

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

General Foundation Program Quality Audit Manual

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FOREWORD

I am very pleased to introduce the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority's (OAAA) General Foundation Program Quality Audit Manual. The publication of this Manual follows approval by the OAAA Board in January 2015 to develop an approach to the accreditation of General Foundation Programs (GFPs), the first phase of which is GFP Quality Audit. It is anticipated that as and when appropriate, the first cycle of GFP Quality Audits will be followed by a review of the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs¹ which were approved in June 2008 (Higher Education Council Decision No.13/2008). Based on this review, a summative GFP accreditation process will be developed and implemented.

GFPs in Oman are study programs undertaken by students prior to admission to higher education programs. The majority of students graduating from secondary school in Oman need to undertake a GFP in order to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies they need to successfully undertake a higher education program. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are required to provide a GFP which includes as a minimum four core areas of study: English Language², Mathematics, Computing and General Study Skills.

GFPs are implemented by HEIs to support students in their future higher education studies. The Quality Audit of GFPs therefore supports the OAAA's mandate to promote the quality of higher education in Oman. It also supports OAAA in meeting its Mission which includes the intent to encourage and support the Omani higher education sector in meeting international standards, and a wider commitment to providing reliable information to the public and other stakeholders about HEIs and their provision.

The GFP Quality Audit has been extensively benchmarked against approaches applied by other international quality assurance agencies, but has also been contextualised for the Omani national and cultural context. The development of the approach has included a comprehensive pilot exercise and extensive consultation with the sector and other stakeholders.

There are two main audiences for this Manual: the HEIs providing GFP to undergo GFP Quality Audit and OAAA External Reviewers who participate on GFP Quality Audit Panels. Other stakeholders having an interest in this Manual include: ministries, government bodies, overseas HEIs affiliated with HEIs in Oman as well as students and members of the public.

On behalf of the Board of the OAAA, I wish all HEIs a positive and constructive experience with their GFP Quality Audit. Together, we will help to assure that the quality of GFPs is valued by relevant stakeholders and Oman's higher education system is supported to progress from strength to strength.

HE Dr Abdullah Al Sarmi
Chairperson
Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

¹ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/GFP%20Standards%20FINAL.pdf>

² This area of learning does not need to be included in a GFP for higher education programs delivered in Arabic, although HEIs may choose to include it.

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INTRODUCTION

This General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit Manual is structured into six distinct parts:

Part A: Overview of National Quality Management System and GFP Quality Audit

Part B: GFP Quality Audit Scope

Part C: The Self-Study

Part D: The External Review

Part E: Methods of Analysis

Part F: Appendices

HEIs offering GFP programs and GFP Quality Audit Panel Members are all expected to become familiar with the content of this Manual and pay particular attention to the parts that are most relevant to them (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: GFP Quality Audit Manual Content Summary and Key Audience

Part	Content	Key Audience
A	<p>Overview of National Quality Management System and GFP Quality Audit</p> <p>This section is of interest to all stakeholders as it provides a brief summary of the National Quality Management System and describes the OAAA's approach to GFP Quality Audit. This section also provides an overview of the GFP Quality Audit process through a timeline which outlines the main stages in the process.</p>	All Stakeholders
B	<p>GFP Quality Audit Scope</p> <p>This section provides the scope of the GFP Quality Audit by listing all the areas of GFP activity considered in the process. It provides details about each area to guide HEIs and GFP Quality Audit Panels in their respective Self-Study and external review activities.</p>	HEIs and GFP Quality Audit Panels
C	<p>The Self-Study</p> <p>This section discusses the principles underpinning an HEI's preparation for GFP Quality Audit. It provides information on how HEIs might approach the Self-Study and on the format of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. It also provides tips on conducting a Trial GFP Quality Audit.</p>	HEIs
D	<p>The External Review</p> <p>This section outlines the process of external review conducted by the GFP Quality Audit Panel and includes the roles and responsibilities of Panel Members and the Review Director (RD) who are all appointed by the OAAA. It provides information for HEIs on the logistical requirements for the GFP Quality Audit Visit and describes the process used for drafting the GFP Quality Audit Report.</p> <p>This section also outlines the processes to be followed by an HEI wishing to appeal the GFP Quality Audit Report. In addition, it explains the feedback mechanisms used by the OAAA upon completion of the GFP Quality Audit.</p>	GFP Quality Audit Panels and HEIs
E	<p>Methods of Analysis</p> <p>This section provides a comprehensive description of some of the methods of analysis that GFP Quality Audit Panels will use when</p>	GFP Quality Audit Panels and HEIs

	<p>examining evidence provided by HEIs. This includes an explanation of how to apply an ADRI³ approach to analysing a topic. This approach will be used by GFP Quality Audit Panels to come to conclusions, and HEIs are encouraged to use this approach to inform their GFP planning, implementation and review as well as their Self-Study. Information is also provided on GFP Quality Audit Visit interviews.</p>	
<p>F</p>	<p>Appendices This section provides a range of information on the GFP Quality Audit process, such as the Portfolio Meeting template; Planning Visit template; GFP Quality Audit Visit template; and an example of the preferred Panel Room layout.</p>	<p>GFP Quality Audit Panels and HEIs</p>

³ ADRI is a four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising Approach, Deployment, Results and Improvement.

PART A: OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND GFP QUALITY AUDIT

1. THE OMAN ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION AUTHORITY

1.1 Royal Decree

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) was established by Royal Decree 54/2010 on 3 May 2010 and replaced the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC). The OAAA is an entity with legal status and financial and administrative independence, which reports to the Education Council. The OAAA was established to continue the efforts initiated by the OAC in the dissemination of a quality culture and accreditation of institutions and programs in Oman.

1.2 OAAA Vision, Mission and Values

The OAAA's Vision, Mission and Values are consistent with its Royal Decree 54/2010.

Vision

The OAAA aspires to provide efficient, effective and internationally-recognized services for accreditation in order to promote quality in higher education in Oman and meet the needs of the public and other stakeholders.

Mission

The OAAA guides and supports the Omani higher education sector to meet international standards; maintains the national qualifications framework; and, through a transparent and rigorous system of institutional and program accreditation, provides reliable information to the public and other stakeholders on the quality of higher education in Oman.

Values

Integrity - We believe in fairness, honesty and respect and we adhere to the highest standards of integrity in dealing with all internal and external stakeholders.

Professionalism - We strive to apply our skills, knowledge and best judgment in order to do our jobs well.

Transparency - We ensure all stakeholders have relevant accessibility to our processes and decisions while respecting confidentiality.

Reflectiveness - We believe in continuous quality improvement in all processes. We reflect on what we do and aim to improve accordingly.

Commitment to international best practice - We strive to ensure that all our work processes comply with international good practices.

Accountability - We believe that we are accountable to all our stakeholders for ensuring that our mandate is achieved.

Collaboration - We value input from all relevant stakeholders to ensure that our work is responsive to their needs.

Diversity - We respect diversity of professional opinion, and encourage innovation and creativity.

1.3 OAAA Structure and Organisation

The OAAA is comprised of three elements:

- An OAAA Board, appointed by the Education Council which has governance responsibilities for the OAAA.

- The Executive Office which is made up of technical and administrative staff who conduct the Authority's day-to-day activities.
- A Register of External Reviewers which lists eminent people from Oman and other countries who have been approved by the OAAA Board to participate in external review activities.

Further information about the OAAA structure and organisation is available on its website⁴.

1.4 INQAAHE Membership

The OAAA is a Member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE⁵) and seeks to abide by INQAAHE policies and guidelines wherever possible.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The initial version of the quality management system was known as the Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance (ROSQA⁶). This document contained some of the key elements of the national system: namely, the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF); the Oman Classification of Institutions of Higher Education; Institutional and Program Standards; and processes for Institutional and Program Accreditation. Royal Decree 54/2010 established the OAAA in order to further develop the national system for assuring the quality of Oman's higher education sector. The Decree stated that OAAA is responsible for regulating the quality of higher education in Oman to ensure the maintenance of a level that meets international standards and to encourage HEIs to improve their internal quality. Background information on the OAAA's establishment and responsibilities related to quality management is available online⁷.

2.1 Institutional Quality Assurance

The first stage in institutional quality assurance is institutional licensure, although this is not part of the OAAA's mandate; historically, HEIs have been established through a variety of means including Royal Decree or approval by the Education Council (formerly the Higher Education Council). The OAAA has a mandate to accredit HEIs and in response to this, the OAAA established a two-stage institutional accreditation system; Stage 1: Quality Audit, and Stage 2: Standards Assessment (refer to Figure 1). Stage 1: Quality Audit is designed to encourage HEIs to develop their internal quality management systems. It is a formative process which results in a public report. Stage 2: Standards Assessment, assesses whether an HEI is meeting a set of national institutional standards that have been both internationally benchmarked and contextualised for Oman. This is a summative process which results in an Accreditation Outcome. Excellent/Good performance in institutional Standards Assessment is recognised through the awarding of accreditation with Distinction/Merit in one or more standards. Institutional accreditation status lasts for a maximum period of five years, after which HEIs again undergo Institutional Standards Assessment in order to be reaccredited. HEIs that do not meet the standards are placed On Probation prior to Standards Reassessment, after which time they join the five year accreditation cycle if they meet the standards.

⁴ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om>

⁵ www.inqaah.org

⁶ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/ROSQA%20ALL.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#Establishment>

Further details of the OAAA institutional accreditation process can be found in the respective Manuals for the Stage 1 and Stage 2 processes on the OAAA website⁸.

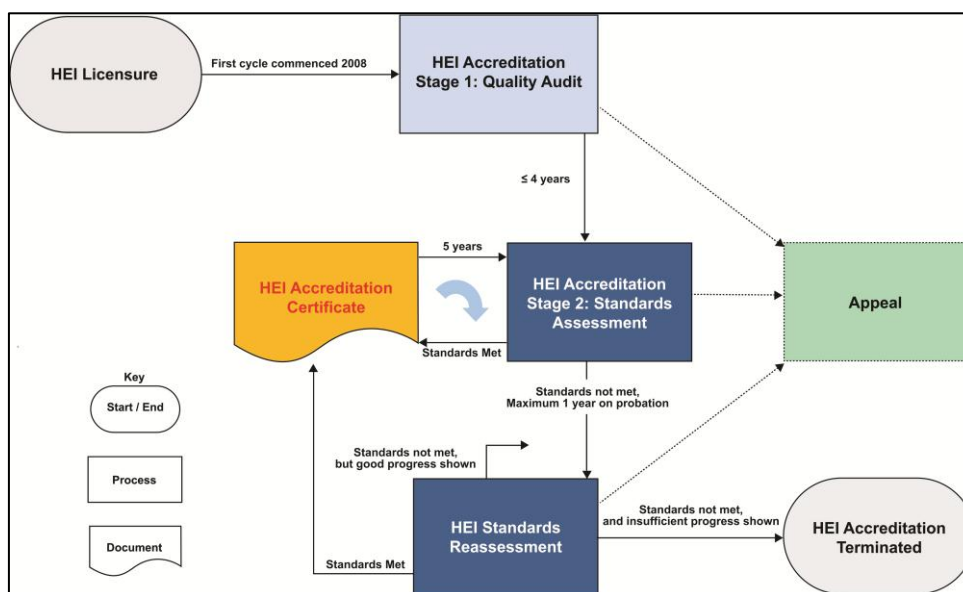


Figure 1: Institutional Accreditation System

2.2 Academic Program Quality Assurance

The process described in this sub-section is applicable to academic programs (which lead to an undergraduate or postgraduate higher education award) but is not applicable to GFPs as these are not academic higher education programs, in the sense that they do not lead to higher education qualifications.

The first stage in academic program quality assurance is program licensure, although this is not part of the OAAA’s mandate; the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is responsible for the licensing of academic programs in private universities, university colleges and colleges, and other Ministries/bodies are responsible for the licensing of academic programs in public HEIs.

The OAAA is responsible for the accreditation of all programs offered in Oman. The OAAA’s role is to accredit programs against national standards. The process includes programs where the award is conferred by an affiliate university. HEIs must have been awarded institutional accreditation before they can apply for Program Accreditation. External program accreditation (for example: by a recognised international accreditation body) is not a substitute for the national system for program quality assurance. Figure 2 illustrates the approach to program accreditation in Oman.

⁸ Quality Audit Manual: Institutional Accreditation Stage 1: http://www.oaaa.gov.om/QAM_2008_FINAL2.pdf and Institutional Standards Assessment Manual: Institutional Accreditation Stage 2: <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/InstitutePdf/ISAM%20Book%20Final.pdf>

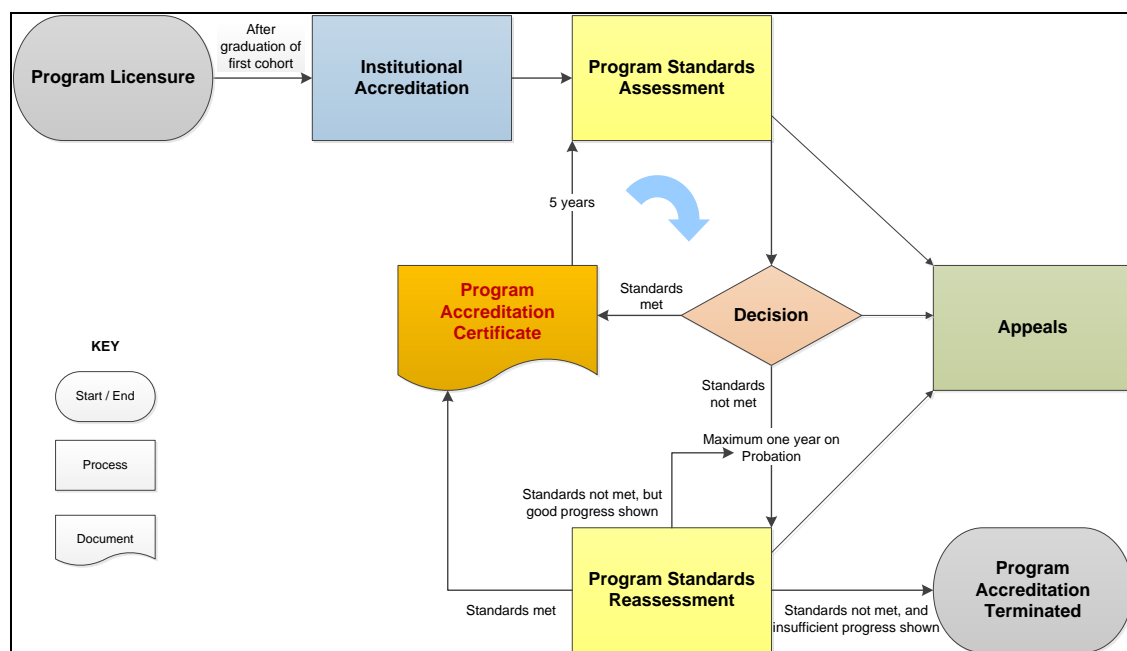


Figure 2: Program Accreditation System

2.3 Related Processes and Frameworks

There are several components which make up Oman's overall System of Quality Management for Higher Education (previously known as ROSQA). They all inter-relate to form a comprehensive system. The set of processes and frameworks is set out below.

2.3.1 Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF)

Royal Decree 54/2010 states that the OAAA is responsible for developing and maintaining the OQF⁹ in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education and other relevant authorities. The Oman Academic Qualifications Framework, which is included in ROSQA, is a key part of Oman's system for quality assurance as it defines the levels and types of qualifications in postsecondary education. The framework identifies six levels of awards, four at undergraduate level and two at postgraduate level. Standards for academic awards are expressed as student achievements at each level. The existing Academic Qualifications Framework does not include GFPs as these are undertaken prior to admission to higher education programs and do not lead to an academic award that is recognised on the framework. The OAAA is in the process of developing a national comprehensive OQF which will include school, vocational, technical and professional qualifications.

2.3.2 Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework (OSCED)

The *Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework*¹⁰ defines the broad, narrow and detailed fields of study. It was developed by the former OAC in 2009. It has assisted with matters such as program licensing, program classification, enrolment statistics and national reporting of academic offerings. Because it is based on international benchmarks, it can also help facilitate international reporting.

2.3.3 Oman Classification of Institutions of Higher Education

The *Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*¹¹ sets the requirements for designating an institution and specifies which institutions may be recognised as universities, university

⁹ http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Oman_ROSQA%20%28all%20part%20one%29.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/oscedv1b.pdf>

¹¹ http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Oman_ROSQA%20%28all%20part%20one%29.pdf. The institutional classification

colleges and colleges of higher education. This classification system makes a clear distinction between the criteria for universities, university colleges and colleges of higher education.

2.3.4 Appeals Process

All OAAA's External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities, Reports and Decisions are subject to appeal in line with the *International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Guidelines of Good Practice*¹². The detailed process for appeals is available in the OAAA Policy on Appeals against External Quality Assurance Activities, Reports and Decisions¹³ and Appeals Manual¹⁴.

3. INTRODUCTION TO GFP QUALITY AUDIT

3.1 Background

GFPs are of critical importance to the higher education sector in Oman; GFPs are undertaken by most Omani students prior to their admission to higher education programs and therefore serve a large student body in the country. In 2006, the OAAA (then the OAC) set a goal to establish a national system of GFP external review to help ensure that GFPs adequately prepare students for their higher education studies¹⁵. As a step towards achieving this goal, the OAAA led the development of a set of national standards for GFPs which focus primarily on learning outcomes in four areas: English Language, Mathematics, Computing and General Study Skills. As a result, the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs¹⁶ were approved in June 2008 (Higher Education Council Decision No.13/2008). Ministerial Decision No. 72/2008 required the standards to be adopted by all public and private HEIs in Oman in the academic year 2009-2010. These standards were informed by international benchmarks but do not meet international standards for entry to higher education in all areas of study, for example, the equivalent entry level standards for English Language are below international norms.

It is anticipated that the OAAA will ultimately implement a GFP accreditation process. However, based on the findings contained in OAAA Institutional Quality Audit Reports, as well as international benchmarking and fact finding meetings with relevant stakeholders, the OAAA Board concluded in January 2015 that it would be premature to offer a national schedule of accreditation of GFPs at that point in time. As a result, the Board approved the following approach leading to the implementation of GFP accreditation:

Phase 1: GFP Quality Audit

Phase 2: Review of the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs

Phase 3: GFP Accreditation

Phase 1 commenced in 2017. This is the first time that GFPs in Oman have been subject to comprehensive external scrutiny at a national level. OAAA Institutional Quality Audit typically includes some consideration of an HEI's GFP, but this is confined principally to consideration of entry standards to higher education programs. In the context of the GFP Quality Audit, the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs are used as an external reference point in the four core areas of English Language¹⁷, Mathematics,

system is currently under review.

¹² <http://www.inqaahe.org/guidelines-good-practice>

¹³ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#OAAAPolicy>

¹⁴ http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Appeals

¹⁵ This refers to Goal 8 of the 2006 Plan for an Omani Higher Education Quality Management System (The Quality Plan)

¹⁶ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/GFP%20Standards%20FINAL.pdf>

¹⁷ This area of learning does not need to be included in a GFP for higher education programs delivered in

Computing and General Study Skills. These standards outline the minimum requirements for a GFP.

3.2 Purpose of Quality Audit

GFP Quality Audit fulfils two different but related purposes: firstly, it is an important means by which HEIs offering GFPs are held accountable to the public for their role in preparing students for higher education. GFP Quality Audit Reports are normally published in English or Arabic according to the language used in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio with the Executive Summaries in English or Arabic, enabling that the public to have an informed view about the quality of an HEI's GFP. Secondly, and of equal importance, GFP Quality Audit is a means for facilitating continuous quality improvement in GFP provision with the aim of improving GFP student achievement.

3.3 GFP Quality Audit Process

A GFP Quality Audit is an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the systems and processes by which an HEI sets, pursues and achieves the aims and objectives of its GFP and the results that have been achieved through the implementation and review of these systems and processes. Like OAAA Institutional Quality Audit, it has two key elements: Self-Study and External Review (refer to Figure 3).

Firstly, an HEI conducts a Self-Study of its own GFP quality assurance and quality enhancement activities and summarises its findings in a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. Advice about how to undertake a Self-Study is set out in Part C of this Manual. This element is based on international best practice and the premise included in the *INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice*¹⁸ that institutional and program quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of HEIs themselves.

Following this, an external GFP Quality Audit Panel (the Panel) comprised of national and international peers, approved by the OAAA Board, undertakes an external review (which includes a Visit to the HEI). During the external review, the Panel considers the Portfolio and checks its completeness and accuracy through such means as interviews and cross-checking with original documentation and other information sources. The Panel produces a Report which presents its findings, including Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations (CARs) about the HEI's management of the quality of its GFP (refer to Section 31.3).

In line with the OAAA's Mission to provide reliable information to the public and other stakeholders, the GFP Quality Audit Report is normally published in English or Arabic according to the language used in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio with an Executive Summary in English or Arabic on the OAAA website. Copies will be sent to the HEI, its supervising ministry (if applicable), OAAA Board Members and the Education Council. Details of the external review part of the GFP Quality Audit process are set out in Part D of this Manual.

Arabic, although HEIs may choose to include it.

¹⁸ <http://www.inqaah.org/guidelines-good-practice>

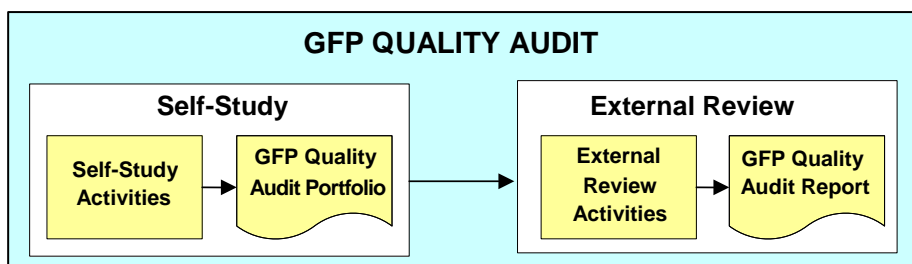


Figure 3: GFP Quality Audit Overview

3.4 GFP Quality Audit Schedule

The schedule of GFP Quality Audits is published on the OAAA website. While HEIs are consulted on their scheduled dates for GFP Quality Audit, the final decision rests with the OAAA Board. The OAAA will notify each HEI of the date of the submission of its GFP Quality Audit Portfolio as far in advance as possible.

3.5 GFP Quality Audit Fees

The OAAA typically operates on a cost recovery basis. Royal Decree 54/2010, Article 18 permits the OAAA to determine fees for work undertaken in the performance of its functions. The Ministry of Finance approves fees for work undertaken by the OAAA related to GFP Quality Audit. The *OAAA Policy on Fees Charged for OAAA External Quality Assurance Activities and Appeals*¹⁹ provides details of the current OAAA charges.

3.6 GFP Quality Audit Timeline

Table 2 below provides a summary of the indicative timeline for GFP Quality Audits. Details of the key tasks identified in the table as well as supporting tasks are provided in the following sections of this Manual.

Table 2: Summary of Indicative GFP Quality Audit Timeline

Indicative Time	Task #	Task	Responsibility
Prior to Portfolio Submission	1	HEI undertakes GFP Self-Study resulting in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio.	HEI
	2	Review Director (RD) appointed.	OAAA
	3	GFP Quality Audit Panel long list prepared from OAAA Register of External Reviewers and submitted to the OAAA Board.	OAAA
	4	OAAA Board approves GFP Quality Audit Panel long list (or sends back to Task 3 for attention) and it is sent to the HEI for consideration together with the name of the RD and a request for the HEI Contact Person to be identified.	OAAA
	5	GFP Quality Audit Fee Invoice sent to HEI and fee payment made (refer to Section 3.5).	OAAA HEI
	6	HEI reviews, in confidence, whether any External Reviewers on the GFP Quality Audit long list may have a conflict of interest and informs the OAAA accordingly.	HEI
	7	RD confirms key dates (Portfolio Submission, Planning Visit and GFP Quality Audit Visit) with the Contact Person.	RD

¹⁹ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#OAAAPolicy>

	8	RD invites selected External Reviewers on the GFP Quality Audit long list to form a GFP Quality Audit Panel.	RD
	9	GFP Quality Audit Panel announced to the HEI and published on the OAAA website.	RD
Week 1	10	GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials submitted to OAAA	HEI
	11	Portfolio and Supporting Materials sent to the Panel.	RD
	12	Reviewers provide Preliminary Comments to the RD.	Panel
	13	Based on HEI's submission and GFP Quality Audit Panel's Preliminary Comments, GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v1 prepared and circulated to the GFP Quality Audit Panel with the Portfolio Meeting Agenda.	RD
Week 7	14	GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting	Panel RD
	15	GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v2 prepared incorporating outcomes from the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting and circulated to the GFP Quality Audit Panel.	RD
	16	Panel Members study allocated sections in detail to provide feedback and further input into the GFP Quality Audit Visit Program, List of Additional Supporting Materials required and Matters for Clarification.	Panel
	17	Based on Panel Members' contributions, RD finalises documentation for discussion at the GFP Quality Audit Planning Visit and these documents are sent to HEI: Planning Visit Agenda; Matters for Clarification; Request for Additional Supporting Materials; Draft GFP Quality Audit Visit Program and Call for Public Submissions.	RD
Week 10	18	GFP Quality Audit Planning Visit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters for Clarification • Request for Additional Supporting Materials • Draft GFP Quality Audit Visit Program • Call for Public Submissions • GFP Quality Audit Visit Venue and Logistics 	HEI Panel Chairperson (or representative) RD
	19	Any Additional Supporting Materials and information requested by the Panel submitted to the OAAA and forwarded to the Panel.	HEI RD
	20	Call for Public Submissions circulated within HEI and via media.	HEI OAAA
	21	Public Submissions assessed against acceptance criteria and forwarded to the GFP Quality Audit Panel.	RD
	22	Panel Members develop provisional text and formal conclusions for the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v3 in their allocated sections.	Panel
	23	Panel Members develop Quality Audit Visit questions required for allocated sections and forward them to the OAAA.	Panel
	24	GFP Quality Audit Visit question sheets prepared based on evidence available to date and the Panel's input, and circulated to the Panel for feedback.	RD Panel
	25	GFP Quality Audit Visit questions finalised as a draft for consideration on Day 0 and forwarded to the Panel	RD

		for further consideration prior to the Panel Meeting on Day 0.	
	26	HEI adds names of Interviewees to the GFP Quality Audit Panel Visit Program and returns it to OAAA.	HEI
	27	Final GFP Quality Audit Visit Program with names of Interviewees forwarded to the Panel.	RD
	28	HEI prepares Interviewees and logistics for the GFP Quality Audit Visit.	HEI
Week 15	29	GFP Quality Audit Visit Panel Members submit their text to RD at the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit	HEI Panel RD
	30	GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v3 prepared based on text submitted by the Panel and circulated to the Panel for action and feedback.	RD
	31	Panel Members submit amendments to GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v3.	Panel
	32	GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4 prepared through editing and cross-checking against evidence.	RD
	33	Internal and external moderation of GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4.	OAAA External Moderator
	34	GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 developed in response to feedback from internal and external moderation.	RD
Week 22	35	GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 sent to OAAA Board and forwarded to HEI for response	RD
	36	HEI submits response to GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 within ten working days.	HEI
	37	HEI's response sent to the Panel.	RD
	38	Panel Members comment on HEI's response.	Panel
	39	Panel's response to HEI's feedback collated and analysed. Changes (if any) made to produce GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v6.	RD
	40	GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v6 forwarded to OAAA Board for approval.	RD
Week 27	41	OAAA Board approves the Final GFP Quality Audit Report	OAAA Board
	42	Executive Summary of approved GFP Quality Audit Report sent for translation into Arabic or English.	RD
	43	Approved GFP Quality Audit Report sent to HEI with details of the OAAA's appeals procedure.	RD
Week 31	44	GFP Quality Audit Report in English or Arabic according to the language used in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Executive Summary in English or Arabic posted on OAAA website (unless an appeal is lodged)	OAAA
	45	OAAA sends Feedback Form to the Panel to seek comment on various aspects of the GFP Quality Audit process.	OAAA
	46	OAAA Board Chairperson (or nominee) seeks feedback from the HEI CEO about the value and effectiveness of the GFP Quality Audit process.	OAAA Board Chairperson
	47	OAAA CEO seeks feedback from HEI CEO (or equivalent) and Contact Person about the value and	OAAA CEO HEI

		effectiveness of the GFP Quality Audit process.	
	48	RD prepares a report on the GFP Quality Audit process.	RD
	49	OAAA CEO prepares a report on all feedback received for the OAAA Board.	OAAA CEO

PART B: GFP QUALITY AUDIT SCOPE

4. GFP QUALITY AUDIT SCOPE

The scope of the GFP Quality Audit (set out in Table 3) was informed by the following: alignment with the scope of existing OAAA's External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities; fact finding meetings with a range of stakeholders; benchmarking against international approaches; feedback from the higher education sector in Oman and the Pilot GFP Quality Audits of four HEIs.

The scope covers four main areas: Governance and Management; GFP Student Learning; Academic and Student Support Services and Staff and Staff Support Services. It is important to note that the following topics provide *guidance* for the scope of the Self-Study, and not *standards* stating how each topic ought to be addressed. It is up to each HEI to analyse the performance of its GFP for each topic, based on its analysis of its statements of intent reported in its planning documents and the aims of the GFP, and by using the ADRI model (or equivalent) for analysis (refer to Section 25).

GFP Quality Audits are not prescriptive (unlike Institutional or Program Standards Assessment where HEIs are expected to report on performance against national standards). The scope headings do not constitute a 'checklist'. An HEI may choose to add topics where it believes they are relevant to its GFP. An HEI may also delete topics provided that it writes a justification in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio for why the topic does not (and ought not to) apply to its GFP to any significant extent. In this way, the GFP Quality Audit process is designed to accommodate diversity in the higher education sector.

The GFP Quality Audit process is underpinned by the following principles:

- Responsibility for the quality assurance of a GFP lies with the HEI. This principle informs all the work of OAAA and indeed all EQA bodies that are members of INQAAHE.
- GFP Quality Audit is an evidence-based process. The process involves the evaluation of both qualitative and quantitative evidence. However, while it is the responsibility of the HEI to submit relevant evidence to support claims in its GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, it is the GFP Quality Audit Panel's responsibility to ensure it has evidence to support its conclusions. The majority of the evidence submitted by the HEI supporting its Portfolio should already be in existence.
- The OAAA seeks to minimize the burden on HEIs. GFP Quality Audit has been designed to achieve a balance between effectiveness and efficiency. While ensuring that GFP Quality Audit is effective, it will seek to minimize the burden on HEIs in the following ways:
 - HEIs will be expected to submit mostly existing Supporting Materials in support of their GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. For HEIs familiar with EQA processes, the majority – if not all of the supporting evidence – will already be in existence and used by the HEI in its internal quality assurance processes for the GFP.
 - GFP Quality Audit will only focus on matters related to the quality assurance of GFPs and will seek to work in harmony with other OAAA processes to minimise duplication.

Table 3: GFP Quality Audit Scope

1. Governance and Management
<p>1.1 Mission, Vision and Values</p> <p>The HEI should describe and evaluate how the GFP supports the HEI's Mission, Vision and Values and how these are communicated to GFP stakeholders. Where the GFP has its own Mission and Vision, the HEI should indicate how these were developed and how they align with the HEI's Mission and Vision. How does the HEI know that the GFP is supporting the meeting of its Mission and Vision and that the GFP is being delivered in line with its Values?</p>
<p>1.2 GFP Governance and Management Arrangements</p> <p>The HEI should describe and evaluate how the GFP is governed and managed; this may include consideration of, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ where responsibility for the governance and management of the GFP lies; ○ how the management of the GFP fits in with the HEI management system (including the organisational structure) and committee structures; ○ how liaison is managed between: the GFP unit(s) and institutional senior staff (such as HEI CEO (or equivalent) depending on the HEI context); ○ the different units responsible for running a GFP; ○ Foundation and Post-Foundation departments; and ○ delegations of authority and terms of reference for specific GFP committees (if these exist). <p>How does the HEI know that its GFP governance and management arrangements are appropriately effective and constructive?</p>
<p>1.3 Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance</p> <p><i>This area of scope is only relevant to those HEIs which offer GFPs in affiliation with an external HEI.</i></p> <p>The HEI should describe and evaluate the effectiveness of any affiliation agreement(s) that the HEI has to support the development and/or delivery of the GFP. How does the HEI know if the affiliation agreements involving the GFP are effective? The operational aspects of this/these agreement(s) in relation to the GFP should be discussed as they arise throughout the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio.</p>
<p>1.4 Operational Planning</p> <p>The HEI should describe how the GFP is considered in its institutional strategic planning and how strategic planning regarding the GFP is operationalised. This may include consideration of, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operational Plans of the unit(s) delivering the GFP or other units that have an impact on the delivery of the GFP; ○ targets; ○ Key Performance Indicators (KPIs); ○ alignment of resource allocation; and ○ monitoring of plan implementation. <p>How does the HEI know that the planning processes for GFP are effective?</p>
<p>1.5 Financial Management</p> <p>The HEI should describe and evaluate the financial planning and budgeting arrangements for the GFP. This may include how resources are allocated to the GFP and where responsibility for budget allocation and monitoring lies. How does the HEI know that its system for the financial management of its GFP is effective?</p>

1.6 Risk Management

The HEI should describe and evaluate how risks associated with the GFP are identified, assessed, treated and monitored. This may include how risk management policies are implemented for the GFP and how risks relating to the GFP have been identified and mitigated.

How does the HEI know if its system in this area is effective?

1.7 Monitoring and Review

The HEI should describe and evaluate how its GFP is regularly monitored and reviewed. This may include consideration of, for example:

- a review schedule;
- where responsibility for the monitoring and review of the GFP lies;
- how monitoring and review activities are responded to and improvements are made;
- the data used to monitor and review the GFP; and
- how GFP staff and students in higher education programs and other relevant stakeholders are involved in the GFP review.

How does the HEI know if its system for the monitoring and review of the GFP is effective?

1.8 Student Grievance Processes

The HEI should describe and evaluate how GFP students make formal complaints about academic or non-academic matters. This may include how specific issues for GFP students are identified, monitored and addressed; and how academic appeals for GFP students are managed.

How does the HEI know that its GFP students have appropriate access to fair and effective grievance processes?

1.9 Health and Safety

The HEI should describe and evaluate how the health and safety of all GFP students and staff involved with the GFP is ensured. This may include how health and safety policy and procedures are implemented and disseminated for the GFP; and how specific areas of health and safety relevant to GFP students and staff are identified and addressed.

How does the HEI know that it provides a safe and healthy environment for GFP students and staff?

2. GFP Student Learning**2.1 GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes**

The HEI should describe and evaluate how the aims of the GFP align with the needs of students in their future higher education studies. This may include consideration of, for example:

- how these aims are reflected in the overall GFP learning outcomes and in the design of the GFP;
- how external reference points such as the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs²⁰ in the four areas of learning (English Language²¹, Mathematics, Computing and General Study Skills) are reflected in the GFP learning outcomes;
- benchmarking activities that are carried out (refer to Section 26);
- how overall program learning outcomes are reflected at module/course level; and
- how stakeholder feedback (such as staff and students on higher education programs and employers) is sought and taken into account.

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

²¹ This area of learning does not need to be included in a GFP for higher education programs delivered in Arabic, although HEIs may choose to include it.

How does the HEI know that the GFP is fulfilling its aims and is effective?

2.2 Curriculum

The HEI should describe and evaluate how the development and quality of the GFP curriculum is managed. This may include consideration of, for example:

- how the GFP is structured;
- needs-analysis;
- benchmarking;
- curriculum approval, monitoring and review processes;
- identification of text books and teaching materials development;
- module/course outlines;
- expectations regarding independent study; and
- how stakeholder feedback (such as staff and students on higher education programs and employers) is sought and taken into account.

How does the HEI know if its GFP curriculum is effective in supporting the delivery of the GFP learning outcomes?

2.3 Student Entry and Exit Standards

The HEI should describe and evaluate how GFP entry and exit standards are set, implemented and reviewed. This may include consideration of, for example:

- entry levels in different subject areas in relation to the lowest GFP study levels and duration of the program;
- entry levels in relation to any pre-GFP program;
- exit levels in all subject areas in relation to the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs, national and international benchmarks and the entry requirements of the higher education programs that the GFP is preparing students for;
- entrance and/or placement testing systems and procedures;
- how entry standards are set, communicated and implemented;
- exit testing systems and procedures;
- monitoring of GFP student entry and exit standards to ensure they are being implemented fairly and consistently;
- how the rigour of entry and exit testing is assured; and
- monitoring of student cohorts in terms of progression in GFP relative to entry standards and progression of GFP alumni on higher education programs.

How does the HEI know that the student entry and exit standards are appropriate, implemented and monitored effectively?

2.4 Teaching Quality

The HEI should describe and evaluate how it ensures that the quality of teaching on GFP is effective in facilitating student learning. This may include consideration of, for example:

- implementation of pedagogic frameworks;
- consideration of different types of teaching methods (group work, project work, task-based learning, etc.);
- incorporating staff research and scholarly activities in enhancing teaching quality of its staff;
- student evaluations of teaching;
- peer and/or line manager review;
- use of teaching portfolios;
- teacher availability to students; and

- the HEI's policy on the language of instruction for the four GFP areas.

How does the HEI know that its quality of teaching on the GFP is appropriately effective and constructive?

2.5 Academic Integrity

The HEI should describe and evaluate how it ensures that GFP students and staff involved with the program understand and maintain academic integrity. This may include consideration of, for example:

- induction program;
- student handbooks;
- academic integrity policy and procedure (covering for example: plagiarism, collusion, cheating and other forms of academic misconduct);
- training seminars for staff and students on how to avoid plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct;
- support and guidance for staff in developing plagiarism-free teaching materials when these are prepared in-house;
- plagiarism detection methods;
- referencing guidelines; and
- feedback from staff teaching former GFP students in higher education programs.

How does the HEI know that its GFP students are maintaining academic integrity such as through presenting original work and appropriately acknowledging the work of others?

2.6 Assessment of Student Achievement

The HEI should describe and evaluate how it ensures that the assessment of student achievement on the GFP is appropriate and effective in relation to the GFP learning outcomes and how the process and methods for assessing student attainment of the learning outcomes are developed, communicated to students and staff and implemented. This may include consideration of, for example:

- assessment design in order to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes in areas all areas of the GFP;
- coordination and balance of assessment across GFP areas;
- benchmarking (refer to Section 26);
- internal/external moderation;
- formative and summative assessment; and
- methods of assessment (examinations, assignments, placements, laboratory exercises, orals, etc.) and their appropriateness.

How does the HEI ensure that assessment practices are appropriate and effective in relation to the HEI's GFP learning outcomes and that academic standards achieved by GFP students are at the appropriate level?

2.7 Feedback to Students on Assessment

The HEI should describe and evaluate the effectiveness of feedback provided to students on their assessed work. This may include consideration of, for example:

- policies on timeliness and nature of feedback;
- student handbooks;
- staff development sessions;
- the expectations for feedback to students on their formative and summative assessed work and how this is communicated to students and staff; and
- student view on the helpfulness of feedback received.

How does the HEI monitor the effectiveness of feedback provided to students and how does the HEI

intend to improve the effectiveness of feedback?

2.8 Academic Security and Invigilation

The HEI should describe and evaluate how it ensures that the security and integrity of its GFP assessment activities is maintained. This may include consideration of, for example:

- the process for approving summative assessments;
- physical security of examination materials;
- invigilation of examinations;
- use of different moderation methods (for example: double blind marking, use of external examiners and examination review committees);
- student results; and
- analysis of cohort results.

How does the HEI know that its academic security and invigilation arrangements for GFP are effective?

2.9 Student Retention and Progression

Note that wherever possible, statistics should normally show trends over at least five academic years.

The HEI should describe and evaluate the GFP student academic achievements in relation to retention and progression. This may include consideration of, for example:

- retention rates and progression rates;
- performance of GFP students that have progressed to higher education studies; and
- how the HEI responds to data on GFP student retention and progression, for example, provision of learner support for underperforming students

How does the HEI know that it is effectively guiding GFP students through to timely completion of their program of study?

2.10 Relationships with GFP Alumni

The HEI should describe and evaluate its systems for maintaining positive relationships with former GFP students who have entered or completed their higher education studies. This may include consideration of, for example:

- feedback elicited from students on higher education programs on their experience and how well GFP prepared them for their studies;
- feedback elicited from GFP alumni in GFP curriculum review;
- how former GFP students are involved in induction and preparing current GFP students for their higher education programs; and
- networking and other communication activities.

How does the HEI know that its relationships with its GFP alumni are helping it to improve the learning experience of current and future GFP students?

3. Academic and Student Support Services

3.1 Student Profile

The HEI should describe and critically analyse the key features of its GFP student profile and how it uses this information. This may include consideration of, for example:

- trend statistics with regard to each GFP level and year;
- gender, age, nationality and unique features of the profile (such as international students or

- students with special learning needs);
- analysis of the GFP student profile and how this is used to enhance GFP student learning and support for the GFP student population; and
- how GFP student profile data is used to ensure provision of appropriate services.

How does the HEI know that its system for analysing and responding to its GFP student profile is effective?

3.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)

The HEI should describe and evaluate its range of registry services including enrolment and the collection and analysis of data related to GFP students. This may include consideration of, for example:

- student admission and enrolment (including management of the relationship with MoHE Higher Education Admission Centre);
- timeliness of the enrolment process;
- GFP student satisfaction with the enrolment process;
- monitoring of GFP student attendance;
- quality controls on accuracy of data input and security of records;
- assessment of the comprehensiveness of the range of data collected including declared disabilities and special learning needs and how this information is communicated to GFP staff; and
- ease and usefulness of reporting.

How does the HEI know that its registry services for GFP students and staff involved with the GFP are effective?

3.3 Student Induction

The HEI should describe and evaluate its arrangements for GFP student induction and support for their transition to higher education. This may include consideration of, for example:

- information made available to students in advance of enrolment;
- written information (such as student handbooks, GFP handbooks, academic regulations and By-laws) provided on arrival;
- effectiveness of provision of information to GFP students;
- the purpose and structure of the GFP induction program and its timeliness;
- how students are supported in the initial stages of the GFP;
- identification and support for students with special learning needs; and
- how students are prepared to enter their higher education programs.

How does the HEI know that induction for GFP students and support for their transition to higher education programs is effective?

3.4 Teaching and Learning Resources

The HEI should describe and evaluate the teaching and learning resources in place to facilitate teaching and GFP student learning. This may include consideration of, for example:

- library provision, including information literacy skills;
- classrooms, classroom equipment and teaching materials;
- laboratories; and
- monitoring of GFP student and staff usage of learning resources and user satisfaction.

How does the HEI know that its teaching and learning resources are adequate and meeting the learning needs of GFP students and teaching requirements of staff effectively?

3.5 Information and Learning Technology Services

The HEI should describe and evaluate the information and learning technology services in place to facilitate GFP teaching and student learning. This may include consideration of, for example:

- online learning management platforms or services;
- Wi-Fi provision;
- computer-assisted learning; and
- provision of IT resources, helpdesk and training services.

How does the HEI know that its information and learning technology services are meeting the needs of its GFP students and staff?

3.6 Academic Advising

The HEI should describe and evaluate the effectiveness of academic advising services for GFP students. This may include consideration of, for example:

- assignment of GFP students to advisors;
- training for advisors;
- information provided to GFP students on academic advising;
- how academic advising for GFP students is managed; and
- how academic advising is linked to student learning support.

How does the HEI know if its system for academic advising for GFP students is effective in supporting students to make the most of their learning experience?

3.7 Student Learning Support

The HEI should describe and evaluate the range, resources and effectiveness of the extracurricular activities and services to provide GFP student learning support. This may include consideration of, for example:

- planned alignment of student learning support services to student needs;
- identifying and supporting students at risk or with special learning needs;
- workshops and seminars (e.g. for support with writing and Maths); and
- peer-assisted learning schemes.

How does the HEI know if it is providing appropriate, effective and targeted GFP student learning support opportunities?

3.8 Student Satisfaction and Climate

The HEI should describe and evaluate its GFP student climate and the methods used to ensure that a positive and constructive climate is maintained for GFP students. This may include consideration of, for example:

- monitoring of student satisfaction of academic and non-academic support services through mechanisms such as surveys or focus groups and responding to findings;
- handling of complaints;
- eliciting student views such as through suggestion boxes;
- other morale indicators (such as retention rates, level of participation in extra activities, rates of student absence, etc.); and
- GFP student representation and how the GFP student voice is heard.

How does the HEI know that it is maintaining a positive, constructive and supportive climate for GFP students?

3.9 Student Behaviour

The HEI should describe and evaluate how GFP student conduct is managed. This may include

consideration of, for example:

- methods for communicating expectations to students;
- implementation of code(s) of conduct (or similar);
- activities of investigation and disciplinary committees and records of student behaviour; and
- analysis of data to identify and address common issues for GFP students.

How does the HEI know its system for managing GFP student behaviour is effective?

3.10 Non-academic Support Services and Facilities

The HEI should describe and evaluate its services to align with and meet GFP student non-academic, social and recreational needs, covering such areas as student accommodation; catering; transportation; medical and counselling support; and provision of social and recreational facilities.

How does the HEI know that the range and quality of its student support services and facilities are appropriate for GFP students?

3.11 External Engagement

The HEI should describe and evaluate its external engagement for the GFP. This may include consideration of, for example:

- relationships and collaboration with other HEIs;
- schools;
- the local community;
- employers;
- other stakeholders; and
- how external relationships support GFP (for example: benchmarking, sharing of resources, input into curriculum development, external examiners, guest speakers, support for students selecting post GFP programs and identifying career opportunities and training for staff).

How does external engagement support the development and delivery of the GFP and how does the HEI know if it is effective?

4. Staff and Staff Support Services

4.1 Staff Profile

The HEI should describe and evaluate its GFP staff profile. It may include consideration of, for example:

- a staffing needs-analysis (for academic and non-academic staff);
- staff planning;
- statistical analyses with a range of demographic and academic variables (such as qualifications, gender, nationality, age, years of experience and staff with disabilities); and
- how the HEI ensures that its GFP staffing profile reflects the needs of the GFP in terms of teaching, assessment and curriculum development as well as language skills.

How is GFP staff profile data used to support the effective planning and delivery of the GFP?

4.2 Recruitment and Selection

The HEI should describe and evaluate how it recruits and selects GFP staff of appropriate quality in line with its needs-analysis. This may include consideration of, for example:

- GFP workforce planning;

- GFP staff position descriptions and selection criteria;
- GFP unit involvement in candidate interview processes and decision-making processes;
- probation procedures; and
- how the HEI ensures that new staff are appropriately qualified (including teaching qualifications), experienced and competent.

How does the HEI know that its system for recruiting and selecting appropriate GFP staff to support the development and delivery of the GFP is effective?

4.3 Staff Induction

The HEI should describe and evaluate its system for the induction of new GFP staff. This may include consideration of, for example:

- induction manuals;
- formal individual and group induction programs;
- academic induction; and
- mentoring system.

How does the HEI know if the induction process of GFP staff is effective in supporting them to successfully fulfil their roles?

4.4 Professional Development

The HEI should describe and evaluate how it ensures that GFP staff are up to date with the professional, teaching and skills-based requirements for their area of responsibility. This may include consideration of, for example:

- aggregated training needs-analyses (for GFP staff or the GFP unit);
- individual training needs-analysis (related to performance planning and review);
- generic skills training;
- teacher training;
- support for classroom-based research; and
- GFP seminars/workshops and mentoring programs.

How effective is the provision of professional development of GFP staff in supporting the successful development and delivery of the GFP?

4.5 Performance Planning and Review

The HEI should describe and evaluate how it ensures that GFP staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, how the HEI reviews whether these are being achieved and how the HEI responds to the outcomes of the review process. This may include consideration of, for example:

- the process and regularity of performance planning and review;
- communication of the approach to GFP staff, such as in a staff handbook;
- support for staff in goal setting;
- reporting; and
- follow-up.

How does the HEI know that its system for GFP staff performance planning and review is effective?

4.6 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention

The HEI should describe and evaluate the methods used to ensure that a positive climate is maintained for GFP staff. These may include consideration of, for example:

- mechanisms to monitor GFP staff satisfaction such as surveys or focus groups;

- analysis of retention trends over time;
- staff events;
- staff awards;
- staff code(s) of conduct (or similar);
- staff grievance processes;
- disciplinary processes;
- mediation;
- how inappropriate behaviour is addressed;
- exit interviews; and
- measuring the effectiveness of institutional communication channels.

How does the HEI know that its system for maintaining a positive organisational climate among its GFP staff is appropriate and effective?

4.7 Omanisation

The HEI should describe and evaluate the GFP staffing profile with respect to Omanisation. This may include consideration of, for example:

- HEI Omanisation plans as they relate to GFP;
- recruitment processes; and
- tailored and targeted professional development programs for Omani staff.

How does the HEI know that its system for Omanisation is effective in its GFP?

PART C: THE SELF-STUDY

5. THE GFP SELF-STUDY PROJECT

A Self-Study is a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation of the HEI's GFP. Undertaking a GFP Self-Study is a significant project and can take time. This is especially true the first time, because it involves structuring, collecting and analysing information in a manner that has probably not been done before. The result of a GFP Self-Study is the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio (refer to Section 6).

5.1 GFP Self-Study Principles

There are some points of principle that are worth reiterating here:

- The Self-Study should be championed by the very highest levels of the HEI.
- The Self-Study, as with quality assurance and quality enhancement generally, should involve many people. A team approach is recommended.
- The Self-Study will take time. There is a large amount of information to be collected/disaggregated (sometimes this will involve establishing brand new information collection methods), analysed, interpreted and reported.
- A Self-Study is evaluative, not just descriptive. The idea is to find out not just what is happening, but how well it is happening. If an HEI thinks it is doing something well in its GFP, how can it be proved?
- A Self-Study will require valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative information and information collection methods. Claims require evidence; impressive claims require impressive evidence.
- If done well, the Self-Study will also have a value to the HEI and its GFP, independent from its purpose as the submission document for GFP Quality Audit.

5.2 Project Management

There are many different ways in which an HEI may manage its project to undertake its Self-Study of its GFP – the OAAA does not require one specific approach. However, the HEI must recognise that this comprehensive process takes considerable time and resources. The OAAA Training Module *Preparing a Self-Study Portfolio*²², which provides advice on how to prepare an Institutional Quality Audit Portfolio, is also applicable to the preparation of a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. One possible method for conducting the Self-Study is set out in the bullet points below:

- Form a high level Steering Committee well in advance and communicate this initiative and its purpose to the HEI community, particularly those involved with the GFP.
- Form a working group for each area of the GFP Quality Audit Scope ensuring that all units involved in the design and delivery of the GFP are involved. The chairperson of each working group should be on the overall Steering Committee.
- It is expected that the GFP Self-Study, and the production of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, will be undertaken primarily by GFP staff.
- All members of the working groups should become familiar with this Manual, especially those sections which explain how to conduct a Self-Study.
- Each working group should start by collecting all the relevant internal and external directives, statements of intent, etc. pertaining to each topic. These documents can then be used as the starting point for the ADRI analysis (refer to Section 25). The working group should not operate exclusively, but should involve other people wherever appropriate.
- The findings should be written up in a draft section for the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. The Quality Director/GFP Director (or equivalent) has responsibility for bringing all the sections together in a coherent, overall draft Portfolio and ensure consistency in style, tone and presentation.

²² <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Training.aspx#Train>

- The Steering Committee should review the draft GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and, in addition to helping improve the document generally, identifies which Opportunities for Improvement (OFI) could be addressed before the draft Portfolio has to be finalised (providing time for this activity is one reason why a Self-Study can take many months).
- The GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials must be checked for plagiarism. Any plagiarism detected by the OAAA in the HEI's primary submission will be reported in the Final GFP Quality Audit Report (refer to the OAAA Policy on Plagiarism in External Quality Assurance Submissions²³).
- Finalise the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. Ensure it has been professionally edited and then approved by HEI CEO (or equivalent). Share it with relevant members of the HEI and GFP community.

Consider how the Self-Study process, and what has been learned, could be embedded as long term quality assurance and quality enhancement activities within the HEI and its GFP.

6. THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT PORTFOLIO

6.1 What is a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio?

The GFP Quality Audit Portfolio summarises the HEI's Self-Study of its GFP. It covers all major aspects of the GFP and its activities (for details of the GFP Quality Audit Scope, refer to Part B).

A GFP Quality Audit Portfolio should be both descriptive and evaluative. In other words, for each topic, the Portfolio should describe the intended result (i.e. the goal or objective), the plans for achieving it and what happens in practice, as well as the results achieved. But then, it should also provide an evaluative summary of how well these processes are going by designating them as Areas of Strength (refer to Section 31.2.1) or Opportunities for Improvement (OFI) (refer to Section 31.2.2).

It should be noted that the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials are the only items of evidence that the HEI may submit, except in response to specific requests made by the Panel through the Review Director. The HEI may not continue to submit unsolicited materials to the Panel because the Panel controls the samples of issues and evidence, and cannot accept attempts to have that influenced by the HEI.

GFP Quality Audit serves both public accountability and quality improvement purposes. The principle of public accountability demands a measure of public disclosure to be deemed valid by external stakeholders such as Government entities, families, employers and the international academic community. This has several pragmatic implications. Firstly, the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio ought to be the result of an extensive and inclusive effort. By the time it is finalised, many people should have been involved in its preparation, such as internal working groups, student focus groups, relevant external stakeholders, etc. The document is then subject to scrutiny in a process that involves discussions with a wide range of people. While the discussions themselves are treated in accordance with the Non-Attribution Rule (refer to Section 10.3), the Panel needs to be able to discuss the Portfolio with relevant stakeholders in order to fully verify and validate its contents.

The Portfolio's ownership remains with the HEI and the OAAA will not publish or distribute it except for GFP Quality Audit purposes (which will include distribution to the Panel, Observer, OAAA Board and staff). However, the HEI is encouraged to make this document

²³ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#OAAAPolicy>

available as it sees fit. In particular, the Panel will expect that everyone who participates in an interview with the Panel will have read the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio.

6.2 GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Presentation and Submission

6.2.1 Requirements

The following sets out some precise details for presentation and submission of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio:

- The Portfolio should not be longer than 20,000 words, including tables, figures and appendices. There is some room for flexibility and this should be discussed between the HEI Contact Person and the OAAA Review Director as the HEI finalises the Portfolio.
- The Portfolio should be written in the main language of the HEI/language of instruction which should be clarified with OAAA at the outset.
- The Portfolio should be professionally typeset, printed and published. It should be presented in soft cover paginated book format (preferably with back-stitch or hot melt binding). Ring binder and spiral bound copies will not be accepted. HEIs should avoid using glossy paper and ensure that the final document is easy for Panel Members to work with. Electronic copies should also be available on a USB data stick in searchable and printable PDF format.
- Seven hard copies and seven electronic copies of the Portfolio should be submitted to the OAAA (three for the Panel, one for the Review Director, one for the Back-up Review Director, one for an Observer and one for the OAAA's official record). The Review Director will have notified the HEI in advance of the due date for submission of the Portfolio. It is imperative that this date be met, because the rest of the GFP Quality Audit will depend on adherence to the timeframe.
- Seven copies of the Supporting Materials must be submitted together with the GFP Portfolio (electronically on a USB data stick). These should be cross referenced in the Portfolio. All electronic copies of Supporting Materials must be in a searchable and printable PDF format.
- Where the Portfolio or any attachments refer to information on evidence on the HEI's website, the web link reference (URL) should be written in full, together with the exact location of the relevant information (for example: the name of the document and page number or section number that is being referred to). The URL reference should hyperlink to the URL. If information on a webpage is referred to, please ensure:
 - the system is accessible by the OAAA and the GFP Quality Audit Panel;
 - appropriate checks have been made to ensure that access is not hindered by internal firewall or password protection; and
 - there is a facility to print, save and download the documents.

6.2.2 Suggestions

- It is strongly recommended that the Portfolio is professionally edited prior to its final submission. A number of potential problems and misunderstandings during a GFP Quality Audit can be prevented by ensuring that the Portfolio is accurate and understandable.
- The HEI should consider printing a number of Portfolio copies for its own future use. Copies are needed for the HEI Board/Council, senior management and persons selected by the Panel for interviews.

6.3 GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Table of Contents

A typical table of contents for a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio is set out in Appendix E. Some items are clarified in the following sections.

6.3.1 Introduction (from the HEI CEO (or equivalent))

This should be a brief (half page) letter of introduction and committal from the HEI CEO (or equivalent), concluding with their signature. Its purpose is to reflect that the HEI's commitment to the quality assurance and quality enhancement of the GFP is owned and championed at the very highest levels of the HEI and that the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio is an accurate evaluation of the HEI's management and delivery of its GFP.

6.3.2 Overview of the HEI

The purpose of this section is to set the scene. This should include a brief history, campus location(s), a general description of the HEI and its context and any special characteristics it may have. The description should include the general features and structure of its GFP. The overview should include the statistical information on student and staff numbers, shown in Appendix U, along with any other institutional statistics that the HEI considers is significant to the management and delivery of its GFP.

6.3.3 The Self-Study Method

This section should outline the method that the HEI used in its GFP Self-Study and in developing the findings reported in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. The purpose of this is to provide the Panel with a level of confidence that the Portfolio is sufficiently rigorous and comprehensive.

6.3.4 Substantive Content Sections

A list of these sections is provided in the GFP Quality Audit Scope (refer to Part B). Each section should conclude with formally designated Areas of Strength (refer to Section 31.2.1) or Opportunity for Improvement (refer to Section 31.2.2). Note that every section may have Strengths and OFI, although probably not for every topic within the section. The section headings are:

1. Governance and Management
2. GFP Student Learning
3. Academic and Student Support Services
4. Staff and Staff Support Services

It is not expected that these sections will be of equal length. The HEI may choose to emphasise some sections more than others depending on its GFP context.

6.4 Supporting Materials

The GFP Quality Audit Portfolio should be submitted with a number of Supporting Materials. The purpose of these materials is for the HEI to provide evidence to support its claims, to help the Panel in verifying the Portfolio and to facilitate the Panel's understanding of the HEI's GFP.

6.4.1 Required Supporting Materials

All Supporting Materials referenced in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio must be submitted as part of the evidence. The following required documents, if they exist, must be submitted along with the evidence cited in the Portfolio:

SM001 GFP information and module/course files for each module/course that contributes to the GFP (refer to Appendix F).

SM002 Formal agreements with other HEIs relevant to the GFP.

SM003 Bylaws and regulations that apply to the GFP, its students and staff.

SM004 List of all managerial, academic and administrative staff involved in the management and delivery of the GFP (names, titles and roles).

SM005 Organisational chart of the HEI and the unit(s)/department(s) delivering the GFP, indicating management of the GFP and reporting lines to HEI's senior management.

SM006 Constitution and terms of reference of the unit(s)/department(s) delivering the GFP and relevant committees at the program and institutional level.

SM007 Most recent monitoring/review reports relevant to the GFP during the past five years.

SM008 GFP student handbook (or equivalent).

SM009 Campus map identifying where the GFP is being delivered.

SM010 If the HEI has an agreement with another education provider to deliver the GFP on its behalf, the HEI should submit the documentation relevant to this.

6.4.2 Additional Supporting Materials

The HEI should submit evidence to support claims made in the Portfolio. All materials submitted should be referenced in the main text of the Portfolio and be directly applicable to the area under discussion; overwhelming the Panel with information that is not relevant is not productive. GFP Quality Audit Panels will look for evidence that the documents, policies and procedures related to practice are fully embedded in the HEI's systems.

Examples of Additional Supporting Materials include (and are not limited to) the following:

- GFP student evaluation of teaching survey and results
- Data on GFP student retention and progression
- Professional development programs for GFP staff and attendance rates

6.4.3 Indexing Supporting Materials

GFP Quality Audits usually involve a substantial number of items of evidence. It is important to maintain a clear indexing system to assist with managing these materials, and it is helpful if the OAAA and the HEI use the same system to facilitate communication. All Supporting Materials, whether submitted with the Portfolio or thereafter, should be indexed using the aforementioned convention (refer to Section 6.4.1).

Each Supporting Material document must be saved in an individual folder that carries its number and clearly named to reflect its contents so that it may be readily located by the OAAA and GFP Quality Audit Panel.

If a request for further Additional Supporting Materials is made by the Panel, either at the GFP Quality Audit Planning Visit, during the GFP Quality Audit Visit or up to two weeks after the end of it, their numbering should follow the number of the last document submitted.

7. TRIAL GFP QUALITY AUDITS

A Trial (Mock) GFP Quality Audit is a process whereby an HEI engages its own GFP Quality Audit Panel to conduct an internal GFP Quality Audit prior to the external GFP Quality Audit conducted by the OAAA. The OAAA does not require HEIs to undergo a Trial Audit – it is up to each HEI to determine whether it wishes to do so or not. The OAAA offers the following advice (based on international experience) to those HEIs considering a Trial Audit.

7.1 Possible Purposes of a Trial GFP Quality Audit

7.1.1 GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Quality Control

If a Trial GFP Quality Audit is conducted before the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio is finalised and submitted to the OAAA, then it could be used to help identify any problems with the document (such as inaccuracies, inconsistencies, significant omissions or lines of reasoning which do not make good sense) by comparing it with interview responses. This is a legitimate and potentially useful addition to the HEI's own process of Self-Study. It may lead to amendments to the Portfolio which will make it a more accurate and complete account of the HEI's quality management in relation to its GFP. Of course, if the Trial GFP Quality Audit occurs after the Portfolio has been finalised, then this purpose becomes redundant.

7.1.2 Familiarising the HEI with the GFP Quality Audit Process

Some HEIs may seek to conduct a Trial GFP Quality Audit Visit in order to provide its staff and students with an experience of being interviewed by a GFP Quality Audit Panel. This is a potentially useful purpose. Some people are nervous about being interviewed in a formal setting, and having the opportunity to experience it in advance of the external GFP Quality Audit Visit may help them develop confidence. It also provides the HEI with an opportunity to test out its logistical arrangements, in terms of room setup, catering, mobilising groups of people, etc. Note that this purpose is focused on the GFP Quality Audit process and not on the content.

7.1.3 Planning Responses for the GFP Quality Audit Panel

An HEI may choose to undergo a Trial GFP Quality Audit as a way of anticipating what questions may be asked during the GFP Quality Audit Visit, so that the HEI may prepare model answers. This is a practice that the OAAA strongly advises against. There are pragmatic reasons for this, such as the probability that the sample of issues (refer to Section 27) would vary between the Trial GFP Quality Audit and the external GFP Quality Audit, as would the totality of people interviewed, questions asked, materials reviewed, etc. However, more important than this are the GFP Quality Audit Protocols (refer to Section 10). It is wholly inappropriate for an HEI to instruct its staff on the answers they should give in response to questions from the GFP Quality Audit Panel.

7.1.4 Anticipating the GFP Quality Audit Report

An HEI may undergo a Trial GFP Quality Audit in order to anticipate what the Final GFP Quality Audit Report may state. As stated above, the chances of the total combination of sampled issues, Interviewees, questions, materials reviewed, etc. being the same are low. However, more importantly, Interviewees will develop a different approach to an internal panel than to an external panel and Panel Members will conduct their deliberations differently depending on whether their report is to be confidential to the HEI or public via the OAAA Board. Therefore, an HEI that tries to anticipate the Final GFP Quality Audit Report based on its Trial GFP Quality Audit Report may develop false and unhelpful expectations.

7.2 Suggestion on Timing for a Trial GFP Quality Audit

A Trial GFP Quality Audit places an additional financial and administrative burden on the HEI. If an HEI chooses to proceed with it, then the HEI should seek to maximise the potential benefits and minimize the potential disadvantages. One way to do this is to conduct the Trial GFP Quality Audit at least a year before the external GFP Quality Audit. In that way, it becomes a part of the HEI's own quality management activities.

7.3 Trial GFP Quality Audit Reports

The OAAA recognizes that, while GFP Quality Audit results in a GFP Quality Audit Report, there are times when an HEI needs to benefit from engaging in private quality assurance and quality improvement activities, purely for its own purposes (a Trial audit is one obvious example of this sort of activity). Respecting those purposes, the OAAA will not request a copy of a Trial GFP Quality Audit Report as part of its own GFP Quality Audit Process, unless the HEI has already chosen to make the document public. For the same reason (and for the reasons listed in Sections 7.1.3 and 7.1.4), the HEI will not be permitted to subsequently use its Trial GFP Quality Audit Report to contest, in public or in private, any findings in the OAAA's GFP Quality Audit Report. Any attempt to do so may be regarded as a breach of GFP Quality Audit Protocols (refer to Section 10).

8. MAINTAINING THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT PORTFOLIO

A significant amount of effort goes into creating a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. It makes sense for the HEI to obtain as much benefit from the document as possible. Therefore, it is

recommended that the HEI's Quality Manager/GFP staff take responsibility for maintaining the Portfolio by updating it (in electronic form) each time goals or processes change, or new results become available in relation to the GFP. This has several advantages since it:

- Serves as an up to date tool for ongoing quality assurance activities in relation to the GFP.
- Facilitates the development of trend information over time, which can lead to better analysis and decision making.

The maintenance of a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio means also that it can continue to bring other benefits. International experience shows that some of the most popular uses for the Portfolio, other than as the submission document for the purpose of an external quality audit, include the following:

- Providing the basis for establishing a comprehensive set of KPIs for the planning and review of the GFP.
- Induction material for new GFP staff.
- Information for prospective institutional partners and affiliates in relation to the GFP.

PART D: THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

9. THE EXTERNAL REVIEW PROJECT

The part of the GFP Quality Audit most commonly discussed is the GFP Quality Audit Visit of the Panel to interview staff and students. However, this is just one component of what is a comprehensive and rigorous external review.

10. GFP QUALITY AUDIT PROTOCOLS

The *INQAAHE Policy Statement* (2006) states:

‘While higher education comes in many forms, the Network holds that the defining characteristics of higher education include clear policy and procedural commitments to academic integrity and academic freedom, which is the recognition that academic endeavours should be wholly conducted in a spirit of honesty and openness. External quality assurance should be conducted in such a way as to promote academic freedom and intellectual and institutional integrity’.

It also states that “every effort should be made to ensure the independence of the individual evaluators, including the adoption of a clear policy on real or potential conflicts of interest.” The OAAA applies several protocols in order to meet this *INQAAHE Policy Statement*.

10.1 Conflicts of Interest

All people involved in the GFP Quality Audit from the OAAA must declare any potential conflict of interest prior to their participation. A conflict of interest may prevent a person’s further involvement.

A person may have a personal conflict of interest if:

- They have an immediate family member or very close friend on the governing body or staff of the HEI or as a student of the HEI;
- Animosity exists with a person on the governing body or staff of the HEI;
- They have any financial interest in the HEI, or financial interest in a going concern in association with a Board Member, Council Member or Senior staff of the HEI; or
- They bear bias for or against the HEI due to some previous event (including being a graduate or having been a staff member of that HEI).

A person may have a professional conflict of interest if they:

- Are currently an applicant or candidate for a position with the HEI;
- Are currently providing, or have provided within the past five years, professional services to the HEI which may impact on the GFP Quality Audit (such as being an external examiner; participating in internal review processes, providing consulting services, etc.); or
- Belong to, or have an interest in, an organisation currently involved in an explicit and important competitive process against the HEI (this does not include normal competitiveness within the sector).

HEIs will be asked to advise the OAAA if any proposed External Reviewers on the GFP Quality Audit long list pose a potential conflict of interest. The HEI must detail the nature of the personal or professional conflict of interest in writing. The OAAA will respond to the

HEI's claim, and if necessary, recommend an alternative appointment to the long list of GFP Quality Audit External Reviewers.

10.1.1 External Reviewer Declarations

External Reviewers must complete, sign and return the GFP Quality Audit Panel Declaration Form (refer to Appendix C) to the OAAA before they can be confirmed as a member of a particular Panel. If they have concerns about a possible conflict of interest, they should contact the relevant Review Director or the OAAA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to discuss the matter.

10.1.2 Reviewer Director Declarations

Review Directors or Back-up Review Directors (refer to Section 12.2) must disclose any potential conflict of interest to the OAAA CEO at the time that they are assigned to a GFP Quality Audit. The OAAA CEO may decide to replace the Review Director or the Back-up Review Director on a particular GFP Quality Audit with another.

10.1.3 OAAA Board Member Declarations

OAAA Board Members must disclose any potential conflict of interest to the Chairperson of the OAAA (or, if it is the Chairperson, to the Deputy Chairperson), who may ask the Board Member to absent themselves from any discussions at the Board relating to that particular GFP Quality Audit.

10.1.4 Observer Declarations

From time to time, the OAAA provides opportunities for individuals involved in external accreditation or related quality assurance professional role to observe a GFP Quality Audit. OAAA staff are also provided opportunities to observe GFP Quality Audits as a part of their professional development. Although observers have no influence on the GFP Quality Audit Report, they will have access to information about the HEI undergoing GFP Quality Audit. Members of OAAA staff attending as Observers must complete, sign and return a GFP Quality Audit Observer Declaration Form (refer to Appendix D) before they can be confirmed as an Observer for the GFP Quality Audit. If they have concerns about a possible conflict of interest, they should contact the relevant Review Director or the OAAA CEO to discuss the matter (refer to Section 10.1). No more than one observer is permitted to participate in a GFP Quality Audit.

10.2 Undue Influence

It is not acceptable for the HEI to exert any undue influence on the GFP Quality Audit Panel, OAAA staff or OAAA Board in relation to the GFP Quality Audit. Undue influence by the HEI (or stakeholders of the HEI) may take a number of forms, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Communication about the GFP Quality Audit with individual Panel or OAAA Board Members during the course of the GFP Quality Audit (except, of course, as a formal part of the GFP Quality Audit Visit).
- Explicit or implied threats made against the Panel, OAAA staff or Board Members.
- Explicit or implied promises of benefits to the Panel, OAAA staff or Board Members.
- Gifts and overly generous hospitality.

In the event of undue influence occurring, it will be reported to the Board and may be included in the GFP Quality Audit Report. Excessive undue influence may require the GFP Quality Audit process to be cancelled.

10.3 The Non-Attribution Rule

When conducting GFP Quality Audit interviews, the Panel need to use the information it receives, but it should not attribute that information to the person who provided it. The OAAA asks that confidentiality be respected by all people who participate in the GFP Quality Audit interview process. In particular, this will mean:

- Interviewees will not be permitted to take notes or use any form of recording device in the interview sessions.
- HEIs should not place Interviewees under any pressure to disclose any responses that they or other Interviewees provided to the Panel.

10.4 Transparency vs Protectionism

INQAAHE is clear that academic endeavours ought to be conducted in the spirit of honesty and openness and that applies concomitantly to GFP Quality Audit. However, experience has shown that one of the main concerns HEIs have during EQA activities is the desire to protect their reputation. That may provide motivation to omit or conceal areas where improvements are required or, when they cannot be concealed, to present them in a form that deliberately over exaggerates positive aspects and underplays problems. It may even motivate HEIs to ensure that certain people will be unavailable to meet with the Panel during the GFP Quality Audit Visit.

GFP Quality Audit services two purposes which are organisational improvement and public accountability. For each of these purposes, there is a good reason why the OAAA strongly advises against a protectionist approach.

Every organisation – without exception – has OFI. A good quality organisation is one that is actively committed to identifying and addressing OFI. GFP Quality Audit provides a positive opportunity for HEIs to thoroughly explore such issues.

In terms of public accountability, a deliberate effort to conceal important issues from the Panel could (depending on the severity of the issue) result in perhaps the most unfortunate outcome of an GFP Quality Audit – a published finding that the HEI submitted a fraudulent Portfolio.

The desire by HEIs for their GFPs to be presented positively is entirely understandable and reasonable. The OAAA wishes to emphasise that in quality management terms, the HEI that presents its GFP as perfect is not regarded as positive – it is regarded as implausible. The HEI that is actively and effectively attending to its issues in relation to its GFP is regarded as positive and this will be acknowledged in GFP Quality Audit Reports.

GFP Quality Audit Panels will be trained to identify the likelihood that Interviewees are delivering rehearsed answers to its questions. This will be considered an attempt by the HEI to prevent the Panel from obtaining the information it seeks, namely people's lived experience rather than official HEI policy (which it will already have from the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials).

10.5 Personal and Commercially Sensitive Information

The OAAA's Royal Decree 54/2010 states that HEIs and other related parties "*shall provide the OAAA with the information it requires and deems imperative for the accomplishment of its tasks*". From time to time, an HEI may claim that certain information requested by a GFP Quality Audit Panel is either personally or commercially confidential, and may wish to withhold the information from the Panel. Whether or not certain information should be treated as confidential is often a matter of opinion and the Panel is not obliged to agree with

the HEI's assessment of that information unless stipulated otherwise by applicable Royal Decrees. However, as a general principle, the OAAA Board has ruled that Panels should avoid accessing personally or commercially confidential information, unless it is absolutely necessary. Should such a need arise, Panels are required to treat the information with sensitivity in order to avoid or minimise any potential discomfort for the HEI. A range of options for accessing the information should be explored, as follows:

- Examples of information that an HEI may deem personally confidential include a GFP student's marked work; or a GFP staff member's appraisal report or promotion result. If the Panel wishes, for example, to verify that staff performance appraisals are actually taking place, it may ask to see a sample of completed appraisal forms but with the staff members' names masked.
- Examples of information that an HEI may deem commercially sensitive include competitive student recruitment strategies or financial records. If the Panel wishes, for example, to explore the alignment of GFP operational planning with resource allocation, it may arrange with the HEI to view any particularly sensitive financial records on site rather than removing copies of those records from the HEI.

The Panel will use its best efforts to be sensitive to the concerns of the HEI in terms of personal and commercially sensitive information. At the same time, the HEI needs to acknowledge that the Panel must have access to the information necessary for it to effectively complete the GFP Quality Audit. In most cases, mutually acceptable solutions can be reached through discussion between the Review Director and the Contact Person (refer to Section 11.2).

Lastly, all OAAA External Reviewers are required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to their participation on a Panel (refer to Appendix C).

10.6 Complaints about the HEI

It is not the purpose of a GFP Quality Audit to hear and resolve complaints about specific issues in relation to the HEI and its GFP. The Panel is not a court, arbitrator or mediator. It does not have a role in resolving individual complaints or problems, and will never offer a proposed resolution to a particular case. However, the Panel may use a particular case as one source of evidence when exploring whether the HEI has policies and processes in place for receiving and addressing complaints in relation to the GFP and for resolving not only the individual complaint but any systematic problem that may have caused it.

11. STARTING A GFP QUALITY AUDIT

11.1 Initiating the GFP Quality Audit

At least six months prior to the date by which an HEI must submit its GFP Quality Audit Portfolio (and usually earlier), the OAAA will contact the HEI in writing and in person to commence general arrangements for the GFP Quality Audit. HEIs will be provided with training by OAAA to prepare for the GFP Quality Audit.

11.2 Appointing a Contact Person

For each GFP Quality Audit, there will be a single communication channel between the HEI and the OAAA. For the OAAA, the point of contact is the Review Director appointed to the GFP Quality Audit Panel. The Review Director will usually be a professional staff member of the OAAA.

The HEI should designate its own Contact Person. This needs to be someone with sufficient seniority to direct or influence the HEI's involvement in the GFP Quality Audit. A senior member of the Quality Office working with the GFP or similar is a suitable person to act as the Contact Person but it should not be the HEI's most senior academic post holder (such as Vice-Chancellor or Dean).

All communications between the OAAA and the HEI about GFP Quality Audit matters should be conducted through the Review Director and the Contact Person. No communication about the GFP Quality Audit process is permitted between the HEI (including its governing body, staff, students and external stakeholders) and any member of the Panel or OAAA Board until the GFP Quality Audit is completed. The only exceptions to this pertain to formal communications between the HEI CEO (or equivalent) and the Chairperson of the OAAA Board or the OAAA CEO. However, these communications should be limited to matters of protocol or in the event of a serious complaint by the HEI over the conduct of the GFP Quality Audit (refer to Section 19.1.1).

11.3 GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Completeness Check

Upon receipt of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, the Review Director will conduct a Completeness Check of it. The Review Director will check:

- Each area of the GFP Quality Audit Scope applicable to the HEI's context has been addressed by the HEI;
- All applicable sub-areas of the GFP Quality Audit Scope have been addressed by the HEI;
- A justification has been provided in each case where a sub-area has been deemed not applicable to the GFP.
- All Supporting Materials referenced in the Portfolio are included with the application;
- All Supporting Materials are complete documents and as described in the title;
- All Supporting Materials are in pdf format, searchable and printable; and
- All Supporting Materials are clearly numbered and labelled.

Any issue identified by the Review Director during the completeness check will be addressed, on a case-by-case basis, with the aim of ensuring that the GFP Quality Audit process and the planned time-frame for this are not compromised.

12. GFP QUALITY AUDIT PANEL

12.1 External Reviewers

12.1.1 Register of External Reviewers

The OAAA Board has established a Register of External Reviewers. The Register includes eminent people from Oman and overseas who have shown leadership in their disciplines, higher education management, or professions and industries that engage with higher education institutions. The Register is publicly available²⁴. All people listed on the Register have been through a rigorous selection and approval process.

²⁴ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#Reviewer>

12.1.2 Criteria for External Reviewers on GFP Quality Audit Panels

It is important that the Register of External Reviewers be comprised of peers who command the respect of the higher education and Omani communities. Desirable attributes and characteristics of External Reviewers for GFP Quality Audits are as follows:

- Experience of working with GFPs.
- Commitment to principles of quality enhancement and quality assurance in higher education.
- Knowledge of quality assurance methods and terminology and their appropriate uses.
- Knowledge and understanding of the Omani higher education sector, including its broader context.
- Ability to reconcile the theory of quality with organisational realities.
- Experience of undertaking quality reviews (audit, assessment, accreditation, etc.) in educational, professional or industrial settings.
- Ability to understand and evaluate information provided by HEIs in a manner that is sensitive to the particular context from which it arises.
- Experience of graduates and/or teaching and/or research.
- Appreciation of Omani culture.
- Breadth of perspective.
- Ability to focus knowledge and experience to evaluate quality assurance procedures and techniques, and to suggest good practices and/or starting points for improvements relative to the HEI's particular context.
- Ability to work in a team actively and cooperatively.
- Ability to communicate effectively.
- Ability to recognise personal values and presumptions and have insight into the ways these may affect thinking and judgments.
- Integrity, discretion, commitment and diligence.
- Experience in quality management processes within a reputable higher education provider.
- Trained in one or more methods of external institutional or program review.

12.1.3 Training for External Reviewers

All locally-based External Reviewers are required to complete the OAAA External Reviewer Training Program before their inclusion in the Register is confirmed. The Training Program is typically for two days and is run at the expense of the OAAA. It is different from the Training Program for institutional accreditation and all locally-based External Reviewers will undergo it prior to serving on a Panel. If there are places available, people who are not External Reviewers may participate in the Training Program on a fee-paying, first come first served basis.

It is expected that international External Reviewers will have training and experience with foreign external accreditation agencies and will have the required expertise and skills to implement the GFP Quality Audit process in accordance with this Manual.

12.2 Assembling the Panel

For each GFP Quality Audit, the OAAA will assemble a Panel normally comprised of up to three External Reviewers from the Register. The OAAA reserves the sole right to determine the composition of the GFP Quality Audit Panel and, in each case, will endeavour to assemble a group of External Reviewers that are appropriate for the HEI undergoing GFP Quality Audit. The Panels will normally comprise at least one member who is Oman-based; one from outside Oman and one who is a native Arabic speaker. The Panel will have combined expertise in the subject areas included in the GFP (such as English Language, Mathematics, Computing and General Study Skills).

Each Panel has a Review Director, who is usually a member of the OAAA professional staff. A Back-up Review Director will also be assigned to the Panel. The HEI and the Panel will be provided with the names of the Review Director and the Back-up Review Director. The OAAA will implement necessary support and back-up mechanisms as required ensuring that the role of the Review Director is carried out effectively.

The OAAA will draw up a long list of names for each Panel. This list must be approved by the OAAA Board. Then, it is submitted in strict confidence to the CEO (or equivalent) of the HEI, who is invited to comment on whether any may have a conflict of interest which is the only grounds for objection or raise any other area of concern. The OAAA is not obliged to agree with any objection from the HEI, but must consider all objections carefully.

The OAAA CEO and Review Director will then finalise the GFP Quality Audit Panel and must advise the OAAA Board and the HEI. The Panel is announced on the OAAA website.

12.3 Administrative Support for the Panel

12.3.1 Panel Support Officer

The OAAA will assign a Panel Support Officer (PSO) to each GFP Quality Audit Panel. For the purposes of the GFP Quality Audit, the PSO works under the instruction of the Review Director. The role of the PSO is to facilitate the logistics of the GFP Quality Audit such as travel, accommodation and other administrative tasks. This may include attendance at the Panel Visit. However, the PSO is not a member of the Panel and may not influence the Panel or the HEI in any way.

12.3.2 Honoraria

Each Panel Member will receive an honorarium. The sum of the honorarium is reviewed from time to time by the OAAA Board and the External Reviewers are notified of the sum at the time that they are invited to join a GFP Quality Audit Panel. Any tax liabilities associated with the honorarium will rest in full with the Panel Member.

12.3.3 Travel, Accommodation and Meals

All travel for Panel Members related to the GFP Quality Audit is in business class by the most direct and economical route. The PSO will usually make the necessary arrangements. All tickets will be purchased by the OAAA. The OAAA will reimburse Panel Members the cost of travel from home to the airport and vice versa (if the distance exceeds 50 km) to a predetermined limit.

For most Panel Members, the GFP Quality Audit Visit will take place away from their home. The PSO will arrange suitable hotel accommodation and all Panel meals for the days of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. The OAAA will normally fund accommodation from the night before Day 0 to the day immediately after the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit and any additional nights that are incurred as an unavoidable consequence of the travel arrangements.

It is understood that international Panel Members may wish to extend their time in Oman for personal purposes. The OAAA welcomes this interest in Oman and will endeavour to provide some helpful advice as required, but regretfully advises that any additional night's accommodation and any increase in the cost of the flight is at the Panel Member's personal expense.

12.3.4 Travelling Companions

The OAAA understands that some Panel Members, and particularly international External Reviewers, may wish to bring companions with them during the GFP Quality Audit Visit.

The OAAA appreciates this interest in Oman and the desire to spend some time to enjoy the country. However, Panel Members are reminded that during the GFP Quality Audit Visit no external social activities can take place. All Panel Members are asked to commit their time and full attention to the GFP Quality Audit throughout the duration of the Visit. Panel Members will normally have meals together in the evenings, and although the setting is social, the meals often involve continuing discussion of the GFP Quality Audit in which the participation of non-Panel Members would not be appropriate.

12.3.5 Medical Insurance

The OAAA requires that all international Panel Members arrange medical insurance for the time that they are in Oman and will reimburse the cost up to a pre-determined limit against original receipt. The PSO will provide detailed information on reimbursement.

13. OBSERVERS OF GFP QUALITY AUDIT PANELS

From time to time, the OAAA will invite members of its staff to observe the external quality review process for their own professional development purposes. Staff from other quality assurance agencies or relevant organisations may also apply to observe an OAAA GFP Quality Audit. The practice of permitting observers is well established internationally and is an important means by which knowledge and experience about GFP Quality Audit can be shared.

The OAAA permits up to one external Observer for each Panel. In order to protect the HEI's confidentiality, members of the public are not permitted to observe a GFP Quality Audit. All Observers are expected to complete the Observer Declaration Form (refer to Section 10.1.4).

13.1 What will the Observer 'observe'?

In order for the position of Observer to be as beneficial as possible, the OAAA will seek to provide the Observer with substantial access to the GFP Quality Audit process and materials.

The Observer will receive a copy of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio along with a list of Supporting Materials. In order to minimise the burden on the HEI, and recognising that the Observer is not tasked with scrutinising materials for external review purposes, the Observer will not receive the Supporting Materials.

The Observer may attend the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting (in person or by teleconference) and the GFP Quality Audit Visit and be present for all interview sessions and Panel review sessions. The Panel Chairperson reserves the right to require the Observer to absent him or herself from any session where his or her presence may otherwise be problematic, but it is expected that this will only be exercised in exceptional circumstances.

The Observer will receive a copy of all drafts of the GFP Quality Audit Report and the HEI submission in response to GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5, so that they may experience how the drafts change at each stage in the process. However, they do not participate in the drafting process and will not be copied into any of the Panel's deliberations other than during the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting and the GFP Quality Audit Visit.

The Observer may not participate in any disputes or appeals process. The Observer's involvement concludes when the Final GFP Quality Audit Report is published.

13.2 Conduct of Observers

The Observer is not a Member of the Panel and has no formal role in relation to the GFP Quality Audit. The Observer may not influence the Panel or the HEI in any way during the GFP Quality Audit.

The Observer **must remain silent** during all interview, feedback and Panel review sessions. The Observer may not take notes on content or use any recording devices during any of the Panel's interview or feedback sessions; however notes on the process and procedural matters may be taken. The Observer may take notes about the GFP Quality Audit process during Panel-only sessions (including the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting and the Panel review sessions during the GFP Quality Audit Visit) but is not permitted to take notes about the Panel's deliberations on the HEI nor about the HEI itself (it must be clearly understood that the purpose for having Observers is to share information about the GFP Quality Audit process, not about the HEI or its GFP).

During the course of the external review, the Observer will have questions about the process. These should be put to the Review Director during appropriate breaks in the process. The Observer must not, under any circumstances, liaise with the HEI during the GFP Quality Audit.

13.3 Administrative Arrangements for Observers

Observers (excluding OAAA staff members) are responsible for the costs of their own meals, travel and accommodation, although the PSO may assist with bookings. The OAAA will not be liable for any other costs associated with the Observer's involvement with the GFP Quality Audit.

14. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

14.1 Panel Members

The following responsibilities are shared by GFP Quality Audit Panel Members:

- Complete and return the GFP Quality Audit Panel Declaration Form (refer to Appendix C) and inform the OAAA about any matters that are or could be perceived as possible conflicts of interest.
- Read the GFP Quality Audit Manual thoroughly and apply the process and methods of GFP Quality Audit set out in this GFP Quality Audit Manual.
- Commit fully to the GFP Quality Audit process, including postponing all other professional commitments during the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting and GFP Quality Audit Visit, and completing all other assigned tasks in a timely manner.
- Read and evaluate the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and all other materials assigned to them.
- Participate actively in all Panel meetings and activities (whether face-to-face or via communication technologies) in a spirit of teamwork and collaboration, and undertake any consequential responsibilities assigned to Panel Members during meetings.
- Participate in the preparation of the GFP Quality Audit Visit Agenda, develop interview questions and requests for Additional Supporting Materials.
- Participate positively and constructively in the GFP Quality Audit Visit, including interview sessions and Panel review sessions.
- Record evidence from the different review activities (e.g. interviews and documentary reviews) and share it with other Panel Members.
- Provide draft text for sections of the GFP Quality Audit Report, as assigned to them.

- Provide detailed and timely commentary on all drafts of the GFP Quality Audit Report.
- Be vigilant in identifying and reporting to the Review Director any suspected incidences of plagiarism, particularly in relation to the primary submission of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials.
- Comply at all times with the direction of the Panel Chairperson and the guidance on the professional process provided by the Review Director.
- Provide feedback on the GFP Quality Audit process to the OAAA as requested.
- Be available to participate in an appeal interview if required.

GFP Quality Audit Panel Members are ambassadors for the OAAA. As such, they should:

- Be aware of the OAAA's Values²⁵ (refer to Section 1.2) and seek to uphold these at all times.
- Act in a positive, ethical and professional manner at all times, and perform duties to the highest standards of honesty and diligence.
- May not at any time delegate work to anyone else. Panel Members have been carefully selected based on their experience, expertise and skills. All Panel Members are approved by the OAAA Board prior to their invitation to be involved in a GFP Quality Audit. Delegation of work to any person not approved by the OAAA Board to participate on the GFP Quality Audit would constitute a serious breach of confidentiality.
- Respect the OAAA's Protocols and report any potential breach of them to the Review Director as soon as possible.
- Avoid direct liaison with the HEI during the GFP Quality Audit process, other than the interview sessions. All other liaison with the HEI is to be via the GFP Quality Audit Panel's Review Director. If the HEI and Panel Member have contact during the GFP Quality Audit process, this must be disclosed to the Review Director for appropriate consideration.
- Maintain positive and constructive relationships with other Panel Members, the OAAA staff and the HEI throughout the process.
- Recognise that Panel Members do not have a power of veto over the Final GFP Quality Audit Report.
- Adhere to the OAAA's protocol on media management (refer to Section 18.12). Panel Members may not publicly disclose any deliberations, discussions or materials of the GFP Quality Audit.

14.2 GFP Quality Audit Panel Chairperson

In addition to the responsibilities of Panel Members, the Panel Chairperson has the following responsibilities:

- Chair all meetings of the Panel, including all interview sessions during GFP Quality Audit Visit. This responsibility may be delegated to another Panel Member if the Panel needs to split during the GFP Quality Audit Visit to conduct additional interviews.
- Create a professional, open and positive atmosphere in which critical enquiry, difficult decision making and robust debate may occur without compromising the integrity of the process or of participants.
- Guide the Panel towards consensus, but not necessarily unanimous agreement, on key findings.
- Undertake with the Review Director, the Planning Visit and any Visits to one or more campus sites that may be required. This responsibility may be delegated to another Panel Member if necessary.

²⁵ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#Vision>

- Provide verbal feedback to the HEI CEO (or equivalent) at the Preliminary Feedback session (refer to Section 17.2.6).

14.3 Review Director

The OAAA ensures that there are sufficient mechanisms in place to support the smooth and effective implementation of the GFP Quality Audit process through the appointment of a Review Director who directs the process. The Review Director is usually a member of the OAAA staff. This role includes the following responsibilities:

- Provide direction to the Panel on the professional process as set out in this GFP Quality Audit Manual and in other directives from the OAAA.
- Be the primary point of contact between the HEI and the Panel.
- Read and be familiar with the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and all supporting documentation submitted by the HEI.
- Based on Panel Members' contributions, prepare agendas, worksheets and other working documents.
- Based on Panel Members' contributions, produce and edit reports and circulate drafts to Panel Members for their comments and input.
- Prepare the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4 for internal and external moderation, address issues identified by the moderators, provide feedback on the moderation process to the Panel and prepare GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 for consideration by the HEI.
- Prepare GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v6 incorporating action taken in response to HEI's feedback on GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 for approval by the OAAA Board.
- Oversee the translation of the Executive Summary of the GFP Quality Audit Report into Arabic or English (if the Review Director is bilingual).
- Prepare a confidential report on the GFP Quality Audit process including an assessment of the effectiveness of the Panel.
- Provide, with the assistance of other OAAA staff, high quality administrative support to the Panel.

The Back-up Review Director will be expected to fulfil the role of the Review Director in their absence and will have ready access to all GFP Quality Audit materials. On occasion, a Back-up Review Director may be assigned by OAAA to support the Review Director.

14.4 OAAA CEO

The OAAA CEO is not a member of the GFP Quality Audit Panel, but plays an important role in the overall management and quality control of the process. This role includes the following responsibilities:

- Develop the GFP Quality Audit Schedule and submit it to the OAAA Board for approval (refer to Section 3.4).
- Assign a Review Director to each GFP Quality Audit Panel.
- In conjunction with the Review Director, propose the long list of GFP Quality Audit Panel Members to the OAAA Board for approval (refer to Section 12.2).
- Manage the budget for the GFP Quality Audit.
- Intervene in the GFP Quality Audit process to help resolve serious process disputes, but only if necessary.
- Undertake a final check of the GFP Quality Audit Report and the Executive Summary in English or Arabic to ensure they comply with OAAA policies and guidelines.
- Manage all media statements in relation to the GFP Quality Audit and prepare a briefing report on the GFP Quality Audit process for the OAAA Board.

14.5 OAAA Board

The Board has the overall governance role for GFP Quality Audit. This role includes the following responsibilities:

- Approve the GFP Quality Audit Manual and amendments to the Manual.
- Approve all External Reviewers for entry onto the Register (refer to Section 12.1).
- Approve the GFP Quality Audit Schedule (refer to Section 3.4).
- Approve the budget for each GFP Quality Audit.
- Approve the long lists for all GFP Quality Audit Panels (refer to Section 12.2).
- Consider and provide feedback on GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 (refer to Section 18.8.2).
- Approve the Final GFP Quality Audit Reports, based on a judgment as to whether the OAAA's policies have been properly followed (refer to Section 18.9).
- Receive and consider the Review Director report on each GFP Quality Audit (refer to Section 20.4).

15. BEFORE THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT VISIT

15.1 Reviewers to Establish GFP Quality Audit Folders

Panel Members will receive a substantial amount of information about the HEI and its GFP during the GFP Quality Audit process. Some of this information will be confidential to the HEI and/or to the OAAA. Therefore, Panel Members should immediately establish three folders:

- An email folder, for storing all related emails.
- A computer folder for storing all related electronic information.
- A physical folder for storing all related physical information.

These folders should be kept in a confidential manner (including password protection for the email and computer folders). Upon the completion of the GFP Quality Audit (i.e. the public release of the GFP Quality Audit Report), all folder contents should be deleted (except, if the Panel Member so wishes, those items that are clearly in the public domain such as official publications from the HEI). Note that the folder contents should not be deleted before the GFP Quality Audit Report is released, as they may be required for finalising the GFP Quality Audit Report or for an appeal (refer to Section 19.2).

15.2 Reviewers to Produce Preliminary Comments

The GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials are circulated to Panel Members as soon as they become available. Each Panel Member is asked to prepare a document called Preliminary Comments which outlines their initial analysis of the Portfolio. For each section heading in the Portfolio, the preliminary analysis should include:

- Potential areas for Commendations.
- Potential areas for Affirmations.
- Potential areas for Recommendations.
- Further information/evidence that will be required.
- People that the Panel will need to meet.
- Questions that need to be asked.
- Points requiring clarification.
- Panel Members should immediately report to the Review Director any suspected incidences of plagiarism detected in the primary submission of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials.

These Preliminary Comments should be submitted to the Review Director by a notified date. The Review Director will use them to produce the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v1 (refer to Section 18.4), which will be circulated prior to the Portfolio Meeting.

15.3 The GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting

About eight weeks before the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the GFP Quality Audit Panel holds a Portfolio Meeting at the OAAA Offices. International Panel Members are invited to participate in this meeting by communication technology (the choice of technology will vary depending upon circumstances). A typical GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting Agenda is provided in Appendix G.

This Portfolio Meeting is important for the following reasons since it:

- Ensures that the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio receives appropriate attention (so that the overall process is not dominated by the GFP Quality Audit Visit).
- Enables the Panel to get to know each other.
- Ensures that the Panel is very clear about the task and the expectations at an early stage.
- Helps with planning for the rest of the GFP Quality Audit activities.

15.4 Additional Supporting Materials

The Panel may request Additional Supporting Materials up to two weeks after the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. All requests must be made through the Review Director and the HEI must respond to the Review Director.

While the Review Director may submit a request to the Contact Person for Additional Supporting Materials at any time during the aforementioned period, it is best if the requests are made in block in order to minimize the burden on the HEI. The best times to make the requests are:

- In the paperwork sent to the HEI regarding the Planning Visit (refer to Section 15.5).
- In the Daily Liaison Meetings during the GFP Quality Audit Visit (refer to Section 17.2.5).

15.5 The Planning Visit

About six weeks before the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the Panel Chairperson (or representative) and the Review Director will visit the HEI to discuss the forthcoming GFP Quality Audit Visit and other matters pertaining to the GFP Quality Audit. A typical GFP Quality Audit Planning Visit Agenda is provided in Appendix H.

These meetings are small, operational meetings. Usually the attendees from the HEI are the HEI CEO (or equivalent), at least for the first session, and the Contact Person. The HEI may involve other people as it deems necessary, but should keep the meeting small so that the focus may be operational.

It is important to note that the focus of the Planning Visit is on facilitating the overall GFP Quality Audit and preparing for the GFP Quality Audit Visit. The Planning Visit is not an opportunity for the Panel delegation to conduct interviews or other such GFP Quality Audit activities, nor for the HEI to enquire as to the Panel's preliminary conclusions.

16. PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

There is only one formal submission from the HEI to the GFP Quality Audit process and that is the Portfolio. However, an important aspect of public accountability is to ensure that the

GFP Quality Audit Panel, representing the interests of the public at large, is able to investigate the HEI's GFP in an independent manner. This involves having access to information that has not first been vetted by the HEI. Shortly prior to the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the Review Director will call for Public Submissions on behalf of the Panel. The method used will be as follows:

- A Public Submissions Notice will be sent to the Contact Person for wide distribution within the HEI (refer to Appendix I).
- Notices are made public through appropriate media (such as local newspapers and SMS).
- A notice is posted on the OAAA website.

The notices will include an email address to which the submissions should be forwarded. The Panel will only accept unsolicited submissions provided that they meet the following criteria:

- They include the name, position, organisation (HEI, workplace, etc.) and contact details of the person/s making the submission. This information will be treated in confidence. Anonymous submissions will not be considered by the Panel under any circumstances.
- The person/s making the submission must be willing to participate in a telephone interview should the Panel consider such a discussion to be necessary.
- Submissions should not refer to personal grievances or single out individual members of staff.
- Submissions must contain specific evidence for any claims being made. Vague allegations will not be pursued by the Panel.
- The submission (excluding any particular corroborating evidence) should be no more than 1,000 words (two sides of an A4 page) in length.

A general call for submissions does not constitute a statistically valid survey. The number of submissions received on a certain topic is not relevant. However, the substance of the submissions received is potentially useful. The Panel may choose to investigate or not investigate the matters raised. If the Panel chooses to investigate, it will be only as part of the overall GFP Quality Audit and not in terms of the details of a particular complaint. The Panel will not make any response or report to the person/s making the submission. The only report issued by the Panel is the GFP Quality Audit Report. The Panel will not reach any conclusions for inclusion in its GFP Quality Audit Report on the basis of an unsolicited submission without properly triangulating the issue (refer to Section 29.2). This may include directly asking HEI management about the matter, although if this occurs, the identity of the person making the submission will still remain confidential to the Panel.

17. THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT VISIT

The GFP Quality Audit Visit is perhaps the most visible part of the overall process and typically attracts most of the attention. However, it is important to note that it is only one part of the overall GFP Quality Audit process. Prior to the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the Panel is able to begin testing the accuracy of claims made in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio through examination of documentary evidence provided in the Supporting Materials. The GFP Quality Audit Visit provides the Panel with a further opportunity to do this. While the Panel visits the HEI to thoroughly check on the claims made in the Portfolio and other matters that may arise, the GFP Quality Audit Visit should be conducted in a positive, friendly and professional spirit.

17.1 Purpose of the GFP Quality Audit Visit

The primary purpose of the GFP Quality Audit Visit is for the Panel to verify the HEI's claims in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio.

The methods the Panel will use to fulfil this purpose include:

- Interviewing people to compare their personal experiences with what is reported in the Portfolio.
- Viewing resources and facilities in situ to verify that they match what is reported in the Portfolio.
- Considering further documentary evidence.

17.2 The GFP Quality Audit Visit Program

An example for the GFP Quality Audit Visit Program (i.e. before the names have been added) is provided in Appendix J. Each Panel Member may amend this to suit the particular issues which they wish to explore during the GFP Quality Audit Visit.

17.2.1 Interview Sessions

There is a maximum of eight Interviewees per interview session. The reason for this is to ensure that every participant will have an opportunity to speak in the limited time available:

- Interviewees should wait outside the Panel Room until the Review Director invites them in.
- Individuals will not be permitted to dominate the session (for example: by attempting to answer all the questions on behalf of the other Interviewees).
- Where practicable, people should meet with the Panel once only. It is understood that many people will hold more than one area of responsibility. However, the Panel is seeking a broad range of input. Also, by meeting people other than the most senior person for any given issue, the Panel is able to explore such topics as internal communication, delegation of authority and teamwork.
- Managers and staff will, where possible, be interviewed separately.
- The sessions are confidential, in that the Panel may use the information received, but not in a manner that reveals the identity of the provider.
- HEIs are also expected to respect the confidentiality of the process and may not coerce Interviewees to say certain things or divulge what was said.
- All Interviewees should have a name card that identifies their name and program of study (for students) or department/role (for staff and others). These should be printed in a large and plain font (e.g.: Arial 72 pt) and positioned upright on the table in front of the person.
- Interviewees should not bring mobile phones into the Panel Room.
- Interviewees are not permitted to take notes or use any form of recording device in the interview session.

17.2.2 Random Interviews

For GFP Quality Audit to meet the public expectations of HEI accountability, it needs to be able to show that the data collection methods were, in part, independent of the HEI's influence. One mechanism for achieving this is to conduct Random Interviews with GFP staff and students during the GFP Quality Audit Visit (and only at that time). The way this occurs is for a GFP Quality Audit Panel Member to excuse himself or herself from the Panel interviews and to visit GFP staff and students in their places of work and study. There are some rules for Random Interviews in order to ensure that they are conducted in a fair, safe and professional manner.

- All Panel Members will have name badges that clearly identify them and their status.

- Panel Members will only seek to speak with GFP staff and students. Other visitors on campus will not be interviewed.
- Panel Members will politely request the interview, and will not pressure people if they do not wish to participate.
- Every attempt will be made to keep the duration of each random interview under fifteen minutes.
- Interviews will usually be with individual people and will be conducted confidentially.
- Most Random Interviews are expected to be conducted in GFP staff offices or in communal spaces such as the Library, the Cafeteria or foyers.
- Panel Members will not intrude upon teaching sessions.
- Panel Members will not access secure locations such as laboratories, chemical storage areas, where financial transactions take place or construction sites.
- It is not appropriate for any of the HEI staff to accompany Panel Members during the Random Interviews. Panel Members will use the campus map (refer to Section 6.4.1) as a guide but the Review Director may also need to ask the Contact Person for assistance in determining appropriate locations.

Responses will be recorded on Random Interview Worksheets (refer to Appendices K and L). These will be shared with the other Panel Members, but will otherwise be confidential. Panel Members will have one worksheet for each Random Interview. Each Random Interview Worksheet for staff should be the same, allowing the collection of several responses to the same questions. However, scope should be left for other issues to be raised by the Interviewee if they so desire.

A week or so before the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the Review Director will provide the Contact Person with a public notice advising members of the HEI's community about the pending GFP Quality Audit Visit. This notice includes advice about the potential for Random Interviews (refer to Appendix M).

17.2.3 Call Back Interviews

Some time may be set aside on the second day for the Panel to meet post holders whom it believes can assist in finalising its deliberations on certain issues. Sometimes, issues arise during the GFP Quality Audit about which the Panel cannot form a final judgment without asking further questions or seeking further data. Therefore, it may ask to meet key people at the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit to assist with those issues. These Call Back interviews are different from the normal interview sessions in three respects:

- The Interviewees are likely to have already met the Panel earlier in the GFP Quality Audit Visit.
- They will not know they are required until the evening before.
- The Interviewees will be told in advance what the line of questioning will be.

During the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the Review Director will meet with the Contact Person and discuss whom the Panel wishes to meet and what the precise topics are. The Contact Person then needs to try and arrange for those people to be available at the designated times. The sessions of Call Back Interviews are usually only about ten to fifteen minutes in duration.

This can be a very important part of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. It is in the HEI's best interests to ensure that the Panel has all its questions answered to ensure that the Final GFP Quality Audit Report will be as accurate and fair as possible. That said, the OAAA understands that organising the sessions of Call Back Interviews requires some flexibility on the part of the HEI and appreciates the HEI's assistance in this regard.

17.2.4 Panel Review Sessions

The GFP Quality Audit Panel will meet on its own at regular intervals throughout the GFP Quality Audit Visit in order to discuss the information obtained through the interviews and to plan for the following interview sessions. These sessions are confidential.

17.2.5 Daily Liaison Meetings

At the end of each day, the Contact Person and the Review Director should meet to review the day and plan for the next day. These meetings usually last only a few minutes. Items for discussion will typically include the following:

- Potential Call Back interviews (refer to Section 17.2.3).
- Additional Supporting Material requested by the Panel.
- Logistics.
- Any problems that may have arisen during the day.

The Daily Liaison Meetings should under no circumstances be used to exchange information about the Panel's deliberations.

17.2.6 Preliminary Feedback Session

HEIs put a large amount of effort into preparing the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and participating in the GFP Quality Audit Visit. It would be unfair for the Panel to leave at the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit without providing the HEI with at least a preliminary indication of their findings. Therefore, the last session in the GFP Quality Audit Visit is a Preliminary Feedback session. This is an opportunity for the Panel Chairperson, on behalf of the Panel, to verbally provide the HEI with an indication of what will be in the Final GFP Quality Audit Report.

HEIs must understand that this is preliminary feedback only and is not binding on the OAAA. In the weeks that follow, the Panel and Review Director will need to cross-check their findings with the documentary evidence, and this can sometimes lead to a different final conclusion from the one held by the Panel at the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. Therefore, the following rules will apply to the Preliminary Feedback session:

- The Panel will meet with the HEI CEO and up to seven other HEI representatives at the discretion of HEI CEO.
- The information presented to the HEI during this session is confidential. It may not be recorded or reported by the HEI.
- Given its preliminary status, the feedback is not open for discussion during the Preliminary Feedback session. The HEI will have an opportunity later to challenge a draft of the GFP Quality Audit Report.

17.3 The GFP Quality Audit Visit Logistics

The interviews of the GFP Quality Audit Visit may be extended to three days, or even more, if the Panel decides that the scope of the GFP Quality Audit warrants the additional time. For multi-campus HEIs, the GFP Quality Audit Visit Program may involve two or more Panel Members visiting satellite campuses for additional GFP Quality Audit Visit days.

17.3.1 The Panel Room

Ideally the rooms used by the GFP Quality Audit Panel during the GFP Quality Audit Visit are conveniently co-located; the Panel will have much to achieve in a short period of time and will wish to work as efficiently as possible. The following room/interview setup details are designed to help ensure that the GFP Quality Audit Visit flows smoothly.

The Panel Room is where the Panel will spend the majority of its time and is where most of the interviews and the Panel review sessions will take place. Appendix P shows a typical layout of a Panel Room.

- An interview table is required with four chairs on the Panel's side (for the three Panel Members and the Review Director) and eight chairs on the Interviewees' side. The table will need to be large enough to accommodate the Panel's folders, laptops, etc.
- Given the amount of time that the Panel Members will spend in their chairs working at the table, it is appreciated if the HEI can ensure that the chairs are of an appropriate ergonomic design.
- If there is an Observer accompanying the Panel, a small separate table/desk for the Observer is required. This should be in a convenient location to the side of the Panel Room.
- Panel Members and the Review Director will wish to work from their laptops and sufficient access to a power supply is required. This may require the provision of one or more extension cables. Panel Members and the Review Director (and, if applicable, the Observer) will bring their own laptops.
- On a separate table, the HEI should provide at least one computer with access to the internet and a printer with a supply of paper. The printer should be in the Panel Room. Where applicable, the Panel should be provided with appropriate access to the HEI's intranet or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).
- A small supply of stationery, including a stapler and a hole punch should be provided for use by the Panel.
- The Panel Room should have an internally connected telephone to enable direct calls to the Contact Person.
- The room should have an easily visible and accurate wall clock.
- Provision of a projector and screen is appreciated. It is likely that the Panel will require these during its deliberations, particularly towards the end of the visit.
- A room with good acoustics will facilitate the interview sessions.
- A supply of refreshments is appreciated. GFP Quality Audit Visits are tiring and intensive exercises. Continuous access to refreshments, such as water and juice, tea and coffee, fruit and biscuits, is welcomed. Ideally, these should be permanently in the room as the interview sessions and the Panel review sessions should never be interrupted.
- The Review Director will require a key to the Panel Room for use during each day. This will allow the OAAA to ensure that the room is locked if fully vacated at any time during the day. This will help to ensure that confidentiality of the Panel's work is maintained.

17.3.2 Room for Concurrent Interview Sessions

It is likely that some concurrent interview sessions will be scheduled. For these sessions, one interview is normally conducted in the Panel Room with two members of the Panel and the second interview is normally conducted at the same time in another room and with the remaining member of the Panel and the Review Director. The additional interview room needs to have an interview table set up in a similar manner to the interview table in the Panel Room. There will need to be two chairs on the Panel's side (for up to two of the Panel Members and/or the Review Director) and eight chairs on the Interviewees' side. The room needs to have an easily visible and accurate wall clock, but there are no other requirements.

17.3.3 Round Table Interview Room

The Panel will conduct some interviews in a round-table format. This format is used for interviews which lend themselves to a slightly less formal setting (e.g. interviews with students). In these interview sessions, each Panel Member will interview a group of five Interviewees who sit with the Panel Member around a small table. Students are typically interviewed in a round-table format but other Interviewees may also be interviewed in this

way. The room in which round-table interviews are held needs to have three tables each with six chairs (for one Panel Member and five Interviewees), with sufficient distance between the tables to allow the three different interviews to be conducted without undue disturbance.

The Round Table Interview Room should have an easily visible and accurate wall clock, but there are no other requirements. No refreshments need to be provided during round-table interviews (refer to Appendix Q). It may be possible for the HEI to use the same room for both concurrent and round-table interview sessions; this will depend on the timing of the sessions and how easily the HEI is able to rearrange the furniture in accordance with the requirements for the different sessions.

17.3.4 Facilities for Telephone Interviews

The GFP Quality Audit Visit may involve one or more local or international telephone interviews. For these, the Panel will require access to a telephone with a speaker phone facility and an outside/international line as required. If required, ideally the telephone facility should be provided in the Panel Room or in the Room for Concurrent Interview Sessions. This will help to ensure the confidentiality of calls and avoid interruptions. Telephone facilities in offices should not normally be used.

17.3.5 In Situ Interviews

The GFP Quality Audit Visit will involve a number of in situ interviews during which Panel Members will conduct interviews with relevant staff in a specific location/facility associated with the program(s), (e.g. laboratories and the Library). These interviews will allow the Panel to view the location/facility and to verify claims made in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio.

While, in situ interviews may involve demonstration of the use of equipment or facilities, there is no requirement for any special room-layout for the Panel; Panel Members will simply ask questions while viewing the location/facility and will either remain standing or may sit informally, if there is already available seating.

17.3.6 The Panel Lunch Room

The Panel will schedule a time period for lunch during each day of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. An appropriate room other than the Panel Room is required for this. It is not suitable for the Panel to have lunch in the Panel Room as any lingering smell of food would make the environment unpleasant for interviews and Panel discussions following the lunch period. The Panel will also appreciate a break from the Panel Room and vacation of the Panel Room at this time will provide an opportunity for the HEI to replenish refreshments in this room.

During formal breaks (lunch breaks, campus facility visits and so on), the Panel Room is locked and the key is in the sole possession of the Review Director. The Panel lunches are likely to be working lunches during which the Panel will continue discussions. Therefore, the Panel needs to have lunch in a room which allows confidentiality to be maintained. Therefore, It is not appropriate, for example, for the Panel to have lunch in an open cafeteria. The Panel will appreciate provision by the HEI of a simple lunch buffet from which the Panel Members will serve themselves. Provision of a vegetarian option is appreciated.

17.3.7 Prayer Facilities

Conveniently located prayer facilities are appreciated.

17.4 Evidence Deadline

The evidence deadline for the GFP Quality Audit is the date of the last day of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. In other words, no information that is created after that date may be included in the Panel's deliberations.

In the period following the GFP Quality Audit Visit, the Panel will be refining GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4 text. This is based on extensive cross-checking of preliminary findings against all the available evidence. During this time, the Panel may find that it requires further documentary evidence in order to finalise its conclusions. Therefore, it may request Additional Supporting Materials from the HEI for up to two weeks after the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. However, the Panel should ensure that it only seeks information where that information is necessary to help finalise its conclusions. It is not appropriate to use this time to raise new topics, because there is no further opportunity to fully saturate or triangulate such topics. Also, consistent with the evidence deadline, any material or information provided to the Panel in response to requests during these two weeks must have already existed before the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit.

18. THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT REPORT

18.1 Overview of GFP Quality Audit Reports

The GFP Quality Audit Report is a document prepared by the OAAA that presents the Panel's findings and conclusions about the effectiveness of the HEI's quality assurance systems for its GFP. It is the main output of the GFP Quality Audit process. The Report does not include a summative result such as a pass/fail, grade or score of any sort. Rather, it is a textual document that provides evaluative comments on a comprehensive range of issues in relation to the GFP and includes formal conclusions in the form of CARs (refer to Section 31.3). The GFP Quality Audit Report (with the Executive Summary in English or Arabic), which provides an overview of the Panel's findings, will be made publicly available on the OAAA website.

GFP Quality Audit Reports serve two purposes. Firstly, they provide a public account of the effectiveness of the systems by which the HEI assures the quality of its GFP activities. Secondly, they provide information useful to the HEI's ongoing quality improvement efforts in relation to its GFP, including instances where good practice should be celebrated.

18.2 The GFP Quality Audit Report as a Public Document

The GFP Quality Audit Report is a public document. GFP Quality Audit serves both public accountability and quality improvement purposes. The principle of public accountability demands a measure of public disclosure in order to be deemed valid by external stakeholders such as Government, families, employers and the international academic community.

Other information that will be made publicly available on the OAAA website includes the following:

- HEI's Name
- HEI's Classification and whether Public or Private
- Licensing Status
- Date of Institutional Quality Audit
- Institutional Quality Audit Report
- Institutional Standards Assessment Submission Date (including Institutional Standards Assessment Deferral where applicable)
- Accreditation Outcome
- Ratings of Institutional Standards Assessment for all standards and criteria
- Institutional Standards Reassessment Submission Date
 - *Pending*: indicates the OAAA is yet to commence the Institutional Standards Reassessment.
 - *Referred to the Education Council*: indicates the OAAA has not received an Institutional Standards Reassessment Application by the due date and the OAAA

has recommended to the Education Council that the HEI's license to operate as an HEI be revoked.

- Date of GFP Quality Audit
- GFP Quality Audit Report with the Executive Summary

18.3 GFP Quality Audit Report Table of Contents

A typical GFP Quality Audit Report will include:

- (a) Overview of GFP Quality Audit Process
This section, of about two pages, summarises the process and methods used by the OAAA and the GFP Quality Audit Panel.
- (b) Executive Summary of Findings
This is a summary of the major findings and conclusions in one or two pages. It is designed to provide a balanced summary and will be made available in English or Arabic.
- (c) Summary of Commendations
This is a list of the Commendations in the order in which they arise in the Report. They are presented under this section for ease of reference and are not prioritized. They will be made available in English or Arabic.
- (d) Summary of Affirmations
This is a list of the Affirmations in the order in which they arise in the Report. They are presented under this section for ease of reference and are not prioritized. They will be made available in English or Arabic.
- (e) Summary of Recommendations
This is a list of the Recommendations in the order in which they arise in the Report. They are presented under this section for ease of reference and are not prioritized. They will be made available in English or Arabic.
- (f) Substantive Sections
The precise structure of these sections will usually mirror the structure of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Scope, although the Panel reserves the right to modify it if necessary, for example, if the Panel believes that the Portfolio contained a major omission or that a section could be better responded to in two separate sections in the GFP Quality Audit Report.
- (g) Appendix A of the GFP Quality Audit Report: GFP Quality Audit Panel
This is a list of the Panel Members, their positions on the Panel and their primary work affiliations.
- (h) Appendix B of the GFP Quality Audit Report: Acronyms and Terms used in the Report

18.4 GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v1

This is written by the Review Director upon receipt of the preliminary comments from the Panel Members (refer to Section 15.2). The purpose of this skeletal draft is to set out the basic structure for the document and to incorporate key headings and likely topics. It is tabled at the Portfolio Meeting as an aid for the discussions.

18.5 GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v2

This is written by the Review Director after the Portfolio Meeting and before the GFP Quality Audit Visit. The purpose of this draft is to incorporate the Panel's discussions during the Portfolio Meeting and to provide an aid for the Panel Members during the GFP Quality Audit Visit and their ongoing review of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials.

An important reason for preparing GFP Quality Audit Report Drafts v1 and v2 prior to the GFP Quality Audit Visit is to ensure that appropriate emphasis is given to the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and Supporting Materials. The GFP Quality Audit Visit can be a very influential part of the process. However, care must be taken to ensure that it remains a mechanism for verifying the Portfolio rather than becoming the primary information source for the Panel's deliberations. Much of the evidence obtained during the GFP Quality Audit Visit is subjective and its value lies in its ability to corroborate or refute the Portfolio rather than as the primary information on which the Panel should base its deliberations. Panel Members will normally have been assigned responsibility for one or two areas of the GFP Quality Audit Scope following the Portfolio Meeting and Panel Members are expected to draft preliminary report text prior to the GFP Quality Audit Visit.

18.6 GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v3

Normally, on the third day of the GFP Quality Audit Visit, Panel Members are asked to reach consensus on preliminary conclusions, including CARs. On the last day of the GFP Quality Audit Visit, Panel Members are requested to build on the Report text developed by them prior to and during the Visit. This report text also provides an aid for the Panel Chairperson when presenting to the HEI at the Preliminary Feedback session. The Review Director then collates and edits text written by the Panel to ensure accuracy, sufficiency and that a coherent and consistent voice is used throughout the Report. The compiled and edited GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v3 is returned to all Panel Members asking them to check on whether the edits made by the Review Director accurately capture the essence of each Panel Member's original text and the overall findings of the Panel; the Review Director may ask for further input or seek clarification. Panel Members are also asked to read through the entire Report and comment on the text.

18.7 GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4

The Review Director prepares GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4 based on Panel Members' feedback on GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v3. The purpose of this draft is to formulate the main text and to precisely craft the CARs. It is also the first draft to include the 'Executive Summary of Findings' section. Once GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4 is completed, it is sent to the Panel Members for their comments. This will be the Panel's last chance to influence the GFP Quality Audit Report before it is sent as a draft to the HEI for comment.

GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4 undergoes comprehensive internal and, normally, external moderation. Moderation helps ensure the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v4 text is consistent with the OAAA GFP Quality Audit guidelines; is internally consistent in content across the different areas of scope; is professional and objective in tone; expresses clarity of thought and flow of ideas; and reflects international good practice in external assessment. External moderators sign an External Moderator's Declaration Form which requires them to acknowledge the GFP Quality Audit Report is strictly confidential and that they may not refer to any part of the OAAA GFP Quality Audit Report.

18.8 GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5

There are two features to this draft. Firstly, it incorporates the feedback following internal and external moderation. The Review Director will incorporate this feedback, and check with the Panel Chairperson whenever there is doubt about the changes or need for further clarification.

Once GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 is completed, it is forwarded to the HEI and the OAAA Board for comment.

18.8.1 HEI Feedback on GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5

The Review Director will provide the HEI with the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 and invite the HEI to make a submission to the Panel before the Report is finalised. The HEI response to the draft GFP Quality Audit Report is a vital part of the GFP Quality Audit Process. It provides HEIs with an opportunity to address any matters in the report that it believes are:

- Factual inaccuracies.
- Evidence used to highlight factual inaccuracies in the report must not post-date the last day of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. The evidence must exist during the GFP Quality Audit Visit; new policies, practices, data, etc., which have been developed after the GFP Quality Audit Visit are not permissible at this stage.
- Emphases or perspectives taken by the Panel which are unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and result in an unfair assessment.
- The omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the HEI.
- The GFP Quality Audit process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair and deviated from this Manual in a manner that had not been agreed to between the parties.

An HEI should not challenge contents in the GFP Quality Audit Report without providing clear evidence in support of their claims. The claims or opinions of a senior member of the HEI are unlikely, on their own, to constitute clear and convincing evidence.

The HEI's response to GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 is forwarded to the Panel for comment. The Panel's response to HEI's feedback is collated and analysed. Changes (if any) are made to the Report in order to produce GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v6. GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v6 is then forwarded to the OAAA Board for approval.

A template for the HEI's response to the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft is provided in Appendix R.

18.8.2 OAAA Board Feedback on GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5

Draft v5 is sent to the OAAA Board. This is the draft before the last draft and the purpose for giving it to the Board, at this stage, is to provide enough time for Board Members to give it sufficient consideration prior to final approval. Not having been involved in the GFP Quality Audit as such, Board Members do not comment on the interpretations and conclusions reached by the Panel (although they may query instances whether the findings are unclear or do not appear to be consistent with the supporting text). Board Members should direct their attention to the following:

- Were the policies and processes, as set out in this *GFP Quality Audit Manual*, properly applied?
- Is the Report's overall tone appropriate?
- Does the Report read coherently?
- Does the Report show appropriate understanding of the Omani context?
- Is there any content that may be legally actionable?
- Taken collectively, are the GFP Quality Audit Reports treating issues in a consistent and balanced manner?

Board Members should provide their feedback to the Review Director, who will then circulate it to the Panel.

18.9 GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v6

This is the final draft. Its purpose is to incorporate those changes requested by the HEI with which the Panel agrees, having considered the evidence and rationale, and the advice provided by Board Members. GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v6 is then submitted via the OAAA CEO, who conducts a final check, to the OAAA Board for approval. A confidential memo to the Board should accompany GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v6 outlining what changes were made in response to feedback from the HEI and the Board Members.

18.10 Public Reporting and Accountability

The GFP Quality Audit Report and the Executive Summary will be published on the OAAA website.

18.11 Releasing the Final GFP Quality Audit Report

The Review Director will, as soon as possible after OAAA Board approval, advise the HEI of the formal date on which the Final GFP Quality Audit Report will be publicly released. The HEI will be presented with 20 hard copies of the Final GFP Quality Audit Report ten days before the official public release of the Report. These copies must be treated as strictly confidential until the date of the Report's official public release by the OAAA. The purpose of providing copies to the HEI in advance is to:

- Provide the HEI with an opportunity to prepare its method for internally presenting the Report to its staff and stakeholders.
- Provide the HEI with an opportunity to prepare media releases.
- Give the HEI an opportunity to lodge an application for an appeal, if the HEI considers this to be necessary.

The GFP Quality Audit Report will be posted on the OAAA website²⁶ and with the Executive Summary in English or Arabic. Hard copies will also be forwarded from the OAAA Board to the following (this list is subject to amendments at the OAAA Board's discretion):

- The GFP Quality Audit Panel Members.
- Members of the Education Council.
- H.E. the Minister and Undersecretary of the supervising Ministry (if applicable).
- The relevant Director General of the supervising Ministry (if applicable).
- The Observer on the GFP Quality Audit Panel (if applicable).
- EQA Agencies with which the OAAA has a memorandum of understanding.

18.12 Media Management

Essentially, the GFP Quality Audit Report is the OAAA's public comment on the quality of the GFP and the GFP Quality Audit. The Chairperson of the OAAA Board and/or CEO may make further public statements on behalf of the OAAA, if necessary. The GFP Quality Audit Panel, Review Director, other OAAA staff and the Observer are not permitted to make any comments to the media.

The HEI may make its own comments about the GFP Quality Audit, but may not use the GFP Quality Audit Report in a misleading way or to publicly harm other HEIs.

Any disputes about the GFP Quality Audit will be addressed via the appeals process (refer to Section 19.2) and not in the media.

²⁶ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om>

18.13 In Confidence Matters

On rare occasions, an issue may arise during the GFP Quality Audit Visit which is so significant and so personally or commercially sensitive that it may need to be discussed at the highest level of the OAAA. In such cases, the Panel Chairperson and the Review Director shall discuss the matter with the Chairperson of the OAAA Board and CEO. Together, they may decide that it would be helpful for the Panel Chairperson and the Review Director to meet privately with the HEI CEO (or equivalent) to discuss the matter. Such private and confidential meetings are to be considered only as an exceptional circumstance and not as the norm. Its sole purpose is to assist the HEI with its ongoing improvement activities.

19. DISPUTES AND APPEALS

19.1 Disputes during the GFP Quality Audit

Every attempt should be made by the HEI and the Panel to ensure that the GFP Quality Audit is conducted in a positive and professional manner. However, it is possible that matters may arise during the process that give rise to a complaint.

19.1.1 Complaints by the HEI against the Panel

During the course of the GFP Quality Audit, and particularly during the GFP Quality Audit Visit, it is possible that the HEI may believe there are grounds to complain about the behaviour of the Panel (refer to OAAA Policy on Complaints against the OAAA²⁷). Grounds for such a complaint may include:

- An unnecessarily hostile or aggressive manner.
- Perceived breach of the confidentiality of particularly sensitive information.
- Unreasonable demands of the HEI by the Panel.

The objective of raising such issues should be to enable the GFP Quality Audit to proceed in a professional manner. In the first instance, the HEI should try to resolve any problems with the Panel as quickly and as informally as possible through discussions between the Contact Person and the Review Director. In most cases, positive and professional discussions are sufficient to resolve disputes. In the unlikely event that this does not occur, the Review Director may ask the OAAA CEO to intervene.

19.1.2 Complaints by the Panel against the HEI

During the course of the GFP Quality Audit, and particularly during the GFP Quality Audit Visit, it is possible that the Panel may believe that there are grounds to complain about the behaviour of the HEI. Grounds for such a complaint may include:

- Refusal to comply with reasonable requests for access to information, locations or people.
- Perceived coaching by the HEI designed to influence responses given by Interviewees.
- Perceived breach of the confidentiality of the Panel's information and deliberations.
- Any other perceived breach of the GFP Quality Audit Protocols (refer to Section 10).

The objective of raising such issues should be to enable the GFP Quality Audit to proceed in a professional manner. In the first instance, the Panel should try to resolve any problems with the HEI as quickly and as informally as possible through discussions between the Review Director and the Contact Person. In most cases, positive and professional discussions are sufficient to resolve disputes. In the unlikely event that this does not occur, the Review Director may ask the OAAA CEO to intervene.

²⁷ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#OAAAPolicy>

Given that the OAAA has a legal mandate to conduct its evaluation, any clear breach of the GFP Quality Audit Protocols or processes as set out in this manual may lead to the GFP Quality Audit being terminated early and/or associated comments being made in the GFP Quality Audit Report.

19.2 Appealing the GFP Quality Audit Report

There are many checkpoints in the GFP Quality Audit process designed to ensure that the Final GFP Quality Audit Report is a fair and reasonable account of the HEI's GFP. However, it is possible that the HEI may still believe that the Final GFP Quality Audit Report contains problems that are significant enough as to unfairly damage its reputation. In such cases, the HEI may apply for a formal appeal.

The grounds for appeal are:

- Significant factual inaccuracies that the HEI has already tried to correct by providing the appropriate evidence to the Panel.
- Emphases or perspectives taken by the Panel that are unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and result in an unbalanced report of a particular issue.
- The omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and results in an unbalanced GFP Quality Audit Report.
- The GFP Quality Audit process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair and deviated from this GFP Quality Audit Manual in a manner that had not been agreed to between the parties.

In order for the application to proceed to the Appeals Committee, the Chairperson of the Appeals Committee must be satisfied (without reaching a conclusion about the appeal itself) that:

- The matter is significant enough to have resulted in an unreasonable GFP Quality Audit Report. In other words, trivial issues will not be accepted for an appeal.
- The HEI has already attempted to correct the issue by providing the Panel with appropriate evidence during the normal course of the GFP Quality Audit. In other words, if the HEI did not provide the information before the deadline, then it cannot complain afterwards that the Panel reached an unfair conclusion.

The opportunity to apply for an appeal occurs up to ten working days from receipt by the HEI of its GFP Quality Audit Report. Upon receipt of an application for Appeal, the OAAA will defer publication of the GFP Quality Audit Report until either the application has been rejected without proceeding to the Appeals Committee or, if it is accepted, until the Appeals Committee has completed its deliberations. Even after publication of the GFP Quality Audit Report on the OAAA website, an HEI has the right to appeal the GFP Quality Audit Report up to 60 days from the time it is provided with the GFP Quality Audit Report by the OAAA.

The formal costs of convening an Appeals Committee are structured to ensure that applications for appeals are lodged with appropriate seriousness. The fee for lodging an appeal is non-refundable. The detailed process for an Appeal is available in the OAAA Policy on Appeals against External Quality Assurance Activities, Reports and Decisions²⁸ and Appeals Manual²⁹.

²⁸ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#OAAAPolicy>

²⁹ http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Appeals

20. AFTER THE GFP QUALITY AUDIT REPORT

20.1 Feedback on the GFP Quality Audit Process

The OAAA is interested in the continuous improvement of its own processes. Therefore, it will seek feedback from a variety of sources on each GFP Quality Audit.

20.2 GFP Quality Audit Panel Member Evaluations

After the GFP Quality Audit Report has been approved by the OAAA Board, the PSO will send each member of the Panel a GFP Quality Audit Panel Member Feedback Form (refer to Appendix S) seeking their feedback on the GFP Quality Audit Manual, Report and the process itself, as well as the support provided by the OAAA staff.

20.3 HEI Representative Evaluations

After the GFP Quality Audit Report has been publicly released, the OAAA will seek feedback from HEI representatives on this GFP Quality Audit Manual, the GFP Quality Audit process and the GFP Quality Audit Report. This feedback is an important means for the OAAA to ensure its GFP Quality Audit processes remain robust and appropriate (refer to Appendix T).

20.4 Review Director's Report

The Review Director should prepare a confidential report (two or three pages) providing an account of the GFP Quality Audit. The purpose of this report is to help the OAAA identify ways in which it can improve the GFP Quality Audit process. It should include the following:

- Suggested amendments to this GFP Quality Audit Manual and processes.
- Comments on the effectiveness of the Panel.
- Comments on the interactions with the HEI.

20.5 Debriefing Report

The OAAA CEO will draw together the feedback from the GFP Quality Audit Panel Member Feedback Forms, the interviews with the HEI Representatives and the Review Director's Report, along with any media on the GFP Quality Audit and any other relevant evaluative information, into a Debriefing Report. This will be submitted to the OAAA Board for consideration. Given that the Debriefing Report is likely to include information about individual people, it will be confidential and used for the OAAA's own improvement purposes³⁰.

20.6 Follow Up and Ongoing HEI Monitoring

It is the responsibility of the HEI to act upon its GFP Quality Audit Report. It is expected that HEIs will incorporate the Affirmations and Recommendations into quality improvement plans and respond to them in a timely fashion. The supervising Ministry of the HEI will wish to see these quality improvement plans and be kept informed of progress with its implementation. The OAAA does not have a role in the ongoing monitoring of HEIs.

20.7 Sharing Good Practice

Many issues are verified during GFP Quality Audits as being good practices and potentially beneficial to other HEIs. Some HEIs may be reluctant to share their good practices with other HEIs with which they may be in competition. However, the following should be borne in mind: if all HEIs participate, then each HEI, in return for sharing their own good practices, will have access to good practices from up to fifty other HEIs. This is a very good return on

³⁰ The OAAA itself will be subject to external review from time to time, in accordance with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (available from <http://www.inqaahe.org/guidelines-good-practice>).

investment. Also, HEIs deserve to be recognised for what they do well and this would provide an opportunity for such recognition.

PART E: METHODS OF ANALYSIS

21. CONCEPTS OF QUALITY

21.1 Fitness of Purpose and Fitness for Purpose

A fitness *for* purpose approach to external review means assessing the degree to which an HEI or program has fulfilled its stated intentions (e.g. Mission, Vision and goals). A fitness *of* purpose approach assesses whether the stated intentions of an HEI or program are adequate and appropriate.

Fitness of purpose is a term relating to whether or not an HEI's various statements of intent (Mission, Vision, goals, objectives, targets, etc.) are appropriate, bearing in mind its legal responsibilities, other contextual factors and its present capabilities and capacity. At the most basic level, this involves checking for alignment between an HEI's internal statements of intent and its legal requirements (such as applicable Royal Decrees, Ministerial ordinances and regulations as well as OQF). At a more detailed level, fitness of purpose checking considers whether the internal statements of intent are consistent with its stakeholders' needs and its organisational potential. It may also consider relevant national and international benchmarks. Most of these will be voluntary, but nonetheless provide examples of good practice.

The OAAA will consider fitness of purpose during its GFP Quality Audits³¹. The Panel may comment when it considers that an HEI has in place statements of intent that are either too lenient, overly ambitious or otherwise clearly inappropriate. However, the GFP Quality Audit is not a strategic review and the GFP Quality Audit Report will not attempt to set out a new Strategic Plan for the HEI in relation to its GFP. Such a purpose would require the use of different tools and techniques (such as environmental scanning, futures studies, goal testing, etc.) than are used for quality auditing. OAAA respects that it is the responsibility of each HEI to set its own Strategic Plan within the overall higher education framework set by the Government.

Fitness for purpose is a term relating to whether or not an HEI's resources, strategies and processes are appropriate for the accomplishment of its statements of intent related to its GFPs and are proving to be effective. This is an important focus of GFP Quality Audit and is determined using, mainly, the ADRI method of evaluation (refer to Section 25). It is important to note that this is not just about evaluating processes. The ADRI method attempts to ensure that an issue in relation to an HEI's GFP is explored in a fully comprehensive manner.

21.2 Quality in Absolute Terms

Many people will be less interested in whether an HEI has appropriate intentions and effective processes and be primarily concerned with whether its results are of 'good quality' or not. This would require comparing the results against some form of benchmark, whether that be a national (or international) standard, a group average or some specific notion of 'best practice'.

It will be the role of GFP accreditation (refer to Section 3) to determine whether a GFP in Oman meets the revised national standards for GFP. In order for these standards to satisfy international stakeholders (such as foreign HEIs where Omani students may wish to continue their studies), they need to be set with international benchmarks in mind.

³¹ In some countries, fitness of purpose is not included in the scope of quality audits because there are other mechanisms (such as renewable charters agreed between a HEI and its MoHE) for considering fitness of purpose.

23 METHODOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SELF-STUDY AND EXTERNAL REVIEW

The methods of analysis presented in this Manual may be useful for the GFP Self-Study and for external review purposes. However, there are some important differences.

23.1 Internal vs External Mandate

The most obvious difference is that the HEI's internal reviewers involved in the GFP Self-Study ultimately report to the HEI CEO, whereas the Panel Members on the GFP Quality Audit report to the OAAA. All reviewers, however, whether HEI staff or Panel Members, are expected to respect the impartiality and independence of the GFP Quality Audit process. This will assist the HEI with the goal of producing a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio that will help ensure there are no surprises in the Final GFP Quality Audit Report.

23.2 Story Creation vs Story Verification

The purpose of the GFP Self-Study is to create/write the story of the GFP. This will involve the collection, aggregation, analysis and interpretation of primary data. This will often involve a substantial amount of quantitative and qualitative analysis and interpretation. Primary data might include student assignments, survey responses, answers to interview questions, enrolment records, etc.

The purpose of external review, on the other hand, is to verify that the story told in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio is a fair and comprehensive assessment of the GFP. Therefore, external review relies on information produced once the primary data has already been collected, analysed and interpreted. The Panel will usually only access primary data as a means of verifying the integrity of the aggregated analysis. For example, the Panel will not disaggregate and analyse GFP student feedback surveys – that is the HEI's job – but it may ask to see a sample of survey responses just to verify that they exist in the form described.

23.3 All Issues vs Samples Issues

The GFP Self-Study must cover all the areas of an HEI's activity related to its GFP (i.e. the normal responsibility of the HEI's management of its GFP). External review, on the other hand, will select samples of issues and samples of evidence to verify the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio (refer to Section 27).

23.4 Assumptions

HEI internal reviewers involved in a GFP Self-Study will likely have an in-depth knowledge of the GFP and its context. This manifests itself in a variety of ways such as knowledge of recent and significant historical events, terms and acronyms commonly used within the HEI, reasons why things are done in a certain way and awareness of key personalities.

Panel Members involved in the external review do not start with an in-depth understanding of the GFP or its context. They will not share those understandings which internal reviewers may take for granted. For this reason, the HEI must take care to ensure that the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio is self-explanatory to an external audience.

24 OBTAINING A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE GFP

In order to conduct an effective, contextualized GFP Quality Audit, it is necessary to first obtain an overall understanding of the HEI. This applies equally to GFP Self-Study and to external review. Even though the internal reviewers involved in the Self-Study know their own organisation, the development of a shared overview of the GFP is a worthwhile exercise.

The first section of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio should be a general overview of the HEI (refer to Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2). This should contain enough information to give the Panel a reasonable understanding of what the HEI is all about. Panel Members may wish to augment this with their own further study, including a review of the HEI's website and, particularly for international Panel Members, a review of information about Oman and the higher education system in Oman. In doing so, it is important that Panel Members do not engage in audit activities – especially interviews and discussions – outside of the formal GFP Quality Audit process. This is to ensure that the activities of the OAAA are, themselves, properly quality assured through the application of the policies and processes set out in this GFP Quality Audit Manual.

25 ADRI³²

GFP Quality Audit Panels are required to use ADRI³³, a four step cyclical model comprising consideration of Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement (ADRI) in coming to its conclusions. The ADRI model can be applied to an analysis of any given topic. It is an evidence-based method of determining:

Approach:.....what the HEI aims to achieve for that topic and how it proposes to achieve these aims.

Deployment:.....whether the plans are being followed in practice, and if not, why not.

Results:.....the evidence of whether the Approach and Deployment are effective in achieving the intended outputs and outcomes for a topic.

Improvement:...how the HEI is reviewing its Approach and Deployment in order to make improvements to them that may lead to better Results.

For a given topic at any point in time, an HEI may be strong in some dimensions of ADRI and not necessarily in others which is well understood. Quality improvement is a continuous cycle of improvement. A fundamental assumption of quality management is that even the best practices need to continue getting better, because the world does not stand still.

25.1 Starting the ADRI Analysis

The first step in conducting an ADRI analysis is to select and define the topic. ADRI can be used to analyse anything that an HEI does. ADRI can be applied at the micro level (i.e. to specific, well defined issues often directed by an objective or target). An example would be “GFP Student Evaluations of Teaching”. It can also be applied at the macro level (i.e. to larger, aggregated issues often directed by a broad aim or goal). An example would be “GFP Teaching Effectiveness”, which involves many related issues such as instructional design, peer review, student evaluations and professional development.

25.2 Approach

The Approach may also be thought of as the intentions that the HEI has in relation to the issue under analysis and it takes two forms:

³² An OAAA's Training Module on ADRI, including a presentation and handouts, is available at:

<http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Training.aspx#Train>

³³ Derived from Deming's (1986) PDSA cycle (Plan→Do→Study→Act); originally attributed to Walter Shewhart (1980).

What is the HEI trying to do?

These statements of intent take many forms, ranging from the highest strategic levels to the lowest operational levels of the GFP. They include:

- Mission statement (i.e. the highest level purpose that the HEI serves)
- Vision statement (i.e. how the HEI and its targeted stakeholders will have changed in the long term as a result of the HEI successfully achieving its Mission)
- Values (i.e. what the HEI holds dear, e.g. academic freedom, collegiality, the advancement of knowledge, etc.)
- Aims and Goals (broadly, what the HEI aims to achieve)
- Objectives (a more specific definition of its intended achievements)
- Targets (a measurable expression of its objectives)
- Policies, procedures and guidelines (rules by which the HEI operates)
- Plans (identifying objectives)

These statements of intent will be found in a variety of sources – and sometimes they will conflict with each other. Reviewers (internal or external) should undertake a wide search of such materials to ensure that a complete understanding of the intention is attained.

Typical source materials related to its GFP include:

- HEI Strategic Plan;
- Operational Plans;
- Website related to the GFP;
- Minutes of GFP Committees;
- Directives issued from the HEI CEO for the GFP;
- Less formal memos from the HEI CEO or other heads;
- Verbal statements from appropriate authorities; and
- Advertising materials for GFP students.

25.3 Deployment

Statements of intent remain exactly that until they are put into effect. The next step is to deploy those intentions. In other words, do the plans happen in reality? This is sometimes also known as ‘implementation’, ‘processes’ or, most simply, ‘do’.

There are several ways for investigating Deployment. One of the most effective is to hold discussions with people, such as in interviews, focus groups or departmental meetings. The idea is to explore people’s ‘lived experiences’ to see if they align with the plans and manuals. Another way of investigating Deployment is to check whether the planned resources are actually in place and of appropriate quantity and quality.

25.4 Results

Quality cannot be determined by focusing on the goals, plans, inputs and processes only. There must be an emphasis on what is actually achieved, i.e. the Results. In general, every goal must have a reported result (or multiple results) and vice-versa, i.e. every result should link back to a goal. It is important that a causal relationship can be shown between the Approach, Deployment and the eventual Results, otherwise the result may be just chance, with no guarantee that the HEI understands how to influence future ones.

In an accreditation process, Results are compared against externally set standards. For GFP Quality Audit, however, the Results are interpreted in the context of the HEI’s own Mission and statements of intent in relation to the GFP. What is important is that the HEI’s quality assurance and enhancement processes are effective in the GFP.

Results may be either quantitative or qualitative (or both). It is not essential that every result be numerical, although it is essential that every result be measurable. The HEI will need to ensure that it has produced the appropriate type of result for the statement of intent to which it refers. Also, for some goals the results presented may be aggregated from the results of its component objectives. This may involve combining various different types of data. Care must be taken to ensure that such results remain valid and reliable.

25.5 Improvement

This dimension looks at what an HEI knows about itself in order to get better and better. It may be thought of as the quality enhancement aspect of ADRI and is one of the most important distinctions between GFP Quality Audit and GFP Accreditation.

The fundamental assumption of this dimension is that an HEI ought to be *continually* reviewing its GFP activities and looking for ways to improve. Targets should be recalibrated each time; processes should become more efficient and more effective over time; Results should indicate increasing success. This requires a comprehensive system of review – not just consideration of Results.

26 BENCHMARKING³⁴

Several areas of the GFP Quality Audit Scope (refer to Part B) relate to benchmarking of practice and activities against the practices and activities of other HEIs sharing a similar context. The following discussion describes the key steps used to benchmark outcomes.

- **Identify the topic to be benchmarked.** An HEI should not try and benchmark everything at the same time. It should focus on those areas it wants to know how well it is performing in comparison to GFPs of other similar HEIs. For benchmarking to be successful, first, the HEI must study its own side. The HEI should conduct a review of the topic in terms of ADRI (refer to Section 25). Examples of Approach and Deployment information include plans, resources (especially financial resources and staff), training, manuals and processes. The process may involve an exchange of materials and reciprocal visits. Joint meetings will also be required. It should not be assumed that if you give someone your data it will be interpreted in the same way as it is by you.
- **Determine the goal.** Determine the planned method, what happens in practice and what your results are.
- **Find potential benchmarking partners from within the sector, nationally or internationally.** It is best to establish partnerships with other HEIs which are a similar size, have a similar Mission, offer a similar GFP or cater to a similar student characteristics, regional or remote location, etc. HEIs should not get too worried about exact matches – there is no such thing. However, partners ought to be similar enough for comparisons to be meaningful. Approach these partners and ask if they are interested in conducting confidential, informal benchmarking. Benchmarking partners should not be limited to the HE sector but may also include cross-industry comparisons.
- **Establish a formal Memorandum of Understanding.** The aim of benchmarking is not to gather commercially confidential information but to share data and learnings which the data may reveal. The agreement should outline project details such as topic/s, contact people, method, timeframe and cost sharing arrangements. It is also important to establish rules regarding how the information will be treated, such as whether confidentiality is

³⁴ This section is based on OAAA's Training Module on Benchmarking which is available at: http://www.oaaa.gov.om/QualityTraining/Handout/09v1_handout.pdf

required, how the information is to be stored and disposed of, and how the information will be used.

- **Identify performance gaps.** This happens by comparing results, using both quantitative and qualitative data as well as other information. Negotiate what data and information collection methods will be used, e.g. common metrics or conducting totally new surveys. Focus on comparing results and determine who has the best results. Your next step is to find out why one partner has better results than the other. The key phrase in benchmarking is *adapt* then *adopt*. In other words, you may need to modify their superior practices to ensure they will work in your particular institutional context.

It is anticipated that the GFP Quality Audit will result in significant benchmarking activities throughout the HEI sector in Oman. The MoHE has also established a set of KPI data which can provide national comparative data in a number of areas. In order to ensure ongoing preparedness, HEIs could consider establishing informal benchmarking clubs with three or four other Omani HEIs and their GFPs then compare results against the KPI data. The purpose of these clubs is to improve one's own best practice by finding and learning from others. HEIs are also encouraged to establish relationships with overseas HEIs and use these relationships to support international competitiveness.

27 SAMPLING

HEIs are complex organisations and can sometimes be quite large. An HEI is expected to conduct a comprehensive Self-Study that addresses all its major areas of activity related to its GFP. While this is a major undertaking, it is also the clear obligation of HEI management – with or without the prompting of external GFP Quality Audit.

In the case of the external GFP Quality Audit Panel, which has a small number of people and a limited amount of time and access to the HEI, it is not feasible to explore every issue in detail. Therefore, the Panel will use *sampling* to make the task more manageable. Two things are sampled: issues and evidence.

27.1 Sampled Issues

The GFP Quality Audit Panel will select a sample of issues, spread across all the main areas of activity (in other words, the Panel will address all the main headings but not every topic under each heading). In making the decision over which issues to select for its sample, the Panel should bear in mind that the Final GFP Quality Audit Report should provide an overall, balanced account of the HEI. Therefore, it should include those issues which are most fundamental to the HEI's Mission (a GFP Quality Audit Report without mention of teaching would be unacceptable), along with major issues of concern, major strengths and significant innovations or unique features.

A Panel should always start with a larger sample of issues than may end up in the Final GFP Quality Audit Report. This is because some topics, upon investigation, will be unremarkable or inconclusive. Similarly, topics may arise during the course of the GFP Quality Audit, and particularly during the GFP Quality Audit Visit, which were not included in the original sample but which seem to be significant. The Panel may choose to add to, or amend, its sample of topics at any time. However, it must bear in mind that an issue introduced late in the process will still need to be thoroughly investigated (including the use of *Triangulation* – refer to Section 29.2) before it can be included in the Final GFP Quality Audit Report. For that reason, a Panel may request Additional Supporting Materials during and up to two weeks after the end of the GFP Quality Audit Visit (refer to Section 15.4).

27.2 Sampled Evidence

The Panel will also select a sample of evidence (including materials and people to interview). Clearly, the Panel cannot meet everyone and consider every document or artefact. The most obvious application of evidence sampling are when the Panel decides:

- who to invite to interviews;
- which administrative departments to investigate; and
- which documents to consider (e.g. policies, course files, review reports, etc.).

The sampling choices are at the Panel's discretion; although they should be discussed with the HEI during the Planning Visit to ensure that they will best meet the Panel's needs (refer to Section 15.5).

28 TYPES OF EVIDENCE AND DATA ANALYSIS

A GFP Quality Audit is not a court case. The conclusions in the GFP Quality Audit Report are not based on whether the evidence is incontrovertible, but rather are based on the professional judgments of peers (the GFP Quality Audit Panel Members) based on careful consideration of all the available evidence. GFP Quality Audit does not assume that there is a single correct way in which something should be done, nor that there is only a single correct interpretation of an organisational situation. Instead, it endeavours to reach credible, balanced and helpful conclusions that provide an authoritative account to the public and a constructive way forward for the HEI in relation to its GFP.

To achieve that goal, it is helpful to consider the wide range of evidence and a number of tools for collecting, analysing and interpreting the evidence. This Manual does not intend to be fully comprehensive on these topics, but it presents some relevant comments.

28.1 Authority to Access Information

A GFP Quality Audit Panel has the authority to access any information (other than legally protected/privileged information) that it deems necessary to fulfil its responsibilities under the Royal Decree (54/2010) establishing the OAAA (refer to Section 10.5).

28.2 Using Statistics

One of the most powerful means for communicating information about an HEI's performance is to present statistics³⁵.

The OAAA offers the following advice about presenting and interpreting statistics in GFP Quality Audit Portfolios:

- Statistical results should be reported against targets to assist with their interpretation.
- Statistics should be presented as trends of five years. It is accepted that HEIs will not always have a five year history to report, but the trend should at least be commenced.
- Where possible, ratios or percentages should be used instead of raw numbers, which are difficult to interpret.
- Panel Members will be trained to critically assess statistics in terms of what has been included and omitted. It is often the omission of information that is most revealing.

³⁵ Some suggestions on this are provided in OAAA's Training Module 'Using Statistics in Reporting – An Introduction to Reporting Descriptive Statistics' which is available at: http://www.oaaa.gov.om/QualityTraining/Handout/04v2_handout.pdf

- The HEI should be prepared to defend the relevance, accuracy, validity and reliability of any statistics in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio.

28.3 Case Studies and Examples

A common and effective method of reporting complex issues in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio is to present case studies or examples (instances). This is especially helpful for information that cannot be easily summarized using statistics, graphs, tables or figures.

When using case studies or examples, an HEI must take care to ensure that the instance presented is genuinely representative of the issue being reported (unless it is expressly intended to denote the exception) and that there are other instances that could be produced should the Panel request them. In other words, if there is only one instance of an issue, then this must not be presented as being representative of a broader set of instances.

Sometimes, case studies are used to demonstrate processes that involve individual staff or students, such as disciplinary procedures, grievances or appeals. In such cases, care should be taken to ensure that individuals will not be harmed or embarrassed by using the case study (for example: it will usually be appropriate to avoid using individuals' names or other identifying information).

28.4 Date Stamping Evidence

Many forms of evidence are dynamic. They may change over time and even during the course of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. This can make point-in-time auditing extremely difficult, because the evidence may change during the course of the Panel's deliberations, meaning that findings can be disproved. Therefore, it is essential that techniques are used for confirming the date (and, sometimes, the time) when the evidence was collected. There are several techniques for doing this and they are collectively known as 'date stamping'.

The forms of evidence most at risk of changing during the GFP Quality Audit are websites and other online items. If a Panel Member finds a website that will be used as reference material for a finding in the GFP Quality Audit Report, then they should print the page as a PDF or Microsoft Office Document Image file or similar and save it in the GFP Quality Audit Folder (refer to Section 15.1). These file formats should automatically include a date stamp in the document footer.

Another form of evidence prone to change is the verbal comments made during interviews. The most effective means by which the Panel can ensure that it accurately captures verbal comments is by recording them at the time using the Interview Worksheets.

28.5 Evaluating New Processes

HEIs are usually motivated to address a range of problems before the GFP Quality Audit occurs. In part, this is to minimise the number of critical comments in the public GFP Quality Audit Report and maximise the positive comments. Ideally, HEIs ought to be committed to making improvements with or without GFP Quality Audits. However, the OAAA is supportive of an HEI using the GFP Quality Audit to gain additional momentum for its improvement efforts.

One consequence of this phenomenon is that Panels will often find quality assurance processes that appear sound but are, in fact, brand new. It is not uncommon for an HEI to feel embarrassed about admitting that the process is new, hoping instead that the Panel will simply accept it as the HEI's standard practice.

It is advised that HEIs are up front about the recent history of their quality assurance activities related to their GFPs. If a policy or process is brand new, then certainly the Panel

cannot reach positive conclusions about its Deployment or subsequent Results, as these may not yet have come into effect. However, it may well reach positive conclusions about Improvement and Approach, in that the HEI clearly identified OFI and did something about. This demonstrates quality management in practice.

At any point in time for a given GFP area of activity, an HEI will be strong in some aspects of ADRI and not so strong in others. This is normal, and is a forward-looking feature of GFP Quality Audits that is in contrast to accreditation which instead assesses whether an HEI is meeting minimum standards at a given point in time.

Of course, it is inappropriate for all the processes to be brand new. If a topic – such as the development of a GFP Operational Plan – is permanently in its development stages and is never actually achieved, then this is not good quality management – quite the opposite.

28.6 GFP Quality Audit Visits and Observations

Most of the GFP Quality Audit Visit will be spent conducting interviews in a designated Panel Room. There is only a limited amount of time during the GFP Quality Audit Visit and it is best spent talking with people rather than walking from venue to venue. However, there may be some opportunities for Panel Members to visit locations and make observations. In each GFP Quality Audit Visit, one or more sessions may be designated as in situ interviews. In conducting these interviews, Panel Members will have a specific and relevant plan for what they wish to see, rather than a random site visit.

29 GAINING A COMPREHENSIVE PICTURE

Conclusions should never be reached based on single items of evidence. Most issues are complex and arriving at a defensible conclusion will involve comprehensive consideration of the issue. Three strategies for achieving this are saturation, triangulation and process mapping.

29.1 Saturation

The existence of an issue does not necessarily mean that the issue is systematic or endemic. For example, a GFP staff member who expresses satisfaction to the Panel about professional development opportunities at the HEI does not constitute evidence that the majority of staff are satisfied about the professional development opportunities.

Saturation is a method whereby a Panel explores an issue until no new information about it comes to light. During the GFP Quality Audit Visit, this is achieved by asking the same (or similar) questions to several different groups of people until a clear theme emerges from the responses.

It is not always necessary to obtain saturation of an issue. Sometimes, the mere presence of an issue is sufficient. For example, if an HEI claims that all classrooms have fixed data projectors and the Panel discovers one that doesn't, then the HEI's statement has been disproved. However, the exception may or may not be particularly important. In general, it is better for Panel Members to seek as much corroborating evidence as possible in order to have greater confidence in the importance of the findings.

29.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is a method whereby analysis is strengthened using a combination of the following:

- multiple original sources of data (e.g. students, staff, management, external stakeholders, authoritative references and benchmarks);
- multiple methods of data collection (e.g. surveys, interviews, observations, internal documents, literature and statistics); and
- different types of data (e.g. objective and subjective; qualitative and quantitative).

Limitations in data types, sources and methods of collection can lead to poor conclusions being reached on any given issue. However, by using a combination of the above, the potential for such problems can be reduced. This is important to help ensure that the conclusions reviewers reach are fair and balanced.

An HEI should not present information in its GFP Quality Audit Portfolio that has not been adequately triangulated. Similarly, a Panel should not present findings in the GFP Quality Audit Report that have not been adequately triangulated. Triangulation is deemed adequate when there is sufficient corroborative evidence to provide confidence that the issue has been accurately and comprehensively understood.

29.3 Process Mapping

One way of obtaining a comprehensive overview of a complex process is to visually describe it using process mapping³⁶ techniques. This can be a very powerful tool and will be particularly helpful to HEIs wishing to fully understand their processes; however it can also be a useful tool for Panels, albeit used in a less complex form, to draw the key stages/players of a process and the relationships between these stages/players.

30 CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a key feature of the GFP Quality Audit Visit. They provide an opportunity for the Panel to clarify issues, check for completeness and accuracy of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio as well as potential discrepancies and pursue lines of enquiry in greater depth.

30.1 The Interviewees' Perspective

30.1.1 Before the Interview

People have many different reactions to participating in an interview session for a GFP Quality Audit. The experience can be enjoyable or frightening, interesting or boring, easy or daunting. The following are some ways in which the HEI can help people prepare for their interviews:

- Provide a copy of the Information for GFP Quality Audit Interviewees for the HEI staff and students (refer to Appendices N and O).
- Provide a copy of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio sufficiently in advance so that they will have had an opportunity to read it.
- Provide a briefing on the process and what to expect.
- Assure them that their participation will not be monitored.

30.1.2 During the Interview and Responding to Questions

The following are some tips for Interviewees to think about during the interview itself (HEIs may wish to print and circulate these to Interviewees as part of a briefing):

³⁶ Some suggestions are provided in OAAA's Training Module 'Process Mapping' which is available at: www.oaaa.gov.om/enhancement/training

- Relax! The Panel is professional and genuinely wants to hear your views.
- The Panel will ensure that everybody is given an opportunity to speak.
- The interview is not a test – you cannot pass or fail. If you do not know the answer to a question, just say so. This is a much better option than guessing.
- Feel free to seek clarification about any questions that are asked in order to help provide an answer (in other words, it is fine to ask “what do you mean by...?”).
- It is inappropriate to seek information about the Panel’s preliminary views (including questions like “why do you ask that?”).
- You may receive a question that does not obviously fit within your area of responsibility. Try and answer it anyway – the Panel probably knows this and asked you deliberately to test how widespread an issue is.
- Sometimes, you may feel that you are better placed to respond to a question than the person to whom it was put. The Panel may have done this deliberately; or, if they want the ‘authoritative’ answer, may not have known the most appropriate person to ask. You will not know which of these applies, so the best strategy is not to interject until the person asked the question has had an opportunity to provide a response and then seek the Panel Chairperson’s permission to provide another response.
- The interview time is limited so answers should be kept as concise as possible.
- Do not try to present the Panel with materials. If you have some that you think are important for the Panel to have, you can convey this to the Contact Person and mention them to the Panel during the interview. If the Panel wishes to consider these materials, it will make a formal request for them from the Contact Person through the Review Director.

30.1.3 After the Interview

It is common for Interviewees to be left with two distinct impressions after their session, both of which require discussion.

Firstly, it is normal for Interviewees to believe that they did not have sufficient time to say everything that they wanted to say. GFP Quality Audit Visits are intensive periods during which the Panel must cover a wide range of topics in sufficient depth.

Secondly, Interviewees often feel that the Panel focused too much on process (i.e. Deployment) and not enough on actual Results. It is important for Interviewees to understand that the Panel is seeking information on each topic from a variety of sources. Results are usually available in formal reports and similar printed formats. On the other hand, what people actually do each day is not easily documented and is best explored by asking people about their ‘lived experience’.

30.2 The GFP Quality Audit Panel Members’ Perspective

Interviews will yield primarily subjective information, sometimes called people’s ‘lived experience’. This is valuable in testing whether the situations described in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio are generally reflected in practice.

30.2.1 Before the Interview

Immediately before the interview there are some tasks to complete:

- Check who the next group is and update the attendee list via the Review Director.
- Quickly recap the key theme and issues for the session, including reviewing the relevant documents.
- Finalise the list of lead questions, including making any changes that may arise as a result of information already gathered.

- Organise who will ask which questions.
- Decide if there are particular people to whom certain questions should be put (i.e. is the Panel seeking the 'authoritative' answer or testing for pervasiveness).

30.2.2 During the Interview

The Panel Chairperson should start with a welcome and quick introductions.

The Panel should strive to create an atmosphere conducive to constructive discourse. To that end, Panel Members should act as colleagues and peers of the Interviewees, rather than inspectors. Setting the right tone and approaching Interviewees with tact and diplomacy can help to ensure questioning elicits useful and honest responses.

The interview sessions are an opportunity for the Panel to ask a series of questions. Good questioning technique is an art and a science. There are some specific techniques to use and some to avoid, but ultimately the Panel must use its best judgment in ensuring that the desired information is being obtained, whilst maintaining a positive, friendly and professional atmosphere. Questioning technique is covered extensively during OAAA External Reviewer Training Program (refer to Section 12.1.3).

30.2.3 Questioning Techniques to Include

Panel Members will be aware of a range of questioning techniques which can be effectively used in interview sessions. The way questions are asked will shape the answers given.

One useful approach is to practice the technique of 'funnelling' which involves using an open question to begin with, followed by asking a probe question to explore the issue or topic in further depth. Closed questions (e.g. those requiring a yes/no or one word answer) can be used to restate or clarify answers to open or probe questions. Using a variety of question types will provide opportunities for both divergent and convergent inquiry. Panel Members are also advised to phrase questions succinctly in order to make the best use of the questioning time available.

Experienced External Reviewers understand the importance of demonstrating active listening skills. These can be demonstrated both verbally and through the use of body language. Blocks to effective listening include being easily distracted, 'switching off' when an Interviewee is talking or being too absorbed in note-taking. Combining the use of a range of questioning techniques, active listening and observation ensures the effectiveness of the interview sessions.

Some questions are designed to seek confirmation about the official or authoritative view on a topic. However, there may be a difference between how the HEI intends something to happen and what actually happens in practice. Therefore, the Panel may sometimes ask an Interviewee a question not directly related to their role. The Interviewees may be tempted to avoid responding by asking for the question to be put to someone who appears to be more appropriate. However, it is a deliberate tactic by the Panel to determine the extent to which a relevant GFP policy or process is understood throughout the HEI.

30.2.4 Questioning Techniques to Avoid

If not handled properly, there are some problems that can arise during interview sessions:

- Valuable time can be wasted.
- Important information can be overlooked.
- The GFP Quality Audit Panel can convey an inappropriate message to the HEI.

In order to ensure that these problems do not arise, there are some techniques that the Panel should avoid. These include Panel Members:

- Asking multiple questions. This can become too difficult for the Interviewee.
- Making speeches or using wordy preamble to questions. Sometimes it is necessary to provide context for a question, but this must be kept to the minimum to ensure that time is not wasted hearing from the interviewer instead of the Interviewee.
- Detailing the situation in their own organisation. This is entirely inappropriate, because it conveys the message that the HEI and its GFP is being compared arbitrarily with the Panel Member's current or former institution rather than against the HEI GFP's own context and statements of intent.
- Offering suggestions or advice. The only place where the GFP Quality Audit Panel may offer suggestions or advice is in the GFP Quality Audit Report and then only in a manner consistent with the overall objectives of the GFP Quality Audit.
- Thinking about the next question instead of listening to the current answer. The objective of interview sessions is to focus on receiving useful answers, rather than getting through as many questions as possible.

The GFP Quality Audit Visit Program provides opportunities for the GFP Quality Audit Panel to debrief after every interview. Time is limited and the discussion should be very focused on the key points that arose from the interview, in terms of whether they:

- Confirmed or contradicted other evidence.
- Raise issues that require further corroboration (and if so, by what means?).
- Finalised the GFP Quality Audit Panel's information gathering on a particular topic.

30.2.5 After the Interview

Some HEIs may wish to debrief with their Interviewees after each interview session. There can be some benefits in allowing people to unwind together after a formal interview. However, the HEI must ensure that it does not use this as an opportunity to contravene the GFP Quality Audit Protocols (refer to Section 10), especially the Undue Influence (refer to Section 10.2) and the Non-Attribution Rule (refer to Section 10.3).

31 REACHING CONCLUSIONS

31.1 Report Writing Day

The GFP Quality Audit Visit will include a Report Writing Day. No interviews are scheduled on this day. The Review Director may request the Contact Person to provide Additional Supporting Materials to assist the Panel to reach informed conclusions.

31.2 Conclusions for the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio

As has been stated previously, the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio is not just a descriptive account of the GFP but it is also an evaluative account. Each section may conclude with Areas of Strength and OFI that have been determined through the Self-Study process.

31.2.1 Areas of Strength

The Self-Study process will identify a number of areas in which the HEI's GFP can be justifiably proud. These will be issues where the ADRI analysis proved that a process was proving effective in achieving the intended Results. By formally designating Areas of Strength, the HEI signals to the Panel issues which it particularly wishes to have verified as potential good practice.

There is no rule about the number of Areas of Strength to be included in a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. Provided that they are supported by the evidence, a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio may contain many formally designated Areas of Strength. However, HEIs would be wise to remember that claims require evidence; impressive claims require impressive evidence.

Two examples of Areas of Strength follow (in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, each Area of Strength must be preceded by text which explains and justifies the finding):

Area of Strength 1

College X has an effective system for GFP review conducted by the GFP and Quality Assurance Department that incorporates student evaluations, teacher reflections and academic program staff input, which leads to course improvements.

Area of Strength 2

College X provides excellent support for students transitioning into higher education which results in improved student retention in the higher education programs.

31.2.2 Opportunities for Improvement (OFI)

One result of a Self-Study is the identification of issues which are in need of particular attention because they are unsatisfactory in some or all aspects of ADRI. These should be formally identified in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio in a way that demonstrates the HEI's understanding of the issue and its commitment to taking appropriate action in response.

There are two advantages of identifying OFI. The first is that it is simply in the best interests of the HEI in its ongoing quality improvement activities. The second is that if the Panel agrees with the HEI's findings, then it will issue a confirmatory Affirmation. Affirmations provide public support for the HEI's demonstration of quality assurance in practice. If, on the other hand, the Panel identifies OFI which have not been identified and/or reported by the HEI, then it is likely to issue a Recommendation.

Two examples of OFI follow (in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, each OFI must be preceded by text which explains and justifies the finding):

OFI 1

College X needs to implement a systematic approach to analysing and acting upon the feedback received from its GFP student surveys.

OFI 2

College X needs to review the alignment between professional development opportunities and its performance appraisal system to ensure that the needs of GFP teaching staff are met.

31.3 Conclusions for the GFP Quality Audit Report

The GFP Quality Audit Report is an integrated, qualitative document that should be read as a whole rather than in selected passages. However, it is helpful to highlight specific issues using formal CARs. Each CAR should be a single, succinct sentence that summarises the key point. CARs are often quoted and so need to be complete statements independent of the surrounding text. Examples are provided in the following sections.

31.3.1 Evidence-Based Decision Making

Panels are encouraged to work towards consensus, but not necessarily unanimous agreement, on key findings. Reaching consensus is a process whereby the Panel explores these differing conclusions and the supporting evidence for each, and then makes a decision based upon a

thorough analysis and discussion. Different types of evidence should be considered including objective and subjective evidence. Lack of data does not necessarily mean that the analysis is incomplete. Requests for Additional Supporting Materials should be made by the Panel in order to arrive at carefully considered conclusions.

31.3.2 Commendations

The Panel is interested in finding out not only where a GFP needs to improve, but also where it is doing things particularly well. Formal Commendations are appropriate where the HEI has accurately analysed the issue; and either

- The Results are meeting or exceeding appropriate goals and objectives (especially for practices that are common within the sector); and/or
- Significant Improvement can be demonstrated (especially for practices which are innovative).

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice. Commendations are not issued lightly. Claims require evidence; impressive claims require impressive evidence. Commendations are unlikely to be issued for the Approach and Deployment of a topic in the absence of supporting Results and Improvement, because the evidence would not prove that the Approach and Deployment are effective.

Commendations are used by HEIs, appropriately, for public promotion purposes. For that reason, it is essential that the Panel has confidence that any Commendation is likely to remain valid for a reasonable period of time following the release of the GFP Quality Audit Report. For example, an issue which appears excellent but it is scheduled for termination or substantial modification should not receive a Commendation. Similarly, an issue which appears excellent but it is not currently protected from foreseeable risks should not receive a Commendation.

Two examples of Commendations follow. Note that in the GFP Quality Audit Report each one must be preceded by text which explains and justifies the finding.

Commendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends College X for developing and implementing an Operational Plan for GFP which successfully supports its delivery.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends College X for successfully implementing a peer mentoring system for GFP academic staff that has resulted in improved student satisfaction.

31.3.3 Affirmations

GFP Quality Audit serves two purposes: public accountability and continuous quality improvement. One way of supporting the latter is by positively acknowledging efforts made by HEIs to identify and attend to OFI, rather than viewing these as negatives. A formal Affirmation recognises an instance in which the HEI's GFP has accurately identified significant OFI and has demonstrated appropriate commitment to address.

During the external review, the Panel will consider OFI designated by the HEI in its Portfolio. If it concludes that the matter has been fully and accurately identified and understood by the HEI, and that the HEI has taken concrete steps towards taking appropriate

action in response, then the Panel should indicate its support in the GFP Quality Audit Report.

Two examples of Affirmations follow. The key words used in Affirmations are “agrees with” and “supports”. Note that in the full GFP Quality Audit Report each one must be preceded by text which explains and justifies the finding.

Affirmation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with College X that its risk management system needs to consider risks associated with the GFP and supports its efforts in this regard.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with College X that its peer observation method is not effective in the GFP and supports plans to redesign the scheme in order to achieve desired results.

31.3.4 Recommendations

Undoubtedly, an ideal GFP Quality Audit outcome for an HEI would be a GFP Quality Audit Report that contains only Commendations and Affirmations. In reality, in every GFP Quality Audit the Panel will identify a number of issues that require attention. These are issues that the HEI may not have identified or about which it may have reached different conclusions than the Panel. It is also possible that the HEI may have attempted to conceal the issues. In that unlikely event, the Panel may issue some strong statements in the GFP Quality Audit Report. A Recommendation draws attention to significant OFI that the HEI’s GFP has either not yet accurately identified or to which it is not yet adequately attending.

Note that Recommendations must be written in a non-prescriptive fashion. To identify the best solution to an OFI would require problem-solving methods including divergent strategies for identifying all possible solutions and then convergent strategies for selecting the optimal solution given the particularities of the issue. ADRI does not do this. Therefore, Recommendations need to focus on *what* needs to be improved, not *how* it needs to be improved.

Recommendations will not be prioritised, because this requires consideration in the context of the HEI’s own strategic priorities and available resources. However, the Panel may add emphasis words like “strongly recommends” or urgency words like “immediately”.

Two examples of Recommendations follow. Note that in the GFP Quality Audit Report each one must be preceded by text which explains and justifies the finding.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that College X develop a policy on feedback to GFP students on their assessed work and support its implementation.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that College X develop strategies to improve communication between GFP subject areas to support the delivery of the program.

31.3.5 Different Conclusions for the Same Issue

Issues are dynamic. At any point in time they will usually be strong in some aspects of ADRI while requiring Improvement in others. The Panel must ultimately make a judgment call as to

whether, on balance, the evidence suggests an issue warrants a CAR. There would be very few (if any) conditions under which an issue, taken as a whole, should be subject to more than one type of conclusion. However, the Panel may wish to provide further comment in the text with which the conclusion is associated. For example, an issue with an excellent Approach (for example: a well organised and benchmarked manual and training program) that results in a Recommendation because the Deployment is defective and leading to poor Results, may be preceded by text which also notes that the Approach appears strong and needs to be supported with more effective Deployment.

31.3.6 The Number of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations

There are no limits to the number of CARs in a GFP Quality Audit Report. Each Report is likely to contain a different number of CARs. Each CAR will address matters of varying importance and with varying degrees of severity and urgency. In other words, one Commendation might address something more significant than five Recommendations put together.

For these reasons, it is important to note that no meaningful conclusions can be made about the HEI or a group of HEIs based upon:

- the number of CARs an HEI has in its GFP Quality Audit Report;
- a comparison of the numbers of CARs between HEIs; or
- ratios of these results (e.g. the ratio of Recommendations to Commendations).

In particular, ranking tables should not be created based on number of CARs in GFP Quality Audit Reports. Any attempt to do so will be publicly admonished by the OAAA, because it would encourage highly misleading interpretations of the GFP Quality Audit findings.

31.3.7 Reporting an Issue without Commendations, Affirmations or Recommendations

Sometimes issues will arise which do not lead to a formal CAR, but which are important to include in the GFP Quality Audit Report because their inclusion helps the Report to provide a balanced overview of the HEI. This is entirely appropriate. Such issues may be included in the Report as paragraphs in a section or as whole sections without a concluding CAR.

On other occasions, the Panel will not be able to reach a definitive conclusion about an issue because, even after having explored the issue with sufficient thoroughness, important information was either unavailable or inconsistent. However, this problem with the information may, itself, be worth reporting so that the HEI can give it due consideration. Indeed, if the Panel believes that the missing or inconsistent information is sufficiently serious, it may issue a Recommendation on the matter.

31.3.8 Not Reporting an Issue

HEIs are complex institutions and it is not practical for every issue in relation to its GFP to be included in the Final GFP Quality Audit Report – otherwise this Report would be far too long and the HEI may feel overwhelmed. A Panel will normally consider more issues than those included in the Final GFP Quality Audit Report. There are many reasons for not including certain issues in the Final GFP Quality Audit Report. The main reasons are as follows:

- On balance, the issue was not important enough compared with other issues in the GFP Quality Audit Report.
- The Panel was not able to reach agreement on the issue (GFP Quality Audit Reports should not include ‘Split-Panel’ decisions).

- There was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion (although sometimes the lack of important evidence is itself an issue on which the Panel may choose to make a Recommendation (refer to Section 31.10)).
- The issue pertained to an individual grievance (Panels are not designed to address grievances).

PART F: APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), (2016), '*Guidelines of Good Practice*', <http://www.inqaahe.org/guidelines-good-practice>

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Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), '*External Reviewer Register*', <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#Reviewer>

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), '*Institutional Review Schedule*', http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_Review

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), '*Preparing a Self-Study Portfolio Training Module*', http://www.oaaa.gov.om/QualityTraining/Handout/06v1_handout.pdf

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Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), '*Policy on Plagiarism in External Quality Assurance Submissions*', <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#OAAAPolicy>

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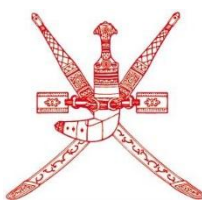
Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs (2008), <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Docs/GFP%20Standards%20FINAL.pdf>

Stella, A. and Woodhouse, D., (2006), '*Ranking of Higher Education Institutions*', Occasional Publications Series, No. 6, Melbourne, AUQA.

APPENDIX B: ABBREVIATIONS

ADRI	A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising: Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement (refer to Section 25)
CARs	Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EO.....	Executive Officer (former role title of Review Director)
EQA.....	External Quality Assurance
GFP.....	General Foundation Program
HEI	Higher Education Institution
INQAAHE.....	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (www.inqaah.org)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education (http://mohe.gov.om/)
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAC	Oman Accreditation Council (former name of OAAA)
OFI	Opportunities for Improvement
OQF.....	Oman Qualifications Framework
OSCED.....	Oman Standard Classification of Education Framework
PSO.....	Panel Support Officer
QA	Quality Audit
RD	Review Director
ROSQA	Requirements of Oman’s System for Quality Assurance
SM.....	Supporting Materials

APPENDIX C: GFP QUALITY AUDIT PANEL DECLARATION FORM



Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

This form should be used ONLY once the Panel Member of the General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit has received a written invitation from the OAAA to join a specific GFP Quality Audit Panel. External Reviewers who receive such an invitation must complete and return this form to the OAAA Offices before their participation on the Panel can be confirmed.

Name of Panel Member (print):
 Name of HEI undergoing GFP Quality Audit:
 Date of GFP Quality Audit Visit:

Declarations	Agree	Disagree
I have read and understood the GFP Quality Audit Manual and will abide by the Roles and Responsibilities for Panel Members.		
I know of no conflict of interest, as set out in Section 10.1 of the GFP Quality Audit Manual, which would jeopardise my participation on this GFP Quality Audit Panel. (If you tick ‘disagree’, the Review Director will contact you as soon as possible to discuss the matter further.)		
I have already provided to the OAAA, or have submitted with this form, accurate and up to date biographical information as required, including a digital photograph, and I consent to this information being edited and published on the OAAA website and otherwise used by OAAA for the purposes of GFP Quality Audit.		
I will not enter into a consultancy relationship (or similar) with the HEI where the GFP is being audited, from the time of signing this form until one full calendar year after the public release of the Final OAAA GFP Quality Audit Report.		
I will not breach the confidentiality of any information in relation to the HEI’s GFP Quality Audit. This includes information received by the GFP Quality Audit Panel in written form (e.g. the HEI’s GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, Supporting Materials, Public Submissions, feedback from internal and external moderators and the HEI’s response to the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft) as well as information received face-to-face (e.g. during the Planning Visit, interview sessions or Random Interviews). It also includes the deliberations and information produced by the GFP Quality Audit Panel in the form of conclusions and all draft versions of the Report.		
I agree that I will not delegate work to anyone else and that the delegation of work to any person not approved by the OAAA Board to participate on the GFP Quality Audit would constitute a serious breach of confidentiality.		

Panel Member’s signature:
 Date:

Please complete and return a scanned copy by e-mail or send by fax to +968 2412 1231

APPENDIX D: GFP QUALITY AUDIT OBSERVER DECLARATION FORM



Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

This form should be used ONLY once the Observer has received a written approval from the OAAA to observe a specific General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit. Observers who receive such an approval must complete and return this form to the OAAA Offices before their participation on the Panel can be confirmed.

Name of Observer (print):
 Name of HEI undergoing GFP Quality Audit:.....
 Date of GFP Quality Audit Visit:.....

Declarations	Agree	Disagree
I have read and understood the GFP Quality Audit Manual and will abide by the Roles and Responsibilities for Observers.		
I know of no conflict of interest, as set out in Section 10.1 of the GFP Quality Audit Manual, which would jeopardize my role as an observer on this GFP Quality Audit. (If you tick 'disagree', the Review Director will contact you as soon as possible to discuss the matter further.)		
I have already provided to the OAAA, or have submitted with this form, accurate and up to date biographical information as required, including a digital photograph, and I consent to this information being edited and published on the OAAA website and otherwise used by OAAA for the purposes of GFP Quality Audit.		
I will not enter into a consultancy relationship (or similar) with the HEI where the GFP is being audited, from the time of signing this form until one full calendar year after the public release of the Final OAAA GFP Quality Audit Report.		
I will not breach the confidentiality of any information in relation to the HEI's GFP Quality Audit. This includes information received by the GFP Quality Audit Panel in written form (e.g. the HEI's GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, Supporting Materials, Public Submissions, feedback from internal and external moderators, and the HEI's response to the draft OAAA GFP Quality Audit Report) as well as information received face-to-face (e.g. during the Planning Visit, interview sessions or Random Interviews). It also includes the deliberations and information produced by the GFP Quality Audit Panel in the form of conclusions and all draft versions of the Report.		
I understand that I will be solely responsible for all costs associated with my participation as an Observer and will not seek reimbursement from the OAAA.		

Observer's signature:
 Date:

Please complete and return a scanned copy by e-mail or send by fax to +968 2412 1231

APPENDIX E: GFP QUALITY AUDIT PORTFOLIO TABLE OF CONTENTS

The following provides an example of a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio table of contents. The precise substantive content sections (the numbered sections) will ordinarily reflect the scope for the GFP Quality Audit (refer to Part B) but are dependent upon the manner in which the HEI chooses to represent its GFP.

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
Introduction (from the HEI CEO (or equivalent))	
Overview of [name of HEI]	
The Self-Study Method	
1. Governance and Management	
[sub-scope headings]	
2. GFP Student Learning	
[sub-scope headings]	
3. Academic and Student Support Services	
[sub-scope headings]	
4. Staff and Staff Support Services	
[sub-scope headings]	
Appendices	

APPENDIX F: GFP REQUIRED SUPPORTING MATERIALS

The HEI is expected to submit the following GFP information and module/course files as Required Supporting Materials with its GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. The module/course file should be for the most recent academic year for which there is a complete set of information. If any of these Required Supporting Materials are not available, the Contact Person should discuss this matter with the Review Director. These materials should be made available electronically and provided as hard copies in the Panel Room.

- GFP goals, or aims and objectives.
- Titles of GFP modules/courses (e.g. English Language, Mathematics, Computing and General Study Skills).
- Learning outcomes of the GFP.
- Module/course learning outcomes.
- Module/course handbook.
- Module/course syllabus.
- Timetable for the module/course.
- Teaching and learning methodologies, including any use of online instruction.
- Copy of all teaching materials (not including text books).
- Copy of all assignments/assessment instruments, with submission due dates; marking criteria and schemes (both coursework and examinations).
- A sample of marked and moderated student coursework and examinations (including criteria, guidelines, etc.); the sample should cover a range of student performance/attainment, including failed assignments (where applicable) and showing feedback on assessment.
- Mapping of assessments against learning outcomes for each module/course.
- A grade analysis for each module/course cohort, showing the distribution of marks/grades awarded for individual assignments/examinations (e.g. using a data spreadsheet); and an overall grade analysis for the module/course.
- Students' feedback and evaluation of the module/course and analysis of the feedback.
- Student attendance data for the module/course.
- Module/course leaders' annual monitoring reports (or equivalent), as required by the HEI and/or the affiliate university.
- Module/course improvements arising from feedback, evaluation and other quality assurance activities.

APPENDIX G: GFP QUALITY AUDIT PORTFOLIO MEETING AGENDA

This sets out a typical agenda assuming that only local Panel Members are able to be physically present, while the international Panel Members will need to link in by teleconference. This agenda can be modified at the Panel Chairperson's discretion and based on the advice of the Review Director.

Item	Duration	Activity
1	10 minutes	Brief introductions: clarifying objectives of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio Meeting.
2	10 minutes	Reminder of approach used in GFP Quality Audit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of the HEI/GFP • ADRI • Evidence and Supporting Materials • GFP Quality Audit Visit • Report Conclusions • Report Writing
3	20 minutes	Brief general overview comments about the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio and any further contextual information required by Panel Members.
4	60 minutes	Portfolio Analysis (using ADRI and building on the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v1): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For each section, what are the main issues to the GFP Quality Audit (identification of potential Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations)? • For each issue, who does the Panel need to see and why? • For each issue, what other evidence does the Panel require?
5	10 minutes	Task Allocation: In order to best utilise the time available, Panel Members will focus on particular sections of the Portfolio (and related Supporting Materials submitted so far) in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on any further evidence required. • Decide on who the Panel needs to meet and why. • Frame potential interview questions to ask during the GFP Quality Audit Visit. <p>Panel Members are welcome to look at the whole Portfolio and share any further thoughts they may have, especially in relation to evidence required.</p>
6	5 minutes	Next steps (e.g. preparing for the Planning Visit) Any other business

APPENDIX H: GFP QUALITY AUDIT PLANNING VISIT AGENDA

This sets out a typical agenda for a Planning Visit. Apart from the pre-meeting with the HEI CEO (or equivalent), the remainder of the meeting will take place between the Panel Chairperson (or representative), the Review Director and the HEI representatives including the Contact Person.

Duration	Activity
15 minutes	Pre-meeting Brief meeting between OAAA and HEI CEO (or equivalent) as well as a courtesy visit, this will provide an opportunity for the HEI to apprise the Panel representatives as to whether there have been any significant developments since the submission of the GFP Quality Audit that may have an impact on the GFP Quality Audit.
30 minutes	Matters for Clarification This is an opportunity for the GFP Quality Audit Panel Chairperson (or representative) and the Review Director to seek clarifications from the HEI about statements in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio or Supporting Materials.
60 minutes	Additional Supporting Materials The list of Additional Supporting Materials requested by the GFP Quality Audit Panel is discussed.
60 minutes	Draft GFP Quality Audit Visit Program The draft GFP Quality Audit Visit Program is discussed. The HEI may raise any concerns or questions.
10 minutes	Public Submissions The process for advertising and handling public submissions is discussed.
30 minutes	Logistics and Inspection of Premises Venues to be inspected for suitability including the Panel Room including power and internet access for Panel Members, the Round-Table Interview Room and the Panel Lunch Room.

APPENDIX I: CALL FOR PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS**Oman Academic Accreditation Authority****CALL FOR PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) will be undertaking a General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit of [HEI]. All HEIs in Oman delivering a GFP undergo GFP Quality Audit. The purpose of GFP Quality Audit is to inform the public about the quality of GFPs and to help HEIs to prepare students for their higher education studies. The GFP Quality Audit involves a Self-Study by the HEI of its GFP resulting in a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, followed by external review by a GFP Quality Audit Panel resulting in publication of the GFP Quality Audit Report.

As part of its deliberations, the GFP Quality Audit Panel invites submissions from interested persons. Submissions may cover any issue relevant to the GFP Quality Audit. A submission will be received by the GFP Quality Audit Panel only under the following conditions:

- It must be sent by email to [*submission email*] by no later than [*close date*].
- It must include the name, position, organisation (HEI, workplace, etc.) and contact details of the person/s making the submission. This information will be treated in confidence. Anonymous submissions will not be considered by the GFP Quality Audit Panel under any circumstances.
- The person/s making the submission must be willing to participate in a telephone interview should the GFP Quality Audit Panel consider such a discussion to be necessary.
- The submission should address aspects of the [HEI's] activities that will assist the GFP Quality Audit Panel in forming conclusions about the [HEI's] GFP. It should contain specific evidence for any claims being made. Vague statements or allegations will not be pursued by the GFP Quality Audit Panel.
- The submission should not refer to personal grievances or single out individual members of staff (the GFP Quality Audit Panel has no mandate to address grievances).
- The submission (excluding any particular corroborating evidence) should be no more than 1,000 words (two sides of an A4 page in length).

All submissions are confidential in the sense that the GFP Quality Audit Panel needs to be able to use the information provided in submissions, but will not reveal their source.

If the GFP Quality Audit Panel chooses to investigate, it will be only as part of the overall GFP Quality Audit, and not in terms of the details of a particular complaint. The GFP Quality Audit Panel will not make any response or report to the person/s making the submission.

Staff and students of [HEI] may wish to contact [Contact Person] for further information about [HEI's] preparations. For more general enquiries about the OAAA or the GFP Quality Audit contact [Review Director] on [phone number] or visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

APPENDIX J: GFP QUALITY AUDIT VISIT PROGRAM (EXAMPLE)

The following is indicative only. A GFP Quality Audit Visit Program will usually be between three to five days. The exact GFP Quality Audit Visit Program and request for interviews with GFP stakeholders will depend on the GFP Quality Audit Panel's requirements.

Time	Day 0	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
0830-0845	Panel Meeting	Panel review of Supporting Materials (at HEI) Panel Meeting	Panel preparation	Panel preparation	Report writing of GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v3
0900-0945			Interview 5 Teaching staff (including post GFP)	Call Back interviews (if necessary)	
1000-1045			Interview 6 Non-academic staff	Panel deliberations on findings and conclusions	
1100-1130			Panel Meeting		
1130-1215			Interview 1 HEI CEO (or equivalent)	Interview 7 Students (including post GFP)	
1230-1300	Panel Lunch	Panel Lunch	Panel Lunch	Panel Lunch	Panel Lunch
1300-1445	Panel Meeting	Panel Meeting	Panel Meeting	Panel deliberations on findings and conclusions	Report writing of GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v3
1445-1530		Interview 2 Head(s) of GFP Unit/Department(s)	Interview 8 Teaching staff involved with GFP Committees		
1530-1615		Interview 4 Students	Interview 9 Affiliate/external stakeholders		Preliminary Feedback session
1615-1700		Interview 3 Teaching staff	Interview 10 Library and IT resources (in situ)		
1700-1830		Panel Meeting	Panel Meeting		

APPENDIX K: RANDOM INTERVIEW WORKSHEET – STAFF (TEMPLATE)

Introduction: You may have heard that the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) is currently conducting a GFP Quality Audit of this HEI. The GFP Quality Audit is based on a Self-Study by the HEI of its GFP, which is then reviewed by an external GFP Quality Audit Panel, of which I am a member. Our process takes several months and involves a wide range of information. Part of that process involves a Visit, which we are doing this week, to meet a range of people. The Visit includes some Random Interviews like this one. Would you have ten to fifteen minutes to share with me? I would like to ask you some general questions about your experience of the GFP. Please know that this worksheet is only for the GFP Quality Audit Panel and will be destroyed when the GFP Quality Audit is over. Nothing that you say to me would ever be reported to the HEI, or publicly, in a manner that identifies who said it.

(Note: it is preferable, although not essential, to conduct Random Interviews with people who will not otherwise be meeting the Panel).

Date & Time	Panel Member	Staff Member’s first name and position

#	Questions <i>(the following are examples only)</i>	Response
1	Can you comment on the communication system within this HEI regarding the GFP? Does everybody get to know what they need to know about this place?	
2	How do you know what, specifically, is required of you in your work? Is your work regularly reviewed, and if so, how?	
3	What are the main things that hinder your ability to do a good job? How would you fix them (assuming no new money became available)?	
4	What is the greatest strength of this HEI in relation to its GFP?	
5	How well do you think this HEI treats students, particularly those in relation to the GFP? Can you give examples?	
7	If you were the HEI CEO (or equivalent), what would be your major priority for improvement, particularly in relation to the GFP?	
8	Is there anything else you would like the GFP Quality Audit Panel to know?	

APPENDIX L: RANDOM INTERVIEW WORKSHEET – STUDENT (TEMPLATE)

Introduction: You may have heard that the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) is currently conducting a GFP Quality Audit of this HEI. The GFP Quality Audit is based on a Self-Study by the HEI of its GFP, which is then reviewed by an external GFP Quality Audit Panel, of which I am a member. Our process takes several months and involves a wide range of information. Part of that process involves a Visit, which we are doing this week, to meet a range of people. The Visit includes some Random Interviews like this one. Would you have ten to fifteen minutes to share with me? I would like to ask you some general questions about your experience of the GFP. Please know that this worksheet is only for the GFP Quality Audit Panel and will be destroyed when the GFP Quality Audit is over. Nothing that you say to me would ever be reported to the HEI, or publicly, in a manner that identifies who said it.

(Note: it is preferable, although not essential, to conduct Random Interviews with people who will not otherwise be meeting the Panel).

Date & Time	Panel Member	Student’s first name and program

#	Question	Response
1	Why did you decide to enrol in this HEI?	
2	How do you know what is expected of you in your studies, particularly the GFP? How do you receive feedback on your progress?	
3	Has the program been meeting/did the GFP meet your expectations?	
4	What is the greatest strength of this HEI in relation to its GFP?	
5	How well do you think this HEI treats students? Can you give examples?	
6	If you were the HEI CEO (or equivalent), what would be your major priority for improvement?	
7	Is there anything else you would like the GFP Quality Audit Panel to know?	

APPENDIX M: GFP QUALITY AUDIT NOTICE**Oman Academic Accreditation Authority****GENERAL INFORMATION FOR [HEI] STAFF AND STUDENTS**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) has convened a General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit Panel to undertake a GFP Quality Audit of [HEI]. All HEIs in Oman delivering a GFP undergo GFP Quality Audit. The purpose of GFP Quality Audit is to inform the public about the quality of GFPs and to help HEIs to prepare students for their higher studies. The GFP Quality Audit involves a Self-Study by the HEI resulting in a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, followed by external review by a GFP Quality Audit Panel resulting in publication of a GFP Quality Audit Report.

The GFP Quality Audit Panel comprises the following people, who are from the national and international higher education sector (they may be accompanied by an Observer, who has no formal role in the GFP Quality Audit):

- [Name]
- [Name]
- [Name]
- [Name], (Review Director)
- [Name], (Observer, if present)

As part of its deliberations, the GFP Quality Audit Panel will visit [HEI] from [GFP Quality Audit Visit start date] to [GFP Quality Audit Visit end date]. During that time, it will meet a wide range of people, including staff and students. Mostly, these meetings will be in formal interview sessions. However, other interviews are 'random' in order to help the GFP Quality Audit Panel Members gain a broad perspective. Therefore, at some stage during the GFP Quality Audit Visit, a GFP Quality Audit Panel Member may approach you on campus and ask whether you would be willing to spend a few minutes with them responding to some questions. All Panel Members will be clearly identifiable from their name badges. You are under no obligation to participate, but it is hoped that you will in order to help the GFP Quality Audit Panel gain as full an understanding of the GFP as possible. The questions will cover a range of topics focusing on your personal experience of the GFP.

All interviews are confidential in the sense that although the GFP Quality Audit Panel needs to be able to use the information you provide, it will not do so in a way that attributes the statements to you. In other words, the GFP Quality Audit Panel may reveal what was said, but not who said it.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should contact [Contact Person] on [phone number] who will be able to provide you with more information about the GFP Quality Audit and the Random Interviews. You may also wish to read the General Foundation Program Audit Manual. For further information about the OAAA generally, you can visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

Thank you very much for participation in this important project.

**APPENDIX N: INFORMATION FOR GFP QUALITY AUDIT INTERVIEWEES
- STAFF****Oman Academic Accreditation Authority****INFORMATION FOR INTERVIEWEES - STAFF**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) has convened a General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit Panel to undertake a GFP Quality Audit of [HEI]. All HEIs in Oman delivering a GFP undergo GFP Quality Audit. The purpose of GFP Quality Audit is to inform the public about the quality of GFPs and to help HEIs prepare students for their higher education studies. The GFP Quality Audit involves a Self-Study by the HEI resulting in a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, followed by external review by a GFP Quality Audit Panel resulting in publication of a GFP Quality Audit Report.

The GFP Quality Audit Panel comprises the following people, who are from the national and international higher education sector (they may be accompanied by an Observer, who has no formal role in the GFP Quality Audit):

- [Name]
- [Name]
- [Name]
- [Name], Review Director
- [Name], (Observer, if present)

As part of its deliberations, the GFP Quality Audit Panel will visit [HEI] from [GFP Quality Audit Visit start date] to [GFP Quality Audit Visit end date]. During that time, it will meet a wide range of people, including staff and students. You have been requested to participate in an interview with the GFP Quality Audit Panel. The main focus of your interview session will be [Interview Session Title]. Interview sessions with staff can involve up to eight people being interviewed together. The GFP Quality Audit Panel will ask a number of questions about [Interview Session Title] and may also seek your comments on a broader range of issues and your experiences of the GFP at [HEI] generally.

All interviews are confidential in the sense that although the GFP Quality Audit Panel needs to be able to use the information you provide, it will not do so in a way that attributes the statements to you. The OAAA expects that all participants in GFP Quality Audit will respect this rule in relation to what other people may say during the interviews.

By way of preparation, we suggest that you read your [HEI's] GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. This provides [HEI's] main submission to the GFP Quality Audit Panel and many of the Panel's questions will be based on the Panel's preliminary analysis of the Portfolio. However, please do not bring pre-planned answers to the interview. The GFP Quality Audit Panel will obtain a wide range of Supporting Materials during its process. What it most wants from you is your experience.

Thank you very much for participation in this important project. With your help, the result will be a useful GFP Quality Audit Report that will properly celebrate the strengths of the [HEI's] GFP and help focus effort on its opportunities for improvement. [Contact Person] will provide you with the time and venue of your interview, along with more detailed information about the GFP Quality Audit. For further information about the OAAA generally, you can visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

APPENDIX O: INFORMATION FOR GFP QUALITY AUDIT INTERVIEWEES - STUDENTS



Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

INFORMATION FOR INTERVIEWEES - STUDENTS

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) has convened a General Foundation Program (GFP) Quality Audit Panel to undertake a GFP Quality Audit of [HEI]. All HEIs in Oman delivering a GFP undergo GFP Quality Audit. The purpose of GFP Quality Audit is to inform the public about the quality of GFPs and to help HEIs prepare students for their higher education studies. The GFP Quality Audit involves a Self-Study by the HEI resulting in a GFP Quality Audit Portfolio, followed by external review by a GFP Quality Audit Panel resulting in publication of a GFP Quality Audit Report.

The GFP Quality Audit Panel comprises the following people, who are from the national and international higher education sector (they may be accompanied by an Observer, who has no formal role in the GFP Quality Audit:

- [Name]
- [Name]
- [Name]
- [Name], Review Director
- [Name], (Observer, if present)

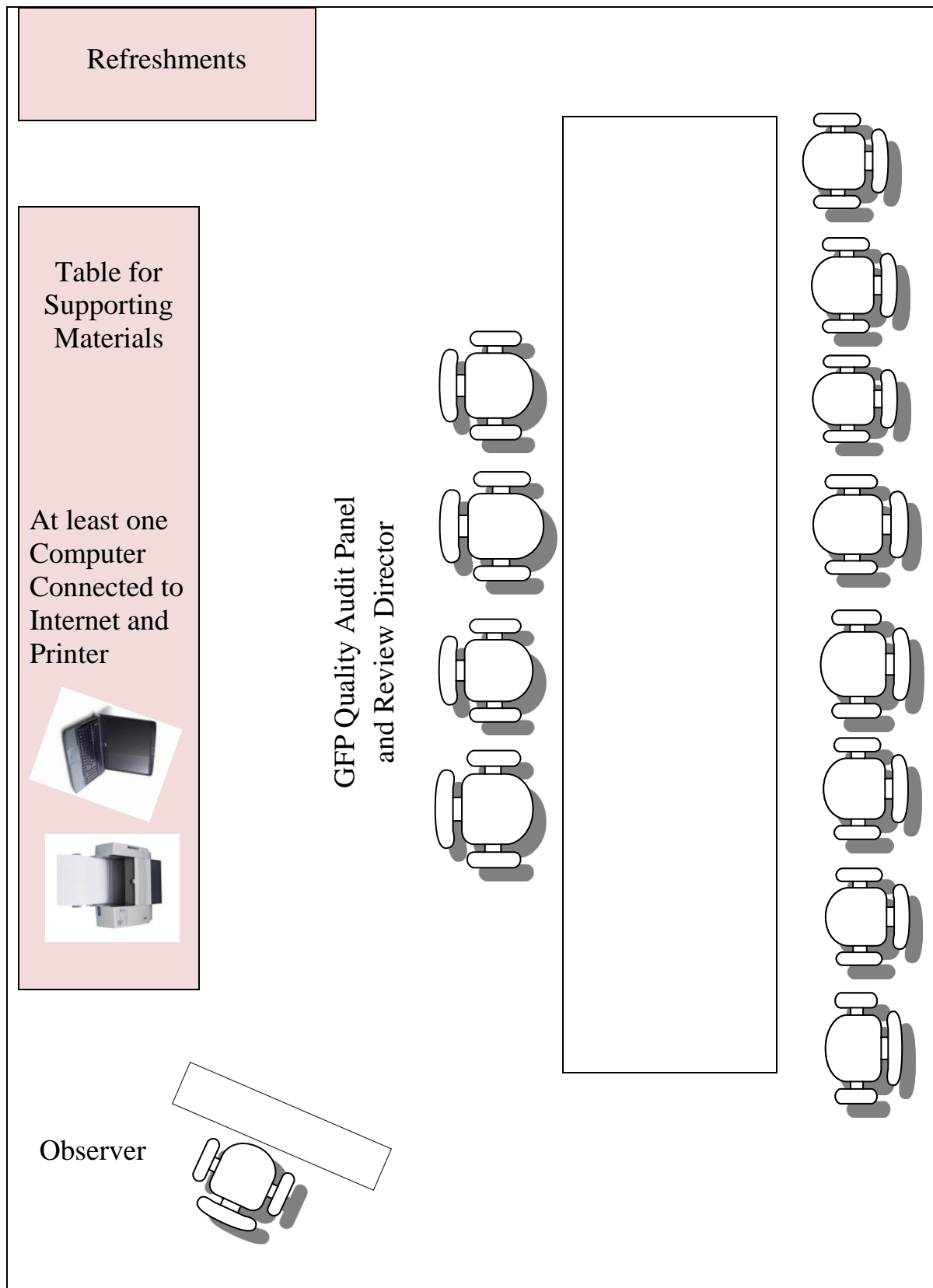
As part of its deliberations, the GFP Quality Audit Panel will visit [HEI] from [GFP Quality Audit Visit start date] to [GFP Quality Audit Visit end date]. During that time, it will meet a wide range of people, including staff and students. You have been requested to participate in a round-table interview with the GFP Quality Audit Panel. Interview sessions with students usually involve groups of up to five people being interviewed together by a single Panel Member. The Panel Member will ask a number of questions during the interview and may also seek your comments on a broader range of issues and your experiences of the GFP at [HEI] generally.

All interviews are confidential in the sense that although the GFP Quality Audit Panel needs to be able to use the information you provide, it will not do so in a way that attributes the statements to you. The OAAA expects that all participants in GFP Quality Audit will respect this rule in relation to what other people may say during the interviews.

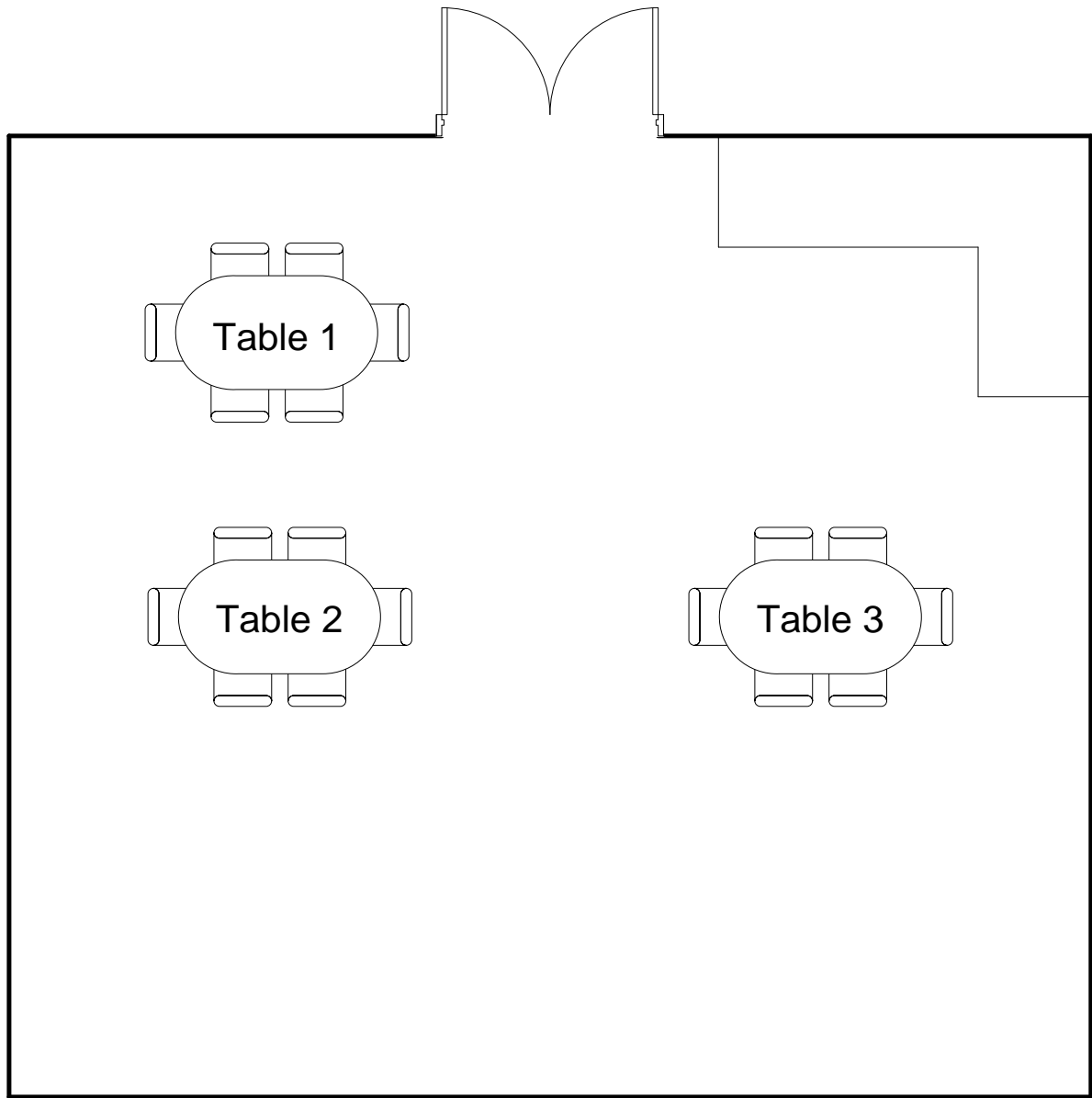
By way of preparation, we suggest that you read your [HEI's] GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. This provides [HEI's] main submission to the GFP Quality Audit and many of the Panel's questions will be based on the Panel's preliminary analysis of the Portfolio. However, please do not bring pre-planned answers to the interview. The GFP Quality Audit Panel will obtain a wide range of Supporting Materials during its process. What it most wants from you is your experience of enrolling and studying on the GFP.

Thank you very much for participation in this important project. [Contact Person] will provide you with the time and venue of your round-table interview, along with more detailed information about the GFP Quality Audit. For further information about the OAAA generally, you can visit www.oaaa.gov.om.

APPENDIX P: TYPICAL PANEL ROOM LAYOUT



APPENDIX Q: TYPICAL ROUND TABLE INTERVIEW ROOM LAYOUT



APPENDIX R: HEI RESPONSE TO GFP QUALITY AUDIT REPORT DRAFT

HEIs are invited to respond to claims made in the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5. The HEI’s response to the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5 must be submitted on the template below. There is no limit to the number of claims that an HEI can make in response to the GFP Quality Audit Report Draft v5. However, all claims must be supported with evidence.

An example is provided on the type of information which might be included in each column.

HEI to number the responses	Quote and reference the precise part of the GFP Quality Audit Report text that is being contested	Present the claim and the supporting evidence. Additional Supporting Materials may be attached as evidence with the HEI’s response submitted	Present alternative wording or make other appropriate suggestions for amending the GFP Quality Audit Report in a manner that would resolve the issue from the HEI’s perspective
↓	↓	↓	↓
#	GFP Quality Audit Report Extract	Claim	Suggestion
1	There have not been any reviews of GFP curriculum in the last five years.	This is incorrect. The GFP curriculum was reviewed in 2015. The Review Report is attached.	The GFP curriculum was reviewed in 2015.

APPENDIX S: GFP QUALITY AUDIT PANEL MEMBER FEEDBACK FORM

In order to support the continuous improvement process of the OAAA and its activities, GFP Quality Audit Panel Members are kindly requested to provide feedback on various aspects of the GFP Quality Audit, once the GFP Quality Audit Report is finalised. The information provided will remain confidential to the OAAA.

Name of Panel Member				
GFP Quality Audit of (name of HEI)				
The GFP Quality Audit Manual	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The GFP Quality Audit Manual is comprehensive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The GFP Quality Audit Manual is useful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The GFP Quality Audit Manual is clear and easy to follow.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Comments on the GFP Quality Audit Manual:				
The Portfolio Meeting	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. The Portfolio Meeting was well structured.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. The Portfolio Meeting was useful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Comments on the Portfolio Meeting:				
The GFP Quality Audit Visit	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. The GFP Quality Audit Visit was well structured.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The Interviewees for the GFP Quality Audit Visit were appropriately selected.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Comments on the GFP Quality Audit Visit:				
The GFP Quality Audit Report	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11. The process for writing the Report is effective.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. The process for evaluating the GFP was effective.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. The format of the Final Report is appropriate for its purpose.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Comments about the GFP Quality Audit Report:				

The OAAA	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14. I felt well-prepared for my role as a Panel Member.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. The Review Director provided useful professional guidance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. The documents and templates organised by the Review Director (agendas, worksheets, etc.) were done well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. The Panel Support Officer provided good administrative support.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. OAAA staff were responsive to the Panel’s requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. The GFP Quality Audit was carried out in line with international practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Comments about the OAAA:				
The GFP Quality Audit Panel	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21. The Panel Members worked together well as a team.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Panel Members behaved professionally throughout the GFP Quality Audit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Comments about the GFP Quality Audit Panel:				
24. Were there any aspects of the GFP Quality Audit that were done particularly well?				
25. Were there any aspects of the GFP Quality Audit that could be improved for the future?				

APPENDIX T: HEI FEEDBACK FORM

In order to support the continuous improvement of the OAAA and its activities, HEIs are kindly requested to provide feedback on various aspects of the GFP Quality Audit, once the GFP Quality Audit is finalised. The information provided will remain confidential to the OAAA.

Preparing the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The OAAA provided appropriate support prior to and during the preparation of the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. We felt confident supplying evidence to support claims we made in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. We understood what the conclusions meant and feel confident in addressing them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Comments on preparing the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio:				
The Planning Visit	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. The Planning Visit was well structured and had a clear focus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. The Planning Visit was professionally conducted by the OAAA.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The Planning Visit was useful for preparing for the GFP Quality Audit Visit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Enough time was scheduled for the Planning Visit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Comments on the Planning Visit:				
The GFP Quality Audit Visit	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. The GFP Quality Audit Visit was well structured.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. We were confident in implementing the logistical requirements for the GFP Quality Audit Visit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Interviews conducted by the Panel were friendly and created a professional atmosphere for open interaction.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. The requests for Additional Supporting Materials made during the GFP Quality Audit Visit were reasonable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Comments on the GFP Quality Audit Visit:				

The GFP Quality Audit Report	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. The Report is clear, consistent and easy to read.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. The Report provided clear justification for the OAAA's conclusions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Our HEI was provided with an appropriate opportunity to respond to the Panel's findings in the draft Report.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. The format of the Final Report is appropriate for its purpose.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Comments on the GFP Quality Audit Report:				
The OAAA Review Director	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. The Review Director provided useful professional guidance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. The requests made by the Review Director were clear and reasonable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. The Review Director responded to our HEI's queries and requests in a timely manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Comments on the OAAA Review Director:				
The GFP Quality Audit Panel	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. The Panel Members were professional and courteous with our students and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. The Panel conducted the interviews in a professional manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Comments on the GFP Quality Audit Panel:				
27. Were there any aspects of the GFP Quality Audit that were done particularly well?				

28. Were there any aspects of the GFP Quality Audit that could be improved for the future?

APPENDIX U: SUMMARY DATA (TEMPLATES)

The following tables³⁷ outline the minimum data reporting requirements in the GFP Quality Audit Portfolio. HEIs may add other key data which they consider important.

Table 1: Number of students by GFP level, year of study and gender

Area of GFP ³⁸	GFP Level of Study	20__ ³⁹		20__		20__		20__		20__	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
English Language ⁴⁰	Level 1										
	Level 2										
	Level 3										
	Level 4										
Mathematics	Level 1										
	Level 2										
	Level 3										
	Level 4										
Computing	Level 1										
	Level 2										
	Level 3										
	Level 4										
General Study Skills ⁴¹	Level 1										
	Level 2										
	Level 3										
	Level 4										

Table 2: Attrition, progression and completion rates⁴²

GFP Level	Year 1 (insert year)			Year 2 (insert year)			Year 3 (insert year)		
	Attrition	Progression	Completion	Attrition	Progression	Completion	Attrition	Progression	Completion

Table 2 (continued): Attrition, progression and completion rates

GFP Level	Year 4 (insert year)			Year 5 (insert year)		
	Attrition	Progression	Completion	Attrition	Progression	Completion

³⁷ These tables are provided as guidance and should be adapted where necessary to reflect the context of the GFP.

³⁸ These are provided as examples of areas that are included in the GFP.

³⁹ The table should show a five-year trend ending in whatever is the most recent year of available data.

⁴⁰ This area of learning does not need to be included in a GFP for higher education programs delivered in Arabic, although HEIs may choose to include it.

⁴¹ If taught as a separate module/course.

⁴² HEIs must provide details on how they have calculated student attrition, progression and completion rates.

Table 3: Number of staff by department, year, employment status and gender

GFP Related Dept. ⁴³	Status	20__ ⁴⁴		20__		20__		20__		20__	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Dept. A	Full-time										
	Part-time										
	Total										
Dept. B	Full-time										
	Part-time										
	Total										
Dept. C	Full-time										
	Part-time										
	Total										

Table 4: Number of staff by academic department, year, employment status and Omani national/Expatriate

Academic Dept.	Status	20__ ⁴⁵		20__		20__		20__		20__	
		Omani	Expat	Omani	Expat	Omani	Expat	Omani	Expat	Omani	Expat
Dept. A	Full-time										
	Part-time										
	Total										
Dept. B	Full-time										
	Part-time										
	Total										
Dept. C	Full-time										
	Part-time										
	Total										

Table 5: Number of staff by academic department and qualifications held

Academic Dept.	Bachelor	Number of staff with highest qualification			Number of staff holding an additional academic qualification
		Bachelor (Hons)/ Graduate or Postgrad. Diploma	Master or equivalent	Teaching qualification	
Dept. A					
Dept. B					
Dept. C					

⁴³ Includes all academic and administrative departments in relation to the delivery of the GFP.

⁴⁴ The table should show a five-year trend ending in whatever is the most recent year of available data.

⁴⁵ The table should show a five-year trend ending in whatever is the most recent year of available data.