



Oman Academic  
Accreditation Authority

**Report of a General  
Foundation Programme  
Quality Audit of  
College of Banking and  
Financial Studies**

**December 2019**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Overview of the GFP Quality Audit Process.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>How to Read this Report.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Executive Summary of Findings .....	5
Summary of Commendations .....	8
Summary of Affirmations.....	8
Summary of Recommendations .....	9
<b>1 Governance and Management.....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Mission, Vision and Values .....	10
1.2 Governance and Management Arrangements .....	11
1.3 Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance .....	13
1.4 Operational Planning.....	14
1.5 Financial Management .....	14
1.6 Risk Management.....	14
1.7 Monitoring and Review.....	15
1.8 Student Grievance Process .....	16
1.9 Health and Safety .....	17
<b>2 GFP Student Learning.....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1 GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes .....	18
2.2 Curriculum .....	19
2.3 Student Entry and Exit Standards.....	20
2.4 Teaching Quality .....	22
2.5 Academic Integrity .....	23
2.6 Assessment of Student Achievement .....	23
2.7 Feedback to Students on Assessment .....	24
2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation.....	24
2.9 Student Retention and Progression.....	25
2.10 Relationships with GFP Alumni.....	26
<b>3 Academic and Student Support Services .....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 Student Profile.....	27
3.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records).....	28
3.3 Student Induction .....	28
3.4 Teaching and Learning Resources .....	29
3.5 Information and Learning Technology Services .....	29
3.6 Academic Advising .....	30
3.7 GFP Student Learning Support .....	30
3.8 Student Satisfaction and Climate .....	31
3.9 Student Behaviour.....	32
3.10 Non-Academic Student Support Services and Facilities.....	32
3.11 External Engagement .....	33

<b>4 Staff and Staff Support Services .....</b>	<b>34</b>
4.1 Staff Profile .....	34
4.2 Recruitment and Selection .....	34
4.3 Staff Induction.....	34
4.4 Professional Development.....	35
4.5 Performance Planning and Review .....	36
4.6 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention.....	36
4.7 Omanisation .....	38
<b>Appendix A. Audit Panel.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Appendix B. Abbreviations, Acronyms and Terms.....</b>	<b>40</b>

## OVERVIEW OF THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

This General Foundation Programme (GFP) Quality Audit Report (the ‘Report’) documents the findings of a GFP Quality Audit by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) of the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS). The GFP Quality Audit followed the process of audit as outlined in OAAA’s General Foundation Programme Quality Audit Manual.<sup>1</sup> The GFP Quality Audit also used the *Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes* (‘GFP Standards’) as an external reference point.<sup>2</sup>

The GFP Quality Audit commenced with CBFS undertaking a self-study of its Mission, Vision and systems in relation to the GFP. The results were summarised in the GFP Portfolio (the ‘Portfolio’). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the agreed date of 11 November 2018.

The OAAA appointed an external GFP Quality Audit Panel (the ‘Panel’), comprising appropriately qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the GFP Quality Audit (for membership of the Panel see Appendix A). The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 23 December 2018 to consider CBFS’s GFP Portfolio. Following this, a representative of the Panel Chairperson and the Review Director undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to CBFS on 09 January 2019 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and arrange for the Panel’s Audit Visit. Prior to the Audit Visit, the Panel formally invited submissions from the public about the quality of CBFS’s activities in relation to the GFP. No public submissions were received using this process.

The GFP Quality Audit Visit took place from 10 February to 14 February 2019. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 75 people, including current and former GFP students, GFP and post-GFP faculty, GFP support staff, CBFS senior management and administrative staff. The Panel also visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

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

The Panel’s audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. No documents created after 14 February 2019 (the last day of the Audit Visit) were taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit other than pre-existing evidence specifically requested by the Panel in advance and/or submitted by the HEI in response to GFPQA draft Report v5. This Report was approved by the OAAA Board on 24 November 2019.

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

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/To%20upload-FINAL-GFP%20Quality%20Audit%20Manual%2025%20April%202017.pdf>

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

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oaaa.gov.om>

## HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

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

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

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

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

## CONCLUSIONS

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

### *Executive Summary of Findings*

The College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) was founded in 1983 under the name of ‘Oman Institute of Bankers’ as an outcome of Royal Decree No 64/1983 and operates under the supervision of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) (Portfolio, p2). It has grown from being essentially an industry training organisation, training Omani citizens for roles in the banking and finance industry, to being a higher education provider open to industries other than banking and finance while retaining a banking and finance focus for core offerings. There are currently more than 1,800 students enrolled in a number of academic and professional courses in the Departments of Professional Studies, Postgraduate Studies, Undergraduate Studies, and the English Language Center (ELC). Approximately 250 students are enrolled in the General Foundation Programme (GFP) offered by the ELC.

The ELC has been responsible for the delivery of the GFP since 2001. Over the years the programme has evolved with the changing external and internal environment. Originally being offered as a seven-level or band GFP to banking professionals with better English language skills, it is now being offered as a two-semester programme allowing students to graduate from the GFP within one academic year (Portfolio, p2). The ELC is currently located in Campus 2 and by the end of the academic year (AY) 2018-19, the ELC will relocate to its own dedicated premises on the Main Campus in Bowsher (Portfolio, p3). This relocation is expected to address a number of issues of concern and areas for improvement identified by the ELC regarding the provision of academic and student support services to GFP students. It is critical that CBFS and the ELC ensure that the identified improvements and actions are implemented and monitored for ongoing enhancement in terms of providing a quality learning and campus experience for GFP students.

CBFS’s Vision is to be a leading institution for higher education in banking and finance in the region. The Vision informs the Mission statement which focuses on developing internationally recognised programmes to meet the evolving needs of banking and finance in the region. Together, these two statements inform the institution’s strategy and shape its educational mandate. The ELC sees its main role in preparing students for their undergraduate studies which is manifested in the ELC Mission and Philosophy statements. The ELC adopts a communicative and collaborative approach to teaching and learning for the GFP.

CBFS has a well-defined hierarchical organisational structure with the Board of Directors (BoD) and the Board of Governors (BoG) providing strategic oversight through the Dean’s office. Three Assistant Deans and several Departmental Directors and Heads of Departments report to the Dean (Portfolio, p7). One of the departments is the ELC, which offers the GFP. The ELC is headed by the Director of the ELC (DoELC) (Portfolio, p7) who operates under the leadership and guidance of the Assistant Dean of Academic Support and Student Affairs (ADASSA) (Portfolio, p7). The ELC is represented on the relevant CBFS committees either by the DoELC or the when required by the Deputy Director. This ensures that GFP issues requiring College-level attention can be addressed directly. Quality assurance oversight at the ELC is provided by the CBFS Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) through the CBFS Quality Assurance Committee. The ELC does not have its own QA structure but assigns the QA role and responsibilities to faculty members who in turn communicate with the QAU for the management of quality assurance of the GFP.

CBFS has institutionalised its strategic planning process through the development of Operational Plans (OPs) for each individual department which are derived from the CBFS Strategic Plan (SP) (Portfolio, p9). The annual ELC OP has recently introduced key performance indicators (KPIs) in alignment with a new CBFS Operational Planning Template. The ELC has an annual review calendar for various aspects of the GFP, and the results of these reviews are used to initiate improvements; if changes are made, their impact is again being reviewed. The Panel concludes that there is evidence of a strong operational governance and management system within the ELC and that the ELC has in place most of the systems required for the effective delivery of the GFP.

The CBFS financial management system is aligned to its SP. The same system is used within the ELC; in particular, there exist well-defined processes to develop, review, and monitor the ELC budget. The ELC has developed its own GFP Risk Register using the CBFS Risk Management Framework. The CBFS Health and Safety Policy underpins the provision of health and safety across all CBFS departments and ensures that there is adequate attention to health and safety issues at the ELC. The CBFS Student Grievance Policy is consistently implemented at the ELC to resolve GFP student grievances in a fair, impartial, and transparent manner.

The GFP aims and learning outcomes (LOs) are clearly defined, comprehensive, and aligned with the Oman Academic Standards for the GFP (OASGFP) and the CBFS Graduate Attributes (GAs) to ensure the 'fitness of purpose' of the GFP (Portfolio, p3). The overall GFP aims are reflected at the individual course level through individual LOs for each course which are mapped against the OASGFP and contribute to the achievement of the CBFS GAs (Portfolio, p16). The ELC Academic Quality Assurance Handbook (AQAH) defines a reliable process to review the GFP curriculum, and both GFP faculty and management are engaged in the review process (Portfolio, p19).

All students eligible for entry into the GFP take placement tests in English, Mathematics and Information Technology (IT) according to the procedures outlined in the Admissions and Registration Policy (Portfolio, p22). For English language the ELC uses the Cambridge English Placement Test (CEPT) which is offered online and free of charge by Cambridge Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge in the UK, and for Mathematics and IT, the ELC uses in-houses tests to determine appropriate learning levels for new GFP students. Benchmarking the Mathematics and IT placement tests against recognised standards of performance would help the ELC develop a more reliable placement mechanism.

The teaching philosophy at CBFS and the ELC is outlined in the CBFS Teaching and Learning Policy and the ELC AQAH. The ELC ensures consistency of the quality of provision and outcomes at the GFP through teaching and learning portfolios maintained by all GFP faculty, regular meetings of the Cohort Teaching Teams (CTT), class observations by mentors and the DoELC and regular teaching and learning evaluation surveys.

CBFS has a set of institutional policies and procedures on academic integrity that reflect its approach to academic misconduct by faculty and students. The ELC has demonstrated a clear effort to raise awareness of the importance of academic integrity amongst the GFP faculty and students. The policies and procedures for upholding academic integrity by GFP faculty and students are comprehensive and reflect prudent higher education practice.

The ELC Assessment Policy (Portfolio, p25) and the Testing and Assessment Manual (TAM) cover the policies and procedures for all areas of testing and assessment related to the GFP. The GFP uses both summative and continuous assessment methods and the ELC has a clearly defined process for the internal moderation of GFP assessments. The TAM includes a clear protocol for giving feedback to GFP students on all types of assessments. GFP students can provide their views on assessment questions and this feedback ultimately feeds into the ELC end-of-year report to inform the academic planning for coming semesters (Portfolio, p28). The ELC makes use of student performance trend data such as student retention, attrition and progression rates to inform GFP curricula, teaching and learning, assessments, and student academic support. The ELC considers GFP alumni as a valuable source for feedback to inform



improvements to the GFP and has recently formalised its engagement with GFP alumni through a survey conducted in AY 2017-18 (Portfolio, p33).

CBFS had 254 GFP students registered in AY 2017-18, compared to 583 students in AY 2013-14, showing a consistently decreasing trend (Portfolio, p61). The five-year trend shows that over the years a majority of the GFP students (76% of the total intake) are sponsored by the MoHE. There has been a significant decrease (58% since AY 2013-14) in the MoHE sponsored students leading to the decrease in the overall student numbers for the GFP. CBFS plans to attract more international students to reduce its dependence on MoHE-sponsored students but would need to provide structured support and assistance to international students in order to attract such students.

The CBFS Admissions and Registration Department (ARD) is responsible for supporting key administrative arrangements and the preparation of various reports needed by academic departments, including the ELC, to inform their planning and review processes. The student profile maintained by the ARD captures the demographic details of the GFP students, but it does not identify any details of special physical or learning needs of GFP students. Early identification of students with special learning needs would allow the ELC to arrange for appropriate support for these students.

The ELC conducts an induction programme, in both English and Arabic, for GFP students at the beginning of the semester (Portfolio, p37). The objective is to introduce newly enrolled students to the facilities and services offered by CBFS in general and the ELC in particular. The induction process at the ELC is reviewed every semester through a survey conducted by the QAU and the feedback is used to inform improvements to this process.

The ELC has a structured approach to the management and review of the provision of GFP teaching, learning and IT resources. CBFS has two libraries, one on each campus and GFP students have full access to both (Portfolio, p38). The library on the ELC campus (Campus 2), however, has limited resources. The IT network limitations at the existing ELC campus hamper the continuous access to software learning platforms such as *Clarity English*, *Mentis* and *Padlet*, limiting the self-study opportunities of GFP students to some extent. It is expected that these identified limitations of the current campus, such as the smaller library and limited internet connectivity, will be addressed by the move of the ELC to the main campus.

CBFS has established the Academic Support Center (ASC) with the objective of complementing the existing range of language and academic writing support services to students provided by the different academic departments including the ELC. The GFP students' use of the ASC is, however, limited as it is located on the CBFS main campus. This is another area where the ELC's move to the main campus will be beneficial for the students. Twice a year, the QAU conducts a student satisfaction survey across all departments of CBFS (Portfolio, p44) but there has been a significant decrease in the number of students responding to the surveys and disaggregated data for GFP students is also not available. This is an area that needs attention as small sample sizes do not provide reliable data to reach significant conclusions.

CBFS, through its comprehensive staff recruitment processes and regulations ensures that the ELC has the required faculty for the effective delivery of the GFP (Portfolio, p52). The ELC faculty profile shows diversity in terms of nationalities, educational qualifications and experience which supports the effective GFP delivery (Portfolio, p52). The CBFS Mentoring Policy as well as the two-stage faculty induction (Portfolio, p53) provide sufficient support for newly recruited GFP faculty to fit into the working environment of the ELC and deliver the GFP in line with the teaching philosophy of the ELC (Portfolio, p53).

Professional development at the ELC takes two forms; internal (i.e., in-house) and external. The GFP staff is encouraged to participate in both (Portfolio, p55). CBFS has a number of mechanisms in place to identify the training needs of ELC faculty (Portfolio, pp54-55). The professional development activities and opportunities, however, seem to be mostly focused on English teaching, as opposed to other GFP subject areas, namely, mathematics and IT. The ELC follows the same framework for performance

planning and review as the other departments but it needs to review its current approach to performance planning and review in the light of some recently introduced measures such as, introducing KPIs in the ELC OP, to ensure sustainability of its performance planning and review process.

The ELC makes a concerted effort to create a positive working environment coupled with incentives and benefits, as detailed in the CBFS Staff Regulations which are applicable to all CBFS staff (Portfolio, p57). In addition to implementing the CBFS Staff Grievance Policy within the ELC, the DoELC follows an ‘open door’ policy providing an accessible platform for staff to voice their opinions, raise concerns and give suggestions (Portfolio, p57). CBFS seeks staff feedback through staff satisfaction surveys administered twice a year. While the response rate to these surveys has been very low for the last four academic years from AY 2014-15 to AY 2017-18, the staff satisfaction rates for the same time period show that a majority of the respondents are satisfied. These data, however, summarize the answers of all CBFS staff and it would be useful to get data specifically for GFP staff as a distinct cohort to better inform the provision for GFP staff. CBFS would also benefit from investigating the reasons for the low response rates and develop strategies to improve participation in the surveys in order to enhance the reliability of the data gathered to inform improvements to the organisational climate within the ELC.

While the ELC OP of AY 2018-19 does not explicitly include Omanisation as an item, the ELC supports CBFS’s approach to Omanisation by giving Omani nationals priority in recruitment and supporting their career progression through scholarships to pursue higher studies (Portfolio, p59). Formalising these initiatives into a plan would help ensure sustainability of the process of Omanisation within the ELC.

Overall, the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio is well structured, clear and reflects the use of the ADRI method for the self-study. It describes the planning and process followed to develop the Portfolio and offers an evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of the policies and procedures, allowing the ELC to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement for the GFP. CBFS has addressed the Recommendations and Affirmations of the 2011 Institutional Audit Report that impact on the GFP.

### ***Summary of Commendations***

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Banking and Financial Studies for the robust governance and management arrangements in place to support the English Language Center in the delivery of the General Foundation Programme. .... 13

### ***Summary of Affirmations***

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority acknowledges that the College of Banking and Financial Studies has identified the need to have clearly defined and measurable Key Performance Indicators in the English Language Center Operational Plan and supports the efforts made in this area. .... 14
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority acknowledges that the College of Banking and Financial Studies has identified challenges to the quality of provision of academic and non-academic support services to the General Foundation Programme students at the current campus, and encourages the College to ensure that identified improvements are realised and result in enhancing student learning experience after moving to the new campus. .... 27

### ***Summary of Recommendations***

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies develop and implement a comprehensive framework to its benchmarking activities for the General Foundation Programme so as to support the assurance of quality of the programme..... 16
2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies review and benchmark its General Foundation Programme Mathematics and IT placement tests for their quality so that they can be used as a suitable tool to define appropriate learning levels of new students within these two areas..... 21
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies, as a matter of urgency, identify the General Foundation Programme students as a separate cohort in the data collection tools and investigate the reasons of their low response rates to the student satisfaction surveys, in order to inform effective planning, provision and monitoring of the services provided to these students..... 32
4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies define the external community for the General Foundation Programme and formalise its approach to and practice of external engagement such that it is aligned with outcomes that serve the development and delivery of the programme. .... 33
5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies review its Annual Training Plan to ensure that the opportunities on offer are relevant to the professional and academic needs of the General Foundation Programme teaching staff. .... 36
6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies formalise its approach to research, and action-research in particular, at the English Language Center to enhance teaching and learning in the context of the General Foundation Programme. .... 36
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies ensure that the General Foundation Programme staff are identified as a distinct cohort in the staff satisfaction surveys and investigate the reasons of their low response rate to these surveys in order to enhance the reliability of the data gathered to inform improvements to staff satisfaction at the English Language Center..... 37
8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies develop and implement an Omanisation plan for the English Language Center aligned to the overall College Omanisation Plan while ensuring the maintenance of the quality of the General Foundation Programme provision. .... 38

## 1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) was founded in 1983 under the name of ‘Oman Institute of Bankers’ as an outcome of Royal Decree No. 64/1983, and it operates under the supervision of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) (Portfolio, p2). It has grown from an industry training organisation, preparing Omani citizens for roles in the banking and finance industry, to being a higher education provider open to industries other than banking and finance while retaining a banking and finance focus for core offerings. Currently, there are approximately 250 students enrolled in the GFP offered by the ELC. The ELC has been offering the GFP since 2001 and over the years the Programme has evolved with changes in the internal and external environment. Since AY 2016-17, the GFP has been offered as a two-semester programme allowing students to graduate from the GFP within one academic year.

This Chapter reports on governance and management of the GFP and includes the Panel’s findings in relation to the GFP Mission, Vision and Values; governance and management; operational planning; financial and risk management; systems for monitoring and review; student grievance process; and health and safety considerations.

### 1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values*

When CBFS was founded in 1983, the aim was to skill Omanis in the field of banking. As the Institute started offering new professional courses in the broad area of banking and finance, it was renamed ‘Institute of Banking and Financial Studies’ through a second Royal Decree (No. 83/1998). In the next phase of its evolution as a higher education institution and in recognition of the manner in which it extended its educational role and activities in the area of banking, finance and business management, a further Royal Decree (No. 12/2004) promulgated a new name change to ‘College of Banking and Financial Studies’. In effect, the Royal Decree recognised and affirmed CBFS’s expansion of academic programmes and enrolling General Education diploma graduates and employees from a wider range of business and industry sectors. There are currently more than 1,800 students enrolled in a number of academic and professional programmes in the Departments of Professional Studies, Postgraduate Studies, Undergraduate Studies, and the ELC.

In 2015, CBFS completed a review of its Mission, Vision, Values and institutional goals (Portfolio, p6). These statements also inform its strategy and shape its educational mandate. The Vision of CBFS is to become ‘a leading institution for higher education in Banking and Finance in the region’. Its Mission is aligned with its Vision, and reads as:

*To develop and offer internationally recognized programmes, capacity building, research and consultancy services, to meet evolving needs of Banking and Finance in the region.*

(CBFS Strategic Plan 2015-2020)

It is in this context that the GFP, under the ELC, fulfils a key role in preparing students for their undergraduate studies. The CBFS Mission and Vision statements serve as an umbrella for the ELC and along with the CBFS Values, influence the ELC Mission, namely:

*To prepare its students with the skills required in English Language, Mathematics and Information Technology to perform and contribute effectively as active, critical thinkers in the academic environment of the college’s diploma and degree programmes; and to become productive, capable and responsible graduates who will add value to the community and society as a whole.*

(ELC Student Handbook 2018-2019)

The ELC's approach to the delivery of the GFP is underpinned by the four CBFS values – offering quality education, stakeholder commitment, innovative services and educational equity (Portfolio, p6). This is evident in the ELC Philosophy which wants 'students to progress in English, Mathematics and Information Technology'.

The ELC adopts a communicative and collaborative approach to teaching and learning emphasising learning by doing, learning through active participation; learning through reflective practices; learning through meaningful production; and learning through exposure to sustainable, portable skills that can be applied at different levels of complexity in a variety of situations. The Panel was informed that since the GFP is a preparatory programme serving to bridge the learning gaps between high school education and tertiary education in HEIs, the ELC Mission statement reflects the core purpose of the GFP.

The ELC is a relatively small unit with 17 faculty members. Most of the faculty members eventually serve in most, if not all, administrative positions and responsibilities in the department thus ensuring that the ELC Philosophy is embedded within the GFP operations. The ELC AQAH underpins the administration of the ELC and the delivery of the GFP in accordance with the CBFS Mission, Vision and Values and the ELC Mission and Philosophy (Portfolio, p23). The Panel noted that the CBFS Mission, Vision and Values as well as the ELC Mission are not only prominently displayed on notice boards in the ELC building but are also included in the ELC Student Handbook. The Panel concluded that involving ELC faculty in the administration of the GFP, implementing the ELC AQAH and conducting relevant workshops for faculty has helped CBFS firmly embed its institutional values and educational approach within the GFP.

## **1.2 Governance and Management Arrangements**

CBFS has an organisational structure that clearly defines the management of its academic and administrative departments. It operates under the jurisdiction of the CBO whose representatives constitute the Board of Governors (BoG) which is the highest approving body for CBFS (Portfolio, p7). The CBFS Board of Directors (BoD) is composed of experienced members from different types of financial institutions, representing important stakeholders, who provide insight and a range of perspectives and expertise to the board. The BoD, chaired by a representative from the CBO, approves the annual budget of CBFS and submits it to the BoG for endorsement (Portfolio, p7). The BoD is supported by the internal Audit Committee which assists with oversight of financial reporting, internal control and auditing, as well as legal compliance. The College Academic Advisory Committee (CAAC) reviews the implementation of the SP and retains the oversight of academic standards.

The GFP is offered by the ELC which is a constituent department of CBFS and headed by the DoELC (Portfolio, p7). CBFS has a well-defined hierarchical structure for the management of the ELC and the GFP that comprises a Dean, three Assistant Deans, and several Departmental Directors and Heads of Departments (Portfolio, p7). The ELC operates under the leadership and guidance of the DoELC with oversight by the Assistant Dean of Academic Support and Student Affairs (ADASSA) (Portfolio, p7).

The DoELC is responsible for the management, administration and pedagogical direction and support of the ELC (Portfolio, p7). Currently, the ELC operates with 17 full-time faculty and, depending on demand, part-time faculty are employed to teach English, Mathematics and IT (Portfolio, p8). Two Deputy Directors assist the DoELC in the day-to-day management of the GFP, each responsible for specific aspects of the programme, namely the Deputy Director for Testing and Assessment (DDTA) and the Deputy Director for Administration and Curriculum (DDAC) (Portfolio, p8). The DoELC is further supported by Campus Coordinators (CCs) who are responsible for all administrative and clerical duties and function as a central contact between the DoELC, ELC faculty, students, other CBFS departments and external stakeholders. The CCs

liaise with the Admissions and Registration Department regarding student intake, student placement testing, student academic progression, repeating students and student attendance. The CCs are also involved in academic planning, timetabling classes, and managing teaching loads, facilities and shifts for each semester (Portfolio, p8). The ELC structure also includes GFP Course Coordinators (CoCo) who lead the Cohort Teaching Teams (CTT) and act as the primary liaisons with the Curriculum Unit (CU) and the Assessment Unit (AU). The GFP has a CoCo for each of the two English language cohorts and one CoCo each for Mathematics and IT (Portfolio, p8). Each CTT is responsible for the effective delivery of the course materials, practice sessions, and assessments as per the programme requirements.

The Panel confirmed from the documentation and the interviews that the corporate and academic governance systems are well defined and that there is attention given to the academic functions of the College, in particular with respect to the oversight of the GFP. The Panel concluded that the core functions of the GFP are sufficiently managed and that care is taken to ensure that key issues are discussed, addressed and monitored at both the ELC and CBFS levels. The documentation reviewed includes, for example, the quarterly Activities Report of the ELC submitted to the senior management which provides regular feedback on the operations of the ELC and minutes of the ELC Faculty meetings discussing different aspects of the GFP learning objectives, LOs, and syllabi.

The Panel observed from the documentation and the interviews that the ELC has a strong, competent, and intellectually capable leadership, which is evidenced in the 'GFP Review and Revision Proposal'. This supports the GFP to not only achieve but enhance its fit-for-purpose objective as a programme. A shared leadership and management approach is taken in running the GFP. It was evident to the Panel that the GFP is made more effective by these factors and that this bodes well for the future of the GFP and its students.

The GFP is represented on CBFS committees either by the DoELC or the ADASSA. The DoELC, for example, is a member of the Academic Committee (AC) of CBFS which meets monthly and has the mandate to oversee matters pertaining to or affecting CBFS's academic direction in accordance with the CBFS Mission, Vision and Values (Portfolio, p8). The ADASSA, on the other hand, is a member of the CBFS Risk and Strategic Management Committee (Portfolio, p8). The Panel reviewed a number of examples of terms of reference to guide the work of the different committees. The Panel concluded that the terms of reference are important and apposite to guide and ensure the good functioning of the ELC and the quality of its academic programmes. The Panel is satisfied that core academic and administrative processes are effectively addressed in the GFP. In addition, the Panel noted that there are effective approval processes in place when GFP related requests are presented from the ELC to the BoD as, for example, seeking BoD approval for changes to the GFP programme structure.

The ELC AQAH provides guidelines for the management of the ELC and the delivery of the GFP and is comprehensive in its scope and detail. It includes ELC staff roles and responsibilities, and it addresses the areas of academic standards, teaching and learning, GFP programme overview, curriculum development, management and review, assessments, academic integrity (plagiarism), student appeals, academic advising and at-risk-of-failing students, student attendance, benchmarking, student participation and representation, teaching quality and teacher performance. The ELC AQAH states, for example, that all issues regarding approved academic standards within the College are addressed by the AC.

The AC has clearly defined terms of reference and its membership includes the Assistant Deans and the Departmental Directors. The Panel tested the functioning of the AC and other committees by tracking a proposal through the system (the proposal was to structure the GFP using a semester timetable rather than making use of a term timetable). After having been discussed by the AC and the CAAC, the proposal was finally approved by the BoD (Portfolio, p8). The Panel observed an appropriate balance of decentralising authority and noted that all

operational issues regarding semester-based internal adjustments and improvements that do not affect the approved curriculum and assessments structure and programme outcomes are overseen by the DoELC. Major changes, however, require the involvement of the ADASSA and approval from the AC and the BoD. The documentation demonstrated a strong, functioning operational governance and management system.

The ELC OP is developed annually by the DoELC and discussed with ELC faculty and the ADASSA (Portfolio, p7). The CBFS senior management is regularly updated on the operation of the GFP through quarterly Activities Reports and the ELC End-of-Academic-Year Summary Report which the DoELC annually presents to the AC (Portfolio, p7, p8). These reports contain a summary of student registration numbers, student performance data, curriculum assessments, and staffing plans for the following academic year (Portfolio, p7, p8).

From the perspective of the GFP quality audit, and in respect of the documentation provided and from the interviews conducted, the Panel is of the view that ELC governance and management structures are well established, fit-for-purpose and well-functioning to support the delivery of the GFP.

### **Commendation 1**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the College of Banking and Financial Studies for the robust governance and management arrangements in place to support the English Language Center in the delivery of the General Foundation Programme.**

A review by the Panel of the sample minutes of an ELC Faculty and Management Meeting showed that management arrangements are working well. Inter-departmental cooperation and efficiency is promoted through regular meetings of the ADASSA with all Departmental Heads/Directors. The Panel, however, heard in interviews that this could be enhanced. The Panel confirmed that an HR Consultancy project is underway to review a range of areas for efficiency and improvement purposes which may result in changes to the committee structure and management reporting lines.

The CBFS Academic Quality Policy submitted for this Audit is in its second draft and dated January 2018. The Portfolio indicates that it is being implemented across CBFS (Portfolio, p7). It is designed to address both internal and external audiences and is intended to benchmark and evaluate teaching and learning and performance across all departments of CBFS while ensuring continuous improvement (Portfolio, p5). It makes explicit reference to the ADRI model for quality assurance and makes use of appendices which include quality procedures with related roles and responsibilities. The Panel is of the view that further benchmarking of the Academic Quality Policy against policies of similar institutions could strengthen the fit-for-purpose of all CBFS academic programmes. CBFS is encouraged to finalise the Policy as it is a critical step in completing the governance and procedural architecture of the College.

The Panel noted the important role of the CBFS Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) in coordinating key planning and quality processes across CBFS including the ELC (Portfolio, p9). The Panel also confirmed from interviews and evidence provided that the ELC gives attention to the management of quality processes and to the review and improvement steps in the quality cycle. The Panel also confirmed that the GFP underwent a fairly detailed participatory review and initiated preparation for its Quality Audit in June 2015 with most work being done in 2018.

### **1.3 Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance**

The CBFS GFP has no affiliation agreements.

#### **1.4 Operational Planning**

CBFS has institutionalised its strategic planning process through the development of an OP for each individual department which is derived from the CBFS SP (Portfolio, p9). CBFS conducted an internal review in AY 2014-15 to produce its SP 2015-2020 (Portfolio, p9). CBFS has addressed OAAA Institutional Quality Audit Recommendation 3 by ensuring that the ELC OP is aligned with the overall operational planning of the College (Portfolio, p9). The DoELC is responsible for the implementation of the ELC OP, while the ADASSA is responsible for ensuring that the ELC OP objectives are derived from the strategic objectives of the CBFS SP (Portfolio, p9).

The Panel confirmed that the ELC is annually reviewing the achievement of targets set out in its OP using the ADRI model. The Panel noted the ELC's use of the ADRI approach to review the results of the improvement activities undertaken in the course of an academic year and outline necessary future actions based on the review of the OP. The Panel was pleased to note the inclusion of staff in the development and preparation of the OP through the collection of their comments and suggestions. This participative approach to operational planning within the ELC was also confirmed during the interviews.

The Panel noted the introduction of a new CBFS Operational Planning Template with a focus on finance. While the Panel found the new template very useful, it noted that its application is limited to some areas of the ELC. The Panel was informed that the CBFS OPs would make more use of KPIs linked to the CBFS SP, in a shift from plans explicitly based on an ADRI template in the future. It was clarified to the Panel that the ADRI model, however, would still be given attention. The Panel confirmed that the annual ELC OP has recently begun to make use of KPIs in alignment with the new CBFS Operational Planning Template. Given the recent strategic decision to utilise KPIs at CBFS and the ELC, the Panel is unable to comprehensively comment on their use, but it encourages the ELC to see that the careful choice of KPIs assists in the quality delivery of the GFP and that the KPIs support the implementation, review and improvement aspects of GFP delivery and outputs. The Panel was informed that attention will need to be given to the ongoing refinement and integration of the KPIs across all operational and other College plans.

##### **Affirmation 1**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority acknowledges that the College of Banking and Financial Studies has identified the need to have clearly defined and measurable Key Performance Indicators in the English Language Center Operational Plan and supports the efforts made in this area.**

The Panel concluded that institutional planning activities at the ELC are taken seriously with high-level discussions held by senior managers from across CBFS to approve the plans and provide feedback where warranted.

#### **1.5 Financial Management**

CBFS has a Financial Strategy which aims at supporting the CBFS SP (Portfolio, p10), and a defined budgeting and financial management system in place to implement the Financial Strategy. The DoELC prepares an annual budget proposal for submission to the Director of Finance (Portfolio, p10). The departmental budgets are required to be aligned with the strategic priorities of the College and line managers must be able to defend their proposed budgets. A process of finalising the budgets leads to a consolidation of the College budget for approval by the BoD which also approves the College's Financial Strategy (Portfolio, p10). Financial forecasting is used to ensure the sustainability of the College and is annually reviewed. The Panel was provided with the CBFS Financial Strategic Plan 2015–2020 which showed, on the basis of



historical financial results and future projections, the alignment of funding to the institutional strategy. There is an established monitoring system of budgetary allocations. The recently introduced Operational Planning Template facilitates an enhanced review of the revenue and expenditure at the ELC.

The Panel concluded that CBFS has a financial management system in place which is aligned to the CBFS strategy and is implemented at the ELC. There are processes for the development, review, and monitoring of the ELC budget. The Panel heard that the ELC budget is prepared by the DoELC in consultation with the deputy directors, particularly when it comes to staff recruitment. The GFP is well-resourced and it was reported that it has an adequate budget

## **1.6 Risk Management**

CBFS has a College Risk Register which was finalised in AY 2013-14 (Portfolio, p11). The Risk Management Framework provides guidance in ensuring that the College maintains a risk register from which institutional risks are managed. This framework helps CBFS identify and evaluate various risks (Portfolio, p11). The Panel noted that the CBFS Risk Register is monitored by the CBFS Audit Committee. From the documents provided, the Panel noted that there were no details on the actual dates on which the registers were finalised or approved and which periods they covered. The Panel encourages CBFS to ensure that all its documents are dated for version control, thus enabling their use for reference and archival purposes (see Section 1.2).

In keeping with the CBFS approach to risk management, the ELC also maintains a Risk Register for the GFP which identifies and ranks risks across a range of areas and proposes specific controls to mitigate each risk. The Panel is of the view that this constitutes good higher education practice. The Panel was pleased to note that the CBFS Risk and Strategy Management Committee (R&SMC) monitors the interventions at the ELC to lessen risk; an example of such an intervention was to develop strategies for supporting GFP students at risk of failing (Portfolio, p11). The Panel also noted evidence of the management of financial and academic risks and how the R&SMC takes them into account at the College level and subsequently acts to address them (Portfolio, p8). The Panel suggests that the Risk Framework in relation to the ELC is reviewed for comprehensiveness and scope against good higher education practices to ensure that the depth of the risk analysis and risk amelioration measures are adequate.

## **1.7 Monitoring and Review**

The ELC is reviewed annually, at a strategic level by senior stakeholders such as the BoD and at the operational level by the senior management such as the ADASSA and the AC (Portfolio, p11). The ELC faculty also conduct a review each semester (Portfolio, p11). The BoD monitors student enrolment through the review of a quarterly report submitted to the BoD Coordinator and reviews improvement interventions proposed by the ELC. Reports of these reviews highlight trends in student registration, progression and attrition (Portfolio, p11). An example of BoD oversight through such quarterly reports into the operations of the ELC is the BoD approval to change the GFP structure from the use of 'terms' to the current 'semester' system to stem the increasing student attrition rate (Portfolio, p11).

The GFP Review and Revision Proposal provided the Panel with insight into the workings of the ELC and its capability to run a well-organised and high-quality GFP. It is a well-conceptualised and data-rich document which furnishes a good analysis of the state of the GFP in that time period.

The Panel was pleased to note that there are surveys of staff and students of the GFP used to inform the monitoring and improvement of the GFP. The Panel is of the view that it is critical that maximum benefit is drawn from the analysis of surveys for improvement purposes and that feedback is provided to survey participants on decisions and improvements which have arisen

from the feedback. As noted later in the Report, there are two areas of concern identified by the Panel. The first is the ability of the College to disaggregate staff and student data as they relate specifically to the GFP so that findings can be used to monitor and implement improvements at the GFP. The second is the response rates by staff and students to provide statistically significant data which allow for the development of trends and findings to inform interventions and actions for improvement (see Recommendation 4 and Recommendation 10).

The Panel established that the ELC has an annual review calendar for the various aspects of the GFP and the results of such reviews are used to initiate improvements; one example is the GFP review in AY 2017-18 after which the semester system was introduced. There is evidence that the impact of such changes on the GFP is being reviewed. The ELC AQAH outlines the processes for curriculum reviews, programme reviews and course evaluations. The Panel concluded that CBFS has mechanisms in place to regularly monitor and review the GFP.

One activity which underpins monitoring and evaluation is to ensure that there is an effective and detailed approach to, and practice of, benchmarking. The Panel noted that CBFS has initiated action on this through the benchmarking of the GFP with a local institution in AY 2017-18, without having a specific framework or policy to inform this activity. The Panel believes that for the monitoring and evaluation at the ELC to be effective, CBFS needs to develop a comprehensive framework to systematise its approach to benchmarking for the GFP.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies develop and implement a comprehensive framework to its benchmarking activities for the General Foundation Programme so as to support the assurance of quality of the programme.**

#### **1.8 Student Grievance Process**

The CBFS Student Grievance Policy is a formal mechanism available to students should they find certain decisions affecting them not in accordance with CBFS rules and policies. The purpose of the Policy is to establish a due process to resolve student grievances and to maintain mutual trust and harmony between students and staff (Portfolio, p12). The procedures stipulated in the Policy allow students to raise issues regarding academic and non-academic matters. Students are made aware of the Policy during induction at the start of the every semester and through the Student Handbook (Portfolio, p12).

There are a number of mechanisms available for students to address their concerns. The class teachers and the Academic Advisors (AA) are the first points of contact for GFP students wishing to raise any concerns. If required, the GFP students can also approach the CC or the DoELC for further assistance within the ELC (Portfolio, p12). GFP students can also approach the staff of the Student Affairs Unit (SAU) or talk to the Dean during his Open-Door Policy hours (Portfolio, p13). The Panel noted that there are other ways for students to resolve their issues, for example filling in the weekly feedback form and making use of the suggestion box. There are also 'students voice' and 'hotline' email addresses available which can be used by GFP students (Portfolio, p13, p37). The Panel was informed that during the period from AY 2013-14 to AY 2018-19 no emails from GFP students were received on the 'hotline'. The Panel concludes that the systems available to GFP students to express their concerns and needs are adequate.

The SAU representatives are available to GFP students twice a week at the ELC (Portfolio, p13). The Panel, however, heard that most GFP-related student issues are resolved by the CCs without the need for intervention by the SAU. It is expected that with the relocation of the GFP to the main campus the SAU will play a greater role in assisting GFP students.

The Panel heard that while students are made aware of the student grievance processes during the induction, because of the amount of information provided to students during induction, they do not always remember what to do in the case of a grievance. The Panel therefore suggests that the ELC staff remind students of the processes from time to time, for example in class inductions. The Panel also heard of the continual review and improvement of the content of the student induction to enhance its effectiveness (see Section 3.3). Overall, the Panel concluded that College's approach to academic and non-academic student grievances is well-established and consistently used to resolve student grievances in a manner which is fair, impartial and transparent.

### **1.9 Health and Safety**

CBFS has a Health and Safety Policy that underpins the provision of health and safety at the ELC. The Head of Administration Affairs under the oversight of the ADCS is responsible for the implementation of this Policy across all departments of CBFS. The R&SMC is responsible for the management of all risks related to the provision of health and safety at the ELC (Portfolio, p14, see Section 1.6).

The Panel confirmed that fire drills are carried out twice a year at the ELC as per the mandate of the policy and that training is provided to staff on first aid and the use of fire extinguishers (Portfolio, p14). In addition to this, Civil Defence authorities provide workshops for staff and students on health and safety topics on campus. A registered nurse provides services to GFP students two days a week and there is an arrangement with a local hospital to treat serious student medical emergencies. The Panel noted from the documentation, observations, and interviews that there is adequate attention to health and safety at the ELC. It was also informed that there will be enhanced health and safety quality and provision after the relocation of the ELC to the main campus (see Section 3, Affirmation 2).

## 2 GFP STUDENT LEARNING

The ELC is mandated to offer all GFP subjects, namely English, Mathematics, and IT. General Study Skills (GSS) are embedded in all these courses. The aim of the ELC is to prepare students to embark on their diploma or degree programmes. The philosophy guiding the GFP is to take ‘a communicative, collaborative approach to teaching and learning’ (Portfolio, p16).

This Chapter considers GFP student learning at CBFS and specifically reports on the following: GFP aims and learning outcomes; curriculum; entry and exit standards; teaching quality; assessment of student achievement; academic integrity; feedback to students on assessment; academic security and invigilation; student retention and progression; and relationship with GFP alumni.

### 2.1 *GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes*

The GFP aims and LOs are clearly defined and comprehensive and can be found in the Course Handbook and the Course Syllabi. They are aligned with the OASGFP and the CBFS GAs to ensure the ‘fitness of purpose’ of the GFP (Portfolio, p3). The LOs for English, Mathematics, IT and GSS are designed to prepare students for the CBFS undergraduate programmes (Portfolio, p16). The LOs for the English language component are derived from the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) (Portfolio, p16). In addition to this, in September 2018, CBFS benchmarked the GFP with the GFP offered by Muscat College which is a local institution similar to CBFS in terms of levels of programmes offered and the nature of the student population (Portfolio, p17). The DoELC’s report based on this exercise highlighted the similarities and differences of processes between the two GFPs. This benchmarking process was intended to inform changes for the enhancement of the CBFS GFP (Portfolio, p17) which resulted in changes (see Section 2.2). The Panel noted that CBFS recognises the importance of benchmarking activities for the continuous improvement of its programme content, processes and policies governing the GFP.

The ELC has been offering the GFP since 2001. Over the years the Programme has evolved from a seven-level format to its current semester structure. The GFP is now being offered as a two-semester programme allowing students to graduate from the GFP within one academic year. In addition, the ELC offers an eight-week, 160 hours summer intensive course to all GFP students who are unable to pass the English language requirements during the course of the academic year (Portfolio, p3). The ELC schedules three shifts of classes per day with the third shift mainly targeting working students.

As an important input to the quality assurance processes in the GFP, the ELC seeks feedback from its stakeholders including current GFP faculty and students, GFP alumni and faculty teaching in CBFS undergraduate programmes (Portfolio, p16). The ELC also gathers feedback through other channels such as class representative focus groups and end-of-semester reports from the CoCos (Portfolio, p17). The Panel reviewed evidence of the feedback sought from GFP faculty, students, and alumni and the use of the feedback to inform the GFP LOs and curricula (Portfolio, p16). An example of the reviewed evidence was the minutes of a meeting of the Cohort B teachers who, based on the feedback from GFP alumni, suggested to change the assessments for AY 2018-19 and to reflect these changes in the departmental OP (Portfolio, p17). The Panel noted from the survey results and interviews that GFP students are generally satisfied with the programme and that it adequately prepares them for their undergraduate studies. The survey conducted in AY 2017-18, for example, showed that a majority of students surveyed (67%) found the Mathematics and IT courses to be engaging and useful.

In AY 2017-18, the ELC compared GFP student performance in the final examinations of the English courses with their performance in the IELTS examination to measure whether GFP

students achieve the required IELTS band to gain admission to the CBFS undergraduate programmes (Portfolio, p17). The Panel noted that 54% of the 185 GFP students who took the IELTS examination in AY 2017-18 achieved an IELTS band 5 and above. The Panel also noted that faculty in the CBFS undergraduate programmes and GFP alumni from those programmes are satisfied with the student preparedness for undergraduate programme studies.

## 2.2 Curriculum

The ELC AQAH defines a clear structure for the GFP, its placement testing and the syllabi for English, Mathematics and IT. The GFP was first offered as a seven-level or band GFP mainly for banking professionals with better English language skills (Portfolio, p2). In AY 2014-15 the ELC was relocated to another site, Campus 2, because of a steady growth in student numbers, faculty, and programmes offered which put a strain on the existing office and classroom space (Portfolio, p2). Over the years the Programme evolved with changes in the internal and external environment resulting in the current GFP structure. The GFP is now being offered as a two-semester programme allowing students to graduate from the GFP within one academic year. The change was made based on the need for the curriculum to be completed in one academic year and the feedback on the shortcomings of the previous structure which had multiple levels with shorter academic terms (Portfolio, p18). The revised structure of the GFP comprises two cohorts with two levels of 8 weeks each. Cohort 1 includes the Elementary Level which offers English for 16 hours/week and IT for 4 hours/week and the Pre-intermediate Level which offers English for 16 hours/week, Mathematics for 2 hours/week, and IT for 2 hours/week. Cohort 2 is divided into Intermediate Level I with 16 hours/week dedicated to English and 4 hours/week for Mathematics, and Intermediate Level II with 20 hours/week dedicated to English. The ELC also offers an eight-weeks, 160 hours summer intensive course to all GFP students who are unable to pass the English language courses during the course of the academic year (Portfolio, p3). The Panel noted that the restructuring resulted in improved student retention and progression rates (Portfolio, p3, p32). The overall GFP aims are reflected at the individual course level through the course LOs, and the Panel noted how the individual course LOs map against the OASGFP. There is evidence of GFP student assessments contributing to achieving the CBFS GAs (Portfolio, p16). The Panel concluded that there is a reliable process for curriculum review.

The ELC follows an active and reflective learning approach for the GFP and the Panel found evidence of the alignment of assessment instruments with Student Learning Outcomes (SLO). Course syllabi include integrated skills of the subject matter and study skills through weekly plans. The effectiveness of the GFP is assessed based on feedback from faculty, students and GFP alumni (Portfolio, p16).

The ELC has a Curriculum Unit (CU) as well as a Materials Development Team which focus on programme development and material preparation respectively, based on feedback received from the CTTs. The process to be followed is mapped out in the ELC AQAH. Changes to the curriculum are proposed, discussed and approved at the relevant committee and leadership levels. There is a clear process of communication to be followed to introduce minor and major changes, and each follows a different path for approval (Portfolio, p18). GFP faculty are involved in the improvement of syllabi as was noted by the Panel in minutes of faculty meetings (Portfolio, p19). One aspect of change in the English curriculum was the removal of an English for Specific Purposes component since the new textbook, called *Life*, was found to adequately address this need. The review of course syllabi show that the GSS are primarily incorporated into the English curriculum. The monthly course delivery plans and class logs are followed by all GFP faculty for each of the cohorts they teach, which supports consistency in the curriculum delivery.

After the changes in the GFP semester structure and corresponding revisions to the curriculum, a benchmarking exercise was conducted with the GFP of Muscat College. The Panel reviewed the materials related to this benchmarking activity and confirmed through interviews that the comparative exercise led to some adjustments such as, considering the addition of debates and

film viewing tasks to the English syllabus. The collaboration with Muscat College is seen by the ELC to be beneficial for further improvements and aligns with Strategic Objective 1, 'To be recognised as a leading Institution in the Banking & Finance in the Region', in the CBFS SP 2015-2020 (see Section 2.1).

The ELC uses the *Clarity English* software to encourage independent study by GFP students. The Panel noted that student usage of this software was initially low but that there has been an increase since September 2018. The Panel heard that one of the factors limiting the usage could be the IT facilities on the current campus which do not always support reliable and consistent internet access to allow for the online use of *Clarity English*. The concerted efforts by the ELC team to embed it into the English syllabus revised for AY 2018-19, however, resulted in an increased usage since September 2018. The Panel was informed that the use of such learning platforms is projected to improve after the move of the ELC to the main campus where computer laboratories and network services are expected to be more reliable and of higher quality (see Section 3, Affirmation 2).

The review of the English, Mathematics and IT syllabi confirmed to the Panel that the curriculum is designed to ensure that the OASGFP LOs and the CBFS GAs are attained. The Panel noted that the basic concepts of Statistics and Probability were recently added to the Mathematics syllabus to fully comply with the OASGFP and to better prepare students to pursue CBFS specialisations.

The process of curriculum approval, monitoring and review requires the engagement of both GFP faculty and management and is documented in the ELC AQAH (Portfolio, pp18-20). The DoELC, DDTA, DDAC, and CoCos are involved in monitoring the implementation of the curriculum. The CoCos collect feedback from faculty and report it to the ELC Management. The Panel confirmed in interviews that GFP faculty are actively engaged in reviewing and developing teaching materials as well as suggesting changes to the curriculum in line with the GFP LOs and objectives (Portfolio, p18). Minor changes to the curriculum are made based on a needs analysis which includes surveys with various stakeholders (Portfolio, p18). Major changes, such as changing the GFP from seven levels to a two-semester programme are made to the GFP after consultation with faculty and in response to environmental changes (Portfolio, p3). The final process of major changes to the GFP curriculum, such as the implementation of a revised and new structure for the GFP is approved by the BoD. Overall, the Panel concluded that the current line of reporting, monitoring, and engagement of GFP faculty in the curriculum change process are appropriate to ensure the fitness of purpose of the GFP curriculum.

### 2.3 *Student Entry and Exit Standards*

The entry criteria to any programme at CBFS are determined by the ARD after approval by the BoD (Portfolio, p21). The entry criteria for all programmes are aligned with the MoHE requirements. The BoD and the AC monitor the admissions criteria and processes to ensure that there is a fair and consistent implementation as outlined in the Admissions and Registrations Policy (Portfolio, p21).

According to the Admissions and Registration Policy, applicants scoring an overall of 60% in General Education Certificate are eligible to enrol in the GFP and bank employees not meeting the 60% requirement may also be considered for admission to the GFP based on their years of work experience (Portfolio, p21). Stakeholders are informed of the entry criteria and the placement tests through multiple channels such as the CBFS website, the Student Prospectus and the MoHE admissions portal (Portfolio, p22). The ELC Student Handbook and the ELC AQAH outline the placement testing and GFP route map, including the assessment overview and entry criteria.

All students who are eligible for entry into the GFP have to take placement tests in English, Mathematics and IT according to the procedure outlined in the Admissions and Registration Policy (Portfolio, p22). The CC decides the schedule of these placement tests and this is made available to all prospective students through the office of the ARD (Portfolio, p22). The performance of a prospective student in these placement tests determines the GFP cohort or level that the student is eligible to join.

In AY 2016-17, the ELC replaced the in-house paper-based placement test for assessing English language proficiency with the online CEPT from the University of Cambridge and which is aligned with the Common European Framework for Reference of Languages (CERF) (Portfolio, p22). The decision to use the CEPT was taken after reviewing the limitations of the existing in-house test and by conducting a pilot test of the CEPT. The ELC requested 23 candidates from the January 2016 intake to take the CEPT. As there is no writing component in the CEPT, the ELC included a writing task in order to conduct a comparative analysis of scores achieved in the online assessment and the written work. The pilot study demonstrated that the placement scores corresponded with the individual student writing abilities. The Panel heard from the ELC management that it opted for the CEPT because it is an internationally recognised assessment tool and based on the results of the pilot study the ELC management believed it would allow for an accurate placement of students. The Panel, however, urges some caution that in the absence of a written component in the CEPT its rigour and effectiveness may need to be further assessed to provide evidence to confirm its 'fitness-for-purpose' for the GFP, including using the findings for improvement purposes.

The ELC also uses in-house placement tests for Mathematics and IT to ensure that prospective students are placed at the appropriate levels in both courses based on their proficiency (Portfolio, p22). The Panel noted, however, that these placement tests are not benchmarked to ensure the robustness of the tests and the correctness of student placement at the appropriate levels. In addition, the Panel noted that the same placement tests are used to grant exemptions to students from GFP Mathematics and IT components (Portfolio, p22). The Panel recommends that CBFS benchmark its Mathematics and IT placement tests against recognised standards of performance so that they can be used together with the results from the standardised placement test for English to provide a more accurate placement of new students to the right levels of GFP courses.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies review and benchmark its General Foundation Programme Mathematics and IT placement tests for their quality so that they can be used as a suitable tool to define appropriate learning levels of new students within these two areas.**

The ELC AQAH and the ELC Student Handbook state that promotion from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2 requires a minimum pass mark of 50% in English in Cohort 1 which is the cumulative total of all English Language assessments for that cohort, and a minimum score of 50% in the final examinations of Mathematics and IT. To graduate from the GFP, a minimum pass mark of 60% in English and a minimum score of 50% in the final examinations of Mathematics and IT are required in Cohort 2. Students achieving less than the minimum scores are eligible to re-sit the final exams if they meet attendance requirements and have passed the continuous assessments. All students with a final score below the required pass mark have to retake the Cohort. The Panel noted that the SLOs are aligned with the course assessments, and the GFP LOs are aligned with the OASGFP (Portfolio, p16). The Panel also noted that GFP students are given a maximum of two years time to pass the GFP before being expelled from the GFP. The Panel holds the view that this constitutes sound higher education practice, barring compelling reasons to grant exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

The Panel found that the exit standards for the CBFS GFP are based on a 60% pass requirement from Cohort 2 for English and 50% for Mathematics and IT. In the absence of benchmarked assessment tools, however, the validity and reliability of these scores are difficult to ascertain. In this regard, as already noted above, it is critical that the ELC satisfy itself about the robustness of the Mathematics and IT tests used in the GFP in terms of academic standards and recognised quality assurance mechanisms.

The Panel was informed that it is of strategic importance for CBFS to maintain high quality exit standards for the GFP as a differentiating factor and advantage over other GFPs offered in Oman. The Panel encourages CBFS to assure itself that its GFP exit standards are constantly reviewed to ensure that they are aligned with the minimum requirements stated in the OASGFP, supported by reliable benchmark reports.

## **2.4 Teaching Quality**

The Teaching and Learning Policy was approved in May 2016 and is expected to be reviewed in May 2019. It provides an overview of the approach to and practice of teaching and learning at CBFS. The ELC teaching and learning strategy, detailed in the ELC AQAH and the Course Syllabi, offers a strong basis to guide GFP faculty in the delivery of the Programme. It provides a common understanding of the teaching philosophy of the ELC and supports the consistency of quality provision and outcomes. In addition, the course specifications document also provides a brief on the teaching and learning techniques.

The ELC requires all GFP faculty to maintain a teaching and learning portfolio (Portfolio, pp23-24) which includes details of courses covered by the Faculty (Portfolio, p23). The portfolio is used for personal and professional development and is also a point of reference for Performance Appraisal. (Portfolio, p55). The GFP also maintains a shared folder, accessible to all GFP faculty, with all the teaching materials used in the delivery of the GFP (Portfolio, p23). The Panel heard that the CTTs have regular meetings to coordinate course delivery and schedule assessments (Portfolio, p23). The Panel also noted evidence of the alignment of the GFP SLOs to the OASGFP as well as the CBFS GAs and the CEFR (Portfolio, p23). The Panel concluded that all of the above taken together enables the ELC to ensure the consistency of quality provision and outcomes at the GFP.

The Panel noted that the GFP delivery is guided by Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Portfolio, p23) and the instructional methodology used is student-centered (Portfolio, p23). Interviews with GFP faculty and management confirmed that the shared folders are useful in supporting faculty with teaching materials and allow the management to monitor the consistency of student progress across the different cohorts and groups (Portfolio, p23). The Panel is of the opinion that weekly logs and monthly CTT meetings are also good practices to be encouraged.

The CBFS Mission, Vision and Values guide the ELC's approach to the recruitment and selection of GFP faculty. The ELC follows the well-defined CBFS recruitment process and the ELC staff profile demonstrates that the GFP faculty are sufficiently qualified to deliver the GFP (Portfolio, p24, see Section 4.2). The ELC supports newly-hired GFP faculty through a mentoring system to further ensure consistency in teaching and learning across the GFP (Portfolio, p52, see Section 4.2).

The Panel heard that the course coordination system adequately aligns with teaching quality requirements. The Panel also heard that the GFP faculty consider quality assurance as a shared responsibility and that the rotational system of responsibilities gives each faculty member the opportunity to assume a variety of leadership and committee roles, handle a range of responsibilities within the GFP and serve as a platform for all faculty to showcase their leadership skills.



Every academic year, the QAU conducts a Teaching and Learning Survey (Portfolio, p39) to inform CBFS and the ELC of the GFP teaching quality. One of the items on the survey is 'Lecturer Evaluation' and the survey results from AY 2013-14 to AY 2018-19 show that GFP students are generally satisfied (mean score of three on a five-point scale) with their teachers and the teaching quality. In addition to this, the ELC conducts a survey each semester to collect feedback from GFP faculty and students on the GFP curriculum. Proposed changes, such as including more supplementary reading material, are actioned in the departmental action plans of AY 2017-18 (Portfolio, p39). Overall, the Panel concludes that the ELC is giving attention to ensure and improve the provision of quality teaching.

## 2.5 *Academic Integrity*

CBFS has a set of institutional policies and procedures on academic integrity which include the Academic Misconduct Policy, the Plagiarism Policy, the Assessment Policy and the Examination Policy (Portfolio, p24). These policies reflect the College's approach to academic misconduct and are applicable to all GFP faculty and students. These policies also clearly state what constitutes academic integrity, plagiarism, academic misconduct in general and the possible penalties. The Panel noted the mechanisms that CBFS uses to promote a culture of academic integrity. It starts with making the GFP students aware of the CBFS policies and procedures on academic misconduct and plagiarism during induction, through explicit reference in both, the ELC AQAH and the ELC Student Handbook (Portfolio, p24).

In addition to these publications, the Panel was pleased to see that GFP students are provided with training on relevant skills such as paraphrasing and referencing which are embedded in the English language course syllabi to ensure that students are able to write effectively and uphold CBFS's ethical standards (Portfolio, p25). GFP students and faculty are given practice in the use of CBFS's chosen plagiarism detection software, *Turnitin* (Portfolio, p25). The Panel also concluded that the GFP faculty maintain academic integrity while developing in-house learning material (Portfolio, p25).

Overall, the Panel confirmed that there is a clear effort on the part of the ELC to raise awareness with respect to the importance of academic integrity, and that the policies and procedures for upholding academic integrity by GFP faculty and students are comprehensive and reflect a good higher education practice.

## 2.6 *Assessment of Student Achievement*

The ELC's philosophy and approach to GFP learning and assessment is detailed in the ELC AQAH and it drives the rationale in the ELC Assessment Policy which is a comprehensive document providing relevant details in terms of the ELC's approach to and purpose of assessing GFP student learning (Portfolio, p25).

The TAM which is derived from the Assessment Policy is a detailed document and covers all areas of testing and assessment related to the GFP subject areas. While the GFP Student Handbook and course syllabi provide students with the required information about the assessment modes and schemes, the TAM details the assessment framework to support the assessment responsibilities undertaken by GFP faculty.

The Testing and Assessment Unit (TAU), composed of the DDTA and the AU, oversees the planning, design and administration of tests and ensures that the prepared assessments are valid and reliable (Portfolio, p25). The TAM also includes the membership details and ToRs of the TAU (Portfolio, p25). The DDTA plays an important role in the oversight of the Assessment Policy. The TAM outlines the criteria and conditions pertaining to student placement, assessment of all GFP subject areas, as well as criteria for successful completion of the GFP by students.

GFP students are informed about the ELC's assessment philosophy, approach, policies and procedures during the induction at the beginning of their first semester (Portfolio, p27), in the course syllabi and course specifications (Portfolio, p27, see Section 3.3) and in the GFP Student Handbook (Portfolio, p27). All these documents are distributed to new GFP students during induction. The assessment calendar displayed on the classroom notice boards is detailed and informative (Portfolio, p27).

The GFP uses both summative and continuous assessments and details of continuous assessment procedures, final examination rules and procedures, marking and moderation, and make-up examination procedures are all documented in the TAM. The assessments for English language courses are designed to evaluate the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Portfolio, p26). For Mathematics and IT, continuous assessment is handled through the use of worksheets, while IT examinations are conducted in the computer laboratories (Portfolio, p26). The Panel was able to confirm the security of the IT examinations during the campus tour with respect to the protocols and procedures followed on loading assessments onto the computers and removing them again afterwards.

The Panel concluded, based on evidence and interviews, that the existing process is consistently implemented for the assessment of GFP student achievement of LOs (Portfolio, p27). The Panel noted that the ELC reviews the effectiveness of the GFP assessment practices through an internal analysis of GFP student retention, attrition and progression rates and by soliciting feedback on the assessment practices from both GFP faculty and students (Portfolio, p27, see Section 2.9).

The ELC has recognised the need for external oversight to its GFP as an opportunity to improve the validity and reliability of the GFP assessment practices and in AY 2018-19 appointed an External Examiner with clearly defined terms of reference. The Panel supports this recent initiative and encourages the ELC to ensure that the intended aims of the appointment are achieved. It is critical that the ELC monitors the external moderation process to achieve the purpose of the appointment, i.e., to demonstrate attention to maintaining academic standards and enhancing and supporting quality assurance. The ELC is encouraged to ensure that the scope of external moderation covers English, Mathematics and IT where it may be necessary to retain additional subject expertise, as warranted.

## **2.7 *Feedback to Students on Assessment***

The ELC TAM dated September 2018 and produced by the TAU is a comprehensive document which covers the purpose, scope, procedures, rules and regulations of assessments together with detailed general rubrics and templates (Portfolio, p28). The Panel noted from samples of student assessments, student academic advising reports and academic progress reports that there is a clear process for providing feedback to GFP students and for prescribing further support, if needed. The Panel also observed that grade appeals are well documented which shows that students have the opportunity to request clarification on their grades (Portfolio, p30).

The Panel concluded that the ELC has a clear protocol for giving feedback to GFP students on all types of assessments except final examinations and they have opportunities to provide their views on the assessments. Students are given feedback after all continuous assessments, and they can see their examination papers and faculty provides both individual and general feedback to the students. The ELC also provides GFP students with a mid-semester report on their performance (Portfolio, p28).

## **2.8 *Academic Security and Invigilation***

The TAU is responsible for the management of all GFP summative examinations. This includes the preparation of all summative examinations, ensuring the physical security of these examinations as well as all invigilation arrangements. The TAM outlines the guidelines on

security and integrity of examinations and invigilation procedures. There are clear and explicit instructions for GFP students to abide by the examination rules and they are notified of the consequences in case of misconduct (Portfolio, p30). Seating arrangements and lists of students barred from the examination are published and posted on notice boards before assessments (Portfolio, p30).

The security is ensured by sharing only the hard copies of the assessments with the CoCos (on campus only) (Portfolio, p29). Examination papers are photocopied by the TAU and kept in sealed envelopes with TAU until the invigilators collect the papers 30 minutes before the start of the examination (Portfolio, p29). In the case of computer-based assessments for IT, the IT Coordinator installs the assessments right before the examinations on the laboratory computers and then deletes them immediately after the students have finished the assessment (see Section 2.6).

The TAM also outlines the process for marking exams based on the use of rubrics followed by an internal moderation process. The Panel noted that for internal moderation, 20% of scripts are moderated and rechecked to ensure consistency (Portfolio, p27). If there is a marking discrepancy between the first and second marker, a third marker blindly marks the scripts. A final score is reached when an average is taken of the third marker's score and the script score drawn from the first two markers which is more closely aligned with the third marker's score (Portfolio, p27). The preparation of marking rubrics and moderation sessions for all subjects are overseen by the TAU and related guidelines are sent to markers (Portfolio, p30). Once the results are ready, the ARD makes the results available to students (Portfolio, p30). Overall, the Panel was able to confirm that in relation to the GFP, CBFS has demonstrated that it ensures the security and integrity of all GFP assessment activities.

## **2.9 Student Retention and Progression**

The ARD under the supervision of the ADASSA is responsible for maintaining student data in the Student Information System (SIS) (Portfolio, p31). The five-year student admission, attrition, retention and progression trend data (Portfolio, p31) collated by the Registrar, support the ELC in its operational and academic planning decisions. The Panel noted that the ELC uses these data to identify and address areas of concern, such as student drop-out and failure rates and initiate actions, providing additional student support classes in English, Mathematics and IT and changing the current Programme structure to improve student success (Portfolio, p32). The Panel noted that for example, during AY 2018-19, an average of 10-15 students attended these support sessions on a regular basis.

The Panel heard that AAs use the GFP Academic Advising and Referral Forms to recommend these support sessions to their advisees based on their academic performance in order to enhance student retention and progression (Portfolio, p32). Similarly, the ACS also provides on-going support to help GFP students improve their English Language skills to progress successfully through the GFP (Portfolio, p32). Moreover, the Panel noted that during AY 2018-19, 38 GFP students availed the one-to-one counselling offered by the ASC.

The Panel noted that the measures taken by the ELC, based on the trend analysis of student retention, attrition and progression rates, resulted in an improvement of the rates over the years. The attrition rate, for example, was 28% in AY 2013-14, 10% in AY 2016-17 and 19% in AY 2017-18. The progression rate was 50% in AY 2013-14, 80% in AY 2016-17 and 70% in AY 2017-18 (Portfolio, p61). Overall, and as noted above, the Panel concluded that the ELC makes use of student trend data on retention, attrition and progression rates to inform GFP curricula, teaching and learning, assessment and student academic support.

### **2.10 Relationships with GFP Alumni**

CBFS states that it acknowledges the value of GFP alumni feedback in improving the quality of the Programme (Portfolio, p32). In response to the OAAA Quality Audit 2011, Recommendation 10, CBFS attempted to formalise the engagement of GFP alumni in the Programme through a survey conducted in AY 2017-18 (Portfolio, p33). The survey elicited feedback from GFP alumni on various matters in relation to the programme such as the GFP curriculum and the skills they developed in the GFP. The Panel noted that the ELC used the feedback in the process of programme improvement to enhance the GFP student learning experience (Portfolio, p21, p33, see Section 2.4). The Panel heard that the ELC regularly invites GFP alumni to various GFP activities such as induction to share their experience at the ELC with current GFP students.

The Panel was informed that the relocation of the ELC to the main campus will enhance its relationship with alumni and offer new opportunities to make greater use of networking and communication opportunities (see Section 3). Overall, the Panel recognises the recent efforts to elicit feedback from GFP alumni and encourages the ELC to continue to use this process systematically to inform improvements in the GFP.

### 3 ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

CBFS provides a range of academic and student support services to GFP students through the SAU, ARD and ASC to enhance learning and support successful outcomes for GFP students.

The ELC will soon relocate from its present campus to a fit-for-purpose designed building on the main CBFS campus. The current campus provides a number of challenges which are recognised by CBFS in terms of provision of health and safety, IT infrastructure, teaching and learning resources, access to academic support services, recreation facilities and participation of GFP students in the life of the College. The relocation to the new building which is in the final stage of being equipped with furniture and other equipment promises to have a significant impact on the ELC's general support services and facilities in the future. The Panel reminds and encourages CBFS and the ELC to ensure that the identified improvements and actions are implemented and monitored for ongoing enhancement in terms of providing a quality learning and campus experience for all GFP students.

#### **Affirmation 2**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority acknowledges that the College of Banking and Financial Studies has identified challenges to the quality of provision of academic and non-academic support services to the General Foundation Programme students at the current campus, and encourages the College to ensure that identified improvements are realised and result in enhancing student learning experience after moving to the new campus.**

This Chapter reports on the Panel findings regarding academic and student support services including student profile; registry; student induction; teaching and learning resources; information and communication technology services; academic advising; student learning support; student satisfaction and behaviour; the non-academic support services and facilities; and external engagement.

#### **3.1 Student Profile**

CBFS had 250 students registered in its GFP in AY 2017-18 as compared to 583 in AY 2013-14 showing a consistently decreasing trend (Portfolio, p61). The five-year trend in admissions from AY 2013-14 to AY 2017-18 shows the following profile: More than 90% of admitted students are Omanis, female students constitute on the average 71% of total admissions and 76% of the total intake are MoHE-sponsored students. There has a significant decrease (58% since AY 2013-14) in the MoHE sponsored students leading to the decrease in the overall student numbers for the GFP. The Panel heard from various interviewees that CBFS plans to reduce its dependence on MoHE sponsored students and attract more international students. The Panel, however, did not see any evidence of significant efforts undertaken by the ELC to attract more international students. The Panel also heard from interviewees that there remain gaps in the structured support and assistance (administrative, academic and pastoral) for international students. The Panel urges CBFS review its approach to attracting more international students to the GFP so that it supports CBFS's intention to decrease dependence on MoHE-sponsored students.

The ARD, and in particular the Registrar, is responsible for maintaining student records. These student data are used to analyse the demographic trends in the GFP student profile, including monitoring the progression, retention and attrition rates (Portfolio, p35). The Panel noted that these trends are used to inform ELC operational planning, for example, the decision to move the

ELC to a new campus in AY 2014-15 and the decision to construct a new building for the ELC on the main campus (Portfolio, p35).

A critical element in using student profile data for planning and academic purposes includes ensuring that they are used to support the academic and personal success of students while at the GFP. Demographic details such as academic performance at school level, work experience, nationality and gender, which are available in the student profile, enable CBFS and the ELC to adequately prepare for and support the different types of students who enrol into the GFP. The Panel observed that the student profile maintained by the ARD captured the details of students with special physical or learning needs. It was also reported to the Panel that a policy to support this category of students is under development and is yet to be finalised. The Panel encourages CBFS to approve and implement this policy at the earliest opportunity. This will give confidence to the ELC and the relevant stakeholders that GFP student enrolment data is helping to identify and support students with special needs in instances where they may be reticent to discuss their needs with academic staff.

### **3.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)**

CBFS has a clear Admissions and Registration Policy that guides ARD operations with respect to the enrolment of new students (Portfolio, p36). The Head of Admissions and the Head of Registration are together responsible for the ARD and report directly to the ADASSA. Students interested in enrolling at CBFS have access to an online application and registration system (Portfolio, p36). The CBFS website also provides clear information regarding the admission conditions and dates for placement tests (Portfolio, p36). The ARD is the guardian of the SIS and facilitates the registration process.

The ARD is responsible for several important functions supporting key administrative arrangements and the preparation of various reports needed by academic departments, including the ELC, to inform their planning and review processes. These reports include, for example, student admission and related trends data, lists of sponsored students and follow up undertaken in implementing the student attendance policy (Portfolio, p37). The ARD is also responsible for any direct communication with students, the institutional disaster recovery plan (Portfolio, p37) and the retention and disposal of documents. The Panel concluded that the ARD is functioning well and provides reliable administrative support to the ELC.

### **3.3 Student Induction**

The ELC conducts an induction programme for new GFP students at the beginning of every semester (Portfolio, p37) with the objective to introduce newly enrolled students to the ELC and the facilities and services offered by CBFS in general and the ELC in particular (Portfolio, p37). The induction is conducted in both English and Arabic and students are informed about the GFP academic and administrative services. During the induction, new students are also informed about the various facilities and services available for their use such as the library, computer laboratories and academic advising (Portfolio, p37). All GFP students are provided with the ELC Student Handbook which includes all the information covered during the induction. In addition to this, students are also inducted into the GFP through the course specifications document given to them at the beginning of the semester. This includes information on the LOs of each course and the assessments used (Portfolio, p38).

The induction process at the ELC is reviewed every semester through a survey conducted by the QAU (Portfolio, p38). The Panel noted the changes made, such as including simple Mathematics and English language activity at the start to better engage the students, to the student induction in AY 2018-19 based on a review conducted in AY 2017-18. The Panel also noted that a majority (85%) of GFP students were satisfied with the changes and found the induction helpful and informative.

### 3.4 *Teaching and Learning Resources*

Objective 1.5 of Goal 1 of the CBFS SP 2015-2020 is 'to provide infrastructure to support high quality teaching and learning activity', and together with the CBFS Teaching and Learning Policy reflects the College's approach to the provision of teaching and learning resources (Portfolio, p38).

The ELC is equipped on the present campus with 17 classrooms and two computer laboratories, and students can access photocopying and printing facilities using their CBFS access authorisation codes (Portfolio, p39). ELC students are provided with course and supplementary materials to support their learning. The ELC has a mechanism in place, which includes the faculty and the AU, to review the suitability of supplementary materials (Portfolio, p39). English language teaching is further augmented through the use of learning software such as *Clarity English* and online applications such as *Padlet* and *Mentis*.

CBFS has two libraries, one on each campus, and GFP students have full access to both (Portfolio, p38). The Panel noted that the library on the ELC campus has limited resources. It was, however, reported and noted by the Panel during its visit to the main campus that the newly built annex on the main campus will contain a library with a collection of books appropriate for and relevant to ELC students and upgraded technology. This will provide GFP students with more physical space to access library resources in a central campus location. The Panel believes from the observations made during the tour of the main campus that the identified limitations of the current campus, such as limited access to the library, will be addressed by the move to the main campus. In the interim, the Panel encourages CBFS to carefully monitor the transition of GFP students and faculty to the main campus so that they can fully benefit from the teaching and learning resources available there (see Section 3, Affirmation 2).

The adequacy of teaching and learning resources at the ELC is reviewed by the QAU through the use of a Teaching and Learning Survey conducted every academic year (Portfolio, p39). The survey results from AY 2013-14 to AY 2018-19 indicate that GFP students are satisfied (a mean score of 4 on a scale of 5) with the teaching and learning they experience at the ELC. In addition to this, the ELC conducts a survey every semester to collect feedback from GFP faculty and students on the GFP curriculum and based on the feedback, includes approved changes in the departmental action plans. The Panel concluded that the ELC has a structured approach to the management and review of the provision of GFP teaching and learning resources.

### 3.5 *Information and Learning Technology Services*

Provision of information and technology services at the ELC is planned in alignment with the objective of providing infrastructure that can support high quality teaching and learning to GFP students (Portfolio, p40). The ADCS, through the Information Technology Department (ITD), is responsible for providing adequate information and learning technology services at the ELC (Portfolio, p40). IT personnel provide support services in addition to training for GFP faculty and students in the use of IT services and software (Portfolio, p40). The ITD ensures data security through employing firewalls, antivirus and endpoint security software and by allowing only authorised software to be installed on computers in the laboratories and staff laptops (Portfolio, p40).

The current ELC campus, guided by the CBFS IT Policy, is equipped with computer laboratories which are available for teaching and for use by students to work on their reports and assignments. Currently there are two computer laboratories (with 24 computers each) available for GFP students on the ELC campus (Portfolio, p39). Online learning is provided in English classes through the use of educational software such as *Clarity English* as part of the ELC strategy to encourage independent learning. It was, however, reported to the Panel by ELC faculty and students that there are network connectivity limitations which hamper the continuous access to software learning platforms such as *Clarity English*, *Mentis* and *Padlet*. The Panel

heard that improvements in network stability could provide increased interactive learning opportunities for GFP students. In this regard, it was reported that the move of the ELC to the main campus would resolve network connectivity issues. The Panel concluded from what it heard in interviews and saw during a visit to the main campus that the relocation to the main campus should ensure better network and Wi-Fi connections for students and the possibility for students to make enhanced use of computer assisted learning (see Section 3, Affirmation 2).

The QAU Staff and Student Satisfaction Survey covers all the services provided by the ITD (Portfolio, p42) but the low response rates to these surveys make it difficult to assess staff and student satisfaction with IT services (see Section 3.8, Recommendation 4). The Panel was informed, however, that students are generally satisfied with the IT infrastructure at the ELC and the learning software used in teaching, but also indicated that the students would like to have better internet connectivity. A comparative analysis of the staff satisfaction survey results of AY 2013-14 and AY 2015-16 shows an increase of 25% in the level of satisfaction with IT infrastructure and support, apart from connectivity issues (Portfolio, p41). The Panel confirmed that GFP has adequate IT resources to allow for an effective delivery of the GFP academic mandate.

### **3.6 Academic Advising**

Academic advising for GFP students is guided by the CBFS Academic Advising Policy (Portfolio, p41). At the ELC, implementation of this Policy is supervised by the DoELC (Portfolio, p41). At the ELC, the faculty teaching English language courses also assume the role of AAs and they are the first point of contact for students who seek academic support (Portfolio, p41). Students are informed about academic advising during induction and are provided with an Academic Advising Guide in both Arabic and English (Portfolio, p41). The ELC Student Handbook also contains information on academic advising. The ELC faculty involved in academic advising have time-tabled hours allocated for academic advising and students are informed of these hours during class; they are also indicated on the individual timetables posted outside the faculty offices (Portfolio, p41). The Panel was informed that GFP students consult their AAs for any academic issues and support and that they are referred to the Student Counsellor based on the main campus for any other non-academic personal or sensitive matters (Portfolio, p41). Academic Advising and Referral forms are used to record the proceedings of the academic advising sessions (Portfolio, p42). These forms are maintained by the ELC coordinator and are accessible to the DoELC and ELC faculty to ensure continuity and consistency of support for individual students. Student performance in continuous assessments is used to identify students who are 'at-risk' of failing and such students are encouraged to seek out additional support sessions during the semester (Portfolio, p42, see Section 3.7). The ELC regularly conducts in-house training sessions for GFP faculty to help them improve their academic advising strategies and capabilities (Portfolio, p42).

CBFS reviews its academic advising process through the use of an annual survey (Portfolio, p42). The college-wide survey conducted in AY 2017-18 shows that out of 372 respondents only 35 students were from the GFP. The results show that over two-thirds of the students (69%) surveyed are satisfied with the academic advising process. The Panel confirmed this during interviews as well. As noted elsewhere in this Report, the Panel encourages CBFS to investigate the reasons for the low survey participation rates by students so as to ensure the reliability of data gathered (see Section 3.8, Recommendation 4). The Panel concluded that CBFS has a clear system in place to provide academic advising to GFP students and that academic advising is an integral part of student support services.

### **3.7 Student Learning Support**

The ELC approach to student learning support is designed to support the achievement of Goal 2, Objective 2.2 of the CBFS SP 2015-2020 which is 'to improve the effectiveness of academic



programme and academic Support Services'. The ELC has various mechanisms in place to promote a culture of learning by students (Portfolio, p42).

Students who are identified by AAs as 'at risk' of failing are guided to complete remedial work, attend additional sessions use the online *Clarity English* software, and attend soft and study skills workshops (Portfolio, p42). The Panel noted that students benefit from these actions as the additional support classes help them better cope with the challenges of Mathematics and English language and develop more effective study skills (Portfolio, p42). While these additional remedial sessions are not mandatory, students are encouraged to make use of them. Attendance is monitored by the ELC to assess the demand for the various types of sessions and their effectiveness, as well as to inform future planning (Portfolio, p42). The *Clarity English* software provides GFP students with online self-study opportunities and its tasks are embedded within the language course syllabi to encourage students to make use of it (Portfolio, p43).

The ELC, with support from the SAU, is participating in a Homestay Programme in the United Kingdom (UK) which gives GFP students the opportunity to live in the UK for four to six weeks with a local host family. This self-paying programme gives the students the chance to experience English culture first-hand by attending courses in a local language school in the UK (Portfolio, p43). The ELC has been organising this programme since AY 2014-15 and the Panel was informed that the ELC plans to continue offering it in the future. The Panel did not see evidence of any monitoring and review of this activity, but did hear from students that it was a helpful experience (Portfolio, p43).

CBFS established the ASC with the objective of complementing the existing range of language and academic writing support services for students provided by the different academic departments and the ELC. The ASC aims to identify gaps in students' personal and academic skills, and provide support through offering drop-in sessions, one-to-one support, and scheduled classes (Portfolio, p43). The Panel noted that GFP students are currently making limited use of the ASC (38 GFP students availed the services in AY 2018-19) because it is located on a different campus. The Panel was informed that after the relocation to the main campus GFP students will be better positioned to benefit from the support services offered by the ASC (see Section 3, Affirmation 2).

### 3.8 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

The aims and terms of reference of the SAU show that CBFS has a structure in place to provide student support services that can positively influence student academic success, campus experience and overall student satisfaction.

The ELC AQAH documents the guidelines for GFP student representation at the ELC level and the CBFS level (Portfolio, p44). CBFS has a Student Council where students can make their views, opinions and suggestions heard and the GFP has one student representative on the council. Every GFP class has a class representative (CR), and all the class CRs meet twice a semester with the CCs to share GFP student concerns and to offer general feedback on the GFP (Portfolio, p44). In turn, the CRs receive feedback on their concerns from the DoELC and the DDs for further distribution to the GFP student body. In addition to this, GFP students can share their views on academic and non-academic matters through other channels such as the Weekly Feedback Form, conveying concerns to the SAU, dropping a note in the suggestion box, or meeting with the DoELC during the open-door hours (Portfolio, p45).

CBFS states that the QAU conducts a Student Satisfaction Survey twice a year across all departments of CBFS including ELC (Portfolio, p44). The Panel found evidence of a review and improvement mechanism at the ELC through the DoELC's report on the analysis of the QAU Student Satisfaction Surveys. The DoELC's report highlights the actions identified for the ELC to undertake in order to address issues raised in the survey, such as communication with and

support to GFP students and internet connectivity. The report also highlights the actions such as establishing a focus group of CRs to improve communication and additional support classes to support 'at risk students' and installation of additional routers to improve the internet connectivity, planned to address issues which were relevant to the GFP students. The ELC, however, was not able to provide the Panel with disaggregated data on GFP student responses to these surveys, let alone the fact of considerable low rate of student participation in these surveys. The Panel believes that in the absence of conclusive GFP-specific data, it would be difficult for the ELC to effectively plan, monitor and improve the provision of student support and overall services to GFP students to assist them meet the OASGFP requirements.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies, as a matter of urgency, identify the General Foundation Programme students as a separate cohort in the data collection tools and investigate the reasons of their low response rates to the student satisfaction surveys, in order to inform effective planning, provision and monitoring of the services provided to these students.**

### **3.9 Student Behaviour**

CBFS has a Student Affairs and Disciplinary Committee (SADC) which is responsible to investigate, conduct fair hearings and make recommendations in cases concerning student misbehaviour (Portfolio, p45). The ELC Student Handbook outlines the behaviour expected of GFP students on campus and this is communicated to all new GFP students during the induction programme (Portfolio, p45). GFP students are also made aware that the CBFS Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct Policy is applicable to them and this Policy is included in the ELC AQAH and the GFP Student Handbook (Portfolio, p46).

Student behaviour at the ELC is monitored by the DoELC. Any misbehaviour is managed according to the established process. Minor cases are dealt with internally within the ELC by the DoELC and more serious cases are referred to the SADC. Samples of student misconduct highlight the consistent implementation of the process within the ELC. The Panel had no concerns in relation to the processes related to dealing with student behaviour at the ELC and confirmed that the SAU is available to intervene in resolving serious cases of student complaints and student misbehaviour at the ELC.

### **3.10 Non-Academic Student Support Services and Facilities**

CBFS provides catering, medical and counselling services on the ELC campus. While the management of catering and medical services is handled by the Administrative Department (AD) which reports to the ADCS, counselling support is offered by the SAU (Portfolio, p46). Since CBFS does not have its own accommodation and transportation facilities, the SAU provides useful information to students (including international students) on how and where to access these services (Portfolio, p47). Extracurricular activities such as National Day and World Book Day are organised with the support of the SAU (Portfolio, p45). GFP students are encouraged to participate in all such activities as well as in the production of the CBFS Newsletter (Portfolio, p45). At the current ELC campus, counselling, academic support and health and safety measures are provided as per the documented policies and plans, and cafeteria services are monitored by the AD with random visits conducted by officials from the Municipality.

The Panel believes, as mentioned in the earlier in this report, that the common student satisfaction survey used by the QAU and the poor response rate of the students to this survey, do not provide CBFS or the ELC with reliable data to assess GFP students' satisfaction with the non-academic support services and facilities. The Panel, however, noted that the DoELC does

use the data of this student satisfaction survey to identify issues relevant to the non-academic support services and facilities at the current ELC campus and action planning (see Section 3.8). The Panel learnt that the GFP students are largely satisfied with the facilities at the current campus but are looking forward to the move to the main campus. The Panel concluded that the non-academic student support and facilities at the current ELC campus are satisfactory, with the prospect of their enhanced accessibility on the main campus after the relocation (see Section 3, Affirmation 2).

### **3.11 External Engagement**

CBFS has identified external engagement as Goal 4 in its SP 2015-2020, namely 'to meet the needs of the Banking and Finance sector with capacity building and consultancy services'. This underpins the ELC's approach to engaging with its external stakeholders (Portfolio, p48).

As part of its external engagement, the ELC recently undertook a benchmarking exercise with Muscat College for its GFP. The areas considered in the benchmarking process ranged from GFP entry requirements to teaching quality and assessments (Portfolio, p48). In addition to this, CBFS has also initiated communication with Eaquals, an international educational network, with the goal of getting international accreditation for its ELC. Eaquals promotes excellence in language teaching and offers accreditation for language teaching organisations (Portfolio, p48). The ELC has involved GFP students in community engagement activities such as the Annual Cancer Walk, blood donation drives at CBFS and fund-raising for charities organised by the SAU (Portfolio, p49).

The Panel acknowledges the various initiatives undertaken by the ELC to foster external engagement but recommends that CBFS define the external community with respect to the GFP to facilitate a more organised and structured approach to the ELC's external engagement. The Panel, however, concluded that CBFS needs to develop a known and shared conceptual understanding of external engagement as it relates to the GFP.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies define the external community for the General Foundation Programme and formalise its approach to and practice of external engagement such that it is aligned with outcomes that serve the development and delivery of the programme.**

## 4 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

CBFS has regulations that guide its approach to staff and staff support services. The Panel considered the policies and procedures defined in the Staff Regulations in the context of the GFP and assessed their impact on the delivery of the GFP (Portfolio, p51). It was noted that GFP faculty are aware of the CBFS support services through the CBFS HR, ADASSA and DoELC and that the GFP faculty found the services to be accessible and helpful with respect to providing support to meet the GFP teaching and learning requirements.

In this Chapter, staff and staff support services provided at CBFS and the ELC are addressed and the Panel findings are reported in relation to its staff profile; recruitment and selection; staff induction; professional development; performance planning and review; staff organisational climate and retention and Omanisation.

### 4.1 *Staff Profile*

CBFS recognises the critical role that its faculty plays in achieving its Vision and this is reflected in Goal 1, Objective 1 of the CBFS SP 2015-2020, 'to recruit and retain high quality staff with international and industry experience'. The ELC supports the achievement of the CBFS Mission and Vision through the GFP Philosophy which is to enable students to progress in English, Mathematics, Information Technology and Study Skills by adopting a communicative and collaborative approach to teaching and learning. GFP teaching and learning is driven by qualified, experienced and supportive faculty who provide the tools and skills necessary to enable students to engage in effective learning. Currently, the ELC has 21 faculty, 20 full-time and one part-time, and the profile reflects a diversity in nationalities, backgrounds and teaching experience. Apart from this, there are two non-academic staff members to assist with the administration of the GFP (Portfolio, p51).

Every year, the ELC conducts a HR needs analysis based on its existing staff profile and the expected number of students which is estimated based on the trends in student intake from previous years (Portfolio, p51). A report on the staffing needs is reflected in the ELC budget and forwarded to the ADASSA for initiating the recruitment process (Portfolio, p51). The recruitment process is handled by the CBFS Human Resources Department (HRD) in accordance with the CBFS Staff Regulations.

The Panel concluded that the ELC has measures in place to ensure that the ELC is staffed with adequate and qualified academic staff based on a trend analysis of the student intake. In addition to the staffing analysis, the ELC also uses tools such as class observations, staff appraisals, student surveys to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching and learning for the GFP courses. The Panel concluded that the current staff profile satisfies the needs of the GFP (Portfolio, p51).

### 4.2 *Recruitment and Selection*

CBFS has a clearly defined staff recruitment process for the ELC which is outlined in the Staff Regulations and overseen by the HRD along with the ADASSA (Portfolio, p52). The recruitment process reflects MoHE's guidelines for hiring staff (Portfolio, p52). The ELC ensures the diversity of its faculty profile during the recruitment process by recruiting faculty from different nationalities with the requisite academic qualifications, for example recruiting teachers with CELTA qualification who are preferred for teaching English language courses (Portfolio, p51). The ELC recruits part-time faculty as and when required based on guidelines provided in the CBFS Part-time Recruitment Policy (Portfolio, p52). The need for part-time faculty is identified during the staffing needs analysis and included in the ELC budget (see Section 4.1). The requests for part-time faculty are sent to the HRD through the ADASSA and follow the same recruitment

process as that for full-time faculty (Portfolio, p52). The Panel noted in the documentation that there is a plan for faculty recruitment and selection, however the plan does not specify clear percentages for the Omanisation rate of faculty at the ELC (Portfolio, p52). The ELC OP for AY 2018-19 also does not include Omanisation as an item (see Section 4.7, Recommendation 11).

The Panel noted that the ELC has clear guidelines with respect to the roles and responsibilities of faculty upon their recruitment at the ELC. This is in addition to the Staff Regulations (Portfolio, p52) which were considered by interviewees as a useful source of information. The quality of newly recruited faculty is measured by the extent to which they match the designated job descriptions for the various posts (Portfolio, p52).

The Panel also confirmed that the recruitment process at the ELC is effective in ensuring that the GFP teaching staff have the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to meet the academic needs of the students.

#### **4.3 Staff Induction**

CBFS has an induction programme in place for all new faculty (full-time and part-time) and the same programme is implemented at the ELC. The objective of this induction programme is to introduce new faculty to their new working environment and job responsibilities (Portfolio, p53). The initial induction is conducted by the CBFS HRD and covers the CBFS Mission, Vision, and Values, staff regulations, and the CBFS organisational chart.

The ELC is responsible for the induction to the ELC and the GFP and is conducted by the DoELC and the CCs (Portfolio, p53). During this stage of the induction new GFP faculty are introduced to the ELC, its mission and philosophy, culture, organisational structure and departmental operations (Portfolio, p53). In addition to this, new faculty are given their job descriptions and are informed about the professional development opportunities available at the ELC.

CBFS has a Mentoring Policy which provides a framework and guidelines for implementing the mentoring process (Portfolio, p53). Newly recruited ELC faculty are assigned a mentor during the probation period. The mentor conducts peer/ class observations to assess the newly recruited faculty's competency to deliver the GFP effectively (Portfolio, p53). The new faculty are given the opportunity to reflect on their taught lessons after having been observed by an experienced GFP faculty. Feedback is solicited from new faculty on the induction and mentoring processes (Portfolio, p54). The Panel heard that the mentoring system is working well and has proven to be useful in assisting new faculty in delivering the GFP programme when they join the ELC. The Panel concluded, based on the available evidence, that the mentoring system is in place and functioning (Portfolio, pp53-54).

Overall, the Panel concluded that CBFS has a well-defined induction process in place which is consistently implemented within the ELC and that newly recruited GFP staff found the induction useful.

#### **4.4 Professional Development**

Professional development of both academic and non-academic staff is described as an area of priority at CBFS as is manifested in Objective 4.2 of Goal 4 of the CBFS SP 2015-2020 which emphasises the provision of needs-based training courses for staff to allow CBFS to provide the banking and finance sector with high quality academic programmes and to be recognised as a leading institution in banking and finance in the region (Portfolio, p54). Staff development is part of the ELC annual budget to ensure that the CBFS approach to professional development is deployed effectively within the ELC (Portfolio, p54).

All professional development activities at CBFS are arranged by the Staff Training and Development Unit (Portfolio, p54) which follows the staff regulations and internal policies and procedures governed by the Staff Development Policy (Portfolio, p54). The Panel was pleased to see an addendum to the Promotions Policy which details the principles, standards, criteria and processes for academic promotion and use of academic titles. It focuses on excellence in teaching, research, leadership and community service.

The Panel observed that professional development at the ELC takes two forms: internal (i.e., in-house) and external, and GFP faculty are encouraged to participate in both (Portfolio, p55). The DoELC is responsible for the planning and delivery of in-house training programmes for GFP faculty based on a training needs analysis (Portfolio, p55). The Panel was pleased to see that CBFS has a number of mechanisms in place to identify the training needs of ELC faculty. These include, for example, the feedback obtained in performance appraisal forms, the peer observation reports and the DoELC's class observation forms (Portfolio, pp54-55). The Panel, however, noted that the professional development activities and opportunities seem mostly to focus on English teaching, as opposed to other GFP subject areas, namely, Mathematics, IT and Study Skills. The Panel suggests that the ELC address this gap and widen the range of training programmes offered.

The Panel also noted that, as part of ongoing professional development, all ELC staff, academic as well as non-academic, must participate in five mandatory training hours per academic year; the same was corroborated in the interviews (Portfolio, p54). CBFS supports this by giving the ELC staff the opportunity to choose relevant courses from the CBFS Annual Training Plan (Portfolio, p54). The Panel, however, noted that the courses in the CBFS Annual Training Plan were not very relevant for the GFP and did not seem to address the GFP context. The Panel suggests that CBFS consider this and widen the range of training programmes offered to GFP staff to better address the specific needs of the GFP.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies review its Annual Training Plan to ensure that the opportunities on offer are relevant to the professional and academic needs of the General Foundation Programme teaching staff.**

The Panel noted that classroom-based action research is encouraged within the ELC to support teaching and learning and that GFP faculty are engaged in independent research activities, publish research papers and have representation in the CBFS Research Interest Group (Portfolio, p55). The Panel, however, noted during its review of the documentation and from interviews that the delivery of the GFP could benefit from a more systematic approach to classroom-based action research and its implementation within the ELC. This would include formalising the approach to and implementation of support for GFP faculty engaged in research.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies formalise its approach to research, and action-research in particular, at the English Language Center to enhance teaching and learning in the context of the General Foundation Programme.**

### **4.5 Performance Planning and Review**

The Performance Planning and Review provision at CBFS stems from the KPIs in the CBFS SP 2015-2020. The approach to performance planning and review at the ELC is aligned with CBFS HR policies for reviewing staff performance, setting objectives and identifying development

needs (Portfolio, pp55-56). The ELC AQAH outlines this approach and details the procedures for staff performance and review of GFP staff (Portfolio, p56).

The ELC has well defined job descriptions for its Director, Deputy Directors, faculty, and departmental coordinators (Portfolio, p56). The Panel verified during that new faculty are given their job descriptions on joining the ELC which helps them understand the link between their job responsibilities and the GFP objectives. The Panel gathered from the documentation and interviews that CBFS has mechanisms in place to monitor performance planning and review within the ELC (Portfolio, p56). One of these mechanisms is the individual SMART-oriented action plan where each teacher monitors the achievement of his/her performance indicators from the mandatory classroom observations and the annual HRD appraisals. Annual staff appraisals at CBFS take into consideration the achievements and areas of improvement and training needs.

The Panel concluded that there is an established framework for performance planning and review of GFP staff. The ELC, however, needs to review and update its current approach to performance planning and review, in particular with respect to some of the recently introduced measures such as KPIs in the ELC OP to ensure the relevance and benefit of its performance planning and review process (see Section 1.4).

#### **4.6 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention**

Goal 1 of the CBFS SP 2015-2020 is ‘to be recognized as a leading institution in Banking and Finance in the region’ and for CBFS an integral part of achieving this goal is to maintain a supportive organizational climate and manage staff satisfaction and retention (Portfolio, p57). Staff satisfaction and staff retention rates are listed as KPIs of Goal 1 of the SP. The ELC makes a concerted effort to create a positive working environment coupled with incentives and benefits, as detailed in the CBFS Staff Regulations which are applicable to all CBFS staff members (Portfolio, p57). The benefits are both financial, such as regular salary increments, annual performance bonuses, the ‘thirteenth month salary’ which is one month’s current salary extra, and non-financial benefits such as flexible working hours (Portfolio, p58). CBFS also conducts every year several events for staff such as the Annual Staff Gathering, celebrations for the National Day and Omani Women’s Day and Iftar evenings during Ramadhan, all of which are intended to contribute to overall staff satisfaction (Portfolio, p57).

CBFS has a Staff Grievance Policy which details the procedures for handling and resolving staff grievances. This is complemented by the policies for academic misconduct, promotions and equal opportunity which aim at facilitating a healthy working environment for staff (Portfolio, p58). The Panel was informed that all these policies are also implemented at the ELC. In addition to this, the DoELC follows an ‘open door’ policy providing an accessible platform for staff to voice their opinions, raise concerns and offer suggestions (Portfolio, p57).

CBFS states that it seeks staff feedback through staff satisfaction surveys that are administered twice a year. The Panel, however, and as was the case with student satisfaction surveys (see Section 3.8) was not able to figure out the exact level of GFP staff satisfaction since the data presented cover staff members of CBFS as a whole and reflect a considerable low rate of response. Although the Panel heard positive comments on the professional and social environment within CBFS it believes that lack of disaggregated for the GFP staff and the low rate of response in this area represent a missed opportunity and encourages CBFS to address.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies ensure that the General Foundation Programme staff are identified as a distinct cohort in the staff satisfaction surveys and investigate the reasons of their low response rate to these surveys in order to enhance the reliability of the**

**data gathered to inform improvements to staff satisfaction at the English Language Center.**

**4.7 Omanisation**

The Panel noted that CBFS addressed Recommendation 20 of the Quality Audit 2011 which suggested enhancing Omanisation through developing and implementing a long-term Omanisation Plan approved by the BoD (Portfolio, p59). The 5-year Omanisation Plan (2016-2021) aims to increase the percentage of Omani administrative staff from 78% to 90% and the academic staff from 11% to 20% (Portfolio, p59). The ELC is aligned to the College's approach to Omanisation and gives priority to suitably qualified and experienced nationals during recruitment (Portfolio, p59).

The process of Omanisation of administrative posts at the ELC was initiated in AY 2016-17. The R&SMC recommended appointing Omani nationals for the posts of deputy director within the ELC to mitigate the risk related to employing an expatriate DoELC. Accordingly, two Omani nationals were appointed as DDTA and DDAC in AY 2017-18 (Portfolio, p59). In addition to this, six of the full-time faculty at the ELC are also Omani nationals (Portfolio, p59). The Panel believes that these appointments help CBFS in responding to Omanisation initiatives in the country.

The Panel established that CBFS encourages the appointment of Omani nationals through its prioritisation in recruitment (Portfolio, p59) and other schemes such as providing scholarships to Omani faculty to pursue higher studies. Two Omani ELC faculty received scholarships to pursue their Master's qualification (Portfolio, p59), and one Omani faculty was seconded to the undergraduate academic department as part of career progression (Portfolio, p59). The Panel, however, noted that while there is a CBFS Omanisation Plan, there is no specific Omanisation plan for the ELC (Portfolio, p52). The ELC OP for AY 2018-19 also does not include Omanisation as an item. The Panel encourages CBFS to formalise the steps taken towards supporting Omanisation within the ELC into a plan to ensure sustainability of the process of Omanisation at the ELC while maintaining the quality of the provision and academic standards of the GFP.

**Recommendation 8**

**The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the College of Banking and Financial Studies develop and implement an Omanisation plan for the English Language Center aligned to the overall College Omanisation Plan while ensuring the maintenance of the quality of the General Foundation Programme provision.**



## **APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL**

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## APPENDIX B. ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

The following abbreviations, acronyms and terms are used in this Report. As necessary, they are explained in context

ADRI .....	Approach→Deployment→Results→Improvement
AA .....	Academic Advisor
AC.....	Academic Committee
AD .....	Administrative Department
ADASSA .....	Assistant Dean for Academic Support and Student Affairs
ADCS .....	Assistant Dean for Corporate Support
AQAH.....	Academic Quality Assurance Handbook
ARD.....	Admissions and Registration Department
ASC .....	Academic Support Center
AU .....	Assessment Unit
AY.....	Academic Year
BoD.....	Board of Directors
BoG.....	Board of Governors
CAAC.....	College Academic Advisory Committee
CBFS .....	College of Banking and Financial Studies
CBO.....	Central Bank of Oman
CC.....	Campus Coordinator
CEFR .....	Common European Framework of Reference
CEPT .....	Cambridge English Placement Test
CoCo.....	Course Coordinator
CR.....	Class Representative
CTT.....	Cohort Teaching Team
CU.....	Curriculum Unit
DDAC.....	Deputy Director for Administration and Curriculum
DDTA .....	Deputy Director for Testing and Assessment
DoELC.....	Director of the English Language Center
ELC.....	English Language Center
FD .....	Finance Department
GA .....	Graduate Attributes
GFP.....	General Foundation Programme
GSS.....	General Study Skills
HEI .....	Higher Education Institution
HRD.....	Human Resource Department
H&S.....	Health and Safety
IELTS.....	International English Language Testing System
IT .....	Information Technology
ITD .....	Information Technology Department

KPI.....	Key Performance Indicator
LO.....	Learning Outcome
MoHE.....	Ministry of Higher Education
OAAA.....	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAAA Board.....	The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OASGFP.....	Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes
OP.....	Operational Plan
Panel Chairperson.....	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel
Panel Member.....	An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel
QAU.....	Quality Assurance Unit
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 Enhancement.....	The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing <i>approach, deployment</i> and <i>results</i>
Review Director.....	An individual assigned to an Audit Panel by the OAAA to provide professional guidance and support
R&SMC.....	Risk and Strategy Management Committee
SAU.....	Students Affairs Unit
SADC.....	Student Affairs and Disciplinary Committee
SLO.....	Student Learning Outcomes
SP.....	Strategic Plan
Sic.....	Indicates that the preceding segment of the quote was copied faithfully, in spite of a mistake
SIS.....	Student Information System
System.....	In this Report, <i>system</i> refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose
TAM.....	Testing and Assessment Manual
TAU.....	Testing and Assessment Unit



