p.43). ASU has an Academic Advising Policy and an Academic Advising Handbook which is available to staff and students on the University shared drive. The Panel found this Handbook to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5).

ASU's policy is to assign all new students to an academic advisor at the time they begin their studies. Each advisor is assigned to around 40 students. Part of the academic advisor's role is to help students understand the ethos and values of the University Program Specifications (Portfolio, p.43). Student orientations are conducted every semester and students are alerted by SMS to contact their respective department coordinators and advisors. Students then meet with their advisors and discuss the course selection options available to them. The students on probation or at risk are advised by their advisors to choose and register for the appropriate courses.

The Panel heard during interviews that students were happy with their advisors; they find the process helpful and useful, and they maintain contact with their advisors. They receive an SMS to meet their academic advisors who help them in selecting their courses and planning for their course study. The Panel heard that, as part of the academic advising role, staff assist in student registration. This was previously carried out online by the students themselves, but as this system had a number of problems (for example, some students were wrongly registered on courses that were not in line with their study plans), ASU discontinued this function in August 2016.

Faculty members schedule one hour per week for academic advising. Faculty members also identify students at risk after the midterm exam. During interview, it was claimed that the rationale for academic advisors to register students is that they are aware of a student's study plan and are in direct contact with students. Faculty members and the A&R agreed that the ERP system will address issues related to academic advising in future.

The Panel found that the Academic Advising Handbook contained details about the registration process. ASU needs to differentiate between the role of academic advising and student registration. The Panel was concerned that the advisors appear to be overburdened and overloaded with administrative work. It took the view that registration is an administrative not an academic role and that it consumes too much faculty time that could better be spent for research and other academic activities. The Panel urges ASU to address this area (see Recommendation 20).

### 6.6 Student Learning Support

ASU established an Academic Support Centre (ASC) in 2015 which is supervised by a member from the Centre for Language and Foundation Studies (CLFS). The goal is to provide extra or
remedial support in all subject areas for students. The Department of Student Affairs (DSA) has overall responsibility for the Academic Support Centre. ASC involves faculty in providing tutorials and also to help encourage students, particularly those at risk, to make use of the support on offer. The ASC also uses academically strong students to help as peer tutors, on either a one-to-one or group basis (Portfolio, p.44). The Panel found that students are also provided with learning support in English, Mathematics and other subjects.

The Panel found that academic support in ASU is mainly about providing English language support. The ASC class timing is from 11am to 1 pm on all working days. The ASC document also states that students can take their assignment to the ASC where a teacher will assist the student in their assignment which can be later submitted for marking. The Panel is of the view that the ASC is basically a tutorial class that supports students in English language, vocabulary and assignments. During interviews, faculty stated that they send students at risk and students who are below the expected standard to the ASC, where students receive tutorials and where peer tutors give support in their learning objectives.

ASU has carried out a satisfaction survey with 58 students in the area of student learning support; most students who responded were satisfied with the services provided. The Panel found that the three questions asked in the survey were about the English language. The questionnaire did not differentiate between the three different Colleges in ASU and no action plans relating to the survey outcomes were available (see Recommendation 6).

The Panel concluded that student learning support in ASU is offered through academic tutorial classes. ASU is encouraged to expand its student learning support to include other activities to assist students in their learning such as conducting workshops and seminars.

6.7 Teaching Resources

The University's Strategic Priority (Number One) focuses on providing innovative programs that utilize contemporary learning and teaching technologies. Strategic Priority (Number Three) also stresses the enhancement of research facilities and infrastructure to develop staff research capacity and capability (Portfolio, p.46). ASU claims that all laboratories are appropriately equipped, and functional with full-time qualified laboratory technicians (Portfolio, p. 46). Faculty report on the adequacy of educational resources through the Course Evaluation Reports that are completed each semester.

The Panel found that ASU currently has eight laboratories supervised by six laboratory technicians and one supervisor. The laboratories are open from 8 am to 4 pm. During interviews, students said that they use the laboratory for practical experiments. If a student needs to use the laboratory individually, an official letter from their course teacher to the laboratory technician is required. The laboratory technicians have to prepare laboratories for five courses as per the syllabus and this is generally scheduled at the beginning of each semester. Laboratory maintenance is carried out by the technicians themselves. The laboratories are provided with necessary medical kits and health and safety posters are displayed on the walls. The Panel found some laboratories had very few experiments in progress despite the adequacy of space.

The adequacy of other facilities, such as classroom space for large groups and the availability of sufficient facilities for students to meet for group discussion, is a matter for concern for the Panel. ASU assured the Panel that the relocation to the new campus in the latter part of 2017 would resolve these concerns. During the Audit Visit, the Panel learned that in the College of Engineering students are taught theoretical principles and engineering practices, using advanced laboratory equipment that has integrated software. Teaching also includes site visits to give students real-life experience. During the visit to the laboratory facility of the College of Engineering, it was clear that there are not enough laboratories to serve the needs of the program and that there is no environmental laboratory available; this was acknowledged by staff during the interviews. While basic equipment
is available in the Civil Engineering laboratory to support the teaching of the program, for example, there is significant laboratory equipment lacking. To overcome the gaps, the teaching in these programs focuses to a certain extent more on theory than on the practical elements of the program. In the absence of an environmental laboratory, ASU arranged for students to carry out their practical experiments at an alternative laboratory at another institution. The Panel’s view is that when the institution registers students for a specific course, the necessary infrastructure for the total required learning experience should be available and provided. While the University management informed the Panel that it intends to install new equipment when it moves to the new campus, ASU is urged to address the lack of laboratory facilities as a matter of priority, particularly for its Science and Engineering programs.

Recommendation 22
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University provide appropriate laboratory facilities to serve the needs of all programs, particularly in the fields of Science and Engineering.
7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

ASU’s Strategic Priority (Number Five) focuses on student experience and support, and states that it aims to provide students with an accessible and supported study experience and a supported transition to employment.

This Chapter presents the findings of the Panel on the planning and development of students and student support services, student profile, student satisfaction and climate, student behavior, 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

Student support services planning and management in ASU falls under the responsibility of the Department of Student Affairs (DSA). Five sections are managed by the DSA covering Student Services, Student Counselling, Career Guidance, Student Support and Student Activities (Portfolio, p.47). ASU Strategic Plan has a Strategic Priority (Number Five) for student experience and support that has five goals. The DSA has a separate DSA Strategic Plan to guide its activities. This Plan has seven goals and a number of objectives related to the goals. The Panel viewed the DSA Strategic Plan follow-up 2014-2015 and found it had achieved most of its goals. ASU needs, however, to ensure that the DSA Strategic Plan aligns to the ASU Strategic Plan. DSA also produces an Annual Report that details the activities conducted and the improvements made. The Panel supports these initiatives.

The Panel saw evidence of a student satisfaction survey in 2015-2016. Analysis of the survey result shows that students in general are mostly satisfied with the services provided by DSA. Some students commented that they find staff are always too busy to give them time and requested more staff in the department. During interviews, the Panel heard that students were not aware of the actions taken as a result of their feedback in the survey. Though ASU provides feedback to students through a number of ways such as “You said… We did campaign”, ASU needs to increase awareness of action taken for improvement. The Panel encourages ASU to take into account the requirements of the individual Colleges in its student satisfaction survey (see Recommendation 6).

The Panel noted a significant amount of documentation in this area to be in Arabic. ASU is encouraged to ensure that non-Arabic speaking members of staff are able to access documentation pertaining to student support services where necessary (see Section 9.3).

7.2 Student Profile

The student profile in ASU is managed by the Admission and Registration Department. At the time of the Audit Visit, ASU had 2,488 female students and 444 male students. ASU attributes the greater number of female students to the fact that male students prefer the job market than education. ASU claims it has nine international students (Portfolio, p.54). At the time of the Audit Visit, ASU had three international students and six expatriate students. The College of Business Administration (CoBA) had the highest number of students with 1,054, followed by the College of Applied Sciences (CAS) with 705, and College of Engineering (CoE) with 425. ASU has 748 students enrolled in the General Foundation Program (Portfolio, p.51). ASU needs to carry out a detailed analysis of its student profile to inform planning and operations such as catering to a high proportion of female students.

7.3 Student Satisfaction and Climate

ASU obtains student feedback through a number of ways. The Panel saw evidence of data being gathered through a suggestion box, course evaluation surveys and student satisfaction surveys. A
summary of results was available, and the improvements made are recorded in the DSA Annual Report.

Students are also represented on different University committees and on the Student Advisory Council. The Panel found that the minutes of the Student Advisory Council were in Arabic. It is not clear to the Panel how non-Arabic speaking staff and students participate and engage with the activities of this Council (see Section 9.3). The Student Advisory Council discussed matters such as the launching of events, upcoming conferences and participation in events such as a literature evening and a media evening. The Panel supports these initiatives.

With regard to the student satisfaction survey conducted by DSA in 2015-2016, ASU states that the majority of the students were satisfied with the services provided by the Student Services Department. The survey results show an overall rate of around 60% satisfaction. ASU also states that, as a result of the survey, action was taken to provide transportation for male students in addition to having rest areas for female students (Portfolio, p.54) and the Panel confirmed this during interviews. As with many other ASU documents, the Panel found that the satisfaction surveys were in Arabic. It is not clear to the Panel how feedback in Arabic is understood by non-Arabic speakers from other departments (see Section 9.3). The Panel supports ASU’s efforts to collect survey data to support quality improvement. Overall, the Panel found DSA to be responsive to the needs of students. The Panel encourages ASU to identify student issues based on the needs of each College to inform its decision-making process (see Recommendation 6).

7.4 **Student Behavior**

Student behavior in ASU is governed by a Code of Conduct (Article 7) which is part of the Student Affairs regulations (Portfolio, p.55). ASU has a complaint flowchart to deal with complaints. The Panel found that these were displayed on ASU noticeboards. New students are made aware of this information during the induction at the start of the academic year. This information is also available on the University’s shared drive as well as in the Student Guide. Reported cases of cheating, grievances and misconduct are dealt with according to complaint and grievance procedures. During interviews, the Panel found that students were aware of these regulations and what is expected of them. ASU submitted data of complaints and grievances for the past three years. The data submitted showed that the number of complaints has decreased over the years. The Panel supports ASU’s efforts in this area.

7.5 **Career and Employment Services**

Career and employment services are provided by ASU through the Career Guidance Section (CGS). The CGS provides services to students including the preparation of resumption of studies and other covering letters; an interview skills workshop; job fairs and career planning. The CGS also assists students with internship and placements. ASU has signed an agreement with Silatech to create a Career and Employment Centre at ASU. This is in the initial stages of development. The Panel encourages this initiative.

The CGS conducted a survey to determine student satisfaction with the services it offers. The feedback received showed that students were generally satisfied with the services, with a satisfaction rate of about 67%. The feedback was in Arabic. ASU needs to ensure that all stakeholders including non-Arabic staff and students are able to benefit from the feedback provided (see Recommendation 25). The Panel also found that the graduate employment rate is low (Portfolio, p.23). While the Panel acknowledges the range of services provided in this area, ASU is encouraged to develop and implement a planned approach and monitor its effectiveness in providing career and employment services.
7.6 **Student Finances**

ASU provides financial support to students in need through the Student Support Fund, as per its Strategic Priority (Number Five); this support is provided to cover transportation and accommodation costs (Portfolio, p.56). ASU contributes one Omani Rial per student per semester to this fund along with contributions from individuals and companies. Students who wish to benefit from this fund are able to apply through the Student Counselling Section who verifies the details and recommends financial support where necessary. ASU states that 579 students have benefitted from this fund (Portfolio, p.56). The Panel supports this initiative as well as ASU’s efforts to extend this fund to tuition fees. While ASU states that this fund has improved student retention, there is no evidence that shows that improvement in student retention is a direct result.

ASU provides two scholarships for each of the three Colleges and offers discount in fees to staff and their relatives. Discount in fees is also offered to students with special needs. ASU provides work placement opportunities for students to work at the University. The Panel supports ASU’s efforts to support needy students with paid work opportunities. The Panel acknowledges the University’s efforts in this area and encourages it to continue these practices and monitor them for effectiveness.

7.7 **Accommodation, Catering and Transport**

ASU provides support with accommodation for female students through two dormitories which have the capacity to house 1,600 students (Portfolio, p.58). Female supervisors at these hostels ensure that students follow the dormitory regulations. ASU has a Student Hostel Guide and security instructions for the hostel. Catering is provided by an outside company both on campus and at the dormitories; students stated they were not satisfied with the food in the hostel. Transportation from the dormitories to the ASU campus is provided, via shuttle buses, six times per day. ASU also provides free transportation to male students between the ASU campus and nearby towns such as Al-Yahmadi (Portfolio, p.58). The student satisfaction survey showed that students in general are satisfied with accommodation, catering and transport. The summary of analysis of the feedback showed that ASU is looking into the dissatisfaction of some students in this area. During interviews, the Panel confirmed that students are mostly satisfied with the accommodation provided by ASU. Students stated, however, that they had problems in transportation from the University to the hostel. The Panel encourages ASU to review transportation and catering services and monitor student satisfaction in these areas.

7.8 **Medical and Counselling Facilities**

ASU has a small clinic staffed by one nurse that provides basic health services for students (Portfolio, p.58). This clinic caters for first-needs medical services for up to 45 students per day. A nearby local hospital is available for cases that require medical attention. During interviews, the Panel heard that a new clinic has been opened in the hostel for students. ASU also provides free transportation to male students between the ASU campus and nearby towns such as Al-Yahmadi (Portfolio, p.58). The student satisfaction survey showed that students in general are satisfied with accommodation, catering and transport. The summary of analysis of the feedback showed that ASU is looking into the dissatisfaction of some students in this area. During interviews, the Panel confirmed that students are mostly satisfied with the accommodation provided by ASU. Students stated, however, that they had problems in transportation from the University to the hostel. The Panel encourages ASU to review transportation and catering services and monitor student satisfaction in these areas.

Counselling is provided for students through the Student Counselling Section of the DSA (Portfolio, p.58). Individual and group counselling is provided for students. The student satisfaction survey on medical and counselling facilities shows that students are satisfied with the services provided. Counselling staff also conduct lectures and workshops for students on self-development and confidence building. Counselling is provided for students who face difficulties in academic areas. ASU states in its Portfolio (pp 58-59) that it provides counselling support through two initiatives: one by providing self-development course for students and the other through student mentoring program which is provided by peer support. While the Panel acknowledges that these initiatives are part of student learning support activities, counselling is part of medical services and should be provided through qualified personnel.
7.9 **International Student Services**

ASU’s student profile shows that it has very few international students. At the time of the Audit Visit, ASU had three international students and six expatriate students. ASU states that its Student Guide caters to both local and international students and that it is aiming to attract more international students through its marketing strategies (Portfolio, p.59). ASU offers Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) for a semester for international students; this attracted seven students (Portfolio, p.59). ASU, however, has a number of challenges, including the remoteness of the University from the capital. Although the number of international students is small, ASU is encouraged to ensure that its documentation, including surveys, is accessible to non-Arabic speaking students in order to ensure an inclusive campus environment. The Panel concluded that this area needs to be developed in future to attract more students from outside Oman, in line with ASU’s strategic objectives.

7.10 **Social and Recreational Services and Facilities**

ASU aims to enhance its social and recreational activities through its Strategic Priority (Number Five) to ‘enhance campus life experience’. As part of this strategy, ASU encourages students to join student societies (Portfolio, p.60). ASU has 19 student societies under five main categories of activity: scientific, sports, artistic, cultural and social. These student societies conduct a number of events including a Cultural Week, National Day celebrations, drama competitions and a media forum. Students take part in these activities and win prizes. These activities are planned and conducted under the supervision of DSA. Student surveys showed that students are satisfied with the social and recreational services of ASU. This was confirmed by the Panel during interviews.

ASU’s move to the new campus facilities in summer 2017 aims to provide a more spacious student center that will cater for the expansion of student social and recreational needs. The Panel acknowledges this opportunity to provide enhanced facilities for social and recreational activities in the future.
8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

ASU’s Strategic Priority (Number Two) is to recruit and develop high quality staff. The Human Resource (HR) Department is supervised by the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance and is responsible for recruitment, payroll management, personnel affairs, and training and development (Portfolio, p.61).

This Chapter focuses on staff and staff support service and reports on the Panel findings on human resources planning and management, staff profile, recruitment and selection, induction, professional development, performance planning and review, promotion and other incentives, severance, staff organizational climate and retention, and Omanization.

8.1 Human Resources Planning and Management

ASU’s Strategic Priority (Number Six) is to recruit and develop high quality staff and provide them with an enabling and satisfying work environment. The HR Policies and Procedures Manual guides the work of the HR Department and there is also a quarterly HR report and a calendar that details the activities of the HR Department such as recruitment summary, payroll and Omanization statistics. The Panel supports this initiative.

The HR Department has a five-year HR Strategic Plan, developed in 2014 with five strategies, goals, action plans, KPIs and timeframes. The goals focused on the development and implementation of various policies, procedures and systems of the HR Department. ASU needs to include long-term planning for its staffing needs that aligns with the University-level strategic focus on recruiting high quality staff. The Panel found that the KPIs in the HR Strategic Plan were more accurately described as targets; ‘approve bylaws’ or ‘prepare workload policies’, for example, appeared as KPIs. The Panel urges ASU to review its HR plans to include long-term planning and development that identifies and ensures that the HR requirements of each College are addressed.

Recommendation 23

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A'Sharqiyah University develop and implement a comprehensive HR plan for the University that identifies and supports the HR requirements of the individual Colleges and ensures that it aligns with the University Mission and strategic priorities.

8.2 Staff Profile

ASU has 22 different nationalities amongst its staff although data provided by ASU on this aspect of staff profile was inconsistent (Portfolio, p.63 and p.78). The Panel found that, overall, staff profile data, such as the number of academic staff in AY 2015-2016, was similarly inconsistent (in Appendix B, Table 1 states 88 whereas Table 2 states 97 and Table 3 states 95 academic staff members; in Portfolio, p.II, the total number of teaching staff is stated as 99). ASU clarified that the data belonged to two different academic years. The Panel urges ASU to maintain accurate and consistent staff profile data and that this data is monitored and analyzed to make informed decisions in order to meet strategic priorities and goals (see Recommendation 6).

ASU has a higher percentage of male staff than female staff. The ratio of expatriate academic staff to Omani academic staff is 78% to 22%. At the time of the Audit, ASU comprised the following distribution of academic staff: 36% PhD holders, 51% Masters degree holders and 13% Bachelor degree holders. In the AY 2015-2016, the College of Applied Sciences comprised 13 PhD, 10 Masters and 2 Bachelor degree holders; the College of Business Administration comprised 12 PhD and 14 Masters degree holders; the College of Engineering comprised 7 PhD and 2 Masters degree holders; the Centre of Language and Foundation Studies comprised 2 PhD, 24 Masters and 11 Bachelors degree holders (Portfolio, p.78). As indicated in the Requirements for Oman’s system of
Quality Assurance (ROSQA), a University is expected to implement a staffing structure in which at least 75% of all academic teaching staff have doctorates (ROSQA B, part One, section v(a)). ASU needs to take specific steps to achieve this staffing profile, in line with its status as a University.

8.3 Recruitment and Selection

The recruitment and selection is outlined in ASU’s HR Policy and Procedures Manual and also follows the Ministry of Manpower and Ministry of Higher Education regulations (Portfolio, p.64). The Panel found the policies and procedures to be comprehensive and well documented. During interviews, the Panel heard that staff recruitment needs were initiated from the department level. However, the Panel found no evidence of how it continued further to the College level or to the University level. Vacant positions are posted internally for current employees, then advertised for external candidates.

During interviews, academic staff confirmed the recruitment and selection process and that sometimes they are present on recruitment committees. The Panel was also informed about the challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, due to the location of the University, as new staff arrive with different expectations. The Panel agrees that the recruitment and retention of academic staff is a challenge for ASU. The Panel urges ASU to implement a comprehensive HR plan to address the current challenges in relation to recruitment and selection of staff (see Recommendation 23).

8.4 Induction

ASU has a structured orientation program and new staff are provided with the HR Manual outlining policies and guidelines. In addition, they are oriented with the facilities and given a presentation of the University (Portfolio, p.65). During interviews, staff confirmed that the induction process takes place. The induction process found in the HR Policies and Procedures Manual is not comprehensive. ASU may broaden its scope of induction to include the process for academic and non-academic staff.

ASU conducted an orientation session during the latter part of 2016 for new and existing staff members and collected feedback for improvements. While not all staff participated in the orientation session, feedback from staff showed that they were satisfied, although they requested more information on research. ASU is encouraged to develop action plans in response to staff feedback to ensure that its approach to staff induction is fit for purpose.

8.5 Professional Development

ASU states that professional development activities and training for non-academic staff are delivered through a center for professional development and continuous learning (Portfolio, p.65). ASU identifies staff training needs through the staff performance appraisal system. The University conducts various professional development activities for faculty and staff, examples of which include a strategic planning workshop, team building activity and seminars and workshops for research writing (Portfolio, p.65). During interviews, staff confirmed that ASU provides professional development activities. While the Panel supports these activities, it did not find any formal overarching plan for professional development activities for academic or non-academic staff. The Panel encourages ASU to develop and implement a comprehensive professional development plan that takes into consideration the individual staff needs of the Colleges and departments.

8.6 Performance Planning and Review

The HR Policies and Procedures Manual includes performance review procedures (Portfolio, p.66). According to ASU’s procedures, annual staff performance appraisal is conducted by line managers,
although the Panel found evidence that academic staff were evaluated by the College Dean rather than the Academic Department Heads. During interviews, the Panel heard that the staff appraisal procedures were not clear to all staff. Furthermore, the Panel heard that performance appraisal was not related to promotion or other incentives claimed by ASU such as bonus, increments or promotion. The Panel urges ASU to ensure that the system for performance planning is transparent, implemented consistently and monitored regularly for effectiveness.

ASU has an Academic Promotion Policy for all academic teaching staff. The promotion of faculty from one rank to another follows the guidelines of the MoHE. According to the Promotion Policy, faculty can be promoted only once in four years, although this is subject to change at the discretion of the VC. Some contents of this policy do not apply to Arabic teaching staff and procedures are amended for them accordingly. The Panel urges ASU to provide a clear and transparent Promotion Policy that applies to all Arabic and non-Arabic teaching staff.

The Promotion Policy has an appeals process which states that the judgment of the Appeals Committee or VC cannot be questioned but reconsideration of process or procedure can be requested. The Policy also states that appeals applicants who have been rejected may not always be informed of their appeals decision and if they do not hear from the VC within 30 days, it needs to be assumed that their appeals is rejected. The Panel considers that ASU needs a system that provides feedback of all decisions made to the staff concerned.

The Promotion Policy for non-academic staff is outlined in the HR Manual and is carried out by the respective line managers. The University provides a bonus for staff with good performance (Portfolio, p.67). During interviews, the Panel was informed that bonuses were given to all faculty and staff and this was not based on their appraisal. The Panel found no reference to the procedures for bonus within either the promotion policy or the HR Manual. The Panel urges ASU to ensure that criteria for promotions and incentives are clearly communicated and operationalized for all ASU employees.

**Recommendation 24**

*The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a transparent system for promotion and incentives that is clearly communicated to both academic and non-academic staff.*

### 8.7 Severance

ASU’s severance policy is aligned to the Oman Labour Law and is also stated in the staff employment contract (Portfolio, p.68). The HR Policies and Procedures Manual describes procedures for resignation, termination, dismissal and redundancy. The Panel did not find any appeals policy for severance. ASU’s HR Manual has a Grievance and Appeals Policy. However, the Policy is more about grievance than appeals. A grievance decision needs to be followed by an opportunity to appeal. The Panel encourages ASU to develop clear policies for grievance and appeals. ASU has an exit interview form as part of its severance procedure. While the Panel found evidence of this, it was not clear how ASU uses data from exit interviews to make informed decisions. The Panel encourages ASU to address all aspects of severance, including appeals on severance and to evaluate these procedures for effectiveness.

### 8.8 Staff Organizational Climate and Retention

ASU’s Strategic Priority (Number Six) is to create a satisfying work environment for its employees. ASU conducted a University-wide satisfaction survey in Spring 2016 on HR, finance, IT, procurement, facilities and security (Portfolio, p.69). While the survey covered a number of different areas, it did not include anything on research. The overall survey results showed a satisfaction rate of around 54%. The Panel found that over 60% of staff were dissatisfied with HR activities. Results
of the subsequent staff survey, conducted in February 2017 showed an increased overall satisfaction rate of above 70%. While the Panel acknowledges the increased rate of staff satisfaction, it did not find evidence of an action plan to address the areas of dissatisfaction for either survey. During interviews, the Panel heard that staff were dissatisfied over promotions, faculty work overload due to administrative burdens and a lack of research facilities. The Panel encourages ASU to develop and implement a comprehensive satisfaction survey for academic and administrative staff in each Department and College to help ASU identify and support the needs of staff and faculty effectively and to monitor this survey for effectiveness.

The Panel heard that ASU faces challenges in attracting and retaining staff, due to its location outside the capital area. The Panel viewed the Attrition Report prepared by the HR Department in 2015/2016 identifying reasons for staff resignation and found that it included items such as a lack of transparency in the salary system, no professional development and high workload. ASU needs to develop strategies to probe these issues to ascertain whether they represent a more comprehensive picture of staff satisfaction that is obtained through other feedback.

8.9 Omanization

ASU states that it is committed to supporting Omanization by giving priority to Omanis who have the required qualifications and experience. The Omanization rate in ASU is 56.8%. As of 2016-2017, ASU had 132 Omani staff members in non-academic areas and 15 Omani staff members in academic areas (Portfolio, p.70). The distribution of academic staff in each College is 14% Omani staff in the Centre for Language and Foundation Studies; 10% in the College of Engineering; 20% in the College of Business Administration, and 28% in the College of Applied Sciences. The Panel concludes that the percentage of Omani academic staff is low in its higher education departments and Colleges. ASU states that the Omanization numbers are increasing which shows a positive intention towards Omanization. However, the Panel did not find any clear strategy or steps taken by ASU to attract or train academic Omani staff. The Panel concluded that ASU needs to develop and implement recruitment and retention strategies for recruiting Omani staff especially in the teaching areas.
9 GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

ASU Strategic Priority (Number Seven) is to provide exemplary campus building and facilities. ASU is confident that the new, modern campus will support the achievement of the University’s Vision. ASU is expected to move to the new campus (which has a total built up area of 43,000 m²) in the latter part of 2017.

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

9.1 General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management

ASU’s planning and management of its general support services and facilities is the responsibility of the Facilities and Stores Department (FSD). This Department is currently staffed with a Director, a civil engineer and three technicians. The Department has a yearly Operational Plan that covers maintenance, building services, operations, transportation and safety. The Operational Plan has targets, measures and responsibilities but, as with other ASU Operational Plans, there is no mention of budgeting of resources. Nor does this plan take into account the individual needs of the different Colleges in the University. The Panel encourages that ASU take into account the different needs of individual Colleges when developing plans.

At the time of the Audit Visit, ASU was in the final stages of planning the move to the new campus. The Panel visited the new campus and was impressed with the efforts to provide appropriate facilities for staff and students. The Panel supports ASU’s relocation to the new campus.

Affirmation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with A’Sharqiyah University regarding the need to expand campus facilities and supports the relocation to a larger and well-equipped campus to better serve students, staff and all stakeholders.

9.2 Public Relations and Marketing

Public relations and marketing activities in ASU are the responsibility of the Marketing Department. ASU’s Strategic Priority (Number Four) states an intention to build the profile of the University in the region by building marketing and public relations capabilities. The Marketing Department was established in 2015 and the structure comprises a Marketing Director and three staff members (Portfolio, pp.71-72). The Panel found that currently this Department has only one recently appointed staff member and all other positions are vacant. ASU has a Strategic Plan for marketing that aims to improve marketing and internal and external communications. The activities of this plan were dated 2014. ASU needs to update its marketing activities and introduce systems that can guide and monitor the activities of this Department.

ASU uses both print and electronic media to create awareness about programs and activities (Portfolio, p.72). The Public Relations and Marketing Policy and Corporate Social Responsibility Policy are currently only in draft form. The Panel encourages ASU to approve and implement these policies. ASU advertises its programs in regional newspapers and works with embassies to disseminate information and materials about the University beyond the region. The Panel encourages ASU to introduce formal mechanisms to guide, monitor and evaluate its activities and to ensure that the Public Relations and Marketing Department has sufficient expertise and capacity to fulfil its responsibilities.
9.3 Communication Services

ASU aims to improve communications by developing an IT strategy. ASU has an IT Manual for communication services but the Panel found this Manual to be plagiarized (see Appendix B and Section 2.5). ASU communicates with faculty, non-academic staff and students through noticeboards, emails, SMS, Twitter, suggestion boxes, handbooks, the university website and shared folders (Portfolio, p.73). The University also has a Student Guide. ASU needs, however, to ensure documents are reviewed and proofread before they are disseminated.

The Panel found that some of the announcements, correspondence, meeting minutes and Exit Award certificates are in Arabic. ASU does not have a communication policy that sets the language of communication in order to ensure that both Arabic and non-Arabic speakers are able to access and engage with relevant documentation. ASU has two exit awards one at the Diploma and other at the Bachelors level. The Panel found the exit awards to be in Arabic. Given that ASU has a number of international students, the Panel urges ASU to ensure that its award certificates meet the needs of its diverse stakeholders. The Panel urges ASU to develop a comprehensive communication strategy. ASU also needs to ensure that the strategy is monitored regularly for effectiveness.

Recommendation 25

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that A’Sharqiyah University develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy that covers the use of Arabic and English languages to ensure that it meets the needs of diverse stakeholders; this strategy needs to be monitored for effectiveness.

9.4 Facilities Management

The planning and management of ASU’s facilities (such as buildings, hostels and parking lots) are the responsibility of the FSD. The FSD subcontracts most of the construction and maintenance work on University facilities. Quality and safety are embedded as part of the contractual obligations with service providers, including in areas such as garbage removal and sewer maintenance. ASU staff conduct regular inspections to ensure health and safety compliance. The Panel did not find a formal system to determine if the approach to facilities management was effective and the Panel encourages ASU to do so.
APPENDIX A.  AUDIT PANEL

Prof. Mairead Browne (Chair)
Quality Assurance Consultant in Higher Education
University of Technology, Sydney
Australia

Dr. Bilal Al Omari
Assistant Professor of Economics
Al Buraimi University College
Oman

Dr. Louis der Westhuizen
Executive Manager in the Office of the Vice-Rector Academic
University of the Free State
South Africa

Dr. Mona Ismail
Dean
Scientific College of Design, Oman

Prof. Ramzi Taha
Department of Civil and Architectural Engineering
College of Engineering
Qatar University, Qatar

Hannah Manogaran
Review Director
Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA)
Oman
APPENDIX B.  EVIDENCE OF PLAGIARISM IN ASU MATERIALS

Access to this content is restricted.
APPENDIX C.  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.

ASU .................................................. A’Sharqiyah University
A&R ................................................. Admission and Registration
AY ..................................................... Academic Year
AVC ................................................... Assistant Vice Chancellor
BoD .................................................... Board of Directors
BSC .................................................... Balance Score Card
BoT .................................................... Board of Trustees
CAB ................................................... College Academic Board
CAS ................................................... College of Applied Sciences
CEC ................................................... Community Engagement Committee
CLFS .................................................. Centre for Language and Foundation Studies
CMA ................................................... Capital Market Authority
CoBA .................................................. College of Business Administration
CoE ................................................... College of Engineering
DVC ................................................... Deputy Vice Chancellor
Deployment ........................................ The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a HEI’s plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not.
DSA .................................................. Department of Student Affairs
External Reviewer .............................. A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of the OAAA’s various external review Panels.
ERP .................................................. Enterprise Resource Planning
FSD ................................................... Facilities and Stores Department
FURAP ............................................... Faculty-mentored Undergraduate Research Award Program
GFP ................................................... General Foundation Program
HEAC ............................................... Higher Education Admission Centre
HEI ................................................... Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider)
HSE ................................................... Health, Safety and Environment
IAC ................................................... Industry Advisory Council
IELTS .................................................. International English Language Testing System
Improvement ...................................... The fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how effectively an organization is improving its approach and deployment for any given topic in order to achieve better results.
KPI ................................................... Key Performance Indicator
MoHE ............................................... Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om)
MoM ................................................... Ministry of Manpower
MoU ................................................... Memorandum of Understanding
OAAA ............................................Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (www.oaaa.gov.om)
OAAA Board ..................................The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OSU ...........................................Oklahoma State University
Panel Chairperson ..........................The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member .................................An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
PDCL ...........................................Professional Development and Continuous Learning
Portfolio ......................................see Quality Audit Portfolio.
QAC ...........................................Quality Assurance Committee
Quality Assurance ............................The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met.
Quality Audit .................................An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its Mission and Vision.
Quality Audit Portfolio ......................The report produced as the result of a self study. Also forms the main submission made to the OAAA by the HEI being audited.
Quality Audit Report .......................A public report published by the OAAA which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel’s External Review of a HEI.
Results .......................................The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic’s approach and deployment.
Review Director .............................An OAAA staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide professional guidance and support
Sic .............................................indicates that the preceding segment of the quote was copied faithfully, in spite of a mistake
SP .............................................Strategic Plan
ROSQA .................................Requirement for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ToR ...........................................Terms of Reference
TRC ...........................................The Research Council
TTU ...........................................Texas Tech University
UAB ...........................................University Academic Board
UREC ...........................................University Research and Enterprise Committee
ULTC ..........................................University Learning and Teaching Committee
VC ...........................................Vice Chancellor