Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Report of an Audit of Al Buraimi University College

November 2012
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OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY AUDIT PROCESS

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

The Quality Audit commenced with BUC undertaking a self study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarized in their Quality Audit Portfolio (the ‘Portfolio’). This document was submitted to the OAAA by the due date of 31 December 2011.

The OAAA appointed an external Audit Panel (the ‘Panel’), comprising suitably qualified and experienced local and international reviewers, to conduct the Quality Audit. For membership of the Panel see Appendix A. The Panel met (international members by telephone) on 20 February 2012 to consider BUC’s Portfolio. Following this, the Audit Panel Chairperson’s representative and the Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to BUC on 6 March 2012 to clarify certain matters, request additional information and make arrangements for the Panel’s audit visit.

Prior to the audit visit, the Panel invited submissions from the public about the quality of BUC’s activities. No submissions were received.

The audit visit took place over 14 – 18 April 2012. During this time, the Panel spoke with around 110 people, including representatives of the governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. It also visited a selection of venues and reviewed a range of additional materials.

No information provided after 18 April 2012 (being the last day of the audit visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit, other than pre-existing items specifically requested by the Panel in advance.

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

The Panel’s audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAAA Board. This Report was approved for release by the OAAA Board on 4 November 2012.

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

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

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

Quality Audit is the first stage in Oman’s two-stage process for institutional accreditation. Its focus is formative (developmental) rather than summative. In other words, although the audit addresses nine areas of activity which are common to all institutions, it does not measure the institution against externally set standards of performance in those nine areas. Instead, it considers how well the institution is attending to those areas in accordance with its own Mission and Vision and in the context of relevant legal regulations. Therefore, Quality Audit recognises that each institution has a unique purpose and profile; it does not directly compare one institution with all the other institutions in Oman.

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

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

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

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

Executive Summary of Findings

Al Buraimi University College (BUC) was established in 2003 and is licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). It is a private institution and the first university college in the Al-Dahirah region of the Al-Buraimi Governorate, in the Sultanate of Oman. Al Buraimi shares a border with Al Ain, in the UAE. The College has grown considerably since it opened and at the time of the audit had nearly 2000 students and around 140 academic, administrative and support staff members. The College is affiliated with California State University, Northridge, (CSUN), USA, which provides consultation on teaching, research, and College services related issues, and assists in the development and implementation of a college wide Quality Assurance Plan at BUC. The Panel findings indicate, however, that the current affiliation agreement between BUC and CSUN needs to be reviewed and revised in order to ensure that it supports the quality assurance of academic standards. BUC recently established an agreement with Ain Shams University, Egypt, to offer a Law program in Arabic beginning in 2011-2012. The College also runs a Directorate of Training, Consultation and Community Service which offers lectures, seminars, workshops, certified programs, consultancy services and other training programs to the local and regional communities. In September 2011, the College moved to a newly-built campus which provides a modern and well-equipped teaching and learning environment. The Panel recognises that this has been a significant achievement for the College.

In its Portfolio, BUC states that it is governed by a Board of Trustees (BoT), led by the Chairman of the Board of Directors (BoD) of the Al Nuaimi Group (ANG), which owns the College (Portfolio, p.11). However, in practice, the Panel found that the BoT is largely inactive and that the Chairman of the BoD, who is also Chairman of the College Council, is responsible for most decision-making, particularly in the absence of a College Dean. This is a situation that BUC needs to review as the governance, management and academic affairs of the College should not be the responsibility of any single individual. As BUC has matured considerably since it was established in 2003, it now needs to develop and implement clear governance and management structures with appropriate systems to match its growth in size, scope and complexity. These structures will need to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, reporting lines and be subjected to regular review to ensure their effectiveness. The College needs to establish transparency and clarity in rule setting, autonomy in academic decision-making and avoid potential situations where conflicts of interest may arise.

BUC has developed a Strategic Plan for the period 2009-2014 which has national, academic, community and research goals. Although the goals address relevant areas of activity, they are broad in nature and are not linked to any timelines, key performance measures, clear outcomes or resources. In order for its strategic objectives to be achieved, the College needs to implement operational plans in all areas of activity. Day to day financial management of BUC is overseen by a Financial Controller based at the ANG Head Office. While financial procedures and monitoring would appear to be robust, the College is encouraged to consider its approach to risk management and establish a risk register to identify non-financial as well as financial risks to the College’s sustainability. Although there are a number of internal and external review activities taking place, such as those carried out by CSUN, and the supervisory visits of the MoHE, BUC needs to establish a regular review schedule to support the quality assurance and enhancement of its activities.
BUC offers a Foundation Program and undergraduate programs in English, Translation, Accounting, Human Resources, Marketing, Business Administration, Finance and Banking, Information Systems, Computer Science and Law (which is delivered in Arabic). Plans to introduce postgraduate degrees (MBA and MA TESOL) have not yet been implemented. BUC emphasizes the role it hopes to play in national development by equipping students with the attributes required in the local labor market and knowledge economy. These attributes need to be embedded into the curricula and assessed as part of the program learning objectives. More work could be done with local industry and employers to formally elicit feedback on the skills of graduates entering the workplace and the appropriateness of the curriculum. This relationship could be formalized through the establishment of a local advisory group who may also be able to provide support for work placement and career opportunities. CSUN is working with BUC on developing a program to support curriculum review and assessment, the Assurance of Learning (AOL) program, which is being well received in the departments where it is being piloted. The College is urged to review its current entry standards and ensure that the learning outcomes of the Foundation Program align with Oman’s national standards. One area which needs attention is the current approach to the marking and moderation of examinations and assurance of standards. At the time of the audit there was no oversight external to the departments developing the examinations and the College itself acknowledged that it was unable to ascertain whether learning objectives have been met or not.

In order for BUC to maintain its classification as a University College, it needs to ensure that it is committed to conducting advanced research activities. The College recognizes that its energies have been focused on developing and building the new campus and has recently established a Unit of Scientific Research and Higher Studies and a Research and Symposia Committee. BUC now needs to develop a clear research strategy which also takes into account targets for research performance; research funding; ethics and intellectual property policies and the establishment of a research-teaching nexus. In terms of academic support services, the College is intending to upgrade its registration facilities and provide online registration. Further work needs to be done in ensuring that the Library services meets student and staff needs, including research, and that information literacy skills are developed. Academic advising and student learning support need to be adequately planned and resourced. Students were overall positive about the College environment and the support provided for their studies; the Panel heard that low-income students are given extra financial support from the College. However, BUC would benefit from carry out regular student satisfaction surveys, identify concerns and inform the student body of action taken in response to their feedback. A consistent and well-communicated approach to career guidance also needs to be implemented.

The College needs to develop, implement and monitor a human resources strategy that includes recruitment; induction; handling of staff grievances; and severance. It also needs to ensure that its mechanisms for monitoring performance are aligned with opportunities for professional development of academic, administrative and support staff. The Panel was informed that staff retention was an issue and while BUC is aware of this, it needs to be addressed in order to ensure continuity in the academic and management performance of the College.

**Summary of Commendations**

A formal Commendation recognizes an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Buraimi University College for developing a Mission and Vision that are aligned to local and regional priorities......................... 12

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Buraimi University College for establishing a special fees structure and offering free accommodation for students from low income backgrounds......................................................................................................................... 40

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Buraimi University College for planning and implementing its new campus project.......................................................... 47
Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to place priority on quality assurance and enhancement issues, and supports its efforts in this area such as through the inclusion of the Director of Quality Assurance Department in the College Council where key decisions are being made. .................................................. 13

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to increase its academic management capacity and supports its efforts to do so through the recruitment of an Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs. ............................................... 14

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to review its curriculum and program learning goals in order to be clearly mapped to course content and assessment tasks, and supports its efforts in this area such as through the introduction of the Assurance of Learning program in order to develop curriculum matrices.......................................................................................................................... 21

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that, in line with its status as a University College, it now needs to develop a research culture, and supports its efforts through the establishment of Unit of Scientific Research and Higher Studies and the formation of a Research and Symposia Committee........................................ 28

5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to establish an alumni association to maintain contact with its graduates, and supports its efforts to do so.................................................................................................................. 32

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to improve its registration services to students, and supports its efforts to implement an online registration system.......................................................................................................................... 34

7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to improve its provision of career guidance and counseling, and supports its efforts in this area, such as through the delivery of workshops on job search techniques. .......... 40

8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to increase the Omanisation of its workforce, and supports its efforts to do so, for example through providing recruitment opportunities for its graduates.......................... 46

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College ensure that the Board of Trustees fulfills its mandate in terms of supporting the governance of the College and implement mechanisms to monitor its effectiveness. ...................... 12

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review its current governance and management structures to ensure that there is a clear separation between them and to ensure that key positions are not held by a single individual.................................................. 13
3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College clarify its management and organization structure with clear definitions of roles, responsibilities and reporting lines, and establish a robust performance review system to regularly evaluate the effectiveness and consistency of College management practices. .................. 14

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College, in conjunction with California State University, Northridge, review the affiliation agreement, and its implementation, to ensure that the quality assurance of the College’s academic programs is rigorously monitored and opportunities for improvement are identified and addressed......................................................... 15

5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review its current approach to strategic planning to ensure that it is inclusive; its objectives are appropriate and measurable; timelines and responsibilities are clearly stated; sufficient resources are allocated; and progress and results are monitored and communicated to key stakeholders on a regular basis. ........................................................................................................ 16

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement operational plans in all areas, ensure they are linked to the College’s strategic objectives and provide support for staff involved in planning........................... 16

7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College pursue its intention to establish proper delegation of financial management authority at the College level in order to enhance operational flexibility and maintain an efficient approach in this area......................................................................................................................... 17

8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a policy management system which includes developing comprehensive policies in areas such as risk management and health and safety and ensure that all policies are being implemented consistently across the College, are regularly reviewed, and communicated to all stakeholders. ............................................................................ 18

9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College establish a regular activity and entity review schedule and ensure that resulting data is being used effectively to monitor progress and enhance quality................................................................. 19

10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College clearly identify its graduate attributes, in consultation with external stakeholders, and that these attributes be clearly mapped to curriculum goals. .......................................................................................... 20

11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review its requirements for students entering directly into higher education programs and carry out benchmarking to establish English proficiency levels of students entering the Foundation Program. .................................................................................................................. 22

12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review its Foundation Program placement test and curriculum to ensure that they align with all four areas in Oman’s Academic Standards for General Foundation and continue to regularly review the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for further study.................................................................................................................. 22

13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a strategic approach to assure and enhance the quality of teaching amongst its academic staff.. ........................................................................................................... 23

14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement its policy on plagiarism and develop a culture of academic
integrity amongst students and staff through an increased emphasis, across the curriculum, on developing skills in appropriate referencing. ................................................................. 23

15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review and maximize the current opportunities available for student placement in local industry in order to prepare students for the workplace. ................................................................. 24

16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College, as a matter of priority and with the support of its affiliate, develop and implement robust moderation processes for its assessment, that it ensure common assessment tasks are clearly linked to the learning outcomes, and that it develop rigorous policies in order to implement clearly identified standards of student achievement for all its courses. ................................. 25

17. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a data management system in order to monitor student progress and retention rates.............................................................................................................. 26

18. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a mechanism to track its graduate destinations......................................................... 26

19. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College, as a matter of priority, develop and implement a comprehensive research plan and policies to support research performance such as funding; ethics and protection of intellectual property; professional development for research; and to promote the research-teaching nexus. ................................................................................................................................. 29

20. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a comprehensive plan for industry and community engagement activities in order to support and strengthen its ongoing relationships with industry, employers, professions, other education providers and alumni..................................................... 31

21. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College improve its Library provision for staff and students in order to meet the needs of its learning, teaching and research environment. .................................................................................. 35

22. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College improve its provision of academic advising, especially in advising and supporting at risk students...................................................................................................................................... 36

23. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a regular mechanism to collect feedback from the students and staff on the effectiveness of its student and student support services, review the feedback and utilize it for planning and management purposes. ..................................................................... 38

24. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a human resources plan that includes recruitment; induction; handling of staff grievances; and severance, along with a mechanism to monitor the effectiveness of this strategy. .......................................................... 42

25. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a comprehensive program of professional development for all staff linked to an institutional needs analysis and regular review of performance...................... 44

26. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College explore the issues relating to high turnover of academic staff and develop an action plan to address these.............................................................................................................. 46

27. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College align its marketing and media strategies with the College’s strategic objectives. .......... 47
28. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a communication policy to ensure that all stakeholders are able to access relevant documentation whether in English or Arabic. .......................................................... 48
1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Al-Buraimi University College (BUC) is a private institution and the first university college in the Al-Dahirah region of the Al-Buraimi Governorate, in the Sultanate of Oman. Al Buraimi shares a border with Al Ain, in the United Arab Emirates. It was established in 2003 and licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The College is affiliated with California State University, Northridge, (CSUN), USA, which provides consultation on teaching, research, and College services related issues, and assists in the development and implementation of a college wide Quality Assurance Plan at BUC. In addition, BUC has established an agreement with Ain Shams University, Egypt, to offer a Law program in Arabic beginning in 2011-2012.

This Chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to the BUC Mission, Vision and Values; governance and management; institutional affiliations; strategic and operational planning; financial, risk and policy management; entity and activity review systems; students’ grievances; health and safety; and oversight of associated entities.

1.1 Mission, Vision and Values

The College states that it has developed its Mission, Vision and Values based on the vision expressed by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said:

*However, we should point out that, by the grace of God, we are enjoying prosperity today, and then not to forget our duty that our thoughts and plans be focused on the future. This is because major targets and many challenges lie ahead of us and we have a long way to go. Therefore, it is required to equip with blessings of God ourselves with knowledge, a firm will, and a readiness to work hard to achieve and seek success [sic] (Portfolio, p.8).*

The College’s Vision is to:

*Strive to be a strategic contributor and partner in achieving the comprehensive development by offering distinct services in the field of higher education, scientific research and community service (Portfolio, p.8).*

The Vision is translated into the following Mission statements:

- *Establishing and developing the spirit of loyalty to the country and its leadership.*
- *Enriching the local and regional community with qualified human resources in education, knowledge, and skills needed to carry out their responsibilities effectively.*
- *Reinforcing scientific research activities with the aim of better serving the different products and service sectors in the community.*
- *Providing various consulting and training services of high quality and transparency, which meet international standards and criteria (Portfolio, p.8)*

The Core Values of BUC are:

- *Transparency and clarity in rules and regulations, and its decisions.*
- *Focusing on fulfilling the aspirations of college clients.*
- *Partnership with public and private sectors.*
- *Flexibility in adapting to the surrounding environment.*
• Organizational learning, continuous improvement and encouraging creativity.
• Involvement and participation in decision making.
• Working in a team spirit (Portfolio, p.8)

The Panel noted that there are differences in the wordings of the Mission and Vision statements in the Portfolio and in other documents being reviewed. The Panel was informed that these differences were down to variations in translating from Arabic to English. Given the importance of these statements in giving the direction and guidance for all activities at BUC, it would be helpful to ensure consistent translation of these key statements in all documents to communicate a clear and consistent message to all stakeholders of the College.

BUC has demonstrated its commitment toward fulfilling its stated Mission and Vision, such as investing in financial and human resources and in providing educational and training services to the local and regional community. The establishment of a new campus, available documentation on training, consultancy, and community services offered, and feedback from external stakeholders and community members captured during interviews indicated that the College has developed Mission and Vision statements which meet local and regional priorities.

Commendation 1
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Buraimi University College for developing a Mission and Vision that are aligned to local and regional priorities.

The College has indicated that priority was given to the development of the new campus facility and now that the building project has been completed (see Section 9.1), it is ready to address other priorities (Portfolio, p.30). Given the importance of scientific research activities as part of BUC’s Mission and in line with its status as a university college, more attention and concerted efforts should now be given to the emerging Unit of Scientific Research and the Research and Symposia Committee. Further discussion on this topic is provided in Chapter 4 of this Report.

1.2 Governance
In the Portfolio, BUC indicated that the Board of Trustees (BoT) is the body, empowered by the Executive Bylaws, responsible for the governance of the College:

The Board of Trustees (BOT) of BUC, which is a private entity and formed at the beginning of the college, is endowed with powers to frame the by-laws that guide the governance of the College (Portfolio, p.11).

The BoT is headed by the Chairman of the Board of Directors (BoD) together with five other members which are the Dean of the College, a representative of the MoHE, two selected experts from the local community, and an additional shareholder representative from the Al Nuaimi Group (ANG) who owns the College. The BoT is expected to have at least two meetings annually in order to review College business and other activities (Portfolio, p.11). A review of the meeting schedules of the BoT indicated that only one annual meeting had been held during 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, while the BoT did not meet at all during 2011-2012. BUC is urged to review the effectiveness of the BoT in order for it to play a useful role in the governance of the College.

Recommendation 1
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College ensure that the Board of Trustees fulfills its mandate in
terms of supporting the governance of the College and implement mechanisms to monitor its effectiveness.

In its review of the current governance and management structures, the Panel was informed that the Chairman of the BoD and BoT also heads the College Council, a key decision-making and management body of BUC. The Panel was not able to clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of the BoD in relation to the governance and management of BUC, except that in addition to the Chairman of the BoD, the General Manager of the ANG also serves as a member of the College Council (Portfolio, p.12).

Given the vital roles and the associated responsibilities involved in the governance and management of the College and to hold true to the spirit of the Core Values (Portfolio, p.9), BUC is urged to review its entire governance and management structures. This includes ensuring compliance with the MoHE Executive Bylaws for Private HEIs to encourage broader participation and involvement of members of the College community. The College needs to ensure that there is transparency and clarity in rule setting, autonomy in academic decision-making and the avoidance of potential situations of conflict of interest. BUC has matured considerably since it was established in 2003 and now needs to develop and implement clear governance and management structures to match its growth in size, scope and complexity.

Recommendation 2
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review its current governance and management structures to ensure that there is a clear separation between them and to ensure that key positions are not held by a single individual.

1.3 Management
The key management bodies for BUC are the College Council and the Academic Council (Portfolio, p.12). According to the Academic Policy and Council and other relevant documents, all major policies and decisions of the College, including recommendations from the Academic Council on academic and related matters, are made by the College Council.

The College Council is headed by the Chairman of the BoD and during 2011-2012 it consisted of 11 members including the Dean as the Vice Chair; General Manager of the ANG; Assistant Deans; Heads of Department; and the Director of the Quality Assurance Department (QAD). Given the value placed on quality as articulated in the current Vision, Mission and Core Value statements, as well as in the strategic goals, BUC recognised the need to include the Director of the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) on the College Council (Portfolio, p.21). The Panel supports BUC’s decision in this area.

Affirmation 1
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to place priority on quality assurance and enhancement issues, and supports its efforts in this area such as through the inclusion of the Director of Quality Assurance Department in the College Council where key decisions are being made.

The Academic Council is headed by the Dean and consists of nine members including the Assistant, Deans Heads of Department and the Director of QAD. Based on the review of samples of minutes, schedules of meetings, and interviews with staff, the Panel confirmed that there are regular meetings held by these management bodies to address operational issues at the College. Aside from the College and Academic Council, the Panel learned that various committees or groups are formed to address a diverse array of both academic and administrative
issues through discussions among instructional and administrative staff, as well as with students. Documentation considered by the Panel indicated that some of these committees are campus-wide, while others are specific to particular departments or units. Academic committees are usually formed by each department to address its operational needs, such as the Equalization Committee for evaluating the eligibility of earned credit hours for transfer students or the Examination Committee for reviewing test and examination questions for their courses. Administrative committees are established to offer support for carrying out the duties and activities of the corresponding administrative departments/units, such as the Purchasing Committee and the Disciplinary Committee for Students.

The Panel did not find clear evidence of how different academic departments, administrative units, and committees communicate and coordinate their work with one another. As the College experiences an increase in enrolment and faces other reported challenges such as competition for students and teaching staff in the local or regional markets, BUC would benefit from having a clear management and organization structure. This structure will need to facilitate timely communication of a consistent and unifying message to all involved in the campus community, and enable review of performance in an efficient and effective manner.

**Recommendation 3**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College clarify its management and organization structure with clear definitions of roles, responsibilities and reporting lines, and establish a robust performance review system to regularly evaluate the effectiveness and consistency of College management practices.

According to BUC, the academic leadership rests with the Dean of the College (Portfolio, pp.11-12). The Dean’s position has been vacant since July 2011 and the Panel was informed that BUC has been actively recruiting; a recent appointment for the Dean’s position fell through shortly before the audit visit. In the meantime, the Panel recognizes the significant demand on the Acting Dean to both manage daily operations and contribute to the management decision-making responsibilities of this role. While the Panel encourages the College to accelerate its attempts to recruit a new Dean, it supports BUC’s interim decision to establish the post of Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs to support the academic management activities in the College.

**Affirmation 2**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to increase its academic management capacity and supports its efforts to do so through the recruitment of an Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs.

1.4 **Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance**

The College states that it has established different types of relationships with regional and international institutions (Portfolio, p.13). Some of these agreements were intended for the provision of short-term services from external institutions, while others were for offering targeted services to client institutions (see Section 5.4).

In terms of institutional affiliations, the College has had an agreement with the California State University, Northridge (CSUN), USA for academic affiliation since 2004-5 (Portfolio, p.13). Two different Memoranda of Agreement (MoAs) have since been established for maintaining the educational affiliation relationship between CSUN and BUC, with one from 2007 until 2010 and the latest from 2010 until 2015. According to BUC, CSUN “guarantees quality of education through supervising and reviewing our programs which set forth high standards according to
international accreditation system [sic]” (Portfolio, p.14). The award certificates have CSUN’s official seal and state:

*This certifies that the curriculum for this Al Buraimi University College program was developed in affiliation with California State University Northridge, U.S.A.*

The award certificates are signed by the Chairman of the BoD and the Dean of BUC. The Panel was informed that CSUN does not have any role in moderating assessments or the grading of examinations. CSUN provides quality assurance through their faculty members acting as “consultants” in the areas of English, IT, Business, setting assessment tasks, teaching and learning and library support. A number of review visits by CSUN have been carried out (see Section 1.10).

In collaboration with CSUN, the College introduced an Assurance of Learning (AOL) program 2011 which is intended to develop mechanisms to support quality assurance in teaching and learning areas (see Section 2.2). However, the Panel was unable to find evidence of how the activities specified in the CSUN agreement explicitly guarantee the quality of education in line within an international accreditation system, as stated above. The College is urged, in conjunction with CSUN, to review the current relationship to ensure that the affiliation agreement supports the quality assurance of academic standards.

**Recommendation 4**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College, in conjunction with California State University, Northridge, review the affiliation agreement, and its implementation, to ensure that the quality assurance of the College’s academic programs is rigorously monitored and opportunities for improvement are identified and addressed.

BUC has also signed an MoA with CSUN to establish the CSU International Post-Graduate Center at BUC for the period between 2009 and 2012 to offer MBA and MA TESOL programs (Portfolio, p.14). However, the Panel was informed that this project has been postponed until the College has a sufficient number of students with the required skills in English to enroll on the programs.

In addition to the affiliation with CSUN, BUC has also entered into an agreement through the MoU with Ain Shams University of Egypt, and begun offering a new Law degree program in Arabic at the College during 2011-2012 (Portfolio, p.13). The Panel was informed that a member of faculty from Ain Shams University is leading the program at BUC, providing a replica of the course in Egypt with appropriate contextualisation where necessary. As this program was only introduced in September 2011, this was not an area explored by the Panel.

The area of affiliated entities is addressed in Section 1.13.

### 1.5 Strategic Plan

The College has developed two five-year strategic plans, 2004-2009 and 2009-2014 (Portfolio, p.14). The 2009-2014 Strategic Plan contains five main goals together with a section for stating future aspirations. The five main goals are the national, educational, academic, scientific research, and community service goals, with a list of approaches or strategies under each focal area (Portfolio, pp.15-16). BUC indicated that the BoT was involved in both the development and implementation of the Strategic Plan (Portfolio, pp.14-15). However, the Panel was unable to find evidence to show how the Strategic Plan was developed and input was sought, or who was responsible for implementing various parts of the plan. A SWOT analysis was identified in
one of the program review documents prepared by BUC for CSUN; however, it is not clear if the SWOT analysis was utilized for developing the current Strategic Plan. The Panel found that the goals stated in the 2009-2014 Strategic Plan were very broad and it was not evident how these were aligned with specific College activities. While there are examples of strategic goals being achieved in the CSUN Program Review reports, the Panel did not find evidence to show how these goals were implemented nor any corresponding key performance indicators (KPIs) for monitoring progress on a regular basis. The Panel was not able to find any link between resource allocation and the Strategic Plan.

In interviews, the Panel found that the majority of BUC staff did not seem to be aware of the College’s current Strategic Plan, its processes or its progress. BUC staff saw the establishment of the new campus facility as the key objective in the College’s Strategic Plan or associated the idea of strategic planning to their individual departmental plans. The College is urged to develop a systematic and transparent approach to the development and implementation of its strategic planning process.

**Recommendation 5**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review its current approach to strategic planning to ensure that it is inclusive; its objectives are appropriate and measurable; timelines and responsibilities are clearly stated; sufficient resources are allocated; and progress and results are monitored and communicated to key stakeholders on a regular basis.

1.6 **Operational Planning**

The College indicated that the shareholder group, ANG, manages operational planning under the supervision of the Chairman of the BoT. The College’s financial planning process and the membership and roles of the Budget Committee were outlined in the Portfolio (pp.17-18). The Panel was presented with two academic department operational plans (for Business Administration and IT) but these were stand-alone strategic plans for each department and did not make any reference to the College’s overall Strategic Plan.

The Panel found no evidence of operational planning, other than short term financial planning, at BUC. The College is urged to develop operational plans with specific, measurable objectives aligned to the Strategic Plan for all departments and units. Training and support will need to be given to staff involved in planning to underpin a consistent approach in this area and mechanisms for reviewing progress against stated objectives will need to be developed.

**Recommendation 6**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement operational plans in all areas, ensure they are linked to the College’s strategic objectives and provide support for staff involved in planning.

1.7 **Financial Management**

The College developed a Financial Management Policy in September 2010 (Portfolio, p.18). The policy clearly states that the Financial Management Division of ANG is responsible for the management of finances at BUC. The Chairman and the Financial Controller, who is appointed by ANG, handle all of the College’s financial affairs.

Documentation submitted to the Panel stated that the key roles of the Financial Controller are to develop and implement the finance functions to ensure that the College’s goals, objectives and
targets are met. Aside from serving as the liaison with external auditors and other agencies for auditing the financial statements and accounts of BUC at the end of each financial year, the Financial Controller is responsible for preparing the annual budget based on needs of the College and thereafter monitoring the allocated budget. The Panel learned that such financial needs were identified through requests submitted by the administrative and academic Heads of Department prior to the beginning of the subsequent semester and the subsequent year and approved by the Dean. In addition, the Budget Committee is expected to contribute to the budget development process (Portfolio, pp.17-18).

According to the Financial Management Policy, the responsibilities of the Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration include establishing policies, standards and procedures applicable to financial accounting and reporting functions and activities, and conducting periodic, systematic reviews of financial accounting and reporting practices. The Panel was informed that the Financial Controller monitors the major financial investment initiatives and budgeting process, while the Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration is responsible for financial operations within the College. As the College matures and increases in size, scope and complexity, the proper delegation of financial management authority at the College level could enhance its operational flexibility and functional efficiency of administration activities. While the College recognized this as an opportunity for improvement (Portfolio, p.18), no action had been taken to address this.

**Recommendation 7**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College pursue its intention to establish proper delegation of financial management authority at the College level in order to enhance operational flexibility and maintain an efficient approach in this area.

### 1.8 Risk Management

According to BUC, the College began to see risk management as an important issue during the development of its new campus in 2010 (Portfolio, p.18). However, the College seems to identify risk solely with health and safety issues. During interviews and the consideration of a range of supporting materials, the Panel noted additionally identified risks not mentioned in the Portfolio, such as the impact of the decline in student intake for financial sustainability; the impact of an unexpected increase in enrolment for coordinating support services; and other potential risks. The College does not have a risk register or a formal action plan to identify, assess and address both the strategic and operational risks that the College may face. BUC is therefore urged to establish a comprehensive risk management policy to take all necessary precautions to protect human, financial and physical resources (see Recommendation 8).

### 1.9 Policy Management

The College has indicated that the BoT, the College Council and the Academic Council are the three main bodies responsible for policy management (Portfolio, p.18). The Panel considered a range of policies, manuals, procedures and guidelines provided in the supporting materials including the Academic Policy, the Administrative Manual, the Assessment Plan for BUC, various Bylaws, the Financial Management Policy, and the Quality Manual. These policies and related documents come in different formats with administrative decisions having a consistent layout and key components. Others are in different layouts and missing some of the key elements like approval authority or review date. Without having such information as the target review date, the Panel was unable to determine how often the policies and guidelines are being reviewed and updated.
The Quality Manual includes a comprehensive review of relevant academic policies and procedures. However, there is no established mechanism for the dissemination of other policies and guidelines with no central location available for accessing master copies of these documents. Furthermore, the Panel found that some of these policies and related documents were only available in Arabic which meant that a number of College staff and stakeholders might not be aware of them. The College would benefit from establishing a consistent approach to policy management, development, implementation and review across the campus. It also needs to develop policies for key areas such as risk management; student grievances and health and safety.

**Recommendation 8**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a policy management system which includes developing comprehensive policies in areas such as risk management and health and safety and ensure that all policies are being implemented consistently across the College, are regularly reviewed, and communicated to all stakeholders.

**1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems**

The College states that entity and activity reviews in various academic and administrative areas are based on the guidelines and recommendations provided by the MoHE, OAAA, and CSUN (Portfolio, p.19). Through its agreements with CSUN, BUC has received consultancy services to develop academic programs, policies, student support services, courses, and the piloting of an AOL assessment system for the three academic departments and the Unit of Foundation Program (UFP). A CSUN onsite review was conducted in 2007 as a part of the requirements for the renewal of the MoA between BUC and CSUN. A follow-up review of the responses provided by BUC in 2009 was conducted by CSUN in 2010. In addition to the onsite review visit, representatives from CSUN participate in the annual graduation ceremony at BUC and meet with faculty and students to discuss academic and curriculum related issues. Furthermore supervisory visits are conducted by the Quality Assurance Department of the MoHE and provide recommendations to BUC in areas where it needs to comply with policies and decisions stipulated by the Ministry.

In 2007-2008, BUC entered a consultation agreement with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to conduct a formal review of the curriculum and structure of the UFP (Portfolio, p.19) (see Section 2.4). The Panel was informed that for internal review, end of semester and annual reports are the primary vehicles for reviewing academic activities and other related matters. These reports are considered by the Heads of Department, the Director of the QAD, and the Academic Council and the Dean. Other College activities are reviewed through the respective administrative or departmental committees, the QAD, and the College Council. As a consequence of those reviews, BUC began applying a more standardized reporting format for academic departments to examine and report activities related to their students, instructors, curriculum, teaching materials, and examination results at the end of each semester in 2010. The standardized AOL form designed by CSUN was piloted during the second semester of 2010-2011 for reporting annual program assessment results. However, despite the number of review activities taking place at College and department level, there was no overall sense that there was a cohesive and coherent activity and entity review system in place. While the Panel acknowledges the efforts of the QAD in collating the review reports, there is a lack of management oversight in this area. The College would benefit from establishing a regular activity and entity review schedule and ensure that actions in response to recommendations in review reports are followed up, and their results are analyzed, documented and utilized systematically for informing decisions.
Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College establish a regular activity and entity review schedule and ensure that resulting data is being used effectively to monitor progress and enhance quality.

1.11 Student Grievance Process

For academic matters, the College has issued a three-step Grievance Procedure and Dispute Resolutions Policy and Procedure (Portfolio, p.20). BUC states that students are encouraged in the first instance to resolve differences with academic staff who are directly involved, then proceed to report the matter to the Head of Department, and lastly involve the Dean for the final resolution (Portfolio, p.20). BUC also offers other channels for students to air their complaints and grievances on other matters, such as through the Student Council, open meetings with College Management, and the Dean’s suggestion box. Students interviewed were generally pleased with the peer-to-peer support system through the Student Council. However, some students indicated that they often chose to go directly to the Chairman of the BoD to file their complaints, particularly when they felt that the Heads of the Department or the Dean might not take actions on their behalf. Other students commented that they would approach the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs directly to seek help. The Panel encourages BUC to review the current approaches for handling academic and other grievances and find ways to ensure all stakeholders are fully aware of the available options and proper procedures.

1.12 Health and Safety

In its Portfolio, BUC identified some of the potential health and safety hazards that could occur on College grounds and in College facilities (p.18). The College has recently appointed a Head for Safety and Security and a new Safety and Security Policy has been drawn up to address issues related to campus security, fire safety, facilities upkeep and a non-smoking policy on the campus. BUC is in the process of installing a new surveillance system, with video cameras, to monitor activities and to control access points on campus. Information about health care, hostel security, and fire safety is available in the Student Handbook. BUC is encouraged to develop a more comprehensive Health and Safety Policy that covers staff and students of the College, and to provide relevant procedures and guidelines together with proper training for all stakeholders (see Recommendation 8).

1.13 Oversight of Associated Entities

Although the College did not include other associated entities in the Portfolio, interviews with staff and documentation indicated that BUC owns and operates the Directorate of Training, Consultation and Community Service (DTCCS) as a separate institute. DTCCS offers lectures, seminars, workshops, certification programs, consultancy services and other training programs to the local and regional communities, as well as various constituent groups. The Head of the DTCCS was newly appointed at the time of the audit, and relevant information about DTCCS’s activities is addressed in Chapter 5 of this Report.
2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMS

BUC offers a Foundation Program and undergraduate programs in English, Translation, Accounting, Human Resources, Marketing, Business Administration, Finance and Banking, Information Systems, Computer Science and Law. There are plans to introduce postgraduate degrees (MBA and MA TESOL) but these have not yet been implemented.

BUC states that it works with a number of national and international organizations in order to develop and quality assure its programs (Portfolio, p.9). All undergraduate programs are developed in affiliation with California State University Northridge (CSUN), with the exception of the Law program, which was developed in association with Ain Shams University, Cairo. This Chapter considers key areas in relation to student learning by coursework, including curriculum, student entry standards, teaching quality, assessment and graduate destinations.

2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives

In its Strategic Plan for 2009-14, BUC emphasizes the role it hopes to play in national development by equipping students with the attributes required in the local labor market and knowledge economy (Portfolio, pp.14-15). BUC states that these graduate attributes are specified by each of the three academic departments with input from the Unit of Foundation Program (UFP) and that learning objectives are aligned with program goals. Each course outline states program objectives along with learning objectives and/or, in some cases, ‘course outcomes’. However, there appear to be no graduate attributes that relate to all students graduating from BUC at the three different levels of qualifications, and the only documented difference between the Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Bachelors degree output appears to be the number of credit hours completed. The Panel was unable to find evidence that in developing its Strategic Plan BUC had consulted with local stakeholders (students, alumni, employers) to identify the attributes that will serve the needs of the local and regional markets. In order to support BUC in its Mission of meeting the needs of the job market, it would be beneficial for BUC to develop its graduate attributes in consultation with external stakeholders and affiliate partners and to clearly communicate and embed these attributes throughout the College and the community.

Recommendation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College clearly identify its graduate attributes, in consultation with external stakeholders, and that these attributes be clearly mapped to curriculum goals.

The College states that it has been unable to ascertain the exact level of achievement of learning outcomes or learning objectives for each course or major (Portfolio, p.22). The College is urged to review its approach in this area to ensure that its learning objectives are measurable and student achievement against these objectives is monitored and used to inform program development and review.

2.2 Curriculum

BUC states that its curricula for the undergraduate programs are developed by BUC academic staff, based on “the curriculum designed by CSUN” (Portfolio, p.22). Standard course outline templates are completed by academic staff and programs are reviewed by departmental committees which make recommendations to the Head of Department (HoD). These recommendations are then submitted to the Dean for consideration by the Committee for Study Plans before going to the Academic Council for approval. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is then informed of any minor program changes. Documentation reviewed by the Panel
indicated that in addition to the curriculum reviews by Departments, several reviews have been carried out by Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) (see Section 2.4) and CSUN, and follow-up action taken by BUC (see Section 1.10).

Despite the fact that improvements have been made to the curriculum, the Panel agrees with BUC that “there needs to be improvement in the curriculum alignment with BUC Mission and national framework” (Portfolio, p.23). There is a need for curriculum objectives to be reviewed in line with graduate attributes (see Section 2.1), and for course objectives to be clearly mapped to course content and assessment. The Panel was interested to learn of one recent initiative that aims to develop greater institutional focus on curriculum evaluation and assessment at BUC. At the time of the audit, the Assurance of Learning (AOL) program was being piloted with the support of CSUN. The project involves the establishment of faculty and departmental roles with regard to assurance of learning (e.g. the appointment of an Assessment Coordinator, and the setting up of a departmental AOL committee in each department) along with the development of curriculum matrices that clearly indicate learning objectives and the degree program learning goals to which these relate. The AOL program also aims to provide support with developing assessment instruments to be used to measure attainment of these learning goals and objectives and the collection and analysis of this assessment data for curriculum development purposes. There is some evidence that AOL is beginning to be applied at BUC, for example in the IT Department. If embedded and applied consistently across BUC, this program could do much to improve the clarity of the curriculum and its assessment.

**Affirmation 3**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to review its curriculum and program learning goals in order to be clearly mapped to course content and assessment tasks, and supports its efforts in this area such as through the introduction of the Assurance of Learning program in order to develop curriculum matrices.

### 2.3 Student Entry Standards

The College states that to be admitted to BUC, students are required to have completed the General Education Diploma and to take an in-house English placement test (Portfolio, p.23). According to the BUC website at the time of the audit visit, students who have attained an overall IELTS score of 5.5 or TOEFL 470, are not required to take the placement test and may proceed directly to credit-bearing courses, although the Quality Manual states that all students are required to take the placement test (p.13). The Panel noted that the requirement of a TOEFL score of 470 is less than the TOEFL score 500 indicated in Oman’s Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs.

The in-house placement test covers Grammar, Reading, Writing and Listening and students are placed in one of the three levels of Foundation, or in academic programs, based on the percentage scored (e.g. a score of 80% enables students to enter academic programs directly, while a score of less than 30% places a student in level one of the Foundation Program). However, to date, no external benchmarking has been carried out to establish the proficiency level of students entering Foundation and academic programs, so it is unclear what proficiency level is implied by a pass mark of 80%. One staff member suggested that those entering the first level of Foundation might be as low as IELTS 3.0 (“extremely limited user”) and felt that the benchmark of 5.5 for direct entry is too high as few students apply with this level of English. It became clear to the Panel that because there are no lower limits on entry apart from completion of the General Education Diploma, it is possible that a significant number of students are potentially ‘at risk’ in the BUC system (i.e. do not have the basic academic and linguistic skills required for successful study at undergraduate level). Additional support services may be necessary for these students.
Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review its requirements for students entering directly into higher education programs and carry out benchmarking to establish English proficiency levels of students entering the Foundation Program.

2.4 Foundation Program

The Foundation Program was reviewed by SQU in 2008 and several recommendations were made with regard to curriculum, materials, assessment and teaching methods. As a result of this feedback, the UFP was created to deliver this program. Interviews with UFP teaching staff and students provided evidence of some good practice, such as double marking of essays, and the establishment of an AOL committee to review program objectives and map these to assessment. However, the Panel noted that the SQU recommendation that English skills be taught in a more integrated way was not fully implemented as most skills in Levels One and Two of the Foundation Program are still taught separately. Further, it appears that the Foundation Program is largely an English language program, with the exception of a Basic Mathematics course, which is taken as part of Level Two. The other two learning areas required as a part of Oman’s Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs, namely Computing and Study Skills, are taught after Foundation, in the Academic Program (with the exception of those students who take Level Three, where students are required to take the Computing and Study Skills courses while still in Foundation). The involvement of SQU in the quality assurance of the BUC Foundation Program has led to some improvements but it is unclear whether SQU’s involvement in quality assurance of this program is regular and ongoing. Further, although improvements have been made to the curriculum, the College needs to develop a mechanism to monitor whether or not the program is meeting its goals of preparing students for academic study at BUC.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review its Foundation Program placement test and curriculum to ensure that they align with all four areas in Oman’s Academic Standards for General Foundation and continue to regularly review the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for further study.

2.5 Teaching Quality

BUC has a policy of recruiting “qualified and experienced staff members” and states that “the college administration and the management make sure that the quality of teaching should be kept above board” (Portfolio, p.23). Teaching staff are recruited both locally and internationally and are appointed from teaching assistant to professor level with qualifications ranging from Bachelor degree to PhD. The Panel was informed that teaching loads varied according to qualifications, from 21 contact hours for those with Bachelor degrees to 15 for those with PhD, and 12 hours for HoDs. Despite the lower teaching hours for PhD holders, there appears to be no requirement to carry out research, yet the academic promotion system is based on a publication points system. The Panel was also informed that the retention of teaching staff, particularly in the UFP, was an issue (see Section 8.1).

The report on the results of the student satisfaction survey carried out in 2011 suggests that BUC has increased its activities in the area of assessing teaching quality. Teaching quality is assessed by means of a number of forms, some of which are included in the Quality Manual appendices. The Students’ Faculty Evaluation Form is administered for each course each semester. Results are compiled by the Quality Assurance Department and sent to teachers and HoDs. In addition, Instructor’s Course Self Assessment and the Faculty’s Head of Department Evaluation Form have
questions on teaching quality, and students are able to give feedback face to face in several contexts, including directly to the HoDs. Observations of teaching are carried out during the probationary period of a teacher’s contract or in cases of student complaint. Students commented that they knew of cases in which, as a result of student complaints, HoDs had carried out observations of teaching which resulted in tangible improvement in teaching quality. However, the use of observation could be broadened and made more systematic as no embedded, regular formative or summative observation of teaching takes place, and no observation report form has been developed. The quality assurance measures in place rely heavily on student opinions of teaching quality and although HoDs are required to report on faculty teaching, it may be difficult to make a judgment on teaching performance without triangulation through direct observation. The Panel acknowledges that the AOL program could be an important step in assuring teaching and learning quality (see Section 2.2).

As part of its Omanisation initiative, BUC has employed local staff as teachers, some of whom have Bachelors-level qualifications, including at least one BUC graduate as an Instructor. In general, however, there appears to be no systematic, documented induction and training process for these relatively inexperienced teachers despite some of them having full teaching loads. The majority of these staff members are located in the UFP, teaching English language classes. Induction and professional development are areas that appear to be in need of review across the board and improvement in these areas may well translate into better retention rates for teaching staff in addition to improving teaching quality. This needs to be clearly linked to the professional development program for academic staff (see Section 8.5).

**Recommendation 13**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a strategic approach to assure and enhance the quality of teaching amongst its academic staff.

### 2.6 Plagiarism

BUC states that its Quality Manual has “a clear cut policy…which provides extensive guidelines to avoid plagiarism at all stages” (Portfolio, p.25). The Quality Manual gives a definition of plagiarism, which includes cheating, and there are guidelines concerning cheating under Exam Regulations and Policies (BUC Quality Manual, p.25). In staff survey documentation, the Panel found that the majority of respondents claimed to be aware of the BUC guidelines on plagiarism. This was confirmed to some extent in the Panel’s interviews with faculty members. The students that were interviewed had some awareness of BUC’s policies on cheating but were less certain about ways of avoiding plagiarism in their academic writing. The Panel acknowledges BUC’s attempt to define plagiarism and set out a procedure for dealing with cases of cheating, but considers that there is not yet sufficient institutional focus on broad issues of academic integrity. This needs to be considered both in terms of equipping students with ways of avoiding plagiarism by developing skills in appropriate referencing (which might be covered as part of a Study Skills focus in Foundation, for example), and by means of a comprehensive and consistently implemented policy for dealing with cases of plagiarism.

**Recommendation 14**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement its policy on plagiarism and develop a culture of academic integrity amongst students and staff through an increased emphasis, across the curriculum, on developing skills in appropriate referencing.
2.7 **Student Placements**

BUC states that the AOL program will enable it to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in preparing students for their work fields (Portfolio, p.25). The intention of the AOL program is to develop an institutional awareness of the process through which measurable program and course objectives are linked to assessment and subsequent quality improvement (Portfolio, p.25). While the AOL program will be useful in focusing attention on the purpose of the majors, the Panel concluded that BUC needs to develop a set of graduate attributes in consultation with local employers, as mentioned in Section 2.1 above, and that course and program goals should be mapped to these attributes.

There is little evidence that BUC has provided work placements or on-the-job training for its students, although interviews with alumni revealed that BUC has provided some on-the-job training for English Department students who were subsequently employed as instructors by the UFP. The Panel concluded that BUC should consider extending and formalizing this by introducing opportunities for students to enroll on a relevant work placement program which would better prepare BUC graduates for the workplace.

**Recommendation 15**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College review and maximize the current opportunities available for student placement in local industry in order to prepare students for the workplace.

2.8 **Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation**

BUC states that the Academic Council, through the Committee for Study Plans, stipulates guidelines for Assessment Methods and Standards (Portfolio, p.25). Every department at BUC has an Internal Examination Committee which follows assessment methods and standards. The Panel was informed that the introduction of the AOL program will do much to improve the specification of objectives and the mapping of these objectives to assessment tasks. It is also expected to raise awareness of the appropriateness of the assessment tasks themselves. The College states that the AOL will be applied to all majors from academic year 2011-12 (Portfolio, p.25). At the time of the audit visit, there was evidence of some AOL activity in all departments and this was confirmed in subsequent documentation, but the program is still in its early stages and appears to be inconsistently applied. For example, the IT Department has established an AOL Committee but in other departments AOL responsibilities appear to be undertaken by the Assessment Committees. Greater consistency between the departments would lead to greater overall coherence and success in the implementation of the AOL program.

The Panel acknowledges the improvements that BUC has made in terms of the specification of exam procedures in the Quality Manual and the work done on standardizing course outlines and objectives. The Panel also agrees with BUC, however, that there are insufficient moderation procedures in place. Evidence from an internal interview-based survey that was carried out in all departments suggests that teaching staff generally prepare tests themselves but many do not indicate objectives to be tested on the examination paper and many do not have their tests checked by a colleague or exam committee. The Panel was informed that marked examinations are double-checked in only around 25% of cases and not all departments have a moderation committee to monitor and give feedback on the allocation of grades. This lack of consistency and cross-checking was confirmed by students and alumni, who commented that even within the same department and courses there is great variation in terms of course content, assessment procedures, and grading. There is no system for external monitoring of examination papers or review of marked scripts in place.
Another issue of concern is the degree of rigor in academic standards. The Panel was informed that the monitoring of standards was not part of the affiliation agreement between BUC and CSUN. Several of the students interviewed commented that BUC is relatively low challenge (‘easy’), which they saw as a good thing as it enabled them to pass courses and proceed quickly through their degrees. In this regard, two institutional practices were of particular concern to the Panel. Firstly, the averaging procedure in the Foundation Program which allows students to pass with an average of 50% overall, even if they fail what could be key components (such as Reading), and secondly, the practice of allowing students to take additional assessments and assignments until they pass so that they avoid failing a course. In addition to the embedding of AOL in all departments, the Panel concluded that a move towards common assessment tasks within courses, and a review of policies to ensure academic rigor is urgently needed in the College.

Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College, as a matter of priority and with the support of its affiliate, develop and implement robust moderation processes for its assessment, that it ensure common assessment tasks are clearly linked to the learning outcomes, and that it develop rigorous policies in order to implement clearly identified standards of student achievement for all its courses.

2.9 Academic Security and Invigilation

As part of its quality assurance initiative, BUC has developed detailed examination policies, which are clearly stated in the Quality Manual (pp.25-30). BUC states that examinations are administered efficiently, with only minor occurrences of misbehavior or cheating (Portfolio p.27). There appears to have been an improvement in this area since 2008 when the SQU reviewers expressed concern about examination administration in the UFP.

BUC states that there is a need for the Admission and Registration department to ensure improved archiving of exam-related documents (Portfolio, p.27). The College could consider establishing a regular review of its approach to academic security and invigilation to ensure that policies are being consistently implemented and are fit for purpose.

2.10 Student Retention and Progression

BUC states that student retention rates are excellent and that most cases of students leaving are due to job offers or for financial reasons (Portfolio p.26). In the 2010-11 academic year, 216 out of the 719 enrolled students left BUC, which is approximately 30%. In terms of progression, no clear figures were available regarding overall pass / fail rates, or grade distributions. Each department is required to submit an end-of-year report detailing grade distributions for final examinations in their department. No figures were available for final pass rates for each course in each department, nor are there clear figures on the pass /drop-out rate for each cohort of students entering Foundation or academic programs. Given that it is likely that a substantial number of students are ‘at risk’ due to low English language level or low general academic ability, the College is encouraged to investigate the reasons for students dropping out and identify the areas in which greater support needs to be provided. The Panel urges BUC to improve its ability to capture data on student enrolment, progress and retention in order to support management and planning decisions.
Recommendation 17

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a data management system in order to monitor student progress and retention rates.

2.11 Graduate Destinations and Employability

A key part of BUC’s Mission is “enriching the local and regional community with qualified human resources” (Portfolio, p.11). Thus, ensuring that graduates have the attributes required by local and regional employers, assisting them in finding employment, and closely monitoring destinations and employment rates would appear to be essential. According to documentation submitted to the Panel, BUC has graduated 1364 students since the first graduation in 2007-8 and 87 have found employment. However, as it points out, BUC has only recently begun to monitor career destinations and full information is not yet available (Portfolio, p.28). The Panel acknowledges that the Career Guidance and Counseling Section has begun working to address this issue, but concludes that this is an area that needs greater institutional attention.

Recommendation 18

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a mechanism to track its graduate destinations.
3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMS

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

According to the Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance (ROSQA), as a designated University College BUC is expected to have a fully-developed, embedded research profile as a core component of its activities:

*A University College must engage in advanced research relevant to local and national needs (ROSQA, Executive Summary, p.3).*

In its Mission statements, BUC includes:

*Reinforcing scientific research activities with the aim of better serving the different products and service sectors in the community. (Portfolio, p.8)*

Research goals have also been included in BUC’s Strategic Plan (Portfolio, p.16 and p.30), but as BUC has been focusing its energies on developing the new campus, research has not been one of its main priorities up until now. However, to maintain its status as a university college, BUC now needs to incorporate advanced research as an integral part of its activities. This Chapter discusses areas pertaining to staff research and consultancy including planning and management; research performance, fund, ethics, intellectual property; professional development for research and commercialization, and the research-teaching nexus.

4.1 Research Planning and Management

BUC has included in its Vision and Mission statements and Strategic Plan its commitment to promoting scientific research and provide various consulting services (Portfolio, p.8). BUC has formed a Research and Symposia Committee (RSC) and established a Unit of Scientific Research and Higher Studies (USRHS). The College also plans to implement postgraduate degrees in MA TESOL and MBA when the International Post-Graduate Center, is established in conjunction with its affiliate California State University (CSUN), Northridge (see Section 1.4).

BUC states that it has recognised the need to develop a comprehensive plan for research and consultancy and has set up a fund for scientific research (Portfolio, p.30). This was confirmed in interviews with staff and the recently recruited head of the USHRS. The Panel agrees with BUC that it now needs to develop its research profile in line with its status as a University College and supports its efforts in this area.

**Affirmation 4**

*The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that, in line with its status as a University College, it now needs to develop a research culture, and supports its efforts through the establishment of Unit of Scientific Research and Higher Studies and the formation of a Research and Symposia Committee.*

Whilst the planning efforts of the College’s governance have focused on the erection of the new building (Portfolio, p.30), the time is now ripe to develop a full strategy for research development and capacity building. This strategy should include support, providing incentives, and monitoring and strategizing of priorities with a view to developing a robust research framework and achieving research visibility over the next few years. The Panel recommends that BUC develop and implement a comprehensive research plan and policies to support research performance, funding, and professional development for research and consultancy. A clear plan for research including provision for support and capacity building would contribute to developing the research potential of BUC.
Recommendation 19

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College, as a matter of priority, develop and implement a comprehensive research plan and policies to support research performance such as funding; ethics and protection of intellectual property; professional development for research; and to promote the research-teaching nexus.

4.2 Research Performance

BUC has formed an RSC to organize seminars and workshops in the College and to promote professional development activities involving research (Portfolio p.30). The Panel considered documentation indicating that the RSC was in the process of setting up a symposium for September 2012. While the forthcoming symposium comes across as a positive way to trigger research interest and collaborations, this needs to be part of the College’s overall strategy to build capacity. A number of faculty members have had their own research papers published and have presented at conferences and in journals. The Panel was informed that the staff teaching workload does not allow for much research activity although the College management has plans to provide more non-teaching hours for staff research. While the Panel encourages the College’s initiatives, there is more work to be done in support of improving BUC’s research performance (see Recommendation 19).

4.3 Research Funding Schemes

At the time of the audit, the Panel was informed that BUC had allocated 25,000 OMR for research activities by staff, to be managed by the USRHS. However, no details were available at the time of the audit to show how the fund will be utilized. The College is encouraged to look for additional sources for research funding such as Oman’s National Research Council. An action plan and policies are required to sustain impetus and create a widespread research culture (see Recommendation 19).

4.4 Consultancy Activities

Although BUC offers training services for the community (see Section 1.13), there are no consultancy services offered to external clients (Portfolio, p.30). BUC now needs to align consultancy activities with its strategic priorities based on the context of the Mission statement and other relevant objectives.

4.5 Ethics, Biosafety and Intellectual Property

Ethics and biosafety have not been addressed in College policies. BUC needs to develop and implement its system for ethics policies, awareness, seminars, approval processes, and monitoring and compliance. The College states that at present it is following the Sultanate of Oman's Policy for Intellectual Property Protection Act (Portfolio, p.31) but has no College-based intellectual property policy. BUC is urged to develop appropriate policies in this area in line with its research strategies (see Recommendation 19).

4.6 Professional Development for Research

BUC states that the relationship with CSUN has afforded a number of professional development workshops for staff in this area (Portfolio, p.31). There are also staff professional opportunities being made available through the establishment of the USRHS. Professional development activities are also proposed by the RSC. The Panel acknowledges BUC’s intention to develop a research culture through the provision of professional development for research; this now needs to be a formal component of the College’s research plan (see Recommendation 19).
4.7 Research Commercialization

BUC has not taken up any research commercialization opportunities (Portfolio, p.31). As a University College, BUC needs to develop its own commercial research policy which includes contractual issues, patent, copyrights, and financial considerations.

4.8 Research – Teaching Nexus

According to BUC, the full implementation of the pilot Assurance of Learning program (see Section 2.2) will help to provide a clear nexus between research and teaching (Portfolio, p.31). There is still an opportunity to strengthen further the research teaching nexus. Academic staff need be encouraged to incorporate their research into their teaching and to enrich students’ learning experiences. BUC could consider incorporating research into the students’ learning environment for example, through students’ involvement in staff research projects and classroom discourse where appropriate.
5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In its Strategic Plan, BUC has included the strategic goals to develop “a more effective partnership with different sectors of the community” (Portfolio, p.15) and “enhancing the role of the College in the community through community initiatives” (Portfolio, p.17). This Chapter reports on BUC’s overall activities in the area of industry and community engagement. This includes industry and community engagement planning and management; relationships with industry and employers, professions, other education providers, alumni, and the community at large.

5.1 Industry and Community Engagement Planning and Management

The College has strategic objectives to engage and involve the local community and industry and build a strong relationship with them (Portfolio, p.10). BUC has established two sections which are the Training and Consultancy Services (TCS, recently renamed the Directorate of Training, Consultation and Community Service (DTCCS) and Students Career Guidance to support the College’s industry and community engagement, both reporting to the Dean (Portfolio, p.32). The Panel was informed that the DTCCS, which is based in BUC’s former building in the center of Al Buraimi, has developed an action plan to achieve its goals which includes a range of training activities for various governmental and local industry employees. The Panel was informed that external stakeholders recognised the efforts that BUC has made to play an active role in the local community and liaise with local employers. BUC has also established a relationship with the American Embassy in Muscat which has provided funding for an “American Corner” with IT and media resources in the Library.

A comprehensive operational plan aligned to adequate resources now needs to be developed and implemented for BUC to effectively engage in industry and the community, and in order to strengthen its relationships with employers and professions. BUC is urged to build on its initiatives in order to support its activities in the areas of developing appropriate graduate attributes (see Section 2.1); student work placements (see Section 2.7); tracking graduate destinations (see Section 2.11) as well as its relationships with other higher education providers and alumni.

Recommendation 20

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a comprehensive plan for industry and community engagement activities in order to support and strengthen its ongoing relationships with industry, employers, professions, other education providers and alumni.

5.2 Relationships with Industry and Employers

BUC states that it has very good relationships with all the local industries and employers (Portfolio, p.32). A number of activities have been carried out to promote awareness of BUC’s activities and programmes with organisations such as Toyota, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Omantel, and Shell (Portfolio, p.32). Through its DTCCS, BUC has succeeded in conducting various training programs in partnership with professional organizations. The Panel was informed that a number of programs introduced by the College, such as the Law program, have been introduced to meet the demands of the local stakeholders, such as the Royal Oman Police.

The College states that it has plans to carry out a survey with local employers to ensure that the graduates are meeting employers’ needs (Portfolio, p.33). While the Panel acknowledges the
College’s efforts in this area, BUC would benefit from formalizing its channels of communication with industry and employers, such as through the establishment of an industry advisory committee. Such a committee could provide a forum for seeking input on the curriculum, supporting work placement opportunities and providing feedback on the performance of graduates.

5.3 **Relationships with Professions**

BUC states that it intends to develop relationships with different professions (Portfolio, p.33). The College is encouraged to identify local, regional and international professional bodies relevant to the current program offering and consider the usefulness of such bodies in terms of membership, accreditation, and benchmarking for program development and review.

5.4 **Relationships with Other Education Providers**

BUC has signed an affiliation agreement with CSUN for English, Business, and IT programs and Ain Shams University for the Law program (see Section 1.4). In terms of its relationships with other higher education providers, BUC signed an agreement with Sultan Qaboos University in 2007-2008 to formally review its Foundation Program (see Section 2.4). Documentation shows that BUC also entered an agreement with the Princeton Review in UAE for test preparation services for the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) and TOEFL during 2010. This agreement was intended to help prospective MBA students at BUC to prepare for these required entrance examinations. Other agreements provided targeted training services to client institutions, such as the Vision Centre for Strategic Development Studies, Kudos LLC, and the Pioneers Academy during 2011-2012 (Portfolio, p.33).

In 2007, the College signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Al Khawarizmi International College (KIC) and the Al Ain University in UAE, intended to facilitate student transfer and credit acceptance between these institutions and BUC but the Panel did not explore the outcome of these. Furthermore, the Panel was informed that resources sharing and coordination of academic, professional development and sports activities are expected through the current agreements. A planned approach is needed in this area (see Recommendation 20).

5.5 **Relationships with Alumni**

According to BUC, its management “is seriously working towards establishing an alumni association and intends to maintain proper database with all information and documents” (Portfolio, p.33). On BUC’s website, one of the alumni association objectives is “maintaining constant contacts with the graduates”. To establish good relationships with alumni, the College held the first forum in April, 2012. The Chairman, Acting Dean, Heads of Departments, and 30 graduates attended the meeting. They discussed the objectives of the alumni association and feedback from graduates. The Panel recognises this as an important first step for the College and supports its efforts to establish a formal channel for communication with its alumni.

**Affirmation 5**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to establish an alumni association to maintain contact with its graduates, and supports its efforts to do so.

5.6 **Relationships with the Community at Large**

BUC established the Public Relations and the Media Sections to promote its relationship with the community. The campus offers female-only classes in the mornings and BUC has extended its campus hours (from 3 to 9 pm) in order to offer its programs at times to suit those students already in employment (Portfolio, p.34). A range of cultural, sports and social activities have
been organized over the past five years. The American Corner on the BUC campus attracts local people and the school children come and utilize its facilities (Portfolio, p.34). Local community stakeholders informed the Panel that they appreciated the establishment of BUC as it meant locally-based education could be provided to their families. In their view, BUC added value to Buraimi society through its participation in community activities and training programs offered to the community. While the Panel supports BUC’s efforts, the College is encouraged to develop and implement a planned approach to strengthen and support its activities in this area (see Recommendation 20).
6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

BUC offers a wide range of academic support services to students for a successful learning experience and achievement of academic excellence (Portfolio, p.36). The new campus has provided an opportunity for the installation of a new library, learning resource center and IT technologies. This Chapter reports on the Audit Panel’s findings in planning and management of academic support services; registry; the Library; information and learning technology services; academic advising; and student learning support at BUC.

6.1 Academic Support Services Planning and Management

According to BUC, academic support services are controlled, managed and planned by the Dean of the College (Portfolio, p.36). In the absence of a Dean, these areas are being overseen by the Acting Dean. All departments are expected to identify their needs and submit their requests to be considered by the Academic Council and the College Council (Portfolio, p.36). The College states that since the creation of the Quality Assurance Department in 2010, all academic services are assessed and strengthened by developing various evaluation instruments and tools (Portfolio, p.36). In interviews with staff, the Panel found that there was no clear sense of planning or of who was responsible for managing and monitoring activities in the area of academic support services. There was only limited evidence that systematic data gathering to support the monitoring of academic service functions has been undertaken. This is an area that the College needs to address as it develops and implements its approach to operational planning (see Recommendation 6).

6.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)

The Admission and Registration Department (ARD) at BUC is responsible for student admission and registration in the various degree programs offered. This department oversees and implements student enrolment and guidance by providing various types of information, support materials and facilities (Portfolio, p.37). The Panel found that the ARD has an Oracle based information system installed to process the data related to student admission, student registration, grade entry and GPA calculation in a systematic fashion. The Panel checked this process and found that there is no interface provided to the faculty to enter the student attendance or grades. The College already identified the need to upgrade the system by adding the functionalities to provide an interface for the faculty.

The academic advising is done by the teaching staff based on printed data provided by the ARD. The same practice is followed for the checking of successful completion of graduation requirements. In order to reduce the dependence on manual registration and ease the workload of the academic advisors, the College intends to offer online registration facilities which were being developed at the time of the audit visit. The Panel supports the College's efforts in this area.

Affirmation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to improve its registration services to students, and supports its efforts to implement an online registration system.

6.3 Library

The College states that it has emphasised the development of the College Library with required resource materials for students and faculty (Portfolio, p.38). Information provided by the BUC Library indicated that it held 5881 items at the time of the audit visit. These items included printed books, magazines and journals. One full-time and one part-time librarian are available in
the Library to manage its activities. The Panel learned that BUC received assistance from its affiliated university (California State University, Northridge (CSUN)) in developing its Library such as selecting the course books and identifying journals. Access to CSUN resources is not part of BUC’s affiliation agreement although the Panel was informed that the CSUN library consultant has provided the Library staff with useful links. An automated library system is in place for cataloging, lending and borrowing books. As mentioned earlier, BUC in coordination with the American Embassy in Muscat has established an "American Corner" which supports the students by providing learning resources such as books, DVDs, and internet computer workstation.

Although BUC states that there is a separate Library Development Committee to expand the existing services with appropriate financial support (Portfolio, p.38), the Panel found no evidence to the Committee’s input into Library activities. There appears to be no long term planning or budgetary system for the Library, with requests for books and other resources being dealt with on an ad hoc basis, such as the funding of the online digital library. The Panel was informed that the contract for the online digital library had lapsed and a decision as to whether or not to extend the contract had been pending for several months. With regard to space, in interviews, students informed the Panel that the Library gets busy during examination time and it is difficult to find a study space. The Library is not positioned to provide much assistance to faculty involved in research. This is clearly an issue that needs to be addressed; yet the Panel was not able to find evidence of a Library user feedback system through which such issues can be communicated. The Panel also found that there was no systematic approach to developing students’ information literacy skills apart from a brief orientation visit for students enrolled on the Foundation Program.

In general, the Panel acknowledges the improvements that BUC has made to its Library provision in the new premises, and the commitment and energy of the Library staff. At the same time, there appears to be a number of issues with regard to financial decision making, resources, space, and feedback systems that require urgent attention. In light of the intention to start Master degree programs and the expectation that a university college will carry out advanced research, the Panel urges BUC to review its current Library provision to ensure that it is fit for its current and future purpose.

**Recommendation 21**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College improve its Library provision for staff and students in order to meet the needs of its learning, teaching and research environment.

### 6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services

The Networking Department manages the College's IT Infrastructure and offers services to facilitate teaching and learning (Portfolio, p.39). During the audit visit, the Panel was informed that the College has around 160 dedicated computers available for the students, with four laboratories and IT provision also available in the Library. Wireless access points have been installed across the campus. IT support staff are available to assist the students and staff with computer problems. In order to automate the service requests, helpdesk software was being piloted at the time of the audit. Regular back up of data is being taken and stored onsite and offsite.

During the audit visit, the Networking Department informed the Panel that they were in the process of developing a comprehensive IT policy. The College has no mechanism in place to gather data or track IT usage but has recently piloted a helpdesk scheme to handle problems of users. The Panel appreciates that the College has been active in enhancing the IT infrastructure and the internet facilities and acknowledges that the move to the new building has had a positive impact in this area. Whilst the IT facilities are very modern and effective, including an emerging
automated system for reporting faults (piloted in the Unit of Foundation Program), the Panel was concerned that there was no formal IT strategy in place to support the planning, implementing and reviewing of IT facilities. BUC would benefit from developing such a strategy to ensure that its IT resources are adequate and meet the future needs of the academic and support community at BUC. The College is also encouraged to continue to evaluate its information and learning technology services through the implementation of regular feedback mechanisms.

6.5 Academic Advising

BUC states that academic advising helps students develop individual abilities and interests and takes into consideration the students’ different majors and specializations to meet their individual needs (Portfolio, p.41). Academic advising “supports the goals of preparing graduates for work and motivating [sic] a competitive spirit among students” (Student Handbook 2011/12, p.20). Faculty members, in their role as academic advisors, are required to meet with their assigned advisees in order to help them to select appropriate courses and this was confirmed in interviews with the Panel. The number of advisees for each advisor varies from one department to another and the Panel was informed that some faculty members have more than 50 advisees. The wider roles of academic advisors of monitoring academic progress and counseling on academic difficulties or problems did not seem to be included. The Panel also found that no formal training is provided to new staff members on academic advising.

The College and the academic department heads have identified that one of the issues with academic advising is the problem of advisors being assigned too many advisees, which places a high demand on the advisors and may cause student dissatisfaction (Portfolio, p.42). However, the BUC has not taken any steps to address this issue. The Panel agreed that the advising system could be made more proactive so that, for example, at risk students who experience difficulties in their studies are more effectively identified and provided with adequate learning support. This is an area the College is urged to review and improve.

Recommendation 22

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College improve its provision of academic advising, especially in advising and supporting at risk students.

6.6 Student Learning Support

The Department of Students' Affairs in collaboration with other departments organized several student learning support activities such as workshops, sports, and extra-curricular activities. The English Club was established to provide more opportunities for students to practice English language and promote students' learning through the various activities (Portfolio, p.42). The Panel verified this during the interviews with a selection of students.

BUC indicated that to increase students' linguistic competencies and their reasoning skills, additional and extra support would be provided in the form of language lab activities, practical experiences and field trips (Portfolio, p.43). However, the Panel found little evidence to suggest that this is taking place on a regular or consistently organised basis. The Panel encourages the College to build on existing practices to plan a system of support that addresses the actual requirements of students in different programs, identified through a comprehensive needs analysis.

6.7 Teaching Resources

The new campus includes fully modernized classrooms and auditoriums with smart interactive boards with a variety of options for faculty and students to use digital and electronic devices (Portfolio, p.43). During the audit visit, the Panel was informed that the campus is female-only in
the morning and mixed classes are offered in the afternoons and evenings. The Panel heard that teaching staff and students seemed satisfied with the current teaching resources, especially following the move to the new campus (see Commendation 3). As in other areas (see Section 6.3), the College is encouraged to develop a mechanism to monitor users’ satisfaction with the teaching resources on a regular basis.
7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The BUC has included the following strategic objectives in the area of students and student support in its Strategic Plan:

- Involving students in decision making.
- Strengthening the existing positive values of students and developing their democratic spirit.
- Supporting cultural, social, artistic, and sporting activities.
- Providing moral and financial support to needy students.
- Providing an encouraging, creative, and distinctive environment for youth. (Portfolio, p.15)

This Chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to student and student support services which include: career and employment services, student finances, accommodation, catering, transportation, medical and counseling facilities as well as social and recreational services and facilities.

7.1 Students and Student Support Services Planning and Management

All student and student support services are managed by the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA). At the beginning of every academic year and semester, the ADSA with other related departments conducts an orientation meeting for all students and provides a Student Handbook including the annual calendar highlighting all the major activities and programs in order to encourage students to participate. These activities include cultural, sports, career and social activities (Portfolio, p.45).

While valuable activities for students have been organized and implemented, proper planning in this area is lacking. As BUC develops and implements its approach to operational planning, this area will also need to be considered (see Recommendation 6). The Panel noted that the College conducted a survey in the academic year 2010-11 to determine student satisfaction with its support services (Portfolio, p.45); however, no action plan was developed to address issues raised and students were not informed of any action taken in response to their feedback. The Panel could not find any evidence of a regular review of student support service activities.

Recommendation 23

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a regular mechanism to collect feedback from the students and staff on the effectiveness of its student and student support services, review the feedback and utilize it for planning and management purposes.

7.2 Student Profile

The College claims that the registration and academic departments maintain a database to document student profiles in a systematic way with both demographic and academic details. The data provided shows that BUC witnessed a significant increase in student enrolment from 27 students in the year 2003-04 to over 1300 students in the year 2011-12 (Portfolio, pp.46-51). The figures indicate that over 60% of the student body is female. Approximately 57% of the current students are privately funded and the remaining 43% are sponsored, mainly by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The majority of students at BUC are Omani nationals (87%), with 13% international students, many of whom are from the neighboring UAE. As it reviews its
approach to the management of student data (see Recommendation 17), the College would benefit from utilizing student profile data in operational and resource planning.

7.3 Student Satisfaction and Climate
BUC claims that “the top management of the College gives student satisfaction a top priority and believes that a proper academic environment strengthens students' achievement” (Portfolio, p.52). The College established a Student Council in the year 2009-2010 in order to allow students to contribute to the College decision-making processes and to voice their complaints through appropriate channels. The representatives of the Student Council are invited to attend Academic Council meetings and offer suggestions (Portfolio, p.52). Interviews with students and alumni suggested that there was a strong sense of loyalty to both BUC and its teaching staff and students felt that they were part of a family. Several students commented that the Chairman of the BoD is frequently present at the College and is always very welcoming and interested in their progress. However, students were not aware of any formal feedback mechanisms for monitoring their satisfaction and complaints were dealt with through talking to senior members of staff on an informal basis. The Panel considers this as an area for the College to address (see Recommendation 23).

7.4 Student Behaviour
The College Bylaws and the Student Handbook document all rules and regulations concerning student behavior and discipline. BUC states that it provides the student Code of Conduct in the Student Handbook, and discusses expectations during the orientation week when all new entrants are supplied with copies of the rules and regulations governing student behavior and any doubts raised by the students are clarified (Portfolio, pp.52-53). The Panel discussions with students suggested that expected standards of behavior and professionalism are understood and followed. The College is encouraged to seek formal feedback from students in order to monitor its effectiveness in this area (see Recommendation 23).

7.5 Career and Employment Services
BUC has established the Career Guidance and Counseling section under the supervision of the Student Affairs Department with the task of providing assistance to its graduates in finding employment. The Career Guidance and Counseling section has conducted a number of workshops for students on writing their CVs, preparing for interviews and job search techniques to develop the employability and soft skills of its outgoing graduates (Portfolio, p.53). The Panel was informed that a number of organizations such as Shell, Omantel, and Saud Bahwan Company for Automobiles have organized programs on the BUC campus from time to time and BUC believed these contributed to the development of its graduates.

According to BUC, since the first batch of students graduated in 2008, graduates have been given full support to find employment in Government and other private sector organizations (Portfolio, p.32). The Panel considered documentation which showed that a range of workshops had been given from 2009-2011, though most of these were general with a goal to “to acquire some of graduates’ skills”. However, the Panel noted that there was no system in place for identifying employment market needs which could be used to determine programs offered or employment strategies to be undertaken.

BUC states that there were plans to develop a local job bank with the Ministry of Manpower (Portfolio, p.53) but this is still under discussion. The College recognises that more could be done in the area of career and employment services, such as better planning and the implementation of a more systematic approach (Portfolio, p.53). The need for improvement in this area was confirmed in interviews with graduates who indicated that they had received no support from the Career Guidance and Counseling section in their search for jobs. The Panel
agrees that there is a need for an expansion of the career guidance activities including better liaison with local business leaders and industries and supports the College’s efforts in this area. BUC is also encouraged to monitor how effective the career guidance support is.

Affirmation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to improve its provision of career guidance and counseling, and supports its efforts in this area, such as through the delivery of workshops on job search techniques.

7.6 Student Finances

Around 43% of the current BUC students are scholarship students and the majority of them receive scholarships from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) (Portfolio, p.50). The College states that it shows considerable understanding of the students’ financial concerns and has taken actions to offer support. Deferred payment facility is provided to students who are employed and to other students on request (Portfolio, p.54). The Panel was informed that BUC gives a financial concession to many students belonging to low income families, either by reducing the fees or by providing free hostel accommodation to all the scholarship holders and low income group students. The Panel confirmed this in interviews with staff and students and encourages the College to continue its efforts to provide educational opportunities for eligible students from low income backgrounds.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Buraimi University College for establishing a special fees structure and offering free accommodation for students from low income backgrounds.

7.7 Accommodation, Catering and Transport

BUC states that it provides hostel facilities for all female students who require accommodation. At the time of the audit, 585 students were accommodated in BUC hostels. Some low income group students, and all the female scholarship students, are provided with free accommodation, while the male scholarship students receive 30 OMR every month as a stipend from the College (Portfolio, p.54). Although the College claims that the majority of students are happy with the facilities offered, respondents to the student satisfaction survey 2010-11 indicated a moderate level of satisfaction with hostels. Transportation services to and from the campus are provided at nominal cost to all female students staying in the hostels. The Panel was informed that a sufficient number of buses offer transport between the hostel and the campus at various times during the day.

In addition to the cafeteria (which is run under contract by a private company), vending machines are also installed in key areas of BUC campus. Students interviewed by the Panel were not happy with the prices and quality of food items in the cafeteria. They have informed the management about their dissatisfaction but had been asked to wait until the end of the contract period of the current provider. Considering the remote location of the College, the Panel encourages the College to plan for an alternative catering solution to ensure that the catering provision is adequate and affordable. The College also needs to regularly monitor student satisfaction with its services in these areas (see Recommendation 23).

7.8 Medical and Counseling Facilities

BUC has a medical clinic with a resident doctor. The doctor is available in the College for the female students in the morning and in the evening and a service is also available for hostel
students (Portfolio, p.55). However, no formal medical facilities are available for the male students who come to class in the afternoons and evenings. The Panel encourages the College to review the available medical provision for all the students and evaluate its medical and counseling facilities so that effective quality provision is established in this area.

7.9  International Student Services

As noted in Section 7.2, approximately 13% of the current students are international students, mostly from the neighboring UAE. The statistics provided to the Panel clearly show an increase in the number of international students over the past few years. The College informed the Panel about its desire to promote BUC internationally in order to attract greater numbers of international students; the College is therefore encouraged to ensure that its student support services are tailored to meet the needs of an international student body.

7.10  Social and Recreational Services and Facilities

BUC states that it provides a range of social, recreational and other extracurricular services and facilities in order for students to have the opportunity to apply transferable skills developed in their formal studies. Many cultural festivals and sports activities have been organized and students have actively taken part in all such events (Portfolio, p.56). The College has a range of sports facilities including a football ground, volleyball court, table-tennis and badminton courts. A schedule of the most important activities and events for each semester is published in the Student Handbook in order to allow students to participate. Students interviewed by the Panel suggested that additional activities would be desirable, especially those that are academically relevant. BUC could benefit from gathering students’ feedback about the organized events and their other particular needs to plan the provision of social and recreational services accordingly (see Recommendation 23).
8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

In terms of staff and staff support services, BUC aims to promote “diversity through faculty hiring, retention, and program development” and reinforce “leadership abilities and empowering the college staff by enriching them with knowledge and privileges [sic] and involving them in decision making” (Portfolio, p.16). This Chapter considers how BUC approaches aspects of its human resource (HR) planning, management and operations which includes recruitment and selection, performance review, professional development and Omanisation which enable the College to deliver on its stated Mission and Vision.

8.1 Human Resources Planning and Management

BUC states that the HR section is supervised by the Directorate of Finance and Administration under the guidance of the Dean. Its work is informed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and Ministry of Manpower (MoM) directives (Portfolio, p.57). Recruitment, selection, induction and orientation fall under the responsibility of the HR Manager, and the rules and regulations are available in the Administrative Manual. The College claims that an important objective is to provide overall support to all staff so that they carry out their job effectively in the best possible atmosphere (Portfolio, p.57). In practice, there is no evidence of issues covering workload, professional development, progression and retention of staff being fully addressed. The ratio of students to academic advisors is uneven, and in some places as high as 50 to one (see Section 6.5). The weekly teaching workload of academics (according to a sample of written interviews from a survey carried out with staff) varies between 12 and 27 hours (office hours not included). The College is urged to review the current staff workload across all departments, especially in light of the challenges regarding staff retention (see Section 8.9).

There have been a number of changes of staff in strategic senior positions across the College and a number of vacant positions were unfilled at the time of the audit. This has resulted in increased workload and some members of staff being given extra responsibilities without due professional training or regular career progression (see Recommendation 3). BUC needs to develop a comprehensive HR plan that is aligned with its Strategic Plan and the College’s Vision of building capacity in research. This needs to clearly outline ways in which the College will address issues regarding staff retention, as well as clear performance-related career paths for all categories of staff.

Recommendation 24

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a human resources plan that includes recruitment; induction; handling of staff grievances; and severance, along with a mechanism to monitor the effectiveness of this strategy.

8.2 Staff Profile

BUC states that the HR Department maintains a staff profile and record for every employee, and that it systematically gathers data from departments on staff (Portfolio, p.57). The number of employees has significantly increased on a yearly basis. According to the data submitted, in 2011 around 140 staff members were employed, with around 60% male and 40% female. Academic staff make up 43% of the total number of staff employed (Portfolio, pp.60-61) and the majority are recruited from Iraq, India, Jordan and other Arab States (Portfolio, p.75). Just over 75% of administrative and support staff are Omani. Omani staff account for around 15% of the total number of academic staff and the majority of these are teaching on the Foundation Program. The College states that it is aware of the need to attract more Omani staff in academic departments
and will need to consider its approach in this area as part of its HR strategy (see Recommendation 24).

Just under 20% of the academic staff have PhDs, the majority being Master degree holders. BUC stated that it aims to build capacity and improve the level of qualifications of its staff (Portfolio, p.62). The Panel found no evidence of how this intention will be implemented either in supporting existing staff to obtain higher qualifications or through the strategic recruitment of highly qualified staff. This is an area that will need to be addressed both in terms of BUC’s research aspirations (see Chapter 4) and as part of its HR strategy. There are issues with staff retention and this is discussed in Section 8.9.

While BUC claims it is using a ‘foolproof software to automatically update the statistics’ (Portfolio, p.62), the database of staff did not appear to be entirely up to date and several members of staff who spoke to the Panel were not on the staff list. The issue of data management in the College has been raised in other areas (see Recommendation 9 and Recommendation 17). Given these inconsistencies, and in order to fully understand the make-up of the workforce (qualifications, demographics, performance), the Panel encourages the College to review how it collects and uses staff profile data. This could be part of a proactive strategy to recruit staff members that are critical to its plans for the future, such as research active academics, for example. It also needs to establish monitoring mechanisms to measure and assure equity of the teaching workload amongst staff.

### 8.3 Recruitment and Selection

The College indicates that it seeks to recruit qualified and experienced staff drawn from a national and international pool. It states that it follows regulations from MoM in its recruitment and selection procedures (Portfolio, p.62). The guidelines for recruitment and selection procedures are found in the BUC’s Human Resource Policy Manual. From discussions with relevant managers, the Panel confirmed that the process of recruiting includes advertising in local papers and through the internet; selection through a committee including the Dean, Assistant Dean and Heads of Department (HoDs) to review CVs and applications; and a follow up conference call or face to face interviews.

While the Panel considered evidence of the actual recruitment process through the minutes of the Recruitment and Selection Committee, these records do not provide evidence of how the approach represents a clear strategic drive to recruit the best candidates with a view to retaining them. The Panel was informed that one of the main challenges in the recruitment of expatriate academic staff is being able to offer competitive salaries as staff can get considerably higher salaries in the neighboring UAE. Examples were cited of staff having accepted a post at BUC, and then moving to the UAE shortly after appointment. The Panel noted that the Dean’s position had been vacant for over a year (see Section 1.3) and that there seemed to be a high turnover of senior staff, such as in the Director of Unit of Foundation Program (UFP) position. While recruitment and selection are clearly important components of building a staff profile, the College is urged to review issues regarding staff retention in order to maintain stability and continuity (see Section 8.9).

### 8.4 Induction

The College states that it organizes an induction program for all newly recruited staff (Portfolio, p.63). From discussions with staff, the Panel found that induction for new academic staff was mainly the responsibility of the HoD who provided information on all aspects of the learning and teaching system. The Panel found no evidence that this was part of a longer term process of orientation, although some individuals indicated that observation of teaching was one condition of successful completion of the three-month probation period. In interviews, some staff informed
the Panel that they had not received job descriptions despite having worked in the College for a period of time.

The Panel found no evidence to show that there is a systematic approach in place for the induction of administrative or support staff. Although BUC notes that it needs to “conduct more organized and timely induction of new staff” (Portfolio, p.66), the Panel found that little progress had been made in this area. The Panel recommends that the induction and probation process be formalized as part of a fully comprehensive HR strategy, and implemented and monitored through relevant and documented procedures (see Recommendation 24).

8.5 Professional Development

BUC states that professional development activities are coordinated and supported by the Training and Consultancy section and the Research and Symposia Committee (Portfolio, p.63). A number of workshops and training sessions have been held for academic and non-academic staff, including those provided by the College’s affiliate California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Workshops have also been held to support staff in research related areas (see Section 4.6). The Panel was pleased to see some examples of good practice originating from the UFP where workshops are organised among teachers sharing their research. Such initiatives are worth supporting and to be encouraged in other departments. The Panel considered written feedback from staff which showed that there was a positive response to professional development opportunities, but it was found that staff feedback and evaluation of these training and development opportunities has not been systematically collected or analysed.

While the Panel acknowledges that professional development activities are taking place, there is no system in place to analyse professional development needs on an institutional or individual basis, for example in areas such as teaching quality, curriculum development, assessment and moderation. There is also a need for training to be provided for all staff being promoted to management positions so that they are able to carry out their roles effectively. In order to instill an institutional culture in which good practice is fostered, the Panel recommends the setting up of a systematic program of professional development addressing all aspects of academic practice as well as addressing needs of staff working in management, administrative and support areas.

**Recommendation 25**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a comprehensive program of professional development for all staff linked to an institutional needs analysis and regular review of performance.

8.6 Performance Planning and Review

BUC has established procedures for assessing faculty and HoD performance each semester (Portfolio, p.64). In terms of performance review, information is provided in BUC’s Quality Manual, on how the performance of academic departments, programs, and staff members are evaluated and how often this should take place. The documents provided include a student-faculty evaluation form; a faculty self-evaluation form; a HoD-faculty evaluation; and a faculty-HoD evaluation form. In its discussions with faculty members and HoDs, the Panel found that these documents were used sporadically, and that there was no systematic follow up of any performance plans.

Most staff members interviewed on the issue of performance review were unaware of how and when their performance was evaluated or whether this happened on a regular basis. There was little information available on how the performance of administrative units, their activities and staff members were being assessed. The Panel was informed by several staff members that the typical indicator of a good performance was the receipt of a letter of commendation. For
academic staff, the appraisal was mainly focused on observation of teaching. The Panel concluded that the performance of all categories of staff needs to be reviewed on a regular basis and findings need to be acted upon. The College would benefit from adopting an appropriate (such as easy to use, record and monitor) system to do this. BUC needs to develop a comprehensive system of staff appraisal which will help identify development needs, and inform its in-house program of professional development (see Recommendation 25).

8.7 Promotion and Other Incentives

The guidelines for promotion are set out in the College’s Bylaws (Portfolio, p.64). The College presented data to show that a number of staff have been promoted over the past 5 years (Appendix B of Portfolio). In order to sustain the rate of promotion, the Panel recommends that a succession plan be drawn up within the HR strategy which aligns with the Vision of BUC (see Recommendation 24).

BUC is intending to provide other incentives (Portfolio, p.65). There is evidence that some members of staff have been supported in attending conferences to disseminate the outcomes of their research. Such initiatives need to be managed within the framework of a research strategy (see Chapter 4). Other incentives for rewarding innovative teaching and learning practices, and excellence in supporting the student experience could be considered as the College develops its HR strategy.

8.8 Severance

Staff termination and dismissal processes are inscribed in the College constitution based on Omani Labour Law (Portfolio, p.65). The Panel recommends that the College establish clear monitoring processes for the recording and analysis of severance (see Recommendation 24).

8.9 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention

BUC aims to maintain a good working climate and conditions for all its employees. The College states that the Social Committee provides a range of activities (Portfolio, p.65). Staff members receive certificates of appreciation and letters, gifts, incentives, discounts in fees for their families, which were confirmed in interviews with staff members. Staff also indicated that they were generally happy at the College, and some felt that there was a family atmosphere within BUC. However, staff satisfaction is not formally monitored. The Panel was informed that a staff satisfaction survey was due to be carried out in March 2012 to capture feedback from both academic and administrative staff members on management and other related issues. The College is encouraged to make this part of a regular review to monitor staff satisfaction.

Staff retention, particularly amongst management and academic staff, was an ongoing issue frequently raised in interviews with the Panel. Although BUC indicates that the rate of staff being retained is higher than the rate of staff leaving (Portfolio, p.62), a high turnover of staff in key areas is clearly a potential risk for the College. The Panel was concerned that the issue of recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff is not explicitly addressed through means other than increased salaries. BUC could consider providing incentives to staff through research-linked initiatives, and/or through a strong program of professional and academic development, and through further developing community links so that there is support and incentive within the community to help retain staff. The College is urged to explore the issues relating to the problem of staff retention (for example, through gathering data in exit interviews) and to devise an action plan to address these.
Recommendation 26

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College explore the issues relating to high turnover of academic staff and develop an action plan to address these.

8.10 Omanisation

In line with its Omanisation objectives, BUC has sought to increasingly recruit from the Omani population and it has identified Omanisation as an important priority. It has begun to implement this by training Omani citizen to replace non-Omani staff (Portfolio, pp.65-66). Information on the staff profile indicates a significant increase in recruiting amongst the Omani population for administrative posts; the increase is less high in respect of academic posts (see Section 8.2). This includes recruiting from its own pool of graduates. The Panel recognises the College’s efforts to enhance Omanisation. It also recommends that, as part of its HR strategy, BUC develops a strategy to attract, develop and retain Omani employees in academic posts.

Affirmation 8

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with Al Buraimi University College that it needs to increase the Omanisation of its workforce, and supports its efforts to do so, for example through providing recruitment opportunities for its graduates.
9 GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

9.1 General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management

The planning and management of BUC’s general support services and facilities are the responsibility of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs and the Directorate of Administration and Finance. Their duties and responsibilities are described in the Administrative Manual. Departments such as Public Relations, Media, Community Services, Maintenance and Hostels Management have a key role to play in this area (Portfolio, p.67).

BUC’s major achievement has been the completion of the new campus. This has provided the College with modern facilities which have been purpose built to provide an infrastructure appropriate to the needs of staff and students (Portfolio, p.67). The Panel was informed that the campus specifications have been planned to meet the anticipated growth as well as current requirements in terms of the activities and population of the College. The new campus is impressive and the Panel agreed with the views of many stakeholders that it was a significant achievement. The next phase of the building has started that will provide extra sport amenities and more teaching facilities for the Unit of Foundation Program.

Commendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends Al Buraimi University College for planning and implementing its new campus project.

9.2 Public Relations and Marketing

BUC aims to establish relationships of trust and partnership with local, regional and international institutions through its Public Relation and Media Department (Portfolio, p.67) The College promotes and advertises itself internally and externally. The Panel considered samples of marketing and promotional material and was informed that the College maintains its profile through the local and regional press.

From discussions with the Panel, it became clear that a more strategic approach needs to be adopted by the College to advertise vacant positions and to attract international students. The Panel’s view is that BUC needs to plan its approach to marketing and public relations to ensure that it supports the recruitment and admissions process, with a clear rationale for using different marketing tools, such as the College website, and strategies to achieve different outcomes. The Panel found a number of typographic errors on the English version of the website, in the promotional material, in educational documents, and in some official documents. The College needs to ensure that all publicity materials are proof-read in the relevant language for accuracy of grammar and spelling, and consistency in use of terminology. The Panel also suggests that marketing strategies should be the responsibility of staff members who are competent in both Arabic and English to ensure that the resulting publicity material is accurate and useful.

Recommendation 27

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College align its marketing and media strategies with the College’s strategic objectives.

9.3 Communication Services

BUC states that it aims to provide effective internal communication channels to its staff and students and that its communication channels are managed by the Dean’s office through memos,
official notices, telephone and emails (Portfolio, p.68). BUC also uses the staff email system to communicate with staff along with text messages to communicate with students. Notices regarding examinations, timetables, holidays and public events, holidays and programs are displayed on LCD boards within the BUC campus. An internal telephone system allows for group teleconferencing which enhances the potential to communicate with remote visitors and potential applicants or collaborators. The Panel was informed that there are plans in place to develop a central password protected intranet site for archiving and sharing relevant official documents online with proper security protection for access and record retention. The Panel encourages BUC to speed up the implementation and monitoring of a College intranet (with clear guidance about who is responsible for maintaining this site).

The Panel found that as of 2009 all official minutes for College and Academic Councils were published in Arabic only. This creates obstacles for Head of Departments (HoDs), faculty and external collaborators (such as its U.S. affiliates) who speak only English. Since these are key documents for faculty members and members of committees, BUC is urged to develop a policy to ensure that stakeholders have access to relevant documentation, such as recording minutes of key meetings in both Arabic and English.

**Recommendation 28**

- The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that Al Buraimi University College develop and implement a communication policy to ensure that all stakeholders are able to access relevant documentation whether in English or Arabic.

### 9.4 Facilities Management

The facilities are managed by the Administration and Finance Directorate. Space is provided on an ‘equal scale’ to staff and students. This includes parking spaces, rest rooms, offices, classrooms, two auditoriums, hostel and transport facilities (Portfolio, p.68). A number of services, such as cleaning, maintenance and transport are outsourced. The Panel heard from a number of staff and students that the new campus was a considerable improvement on the previous facilities. However, the College is encouraged to develop a regular, documented preventative maintenance program to ensure that the current facilities continue to serve the needs of the College community.
APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

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APPENDIX B. ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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

ADRI………………………….. A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising:
     Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement.
ADSA .............................. Assistant Dean for Student Affairs
ANG .................................. Al Nuaimi Group
AOL ................................... Assurance of Learning Project, initiated by BUC’s affiliate CSUN
Approach.......................... The first dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on evaluating
     what a HEI aims to achieve for a given topic and how it proposes to
     achieve it.
ARD .................................. Admission and Registration Department
BoT ................................. Board of Trustees
BUC ................................. Al Buraimi University College http://www.buc.edu.om/
Call Back Interview ............. An interview conducted by the Audit Panel towards the end of the
     Audit Visit for which it has invited specific people, usually at short
     notice, to respond to particular issues on which the Panel will require
     assistance.
CSUN ............................... California State University, Northridge, USA http://www.csun.edu/
CV ................................... Curriculum Vitae
Deployment .......................... The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a
     HEI's plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not,
     why not.
DTCCS ............................... Directorate of Training, Consultation and Community Service
Executive Officer ............... An OAAA staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide
     professional guidance and support.
External Reviewer............... A Member of the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; a person
     approved by the OAAA Board to participate as a member of the
     OAAA's various external review Panels.
GFP .................................. General Foundation Program
HEI ................................. Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education
     Provider)
HoD ................................. Head of Department
HR ..................................... Human Resources
IELTS ............................... International English Language Testing System
Improvement ...................... The fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how
     effectively an organisation is improving its approach and
     deployment for any given topic in order to achieve better results.
KPI ................................. Key Performance Indicator
MoA ................................. Memorandum of Agreement
MoHE ............................... Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om)
MoM ................................. Ministry of Manpower
MoU ................................. Memorandum of Understanding
OAAA Board ......................... The governing body of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAAA ................................... Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (www.oac.gov.om)
OAC ...................................... Oman Accreditation Council (became OAAA in 2010)
OFI ....................................... Opportunity for improvement.
OQF ...................................... Oman Qualifications Framework.
Panel Chairperson .............. The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member ...................... An OAAA External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
Portfolio ............................. see Quality Audit Portfolio.
QA ......................................... Quality Assurance
Quality Assurance ............... The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met.
Quality Audit ...................... An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its mission and vision.
QAD ...................................... Quality Assurance Department
Quality Audit Portfolio ........... The report produced as the result of a self study. Also forms the main submission made to the OAAA by the HEI being audited.
Quality Audit Report ........... A public report published by the OAAA which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel’s External Review of a HEI.
Quality Enhancement ........... The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing approach, deployment and results.
Random Interview .............. An interview conducted in situ by individual Panel Members during the Audit but separately from the main interview sessions.
Results .............................. The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic’s approach and deployment.
ROSQA ............................... Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance
RSC ...................................... Research and Symposia Committee
Sic ....................................... Referenced exactly from the source (even if the source contained errors or was ambiguous)
SQU ...................................... Sultan Qaboos University, Oman
SWOT analysis ..................... Analysis of an organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
System ............................... In this Report, system refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.
TOEFL ............................... Test of English as a Foreign Language
UFP ...................................... Unit of Foundation Program
USRHS ............................... Unit of Scientific Research and Higher Studies