Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF EXTERNAL REVIEWERS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE

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POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF EXTERNAL REVIEWERS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. Purpose

External Reviewers (ERs) selected for their knowledge and skills to assist with OAAAQA External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities are listed in the OAAAQA's National Register of External Reviewers ('ER Register' hereafter) on approval by the DG CHEQA. ERs are an integral part of the OAAAQA's human resources and their primary role, as EQA panel members, is to support the OAAAQA in the undertaking of all EQA activities. Some ERs also serve as External Review Directors (E/RDs) and External Moderators of reports, as well as serving on EQA Appeals Committees and the review of HEIs' applications for the endorsement of International EQA (IEQA) activities. These ERs provide expertise for OAAAQA projects and deliver training, workshops and presentations for the higher education sector in Oman, as and when needed. From time to time, furthermore, ERs are approached to assist with specific technical projects that require international benchmarking or local perspectives. This policy sets out the principles and procedures that support the management of the ER Register as well as the ERs registered therein.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all aspects of the management of the ER Register, including the selection and approval process, management of the ER database, monitoring of ER performance and removal from the Register. It is to be used by OAAAQA staff involved in the management of the ER Register and in the evaluation of performance of the ERs listed therein. This policy does not cover administrative or travel arrangements related to EQA activities; these are addressed through signed ER contracts.

3. Policy Statement

The OAAAQA recognises the important role that the ER Register plays in the implementation of EQA activities. This policy outlines the principles and procedures to support the effective, transparent and consistent management of the ER Register and the ERs listed therein.

3.1. Composition of the ER Register

The OAAAQA aims to ensure that the ER Register is fit for purpose. The ER Register is updated by the OAAAQA on an ongoing basis and is available on OAAAQA website. It includes two categories of ERs: international and locally-based ERs. It is periodically reviewed to ensure that it takes into consideration all EQA activities, including currently scheduled activities and in anticipation of future EQA requirements. The composition of the ER Register is designed to ensure that OAAAQA has access to both international and locally-based experts with quality assurance experience across a wide scope of relevant subject areas.

3.2. Criteria for Selection

In order to be selected for inclusion on the ER Register, an ER candidate must meet specific criteria.

3.2.1 Mandatory Criteria

As ambassadors of the OAAAQA, ERs are expected to perform their role according to the highest professional standards and in line with the OAAAQA's values. These standards and values encompass, but are not limited to, confidentiality, punctuality, courtesy, collaboration, commitment (for example in timeliness of completing allocated tasks) and integrity. The same professional standards are upheld by OAAAQA staff in all dealings with ERs.

In addition, ERs selected for the Register are expected to have the following expertise and attributes:

3.2.1.1 Quality Assurance Experience

a) Knowledge of quality assurance methods and terminology and their application in the higher education context.

b) Proven experience of undertaking quality reviews (such as audit, assessment, accreditation) in educational, professional, industrial and/or military contexts.

c) Ability to reconcile the theory of quality with organisational realities within a higher education institution (HEI) and the higher education sector as a whole.

d) Ability to evaluate higher education processes and information provided by HEIs in a manner that is sensitive to the particular context from which it arises.

e) Ability to evaluate quality assurance procedures and techniques, and identify opportunities for improvements relative to the HEI's particular context.

3.2.1.2 Skills and Personal Attributes

a) Ability to critically analyse text and supporting materials/documentation using a quality improvement approach such as ADRI.

b) Ability to listen and communicate effectively, both through the spoken word and in writing.

c) Ability to write evaluative reports.

d) Ability to work collegially and cooperatively in a team to reach consensus.

e) Ability to make objective and impartial decisions and take into account potential self-bias.

f) Ability to accept responsibility and work with integrity and diligence.

g) Ability to maintain confidentiality and demonstrate discretion.

h) Ability to adhere to prescribed timelines and demonstrate commitment to meeting deadlines.

i) Ability to respond to feedback from different stakeholders involved in an EQA activity, including other ERs, the Review Director, OAAAQA staff and the HEI.

j) Cultural sensitivity to Omani culture and the culture of other ERs.

k) Awareness of and openness to the diversity of the higher education sector and its policy and practice.

3.2.2 Desirable Criteria

Further criteria for ER selection include the following desirable experience and attributes:

a) Knowledge and understanding of the Omani higher education sector, including its broader context.

b) Experience in quality management processes within a reputable higher education provider.

c) Experience of direct interaction with the output of HEIs (such as the employment or management of graduates) and/or teaching and/or research.

d) Experience in senior positions within reputable organisations, including HEIs, professional bodies and businesses (for ERs appointed for institutional EQAs).

e) Direct involvement in the design, development and/or review of academic programmes, curricula or assessments.

f) Trained in one or more methods of external institutional and programme review.

3.2.3 Criteria for International ERs

International ERs are selected and approved on the basis of their proven experience in external quality assurance and their subject expertise. The OAAAQA endeavours to have a wide

representation of international ERs in terms of geographical location, diversity of higher education experience, programme knowledge, subject expertise and a range of professional experience. Those who are self-employed or retired are eligible for appointment, as long as there are no health issues that may affect their participation in the review. Any health conditions which may impact an ER's ability to fully participate in an EQA activity must be declared prior to agreeing to join an EQA Panel.

3.2.4 Criteria for Locally-Based ERs

Prospective locally-based ERs are identified within Oman's higher education community, and from industry, the military or other sectors. The OAAAQA endeavours to include representation from the majority of HEIs on the ER Register in order to support the building of an Oman-based community of practice in the area of EQA. The OAAAQA is committed to identifying and training Omani ERs to join the ER Register in order to support capacity building in quality assurance in Oman. Most candidates for the ER Register are recommended by their institutions or peers; however, a number of candidates may be self-nominated or identified by the OAAAQA or invited to join the register via formal OAAAQA advertisement. While the OAAAQA is keen to encourage a wide range of representation on the ER Register, all applications are appropriately scrutinised to ensure the integrity of the selection and approval process. To avoid conflict of interest employees of the OAAAQA are not eligible to act as ERs for the duration of their employment tenure. Those who are self-employed or retired are eligible for appointment, as long as there are no health issues that may affect their participation in the review. Any health conditions which may impact an ER's ability to fully participate in an EQA activity must be declared prior to agreeing to join an EQA Panel.

3.3. Formation of EQA Panels

Formation of EQA Panels is governed by the provisions in the relevant EQA manual, which cover issues such as conflict of interest. EQA Panel members are selected from the ER Register. The OAAAQA aims to ensure that each Panel has the appropriate profile for the designated EQA activity; this may include a range of experience and expertise, local knowledge and appropriate language skills. ERs are invited to serve on EQA Panels according to their availability and as deemed practical by OAAAQA. Where possible, Reassessment activities are undertaken by those with prior experience of working on OAAAQA's Standards Assessment or Quality Audit Panels.

4. Procedure

The following section sets out the procedures for the selection process for international and locally-based ERs, the management of the ER Register, the monitoring of the performance of ERs, re-approval of appointment, removal from the Register and the management of non-Panel member activities.

4.1. Selection Process for ERs

The steps in the selection process for ERs are described below and illustrated in a process map that can be found in Appendix A of this policy.

a. Prospective candidates for ERs are invited by the External Review Activities Support Department (ERASD) under CHEQA to complete an online application form (see Appendix B) and submit their CV.

b. ERASD prepares the ER Application Review Form (see Appendix C) and submits it to the Director of the relevant CHEQA Department (or a nominated member of the CHEQA team) for their review of the application and initial screening. Initial screening involves consideration of the candidate's experience, knowledge and qualifications. During this phase, the candidate is assessed against the selection criteria and a decision is made whether their application will be processed further or rejected. If accepted, additional information specifying the candidate's strengths and areas of expertise (e.g. institutional vs programmatic reviews) may be indicated. The application and screening process are logged by ERASD and monitored by the relevant CHEQA Department (see Section 4.3 below).

c. The ER application, together with the ER Application Review Form and the initial recommendation are submitted to the ER Selection Team for initial approval. This team is comprised of the Directors of all CHEQA departments and CHEQA experts (or coopted technical staff).

d. Initially approved locally-based ERs are invited to attend an ER EQA training workshop where their performance is evaluated (see Appendix D). Successful performance in the training is a prerequisite but not a guarantee of appointment to the ER Register as this decision lies within DG CHEQA , acting on the recommendations of CHEQA.

e. Initially approved international ERs are sent online training materials and usually requested to provide a written statement of their overall understanding of OAAAQA's external review

activities. These statements are evaluated by CHEQA's technical staff to ascertain the candidate's understanding and knowledge. International ERs may also be asked to attend an online ER EQA training workshop where their performance is evaluated.

f.   Unsuccessful candidates are informed by ERASD that they have not been selected for inclusion on the ER Register.

g.   Key data of initially approved international ERs (including their name, position and place of work) are submitted to the DG CHEQA for approval. The OAAAQA Board is also periodically informed of updates to the ER Register as and when needed.

h.   Once approved by the DG CHEQA, successful candidates are informed by ERASD and asked to submit a current 250-word biography and a recent electronic photograph to be posted on the ER Register available on the OAAAQA website.

i.   Details of the successful ER are added to the ER database by ERASD and uploaded to the Register on the OAAAQA website by the Communication & Media Department.

j.   Before being engaged by the OAAAQA in a specific EQA activity, every ER must sign a service contract which is specific to the activity they have been selected for.

4.2. Management of the ER Register

The ER Register is managed by following the processes outlined below.

a.   All approved ERs are added to the ER Register and related database. If an approved locally-based ER relocates outside Oman or an international ER relocates to Oman, the ER is re-categorised accordingly (from locally-based to international or vice versa) and their profile and contact information on the Register are updated.

b.   Once an HEI has confirmed its intention to submit the EQA Application or Portfolio as per the OAAAQA review schedule, the ERASD informs the DG CHEQA who then calls for a Panel Longlist Meeting during which ERs are selected for each upcoming EQA activity. A longlist for every EQA activity is prepared and comprises locally-based and international ERs and any ERs or OAAAQA staff selected as observers (more information about observers can be found in the EQA manuals). Longlists, including observers, are submitted to the CEO for approval before being sent to HEIs to identify any potential conflicts of interest (see Policy on Conflict of Interest in External Quality Assurance Activities in Higher Education).

c. An EQA Panel is short-listed from the longlist for each activity and the names of the Panel members are announced on the OAAAQA website. Each Panel member's role in a specific EQA activity is recorded on the ER database and within the EQA activities record. This enables the OAAAQA to track all of the EQA activities undertaken by an ER.

d. The ERASD is responsible for maintaining the ER Register and database to ensure the integrity, accuracy and currency of ER data. This involves periodically reviewing the database to ensure it contains up-to-date contact information and CVs for ERs. ERs should also inform the OAAAQA if their circumstances or contact details change to ensure that their profile on the Register is up-to-date and they remain contactable. Updates can be sent via e-mail to the following address: CHEQA-ER@oaaaqa.gov.om

4.3. Monitoring Performance of ERs

The performance of ERs is monitored as follows:

a. Once a final EQA Report has been endorsed by the OAAAQA Board, Review Directors are required to provide feedback on each Panel member using the online form maintained by ERASD.

b. ERASD is responsible for collating the feedback and recording the Review Director's evaluation and recommendations on the ER database and informing the Director of the relevant department. Where an ER is 'not recommended for future work', this is highlighted on the ER database to inform decisions regarding the inclusion of ERs on future EQA Panels and on the ER Register.

4.4. Removal of an ER from the ER Register

An ER who does not continue to meet or uphold the OAAAQA's standards may be removed from the ER Register. The procedure for removing an ER from the Register is outlined below.

a. Cases of poor performance, unethical or unprofessional behaviour, or any activity deemed unbecoming in the role of an ER (see criteria listed under c below) result in a recommendation for removal of an ER from the ER Register being made by DG CHEQA.

b. Removal of an ER from the ER Register can only take place after DG CHEQA approval. ERASD communicates the outcome to the ER.

c. Criteria for permanent removal from the ER Register include but are not limited to:

    i.   Three instances of unjustified decline of invitation to participate in an EQA activity.

    ii.   Not responding to communication from the OAAAQA despite repeated reminders.

    iii.   Poor performance as judged by OAAAQA review mechanisms (see Section 4.3).

    iv.   Unethical or unprofessional behaviour, or any activity that may be damaging to the reputation of OAAAQA by association, including final court sentence.

    v.   Self-requesting withdrawal due to retirement or any other personal or professional reason.

    vi.   Chronic health condition that prevents an ER from performing their role effectively.

    vii.   Death.

d. In some instances, an ER's status may be changed from 'active' to 'inactive' in the ER Register. These include:

    i.   Justified unavailability to participate in EQA activities for a period of two consecutive years or longer, but not permanently (for example, due to temporary ill health or workload).

    ii.   Employment at the OAAAQA.

e. Removal decisions are reflected in the ER Register as shown in Table 1 below.

f. In instances where an ER informs the OAAAQA of their temporary unavailability to participate in EQA activities due to extenuating circumstances (for example, medical treatment or workload), this information will be noted on the ER's profile in the Register, but the ER's status will remain 'active'.

Table 1: Removal of ER from Active Service on ER Register			
	Reason	**Status on ER Database**	**Actions in ER Register**
1	Poor performance or misconduct; three instances of unjustified decline of EQA activity; no communication	Permanently move from 'active' to 'inactive' [but do not delete] Note reason on the database	Remove from the ER Register Remove name, bio and photo from the website Inform DG CHEQA
2	Death, or self-requesting withdrawal from ER Register (e.g., due to retirement or permanent disability)	Permanently move from 'active' to 'inactive' [but do not delete] Note reason on the database	Remove from the ER Register Remove name, bio and photo from the website Inform DG CHEQA

Table 1: Removal of ER from Active Service on ER Register			
	Reason	Status on ER Database	Actions in ER Register
3	Justifiable unavailability (e.g., temporary ill health or workload) for two consecutive years or longer	Temporarily move from 'active' to 'inactive' [but do not delete] Note reason on the database	Keep on the ER Register Keep name, bio and photo on the website No need to inform DG CHEQA
4	Employment at OAAAQA	Temporarily move from 'active' to 'inactive' [but do not delete] Note reason on the database	Temporarily remove from the ER Register Remove name, bio and photo from the website Inform DG CHEQA

4.5. Reactivation of n ER on the ER Register after Tenure at the OAAAQA

If and when an approved ER is recruited as a staff member or is appointed to the OAAAQA Board, he or she is removed from the ER Register for the duration of their tenure. The names of former ERs in this category are retained on the ER database but rendered 'inactive' until further notice. Their profiles are temporarily removed from the OAAAQA website.

At the end of the period of tenure within the OAAAQA or on the OAAAQA Board, any former ER is reinstated on the ER Register, upon approval of the DG CHEQA. The status of the ER is made 'active' on the ER database and the ER is requested to update his/her profile for the OAAAQA website.

4.6. Non-Panel Member Activities by ERs

When an ER is requested by the OAAAQA to undertake a non-Panel member activity (such as acting as an external Review Director or External Moderator, providing ER training or participating in Appeals Committees), this is set out in a separate service contract or letter of agreement indicating scope of work and fees to be paid. Appraisal of the ER's performance in carrying out their non-Panel member activities is conducted by the DG CHEQA in consultation with the relevant Department in CHEQA and other concerned parties.

From time-to-time, the OAAAQA approves requests from ERs to observe EQA activities. Before being confirmed, these candidates' names are submitted to the HEI for vetting against any potential

conflict of interest. Observers also sign a declaration form undertaking to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of the process.

5. Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHEQA	Centre for Higher Education Quality Assurance
DG	Director General
EQA	External Quality Assurance
ER	External Reviewer
ERASD	External Review Activities Support Department
HEI	Higher Education Institution
OAAAQA	Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

6. Definitions

External Quality Assurance (EQA): Any OAAAQA activity such as:

- Institutional or Programme Standards Assessment (ISA or PSA)
- Reassessment activities resulting from an HEI being Conditionally Accredited or placed on Probation or a Programme being placed on Probation (ISR or PSR)
- Institutional or Programme Reaccreditation activities
- General Foundation Programme Quality Audit (GFPQA)
- International External Quality Assurance Agency (IEQA) activities
- Appeals

ER Register: The OAAAQA's National Register of External Reviewers available on the OAAAQA website
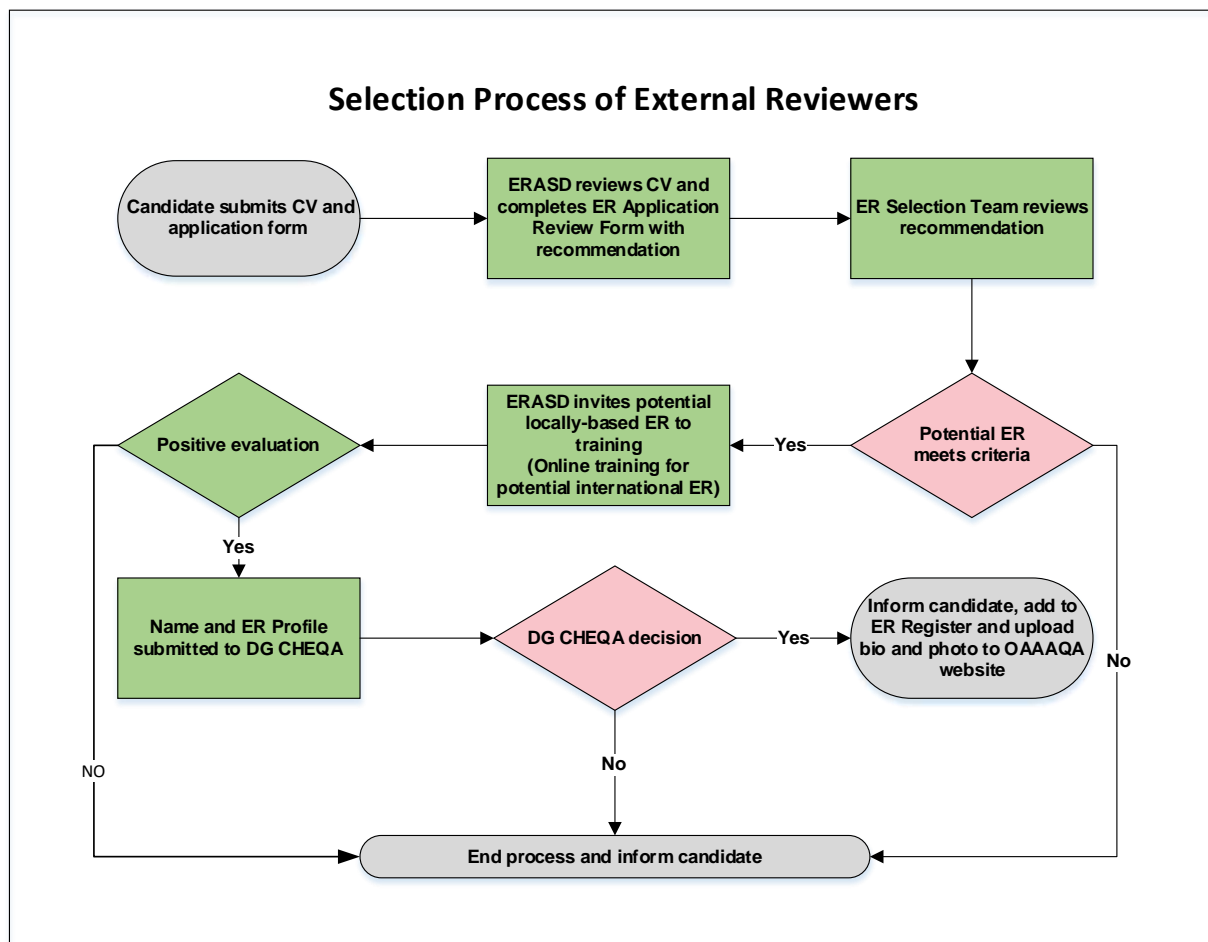
ER Database: The electronic form of the ER Register maintained internally by the OAAAQA which contains information about every ER, including their profile and contact details.

7. References

Institutional Standards Assessment Manual v2 (OAAAQA: Muscat, **2024**)

QAA UK Reviewer Contract [not available in the public domain]

Appendix A: OAAAQA External Reviewer Selection Process Map

Selection Process of External Reviewers

```
Candidate submits CV and      →    ERASD reviews CV and          →    ER Selection Team reviews
application form                    completes ER Application            recommendation
                                    Review Form with
                                    recommendation
                                                                              │
                                                                              ▼
Positive evaluation     ←    ERASD invites potential      ←Yes─    Potential ER
                             locally-based ER to                    meets criteria
                             training                                     │
                             (Online training for                        │No
                             potential international ER)                  │
        │                                                                 │
        │Yes                                                              │
        ▼                                                                 │
Name and ER Profile     →    DG CHEQA decision      ─Yes→   Inform candidate, add to
submitted to DG CHEQA                                        ER Register and upload
                                    │                        bio and photo to OAAAQA
                                    │No                      website
        │NO                         │                                     │No
        │                           ▼                                     │
        └──────────────→    End process and inform candidate    ←────────┘
```

Appendix B: ER Application Form - ER Candidates

Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

الهيئة العمانية للاعتماد الأكاديمي وضمـــــان جـــــودة التعليـــــم

This Application form must be completed by all ER Candidates. It should be read and responded to in conjunction with the OAAAAQA's Policy on the Management of the National Register of External Reviewers for Higher Education Quality Assurance available on the OAAAQA website.

Personal information (Completion of all cells is mandatory)			
Title		Current Position/ Job Title	
First Name(s)		Institution/Organisation	
Last Name		Country of Residence	
Date of Birth		Office Phone Number	
Nationality		Mobile Phone Number	
Recent Photograph		Email Address	
		Postal Address	

Qualifications & Expertise	
Highest Educational Level Attained	
Year of Qualification	
Awarding Institution	
Main specialisation (as per latest qualification)	
Area of Expertise and/or Field of Study (**Broad Field**)	*[Please choose broad field subject area from the attached list of subject codes]*
Area of Expertise and/or Field of Study (**Narrow Field**)	*[Please choose narrow field subject area from the attached list of subject codes]*
Languages and Proficiency level Please indicate languages (spoken and written) and indicate proficiency in each language (5/5 represents 'Excellent')	*[Please specify languages and proficiency in speaking and writing]*

Relevant Experience	
Please list and provide details of your experience in Quality Assurance in Higher Education.	
Please list any training you have undertaken in external quality assurance and/or accreditation.	
Please state how you meet the criteria for an effective member of an OAAAQA external quality assurance panel (refer to Section 3.2 of the related Policy).	
Please list any programme that you assessed/designed or participated in curriculum development in your HEI.	
Please list the subject(s) you are involved in teaching in current/previous HEIs (if you are still in an academic role)	

Appendix C: ER Application Screening Form

Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation
and Quality Assurance of Education

الهيئة العمانية للاعتماد الأكاديمي
وضمـــــــان جـــــودة التعليـــــم

Candidate's Name		Category	☐ International ☐ Locally-based				
Nationality		Subject Area					
Date of CV Submission		Language	English	☐	Arabic	☐	Other ☐

External Reviewer Evaluation Criteria - Part A			
#	The candidate has knowledge and experience in...	Max	Score
1	Quality enhancement and Quality Assurance in Higher Education	10	
2	Quality enhancement and Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Oman	10	
3	Practical application of Quality Assurance (e.g. in a QA role within an HEI)	10	
4	Quality reviews (e.g., audit, accreditation) in educational, professional, military or industrial contexts	10	
5	Engaging with students and/or graduates directly (through teaching or research)	10	
6	A breadth of professional activities (i.e. **not just teaching or research**) in a local or international context	10	
7	Proven communication skills (e.g. through presentation, training or publications)	10	
8	Leading a team or being part of a team (i.e. managerial role or committee membership)	10	
9	Teaching experience in a higher education institution	10	
10	Undertaking Quality Assurance training and development	10	
		100*	

Note: ERs must attain ≥ 60% in their application to qualify for the second stage of the selection process (ER training). Those with ≤59% will be sent a rejection letter.

External Reviewer Evaluation Criteria - Part B			
#	The candidate can participate in <u>Institutional Accreditation</u> because of knowledge and experience in...		
	Holding a senior position within a reputable organisation (in HE and/or other context)	Y/N	
	Quality management processes within an HEI	Y/N	
	External institutional review training	Y/N	
#	The candidate is able to participate in <u>Programme Accreditation or GFPQA</u> because he/she has...		
	A masters or doctoral qualification in the relevant narrow field of study	Y/N	
	Experience in teaching and/or curriculum design in the relevant narrow field of study	Y/N	
	Is published in the relevant narrow field of study in a peer-reviewed publication	Y/N	

The candidate is recommended for (multiple selections are possible)...							
Institutional Accreditation		Programme Accreditation		GFPQA		IEQA	
Other Comments							
Signature						Date	

Appendix D: Locally-based External Reviewer Trainee Assessment Form

Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

الهيئة العمانية للاعتماد الأكاديمي وضمـــــان جـــــودة التعليـــــم

Candidate's Name		EQA Type						
Nationality		Subject Area						
Date of CV Submission		Language	English	☐	Arabic	☐	Other	☐

Trainee Evaluation Criteria

#	Demonstrates the following skills and qualities	Trainer 1		Trainer 2		Trainer 3	
		Max	Score	Max	Score	Max	Score
1	Punctuality (arrives on time and completes tasks by deadline)	10		10		10	
2	Analytical thinking and synthesis skills (gives considered answers and is evaluative)	10		10		10	
3	Collaboration (listens to colleagues and works as a team)	10		10		10	
4	English language fluency and accuracy	10		10		10	
5	Writing and presentation skills	10		10		10	
6	Attentiveness and engagement	10		10		10	
#	**The candidate can participate in Institutional Accreditation because…**						
7	He/she grasps the nature of this EQA activity within an HEI context	10		10		10	
8	He/she is flexible and non-prescriptive in approach	10		10		10	
#	**Can participate in Programme Accreditation or GFPQA because…**						
9	He/she has strong subject knowledge	10		10		10	
10	He/she is able to focus on evaluating detail	10		10		10	
	Evaluation Totals	100		100		100	

Note: Locally based-ERs must attain ≥ 70% to qualify to join the ER Register; those with ≤ 69% will be sent a rejection letter.

Other Comments Justifying Recommendation		Yes	No
Trainer 1:			
Trainer 2:			
Trainer 3:			
	Signatures	**Date**	
Trainer 1:			
Trainer 2:			