Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Report of a General Foundation Programme Quality Audit of Dhofar University

September 2018

CONTENTS

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 Dhofar University (DU). The GFP Quality Audit followed the process of audit as outlined in OAAA's General Foundation Programme Quality Audit Manual[1]. The GFP Quality Audit also used the *Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes* [2] ('GFP Standards') as an external reference point.

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

The OAAA appointed an external GFP Audit Panel (the 'Panel'), comprising 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 20 July 2017 to consider DU'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 DU on 18 September 2017 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel's audit visit. Prior to the audit visit, the Panel formally invited submissions from the public about the quality of DU's activities in relation to the GFP. No public submissions were received using this process.

The GFP Quality Audit visit took place from 30 October to 2 November 2017. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 90 people, including the current and former GFP students, GFP and post-GFP faculty, GFP support staff, DU administrative staff, and DU senior management. They also visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

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

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. No information created after 2 November 2017 (the last day of the audit visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit, other than pre-existing evidence specifically requested by the Panel in advance and/or submitted by the HEI in response to draft GFPQA Report v5. This Report was approved by the OAAA Board on 19 September 2018.

The OAAA was established by Royal Decree No. 54/2010. For further information, visit the OAAA website http://www.oaaa.gov.om.

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

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

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

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

For the above reasons, a GFP Quality Audit does not result in a pass or fail, nor does it provide a 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. Therefore, it is neither significant nor appropriate to compare the GFP Audit Reports of different HEIs solely on the numbers of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations. For more information on Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education please visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

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

CONCLUSIONS

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

Executive Summary of Findings

Dhofar University (DU) is a private non-for-profit university. It was established in January 2004 by Ministerial Decree No. 5/2004, and formally enrolled its first student intake in September of the same year. At the time of the GFP Quality Audit, there were approximately 6,000 students studying at DU which offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in both English and Arabic through its three Colleges, namely the College of Arts and Applied Sciences (CAAS), the College of Commerce and Business Administration (CCBA) and the College of Engineering (CE). The purpose-built University campus is located in Salalah, with special buildings for each College and common service facilities. The Foundation Programme (FP) department is housed in its own building.

The GFP in DU is run by the FP department,[3] which was established in 2004. In the 2016-2017 academic year, 739 new students were enrolled in this programme which covers English, Mathematics, IT and General Study Skills, although the last component is embedded within the English curriculum. The programme structure is such that placement test results determine at which level students commence their GFP studies. The GFP in DU uses three levels (1, 2, and 3) for English and two for Mathematics and IT. All levels run simultaneously during the year, and GFP students may sit for a challenge test and move to the upper level at any time.

Overall, the Panel found that the self-study Portfolio was clear and well written. It reflected the use of the ADRI method (see Appendix B for an explanation of ADRI) for the self-review. The Panel also found the self-review to offer not only a description of FP department practices, processes, facilities and resources, but also evaluation of the effectiveness of these activities and resources. This has allowed DU to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. The Panel determined that a broad-based consultative process was used in the development of the Portfolio.

Throughout the self-review process, evidence is presented of a well-functioning GFP that is managed in a transparent and self-critical manner. Two factors may have helped in shaping the performance of DU's FP department. Firstly, DU's decision to make the FP Director a member of the University Council (UC) and University Academic Council (UAC), the highest academic management bodies within the University, has given the FP directorship direct access to DU's planning and decision-making processes, and above all the opportunity to raise and advocate FP issues first-hand. This has enabled the FP department management to address staff and student concerns in a timely manner.

Secondly, this GFP Quality Audit process took place approximately seven years after DU underwent Institutional Quality Audit (IQA), and a few months after the Institutional Standards Assessment (ISA), and it is evident that the FP department has benefited from DU's considerable experience with OAAA's Institutional Accreditation process. By developing its FP department in tandem with the other departments, DU demonstrates its approach to quality as a process of continuous improvement, rather than intermittent reactions to external events. The FP department now has in place most of the systems it requires for the smooth running of its operations, albeit not at the same levels of maturity and effectiveness across the four areas covered by this audit.

In terms of governance and management, DU's engagement of the FP department with the highest management of the University is commendable, as it has made the higher management aware of GFP needs

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[3]   For the purpose of making a distinction in this Report between "FP" the department and "FP" the programme (a term used interchangeably by DU), "FP department" is used to refer to the former and "GFP" is used for the latter.

and allowed them to address related issues in a timely and appropriate manner. Furthermore, a FP Academic Program Development and Review Committee (APDRC) has been established to help conduct a three-pronged GFP curriculum review regularly and in an integrated manner. The Panel supports this initiative, and expresses confidence that, if it is implemented systematically and monitored closely, it may make the GFP more effective in preparing students for their higher education studies. Another management initiative the Panel welcomes is the FP department's ongoing work towards the development of a system for the collection and analysis of the academic and non-academic grievances of GFP students to identify and act upon recurring issues.

There remain aspects of governance and management where the Panel has concluded the FP department needs support. One such aspect is the FP department committee structure. While the establishment of a large number of GFP-level committees supports the FP department management in discharging its duties and highlights a broad-based approach to decision-making, there are concerns that the terms of reference of some of these committees may be overlapping, which may raise questions over their effectiveness. Another area DU is encouraged to improve is the management of GFP student grievance. DU currently collects data related to academic and non-academic grievances in a consolidated manner at university level. As GFP students are newcomers to a post-secondary environment, their concerns may understandably differ from those of other students. On these grounds, it is vital that any data collection system be able to deal with them as a distinct cohort so as to identify their grievances and address them appropriately.

At the GFP curriculum level, an aspect of good practice is DU's commitment to uphold the integrity of its GFP assessment by developing and implementing an effective system to manage malpractice in examinations. At the time of the GFP Quality Audit, work was in progress on the development and/or expansion of a number of curriculum-related systems which the Panel believes may be useful if they are implemented and monitored systematically. These new systems include the introduction of pre-Foundation courses to allow the students who need support to progress at their own pace and the implementation of formal exit processes and formative assessment strategies across all GFP subjects. The Panel also identified aspects of the curriculum the GFP needs to address in its learning outcomes and assessment tools. These include the requirements of higher education programmes, learning outcomes related to General Study Skills in the GFP curriculum, and a consideration of the specific needs of GFP evening students in data collection and analysis.

In the area of student academic and non-academic support services, the FP department appears to have benefited from the University's growing infrastructure. It has effectively developed and implemented a comprehensive induction system which may have contributed in raising the GFP students' awareness of the University's academic and non-academic expectations. Another aspect which the Panel found laudable is the GFP's multifaceted approach to student learning support, which learning support; this is likely to have contributed to the rising retention, progression and completion rates among GFP students. Furthermore, DU has taken tangible actions to attract more non-scholarship students, as a measure to minimise the risks associated with reliance on government-sponsored students. It has also initiated a plan to formalise its GFP engagement with the community. The Panel considers both initiatives as worthy of support. The Panel drew DU's attention to the importance of extending its academic advising services to evening GFP students and of collecting and analysing GFP student feedback on non-academic student support services and facilities separately in order to be able to identify the specific needs of GFP students and address them promptly and appropriately.

The FP department has benefited from and built upon University infrastructure, particularly in the area of staff support services. The Panel found that the FP department has all the systems in place to provide support to administrative and academic staff in the discharge of their duties. Staff induction stands out as an area of particular strength, helping to improve staff retention in the GFP. Although DU's employment of Omani academic staff falls below the levels set by the Omani Government and by the University itself, the DU senior management has initiated a proposal to address the issue at national level. The Panel supports this initiative.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

Summary of Affirmations

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

Summary of Recommendations

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

1   GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Dhofar University (DU) is a private non-for-profit university based in Salalah, in the south of Oman. It was established in January 2004 by Ministerial Decree No. 5/2004, and formally enrolled its first student intake in September of the same year. At the time of the General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit, there were approximately 6,000 students studying at DU which offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in both English and Arabic through its three Colleges, namely the College of Arts and Applied Sciences (CAAS), the College of Commerce and Business Administration (CCBA) and the College of Engineering (CE). The purpose-built University campus is located in Salalah, with special buildings for each College and common service facilities. The Foundation Program (FP) department has its own building.

The GFP in DU is run by a department known as "Foundation Program", which was established in 2004. In the 2016-2017 academic year, 739 new students were enrolled in the GFP, which covers English, Mathematics, IT and General Study Skills, although the last component is embedded in the English curriculum. The GFP of DU uses three levels (1, 2, and 3) for English and two for Math and IT. All levels run simultaneously during the year, and GFP students may sit for a challenge test and move to the higher level at any time. The placement test results determine at which level students commence their GFP studies.

DU states that its GFP adheres to the guidelines of the MoHE for GFP programmes and in terms of learning outcomes, it is benchmarked against the Oman Academic Standards (OAS) for General Foundation Programmes (Portfolio, p.6).

This Chapter reports on governance and management of the GFP and includes the Panel's findings related to the FP department 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*

DU aspires to align its GFP management with the Vision, Mission and Values of the University (Portfolio, p.10). It claims its FP department Mission and Vision statements are linked with the University's Mission and Vision statements. A common statement of Values applies both to DU in general and FP department.

> *Vision:* The FP aspires to occupy a distinctive position among General Foundation Programs in the Sultanate by imparting quality education. (Portfolio, p.10)

> **Mission:** The FP strives to equip students with quality outcome-based education in a rich teacher-learner environment conductive to academic excellence and life-long learning (Portfolio, p.10).

The Panel found that the FP department Mission, Vision and University Values statements are clearly articulated and widely disseminated, and that efforts are made to ensure that both staff and students of the GFP are familiar with these. The Faculty Manual, the FP Student Handbook and course syllabi, for example, all contain a statement of the FP department's Mission, Vision and Values. There is also evidence that these are discussed during faculty induction sessions with the FP Director, and in meetings between the FP Director and the Class Representatives.

The Panel noted that the Operational Plan (OP) for the FP department is aligned with its Mission and Vision statements and this, in turn, is used to derive specific objectives and KPIs that guide the overall management of the FP department. There is also evidence that the Mission and Vision and Values of DU and the FP department are properly communicated to, and well understood by,

students and staff. The Panel noted, for example, that these statements are displayed in the FP department building corridors, waiting/sitting halls and computer labs. They are also written in the GFP Staff Manual, Student Handbook, and available on the DU website. The staff survey conducted in May 2017 shows an awareness rate of 4.8 on a scale of 5 of the Mission, Vision and Values (MVV) statements. Students reported a 3.72 awareness rate of these statements.

In its Operational Plan (OP) (2014-19), the FP department's quest for "occupying a distinctive position among General Foundation Programs in the Sultanate" has been translated into a plan to "benchmark teaching, learning and assessment practices with other HEIs of repute" (Objective 1.7), which would lead the FP department to identify and "incorporate good practices of benchmarked institutes regarding teaching, learning and assessment" (Strategy 1.7.2). While the Panel strongly supports this externally-focused approach, it wishes to emphasise that the 'quality education' which the FP department aspires to impart is achievable through the identification of and attendance to the needs of the higher education programmes at DU. The Panel believes that any assessment of the success or failure of the FP department needs to be measured in terms of its fitness for its purpose, i.e., its ability to help DU realise its Mission and Vision, by accurately identifying the learning gaps between the FP students' current levels and the requirements of the DU programmes they aspire to join, as well as developing and implementing effective learning experiences to equip the GFP students with the knowledge and skills they require for the successful completion of their studies at DU (see Sections 2.1 and 2.2).

1.2   *Governance and Management Arrangements*

DU's governance is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees (BOT) and the Board of Directors (BOD). The BoT is entrusted with "overseeing authority necessary to manage the affairs of Dhofar University and safeguard its interests in service of its mission". The BOD has largely financial responsibilities, such as the approval of the DU financial policies, establishment of the Audit Committee, and approval of University budget, including the FP department budget (Portfolio, p.24).

DU states that a distinction is made between governance and management, and the Panel confirmed that governance and management of the FP are clearly separated. Whilst responsibility for the governance of the FP department rests with the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC), University Council (UC) and ultimately the Vice Chancellor (VC), the management of the FP department is the responsibility of the FP Director who reports directly to the DVC (Portfolio, p.14). The roles and responsibilities of the University's academic and administrative units, key positions and the University's major committees are set out in the University's bylaws. The University's policies, procedures and key guidelines are contained in the Policy Manual.

The FP department has a clear management structure. It is led by the FP Director who is a member of the UC and reports to the DVC. The FP Director is supported by a Deputy Director (DD) (Portfolio, p. 16) whose job is to "assist the Director in the implementation and administration of all aspects of the Foundation Program". There are also five Level Coordinators who undertake a range of activities in their respective Units (three for English, one for Mathematics and one for IT), including the preparation of syllabi and study plans, compilation of course files, and monitoring of students' progress, etc. While a number of administrative/support coordinators oversee aspects such as timetable, registration and placement, the Foundation Program Academic Council (FPAC) is regarded as "the program's highest decision-making body" (Portfolio, p.7). It is chaired by the FP Director and includes the DD, Level Coordinators and senior GFP teaching staff members, and has authority over a wide range of academic issues in the GFP, including setting GFP committees, reviewing teaching practices (Portfolio, p.43), student retention rates (Portfolio, p.77), student complaints (Portfolio, p.35), etc. The roles of the DD and Coordinators are well-defined and there is evidence that these roles are understood by both staff and students. There is also evidence that

the student voice feeds directly into the management of the FP department, through regular meetings between Class Representatives (CRs) and the FP Director (see Section 3.8).

The FP department is represented at the level of the University, as the FP Director is a member of both the UC and University Academic Committee (UAC), which meet on a monthly and weekly basis respectively. The Panel welcomes this high level representation of the FP department, which has been instrumental in ensuring that issues requiring University-level attention can be addressed without delay and that the senior staff of the University maintain a close awareness of the FP department operations. In the May 2017 survey, the staff assessment of the adequacy of the financial resources DU places at the disposal of its FP department largely meets the interim level targeted by DU, and during interviews, the Panel heard that most of the issues raised to the UC in any of its monthly meetings would usually be solved before the next meeting, i.e., within one month. Satisfaction was also voiced with the senior management's willingness to support major and costly changes in the GFP, such as the acquisition of new textbooks.

Commendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Dhofar University for embedding the Foundation Department into University-level deliberations and providing a platform for issues related to General Foundation Programme to be addressed in a timely manner.

As mentioned above, within the parameters set by the University, the FPAC has the authority to establish new committees as required. At the time of the audit, there were 21 FP department-level committees. The Panel found that these committees vary somewhat in their degree of formality, the frequency with which they meet and the degree to which they are embedded in a formal committee structure. There is even potential overlap between some of them, with the Health and Safety Committee (HSC), for example, having to "Oversee the risk management system" in the presence of a Risk Management Committee (RMC), and the FP Recruitment Committee "Help[ing] facilitate visa processing and the arrival of newly appointed faculty", when the Induction Committee is tasked, among other things, to "Provide support and guidance to new faculty". Whilst the Panel acknowledges the broad scope of the matters dealt with by these committees, DU is encouraged to consider whether efficiencies could be gained by reducing the number of discrete committees, either by combining several committees with a similar remit or by relocating certain responsibilities to individual roles.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Dhofar University review its General Foundation Programme committee structure, monitor its effectiveness and reduce any potential overlap between the committees.

The Panel acknowledges that DU has attempted to address the overlap in the terms of reference of committees in its documentation and now encourages the FP department to take this process further by ensuring consistency of the documentation and its development, review and approval processes. The Panel notes, for example, that the terms of reference of the Health and Safety Committee were modified, but it is not clear how this new document has been developed, revised and approved.

1.3   *Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance*

DU has no academic affiliation in relation to the GFP.

1.4   Operational Planning

DU claims its Operational Plan (OP) is informed by its Strategic Plan (SP) which covers the five-year period 2014-19. The University's SP is derived from its Mission, Vision and Values. A separate FP department-level OP sets out specific goals and KPIs in relation to the FP department.

The FP department OP is both aligned to SP and OP of the University and reflects the Mission and Vision of the FP. There is evidence that the FP department OP is widely communicated to, and well understood by FP department faculty and staff (Portfolio, p.22). The Panel found evidence that the OP has directly informed several recent changes within the FP, such as the move towards exit examinations and improvements in student awareness of academic integrity.

The Panel also found evidence that various aspects of the FP department OP are scheduled for review at different times. Under Objective 1.1., for instance, Strategy 1.1.2. "Align Foundation Program standards of DU with the entry and exit standards of GFP as prescribed in Oman Academic Standards (OAS)" is reviewed annually, whereas Strategy 1.1.3. "Ensure that students have appropriate English language proficiency for admission to post GFP programs in English" is reviewed every term. The Panel found, through interviews, evidence that actions are taken towards reaching the goals that are embedded within it. The Panel notes, however, that the FP department OP has not been subjected to any overall review since the start of its implementation in 2014. It was only revised in September 2016 "to include research and community service, in line with the university's MVVs" (Portfolio, p.21). The Panel was informed that the interim review of the OP, which was scheduled for Spring 2017, was deferred so that the outcomes of the Institutional Standards Assessment could be taken into account. DU is encouraged to proceed with this review as soon as practicable, and to make such reviews more frequent so that issues are detected and addressed in a timely manner.

1.5   Financial Management

DU claims it aims to ensure that FP department has access to adequate resources to achieve the GFP's goals. DU operates a 'bottom-up' annual budgeting process in which budget proposals are solicited from cost-centres (administrative and academic departments) and ultimately presented to the Board of Trustees for approval. At the FP department level, the Panel found evidence of an appropriate level of consultation at the budget proposal development stage, with the effect that the budgets reflect the operational needs of the programme.

The Panel found that, within the broader financial management framework of DU, the FP Director has considerable autonomy in deploying resources as they are needed. Interviews confirmed that the FP Coordinators and teaching staff feel they are provided with all resources necessary to carry out their roles effectively and in a timely manner.

Although DU states that the level of GFP staff awareness of the budget preparation process appears is relatively low (Portfolio, p.25), this could be explained by the fact that the budget preparation process is largely carried out by those in administrative and managerial positions, such as the FP Coordinators who represent their subject areas. Nevertheless, the Panel encourages the University to proceed with its proposal to offer budget awareness workshops to staff in the future (Portfolio, p.26). The Panel found evidence of an effective budget setting process which, through consultation with appropriate personnel, is successful in aligning resources with the needs of the FP department.

1.6   Risk Management

DU aspires to develop a risk management system in order to be able to "identify, assess, and take steps to prevent or mitigate the materialization of risks" (Portfolio, p.27). In accordance with this commitment, DU has identified strengthening its risk management system as one key priority in its OP 2014-19, and a comprehensive Risk Management Policy (RMP) was approved at University

level in May 2015. The Panel found evidence of this Policy implementation at both University and GFP levels. At the GFP level, an FP RMC has responsibility for identifying risks, their 'owners' and the reporting authority ultimately responsible for the management of these risks. As part of the risk management process, the risk owner must identify early warning indicators, the consequences of the risk materialising and plans to mitigate the risk. The resulting risk register should then be updated annually.

The Panel found evidence that, at the level of the GFP, the formal risk management system is beginning to take effect. DU, for example, reports high levels of academic and non-academic staff awareness of the RMP and procedures (Portfolio, p.28: fig. 1.6.1) and, through interviews, the Panel found evidence that the FP RMC meets regularly and that risks are identified according to the University's approved system. The Panel notes, however, that the last FP Risk Register review was in March 2016, despite the RM Policy's explicit stipulation that "The risk register shall be reviewed and updated annually in the month of September". The Panel believes that although it is not possible to get a full assessment of the effectiveness of the RM system at this stage, it nevertheless regards its establishment as a positive practice and encourages DU to set clear intervals for its reviews.

1.7   *Monitoring and Review*

DU aspires to have a monitoring and review system to ensure that the activities of its units serve the overall purposes of the University (Portfolio, p.30). To achieve this, DU adopts a three-pronged approach to review: Entity Review, Activity Review and Program Review. Entity Review is an annual process which is carried out at GFP level by the FP Director and the DD, with inputs from the various FP department Units, and this results in the submission of an Annual Report to the VC. The report includes highlights of the GFP's achievements, areas of concern and plans for improvement over the coming year.

Activity Review is concerned with the degree to which the activities of the FP department are in line with the OP and the degree of satisfaction with these activities expressed by the various stakeholders. The Panel found evidence of active engagement with the Activity Review process through, for example, the submission of Activity Summary Reports by FP Committee Chairs.

The purpose of Programme Review is in part to appraise the standards of the GFP against the requirements of the OASGFP. It is largely the responsibility of the Coordinators to carry out this level of review and it includes four areas: curriculum, teaching, assessment and data management. The Panel also noted that some aspects of programme review are conducted by external parties under benchmarking or external review agreements. Example of such agreements include Anglia Examinations (AE), University of Nizwa, and Sultan Qaboos University (see Section 2.3).

The Panel found evidence of effective review activity in each of these areas, as well as evidence that this activity had led to improvements. Examples heard and confirmed by the Panel include the adoption of the *Unlock* series of textbooks published by Cambridge University Press (CUP), in response to a recommendation by AE (Portfolio, p.48), and the introduction of Moodle-based placement tests for Mathematics and IT. Evidence was also found of effective review of assessment practice, through the introduction of, for example, benchmarking exercises with similar GFPs. While the Panel recognises the attempt by DU to review its GFP through benchmarking against other GFPs and OASGFP, it wishes to emphasise that OASGFP are only minimum SLO standards, and the FP department is encouraged to consider the needs of the higher education programmes in the scope of their review process in order to ensure it is fit for purpose and able to realise the GFP Vision.

The Panel acknowledges the steps taken by DU to ensure a systematic link between the different review processes, and the way in which they feed into each other to operate as an integrated review

system. The Panel observed this is especially important given the large number of committees in charge of review activities. The Panel welcomes the FP department's recent establishment of an FP Academic Program Development and Review Committee (APDRC) as a move in the right direction to make the GFP review process more integrated and methodical.

> **Affirmation 1**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Dhofar University that it needs to make its General Foundation Programme review processes more integrated and supports its efforts to address this through, for example, the establishment of a Foundation Programme Academic Development and Review Committee.**

1.8   *Student Grievance Process*

DU has a well-defined and clearly articulated policy for managing student grievances, complaints and appeals for both academic and non-academic matters. Efforts are made to ensure that GFP students are fully aware of the Student Grievance Policy (SGP) and their rights and obligations associated with this. At the point of induction, a briefing session is conducted in both, English and Arabic which includes information on the SGP. The FP Student Handbook contains the full SGP. The Panel learned that the Student Code of Conduct, the SGP and the Academic Integrity Policy have been made available to students in Arabic as a reflection of their importance.

The Panel found that there was a good understanding of the grievance procedures amongst students of the GFP. Students reported that they were aware that these procedures exist so that any grievances they had could be escalated to a formal level, if they cannot be dealt with informally. Evidence was found that, in most cases, grievances are dealt with swiftly and effectively on an informal basis by the FP Director and his team.

While DU maintains central records of both academic and non-academic grievances, the Panel is of the view that DU needs to analyse the academic and non-academic grievance data according to its student cohorts and levels, to ensure that those grievances relevant to GFP students as a distinct cohort are identified accurately and addressed appropriately (see Sections 2.9 and 3.6).

> **Recommendation 2**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Dhofar University disaggregate the data regarding grievances in order to analyse its relevance to the needs of General Foundation Programme students.**

1.9   *Health and Safety*

The FP department's overall approach to health and safety is outlined in the FP OP and a number of associated KPIs have been identified. The full Health and Safety Policy (HSP) is a University-wide policy which informs practice at the FP department level. There are both DU level and FP department level Health and Safety Committees, which are responsible for ensuring that the HSP of the University is implemented.

The Panel learned through interviews that both staff and students of the GFP had received appropriate training in health and safety procedures. In accordance with the DU HSP, the buildings dedicated to the FP department - are equipped with fire extinguishers and first aid boxes.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the FP department takes health and safety issues seriously in relation to field trips and other student activities, the Panel notes that such activities do not formally figure on the FP department's risk register, suggesting they are handled on an ad hoc basis. DU is encouraged to consider widening its risk management processes to include formal health and safety risk assessments of such activities. Such an approach may allow potential health and safety risks associated with a particular activity to be identified in advance and for appropriate mitigating measures to be put in place ahead of the event taking place.

2   GFP STUDENT LEARNING

At DU, the FP department's approach to teaching and learning is to provide "students with quality outcome-based education in a rich teacher-learner environment conducive to academic excellence and life-long learning" (Mission Statement, Portfolio, p.10). To achieve this objective, DU has chosen to align its GFP aims with the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes (OASGFP).

The GFP of DU covers four major areas of study: English, Mathematics, IT and General Study Skills (GSS) (Portfolio, p.7). DU offers programmes in both English and Arabic, and despite the fact that the GFP English language requirements do not apply to those students who will study on degree programmes delivered in Arabic, DU offers these students a one-term English course. The Panel welcomes this initiative which may help improve the learning experience of the students on programmes delivered in Arabic by improving their access to learning resources in English. The Panel however did not explore the provision of GFP for the students of the programmes taught in Arabic as a separate cohort.

The GFP is designed to be delivered in full-time mode over a period of one year, over three terms (Portfolio, p.42). There are three levels of English, two levels of Math and two levels of IT. Each term has an average duration of 14 weeks. Most of the programme is dedicated to the study of English, which accounts for between 20 to 25 teaching hours per week, depending on students' needs, while Math and IT are allocated five and three weekly hours respectively (Portfolio, p.41). This emphasis on English language appears to align with the SP and OP of DU which aims to "ensure that students have appropriate English language proficiency for admission to undergraduate programs delivered in English".

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

2.1   *GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes*

DU states its GFP aims 'to equip students with the knowledge and skills in English language, Study Skills, Information Technology and Mathematics that will allow them to join their chosen colleges'. To ensure the programme curricula are outcome-based (Portfolio, p.41), and that entry standards to the higher education programmes are appropriate and rigorously applied, DU has aligned its GFP Learning Outcomes with the OASGFP (Referred to in DU Strategic and Operational Plan as Oman's National General Foundation Standards). The Panel found evidence that DU has a consistent approach to aligning the LOs of its GFP with the OASGFP. The Scope and Sequence documents show clear mapping of the GFP LOs with the OASGFP.

The programme is designed and delivered such that they are streamed over three terms in different levels of the English, Mathematics and IT, including the General Study Skills (GSS) which are embedded within English, to support and ensure the sequential achievement of all the LOs upon completion of the GFP. The Panel heard that teaching methodologies and assessment practices are also designed to effectively support the achievement of the LOs. In addition, documentation showed that teaching and assessment strategies are regularly and frequently discussed and reviewed during meetings of FP department staff, to ensure that LOs are effectively aligned with OASGFP.

The Panel found that information about the GFP learning outcomes was communicated to the staff and students through a variety of ways, including induction, academic advisors and subject syllabi. This has yielded high levels of satisfaction among the GFP that the aims of GFP are aligned with those of OASGFP, as their assessment of the items "The aims and the objectives of GFP are aligned

with the OAS of GFPs" and "GFP curricula are aligned with the Oman Academic Standards" reported a satisfaction rate of 4.33 for both, on a scale of 5, exceeding the 3.5 interim target for 2017. They were equally satisfied that "The GFP design and delivery of the academic programs support the achievement of the learning outcomes". Students, in turn, were found to be aware of the learning outcomes of the GFP courses (3.62 out of 5), and believe the design and delivery of the GFP facilitates their achievement (3.73). This indicates that DU is effectively communicating the LOs of the programme with its internal stakeholders.

The Panel also found that DU is continuously engaging in external benchmarking exercises and validation of its GFP and of its examination practices in its effort to align the standards of its GFP units with both the OASGFP and with GFPs of other Higher Education Institutions (see Section 2.3).

Although the Panel appreciates that DU is effectively aligning its GFP with the OASGFP through its multiple approaches, there is no clear-cut indication that this strategy is effective in helping the FP department attain its main goal of preparing the GFP students for their higher education programmes. Feedback from higher education programmes showed that the levels of students in some disciplines when they join Colleges are not satisfactory, especially in English where their performance is lower than in the other areas covered by the GFP. This has been echoed through suggestions (in interviews), such as 'having more frequent meetings between the FP and higher education Departments to discuss the GFP', and 'extending the GFP duration to allow the students to absorb their learning'. Since the OAS for GFPs only set minimum standards and requirements for preparing student participation in postsecondary education, the GFP of DU should focus on addressing and meeting the requirements of higher education programmes in its LOs to ensure that students are sufficiently prepared and have acquired the knowledge and skills in the different GFP subject areas to join their chosen disciplines. DU clarified that in 2014-15 its GFP conducted a major programme review, in conjunction with the College of Arts. While acknowledging and supporting such a practice, the Panel believes that the success of this exercise to "bridge the gap between FP and college" should have motivated the FP department to replicate it with all the colleges of the University, so that the GFP LOs will encompass all the skills and knowledge GFP students are expected to have acquired before they gain admission to any programme in any college.

> **Recommendation 3**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation recommends that Dhofar University incorporate the requirements of all higher education programmes in its General Foundation Programme learning outcomes to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills required for their future higher education studies.**

2.2   *Curriculum*

Despite the fact that as stated in the OASGFP documents, the Standards are not curricula, DU states that it has developed its GFP curriculum in line with the OASGFP (Portfolio, p.45), and this aligns with one of the strategies identified in its SP and OP to ensure that quality is being continuously improved through alignment of LOs with OASGFP. Mathematics and IT curricula are developed in-house, whereas the English curriculum has been re-structured since 2014 according to the Cambridge University Press (CUP) *Unlock* and *Unlock Presentation Plus* (Portfolio, p.45). The elements of DU's GFP curriculum comprise several components which all aim to support the achievement of the LOs of the three Units. These components are: the syllabi, the study plans, the independent study, the chosen resources to support learning, the learning space design in the classroom, the technology used to enhance learning, and finally the assessment strategies. Academic staff and students confirmed that the syllabi and study plans are posted in all classrooms

and are also available on the University website. The Panel found that the different elements of the curriculum are being deployed, implemented and communicated.

DU reports that the curriculum is designed to facilitate delivery of the English, Mathematics, IT and GSS (Portfolio, p.45). The Panel found evidence in the Sequence and Scope documents, in the syllabi and in the study plans that the GFP is well structured, with the content comprehensively layered level-wise to cover the learning outcomes required for the four areas of study. Sequencing of the LOs in the different levels also allows for effective teaching and learning, as well as easier monitoring of students' progress over the terms. The contents of GSS are not explicitly taught, but embedded in the English curriculum and reinforced through Mathematics and IT assignments (Portfolio, p.46), and the LOs are covered across the three other disciplines. For instance, the Panel noted through the examination of some students' Portfolios that Study Skills such as self-study and time management are integrated in the English Unit curriculum. However, DU acknowledges that feedback from alumni on their acquisition of some GSS was not positive (Portfolio, p.80), and the Panel also heard that although students come from GFP largely equipped with GSS, they appear to master some GSS more than others. This lack of consistency may be rooted in the Study Plans, where the Panel noted that the English Study Plan covers the LOs, of which the GSS learning outcomes are a part, in a more comprehensive manner than those of Math and IT.

The Panel wishes to emphasise that while "study skills are considered part of the English standards" (OASGFP, p.26) for the purpose of resourcing, [they] may be taught either as specific course/s, or may be embedded into each of the English, Mathematics and Computing courses" (OASGFP, p.25, Section 6.1). The Panel acknowledges DU's move to collect feedback from students on soft, study and technical skills (Portfolio, p.80), but believes that DU has more to benefit from adopting a proactive approach whereby all the GSS are incorporated in the GFP curriculum and their acquisition is monitored in a systematic way.

> **Recommendation 4**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Dhofar University develop a strategy to embed General Study Skills in the design and delivery of its General Foundation Programme curriculum across all subjects in a harmonised manner, and to monitor students' attainment of these skills to ensure they can participate effectively in their higher education programmes.**

DU states that the GFP curriculum is prepared by the FP Coordinators and approved by the FP Director who monitors it with the support of the Deputy Director (DD) and Coordinators (Portfolio, p.46). Minor updates are discussed during weekly Coordinators' meetings while major changes are approved at the UC. The Panel is satisfied that the curriculum monitoring, review and improvement process is an ongoing and consultative process, and is addressed in different committees, at different levels. The Panel particularly appreciates the active involvement of the FP department staff in this review process, as their feedback, as well as that of students is effectively considered to keep the curriculum relevant. The review process however has not been systematic and consistent: the last major updates in Math and IT were conducted in 2010 and 2008 respectively, and the IT curriculum was reviewed in 2015 (Portfolio, p.48). The English curriculum was reviewed following recommendations from Anglia Examinations (AE) in 2014, to introduce the *Unlock* series of textbooks following a pilot term. DU has rightly identified the need for an overarching GFP curriculum monitoring and review system, and started addressing this through the establishment of chapter of its Academic Program Development and Review Committee (APDRC) in the FP department in 2016 (see Section 1.7). The Panel affirms the establishment of the FP APDRC which should provide a clear direction and standard approach for curriculum review and encourages DU to revise the Terms of Reference of this committee to ensure they better reflect its functions, roles and responsibilities.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Dhofar University that it needs to make its General Foundation Programme curriculum review more systematic and supports its efforts to develop and implement an overarching monitoring system through, for example, the establishment of an 'Academic Program Development and Review Committee' at the General Foundation Programme level.

The Panel also found that the higher education faculty are familiar with the GFP and its requirements, as the FP department issues are raised in different University-level meetings where Colleges are represented. Periodic meetings between the Scope and Sequence Committees have been useful in ensuring communication between the Colleges and FP department. They have led, for instance, to the introduction of *Unlock 4* at College level to maintain the continuity of, and consistency with, the teaching and learning materials from the *Unlock 1*, *2*, and *3* series. The Panel, however, notes that these meetings have not been used to identify and address the requirements of higher education programmes, to be taken into consideration in the monitoring and review of the GFP curriculum design and delivery (See Recommendation 3).

2.3   *Student Entry and Exit Standards*

DU offers programmes in both English and Arabic. It aims to ensure that its GFP entry and exit standards are transparent, fairly and consistently applied, well-regulated and clearly communicated to stakeholders. DU also aims to ensure that its practices are periodically reviewed for effectiveness (Portfolio, p.51).

The Panel found that the entry requirements to DU undergraduate programmes are in line with those stipulated by the Ministry of Higher Education for both English and Arabic-medium programmes. These are the General Education Certificate (or equivalent) and the results in the placement tests in English, Mathematics and IT. These admission requirements are clearly communicated in the DU Catalogue and on the University's website. DU notes that the perception of GFP academic staff regarding the appropriateness of the entry standards is barely above the target for 2016 (Portfolio, p.53). Throughout staff interviews, the Panel heard that secondary school graduates come with low levels of proficiency in English, numeracy and study skills and, as a result, one Foundation year may not be sufficient to bridge this gap to prepare students for higher education studies. The Panel appreciates that DU has acknowledged the issue of low levels of incoming students and has taken the initiative to address it in a way that may help improve the students' learning, without having to cut its annual intake of scholarship students: the FP department has started a pre-foundation Math for those students who achieve very low grades in the test (0-10), and the Panel encourages DU to explore the opportunity of introducing a *full* pre-foundation course.

Affirmation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Dhofar University needs to improve the level of its incoming General Foundation Programme students and supports its efforts to address this through, for example, the introduction of pre-foundation courses to allow the students who need support to progress at their own pace.

With regard to the placement of GFP students, DU has replaced the English placement test, which was until 2015-16 based on the Level 3 final exam, with the CUP online adaptive English Test (Portfolio, p.52). The Panel heard that the new testing system is being effectively implemented by well-trained staff. Interviews and on-site demonstrations confirmed that the GFP academic staff were largely aware and receptive of this online testing system. The Panel heard that the new approach has led to more appropriate placement of students. The Mathematics and IT placement tests are produced in-house and conducted online via Moodle. The Panel learned that this testing system was piloted by GFP staff prior to its implementation. Furthermore, this system contains a provision which allows students who feel misplaced to sit for a challenge test and progress to higher levels if they score higher than 70%. The Panel appreciates the measures taken by the FP department to ensure that its placement testing system is robust, reliable and transparent, and invites DU to monitor its impact on the retention and progression of GFP students, their achievement in properly benchmarked exit tests, as well as their performance in higher education programmes.

DU states that GFP students can be admitted directly to undergraduate programmes in Engineering, Education, IT, Business, Languages and Social Sciences if they take international tests such as IELTS, SAT and IDCL and attain the scores required by these programmes. These requirements are duly communicated to the students in the DU Catalogue. The Panel, however, noted some inconsistency in one of these requirements: as per the DU Catalogue, to be exempted from English, students require a minimum score of IELTS 5.5. However, in the Portfolio (p.52) and the Student Handbook, exemption from English requires an IELTS 5 or higher.

The Panel found that the progression and exit criteria for GFP students are effectively communicated in DU's different documents, albeit with some inconsistency issues, as indicated above. The CUP English test, which is used as a placement test as well as an exit test for Level 3 students, currently accounts for 20% of the students' grade at the exit level, with the remaining 80% coming from in-house assessment. The Panel heard in interviews that an increase of the CUP English test's weightage to 30% was approved by DU in June 2017, and that this weightage will be gradually increased to 100%, so that students must pass the CUP English test to exit GFP. The Panel found evidence that GFP exit standards are extensively benchmarked against national and international standards. The English exit examination, for example, was benchmarked against the OASGFP, as well as with other local GFPs. At the international level, the feedback DU obtained from AE in 2014 was intended to help the GFP gauge its English tests to the European Framework. DU states that it also verifies its GFP exit standards by having a random sample of 10% of its Level 3 students to sit for IELTS each academic year and mapping their IELTs scores with the GFP levels (Portfolio, p.52). The Panel appreciates that such benchmarking activities constitute elements of good practice, and if administered rightly, may give measurable indications of students' achievements and of the effectiveness of the GFP. The Panel, however, wishes to remind DU that notwithstanding the value benchmarking may add, the FP needs to remain focused on its primary goal of identifying and meeting the requirements of the higher education programmes it serves.

The Panel, however, noted that the English language proficiency level DU has set for its GFP students to reach by 2019 (by the end of the 2014-2019 DU Strategic Plan), is an IELTS 4-5, which contradicts the FP department OP and Student Brochure and Handbook, where an IELTS 5.0 is set as the GFP exemption requirement. DU is encouraged to ensure the consistency of key GFP-related information it provides to its current and prospective students (See 1.2 above). What concerns the Panel, however, is the fact that the IELTS 4-5 exit standard set by DU for its GFP students falls below the minimum standard of IELTS 5.0 set in the OASGFP where it is explicitly stipulated: "An IELTS score of at least 5.0 (with none of the four areas of writing, speaking, listening and reading below 4.5" (OASGFP, p. 12). DU stated that "some of [their] students' level was too low to achieve a straight IELTS 5", as a consequence, they "decided to phase it in and not send students out". The Panel wishes to stress that the OASGFP requires students to meet the English language learning outcome standards (IELTS Band 5 or the equivalent) in order to progress to higher education programmes taught in English.

The FP department is encouraged to communicate with the higher education departments in order to identify aspects in the four GFP subjects where the GFP graduates need support to be able to progress towards the successful completion of their higher education studies. External reviews and benchmarking activities may also provide useful input in this regard.

> **Recommendation 5**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Dhofar University ensure that its exit standards in all General Foundation Programme subjects meet the requirements of the higher education programmes at Dhofar University to ensure student retention and progression in these programmes**

At the time of the audit, there were no exit examinations for Math and IT, which leaves the Panel unclear as to how the learning outcomes of these two subjects are mapped to OASGFP, and how their achievement is measured. However, DU has taken some steps to implement a Math exit exam in the first term of 2017-2018 (Portfolio, p.52), the rationale being that an exit test will be indicative of the improvement made by students. As an IT exit test is also being considered, the Panel supports the DU's move towards standardising its exit procedures through the introduction of exit examinations in all GFP subjects, and encourages the FP department to monitor this process to ensure it accurately reflects the real levels of students' achievement.

> **Affirmation 4**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Dhofar University needs to adopt a more systematic and consistent approach to measuring exit standards and supports its efforts to introduce formal exit processes across all subjects in its General Foundation Programme.**

2.4   Teaching Quality

DU claims it intends to improve the quality of its GFP teaching staff through the provision of supporting teaching and learning infrastructure, learning resources and technology, the recruitment of teachers with appropriate qualifications and experience, the implementation of professional development (PD) programmes, and the implementation of 360 degree evaluation of faculty performance (Portfolio, p.55).

The Panel heard, through interviews, that all classrooms and laboratories are equipped with internet access, projectors, and software with the aim of supporting DU's objective to 'enhance the use of modern teaching methods and integration of technology in teaching'. The figures provided by DU suggest that the FP department has at the time of the audit over 50 faculty members of various nationalities, the majority of them have an MA, and 10% hold a PhD. The average university-level teaching experience is 10.5 years (Portfolio, p.115).

The Panel saw evidence of PD activities aimed at improving the GFP teachers' teaching skills. The Panel also noted that the GFP academic staff's involvement goes beyond teaching, as they are actively involved in different academic, research, community service and administration activities. The Panel also found evidence that the GFP academic staff have embraced the use of technology in their teaching and reported that DU is effectively supporting them by providing appropriate hardware and software programmes which are continuously updated. Interviews with students confirmed that teachers use computers, projectors and PowerPoint. DU states that Mathematics and IT are taught through a hybrid lecture-practicum approach (Portfolio, p.55), and the Panel heard

that the GFP academic staff use a variety of teaching methods and resources to make their teaching student-centred in order to address the LOs outlined in the curriculum. The various types of activities integrated in the English Unit, for instance included weekly presentations, group work and study portfolios. In November 2016, the staff and student satisfaction levels with the quality of teaching were 4.2 and 3.99 respectively (Portfolio, p.58) and students felt that the use of the self-study portfolios effectively enhances their acquisition of different soft skills and boosts their self-confidence. This satisfaction has been reflected in the GFP students' evaluation of the availability of the portfolios (4.02 out of 5).

The Panel found evidence that needs analyses are conducted on a yearly basis to identify faculty requirements, and this is done through projections using trends analysis and statistics on staffing and student intakes (Portfolio, p.114). This exercise, however, depends on student intake, which may fluctuate considerably, and in case of shortage of faculty, DU appoints part-time faculty (Portfolio, p.114.). The Panel found there is determination in the FP department to maintain small classes and a low staff-student ratio, to enhance the teaching and learning experience.

DU states that the FP Director and DD monitor and review teaching quality using the Annual Faculty Activities Report (AFAR) and classroom observations, both announced and unannounced (Portfolio, p.57). The FP Director reviews each academic staff member's AFAR at the end of the year and identifies areas for improvement. The academic staff are then expected to pursue PD opportunities in those areas by taking part in events and training (Portfolio, p.123). The Panel found evidence that DU has a formal faculty support system in place, aligning with its different policies to support, retain, evaluate and train its academic staff. This system includes a formal induction programme when new staff are appointed, mentorship by a senior faculty member during the three-month probation period, faculty appraisal which includes feedback from students on teaching quality and a professional development (PD) programme (See Section 4). The Panel confirmed that effective communication is established with GFP academic staff as soon as they arrive to help them acclimatise to DU and the local area and learn about their duties. Mentors provide further information about the courses and all relevant policies and procedures effective in DU.

> **Commendation 2**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Dhofar University for the development and implementation of a systematic approach to improve the teaching quality of its General Foundation Programme teaching staff, to improve the student learning experience**

2.5   *Academic Integrity*

DU lists honesty, discipline, and accountability among its graduate attributes and believes that their achievement is accomplished by cultivating a culture of academic integrity of its staff and students (Portfolio, p.59). It aspires to establish a system "for preventing, detecting, and addressing academic misconduct" (Portfolio, p.59). The Panel found that the University-wide Academic Integrity Policy (AIP) is defined and covers all aspects of academic misconduct by students as well as staff. The document details the different types of academic misconduct, their definitions, the process of investigating, and determination of the level of violation as well as information on the penalties applied. DU states that FP department uses *Turnitin* to check students' work, and sanctions for academic dishonesty range from verbal warning to expulsion (Portfolio, p.60). The AIP is also directly relevant to the Operational Plan and Strategic Plan of DU, which place high importance on academic integrity, with several strategies identified to improve students' academic honesty.

The Panel found evidence that staff and students are familiar with the AIP, and knowledgeable of the different types of academic dishonesty and the consequences of misconduct. The Panel heard

that students are briefed on plagiarism and taught proper referencing. They are also required to sign a pledge to affirm their academic integrity prior to examinations. All policies regarding academic integrity (AIP, DU Examinations Policy), including their guidelines, are effectively and frequently communicated and disseminated in the FP department, including via awareness programmes by the Examination Committee (EC), starting from induction/orientation, and in several documents, such as the Student Code of Conduct and the Student Handbook. These key documents are also available in Arabic, and on the website of the University.

The DU figures suggest a declining trend of the cheating cases reported in its GFP, and the samples provided suggest that the FP department management is intolerant of academic misconduct. Interviews with students confirmed that teachers and the administration are strict. Overall, the Panel found that the FP department is effectively implementing the AIP and that students are being effectively supported to ensure they maintain academic integrity in their learning.

2.6   *Assessment of Student Achievement*

DU states that its GFP adheres to the University's Assessment Policy and approaches assessment as an outcome-based, continuous process (Portfolio, p.62). The Assessment Policy is detailed in the DU Policy Manual and states that "DU has outcome-based programs and approach to teaching. The outcome-based assessment relies on having clearly articulated and measurable course learning outcomes and a matching assessment strategy that can measure the achievement of these pre-defined outcomes". The Panel encourages DU to proceed with its plan to introduce exit examinations in Math and IT for this approach to be effectively implemented (See Affirmation 4).

According to DU, the GFP aims to ensure that its assessment is linked to the OASGFP, and is fair, valid and reliable as well as benchmarked against good practice (Portfolio, p.62). Assessment is conducted through a combination of formative and summative techniques and students are informed of the assessment methods in the course syllabi, where rubrics and weight of each assessment are provided (Portfolio, pp.62-63). The Panel found that assessment practices at GFP are clear and comprehensively documented: they include use of examinations, marking schemes, internal moderation processes, reporting and appeal mechanisms. These are clearly communicated and disseminated in different policies. Continuous assessment for English takes different forms including quizzes, presentations, projects, portfolios, and this is also evidenced from the Alignment Matrix which matches assessment methods to LOs. The GFP has identified the inclusion of formative assessment in Mathematics and IT as an opportunity to improve the validity and reliability of assessment (Portfolio, p.67), and the Panel verified that the implementation of this process has been initiated.

> **Affirmation 5**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Dhofar University's need to improve the validity and reliability of the assessment methods used by its General Foundation Programme and supports its efforts to address this, for example, by using formative assessment strategies across all the programme' s subjects.**

While supporting variation in assessment methods, the Panel has concerns about the frequency of examinations and its potential effects on both students and faculty. In March 2014, Anglia Examinations pointed out that "the total number of tests being written, copied, edited and marked over a three-semester year is therefore 144" and asked "when is the actual teaching taking place and how much time do the lecturers have for this?". The Panel agrees that such a large number of examinations may have adverse effects on the learning experience and encourages DU to take this

into consideration. The Panel also acknowledges DU's response to this concern through the appointment of an Examination Coordinator to write all examinations for English. This initiative, however, addresses the issue only partly, since the Coordinator is only for English and "Math and IT exams are still written by committee" (Portfolio, p.64). Besides, it is not clear how the students will benefit from the appointment of this Coordinator as it does not appear to address the issue of examination quantity and frequency.

DU GFP is shifting gradually towards the use of a standardised examination that would account for 100% of the GFP students' achievement in the English language component of the GFP (see Section 2.3). In 2015-16, the CUP adaptive test they are using "counted toward 10% of students' grades. This percentage was increased to 20% for 2016-17. It is slated to be gradually increased to 100%, such that students must pass the exit exam to exit the FP" (Portfolio, p.52). The Panel was informed, through interviews that, "FP intends maintain the same amount of formative tests even when the exit examination weighs 100%, to ensure complete coverage of all LOS". The Panel, however, found no evidence that the allocation of 100% of the weightage to the exit exam has been informed by systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the GFP assessment, such as test item analysis and exam moderation. Besides, it is not clear how GFP exit standards and needs of the higher education programmes will be reflected in the exit examination, especially when it is developed by an external party such as CUP. The Panel is concerned that the students' achievement will be assessed using an exam that is unrelated to the needs of the higher education programmes they aspire to join. The Panel believes it is incumbent upon DU to put in place a system to inform changes in GFP assessment to ensure the introduction of the assessment methods, such as the new standardised examination, supports the GFP's mission of preparing the students for their higher education studies.

> **Recommendation 6**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Dhofar University develop and implement a system to inform changes in assessment, such as the introduction of a standardised exit examination for the General Foundation Programme, to ensure assessment tools reflect the needs of the higher education programmes.**

2.7   Feedback to Students on Assessment

DU states that it regards timely and constructive feedback to students on assessment as an important component of the learning process, and faculty members are supported in their provision of feedback by PD opportunities (Portfolio, p.68). The Panel learned that feedback on student work, including assignments and portfolios, is usually provided in the classroom, orally or in writing. The students interviewed confirmed they usually get their papers back 'within days'. The Panel examined samples of students' assignments from the three levels of English and found evidence of written feedback provided in a constructive manner to students, which supports DU's claim (Portfolio, p.69) that student are satisfied with the faculty interaction and provision of feedback regarding examinations results. Item 16 of the GFP Students Survey "Course instructors discuss and provide feedback to the students regarding their exam results" had an approval rate of 4.05 on a scale of 5, giving the panel further confidence that students are receiving appropriate and timely feedback on their examinations.

2.8   Academic Security and Invigilation

The FP department of DU states that it maintains an effective academic security and invigilation system, and ensures the integrity of student assessment by adhering to the relevant policies and

procedures set in the DU Policy Manual (Portfolio, p.71). According to DU, the Manual comprehensively covers all assessment-related processes: examination script preparation, writing and photocopying, moderation and double-blind marking, invigilation and management of cheating cases, as well as the recording of results (Portfolio, pp.72-73). An EC is also established on a regular basis and is tasked to ensure the security and smooth conduct of examinations.

The Panel is satisfied that the different processes described by DU (Portfolio, pp.62-67) in the preparation of examinations and assessment of students' achievement are comprehensively structured and aim to ensure fairness and validity across the system. The Panel appreciates that the English Unit has shifted towards using a single exam writer for all examinations, rather than having the examinations written by *ad hoc* coordinators' committees (Portfolio, p.64). This may help ensure the consistency of exam standards across terms and levels. Academic staff members perceive this approach as boosting the security of the process. Once written, exam papers are then reviewed by the FP Coordinators and Director. The Panel also encourages the GFP to approach the adoption of formative strategies as an opportunity to reduce the testing load on students and faculty.

The Panel found evidence that mechanisms are implemented for the moderation of examination papers before the exam, as well as for double-blind marking of exam scripts, as claimed by DU (Portfolio, pp.64-65). There is a double-blind marking procedure, which is applied systematically to Mathematics and English papers, and only partly (sample) for IT, in view of the larger class sizes. The Panel is satisfied that the marking and moderation system is implemented as described in the Portfolio, and is fair and reliable. Interviews also confirmed that staff members are familiar with processes for preparing, moderating and marking exam papers and scripts as per the relevant DU policies. The Panel also found that the GFP students are well aware of the formal appeals process in place, and that DU is working well to support a fair and effective assessment system for the GFP.

The Panel found evidence of systematic implementation of an effective and secure system to administer examinations, with well-defined procedures and guidelines that are effectively communicated. Examinations are prepared, run, collected, marked and archived according to clear procedures of which GFP academic staff are aware (Portfolio, p.71). Examinations are administered according to a schedule, and the examination venues are supported by a set of procedures aimed at maintaining their security.

As part of its approach to maintain the security of its examinations, DU states it has recently implemented an incremental warning system, whereby warning cards of different colours (yellow, orange and red) are issued when students attempt to cheat. For a first attempt, the student will get a yellow card placed on their desk. Any other attempt will incur an orange card, which comes with their relocation to another seat. The red card opens the gate for further disciplinary measures. The invigilators, however, are not bound by this order and may, depending on their assessment of the severity of the misconduct, issue a red card immediately (Portfolio, p.73). The implementation of this system was confirmed by both GFP teachers and students.

The Panel notes that the effectiveness of the invigilation process was highlighted by Anglia Examination in their 2014 report, which attributes it partly to the firm stance of the University management against malpractice, since a penalty "now sticks and is not rescinded as soon as the students begs and pleads", and "the staff now know that they will be backed up by senior management in this and this has made all the difference". The evidence examined by the Panel corroborates these findings, as the reported cases of misconduct witnessed a significant and steady decrease from 14 cases in Term 1 of 2016-17 to 6 and 1 in the following Terms respectively (See also Section 2.5), and as highlighted above (Section 2.5), penalties against cheating are supported by higher bodies. The Panel also heard from GFP staff and students that the decline in misconduct cases is largely attributed to the implementation of this card system. Teachers considered it as a culturally appropriate approach, as it had similar success in another Gulf Country, and students said

they found it 'embarrassing' to be singled out with a card on their desks, and would do anything to avoid being caught in such as uncomfortable position.

Overall, the Panel was impressed with the GFP's approach to maintaining the security of its examinations, and commends DU for the development and systematic implementation of a system which has proven to be very effective in controlling cheating.

> **Commendation 3**
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> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Dhofar University for the development and implementation of an effective approach to maintain the security of its General Foundation Programme examinations.**

2.9   *Student Retention and Progression*

According to DU, the FP department maintains data records on student retention and progression to ensure that all such data is thoroughly monitored and analysed; any issues are identified with a view to finding solutions, at-risk students are identified and supported; and retention and progression rates are reviewed periodically (Portfolio, p.75).

The Panel found evidence that FP systematically records the attrition, progression and completion rates data, and uses it for the planning of student enrolment and the projection of human resources needs for the future. It also informs other academic support activities such as the numbers of peer tutors required (Portfolio, p. 67). The Student Handbook also offers comprehensive information covering the cases where GFP students fail progress to their higher education programmes (dismissal, withdrawal, readmission, etc.). The Handbook is published in both Arabic and English.

DU describes its student retention and progression rates as solid (Portfolio, p.78). Analysis of recent entry and exit results showed that the majority of students enter GFP at Level 1 and, in general, most students progress to achieve higher levels. However, as DU intends to use the CUP exit exam results of students as the only entry requirement into Colleges, DU is encouraged to plan, execute and monitor this transition carefully, including through the collection and analysis of data relating to the GFP students' performance in their higher education programmes. This is particularly important since at present the majority of GFP students' CUP exit exam results are equivalent to IELTS 3-4, which is below the College entry requirement of IELTS 5.5 (See Section 2.3).

Whilst the data collection and analysis is essential for GFP to monitor the performance of its students accurately, it is particularly important to monitor the learning experience of the evening GFP students. The Panel is concerned that the GFP data provided included the morning as well as evening students, but these two categories of GFP students study under different conditions, with different levels of access to student academic and non-academic support services. The Panel wishes to note that overall retention and progression rates may not necessarily apply equally to the morning and evening GFP students. For example, while the attrition rates for Term 1 and Term 2 of the academic year 2014-15 were 6 and 12 (out of 722) respectively, the Panel is unclear as to how many of these are evening students. The Panel concludes that unless the data for evening GFP students is analysed as an independent cohort, DU will not be able to find out whether their attrition, progression and completion rates are similar to or different from those of their morning counterparts, and whether they require any special interventions. The Panel urges DU to disaggregate the data related to the two groups to be able to identify any issues that may affect their retention and progression and attend to them appropriately and in a timely manner.

Recommendation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Dhofar University disaggregate the data collected on evening General Foundation Programme students, in order to identify their specific needs and attend to them in a timely and appropriate manner.

2.10   Relationships with GFP Alumni

DU GFP intends to establish an active and mutually beneficial interaction with its alumni, and aspires in particular to seek their assistance in supporting at-risk students and providing feedback on the programme (Portfolio, p.79). The Panel found that the FP department maintains an alumni database and confirmed DU's claim (Portfolio, p.79) that it invites alumni for FP activities such as delivering motivational speeches to students, serving as guides during registration, giving presentations for at-risk students and tutorials at the Learning Support Centre (LSC). The Panel, however, believes that alumni's attendance to these activities does not constitute conclusive evidence of alumni playing any deliberate and planned role in FP department activities and welcomes DU's initiative to address this by setting up an Alumni Committee in 2017 to "organize alumni activities and events, and to promote formal and informal alumni connections with FP students and staff". The Panel examined the Committee's plan for the academic year 2017-2018, and found that it included a variety of activities such as providing GFP with students "tutoring before midterm exams", "participation in the FP Chronicle", "participation in the FP English Club", and other similar activities. The Panel encourages DU to further explore the different avenues it has identified to formally tap into the experience of alumni to serve the GFP community.

3   ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

DU states that it aims to enhance the quality of support services (Strategic Plan, Goal 5). It has a two-pronged approach to achieve this. Firstly, it aspires to improve the academic services provided to students, including academic advising (Objective 5.2), library resources (Objective 5.3), and extracurricular activities (Objective 5.4). Secondly, it aims at advancing and further expanding non-academic services, including admission and registration processes (Objective 5.1), student grievance policies and procedures (Objective 5.5), and University services and facilities (Objectives 5.7 and 5.8).

DU provides a comprehensive set of policies that regulate aspects of student life on campus, such as examinations, complaints and grievances, health and safety, and a Student Handbook which outlines all the student-related rules and regulations in force in DU, including the GFP.

This Chapter reports on the Panel's findings in relation to academic and student support services including: student profile, registration, student induction, teaching and learning resources, information and communication technology services, academic advising, learning support services, student satisfaction and climate, student behaviour, non-academic support services and facilities, and external engagement.

3.1   *Student Profile*

At the time of the Audit, the GFP had a total of 1047 students, of whom 805 (76.8%) were female and 242 (23.2%) were male. Over 75% of these students are sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education (known as scholarship students) (Portfolio, p.83). DU states it intends to keep its GFP student profile accurate and up-to-date, in order to inform decision-making about the GFP students' needs, by identifying and addressing any potential trends and issues (Portfolio, p.82).

The Panel found evidence that the FP department collects and analyses data relating to student profile and uses this information for different projections, such as faculty and staff recruitment, and future plans in academic and non-academic support services. The Panel also noted that management at University and FP department levels are aware of the student profile trends, and action is taken to address emerging issues. For example, the Panel learned that a new hostel had recently been constructed in response to the increase in the number of female students.

The data provided by DU suggests that while female GFP students outnumber their male counterparts in all three levels of the English Language course, the gap is particularly large in Level 3, which may raise concerns over the male students' progression. The data also shows that the GFP intake decreased from 1334 in 2012-2013 to 1047 in 2016-2017 (Portfolio, p. 83). As DU believes this drop is largely in the students sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education, it has initiated plans to attract more non-scholarship students, including attracting more evening self-sponsored students, developing programmes of interest to local industries, and diversifying its marketing and advertising strategies. The Panel welcomes DU's classification of its reliance on government-sponsored students as a risk area and supports the measures it has taken to diversify its student intake, in order to minimise the financial risks associated with this area.

> **Affirmation 6**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Dhofar University needs to diversify its student profile and supports its efforts to attract more non-scholarship students to decrease the General Foundation Programme's reliance on government-sponsored students.**

3.2   Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)

The registration process in DU is managed by the Department of Admission and Registration (DAR), which is responsible for maintaining student records to ensure they are accurate and up-to-date. DU states that the FP department maintains its own data through LOGSIS which is managed by the Computing and Networking Center (CNC) (Portfolio, p.82). The FP department has a Registration Coordinator who liaises with the DAR Director and supports them with matters related to GFP student registration. A number of FP department faculty also help in the registration process, by receiving tuition fees, maintaining student records, and updating their profiles. The Panel verified through the demonstration of the registry system that access to students' records requires the authorisation of the DAR. The Scholarship Section is responsible for liaising with HEAC. The Panel found evidence that the policies and regulations relevant to registration are properly communicated, and registration schedules are advertised through a variety of means, including the DU website, noticeboards and LCDs across DU campus, as well as via social media. There is also evidence that this enrolment system is implemented, and that many parties at University and FP department levels take part in it, and are fully aware of their roles therein. The Panel heard from the Registration personnel that DU has an office in Muscat tasked to facilitate the registration of the students in the northern areas of the country, once they are offered seats in DU.

According to DU, feedback from faculty, staff, and students on registration is collected annually and analysed along with registration data to identify broad trends and needs of the DU student body (Portfolio, p.82), as well as to identify any registration issues. The Panel confirmed that annual questionnaires contain items evaluating the registration processes and that the FP department discusses registration issues in its official meetings. One example of such issues is the students' low satisfaction with the online registration system (Portfolio, p.87). DU claims it is aware of this issue, and the Panel heard that the University plans to spread awareness of offsite online registration through class representative meetings and training workshops. Through interviews, the Panel was satisfied that no registration-related issues were experienced by the GFP evening students who, due to their work commitments during the day and, as such, rely on the University's online services to help facilitate their admission and subsequent studies at DU. The most recent student survey also suggests that 89 out of 130 GFP students (68%) found the online registration to be effective. Post-GFP academic staff also singled out the GFP students' awareness of the registration system as a factor "which helped reduce the workload on us, as they deal with advising online without having to come to our offices". On these grounds, the Panel is satisfied that the registration system works effectively and is subject to review and improvement.

3.3   Student Induction

DU states that its induction programmes aim at ensuring that newly-admitted students receive effective support prior to and in the initial days of their studies at DU. The student induction system in place is structured through three main stages: pre-enrolment, enrolment, and post-enrolment (Portfolio, pp.88-89). Various parties are involved in its implementation, including the registration advisors, Student Affairs Department (SAD), FP Director, Deputy Director (DD), Coordinators, and academic advisors. GFP alumni, Class Representatives, the library and LSC also take part in induction programmes (Portfolio, p.88). Academic staff from the different Colleges play an important role in spreading awareness among GFP students on how to use the library and various learning resources.

The Panel verified that induction programmes are prepared and implemented. The newly registered GFP students reported they attended induction in a hall, received handbooks in both languages, and received briefings about facilities and aspects of expected student conduct (such as avoidance of cheating and espousal of integrity). GFP academic staff confirmed taking part in these activities to "help FP students integrate with system without anxiety" and "ensure that students are aware of their rights and obligations". The Panel confirmed that post-GFP academic staff participate in the

induction process and that an induction session is offered every semester to GFP graduates to acquaint them with their respective future Colleges' requirements.

The Panel found evidence supporting DU's claim (Portfolio, p.89) that the student induction system is monitored and feedback is sought on a regular basis. The GFP academic staff reported they collected feedback at the end of every Term about the induction process for analysis and evaluation. Out of a sample of 130 GFP students surveyed in May 2017, 93 (71%) believed "the induction system is efficient", and 88 (67.6%) found it "informative". The GFP alumni also felt the process was smooth and helpful, and expressed their willingness to support it if invited to take part. The Panel also heard that improvements to the system are being made in response to the student and staff feedback. Examples of improvement are as follows: the introduction of awareness sessions conducted by the Director of the Library and his assistants for GFP students when they reach level 3 in preparation for their post-GFP studies, the introduction of "On-the-Move Induction" in September 2016 to take new GFP students on guided campus tours, and the recent initiative in January 2017 to elicit post-induction feedback from GFP students at the end of their first term. The morning GFP students in particular, are satisfied with the current induction system, as their approval rate in September 2016 was 3.82, which exceeded the 3.5 target (Portfolio, p.90), and interviews with students indicated their awareness of DU policies, rules, and regulations, even though some of them had been in DU for only a few weeks.

Overall, the Panel found the induction system to be comprehensive, consisting of three phases and inclusive of students and staff, administrative and academic. It is monitored and evaluated, which has made it responsive to GFP students' needs and open for improvement. The Panel commends DU for this effective induction system which has proven to be useful in ensuring the smooth settlement of its morning students in the University environment.

> **Commendation 4**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation commends Dhofar University for developing and implementing a comprehensive induction system for morning General Foundation Programme students to ensure they understand university rules, regulations and processes.**

The Panel, however, notes that the evening GFP students may not be able to fully benefit from this system in view of their off-campus commitments during the day. DU is encouraged to envisage a mechanism through which it can provide its induction programmes to its evening GFP students during their study time.

3.4   *Teaching and Learning Resources*

DU states that it aspires to manage its teaching and learning resources in a way that supports its Mission, Vision and Values. It claims it plans to have a safe, accessible and well-maintained learning environment that strictly adheres to copyright laws (Portfolio, p.91). The Panel learned, through interviews, that the FP Director holds fortnightly meetings with the Administrative Committee which is tasked, among other things, to "Review and manage [the] inventory of FP physical assets" and "Discuss all issues relating to classroom equipment and facilities". The Panel also noted that DU is providing its GFP students with all the necessary teaching and learning resources including classrooms, laboratories, textbooks, computers, software, and projectors. An entire building (Block D) is exclusively reserved for the FP department, in which all classrooms are furnished with whiteboards, bulletin boards, a teacher's desk, a computer and projector, and they are large enough to accommodate up to 30 students. The Panel also heard from the IT support personnel that the log-in system is secure, and GFP students now have access to the Moodle platform, which used to be exclusive to the post-GFP students. Through the in-situ interviews, the Panel confirmed that the Library had access to online databases such as Springerlink, JSTOR, and

EBSCO. The Panel also saw evidence of the acquisition of a number of graded readers for GFP students.

DU claims its subjects the teaching and learning resources of its GFP to regular reviews through questionnaires and interviews (Portfolio, p.92). The Panel saw evidence that these resources are evaluated and heard that the FP department has been responsive to its staff and students' needs in this area. Some of the questionnaire items are general and do not target the specific components of teaching and learning resources and DU is encouraged to address this. The Panel noted, however, that the FP department has managed to identify some issues and make improvements in its teaching and learning resources, such as the introduction of Cambridge University Press (CUP) *Unlock* series for English courses. Staff and student surveys (Portfolio, p.92) which cover the 2014-2016 three-year period suggest an increase in the levels of satisfaction with the teaching and learning resources which meet or exceed the interim satisfaction targets set by DU. This positive response has been echoed in interviews with GFP students who voiced their satisfaction with classroom layouts, teachers use of projectors and computers, adequacy of computers in laboratories, and the support they received in the use of library facilities and services. The Panel also heard that textbooks were distributed in a timely manner. Overall, the Panel concluded that GFP staff and students are satisfied with the teaching and learning resources, and that any requests for their provision or maintenance are addressed in a timely manner; this has positively influenced the teaching and learning environment.

3.5   *Information and Learning Technology Services*

DU states that information and learning technology services are planned and managed to support the teaching and learning processes, and to provide GFP staff and students with the necessary technical support (Portfolio, p.94). DU also states it has systems in place to maintain and update its information and learning services and resources as required to ensure their effectiveness (Portfolio, p.94).

The Panel was informed that this area falls within the remit of the Computing and Networking Centre which is in charge of assessing, upgrading, and enhancing the quality of IT services, and that it has 20 technical support staff, one of whom is dedicated to the FP department. This validates DU's claim in its Portfolio (p.94). There are eight computer labs with scanners, printers, and 217 computers reserved for the FP department. The Panel is pleased to learn that access to DU learning facilities through the Moodle platform which had earlier been restricted to the students of the Colleges, has recently been extended to the GFP students, who can now access an online library and Moodle for IT and Mathematics placement tests and class announcements (Interview/demo with IT staff). The Panel also learned that Wi-Fi is available throughout the campus, including the hostels with two internet points in each room, and that the internet is fast. The Panel verified the availability of Wi-Fi throughout Building D, devoted to the FP department. The Panel was also informed that requests for support, maintenance, updates, and emergency cases are addressed in a timely manner, enabling thus the teaching and learning processes to run smoothly.

With regard to monitoring and review of these services, the Panel found that CNC collects feedback from staff and students, including those of the GFP, to assess their satisfaction with the information and learning technology services it oversees. DU reports that GFP staff and students appear to be satisfied with the current information and learning technology and related support services, although the student satisfaction level is still below the 3.5 (out of 5) interim mark targeted by DU for 2016 (Portfolio, p.95). The Panel, however, notes that some of the questionnaire items are general and encourages DU to address this in order to get a more accurate evaluation of its performance in this area.

In summary, the Panel appreciates DU's continuous improvement of its information and learning technology provision, particularly its recent move to implement an e-library, CUP Online

Placement Test and Moodle for IT and Mathematics placement tests for GFP students. The Panel encourages DU to consider extending the use of Moodle as a teaching and learning platform to all GFP study areas.

3.6   *Academic Advising*

DU indicates that the FP department regards academic advising as a cornerstone in its teaching and learning process, and essential for the successful implementation of its operational plan (Portfolio, p.97). According to the system in place, each GFP section has an academic advisor who is their Reading and Writing teacher. Academic staff members also have six office hours per week reserved for students. The office hour schedules are displayed on their office doors (Portfolio, p.97). Once identified by Students-At-Risk Committee (SARC), 'at-risk students' receive special attention from their academic advisors through tailored learning support services (Portfolio, pp. 97-99). The Panel learned, through interviews, that such individualised support includes discussions, comments on extra assignments, and the allocation of private tutors. According to DU, the system is reviewed on a regular basis, for example, the most recent review targeted the Academic Advising Policy which was revised and approved in April 2015 (Portfolio, p.97). The Panel found evidence that academic advising in GFP is regulated by institutional policies, which are disseminated to stakeholders in both hard and soft copies.

The GFP academic advisors provide their advisees with a range of academic support. The Panel was informed that, in response to student feedback, the FP department took a decision to make academic advisors available not only during the scheduled six weekly office hours, but any time, including occasionally during lunch-breaks. CRs also play a role in liaising with the FP Director and DD in cases of major issues. The Panel heard that GFP students, especially, those studying in the morning are satisfied with the existing academic advising system and processes. However, the Panel has concerns that the evening GFP students do not benefit from these academic advising initiatives due to time constraints. With classes running from 3 pm to 9 pm or from 4 pm to 10 pm, these students have no opportunity for academic advising except, through the personal endeavours of their teachers during the evening classes and the occasional class visits of the FP Director. While acknowledging DU's efforts and initiatives aimed at providing effective academic advising, the Panel notes that only the morning GFP students appear to benefit from these services, to the exclusion of their evening counterparts who, the Panel heard, are obliged to rely on their teachers and the FP Director for guidance. The Panel calls upon DU to extend the formal academic advising system to GFP evening students.

> **Recommendation 8**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Dhofar University extend the academic advising system to the evening General Foundation Programme students to ensure they receive the support and guidance required for the timely completion of their General Foundation Programme studies.**

3.7   *GFP Student Learning Support*

DU states that the FP department offers students a comprehensive range of learning support services to enrich the learning experience and ensure that students' needs are identified and addressed (Portfolio, p.99). The Panel found that learning support services are provided through the LSC which has a policy regulating its activities, and many parties are involved in this process, including the peer tutors who "shall be available for consultations throughout the semester, during

reading and review period and final exam week". Peer tutors also receive a remuneration from the University for the assistance they provide.

The Panel notes that support falls in two categories: general and specific. The general learning support services include motivational speeches, exam preparations (organised by SARC), English Club activities, library resources awareness programmes (for level 3 students), field trips; movie nights, round-table discussions (for hostel students), five extra hours for Level 1 English and two extra hours for Pre-Foundation Mathematics. The specific learning services are targeted at those students whose results in placement tests suggest they require additional support and those who might become at risk after some time. Academic advisors prepare a plan of support for such students in coordination with SARC. DU also states that special tutoring is provided for hostel residents by the LSC (Portfolio, p.99), a claim which the Panel subsequently confirmed through interviews. The Panel also heard that the FP department is working closely with its at-risk students, CRs, faculty, academic advisors, library, LSC, and higher education students to meet its students' expectations related to student learning support. In the academic year 2015-2016, DU introduced peer tutoring which it claims benefited many students: between 2015 and 2016, the number of tutors increased (from 44 to 108 in English, for example, and from 36 to 53 in IT) and the time allocated for tutoring extended (for example from 110 to 240 hours for English, and from 21 to 45 hours for Mathematics), to accommodate the increasing numbers of students (Portfolio, p.100, Table 3.7.1).

Student and staff feedback reported by DU suggests an increase in students' satisfaction with the GFP learning support services from 3.10 in November 2014 to 3.55 in November 2016 (Portfolio, p.101). The GFP students confirmed their satisfaction with the advice and direction they get from their academic advisors, subjects teachers and peer tutors. The Panel also confirmed that these services helped scores of students to progress: in Term 3 of 2016-2017, for example, out of the 151 who got tutorials in English, 82 (54%) managed to move on to higher levels or meet the GFP English language requirement. The Panel acknowledges the broad-based approach adopted by DU, which has allowed a number of parties to play an active role in the provision of learning support for FP students. On these grounds, the Panel concludes that DU's efforts have culminated in the establishment of an effective system of which students, faculty and staff are satisfied and proud.

> **Commendation 5**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Dhofar University for developing and implementing an effective and multifaceted approach to learning support to improve student retention and progression on the General Foundation Programme.**

3.8   *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

DU aspires to position itself as a destination of choice for higher education seekers, and perceives student satisfaction as crucial for the achievement of this status. To realise this goal, DU has implemented a three-pronged strategy aimed at building a positive academic climate: firstly, the provision of the required services and facilities, secondly, the opportunity for students to make their voices heard, with timely response to their needs, and thirdly, awareness of the students' role in the provision of services and facilities (Portfolio, p.102).

DU believes that improving academic activities, support services, governance and management, and seeking regular feedback from students will help create a good learning climate and have positive effects on student satisfaction (Portfolio, p.102). Accordingly, they have set and implemented plans to improve the communication between the GFP management and students, and to reflect their feedback in any improvements they introduce (see Section 3.7). The Panel found the liaison between students and management to be robust, with CRs acting as conduit and meeting

with the FP Director every two or three weeks. There is a Student Feedback Policy established in 2013-2014 as well as a Student Grievance Policy (SGP).

The Panel also confirms that GFP staff and students are made aware of these various policies through the induction programmes, University website, manuals and brochures. The FP department management and staff give due importance to student satisfaction, and collect regular feedback from them to inform future plans and improvements in academic and non-academic services. GFP students appeared to be satisfied with the DU academic and non-academic services (see Section 3.7). The survey results (Portfolio, p.103, Table 3.8.1) show an increasing trend of satisfaction during the 2014-2016 period, and interviews with students confirmed this overall positive response, with the exception of a few negative remarks on the DU hostel, transportation and recreational activities (see Section 3.10). In view of the positive response to CRs as a useful tool to build a two-way communication channel between students and the FP department management, DU intends to boost its GFP student representation by including a GFP student representative in the University-level Student Advisory Council. The Panel confirmed the existence of this Council, with 17 student members "from all colleges" and strongly supports this initiative.

3.9   *Student Behaviour*

DU seeks to build "character and a sense of civic duty in its students", by making them aware of their rights and responsibilities and attending to cases of misconduct promptly and fairly (Portfolio, p.105). It has developed a number of regulatory documents, procedures and mechanisms aimed at identifying and addressing cases of misconduct promptly, properly, and equitably. These include DU-level documents and bodies such as the Student Code of Conduct, Student Disciplinary Committee, tasked to "examine students' non-academic violations", SGP and University Appeal Committee. At the GFP level, the Student Affairs Committee (SAC) has powers to "examine student-related academic issue *[sic]* referred by the dean or any academic staff "and "take disciplinary action against students violating proper academic conduct". The FP department claims it communicates the expectations in relation to student behaviour and the related documents and procedures to GFP students in both Arabic and English, through a variety of channels including induction programmes, academic advisors, CRs and the DU website (Portfolio, pp.105-106). The Panel confirmed this claim through supporting materials and interviews. The Panel also noted that the parties involved are aware of the existing system for monitoring student behaviour and understand their roles within it. This corroborates the figures reported by DU (Portfolio, p.107, Table 3.9.2) that student awareness of the disciplinary system and its key policies in November 2016 is 3.6, exceeding the 3.5 interim mark set by DU. Above all, the system is effective, as SAC is fulfilling its mission and the penalties for misconduct are applied systematically, which may have helped drop cases of academic misconduct in the FP department during the academic year 2016-2017 from 22 in Term 1 to 0 in Term 3 (see Section 2.8). Stakeholders, in turn, are satisfied with these outcomes of the system, as both staff and students expressed their confidence in the current practices and reported no concerns in this regard.

Overall, the Panel concludes that DU has an effective system for communicating expectations and monitoring student behaviour, with a variety of components and clear roles and responsibilities.

3.10   *Non-Academic Student Support Services and Facilities*

DU aims to provide GFP students with quality non-academic support services and facilities to facilitate and enhance their learning experience and well-being (Portfolio, p.108). It offers a range of such services and facilities, including on-campus hostels for female students, transportation, canteens, medical assistance, counselling services, and social and recreational programmes (Portfolio, p.108). The provision of these services is managed by the SAD, supported by a number of GFP-level committees such as the Health and Safety Committee. The management is supported

by a set of policies and regulations, widely communicated through a number of channels such as the Student Handbook and DU website.

The Panel heard from non-academic support staff as well as from students, that GFP students can establish student clubs or join existing ones to engage in extracurricular activities. These activities are advertised by the University. According to data presented by DU, GFP students reported high levels of satisfaction (3.98 on a scale of 5) with the opportunities to take part in activities (Portfolio, p.110, Table 3.10.1). Dining options are available (Portfolio, p.110), and students also have access to medical assistance on campus as well as in hostels. DU provides transportation for female students who wish to go shopping. While the Panel confirmed the provision of these services, it also heard that campus cafeterias and buses to shopping centres are often crowded, and that hostels may require better cleaning. The Panel learned, through interviews, that DU has identified these issues, and started addressing them. For example, regular meetings are now held between the SAD and the private contractor to monitor the hostel's cleanliness, and a supermarket has been opened inside the hostel. Although the Panel welcomes these recent interventions, it is of the view that DU has further room for improvement, especially considering that GFP students are in a critical transition from family to campus life. The Panel recommends that DU improve its system for collecting and analysing students' feedback on the non-academic student support services and facilities, in a disaggregated way for example, to be able to identify the specific needs of the GFP students and address them appropriately.

> **Recommendation 9**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Dhofar University improve its system for collecting and analysing its feedback from General Foundation Programme students on non-academic student support services and facilities in a way that ensures their specific needs are identified and addressed appropriately.**

3.11   External Engagement

DU has signed a number of national and international MoUs which include the FP department: academic cooperation agreements include CUP, University of Nizwa, Anglia Examinations, Sultan Qaboos University, and Salalah College of Technology, and their scope covers benchmarking of teaching-learning and assessment tools, such as placement tests and textbooks. The FP department also has joint activities with local community institutions such as Sultan Qaboos Hospital, Royal Oman Police, and local schools. Cooperation with these institutions involves guest lectures, training sessions, visits, and social awareness and philanthropy campaigns, such as blood donation (Portfolio, p.111).

The Panel notes that the FP department's external academic cooperation has been instrumental in the introduction of some improvements to its provision, such as the adoption of new textbooks (See Section 1.7), the adoption of new assessment tools and the benchmarking of GFP standards. The Panel also notes that the FP department's non-academic engagement with the community has thus far taken the form of spontaneous, individual initiatives, the connection of which with GFP's learning outcomes is unclear. DU needs to develop a systematic approach to "Strengthen Relationship with Community (Goal 6), "Encourage different community activities" (Strategy 6.2.1), and "Involve community members in various FP events" (Strategy 6.2.4). In this regard, the Panel welcomes DU's initiative in February 2017 to expand the range of its FP department external engagement activities and make them more relevant to the skills being fostered by the GFP (such as Emotional Intelligence lecture; Reading Day; etc.). The Panel also confirms the establishment and activation of a Community Services Committee at FP department level, and hopes it will help

support the non-academic external engagement of GFP staff and students in a more organised and systematic way.

Affirmation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Dhofar University needs to establish and implement a formal external engagement system and supports the establishment of a mechanism to ensure that General Foundation Programme staff and students actively engage with the community in order to help the University achieve its objectives in this area.

4   STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

The provision of staff support services at the FP department of DU is informed by an aspiration to 'Recruit and retain duly qualified and experienced faculty and staff' (FP OP, Objective 1.4). It intends to achieve this through a variety of strategies aimed at improving the teaching and research skills of academic staff. In its OP, the FP department aims, among other things, to 'provide training programs for faculty to introduce the new technologies in their teaching' (Strategy 1.6.2), and 'encourage faculty to do research related to FP' (Strategy 3.1.3). The FP department also aspires to improve staff retention by creating and maintaining a "motivating work environment to faculty and staff at FP" (Objective 4.4), and "identify[ing] and reward[ing] excellent and deserving faculty and staff on the basis of appraisal" (Strategy 4.6.3).

The Human Resources Department (HRD) is responsible for this area, and DU Bylaws provide a detailed description of the internal, personnel and financial regulations implemented in DU. The DU Policy Manual offers a comprehensive list of policies which cover a range of aspects applicable to DU staff in general. Those aspects of the FP department not covered by the DU-level Policy Manual are addressed in the GFP Faculty Manual.

In this Chapter, staff and staff support services for the FP at DU 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

In its Operational Plan, the FP department states it recruits and retains duly qualified and experienced faculty and staff (Objective 1.4). The staffing process is governed by two DU policies: Recruitment Policy and Omanisation Policy.

The Panel noted that the teaching staff of the FP department are academically qualified and have appropriate experience to fulfil their roles: it currently has 52 members of academic staff and of these 71% hold a Master's degree and 10% have a doctoral qualification. The average length of University level teaching experience is over 10 years and the University has a requirement that all new appointees must have at least two years of teaching experience (Portfolio, p.115).

The Panel also found that English native speakers make up 22% of the staffing complement and the ratio of part-time faculty has decreased from 10 in 2014-15 to 3 in 2017-18. The relatively high level of staff satisfaction (4.16) reported by DU (Portfolio, p.115) was corroborated in interviews and reflected in the steadily decreasing staff turnover rates (See Section 4.6).

4.2   Recruitment and Selection

DU states it aspires to carefully recruit "qualified, experienced, and professional faculty and staff […] for the smooth running of the FP" (Portfolio, p.117). The DU HR Department manages the recruitment and selection process of FP department staff, with input from the FP department management and the FP Recruitment Committee. Staffing needs are reviewed annually through the 'staff needs projection'. In this exercise, projected student numbers are used to calculate emerging staffing needs and the outcomes of this exercise are forwarded to the HRD which arranges for posts to be advertised. Although an unavoidable volatility in student numbers year on year can make staffing needs difficult to predict with precision, the Panel noted that as far as is possible, the GFP anticipates and plans for future staffing needs in an efficient and timely manner. Following this annual staffing needs analysis and upon approval by the DVC, the HR Department arranges for vacant posts to be advertised in suitable media. The FP Recruitment Committee plays a role in

screening applications and in conducting interviews with shortlisted candidates, either in person or by videoconference.

The Panel confirmed that all new faculty members go through a three-month probationary period. To pass this phase successfully new staff members must undergo three successful classroom observations and receive a positive mentor's report (see Section 4.3). Taking into consideration the increasing retention rates and the high satisfaction with the recruitment process (4.18 on a scale of 5) reported by the staff members in June 2016 (Portfolio, p. 119), the Panel concluded that this process is appropriately conducted and plays an important part in maintaining the quality of teaching staff on the FP department. Interviews confirmed the staff's positive perception of the recruitment and selection practices.

Overall, the Panel formed the impression that the recruitment and selection system adopted by DU has been effective in securing its FP department appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

4.3   *Staff Induction*

DU states it has a staff induction system which aims to help newly recruited staff and faculty settle quickly and smoothly into their new environment (Portfolio, p.120). The Panel found the staff induction processes for DU, and the FP department in particular, to be comprehensive and well-documented with an Induction Policy, a University-wide staff handbook (GFP Staff Handbook). The process begins before the staff member arrives at the University. Prior to arrival, new staff members are sent the Staff Induction Handbook, the FP Induction Manual and the Faculty Manual. On arrival, a range of support services are provided by the University to ensure that they settle in quickly and complete the various necessary formalities as easily as possible (Portfolio, p.120). GFP staff members receive a University level induction as well as FP level induction. At the FP department level, the induction process is guided by a comprehensive checklist which, on completion, is signed by the staff member to confirm that all necessary items have been covered. As part of the induction process, new staff members are assigned a mentor. The duties and responsibilities of mentors are captured in a checklist which mentors are expected to follow. Mentorship lasts for one term.

The Panel heard that the induction process is conducted thoroughly and conscientiously and the approach has yielded a positive response from the FP department staff whose satisfaction rate of 4.5 in 2016 exceeded the DU overall satisfaction level which stands at 3.9 (Portfolio, p.122). This finding is reinforced by an improvement in staff retention (see Section 4.6), as the turnover has dropped consistently, from 14 (26.9%) in 2011-12 to six (10.7%) in 2015-16 (Table 4.6.1, Portfolio, p.130). The Panel, therefore, commends DU for the comprehensive and effective staff induction system it implements in its GFP, which has been instrumental in improving staff retention and satisfaction.

> **Commendation 6**
>
> **The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Dhofar University for the comprehensive and effective staff induction system it implements in its General Foundation Programme which has helped improve staff retention and satisfaction.**

4.4   *Professional Development*

DU states that the professional development programme is offered through the Professional Development Committee (PDC), as well as through the Research Committee (RC). The Panel found that academic staff members at DU regularly engage in PD activities to improve their

teaching, and to remain up-to-date with newly introduced textbooks and technologies. Evidence examined by the Panel suggests that feedback from faculty on their needs is collected by the FP department, through Coordinators, to inform PD activities which are organised by the PDC.

A variety of professional development activities are provided for both academic and non-academic staff. Professional development needs both for individual staff members and for groups of staff, such as academic advisors and subject teachers are identified through the annual appraisal process and through the Annual Faculty Activity Review (AFAR) Reports. There is evidence that PDC responds to needs identified in these annual reports in constructing its annual PD programmes. The Panel found evidence that faculty members are encouraged to engage in research activity and to participate in external professional development activities, such as conference attendance. There was also evidence of PD being informed by the review of teaching practice through the annual appraisal system, peer review and the monitoring of student feedback. The Panel also heard that PD activities are proposed by staff members as per their self-identified needs, and by Management and Coordinators of the FP department, in light of recent curriculum reviews. Non-academic staff are provided with a range of professional development opportunities. They are identified by the Community Service and Continuing Education Center in its annual schedule of professional development events for non-academic staff.

The Center for Teaching and Learning also organises PD activities and seminars with other Colleges, and Coordinators are asked to provide feedback on activities and to make recommendations for future sessions. In response to feedback, DU is working towards linking PD with academic staff performance appraisal.

As part of the University's efforts to increase the number of Omani staff (see section 4.7), Omani academic staff are entitled to apply for up to four years of paid study leave. Overall, the Panel concluded that appropriate professional development activities are provided for both academic and non-academic staff involved with the GFP.

4.5   *Performance Planning and Review*

DU states it reviews its FP department staff performance for the purposes of improvement and acknowledgment of excellence (Portfolio, p.125), and the Panel found that the FP department has comprehensive processes and procedures for the performance appraisal of academic and non-academic staff. Performance appraisal is an annual process which is linked to incentives, promotion and contract renewal. The Panel found evidence that the performance appraisal policy and procedures are conveyed to faculty and staff and are widely understood and fully implemented. At the centre of the DU performance appraisal system is the AFAR, which must be completed by all staff with supporting materials as necessary.

Academic staff appraisal takes account of teaching performance as well as scholarly achievements and community and university service. The performance appraisal system is also used to identify both individual development needs and the collective development needs of the wider team. The quantitative approach adopted in the appraisal system allows for transparency and comparability of outcomes, and there is the opportunity for staff members to appeal reviews with which they do not agree.

Through interviews, the Panel found evidence that faculty and staff members are both aware of the appraisal process and are generally satisfied with its fairness and transparency. In the 2016 questionnaire, DU reported scores of 4.18 and 3.67 for awareness and satisfaction respectively, which exceeds the interim target of 3.5 set by DU (Portfolio, p.128, Table 4.5.1).

4.6   *Staff Organisational Climate and Retention*

DU aspires to build and maintain a healthy organisational climate for GFP staff to help improve their retention (Portfolio, p.129). It intends to achieve this by setting and communicating clear guidelines, attending to staff issues quickly and fairly, and acknowledging excellence (Portfolio, p.129). It also claims it reviews its system regularly (Portfolio, p.129). In practice, the Panel found that the University takes the staff organisational climate seriously and has developed a number of policies aimed at ensuring that the organisational climate remains conducive to the aim of recruiting and retaining experienced and qualified staff. The Panel heard that the provision of an attractive benefits package has been successful in attracting well-qualified and experienced academic staff to the GFP and, according to staff, this also plays an important role in retaining staff.

The GFP staff surveys reveal a high level of satisfaction with the DU working environment, the effectiveness of communication channels and the fairness and consistency of HR policies (Portfolio, p.131). Retention rates have risen steadily over recent years (Portfolio, p.130) and the Panel heard that staff attrition may be partly attributable to factors outside the control of the University, such as the unavailability of international schools, making it difficult to attract and keep expatriate staff, and the fluctuation in the numbers of scholarship students.

The Panel found that the FP department academic staff are supported in their professional development (see Section 4.5) and also in their research activity. Research workshops and presentations are organised for the FP department academic staff by the GFP RC, and the Panel confirmed, through interviews, that individuals with research proposals are supported by DU to carry out the research and disseminate the results.

The Panel also noted that the University has comprehensive policies for dealing with staff grievances and several formal and informal channels through which to raise any concerns. Interviews revealed that annual staff feedback is also taken through the faculty and staff questionnaire, as well as through regular informal meetings with the FP Director, Deputy Director and Coordinators and the results of these are used to inform decision-making. The Panel was informed that the acquisition of 1650 graded readers for the GFP students, and the adoption of the card-based warning system in examinations were responses to suggestions by academic staff members.

4.7   *Omanisation*

DU claims it targets Omanisation rates of 80% for non-academic staff and 20% for academic staff (Portfolio, p.132). To achieve this, it has included Omanisation as one of its strategic foci in the Strategic Plan. The FP department also addresses this in its Operational Plan. DU also has an Omanisation Policy, which sets guidelines for the recruitment of Omanis for academic and non-academic positions.

During the site visit, the Panel found inconclusive evidence about DU's success in this area. While DU claims to have achieved 100% Omanisation of its non-academic GFP staff, the number of Omani academic staff on the GFP remains at 6% in 2016-2017 (Portfolio, p.133). The Panel also noted that this percentage is in the decline, from 7% in 2014-2015 and 9% in 2012-2013 (Portfolio, p.133). According to DU management, the low number of Omani faculty is attributed to the reluctance of qualified Omanis to apply, because they find the prospect of governmental employment more attractive.

In response to this situation, the Panel notes that DU has introduced a number of initiatives to increase the proportion of Omani faculty. At the recruitment stage, priority is given to suitably qualified Omanis. Once appointed, Omani faculty can apply for special study leave for up to four years. The Panel also saw evidence that DU has submitted a proposal to address the Omanisation issue at the national level. The Panel acknowledges the efforts made by DU to increase the

proportion of Omani staff involved with the FP department and encourages DU to continue its efforts in this direction.

Affirmation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees that Dhofar University needs to increase the number of Omani academic staff in the General Foundation Programme and supports its efforts with government bodies to attract and retain Omani faculty.

APPENDIX A.   AUDIT PANEL

Dr Keith Sharp (Chair)
Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance
Kingdom of Bahrain

Dr Shaheen Motala-Timol
Quality Assurance and Accreditation Officer
Tertiary Education Commission, Mauritius

Dr Chaker Ali Mhamdi
Head of Quality Assurance Department
Al Buraimi University College
Sultanate of Oman

Dr Hamadi Dhaou (Review Director)
Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

APPENDIX B.   ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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

ADRI ....Approach→Deployment→Results→Improvement

AE..Anglia Examinations

AIP...Academic Integrity Policy

APDRC...Academic Program Development and Review Committee

Approach ....The first dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on evaluating what a HEI aims to achieve for a given topic and how it proposes to achieve it.

BOD...Board of Directors

BOT ....Board of Trustees

CAAS ....College of Arts and Applied Sciences

CE..College of Engineering

CCBA ....College of Commerce and Business Administration

CR..Class Representative

CUP ....Cambridge University Press

DAR...Department of Admissions and Registration

DD ....Deputy Director

Deployment ....The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a HEI's plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not.

DU ....Dhofar University

DVC...Deputy Vice Chancellor

EC..Examination Committee

External Reviewer ....A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of the OAAA's various external review Panels.

FP...Foundation Programme

FPAC ....Foundation Program Academic Committee

GFP..General Foundation Programme

GSS..General Study Skills

HEAC ....Higher Education Admissions Center (www.heac.gov.om)

HEI ....Higher Education Institution

HRD...Human Resources Department

HSC. ....Health and Safety Committee

HSP..Health and Safety Policy

ICT...Information and Communication Technology

IELTS ....International English Language Testing System

Improvement ....The fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how effectively an organisation is improving its *approach* and *deployment* for any given topic in order to achieve better *results*.

IT ....Information Technology

KPI...	Key Performance Indicator
LSC..	Learning Support Centre
LOSLOs...	Learning Outcomes
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MVV..	Mission Vision and Values
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.
PD...	Professional Development
PDC	Professional Development Committee
Quality Assurance..........................	The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met.
Quality Audit	An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its mission and vision.
Quality Enhancement	The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing *approach*, *deployment* and *results*.
RC...	Research Committee
Results	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's *approach* and *deployment*.
Review Director	An individual assigned to an Audit Panel by the OAAA to provide professional guidance and support.
RMC	Risk Management Committee
RMP...	Risk Management Policy
SAC	Student Affairs Committee
SAD...	Student Affairs Department
SARC...	Students-At-Risk Committee
Sic...	indicates that the preceding segment of the quote was copied faithfully, in spite of a mistake
SGP...	Student Grievance Policy
SP...	Strategic Plan
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
System	In this Report, *system* refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.
UAC..	University Academic Council
UC	University Council
VC	Vice Chancellor

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