Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Report of an Audit of
The German University of Technology in Oman
(GUtech)

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P.O. Box 1255
P.C. 133
Al-Khuwair
Sultanate of Oman
Ph +968 24121600
Fax +968 24121231
http://www.oaaa.gov.om
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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) of the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech). It comments on GUtech’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 GUtech’s activities and constructive feedback to the University to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The Quality Audit commenced with GUtech 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 1 December 2012.

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 16 January 2013 to consider GUtech’s Portfolio. Following this, a representative of the Audit Panel Chairperson and the Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to GUtech on 13 February 2013 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 GUtech’s activities. No valid submissions were received.

The audit visit took place over 10-12 March 2013. During this time, the Panel spoke with over 100 people, including governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. They also visited a selection of venues and examined additional documents.

No documents created after 12 March 2013 (being the last day of the audit visit) were taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit.

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

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 19 November 2013.

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.oac.gov.om/QAM_2008_FINAL2.pdf).
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 useful because it provides some independent comment on the learning environment at this institution (particularly Chapters 2, 6 and 7 below). 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 HEIs solely on the numbers of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations.

The second stage in the institutional accreditation process is Standards Assessment. Unlike the Quality Audit, 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 programmes, 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 summarises the main findings and lists the Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report, and are not prioritised. It should be noted that other favourable comments and suggestions for improvement are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Executive Summary of Findings

The German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) is a private university located in Halban on the outskirts of the capital city of Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman. It was established in 2007 under a collaborative agreement between Oman Educational Services LLC (OES) which owns the University and RWTH Aachen University (RWTH), Germany. The University now operates under an academic affiliation agreement with RWTH. As articulated in its Vision statement, the University is built on three symbolic pillars: education, research and innovation. This reflects the profile of RWTH. The language of instruction at GUtech is English but German language classes are offered to students and intercultural exchange with Germany is embraced in its Values and activities.

The University aspires to become a leading university of science and technology in Oman and the wider region. It currently offers four Bachelor of Science programmes and three Bachelor of Engineering programmes as well as a Master’s degree in Petroleum Geoscience. It has plans for further programmes at all levels, including doctoral degrees. The University has two pre-university programmes (an Intensive English Programme and a Foundation Year Programme) which currently cater for around 55% of the total student body. Overall, the University has about 640 students, approximately 70% of whom are female, and 140 staff comprised of an equal number of academic and administrative staff.

GUtech undertook a comprehensive institutional self-evaluation to produce its Portfolio. The self-study process was extended and inclusive. Strengths and opportunities for improvement were identified in each of the defined major areas of scope of the audit although critical, evidence-based evaluation was sometimes lacking. This is partly a reflection of the University being a very young institution with many of its processes described in the Portfolio having been implemented only recently. The University is currently in transition from its Initial Period. This was the period of planned growth, defined by GUtech, which began at the time of the University’s first intake of students in 2007 and formally ended with its first students graduating in 2012. It has also recently relocated to a new purpose-built campus from two temporary campuses near to Muscat International Airport which it previously occupied. To date, Phase 1 of the new campus has been completed. This has sufficient space and facilities to accommodate 1500 students. The campus reflects the ethos of the institution, its Vision and Mission, and commitment by relevant stakeholders to establish a high quality university. The technical specification, particularly in relation to environmental factors, reflects the University’s Mission related to excellence in science and technology as well as social responsibility.

OES is governed by a Board of Directors (BoD) and the main governing body of the University is a Board of Governors (BoG). GUtech’s academic affiliate is closely involved in its governance and management: RWTH has non-voting representation on the BoD and the RWTH Rector is the Chair of the BoG. BoG meetings are held alternately in Aachen and Muscat and follow international good practice in their operation. Appropriate distinctions between governance and management are maintained. During its Initial Period, GUtech’s strong affiliation with RWTH resulted in the establishment of sound starting curriculum, oversight of programmes by Inaugural Deans from RWTH, valuable assistance in recruiting faculty, staff training, and some enriching experiences for student learning and collaborative work. In parallel with this, a strategy for progressive implementation of the various entities within the governance structure has been adopted alongside establishment and ongoing development of a comprehensive software infrastructure to support existing and future communication, student registration and enrolment.
management, and organization and operations across the University. Governance and management processes are attentive to student feedback and provide for student representation.

Having completed the Initial Period, GUtech is now entering a new phase which includes the challenge of maintaining the quality of the student learning experience and meeting the other commitments within its Mission. The University’s Mission, Vision and Values have effectively guided development of its strategic, operational plans and functional plans but systems to monitor and evaluate these plans need to be enhanced. Effort will be required by GUtech to embed its newly established Academic Board within its governance system and to ensure the University’s policy management system is fully implemented. Documented responsibilities for quality assurance in GUtech’s academic affiliation agreement and in various role descriptors have not been fully addressed and implemented as yet, and quality assurance and improvement systems are lacking in some areas. Although the University engages in a range of internal and external review and evaluation activities, a comprehensive, institution-wide approach to quality assurance is required. This will enable the University to assure itself that evaluation of all academic programmes, academic support and administrative units provides for effective monitoring and informs continuous quality improvement. There is obvious strength in GUtech’s affiliation with RWTH. Formal monitoring of the implementation of its academic affiliation is required to support planned periodic review of this. The University is working to strengthen its risk management system which is currently under-developed. Associated with this, and in the context of ensuring its sustainability, the University requires financial management systems which will better allow for actions to enhance generation of income to be informed and evaluated efficiently and effectively. Considerable effort is being made to develop systems and provide training to ensure that health and safety are managed effectively in the University.

GUtech’s BSc degrees received early accreditation by the German Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) and further international accreditation is planned for all programmes. The University now needs to fully implement its policy for regular programme and course review. In terms of teaching and learning, the University demonstrates commitment to recruiting high caliber academic staff, providing high quality teaching facilities, and maintaining high entry standards for its academic programmes. A strong teaching–research nexus has been established. Teaching is also conducted by “fly-in professors” typically from RWTH or other European Universities. While this model provides access to specialist expertise, there are challenges associated with furnishing adequate support for students taking courses delivered in this way. Systematic monitoring and review is required to inform improved management of this aspect of programme delivery. In terms of assessment at Bachelor and Masters levels, the University requires a means to assure itself of consistency of practices and procedures and attainment of required standards of achievement across programmes. Student internships are encouraged by the University but further work is needed to ensure that these are managed effectively across departments and available to all students. GUtech’s pre-university programmes are characterized by a range of good practices that emphasise students being sufficiently prepared to enter degree programmes.

GUtech has established a strong foundation for research and consultancy. Multiple initiatives are being implemented to advance these areas in line with the strategic aims and founding principles of the University. Strong support is provided by RWTH through, for example, collaboration on research projects and GUtech staff and student access to RWTH library resources. Research performance has been strong relative to the early stage of development of the University and specific effort is made to include students in research projects. GUtech is establishing a subsidiary company to manage its consultancy activities. To support further development of this company, a mechanism to systematically evaluate its performance is required.

The University shows on-going progress in establishing external linkages with industry and relevant organizations to place students in internships and to build other beneficial collaborations. Its first programme external advisory committee has now been established. Following its first cohort of graduates in 2012, GUtech is developing formal means to engage effectively with its alumni.
GUtech provides a wide range of academic support services and at pre-university level has effective systems for identifying students at risk and providing appropriate support. Student support services for non-academic matters reflect the University’s commitment to student welfare. The University’s intent to foster intercultural awareness and appropriate behaviour is supported by its establishment of a specific committee for culture and values. Student survey feedback on courses and non-academic matters is collected systematically, although not all support services are sufficiently evaluated for their effectiveness. Services which require enhanced evaluation include student mentoring in Bachelor programmes, student medical and counseling services, and services to international students. Mechanisms to inform students of action that has been taken in response to their feedback need to be further developed and formalized. GUtech’s elected Student Council plays a significant role in representing the student body.

The University has comprehensive human resources management policies and procedures in place although the recent relocation of the University has resulted in an element of disruption to staffing. To address challenges in maintaining a staff profile which effectively supports its Mission, it is important for Gutech to build on its existing systems and evaluation of these, and consider mechanisms to maintain and expand the staffing complement in accord with development plans.

GUtech has restructured its provision of general support services to align with the requirements of the new campus and operational planning for this is underway.

**Summary of Commendations**

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its ongoing development and implementation of software systems which enhance communication and organization across the University and provide a strong foundation for future expansion. ................................................................. 15

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its ongoing review of programme entry requirements and its rigorous application of standards for entry into its degree programmes which support its strategic intent to enroll and educate students with high academic potential. ......................................................... 25

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for establishing a strong foundation for research and consultancy and implementing multiple planned initiatives to take this forward in line with the strategic aims and the founding principles of the University. ................................................................. 34

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for establishing a strong connection between its teaching and research activities................................................................. 38

5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its provision of up-to-date technology and equipment which supports its teaching and learning activities and aligns with its profile as a university of technology. ................................................................. 45

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its establishment of a Culture and Values Advisory Committee that has supported its work to foster in students appropriate behaviour and, in line with its stated Values, promote intercultural awareness................................................................. 48
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its establishment of a new campus designed specifically to reflect its Vision to become a leading university of technology and support implementation of its Mission. .......................................................... 55

Summary of Affirmations

A formal Affirmation recognizes an instance in which GUtech 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 the German University of Technology in Oman that an Academic Board needs to be embedded within the University’s governance system and supports its establishment of an Academic Board with clear terms of reference for the purpose of reporting to and advising the Rectorate on all academic matters....... 13

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that its Strategic Plan needs to be monitored more effectively and supports the University’s efforts to achieve this by developing key performance indicators and achievement targets, of a quantitative nature where appropriate, and enhancing access to data through its central IT systems. .................................................................................................. 17

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that further action is required to ensure that its policy management system is fully implemented and evaluated and supports its on-going development of software and training of staff which are required to achieve this..................................................... 19

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the German University of Technology in Oman in its efforts to develop and implement an externally benchmarked and appropriately contextualized Health, Safety and Environment Management System...................... 22

5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that all its programmes need to be subject to regular review, and supports its efforts in this area including the development of a policy to guide programme review and establishment of a departmental External Advisory Committee................................. 24

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that policies, procedures and practices to guide student internships need to be more systematic across departments and supports its work to enhance the management of this activity.............................................................................................................. 28

7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that more detailed analysis of student retention and progression data is required and supports it further developing its systems to do this.......................................................... 30

8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that enhanced management of its consultancy activities is required and supports its commitment to the development of a comprehensive policy to achieve this.............. 36

9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that an effective system for alumni engagement is required, and supports its efforts to achieve this which include development and use of an alumni database. ..... 41

10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that students need more support to overcome language problems in
using RWTH Aachen University’s electronic library, and supports the steps the University is
taking to address this which include developing the necessary, online interface.......................... 43

11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of
Technology in Oman that it needs to further develop and formalise processes for providing
information to students about actions taken as follow-up in response to their feedback, and
supports its work with the Student Council as one means of addressing this.............................. 47

12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of
Technology in Oman that systematic career guidance for students is required, particularly in
the context of expected growth in student numbers, and supports the steps the University is
taking to further develop initiatives and systems to address this.................................................. 48

13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of
Technology in Oman that further action to increase Omanisation is required, and supports its
efforts and initiatives to achieve this which include intention to develop a more formal career
programme for developing Omanis to occupy academic and senior management positions........ 54

14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of
Technology in Oman that appropriate operational plans are required to guide the units
responsible for the management of the University’s building and facilities, and supports the
steps taken towards developing these............................................................................................. 56

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of
Technology in Oman develop and implement a system to monitor the implementation of its
Academic Affiliation Agreement with RWTH Aachen University................................................ 16

2. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of
Technology in Oman include key performance indicators and achievement targets, of a
quantitative nature where appropriate, in its Operational Plans...................................................... 17

3. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of
Technology in Oman develop and implement a financial management system that enables it
to more easily align financial projections with actual revenue and expenditure activities......... 18

4. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of
Technology take steps to ensure that its risk management system, which includes the
development and maintenance of risk registers at departmental level, is implemented
effectively across the university................................................. 19

5. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of
Technology in Oman build on its range of quality assurance tools currently being used to
develop and implement a comprehensive and integrated system for quality assurance and
enhancement across all academic, administrative and support units.............................................. 21

6. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of
Technology in Oman develop and implement a system to routinely evaluate the performance
of its subsidiary company Oman German Technology Solutions LLC and its contribution to
achieving the University’s Mission................................................................. 22
7. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman undertake systematic review of its use of “fly-in” professors from its German affiliate, RWTH Aachen University, and other foreign universities to assess the impact on student support and learning and inform its planning and management of course delivery. ................................................................. 27

8. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman develop and implement a mechanism to assure itself of consistency of assessment practices and procedures and attainment of required standards of achievement across the University. ................................................................................. 28

9. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman ensure that Bachelor theses are examined in full accordance with its Assessment and Examination Policy across the University and that policy and practice in this area continue to be evaluated to ensure transparent, valid and reliable processes which allow good practice from different departments to be shared. ............................................ 33

10. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman further develop its mechanisms for collecting feedback on its academic support services to ensure that feedback specific to the services it provides is collected from students as well as from relevant staff. .............................................................................. 42

11. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman subject its student mentoring scheme in all departments to periodic comprehensive review to ensure that it is fit for purpose......................................................... 44

12. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman evaluate student medical and counseling services regularly and in the context of the University’s overall management of Health, Safety, Security and Environment. ..... 49

13. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman develop and implement formalised systems to evaluate the services which it provides to meet the needs of its international students on matters which affect this specific student group. ......................................................................................... 50

14. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman systematically apply its performance appraisal system to all staff. .................. 53

15. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman take action to fill existing administrative vacancies with staff on permanent appointments and improve the satisfaction and retention of administrative staff.............. 54

16. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman review its approach to recruiting more students in general and foreign students in particular...................................................... 56
1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) is a private university in the Sultanate of Oman. It is owned by Oman Educational Services LLC (OES) and operates under an academic affiliation agreement with RWTH Aachen University, Germany (RWTH). OES is a company which is registered with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Oman for the purpose of running the University. OES is governed by a Board of Directors (BoD) and all shareholders are of Omani nationality (Portfolio, p.17). GUtech began its operations in 2007. In September 2012, the University moved from two temporary campuses in Oman’s capital city, Muscat, to the site of its new purpose-built campus in Halban on the outskirts of Muscat.

This Chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to overall governance and management at the University and specifically covers the following: Mission, Vision and Values; governance; management; institutional affiliations; strategic plan; operational planning; financial management; risk management; policy management; entity and activity review systems; student grievance process; and health and safety.

1.1 Mission, Vision and Values

The Panel confirmed that the current statements of Vision, Mission and Values of GUtech were developed through a series of stakeholder workshops culminating in approval by the University’s Board of Governors (BoG) in May 2011. Aligned with the Mission Statement of RWTH and informed by anticipated strategic development of education in Oman, the statements are as follows (Portfolio, p.16):

Vision:
The German University of Technology in Oman ("GUtech") strives to become a leading university of technology in Oman and the wider region, thus defining the highest standards in education, research and innovation.

Mission:
GUtech provides students with the education required to become highly qualified and socially responsible graduates, guided by German excellence in science and technology and with a firm grounding in Oman's culture and heritage. The University fosters creative and critical thinking to advance research and development and, through this, aims at serving society as a whole.

Values:
GUtech is committed to ethical principles in all of its undertakings. In particular, the University welcomes students and employees from both genders, all ethnic, geographical, cultural and religious backgrounds. The University encourages association in peace and with tolerance, and welcomes further intercultural exchange between Oman and Germany.

The Panel noted that the “pillars” of education, research and innovation on which the University is being developed are clearly identified in the Vision statement. The shared ownership of the Vision and Mission claimed by GUtech (Portfolio, p.16) was borne out from interviews with faculty, support staff and administrators. The Panel found that University publications state the Mission and Vision consistently and accurately and these statements form the starting point for strategic planning exercises. The Panel encourages the future involvement of students and alumni in periodic reflection on the University’s Mission, Vision and Values which is being considered by GUtech (Portfolio, p.16).
1.2 Governance

GUtech was licensed to operate by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Oman in 2007. The main governing body of the University is the BoG whereas the BoD is the main governing body of OES. An Academic Affiliation Agreement (AAA) signed by OES and RWTH in 2010 regulates GUtech’s relationship with RWTH. The AAA replaced a Collaborative Agreement between OES and RWTH which was in place from 2006 to 2010 (Portfolio, p.17). The terms of the AAA include RWTH providing GUtech with academic curricula, quality management of teaching and learning, and expertise in setting up the operations of GUtech. The AAA also details GUtech’s governance structure and responsibilities of the entities involved. The entities identified are: BoD; BoG; Rectorate; Academic Board; Faculty Boards; Departmental Boards; and Student Council.

The BoD acts as the ultimate supervisory body for GUtech and its responsibilities include, for example, appointing the BoG and the Rector, and approving the annual budget. The University states that the Rector of RWTH is a non-voting member of the BoD (Portfolio, p.17). This RWTH non-voting representation on the BoD indicated in the BoD’s terms of reference is currently fulfilled by the GUtech Rector representing the RWTH Rector. The RWTH Rector is the Chair of the BoG and the GUtech Rector is a non-voting member of the BoG. A University Constitution derived from the academic governance arrangements detailed in the AAA was approved by the BoG in May 2011. The University identifies the close involvement of RWTH in its governance and management structures as a strength (Portfolio, p.32).

Primary functions of the BoG include strategic and operational planning, recommending annual budgets to the BoD, recommending appointment of the GUtech Rector and performance appraisal of the Rector and Deputy-Rectors. A clear statement in the terms of reference of the BoG appropriately requires separation of governance from day-to-day management: “Monitor and accept responsibility for the total operations of GUtech in accordance with this Constitution, but avoid interference in management decisions or with the judgment of internal academic bodies”. The Panel found from interviews that there is clear appreciation of the responsibilities of the BoD and a practiced differentiation of functions from the BoG. From the records of both Boards considered by the Panel, the frequency of meetings, agenda setting, communications and recording of minutes follow good international practice. The University reports that the BoG (which meets alternately in Aachen and Muscat), has decided to meet with Student Council representatives when the meeting is held in Muscat (Portfolio, p.18). The Panel heard two such meetings had taken place and it encourages the University to strengthen and formalize this interaction. The BoG has not carried out a formal appraisal of the performance of the Rector as required by the terms of reference, but evaluation has been based on reports submitted to the Board by the Rector.

In its Collaborative Agreement and subsequent AAA, the University identifies an “Initial Period” of planned growth between its first intake of students and its first cohort of students graduating (i.e. between 2007 and the end of the 2011-2012 academic year). During this time, a strategy for progressive implementation of the various entities within the governance structure has been adopted. As a result, in this initial period no Academic Board or Faculty Boards were established and much of the academic management revolved around a departmental structure. The Panel supports the review and revision of the Collaborative Agreement to form the AAA which resulted in, among other changes, a requirement for GUtech to establish an Academic Board. The Panel confirmed that the first meeting of the Academic Board had taken place (in March 2013). Effort will now be required to embed the Academic Board as an effective academic governance body in the University.

Affirmation 1

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that an Academic Board needs to be
embedded within the University’s governance system and supports its establishment of an Academic Board with clear terms of reference for the purpose of reporting to and advising the Rectorate on all academic matters.

The membership of the Academic Board as detailed in the AAA and the Constitution includes the President of the Student Council. The Panel was pleased to note the anticipated involvement of the Student Council in the Academic Board, along with the interaction of students with the BoG. However, this involvement was not reflected in the minutes of the first Academic Board meeting and the Panel was advised that the student concerned was out of the country at that time. The University is encouraged to make every effort to ensure student representation in subsequent meetings.

There is evidence that GUtech has undertaken review in relation to its governance through, for example, formal review of its initial Collaborative Agreement as well as review of the BoG terms of reference (which the University states that it will revise regularly as GUtech grows; Portfolio, p.18). Development and implementation of an appropriate quality management system (see Recommendation 5) will support the University in ensuring that appropriate review takes place systematically.

1.3 Management

Authority to undertake the day-to-day management of the University is delegated to the Rectorate (RC) by the BoG. The Rectorate comprises the Rector (Chairperson), the Deputy-Rector for Administration and Finances (DRAF), and the Deputy-Rector for Academic Affairs (DRAA). All members of the Rectorate report directly to the BOG (Portfolio, p.18). The role of the Rectorate is described in the University Constitution and its specific duties and responsibilities are detailed in separate formal Terms of Reference. A Manual of Delegations of Authorities provides additional guidance on responsibilities for key specific business events/transactions and includes a detailed matrix of authorities to clarify the specific duties and corresponding authority holders. The Panel found that there is a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Rectorate across the University.

GUtech’s Constitution states that Deans and Heads of Departments (HoDs) are elected positions. During the Initial Period, as required by the AAA, each of GUtech’s four faculties (see Chapter 2) was headed by an RWTH Professor acting as an Inaugural Dean. The Inaugural Deans were appointed to establish the first portfolio of academic programmes and appoint faculty members to the departments, including Heads of each department (Portfolio, pp.18-19). The Panel confirmed that at the time of the audit visit (i.e. post the Initial Period), this commitment to move to elected positions had been implemented with recent elections of HoDs and Deans. This strategy appears to have been appropriate and effective given the rate of expansion of the University.

The University reports that in addition to chairing departmental meetings, HoDs of administrative departments chair Steering Committees for their respective departments (Portfolio, p.19). The membership of these committees includes stakeholders from academic and other administrative departments with the aim of ensuring better collaboration and lateral integration between departments. The terms of reference of the Departmental Steering Committees also provide for optional student membership. The main role of the committees is to evaluate departmental achievements against operational plans and report on this to the Rectorate. GUtech acknowledges that the Steering Committees have yet to fulfil this role effectively (Portfolio, p.24). Minutes of meetings considered by the Panel reflect this and provide limited evidence of student participation. Panel discussions with academic and non-academic staff nevertheless indicated the potential value of better established and fully operational Steering Committees.

As a component of GUtech’s strategy for effective management, communications and transparency, attention has been given to the use of software to facilitate information sharing
between staff and between staff and students. The core system portal is myGUtech and this development has progressed so far to establish a Student Information System and more recently a Human Resource Module. A Business Portal is expected to become operational some time this year (see Section 1.7). Also linked to myGUtech is the University’s QWiki platform which provides access to policies, manuals, committee minutes and strategic plans (Portfolio, p.19). From Panel interviews with staff, administrators and students, and from demonstration of the operation, it is evident that the system is appreciated and well-used. The system is being developed and implemented at an early stage in the establishment of the University and should serve the University well as it expands in terms of student enrollments, faculty and staff complement and the portfolio of academic programmes.

Commendation 1
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its ongoing development and implementation of software systems which enhance communication and organization across the University and provide a strong foundation for future expansion.

1.4 Institutional Affiliations for Programmes and Quality Assurance

A Collaborative Agreement (CA) between OES and RWTH was signed by both parties to be effective from January 2007 until December 2012. This agreement established the framework for GUtech including governance, initial programmes to be offered and quality assurance. Prior to expiry of the first agreement, it was reviewed and revised in the form of the current AAA in effect from 2010 to its expiry date that remained at 31st December 2012. The Panel understands that this has been automatically extended for a further five years. The revised AAA, which remains a comprehensive document, has opened the possibility of additional institutional affiliations and bringing new programmes and levels of qualifications into the GUtech portfolio. Negotiations are currently underway to bring new programmes to GUtech from a number of European universities (Portfolio, p.21).

From interviews, the Panel found that GUtech administration, faculty, staff and students perceive the RWTH affiliation to be of considerable benefit to the University; it has enabled the institution to start-up with a high quality curriculum delivered by well-qualified faculty supported by clear systems of governance and management. The particular aspects of support from RWTH, confirmed by the Panel, include provision of Inaugural Deans, fly-in professors, student exchanges, development of QWiki, staff training, access to electronic learning resources and assistance in gaining international accreditation for starting BSc programmes. The Panel noted that the provision of opportunities for staff and students visits from GUtech to Aachen supports the intercultural exchange with Germany, embraced within the stated values of GUtech. Further, RWTH is closely involved with the governance and management of GUtech through, for example: its representation on the BoD and BoG (and hosting of alternate BoG meetings); its right to recommend the Rector and Deputy-Rectors (Portfolio, p.21); its role in the appointment of Associate and Full Professors (Portfolio, p.96); and the liaison requirements between senior GUtech staff and RWTH included in GUtech terms of reference for these positions. It is clear that GUtech’s affiliation with RWTH has brought early benefits to the student and faculty experience at GUtech.

GUtech formally identifies its affiliation with RWTH as a strength and the Panel, which spoke to senior representatives of both institutions, shares this view. However, the commitment expressed in the AAA to provide the quality management of teaching and learning at GUtech, and the documented responsibility for Quality Assurance in various role descriptors, has not been fully addressed and implemented as yet (also see Section 1.10 1.3 and Recommendation 5).
The current AAA resulted from review of the previous agreement and the Panel found evidence of intent to review the current agreement periodically. The Panel supports this intention but considers that a formal GUtech system to monitor implementation of the agreement is also required. This will help to ensure that any lapses regarding responsibilities defined in the AAA under the scope of services for each partner are identified and acted on, and inform subsequent review of the agreement. This monitoring system needs to align with the requirement included in the AAA for the BoD to monitor the BoG to ensure the operation of GUtech is in accordance with the AAA (and the Constitution).

**Recommendation 1**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman develop and implement a system to monitor the implementation of its Academic Affiliation Agreement with RWTH Aachen University.

### 1.5 Strategic Plan

GUtech reports that its current 2008-2013 Strategic Plan (SP) was developed through a consultative process that included a wide range of stakeholders (Portfolio, p.23). An initial SP was developed during a workshop held in Aachen in April 2008. This was attended by members of the BoG, representatives of OES, DAAD (the German Academic Exchange Service which is funding the development of a quality management system at GUtech – see Section 1.10), Inaugural Deans and members of the Rectorate of both RWTH and GUtech. In March 2009 this Plan was reviewed in a workshop at GUtech which resulted in changes that were approved by the BoG in April 2009. Further revisions were approved in 2011. The Plan is based on the Balanced Scorecard approach with four core perspectives focusing on: Stakeholder Expectations; Education, Research and other Internal Processes; Corporate Culture; and Finance (Portfolio, pp.22-23).

The Panel learned that annual planning workshops for all GUtech staff take place. Minutes from these demonstrate a sound internal process of introduction to strategic planning principles, SWOT analysis, and reflection on the Mission and Vision for guidance in development of educational programmes, teaching and learning strategies, and other activities. These workshops were also used to introduce the Balanced Scorecard methodology for monitoring progress in achieving strategic objectives, ADRI (see Appendix B), and preparation for the OAAA Quality Audit.

The 2008-2013 SP, which is accessible on the QWiki platform, has “indicators of success” for each objective but does not have time targets for achievement of all indicators. This would appear to make routine monitoring of progress difficult. Progress made by the University is reported to the BoG by means of Business Reports (Portfolio, p.23). Interviews with relevant stakeholders and minutes of BoG meetings showed this to be the case, although these reports are not explicitly linked to objectives and indicators in the SP. A report showing achieved outcomes against the objectives and indicators of success in the SP was considered by the Panel but this undated document appears to be summative judgment produced at the end of the 5-year period. Some objectives are clearly achieved but others have no target reference point against which to judge the extent of achievement. The Panel considers that appropriate targets should be set within the SP in order to guide target setting within the Operational (short-term) Plans derived from this (see Section 1.6). This would also facilitate progress reporting to the BoG. This deficiency in the Plan may partly explain the rather poor response in the Staff Satisfaction Survey to the statement “I am aware of the plans for the University as a whole” (Portfolio, p.23).

The process of developing the 2013-2018 SP has begun. The University states that “particular emphasis will be given to improving the quantitative description of key performance indicators” and that the myGUtech Portal is being further developed to improve access to data (Portfolio,
1.6 Operational Planning

From the SP, the University has derived its Operational and Functional Plans which are typically valid for two years (Portfolio, p.23). The Operational Plans relate to objectives in specific administrative departments. The Functional Plans relate to themes across the entire University and include the 2012-2014 Teaching and Learning Plan (TLP) and 2012-2014 Research and Consultancy Plan (RCP).

The Functional and Operational Plans identify actions in relation to each objective and include Indicators of Success, Responsible Persons and Completion Dates. Each action is prioritized as high or medium but quantitative or precise qualitative targets are generally lacking. Completion dates are frequently designated as “continuous” which does not assist the monitoring of progress. It is therefore not surprising to the Panel that effective progress reports are not being generated systematically. This is acknowledged by the University which concludes that the introduction of its information management software together with staff training on defining effective key success indicators and using data effectively will improve the situation (Portfolio, p.24). The Panel considers that at least part of the solution lies in producing plans with more precise and quantitative targets where possible and supports the University in its efforts to further develop and better implement its planning activities (also see Affirmation 2). An identified exception to the lack of quantitative targets is in the Health and Safety Plan (see Section 1.12).

Recommendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman include key performance indicators and achievement targets, of a quantitative nature where appropriate, in its Operational Plans.

1.7 Financial Management

GUtech has a 2007-2017 Business Development and Financial Plan and “Financial Aspects” is one of the four major components of its SP. The SP includes objectives relating to increasing income through tuition fees, diversifying sources of revenue, making use of available resources, ensuring transparent and effective financial reporting and achieving financial sustainability of the University. Financial statements of OES and related administrative operations of the University undergo annual external audit and internal audit which, since 2009, has been delegated to international auditors (Portfolio, pp.24-25).

The Panel learned that to date student enrolment has lagged behind projected enrolment. The resulting shortfall in tuition revenue has been magnified by a higher than expected increase in MoHE scholarship students who yield lower net revenues than self-funded students. The major shift in the proportion of self-funded students to scholarship students puts mounting pressure on GUtech management to more vigorously diversify its sources of revenues, including the need to...
significantly step up enrolment of international students in its Bachelor degree programmes. Since tuition revenues constitute two-thirds of the projected total revenues, the expected financial breakeven point, which has not met the target date set in the SP, will move farther into the future if there is no substantial growth in student enrolment and revenues from other GUtech activities. The need to augment its revenue with alternative sources of income is clearly recognized by the University (Portfolio, p.26).

GUtech has identified the need for financial management software to be integrated with its new Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) system and the development of an online Business Portal to enhance budget planning and to improve alignment between budgeted and actual income and expenditure (Portfolio, p.26). The Panel was able to corroborate via staff interviews GUtech’s plan to improve its online financial tracking and reporting system in order to engage operating departments more directly in integrated budgeting and alignment of plans with actual expenditures and revenues. However, the Panel found it difficult to piece together a comprehensive and readily assimilated financial snapshot of GUtech. This would be achievable once a financial management system is in place and would allow senior management to monitor and track changes in its financial position in timely fashion. A comparison of revenue forecasts in the Business Development Plan, with audited revenue figures of August 2012, shows a substantial gap in planned versus actual revenues that have accumulated over the planning period. Given the acknowledged urgency for revenue enhancement (via stepped up enrolment) and diversification that are critical to the financial viability of the institution, the Panel recommends development and implementation of a financial management system that enables GUtech to more easily align financial projections with actual revenue and expenditure activities.

**Recommendation 3**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman develop and implement a financial management system that enables it to more easily align financial projections with actual revenue and expenditure activities.

### 1.8 Risk Management

GUtech has a Risk Profile which was developed in 2009 in relation to its SP, as well as a manual documenting a Health, Safety, Security and Environment (HSSE) Management System which was developed in 2012 (Portfolio, p.26). The Risk Profile includes areas such as: student recruitment; HSSE; completion of the new campus; staff recruitment and retention; third-party research and consultancy funding; litigation and government regulations. The management of HSSE is considered in Section 1.12 where it is noted that further contextualization of the present system is required.

The University reports that the impact and likelihood of risk are regularly discussed at RC and BoG level but indicates that further engagement at department level is required to improve implementation of its risk management mechanisms (Portfolio, pp.26-27). The Panel agrees that further work is required in this area. Although several examples are cited in the Portfolio where risks have been identified and addressed (p.26), the Panel is not convinced that the principles and practice of risk management are applied across the University. At this stage of establishment of GUtech, the Panel considers that risk associated with lagging student enrollments in particular needs further attention. With high dependence on student tuition fees for financial viability (see Section 1.7), shortage of enrollments poses risks in capacity to recruit and retain adequate full-time instructors and support staff.

GUtech has still to embed systems which ensure that the principles and practice of risk management are applied effectively across the University and the Panel supports its intent to
strengthen this area by developing and maintaining Risk Registers at departmental level and monitoring these processes through the Rectorate (Portfolio, p.27).

**Recommendation 4**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology take steps to ensure that its risk management system, which includes the development and maintenance of risk registers at departmental level, is implemented effectively across the university.

1.9 **Policy Management**

Wherever appropriate, policies have been based on those of RWTH, but many additional policies and regulations have been required to fit the new context and culture of GUtech as a private, English medium, Omani institution under the jurisdiction of MoHE in the Sultanate of Oman (Portfolio, p.27). The Panel confirmed the accessibility of policies and other approved documents through Qwiki. It also viewed the comprehensive policy which governs policy management and a policy register covering manuals and policies which records approval and revision data. Similar registers are maintained for GUtech plans and terms of reference for governance and management groups.

Under the GUtech Constitution, the BoG delegates responsibility for policy approval to the Rectorate. The Academic Board has a formal responsibility to approve policies related to academic matters. The policy owner is the Rector, a Deputy-Rector or the relevant Head of Department (HoD). The policy owner is responsible for: informing relevant parties of the existence of a new policy; uploading the new policy onto QWiki and other internal websites; organizing briefing sessions if required; monitoring compliance with the policy; and taking action in cases of non-compliance (Portfolio, p.27). The Academic Board, according to its terms of reference, is to be responsible for advising the Rectorate on all academic matters, including academic priorities and policies of the University; academic aspects of the University’s SP; policies concerning the conditions of appointment and employment of academic staff; the maintenance of academic standards; and any other matters it considers to be of strategic importance. The Panel notes that much of this business agenda requires contextualization to GUtech and cannot be adopted directly from RWTH.

The University does not address the effectiveness of its policy management system in the Portfolio and at the time of the audit visit, the Panel found that QWiki was still essentially functioning as a file management system. However, further development of the QWiki platform and training in its use is anticipated to allow for departments to have an interactive role in policy management and review (Portfolio, p.26). Interviews with relevant stakeholders provided evidence of progress in implementation of the policy management system. The Panel encourages these efforts which will allow for review of the policy management system as a whole through review of its Policy Management Framework policy.

**Affirmation 3**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that further action is required to ensure that its policy management system is fully implemented and evaluated and supports its on-going development of software and training of staff which are required to achieve this.

1.10 **Entity and Activity Review Systems**

GUtech reports that it has developed an extensive external review system for the review of its faculties, departments, programmes and services which together with regular internal review
activities supports continuous improvement (Portfolio, p.28). Through examination of review reports and completed surveys as well as interviews with relevant stakeholders, the Panel confirmed review activities are being undertaken as described by the University.

Regular external financial and administrative audits take place and the resulting reports are considered by the BoG and/or the BoD and inform action. As GUtech is a private HEI, annual reviews by MoHE are conducted and the Panel heard about actions that have resulted from these such as changes to library opening hours and a reduction in the number of “fly-in” professors teaching in block courses (also see Section 2.5). The University’s BSc programmes underwent review by the German Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) in 2008 resulting in their accreditation (valid for a period of 5 years). In terms of self-review, apart from its production of the Portfolio for the OAAA Quality Audit, the University prepared a comprehensive institutional self-study (using the ADRI model) in 2009 as part of a review by DAAD. It also submits a comprehensive annual report to its affiliate, RWTH, for feedback.

Internal review includes use of a suite of surveys. These have closed and open-ended questions and are conducted electronically through a system termed “EvaSys” which is linked to RWTH. The surveys comprise a student satisfaction survey for non-academic matters and a staff satisfaction survey, both of which are conducted annually, as well as student course evaluations which are conducted each semester. The Panel found these evaluation instruments to be comprehensive and easy to interpret.

Overall, however, the Panel found a lack of evaluation and reflection on the effectiveness of these review processes by the University in the Portfolio. In addition, the Panel found the processes by which survey results, for example, are disseminated and acted upon to lack clarity. Although not made explicit in the Portfolio, the Panel noted that the University’s SP has a strategic objective “to promote a culture of excellence through quality assurance”. In addition to calling for accreditations to be achieved and yearly feedback from RWTH and DAAD to be sought, it includes “Completion of a Quality Plan” as an indicator of success. To date no such plan exists. The Panel considers a consolidated description of the University’s quality assurance systems is required, perhaps in the form of a Quality Assurance Manual, to help ensure that evaluation of all academic programmes, academic support and administrative units provides for effective monitoring and leads to continuous quality improvement.

GUtech reports that the QWiki platform is the focus of the “Quality Management System” that RWTH has supported GUtech in developing in a project funded by DAAD (Portfolio, p.21). As yet, however, responsibilities for quality assurance in role descriptions of various GUtech staff have not been fully addressed and implemented in a way that will ensure that academic and supporting departments engage in a process of evaluation and continuous quality enhancement. It is clear that the information management systems that are now available in the University can support the implementation of relevant quality assurance systems and that the Quality Assurance and Planning Office is well positioned to support this cross-institutional function if adequately resourced. The Quality Assurance and Planning Office is currently a unit under the Rectorate with a single staff member. The Panel found that at present there is no working relationship between RWTH and this unit, although the Panel heard that this was to be developed.

During interviews, the Panel heard widespread expression of the University’s commitment to quality in terms of its commitment to: recruit high calibre staff; provide high quality facilities; maintain high entry standards for its academic programmes; and, critically, produce good quality graduates. These commitments are captured in the strategic objectives in GUtech’s 2008-2013 Strategic Plan. The Panel found evidence of achievement in these areas (see Sections 8.2, 9.1, 2.3 and 2.11). Nevertheless, the Panel found an overall lack of internal quality assurance systems to support consistent implementation of processes and activities across the University and provide mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these. The Panel considers it is timely
for GUtech to focus attention on developing internal quality management systems in order to sustain the quality of its operations and support continuous quality improvement.

**Recommendation 5**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman build on its range of quality assurance tools currently being used to develop and implement a comprehensive and integrated system for quality assurance and enhancement across all academic, administrative and support units.

1.11 **Student Grievance Process**

The 2012 GUtech Student Handbook defines various categories of complaints and grievances which include grade appeals, complaints resulting from student behavior, complaints regarding the University policies and procedures etc. GUtech students are explicitly encouraged to approach members of staff or their assigned mentors directly in the first instance to resolve their problems and complaints. The process and stages in the procedure relating to cases where satisfaction is not gained in the first instance are clearly articulated in the Handbook and students interviewed by the Panel were aware of this source of guidance and the general approach to dealing with such matters. Records of the cases dealt with between 2009 and 2012 by the DRAA (Stage 2 of the Formal Resolution) were provided to the Panel and this demonstrated a sound process of consideration and resolution to a variety of complaints.

The criteria for appeals against grading are fully described in the Student Handbook along with a clear description of procedures. The Panel considered documented cases of which there had been very few up to the time of the audit visit.

GUtech reports that general student feedback is encouraged at GUtech through different channels such as through teacher and course evaluation surveys or through the elected Student Council representatives (Portfolio, p.29). Undergraduate and graduate students interviewed by the Panel had a reasonable awareness of the various opportunities to raise issues of concern.

1.12 **Health and Safety**

GUtech worked with consultants to develop an HSSE management system which was approved by the BoG in 2012. The Panel viewed the components of the system which comprise: a policy statement; a comprehensive manual; a 2012-2013 HSSE Plan; and forms/checklists for activities such as bus transport and field trips.

GUtech reported that it is seeking external certification for its HSSE management system from the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) (Portfolio, p.31). OPAL is a non-profit organization initially established by the oil and gas industry in Oman which sets standards for best practice in the area of HSSE and Human Resources (Portfolio, p.31). At the time of the audit visit the University had two dedicated HSSE staff who report to the Rectorate.

GUtech is aiming to develop and implement an HSSE management system appropriate to its needs and attain external recognition of this in line with its overall efforts to “meet high standards of quality by adhering to external benchmarks” (Portfolio, p.31). Through interviews, the Panel learned that staff training in relation to the new system is seen as the current priority but some requirements of the system are considered to be inappropriate and/or over restrictive. The Panel agrees that the system as it stands needs to be further contextualized. For example, the Health and Safety Plan contains repeated reference to PDO (Petroleum Development Oman, the national oil company) and requirements which appear more appropriate for contractors working for this organization than for the University. The Panel considered that the University context was not adequately reflected in this plan and was not surprised to find little evidence of implementation of
the plan as it stands. During the course of the audit, no specific matters of concern regarding HSSE were noted by the Panel but further work is nevertheless required to ensure that the University’s HSSE system is fit for purpose and fully implemented. The Panel supports the University’s stated intention to support this with appropriate training (Portfolio, p.60).

Affirmation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority supports the German University of Technology in Oman in its efforts to develop and implement an externally benchmarked and appropriately contextualized Health, Safety and Environment Management System.

1.13 Oversight of Associated Entities (e.g. owned companies)

In 2009, GUtech established a subsidiary called Oman German Technology Solutions LLC (OGtech Solutions) in partnership with a German company called WZL GmbH which is a spin-off of RWTH. GUtech has established OGtech Solutions in order to address its commitment to its “pillar” of innovation as expressed in its Vision statement (see Section 1.1).

Objectives relating to the establishment and activities of OGtech Solutions are included in GUtech’s 2012-2014 RCP. The Panel found that since its commercial registration, activity regarding OGtech Solutions has been primarily focused on dealing with the formal requirements for such an entity to operate in Oman and that this company is still, effectively, under establishment. A revised agreement between OGtech Solutions and GUtech signed in 2012 articulates the intention for consultancies, short courses and advisory services to be provided through OGtech Solutions. Examination of documentation and interviews with relevant staff revealed that significant progress has now been made towards the company becoming more fully operational and productive for the University, and the Panel supports on-going effort in this area.

At a broad level, GUtech’s Annual Report to RWTH reports on consultancy projects, and reports on completed, ongoing and submitted consultancy projects are included in the DRAA Business Report to the BoD. However, the Panel considers that a specific system for routine evaluation of OGtech Solutions is required to inform its further development and monitor its effectiveness as a means for the University to address its aims regarding innovation.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman develop and implement a system to routinely evaluate the performance of its subsidiary company Oman German Technology Solutions LLC and its contribution to achieving the University’s Mission.
2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMMES

In 2012, GUtech enrolled a total of 632 students in two pre-university preparatory programmes, six Bachelor and one Master’s degree programmes. Over half of all students are enrolled in the pre-university programmes that concentrate on English and foundational skills development, while the rest are enrolled across the following programmes: Bachelor of Science (BSc) Applied Geosciences; BSc Applied Information Technology; BSc Sustainable Tourism and Regional Development; BSc Urban Planning and Architectural Design; Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) Mechanical Engineering; BEng Process Engineering; BSc Environmental Engineering; Master of Science (MSc) Petroleum Geoscience. Placement into the pre-university programmes and entry into degree programmes and is governed in particular by a student’s score on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test (see Appendix B).

In this Chapter the Panel states its findings in relation to the following: graduate attributes and student learning objectives; curriculum design; student entry standards; plagiarism; student placements; assessment methods, standards and moderation; academic security and invigilation; student retention and progression; and graduate destinations and employability.

2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives

The University states that it is committed to an alignment of its defined attributes and skills of University graduates with the learning outcomes of each course and the forms of assessment for each course, as stipulated in its Academic Regulations (Portfolio, p.34). GUtech’s generic student attributes include: ethics, critical thinking and problem solving, creative thinking, individual and team work, life-long learning, intercultural awareness, and entrepreneurship. These are addressed through courses at both pre-university and degree programme level. Regarding entrepreneurship for example, relevant courses embedded in the curricula of Bachelor programmes include Green Innovation and Entrepreneurship (BEng Environmental Engineering) and Innovation Management (BEng Mechanical and BEng Process Engineering).

GUtech’s BSc degree programmes are accredited by the German Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) and the University considers this to be a general endorsement of alignment between its Mission and Values, generic attributes and skills, and course-specific learning outcomes, and assessment (Portfolio, p.34). The current ACQUIN accreditations were granted in 2009 following the introduction of the programmes in 2008, and were not therefore informed by consideration of GUtech’s graduate outcomes or much of the actual implementation of these programmes. The Panel confirmed that the University intends to seek re-accreditation of these in 2014. Through examination of the comprehensive programme and course specifications and interviews with staff and students, the Panel confirmed the use of student learning outcomes for courses across all programmes. The Panel also heard very positive feedback from external stakeholders, including placement hosts and employers, regarding the generic attributes and skills of GUtech’s graduates, although the University has no system in place to capture and consider this feedback.

2.2 Curriculum

GUtech’s higher education programmes have been developed at RWTH with the aim of serving the needs of Oman and the region and meeting international standards (Portfolio, p.35). This approach to programme development aligns with the University’s Strategic Plan (SP) which states its intent to follow “a strategy that promotes stakeholder interactions in which German standards and expertise are adapted to meet the needs of the wider region”. This contextualization has resulted in programmes which are taught in English, sequenced over a four-year period (rather than a three-year period) and which cater to, for example, the region’s oil and
gas industry. As stated above, the University’s four BSc programmes are due for re-accreditation by ACQUIN in 2014, and the Panel was informed that GUtech is to seek accreditation from relevant German accrediting agencies for its other programmes as indicated in the Portfolio (p.36).

The Panel found that GUtech is fully aware of the need to implement a system of formal programme review across all its programmes. Development of an approved “Programme Review and Implementation of Programme Changes” policy examined by the Panel is one step towards achieving this. Implementation of this policy will require the Academic Board which has now been established to approve major changes (as defined in the policy) prior to seeking any required approval from external bodies, such as the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The policy emphasizes the importance of academic standards and calls for programme review to be informed by input from a range of stakeholders including external examiners, alumni, employers, internship providers and an External Advisory Committee. The Panel viewed the terms of reference for the External Advisory Committees which GUtech intends to establish in each academic department to formalise its links with industry and government. At the time of the audit visit, the first External Advisory Committee – for the department of Applied Information Technology - had been formed and had met.

The University reports on previous programme review activities (Portfolio, p.36) and the Panel heard that the BSc Urban Planning and Architectural Design programme was under review at the time of the audit visit. The new programme review process now needs to be implemented across the University in order for GUtech to evaluate how effectively its programmes have been contextualized to Omani conditions and are serving the needs of relevant stakeholders, and to inform improvements.

Affirmation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that all its programmes need to be subject to regular review, and supports its efforts in this area including the development of a policy to guide programme review and establishment of a departmental External Advisory Committee.

2.3 Student Entry Standards

GUtech’s SP has a strategic objective to enroll and educate students with high academic potential and states that it wishes to ensure that entry requirements are of international standard. Potential students apply to GUtech either through the MoHE’s Higher Education Admission Center or through GUtech’s Marketing and Student Recruitment (MSR) Department. Students are informed of their application status through GUtech’s Registration and Student Affairs (RSA) office, which determines a student’s admissibility on the basis of IELTS test scores in English and other stated admissions requirements. Students who meet the requirements for direct entry (e.g. students with relevant A-levels or IB certificates – see Appendix B) are admitted directly into the degree programmes, while those who do not may be admitted to either the Intensive English Programme or the Foundation Year Programme (FYP), each lasting two semesters. Intensive English students are admitted to the FYP upon successful completion of their English programme (Portfolio, pp.35-36). The Panel confirmed that the Programme Specifications for the FYP and the degree programmes clearly state the entry requirements in relevant subject areas as well as in English language. For English language, normally a minimum official IELTS score of 4.5 or equivalent is required for entry into the FYP and a minimum IELTS score of 6.0 (with no band lower than 5) is required for entry into a Bachelor degree programme.

In interviews with GUtech staff, and as documented in the self study (Portfolio, p.39), the Panel was told that the earlier raising of minimum IELTS test score requirements as well as standards of mathematics in the pre-university programmes occurred in order to ensure acceptable student
academic progress. Limiting direct entry into degree programmes to students with a minimum IELTS of 6.0 (as well as meeting all requirements of the FYP for the non-direct entry students) is central to GUtech’s strategy of maintaining high standards that are comparable to those at RWTH. Interviews with relevant staff provided supporting evidence of the University’s commitment to pass requirements being implemented rigorously. The Panel also noted the strong engagement of staff from the Bachelor programmes in on-going review of the FYP and the different courses that this programme offers which students select in accordance with the Bachelor programme they wish to progress into (also see Section 2.4). The Panel recognizes GUtech’s well-defined articulation of what minimum student preparation standards it deems acceptable and the fact that these exceed the minimum national standards and requirements for General Foundation Programmes. The Panel also recognizes the efforts GUtech has made, and continues to make, to revisit and refine admission standards that are congruent with its strategic goal of being identified as a high-quality academic institution in Oman and the surrounding region.

Commendation 2

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its ongoing review of programme entry requirements and its rigorous application of standards for entry into its degree programmes which support its strategic intent to enroll and educate students with high academic potential.

At present, the University does not have a formal mechanism to compare the academic progression of students entering degree programmes via the FYP with that of direct-entry students (i.e. students entering the degree programmes directly). The Panel heard that direct-entry is currently rare but given GUtech’s strategic goal of stepping up enrollment of students, particularly foreign students, the number direct-entry students is likely to increase. The Panel suggests that the academic performance of students in Bachelor degree programmes be evaluated in relation to programme entry routes and that this data be used to inform GUtech’s ongoing review of the FYP and entry standards (also see Section 2.10).

2.4 Foundation Programme

The University’s pre-university programmes (the Intensive English Programme and the FYP) serve as a bridge for school graduates who are in need of additional academic preparation in order to enter GUtech’s degree programmes. In 2012, these programmes catered for over 350 students, around 56% of the total student population. At the time of the audit visit, around 53% of the students in the pre-university programmes were enrolled in the FYP. The FYP is characterized by a majority of native-speaker English language teachers.

The University claims a strong interface between its FYP and Bachelor degree programmes which results in “continuous review and improvement of the Foundation Year curriculum to meet students’ needs” (Portfolio, p.47). Interviews with staff and examination of programme review documentation provided evidence of this. The Panel noted that, in addition to courses in Mathematics, Information Technology, Study Skills and English language required by national standards for General Foundation Programmes, students in the FYP are also required to take other courses in accordance with their anticipated progression route. These include courses in Physics, Chemistry, Economics and Creative Design.

GUtech uses a “traffic light system” in the pre-university programmes whereby student progress in specific areas is monitored and color coded for easy identification of at-risk students. The Panel was impressed by the strength of academic support and feedback mechanisms in operation in these programmes (also see Section 6.6).
The Panel heard that the University had enrolled a much higher number of students into the Intensive English Programme for the 2012-2013 academic year than it had planned for. Coupled with the recent move to the new campus, it was clear to the Panel that this sudden influx of students with scholarships from the MoHE had presented the University with considerable short-term logistical challenges and longer-term financial challenges (see Section 1.7). Further, the Panel heard that some of these students have very poor levels of English language which will also present the University with challenges in relation to academic progression. The Panel urges the University to ensure that this situation is risk-managed effectively.

2.5 Teaching Quality

GUtech addresses its approach to teaching quality in its SP and the Teaching and Learning Plan (TLP). The focus is placed on: recruiting highly trained academic staff; providing continuous staff development; promoting a student-centered approach to teaching; using a variety of teaching methods (from theoretical to highly applied) and instructional technology; sharing best practices in teaching; promoting student exchanges; ensuring adequate class sizes; and on assigning reasonable teaching loads (Portfolio, pp.39-40).

Documents examined and interviews conducted largely confirmed the implementation of mechanisms laid out in the self-study that GUtech pursues to provide quality instruction to its students. The high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching as reflected in student surveys (Portfolio, p.40) was echoed in interviews with students, who also indicated their appreciation of the opportunity to take courses in Europe as part of their academic programme. Similarly, the emphasis on internships, access to laboratories, and practical projects was highlighted in interviews as an important part of the learning experience of students. The Panel met students in Urban Planning and Architectural Design who found the work experience with the Eco-House (a research based competition funded by The Research Council of Oman) eminently useful. The Panel heard that class size in most instances is kept at less than 20 students, and found that teaching loads are reasonable to ensure faculty have sufficient time to support their students and engage in research.

EvaSyS surveys conducted at the end of every course across the University provide systematic feedback on teaching from students. The results show consistently high levels of student satisfaction in this area. To support teaching quality, workshops and seminars have been conducted on a range of professional development topics and relevant conference participation is encouraged. The University states that attention is given to sharing best practice through peer-observation of teaching (Portfolio, p.40) and this is identified as an action to promote excellence in teaching in the TLP. The Panel confirmed that both peer-observation as well as Head of Department (HoD) observations of teaching take place in the pre-university programmes but not in the degree programmes. In the pre-university programmes these activities are not, however, part of a formalized system. The Panel encourages GUtech to apply such processes more systematically across all academic departments in order to produce instructive feedback for teaching quality enhancement in line with the University’s plan to promote excellence in teaching.

GUtech has full-time academic staff at the University but also makes use of “fly-in professors” from RWTH or other European universities (Portfolio, pp.36-37). This strategy is identified in the TLP as an action to promote excellence in teaching. The Panel heard that this model allows for high caliber experts to contribute to the delivery of GUtech’s programmes (particularly where local expertise is not available) and contribute to benchmarking. The management of this model, however, clearly presents both logistical and administrative challenges. Courses taught by fly-in professors are delivered mostly in concentrated teaching modules lasting no more than a few weeks. The Panel heard views indicating that undergraduate courses taught by fly-in professors can be very intensive, leaving students at times overwhelmed with the amount of material covered, and the relative lack of faculty interaction. These courses may also overlap with periods
when no regular courses are taught, or the courses are delivered in segments with intervening periods lasting weeks. There is indication that this method of course delivery does not currently work optimally for some undergraduate students. Conversely, the Panel found the experience of being taught by a number of experts in their respective fields to be greatly appreciated by part-time Masters degree students.

GUtech reports that courses taught by fly-in professors constitute approximately 20 to 25% of total instructional activity (Portfolio, p.36). The Panel found that action has been taken by GUtech to reduce this percentage, and data examined by the Panel showed the percentage of credit points taught at Bachelor level by fly-in professors to have reduced steadily from a high of 31% in 2008-2009 to 14% in 2012-2013. GUtech identifies its affiliation with RWTH as a strength and highlights the teaching performed by its fly-in professors from RWTH as one aspect of this. The Panel also recognizes the potential value of fly-in professors to programme delivery. The Panel considers, however, that the University needs to evaluate the impact of its fly-in professors on students and student learning more comprehensively and systematically in order to inform its management of course delivery and teaching.

**Recommendation 7**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman undertake systematic review of its use of “fly-in” professors from its German affiliate, RWTH Aachen University, and other foreign universities to assess the impact on student support and learning and inform its planning and management of course delivery.

### 2.6 Plagiarism

GUtech addresses plagiarism in its Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy. To prevent students from engaging in plagiarism, GUtech explains the issue during student orientation, addresses it in English and study skills courses, teaches correct referencing based on one common standard (the American Psychological Association Manual), and uses plagiarism detection software (Portfolio, p.41).

The Panel was able to corroborate student awareness of the plagiarism policy and the presence of accessible detection software (Ephorus). Evidence collected does not suggest plagiarism to be a significant problem, and the documents examined indicate that the institution has a process in place to refer cases of misconduct to an Academic Disciplinary Committee.

A demonstration to the Panel indicated that the new Student Information System will facilitate reporting of plagiarism cases. This will support the University’s intention to maintain central records of cases of academic (and non-academic) misconduct (Portfolio, p.47).

### 2.7 Student Placements

GUtech’s programmes of study were developed “to meet the needs of the Sultanate of Oman and the wider region” (Portfolio, p.35) and it has embarked on a “continuing effort to link a solid theoretical conceptual foundation with its application outside the classroom,” which includes integrated internship courses for its Bachelor programmes (Portfolio, pp.34, 42). GUtech emphasizes student practical experiences as part of degree completion to ensure workplace readiness of its graduates although a placement is not a compulsory part of every Bachelor programme. The commitment to students undertaking internships is integrated into GUtech’s strategic and functional planning. Students may undertake one or more internships which may or may not be credit-bearing.

The University reports that 90% of its first cohort of graduates completed an internship (Portfolio, p.42) and records of internships January 2010 and September 2012 provided evidence in support
of this. Although internship opportunities vary by academic programme, the Panel received very positive comments from students on their internship experience. The Panel also saw and heard evidence of equally positive feedback from internship hosts.

GUtech acknowledges the need for a centralized internship management support system (Portfolio, p.43). The Panel agrees with this as while good practice exists within the University, there is acknowledged inconsistency between departments (Portfolio, p.42). The Panel was also made aware that internship opportunities are reserved primarily for Omani students, while foreign students find it difficult to find an internship. The Panel was unable to ascertain the nature of what prevents foreign students from engaging in internships but encourages GUtech to address this issue, particularly in view of its plan to significantly augment enrollment of international students (see Section 2.3).

As an important component of academic programmes, and in the context of anticipated increase in student numbers, the Panel considers that the implementation and management of internships needs to be clear, appropriate and well-documented for all programmes. A generic approach or departmental approaches to managing internships ought to include elements such as: the processes for securing placements for all students (including international students); monitoring of performance; reporting; assessment strategies and grading; supervision; contribution of external personnel in these processes; and evaluation. The Internship Handbook provided to the Panel for the BSc Regional Management and Tourism has much of what is needed.

**Affirmation 6**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that policies, procedures and practices to guide student internships need to be more systematic across departments and supports its work to enhance the management of this activity.

2.8 **Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation**

GUtech’s approach to learning assessment and course examination is laid out in a 12-page Assessment and Examinations Policy. This policy details the purpose of assessment, the duties and responsibilities of a Board of Examiners, the forms of course assessments, the evaluation method used for the Bachelor thesis, the grading system, and record keeping of student performance in courses and theses.

Students interviewed were familiar with the assessment and thesis examination process, and they confirmed the existence of a grade appeal process available to them. However, interviews with academic staff provided evidence that standards to determine student proficiency are not always consistent, and that there is a need for more faculty interaction and the introduction of a system of moderation to compare and contrast grading standards within GUtech and vis-à-vis RWTH.

The Panel considers that GUtech needs to further develop systems, such as the use of moderation, for assuring itself that the required programme outcomes and standards of achievement are being met by students across all programmes. A systematic mechanism for external benchmarking is necessary for evaluation and continuous improvement and the Panel supports GUtechs plans to expand the use of external examiners across all its degree programmes (Portfolio, p.43).

**Recommendation 8**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman develop and implement a mechanism to assure itself of consistency of assessment practices and procedures and attainment of required standards of achievement across the University.
GUtech reports that English language lecturers are included as co-examiners to review examination papers for courses in academic programmes prior to their use and indicates that this is to ensure that a student’s subject matter proficiency is evaluated separately from mastery of the English language (Portfolio, p.43). The reported intent is to also to support faculty who are non-native speakers of English to ensure correct use of language. The Panel recognizes the value of this practice.

2.9 **Academic Security and Invigilation**

GUtech has in place a detailed academic security and invigilation process guiding the administration of final examinations. The process is implemented through an academic staff induction into the details of exam administration, an exam timetable for each term, access to and distribution of exam stationery, safekeeping of exams, and online grade posting via the Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) system. Students are briefed on the exam process and made aware of the Student Disciplinary Policy, and the number of students assigned to an invigilator is kept to a reasonable size (Portfolio, p.44).

The Panel found an invigilation process in place that is clearly stated, known to both staff and students, and that governs all important aspects of student final exam administration. The Panel also noted the growing role the new ERP system plays in facilitating exam administration and in securing associated grade and test-taking information. Interviews with relevant staff provided evidence that the system will also help improve administration of mid-semester exams and thus address the need for these to be managed more systematically (Portfolio, p.44). GUtech has experienced only a small number of student infractions during final exams (Portfolio, p.44) and the Panel viewed this as a reflection of the effectiveness of the system GUtech has put in place for examination security.

2.10 **Student Retention and Progression**

The production, monitoring, and analysis of student retention and progression information is managed by the Registration and Student Affairs Department (RSA) Department in collaboration with the Quality Assurance and Planning Officer and the Deputy-Rector for Academic Affairs (DRAA) (the latter two primarily responsible for data analysis). Student retention and progression data is reported annually to the RC and the BoG (Portfolio, p.44), and the data is captured through the Student Information System. To improve student retention in the wake of a 50% progression of its first student cohort from pre-university programmes into the Bachelor programmes, GUtech raised entry requirements for the pre-university programmes, modified its pre-university placement tests, introduced a student performance monitoring system (the “traffic light” system), and established help desks for core academic subjects with mentor support (Portfolio, p.45). Subsequent student cohort data shows an improvement in retention rates, which the institution attributes to implementation of the aforementioned steps.

The Panel recognizes GUtech’s efforts to ensure students are progressing through their programmes at acceptable rates, and it supports measures taken by the University, as articulated in interviews and the Portfolio (p.45), to engage in a more detailed analysis of student enrollment data. Data on retention for Bachelor programme students showed that after four years, 94 percent of the 2008 cohort were still enrolled, while 98% of the 2009 cohort were still enrolled after three years. These numbers exclude students that transferred to other institutions, and the Panel encourages the University to also consider these students in its effort to analyze student enrollment in more depth. The Panel notes that the retention rate data for Bachelor programme students does not distinguish between direct-entry students and those who completed the Foundation Programme. Given the importance of degree programme enrollees from the Foundation Programme in sustaining degree programme enrollment, the Panel encourages GUtech to ascertain and compare the progression rate of direct-entry versus Foundation Programme students.
Affirmation 7

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that more detailed analysis of student retention and progression data is required and supports it further developing its systems to do this.

2.11 Graduate Destinations and Employability

The SP calls for “employability of students” and quantifies GUtech’s success in this area by tracking the number of students employed six months after graduation, their type of employment, and their salaries. GUtech also stresses its efforts to: deliver education that is “relevant” to Oman and the region; offer students a “real-life work environment” by way of internships; and to offer career guidance (Portfolio, p.46).

Given that GUtech has, as yet, had only one graduation cohort (in 2012), a Student Career Guidance Center has yet to be fully established, although employment statistics for the first graduates have been generated (also see Section 7.5). An updated list of graduates’ employment destination, as of February 2013, provided evidence that GUtech tracks the employment status, work place destination, and job positions of its graduates. The Panel recognizes efforts made to improve data collected through surveys of its graduates and employers, as evidenced in the updated employment data list. The Panel learned that GUtech’s first cohort of graduates were very successful in entering the job market and graduates felt positive about their employability.

The Panel found GUtech student internship hosts, who are potential employers, to be very interested in closer collaboration with the University. The possibility of developing more systematic support for students in finding internships is addressed in Section 2.7.
3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

The research component of students’ learning experience is part of the research pillar of GUtech as spelled out in the Teaching and Learning Plan (TLP) and the Research and Consultancy Plan (RCP). All GUtech degree programmes require students to compete a research thesis. The Assessment and Examination Policy lays out the research requirements for this element of the programmes. Preceding the production of the thesis are courses in research methods that are embedded as part of the curriculum for each degree (Portfolio, p.48). At the end of the spring semester of 2012, a total of 30 students had completed their Bachelor thesis (Portfolio, p.50).

It is indicated that a policy framework will be developed to guide GUtech’s plans to introduce doctoral level programmes once it graduates its first Master’s degree students (due to graduate in the Winter Semester of 2014-2015) (Portfolio, p.48).

This chapter reports on research programme design; supervisors; postgraduate supervision; student research support; thesis examination; and retention, graduate destinations and student employability.

3.1 Research Programme Design

Beyond the formal curricular requirements for student to undertake research, GUtech states that student exposure to research derives from the “strong nexus” that connects faculty teaching with research (Portoflio, pp.48, 62), specifically the integration of faculty research projects into course syllabi. While the thesis is the principal vehicle for students to develop and demonstrate their research skills, Bachelor degree students are not expected to produce publishable studies for peer-reviewed journals. However, some students complete their thesis at RWTH or other partner institutions in Europe which exposes their work to international standards of excellence. According to GUtech, benchmarking the quality of students’ theses work will also occur with the input of outside industry experts (e.g., for the first Master’s cohort in Petroleum Geoscience), (Portfolio, p.48).

The Panel examined curricula and course syllabi to establish the depth of research “exposure” associated with required coursework in each degree programme. The Panel confirmed that most programmes include courses to support the development of research skills. Interviews with students and graduates indicate that these courses provide valuable training that is complemented with exposure to outside experts (e.g. thesis completion in overseas institutions). Indications are that GUtech has put in place the requisite mechanism and deployed the necessary resources to facilitate the student research experience. However, the Panel believes that the capacity for student research exposure, at this stage, is also limited to some extent by the University’s relatively recent establishment. Hence, a well-anchored research culture among students may take a few more years to establish. The Panel considers that successful launch of doctoral level programmes will also hinge in part on the maturity of the research enterprise in place, both for faculty and students.

3.2 Supervisors

The Assessment and Examination Policy details the academic supervision of Bachelor degree students and their thesis work. Two supervisors (a main supervisor and a co-supervisor) are assigned to guide, monitor, and evaluate a student’s thesis work. The main supervisor is from the student’s academic department and the co-supervisor may be either from another department or may be from outside the University. The student is given twelve weeks to complete their Bachelor degree thesis, and the aforementioned policy spells out the process of thesis evaluation (Portfolio, p.49).
The Panel found evidence that thesis supervision takes place along the lines described although it was less clear about how the supervision process described in the Assessment and Examination Policy is carried out for students completing their thesis at another institution. The Panel suggests that this should be clarified in the Policy. Following its first experience of Bachelor theses supervision in 2011-2012, the University has identified a need for stricter adherence to timelines and more consistency in supervision across departments (Portfolio, p.49).

3.3 Postgraduate Supervision

GUtech has had no students undertaking a post-graduate thesis yet and so has not yet conducted supervision of post-graduate research work. Documentation examined by the Panel showed four GUtech faculty to be engaged in supervision of post-graduate work (thirteen theses in total, including doctoral level studies) at outside institutions. Thus, GUtech faculty include professors with doctoral level supervisory experience on which to build policy and practice for the supervision of its own Masters and future PhD students’ research.

3.4 Student Research Support

GUtech’s emphasis on involving students in research is addressed in the TLP and the RCP through a series of actions to strengthen, respectively, the nexus between teaching, research and industry and to develop human resources with research capacity. The Panel found significant evidence of achievement in this area, including an award by The Research Council of Oman for the GUtech Eco-House Project, the extensive field trips by Urban Planning and Architectural Design students, and European conference participation by Geoscience students.

Support for research is provided by the campus library which has access to RWTH’s electronic library catalog. To better accommodate students, the library has extended its operating hours and has hired staff to develop a new online interface for the RWTH catalog. This innovation will render the information in English (instead of German) and filter the RWTH catalog down to the subject matter that is pertinent to GUtech academic disciplines. GUtech identifies that additional training of research students in the use of RWTH’s electronic library is required (Portfolio, p.51) and the Panel found that this is being addressed (see Section 6.3). The Panel noted that the move to the Halban campus has effectively addressed the previous lack of office space for research.

GUtech identifies a need for support for student research to be more formalized and systematic (Portfolio, pp.50-51) and the Panel encourages further attention to this area.

3.5 Thesis Examination

The Panel recognizes in positive terms the international benchmarking opportunity afforded by students who have undertaken Bachelor theses in other Universities i.e. RWTH and Salzburg, (Portfolio, p.51) and the involvement of RWTH professors in supervision and examination of theses. Upon examination of samples of Bachelor degree theses and completed Bachelor theses assessment forms, however, the Panel agrees with the University’s assertion that more detailed feedback and more clarity in the marking of Bachelor theses is required (Portfolio, p.50). The assessment forms showed considerable inconsistency; for example, not all provided evidence of involvement of a co-examiner or justification of final grades in writing as required by the Assessment and Examination Policy. In order for the University to be able to assure itself that its thesis examination process is valid, reliable, and ensures parity for students across departments, the Panel urges the University to continue its evaluation of policy and practice in this area and implement changes where required.
Recommendation 9

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman ensure that Bachelor theses are examined in full accordance with its Assessment and Examination Policy across the University and that policy and practice in this area continue to be evaluated to ensure transparent, valid and reliable processes which allow good practice from different departments to be shared.

3.6 Retention, Graduate Destinations and Employability

At the time of the audit visit, the University had one Masters programme running, an MSc in Petroleum Geoscience which started in 2011 and runs on a part-time basis. Records show an initial enrollment of six students and progression of five of these to Year 2. The Panel met four of these students all of whom were already employed. The Panel noted that this group of students was particularly positive about their learning experience to date.

The University has yet to reach a stage in its development to report fully on this area.
4  STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

Research is one of GUtech’s key “pillars”. This is reflected in the University’s Vision, Mission, Constitution and 2008-2013 SP. The Panel found that the University has made an impressive start in the areas of research and consultancy considering its short lifespan to date and the necessary early focus on teaching programmes.

This Chapter reports on the planning and management of staff research at GUtech, and describes the audit Panel’s findings with regards to: research performance; research schemes; consultancy activities; ethics and bio-safety; intellectual property; research commercialization; professional development for research; and the link between research and teaching.

4.1  Research Planning and Management

The University has developed a comprehensive 2012-2014 Research and Consultancy Plan (RCP) which is derived from its Mission, Vision and Strategic Plan (SP) and which reflects research, together with innovation, as two of three “pillars” the University is built on. The Plan includes four main objectives: to establish strong linkage with industry, government and the community; to build a reputation as a centre of excellence in applied research; to promote a culture of excellence; and to ensure a diversification of revenues with the aim of financing in a sustainable way the expenditures required to achieve the desired quality standards. Outcomes relating to research and consultancy are included in the job descriptions of Assistant, Associate and Full Professors. The Panel noted that these outcomes are clearly aligned with the University’s Mission and strategy and performance against these is considered in annual performance review although no specific targets for research output are specified.

The Panel confirmed that at institutional level, research performance is reported in the Deputy-Rector for Academic Affairs (DRAA) Business Report submitted to the BoG and GUtech’s Annual Report to RWTH. These reports detail staff research and consultancy achievements and reflect progress in all the main areas of the RCP although they are not explicitly linked to this plan. The Panel noted that some of the objectives and actions in the plan are phrased in general terms and do not have a specific timeframe. Some of the objectives and actions with specific completion dates have been achieved, such as the recruitment of research assistants, introduction of Master’s programmes, undertaking consultancy projects, and engaging students in internships. Some RCP actions, however, have not been achieved within the planned timeframe. For example, the Seed Funding Policy that was supposed to be in place by Winter 2012 is not ready yet. There are also some objectives that are dependent on the establishment of the subsidiary company OGtech Solutions which is not yet fully functioning due to logistical hurdles (see Section 1.13). The Panel suggests that the University would benefit from including more specific targets and timeframes in the RCP to allow for more effective evaluation (also see Affirmation 2).

The University claims as a strength its introduction of a research culture through a wide range of initiatives, such as in-house research seminars, recruitment of staff with research records, keeping teaching load to maximum of ten contact hours per week, encouragement of collaborative research, and organisation of international conferences (Portfolio, p.64). Through interviews and examination of documentation, the Panel found evidence to support this claim and noted that staff research performance in relation to the University’s performance indicators shows continuous growth (see Section 4.2).

Commendation 3

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for establishing a strong foundation for research and consultancy and implementing multiple planned initiatives to
take this forward in line with the strategic aims and the founding principles of the University.

The University may wish to consider establishing a formal post to oversee research and consultancy activities and support further development of its research infrastructure.

4.2 Research Performance

Research engagement has increased steadily since the establishment of the University. This is manifested in the number of publications, conference presentations and workshops over the last three academic years (from 2009-2010 to 2011-2012) (Portfolio, p.53). This is also evident in the 100% success rate of the proposals submitted to The Research Council in Oman (Portfolio, p.54). GUtech reports on four projects funded by The Research Council with a combined funding of 372,150 Omani Rials. The Panel spoke with a number of employers and research funding organizations who expressed their satisfaction with the level of GUtech’s engagement and the quality of the research work conducted. The engagement of GUtech students in staff research projects was also highlighted. The Panel was impressed with the research record that the University has been able to establish in such a short period.

The Panel confirmed that the University encourages research among its faculty through several strategies, such as a reduced teaching load, funding of conference presentation, acquisition of library materials, subscription to journals, and provision of equipment and facilities. At this phase of development the University has put the primary focus on meeting the teaching needs of its students and research output of individuals is not assessed against targets. The University has recognized that some faculty may be more interested in teaching than in research and the Panel heard from senior management that different contracts may be offered in the future to reflect this.

4.3 Research Funding Schemes

GUtech depends solely on third-party funding of its research activities. To date, the University has successfully secured funding from Petroleum Development Oman (the national oil company) for four projects and from The Research Council for a further three projects (Portfolio, p.56). Organizations that had funded GUtech research that the Panel met expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the completed projects.

The Panel noted GUtech’s plans to diversify the sources of research funding and encourages its efforts to do this. The Panel confirmed that information to support staff in securing funding is provided through myGUtech Portal and recognizes that the regular in-house research seminars that GUtech holds provide a mechanism for discussion regarding this as indicated by the University (Portfolio, p.55). The in-house research seminars held in Spring 2012 included one conducted by The Research Council specifically addressing research funding opportunities.

4.4 Consultancy Activities

GUtech recognizes consultancy activities as a vehicle to develop a better understanding of the needs of industry and government and a means to serve society in accordance with its Mission. Its current activities will inform its longer-term plans to advance innovation as a core aspect of its activities (Portfolio, p.57). The importance of consultancy in GUtech’s operations is clearly reflected in its Constitution and SP.

The University has completed a range of consultancy projects for different public and private sector organizations. Students have been involved as research assistants in two of these (Portfolio, p.57). Business Reports to the BoG provide evidence of on-going efforts to secure additional consultancy projects.
GUtech’s subsidiary company, OGtech Solutions, was established in 2009 to manage and provide consultancy and training services and generate revenues (Portfolio, p.31). This, in effect, is to be the business arm of the University. The shared ownership of this company is intended to consolidate GUtech’s partnership with RWTH and provide opportunities for collaboration (Portfolio, p.57). OGtech Solutions is still in the process of becoming fully established and mechanisms are needed to support GUtech’s oversight of its performance (see Recommendation 6) but it has nevertheless been involved in the University’s provision of a range of short courses (in areas such as Project and Quality Management) to the public. This provision addresses actions in the SP and RCP and is subject to evaluation by participants.

GUtech states that it is currently in the process of developing a detailed Consultancy Policy to “provide a clear framework for the performance of consultancy activities” (Portfolio, p.59). The action to “develop a Consultancy Policy together with academic staff, which clarifies processes and incentives to work on consultancies” in the RCP was due to be completed in 2012 and so is overdue. It was indicated to the Panel that content within a draft agreement between GUtech and OGtech Solutions (which preceded the signed agreement now in place) has provided a basis for the management of consultancy work to date. The Panel viewed this agreement which can clearly guide development of a new comprehensive Consultancy Policy.

**Affirmation 8**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that enhanced management of its consultancy activities is required and supports its commitment to the development of a comprehensive policy to achieve this.

### 4.5 Ethics and Biosafety

The University has established policies and procedures to support its commitment to ethical principles included in its Values statement (see Section 1.1). These are included in its Human Resources Manual, the Student Code of Conduct and the Student Disciplinary Policy (Portfolio, p.59). Research ethics specifically are addressed in its “Principles to ensure good scientific practice at GUtech” policy which is derived from a policy at RWTH. This includes a procedure for dealing with suspected scientific misconduct. Research ethics are also stressed in the curriculum by offering training and instruction in research methods and the purchase of the anti-plagiarism software programme ‘Ephorus’. The Panel considered this area to be well covered by the University.

GUtech reports that at this early stage in its development, biosafety has not been a major area of concern (Portfolio, p.59). General safety in research and teaching laboratories is addressed in the Health, Safety, Security and Environment (HSSE) Management System (also see Section 1.12).

### 4.6 Intellectual Property

The Panel found that GUtech puts a lot of emphasis on intellectual property (IP) rights. This aligns with the central importance of innovation to the longer-term aspirations of the University (see Section 1.1) as well as Oman’s commitment to and legislation governing IP (Portfolio, p.60). GUtech’s attention to intellectual property rights is reflected in the SP, the RCP, the “Principles to ensure scientific practice at GUtech” policy, and the Human Resources (HR) Manual. All of these documents emphasize the importance of preserving the intellectual rights of people and compliance with academic standards in research. GUtech has not yet developed a dedicated IP Policy although this action in the RCP has a completion date of Spring 2012. Although the Panel learned in the interviews with students and faculty that there is a good level of awareness about IP in the University, the Panel encourages the University to speed up the process of development of its IP Policy.
4.7 Professional Development for Research

GUtech recognizes the importance of professional development as a way to build capacity in relation to its strategic objective of building a centre of excellence in applied research. The University’s plans and actions reflect its commitment to recruiting academic staff with proven research records but include building research capacity by training young researchers. Professional development is realized through various activities such as training workshops, conference participation and regular in-house research seminars which the Panel confirmed take place as described by the University (Portfolio, p.61). The Panel noted that the in-house research seminars have involved a range of international and local speakers as well as researchers from RWTH and GUtech.

The RCP includes a specific objective to develop the research capacity of its staff and the associated actions call for Omani researchers to be trained and recruited. As with other plans, no time-bound targets are specified but the University reports two of its Omani staff having attained PhD qualifications facilitated by the provision of paid leave for research permitted in its HR regulations (Portfolio, p.61).

4.8 Research Commercialisation

GUtech stresses the importance of research commercialisation to the University in the long-term. This is in the context of innovation being one of the three “pillars” on which GUtech is founded and on which its Vision is based (Portfolio, p.61).

The Panel noted the area in the new campus which has been designated for spin-off companies and industrial partners. This is shown on the master plan for the campus which members of the Panel viewed. In the shorter term, the University’s focus is on applied research relevant to local industry. This is addressed in the current SP and RCP which run until 2013 and 2014 respectively and faculty members have conducted a number of research and consultancy projects for industry (see Sections 4.2 and 4.4). The Panel agrees with GUtech that it will need to develop a policy on research commercialization in due course (Portfolio, p.61).

4.9 Research – Teaching Nexus

GUtech’s recognition of the importance of a research-teaching nexus is shown in its planning documents (specifically, the SP, RCP and Teaching and Learning Plan - TLP). The SP has an objective to “develop a culture that promotes and values good teaching and learning” which is supported by an action to “strengthen the nexus between teaching, research and industry”. This action translates into a main objective in the TLP with associated actions to: involve Bachelor students in research activities; include topics from research and consultancy projects into the syllabi of courses; encourage students to participate and present in local conferences; and identify topics for Bachelor theses with a strong research component. The RCP also calls for the students to be involved in research and development.

The Panel found that undergraduate students have been drawn into research activity and project work in the range of ways identified in GUtech’s plans. Examples cited by the University (Portfolio, p.63) that the Panel examined further include: Phase I of a research based Eco-House competition funded by The Research Council (which was won by GUtech students) being embedded into an Integrated Project course of the BSc Urban Planning and Architectural Design programme; and students from the BSc Applied Geosciences programme completing their Bachelor theses on a GUtech research project examining changes on Oman’s coastline being funded by The Research Council. The Panel learned that many BSc students in the undergraduate programmes are involved in research projects as part of their course requirements and that the graduation projects/theses are designed to strengthen the research-teaching nexus. The Panel also noted evidence of a Year 4 BSc Applied Geosciences student at GUtech presenting their Bachelor thesis research at the European Geosciences Union EGU in 2012 in
Vienna. During interview, alumni students praised GUtech’s efforts to provide undergraduate students with ample hands-on research experience.

The Panel was impressed with GUtech’s efforts to date in establishing a strong teaching-research nexus and found that external organizations appreciate GUtech students’ and graduates’ competencies and approach to investigative work.

Commendation 4

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for establishing a strong connection between its teaching and research activities.
5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

GUtech has demonstrated strong commitment to industry and community engagement. This aligns with its Mission which calls for the University to produce “socially responsible graduates” and “serve society as a whole” (Portfolio, p.65).

This Chapter reports on GUtech’s relationships with industry, employers, professions and other higher education providers as well as its interaction with alumni and the community at large.

5.1 Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management

The objectives set in the Strategic Plan (SP) reflect GUtech’s commitment to industry and community engagement. These include objectives to: develop strong linkages with industry; develop strong linkages with government; and build a reputation as a quality university. These objectives are reflected in the Teaching and Learning plan (TLP) and the Research and Consultancy Plan (RCP) and also in the 2011-2013 OP for the Registration and Student Affairs Department (RSA). The RSA OP includes specific objectives relating to involvement with the community and developing strong links with industry, business and other organizations to facilitate student internships and employment. The University reports that the Public and International Relations Unit supports the development of local and international industry relationships, including, in particular, relationships with industry in Germany (Portfolio, p.65). Industry and community engagement is therefore managed by several departments.

Relationships with industry are mainly developed through student internships, consultancy projects, and membership of GUtech staff on external committees. There is evidence of increasing development of these relationships and the number and range of activities resulting from them. The University reports on a range of community engagement activities that have been carried out in association with the Student Council (Portfolio, p.65). The Panel noted the enthusiasm and high regard in which GUtech is already held among external stakeholders. It was clear to the Panel that GUtech’s industry and community engagement initiatives are making a significant contribution to the development of the University and towards fulfillment of its strategic ambitions.

The University recognizes the need to develop more comprehensive mechanisms to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of its industry and community activities (Portfolio, p.70). Use of more precise key performance indicators and quantitative targets relating to industry and community activities will assist evaluation of these (see Recommendation 2).

5.2 Relationships with Industry and Employers

There is a particular emphasis in GUtech’s SP, RCP and TLP on establishing strong linkages with industry. Its research, consultancy and student internships provide evidence of achievement against a number of its planned objectives. Following interviews and examination of documentation, the Panel appreciates that GUtech’s initiatives to engage with industry and employers have made a significant contribution to, for example, students’ learning experience and curriculum development and contextualization. The GUtech staff expressed their view that the University’s interactions with employers were likely to lead to various spin-off collaborations in future.

The University recognizes, however, that much of the interaction between industry and academic departments has been relatively informal and it is aiming to address this by the establishment of External Advisory Committees (EACs) in each department (Portfolio, p.66). The Panel viewed the approved terms of reference for these committees and confirmed during the audit visit that the
first EAC (for the Applied Information Technology Department) had been formed. This EAC had held its first meeting and effort is being made to find membership for the other EACs. The TLP links the establishment of EACs with intent to ensure the relevance of the content of its programmes and through this to help assure high levels of employability among students. The Panel noted the completion date for this action in the TLP has now passed and it encourages GUtech in its efforts to establish EAC’s for other departments. The University receives feedback from organizations hosting internships (Portfolio, p.66) and the Panel viewed samples of completed feedback forms. The TLP requires this feedback to be collected and routine mechanisms related to this are being further developed (see Affirmation 6).

5.3 Relationships with Professions

GUtech states that its main strategy for ensuring that its programmes meet relevant professional requirements is to seek international accreditation for each programme (Portfolio, p.67). This is identified in the SP and TLP. This has been achieved for all the University’s BSc programmes which have been accredited by ACQUIN (a German-based accreditation agency; see Sections 2.1 and 2.2). International accreditation of the BEng and Masters programmes is planned and relevant accreditation bodies for this have been identified (Portfolio, p.36). The Panel also viewed evidence of recent review of the BSc Applied Information Technology Programme informed by benchmarking with professional bodies (e.g. the American Association for Computer Machinery) as reported by GUtech (Portfolio, p.67).

GUtech reports that there are professors of the Applied Geosciences Department who are active members of the Geological Society of Oman (Portfolio, p.67). It anticipates future association with the Engineering Society of Oman and reports that a Chamber of Architects is being established in Oman which will be relevant to the Department of Urban Planning and Architectural Design (Portfolio, p.67). GUtech indicates that it encourages staff to be active members of professional associations although financial support is not provided for this (Portfolio, p.67).

The Panel recognizes that establishing relationships with professions is important especially in the light of GUtech’s vision to be a leading university in education, research and innovation. As the University grows and the programmes develop, more systematic support, monitoring and evaluation of such relationships will be required.

5.4 Relationships with Other Education Providers

GUtech’s strategic and functional plans emphasize the importance of establishing relationships with other universities. These plans identify strategies to support GUtech’s efforts to achieve its strategic objectives of building a reputation both as a quality university and a centre of excellence in applied research (Portfolio, p.68). Planned strategies relate to activities such as collaborative research; recruitment of international internship students as teaching assistants; and use of fly-in professors. GUtech reports that its relationships with other education providers include: agreements for academic collaboration and student exchange; agreements for the delivery of programmes; internship students and academic staff from other universities participating in teaching at GUtech; research collaboration; and co-organization of conferences (Portfolio, p.68).

A range of activities and events involving other universities provide evidence of productive links having been established. In addition to its affiliation agreement with RWTH, the Panel viewed formal agreements with a number of other German and European universities to support student and staff exchange, collaborative research and delivery of programmes. Although most internship students who have worked at GUtech have been recruited from RWTH, some have also been recruited from international universities. Perhaps the most prominent collaborative activity has been the ‘fly-in professors’ programme where faculty from international/other universities come to GUtech to teach courses during set periods of time (see Section 2.5). In
2012, this included professors from universities in the UK, Switzerland, the Netherlands and also Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, in addition to RWTH professors and consultants from across Europe. The Panel recognizes the potential value of this initiative although its management requires attention (see Recommendation 7). Records of GUtech’s research output confirm GUtech’s joint research with international universities.

The Panel recognizes the strength in GUtech’s engagement with other universities and supports its intent to consolidate and build on the links with these that have been initiated (Portfolio, p.68).

5.5 **Relationships with Alumni**

GUtech produced its first graduates in 2012. All of those interviewed by the Panel had been in contact with GUtech since their graduation.

An Alumni Relations Strategic Plan has been developed to guide GUtech’s engagement with this group (Portfolio, p.69). The plan includes a mission, vision and goals and describes the anticipated mutual benefit for alumni and the University as well as strategies and activities to take the plan forward. At present, the plan lacks operational detail but it states that a more detailed approach is to be developed. During interviews the Panel heard that work on this was ongoing. Relevant terms of reference and surveys are still to be developed and an alumni database, which will effectively support an Alumni Network, is also under development. The Panel supports GUtech in establishing its alumni database and agrees that there is more work to be done in setting up an effective system to engage with its alumni.

**Affirmation 9**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that an effective system for alumni engagement is required, and supports its efforts to achieve this which include development and use of an alumni database.

5.6 **Relationships with the Community at Large**

GUtech reports on community events and activities which GUtech students have taken part in and the Panel viewed media coverage of some of these. The University also indicates its willingness to consider and meet requests from the community to utilize its facilities (Portfolio, p.69).

GUtech’s SP identifies “organizing events for the community” as one of its strategies to support its strategic objective to build a reputation as a quality university, and this is reflected in the 2011-2013 RSA OP, but the Panel found limited evidence of such events taking place to date. Now that the University has relocated to a new campus in a new area, it recognizes that its involvement with the local community needs to be re-evaluated (Portfolio, p.70). The Panel encourages the University with its new campus and facilities to enhance its efforts to explore and act on opportunities to serve the community at large.
6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

GUtech offers a range of academic support services to students for a successful learning experience. This includes academic advising though mentoring and continuous monitoring of student performance by a “traffic light” system. The move to the Halban campus provided opportunities for joining the previously separated libraries and centralizing registry functions. GUtech is also discussing setting up a Centre of Teaching Excellence which will potentially support its efforts to provide good teaching.

This Chapter presents the Panel’s findings on planning and management of academic support services; registry; the Library; information and learning technology services; academic advising; student learning support; and teaching resources.

6.1 Academic Support Services Planning & Management

The responsibility for GUtech’s academic support services lies with five different administrative departments: Registration and Student Affairs (RSA); Library and Information Services (LIS); Information Technology Services (ITS); Human Resources (HR); and Finance and Accounts (FA). These departments report to either the Deputy-Rector for Administration and Finances or the Deputy-Rector for Academic Affairs. Each department, under the supervision of a Head of Department (HoD) is responsible for developing its OP and reporting on achievements in relation to this in processes supported by a Steering Committee. Steering Committees comprise staff from academic and other administrative departments and were established to promote interdepartmental communication (Portfolio, p.71). There is evidence of some Steering Committees meeting regularly but as acknowledged by the University (Portfolio, p.112) this is not the case for all. Further, minutes of these meetings indicate student membership and participation in the Steering Committees has been very limited. Further effort is required to ensure that these committees fulfill their terms of reference effectively.

Regarding quality assurance aspects, based on interviews during the audit visit and examination of the Student Satisfaction Survey for non-academic matters, the Panel concluded that this survey should also cover academic support services like enrolment and internship placement, and go beyond questions of general satisfaction (also see Chapter 7). The University is aware of the shortcomings in this feedback mechanism and plans to revise the survey accordingly (Portfolio, p.71). The Panel urges this to be done as soon as possible and, in addition, for feedback on academic support services to be collected from relevant staff as well.

Recommendation 10
The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman further develop its mechanisms for collecting feedback on its academic support services to ensure that feedback specific to the services it provides is collected from students as well as from relevant staff.

6.2 Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)

The Registration and Student Affairs Department (RSA) is responsible for admission and enrolment of students, student records and student support services in non-academic areas (see Section 7.1). The processes of enrolment, course registration, and management of student records are supported by a recently implemented Student Information System.

The Panel established through interviews that the system guarantees up-to-date electronic management of academic administrative processes. Students have access to their own data and
academic staff use the system for setting up their assessments, entering grades and uploading course material. In addition, mentors can access data of their mentees. The Panel did not find a formal process in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the Student Information System and encourages the University to consider addressing this.

6.3 Library

GUtech’s Library provides an expanding print collection, and access to the online library of RWTH. The latter is a major resource for students and staff. The Library has work stations and personal computer stations for searching literature. Students and staff have access to the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) from their laptops and the library computers. Due to technical restrictions, access to the online library of RWTH is not provided for students’ laptops. The Library provides training to all students on how to access information as part of scheduled orientations. A security gate has been installed to improve tracking of library material, and a new library management system (Libero) has been introduced for more efficient operation.

The acquisition policy, based on the OP for the Library, comprises regular collection analysis by the Library’s staff and regular acquisition requests by academic staff each semester. The Panel heard during the interviews that to date no financial constraints have impacted the acquisition policy. In order to respond to reported difficulties of students with handling the OPAC of RWTH’s online library, a specific interface for GUtech is currently under development. This will not only enhance effectiveness and ease of access, because it is in English (rather than German), but will also guide students directly to relevant discipline areas. The effectiveness and user-friendliness of library services are evaluated mainly through the Student Satisfaction Survey. The Panel learned that issues raised in surveys are addressed. For example, Library opening hours have been extended and additional training for students is planned. The University’s efforts to improve student access and use of library resources were confirmed by the Panel in meetings with staff and during a visit to the Library.

Affirmation 10

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that students need more support to overcome language problems in using RWTH Aachen University’s electronic library, and supports the steps the University is taking to address this which include developing the necessary, online interface.

6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services

The provision of information and learning technology services is a significant component of academic support services at GUtech, in line with the University’s Vision of becoming a leading university of technology.

Internal communication and information at GUtech, as well as all main internal processes, are substantially supported by information and communications technology (ICT). The responsibility for implementation, management and maintenance of hardware and software lies with the ITS Department. As a major tool for internal information and communication, GUtech implemented the portal myGUtech. Students and staff use this portal for basic procedures like providing student data, data about student assessment and other internal processes. In addition, GUtech implemented QWiki as major source for all relevant internal information about policies and procedures etc. QWiki is to be developed into an interactive tool in order to support the revision of policies etc. The Panel agrees with the University that the launch of the web portals myGUtech and QWiki have improved substantially the provision of relevant information on all aspects of academic support to students (Portfolio, p.71).
The effectiveness of these information and communication tools is monitored by the ITS Steering Committee and also an item in the student and staff satisfaction surveys. During the audit visit, the Panel confirmed that the information function of QWiki and the communication function of myGUtech portal are highly appreciated by staff and students. The Panel also established that QWiki bears a high potential to support quality assurance functions once it is developed into an interactive tool.

ITS is also responsible for providing necessary IT-support for teaching and learning. Students have free wireless access on campus and GUtech e-mail addresses. The Panel agrees with GUtech that growing student and staff numbers will create a growing demand for training students and staff in the use of the various ICT tools.

The overall positive feedback from students and staff on the effectiveness of ICT and the support provided by the ITS Department through both satisfaction surveys and discussions during the audit visit provided evidence that GUtech offers high quality IT solutions for academic support services. However, the Panel observed that the full potential of QWiki has yet to be realized and growing student and staff numbers might challenge currently available training resources in this area.

6.5 Academic Advising

GUtech has implemented a Student Learning Support Policy. The Panel noted that this is underpinned by a set of principles which include the University’s wish to educate life-long learners and therefore encourage students to develop a self-directed approach to learning. The main focus of the Policy is “to monitor student attendance and performance on a continuous basis, identify at an early stage performances in need of improvement, and work with the respective students to determine corrective measures.” In line with this, continuous monitoring of students’ attendance and a mentoring scheme are in place. Academic staff who are mentors should, according the policy, hold “regular meetings of an informal nature with mentees (for example, set aside 1 hour per week) although GUtech states in the Portfolio (p.77) that they shall meet their mentees twice per semester. GUtech states that the mentoring scheme is pro-active at pre-university level and only re-active at Bachelor level but acknowledges that student participation in the mentoring process needs improvement (Portfolio, p.77). GUtech claims that the mentoring scheme had a significant impact in improving student retention and progression at pre-university level (Portfolio, p.77).

During the audit visit the Panel established that the mentoring scheme was highly appreciated by staff and students at pre-university level. At Bachelor level, however, no systematic application of the mentoring scheme is evident. Instead, issues range from mentors who don’t know their assigned mentees and consequently don’t call them for meetings to students who are not interested or feel they have no need to meet their mentors. The Panel noted that the annual student satisfaction survey conducted for all students was amended for 2011-2012 to include two items specifically relating to the mentoring programme and that these elicited broadly positive responses. However, the Panel considers that a more comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the scheme, particularly at Bachelor degree level, is required.

Recommendation 11

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman subject its student mentoring scheme in all departments to periodic comprehensive review to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
6.6 Student Learning Support

GUtech has implemented a variety of means to support student learning, mainly at pre-university level. As a main pillar of the Student Learning Support Policy, students’ performance is constantly monitored by teaching staff. Staff meet regularly to discuss individual student records in which each student’s performance in different elements of their programme is colour coded as part of a “traffic light” system. Individual students who are in danger of not reaching the intended level are identified accordingly and supportive measures are decided on. The Panel viewed documentary evidence of the system and heard from academic staff about its implementation. Follow-up measures such as agreement of a Student Learning Contract and attendance at a Help Desk are put in place. Help Desks in, for example, Economics, Mathematics and English are offered at pre-university level and this practice has been extended to support Bachelor level students in Mathematics and also English language (through the establishment of a Writing Centre). The Panel noted that GUtech intends to set up a Centre for Teaching Excellence which might potentially contribute to supportive learning conditions.

The Panel noted evidence of significant efforts to provide effective learning support for pre-university level students and many good practices have been implemented. GUtech might wish to roll out these practices systematically at Bachelor level as well. The Panel did not find evidence of formal systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of its learning support policy and the different student learning support activities which it provides and encourages this to be addressed (see Recommendation 10).

6.7 Teaching Resources

Based on its Mission and Vision and its profile as a university of technology, GUtech has set in place plans, policies and procedures for providing up-to-date technology and equipment as supportive features of teaching and learning. The Panel was impressed by the high level of IT hardware and software and by the equipping of classrooms and workshops with “high-end” IT. In addition, the Panel found the laboratories to be comprehensively equipped. The Panel concluded that at Halban campus students and teachers enjoy excellent teaching and learning resources. This is echoed by the outcomes of the course feedback survey completed by students that show a consistently high level of satisfaction with the teaching facilities. GUtech might wish to reinforce these results by including relevant questions in staff satisfaction surveys. The Panel agrees with the University that its teaching resources (including laboratories, studios, workshops, library and teaching technologies) are an area of considerable strength (Portfolio, p.75).

Commendation 5

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its provision of up-to-date technology and equipment which supports its teaching and learning activities and aligns with its profile as a university of technology.
7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

A core objective in GUtech’s 2008-2013 Strategic Plan (SP) is “to ensure a high level of satisfaction among students and their parents” and it aims to offer “a pleasurable student-life experience, with a focus on student welfare and leisure activities” as one of the ways to help achieve this. GUtech has translated this aim into various policies and procedures in the fields of student support such as financial support and career guidance, accommodation and health care, and also social and recreational opportunities.

This Chapter presents the Panel’s findings on the various student support services provided and the planning and management of these.

7.1 Students and Student Support Services Planning & Management

The responsibility for student affairs and student support lies mainly with the Registration and Student Affairs (RSA) Department and partly with the Library, Finance and Accounts (FA) Department and Information and Technology Services (ITS) Departments regarding their specialist functions. GUtech intends to split RSA into two departments with separated responsibilities for academic affairs and students’ affairs respectively. In the various departments the Heads of Department (HoDs) are supported by Steering Committees which are expected to regularly review achievements regarding relevant policies and Operational Plans (Ops). The policies are recorded in a policy register, and the Quality Assurance and Planning Officer is responsible for initiating regular policy reviews.

The most important source of feedback from students on student support services is the annual Student Satisfaction Survey for non-academic matters which covers the main aspects of student support. The Panel found that existing feedback mechanisms, formal and in particular informal ones, enable GUtech to be highly responsive regarding student complaints about issues like food or library opening hours. However, growing student numbers will create a need for a more formalized approach for rectifying these kinds of quality problems.

7.2 Student Profile

Based on its stated Values, GUtech welcomes students “from both genders, all ethnic, geographical, cultural and religious backgrounds” (Portfolio, p.16). At the time of the audit visit, there were 640 students representing 24 different nationalities. Around 70% of the students are female.

RSA is responsible for keeping student records. The management of student records is supported by the Student Information System which provides up to date information from the time of admission through to graduation. It also produces statistical records required for internal or external purposes, such as statistical reports required by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The Panel concluded that the University is able to keep comprehensive and current records of its student population in an effective and efficient way.

7.3 Student Satisfaction and Climate

GUtech has implemented a variety of procedures and policies for providing strong interaction between students and staff and providing opportunities for feedback. In addition, formalized complaints and grievances procedures which are described in the Student Handbook are implemented (see Section 1.11).
An important role regarding the “student voice” is assigned to the Student Council. GUtech also lists the mentors as a channel to collect student feedback. In addition, GUtech conducts various anonymous surveys, the most important of which are Student Course Satisfaction Survey and Student Satisfaction Survey for non-academic matters. The results of the Student Satisfaction Survey in particular indicate a positive degree of overall satisfaction sustained since the academic year 2007-2008. The University attributes a slight decline in satisfaction prior to the move to the Halban campus to be related to its operation from two different campuses. However, the move to Halban campus has also inevitably caused a range of changes (regarding, for example, accommodation and transport arrangements for students) which will have to be followed up closely by the University in order to reverse this slight downturn.

The Panel found that students make extensive use the Student Council to raise their concerns and that the Student Council is perceived as a good way of channeling students’ views. At pre-university level, mentors play an important role in guiding students and collecting feedback from them (see Section 6.5).

The Panel found that in terms of complaints about food and transportation the University has been very responsive (also see Section 7.7) although not through implementation of formal procedures. As a young institution with a small student body to date, the University has clearly benefited from various opportunities for direct communication with students. In order to keep this high level of interaction and responsiveness as the student population grows, the University might wish to make more systematic use of the Student Satisfaction Survey by way of feeding the results more systematically into quality assurance procedures. The Panel noted evidence of feedback being provided to the Student Council by the Rectorate regarding action taken in response to student feedback on non-academic matters but agrees with GUtech that another important step forward will be to enhance its processes for providing information to students about how the University follows up on any feedback (Portfolio, p.86). “Closing the loop” systematically will also enhance communication with students.

**Affirmation 11**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that it needs to further develop and formalise processes for providing information to students about actions taken as follow-up in response to their feedback, and supports its work with the Student Council as one means of addressing this.

### 7.4 Student Behaviour

The University’s Mission requires students to have a “firm grounding in Oman’s culture and heritage” and its stated Values call for “association in peace and with tolerance”. A number of practices and activities support these intentions. These include cultural events and academic courses addressing cultural skills and ethics. In addition, under the responsibility of RSA, GUtech has implemented a Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy which addresses both academic and non-academic discipline. There is a formal procedure for dealing with alleged violations raised by staff or students.

The Panel explored the University’s implementation of a Culture and Values Advisory Committee which deals with questions related to cultural and religious aspects in all areas of student life. This Committee was established to promote cultural awareness in the University as well as encourage culturally appropriate behaviour (Portfolio, p.35). This initiative aligns with supporting development of the attribute of “intercultural awareness” which the University aims to foster in all its graduates. The Committee has formal terms of reference and student representation. The Panel found wide awareness of the business of this Committee among staff who provided examples of the Committee’s work and considered it to helpful in promoting cross-
cultural understanding between and among international and Omani students. The Panel concluded that this is a very strong approach to foster respectful coexistence in a nationally, culturally and religiously diverse student and staff body.

Commendation 6

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its establishment of a Culture and Values Advisory Committee that has supported its work to foster in students appropriate behaviour and, in line with its stated Values, promote intercultural awareness.

7.5 Career and Employment Services

As stated in the 2008-2013 SP, GUtech aims to “ensure a high level of satisfaction among students and their parents”. The University offers career guidance following a Career Guidance Plan that was approved in 2011 and which includes actions such as gathering information about potential employers, and preparation of students through workshops on CV writing and portfolio preparation.

Interviews provided evidence to the Panel that graduates felt positive about the employment support they received from GUtech. Given that prior to the audit visit taking place only one cohort had graduated, the effectiveness of the various career guidance tools and activities employed had not yet been evaluated. As with provision of all its services, systematic evaluation will be required to inform continuous quality improvement of career and employment services. The Panel was nevertheless impressed with GUtech’s support for students seeking employment in view of the institution’s short history.

The University plans to build on its work in this area as the number of graduating students increases, and is considering incorporating career guidance throughout students’ entire period of study (Portfolio, p.87). The Panel encourages and supports GUtech’s plan to develop a student Career Guidance Center (Portfolio, p.46) as a focal point to coordinate and deploy services to enhance both student work experience and employment prospects for its graduates.

Affirmation 12

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that systematic career guidance for students is required, particularly in the context of expected growth in student numbers, and supports the steps the University is taking to further develop initiatives and systems to address this.

7.6 Student Finances

Around 77% of GUtech students receive scholarships of which the vast majority is funded by the Omani government (Portfolio, pp.25 and 88). While in the last two years the numbers of government funded students increased significantly, the numbers of self-funded students and of GUtech-funded students stayed rather stable. GUtech offers a number of its own scholarships and has secured scholarships from other organizations such as DAAD. In line with its SP, GUtech has also achieved some success in accessing industry-funded scholarships for students. GUtech expects further opportunities to receive scholarships from other organizations since graduating its first cohort in the Bachelor programmes.

The Panel agrees with GUtech that scholarships are an essential funding source for students (Portfolio, p.88) and encourages the University in its efforts to enhance the provision of full-fee scholarships where sponsors pay full standard University fees.
7.7 **Accommodation, Catering and Transport**

The responsibility for policies and procedures in the fields of accommodation, catering and transportation lies with Facilities and Support Services which report directly to the Board of Directors (BoD). With the move to Halban campus, GUtech now offers its own hostel accommodation for both male and female students. There is a cafeteria on campus and the University has buses which provide, for example, transportation for students living on campus to the city centre at the weekends. Students not living on campus may pay to use transportation to and from campus provided by third parties contracted by OES. GUtech collects feedback on these areas through the annual Student Satisfaction Survey for non-academic matters. No formal feedback on the living conditions on campus and on current transportation issues has been collected yet. The Panel found that GUtech has been highly responsive to quality issues in areas such as food, safety and cleanliness.

7.8 **Medical and Counselling Facilities**

Whilst the Panel considers that the University’s approach to Health, Safety, Security and Environment (HSSE), reflected in its 2012-2013 HSSE Plan, needs further contextualization, its efforts to develop comprehensive HSSE procedures are recognized (see Affirmation 4). The move to the Halban campus has also introduced a positive development since GUtech now employs its own nurse who lives on campus. In addition, the University now has a student counselor.

The Panel welcomes GUtech’s commitment to HSSE and supports the provision of related training, for example, in first aid. However, newly implemented medical and counseling services as well as other HSSE policies and practices need to be evaluated regularly, perhaps through additional items being added to the existing student (and staff) satisfaction surveys. The University recognizes that action is required in this area (Portfolio, pp.90 and 93) and the Panel urges this to be addressed.

**Recommendation 12**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman evaluate student medical and counseling services regularly and in the context of the University’s overall management of Health, Safety, Security and Environment.

7.9 **International Student Services**

GUtech has implemented a series of supportive measures to help international students, particularly during their initial phase in Oman. However, as at the time of writing the Portfolio GUtech had only eight international students (i.e. foreign students who came to Oman specifically to study at GUtech). In view of this, RSA takes responsibility for them rather than the University concentrating this responsibility in a separate department. RSA is responsible for any pre-arrival information, support in any visa issues, support in finding accommodation and also in urgent cases of illness or financial problems. Although GUtech claims the internal audits provide for review of the effectiveness and efficiency of the support to international students, it also recognizes that currently it has no systematic procedure for gathering feedback directly and specifically from international students, or their parents (Portfolio, p.91). Particularly in the context of the University wishing to recruit more international students, the Panel considers that formalized means for collecting feedback on a regular basis are required. The Panel suggests that existing systems such as the Student Satisfaction Survey and the mentoring system could be used to collect specific feedback on GUtech’s policies regarding particular issues affecting international students, for example the issue of finding internships for these students.
Recommendation 13

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman develop and implement formalised systems to evaluate the services which it provides to meet the needs of its international students on matters which affect this specific student group.

7.10 Social and Recreational Services and Facilities

As part of its aim to offer students a “pleasurable student life experience” (2008-2013 SP), GUtech offers various extracurricular activities. The move to the Halban campus has increased GUtech’s opportunities to provide students with a range of sports facilities that can also be used by students individually or for organized sports team activities. GUtech offers students a number of sports courses and other social activities such as photography classes and visits to various locations in Muscat. It also organizes social events such as National Day celebrations. Recently, the position of a Sports and Recreation Officer was established, and the implementation of a structured “Student Life Programme” is envisaged. Student feedback on extracurricular activities is obtained through the annual Student Satisfaction Survey for non-academic affairs. The results of the surveys from the academic year 2007-2008 to the academic year 2011-2012 show broad satisfaction in this area.

During the audit visit the Panel established that in particular the employment of the Sports and Recreation Officer has helped the University to develop its provision of sports and social activities more systematically and with more involvement of students in the planning of these activities than in the past. The Panel found that students appreciated the widened opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities following the move to Halban campus.

The University considers the introduction of a structured “Student Life” programme of social and recreational activities to have improved the overall student experience at GUtech (Portfolio, p.92). The Panel agrees with the University that implementation of this programme has the potential to raise student satisfaction significantly and encourages the University to pursue this initiative.
8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

As a core value, the University welcomes employees from both genders and different ethnic, geographical, cultural and religious backgrounds. The University follows a strategy to provide a culture of quality, respect and global citizenship in which decision-making is based on ethical principles and aims to provide sound, equitable and competitive employment conditions to attract, retain and motivate its employees (Portfolio, p.94).

This Chapter considers the planning and management of human resources (HR) at GUtech and reports on the Panel’s findings in areas such as: staff profile; recruitment and selection; induction; professional development; performance planning review; promotion and other incentives; severance; staff organizational climate and retention; and Omanisation.

8.1 Human Resources Planning & Management

The HR Department is managed by a Head of Department (HoD) and guided by the University’s Strategic Plan (SP), the HR Operational Plan (OP) and the HR Manual. The HoD works closely with the HR Steering Committee. The HR Manual is available to all staff through the QWiki electronic platform. All employees personal files are kept in both hard and soft copies. Staff are able to access their personal data online. The Panel heard from staff that most of the HR information they require is accessible online through myGUtech Portal as a result of the introduction of a new HR software package.

The University carried out its first Staff Satisfaction Survey in 2012 when it was felt that there was a sufficient number of staff to ensure anonymity of respondents (Portfolio p 95). The Panel viewed a copy of the survey and the overall results. The data show broad satisfaction in the areas surveyed. The University reports its intention to make improvement to the survey (Portfolio, p.95) and the Panel confirmed that the survey has now been amended to include two new sections, one relating specifically to academic staff and the second to non-academic staff. The Panel agrees with the University that this survey has the potential to elicit more valuable feedback and encourages GUtech to continue to refine its feedback systems in this way.

8.2 Staff Profile

In order to achieve its Vision, the University aims at recruiting very experienced and qualified staff. The University’s emphasis on recruiting and retaining excellent academic staff is reflected in its SP and OPs. The Values of GUtech call for employees as well as students to be part of its community regardless of the gender, ethnic, cultural, religious or geographical background (Portfolio p 95).

At the time of the audit visit GUtech had 140 staff. These included 70 non-academic staff, 34 academic staff teaching in the degree programmes and 36 academic staff teaching in the Foundation Programme. For 2012, the University reports 72% of staff teaching in its Bachelor programmes to be PhD holders, noting that the exceptions are architects who hold Masters degrees with relevant practical experience (Portfolio, p.95). The Panel recognizes this aspect of the GUtech’s staff profile aligns with its strategic aims. The University also reports 21 nationalities represented among its staff.

8.3 Recruitment and Selection

The University’s recruitment policy aims at recruiting academic and administrative staff based on their qualifications, experience and skills. In doing so, GUtech aims to ensure transparent and equitable hiring processes. The University gives priority to Omani candidates where experience,
qualifications and skills are appropriate to the position (Portfolio, p.96). The recruitment policy for academic staff shows RWTH membership in the recruitment committees for Associate and Full Professor positions and gives both parties the right of veto in the final recruitment decision as indicated in the Portfolio (p.96). During interviews, the Panel heard confirmation of this process.

In its aim to recruit excellent academic staff, the University is competing with the neighboring Gulf countries. The University recognizes that this competition affects the overall package that needs to be offered to potential staff.

The University indicates that the introduction of a visit to Oman into the recruitment procedure for overseas applicants at the professorial level has improved retention and that departments are encouraged to ensure that vacancies are identified in good time (Portfolio, p.97). The Panel considers that GUtech needs to further develop plans and action plans to address recruitment challenges in the context of its aspiration to increase the number of students and maintain the quality of education provided.

8.4 Induction

The HR Department provides induction sessions and material to all new staff in a process that is subject to evaluation by those receiving induction. Extra sessions are conducted in September and October to cater for academic staff joining at this time. A welcome package that includes all the necessary information for new staff is provided by the HR Department. The Panel heard from staff that they were inducted and received the support they needed which aligns with positive feedback on the induction process and its effectiveness collected in the Staff Satisfaction Survey.

It was evident that the move to the Halban campus had caused some disruption and required changes to the induction process but the Panel acknowledges previous good practice in this area that is set to resume.

8.5 Professional Development

GUtech’s strategy and objectives for professional development are identified in its SP, HR OP and the Teaching and Learning Plan. In line with these, the Panel confirmed that the University provides staff with opportunities to attend conferences, workshops and training courses. The Panel met and heard from staff who had attended courses either in Oman and/or abroad. Release time is also granted to staff to pursue their doctorates. Full financial support is provided to staff who present papers or run workshops outside the University. In addition, various in-house training activities and Professional Development Days are conducted.

GUtech indicates that creation of a learning and development policy and a training needs analysis are being considered by the HR Department and that an increase in training budget is required (Portfolio, p.99). The Panel encourages such review of the management of professional development activities to inform action required to achieve strategic objectives.

8.6 Performance Planning and Review

GUtech’s performance management system for both academic and administrative staff is described in its HR Manual. The University states that the intention of the system is to ensure that all staff are involved in a process of performance assessment which relates to achievement of the University’s Vision, Mission and strategic objectives and an understanding of the planning framework (Portfolio, p.99). The process requires annual planning and appraisal meetings to be held with individual staff prior to which staff members complete a self-assessment of their performance. Following this appraisal, annual increments are given and financial awards or promotion may also result.
GUtech reports that staff appraisals are not administered systematically across all departments (Portfolio, p.99). The Panel also heard from some staff that they did not go through this process. The Panel found that whilst implementation appeared effective and consistent for staff in the pre-university programmes, this was not the case for academic staff in the degree programmes or for non-academic staff. Particularly as this process is linked to increments and is also a way of recognizing good and excellent performance (Portfolio, p.101), the Panel considers it important for the performance management process to be implemented systematically across the University. The Panel considers this important too in relation to staff retention.

**Recommendation 14**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman systematically apply its performance appraisal system to all staff.

**8.7 Promotion and Other Incentives**

GUtech aims at providing a promotion procedure that is transparent, equitable and professional (Portfolio, p.99). In line with this, there is comprehensive coverage of promotions for academic as well as non-academic staff in the HR Manual. This includes details of eligibility for promotion, requirements and procedures. Feedback from staff has informed revision of the Manual in this area and led to introduction of a system whereby good performance can be recognized and rewarded through a Performance Allowance Policy which allows an employee to be promoted from one salary grade to the next.

While academic promotions have taken place, staff survey feedback indicates that a wider understanding of the promotions policy is still required. The Panel recognizes the University’s ongoing efforts to improve its practices in this area.

**8.8 Severance**

The HR Manual has clear procedures for staff wishing to leave the University. The University recognises that the results of its exit interviews can be used to identify opportunities for improving staff retention. The Panel supports GUtech’s intention to carry these out more systematically (Portfolio, p.101).

**8.9 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention**

The importance to GUtech of attracting and retaining excellent staff is recognized in its formal planning. The University identifies four areas that influence staff satisfaction: conditions of employment; work environment; change management; and recognition of good practice (Portfolio, p.101). Staff are provided with the necessary information regarding their employment and job related activities.

The University reports that the turnover of administrative staff is significantly higher than for academic staff. From exit interviews, GUtech has found this to be mainly due to Omani staff moving to better paid positions in the public sector or getting opportunities for further studies offered by the government. GUtech also states that as a result of the movement to Halban Campus, a large number of the administrative staff resigned (Portfolio, p.102). The main reason was that the new location did not suit them. The University has recruited temporary staff for interim periods to alleviate the burden on the existing staff.

The University introduced its Staff Satisfaction Survey in 2012 (when the number of staff allowed anonymity to be observed – Portfolio, p.102). The outcome of the survey shows a reasonable level of overall job satisfaction for both academic and administrative staff. In terms of
areas of dissatisfaction, GUtech reports that the main reason for academic staff dissatisfaction is lack of time to do research (even though the teaching load is limited to 10 hours per week). The main reason for administrative staff dissatisfaction is the difference in salary scale, allowances and leave between them and the academic staff (Portfolio, p.102). The Panel also became aware of these concerns of administrative staff during the audit visit interviews.

The University recognizes the need to increase the satisfaction and retention of Omani staff (Portfolio, p.104) and the Panel found this area to be under review. The Panel urges action to be taken regarding existing vacancies and improving satisfaction.

**Recommendation 15**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman take action to fill existing administrative vacancies with staff on permanent appointments and improve the satisfaction and retention of administrative staff.

### 8.10 Omanisation

The University works towards fulfilling the requirement of the Ministry of Manpower for 70% of its administrative staff and 16% of its academic staff to be Omani nationals (Portfolio, p.103). Where Omanis are identified as appropriate for a position, the University considers that it is able to offer competitive packages so as to provide an attractive offer (Portfolio, p.103). The Panel noted, however, that exit interviews have indicated that for some Omani staff, more attractive positions may be available in the public sector (see Section 8.9). The Panel confirmed that the University also supports both academic and administrative Omani staff in pursuing further studies.

The University has an Omanisation Plan and aims to achieve 100% Omanisation among administrative staff by the year 2020. The Plan includes yearly targets for the different academic and administrative departments. The current Omanisation percentage is 61% for administrative staff and 9% for academic staff. Small improvements in both areas will be required to reach the 2013 targets. GUtech recognizes a need to increase Omanisation and is considering introducing a more formal career programme to support young Omanis to gain experience and skills needed to take academic or senior management positions (Portfolio, pp.103-104). The Panel encourages further effort in this area.

**Affirmation 13**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that further action to increase Omanisation is required, and supports its efforts and initiatives to achieve this which include intention to develop a more formal career programme for developing Omanis to occupy academic and senior management positions.
9  **GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

GUtech’s Strategic Plan (SP) includes a strategic objective “to ensure a timely construction of the campus that supports the growth of the University” (Portfolio, p.105). During the planning and construction of the new Halban Campus, the University occupied one and then an additional premises which together served as an interim campus for the University. The University relocated to the Halban Campus in September 2012.

This Chapter reports on the Panel’s findings in relation to general support services, facilities and their management at the University. Public relations and marketing as well as communication services are also considered.

9.1  **General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management**

Planning for the construction of GUtech’s new campus at Halban began in Spring 2008 and the actual construction began in 2011. The Inaugural Deans who were in place at that time were involved in the planning of labs, classrooms and offices. Subsequently, as the University continued to grow, more staff and also students became involved with the planning. This included Urban Planning and Architectural Design Students working as interns with the project architects.

Through interviews and viewing of infrastructure plans, the Panel concluded that the new campus has been carefully planned and designed, with appropriate consultation and involvement of faculty staff and students. The Panel considered the building to be attractive, interesting and functional, reflecting the ethos of the institution, its Vision and Mission, and the commitment that has been made by all concerned parties to establish a high quality University. The technical specification, particularly in relation to environmental factors, reflects the University’s Mission related to excellence in science and technology as well as social responsibility. To date, Phase 1 of the Halban Campus has been completed. This has sufficient space and facilities to accommodate 1500 students. The Panel also noted that the building’s design features allow for flexibility in its future expansion.

**Commendation 7**

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority commends the German University of Technology in Oman for its establishment of a new campus designed specifically to reflect its Vision to become a leading university of technology and support implementation of its Mission.

It was clear to the Panel that the short time frame (of around 18 months) in which the construction of the new campus was completed, and the recent actual move to the new campus, have been major challenges for GUtech. At the time of the audit visit, the University community was still in the process of settling in. Nevertheless, the University is understandably proud of its new campus. The University’s formal system for evaluating its infrastructure from the perspective of staff and students (via annual surveys) is to be implemented as it was previously in the interim campuses.

The move to the new campus in Halban has resulted in restructuring of the Facilities and Support Services to include three administrative units: Infrastructure Unit; Central Stores; and Supply Management Services (Portfolio, p.105) which report directly to the Board of Directors (BoD) of Oman Educational Services LLC (OES). The Panel heard that the University is committed to providing continuous service and maintenance to the new building, and viewed draft OPs covering various aspects of Facilities and Support Services that have now been developed.
Affirmation 14

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with the German University of Technology in Oman that appropriate operational plans are required to guide the units responsible for the management of the University’s building and facilities, and supports the steps taken towards developing these.

9.2 Public Relations and Marketing

GUtech’s SP includes strategic objectives to build a reputation as a quality university as well as to increase income through tuition fees (Portfolio, p.106). The University has expanded its marketing activities to include areas outside Muscat and the Panel heard that international marketing visits had taken place with the aim of recruiting foreign students. However, success in this area has been limited and GUtech is aware that its approach to recruiting more international students requires review (Portfolio, pp.107 and 113). The Panel did not find evidence that GUtech has reviewed or has a clear plan to measure its performance in this area, either in relation to international or Oman-based students. The Panel encourages this to be addressed in the context of the existing 2011-2013 plan for the Marketing and Student Recruitment Department.

Recommendation 16

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that the German University of Technology in Oman review its approach to recruiting more students in general and foreign students in particular.

9.3 Communication Services

GUtech’s SP includes a strategic objective “to ensure an effective and customer-friendly administrative support” and an action to “ensure effective communication between all departments” in relation to its core perspective of Corporate Culture (Portfolio, p.109). Various strategies and practices have been implemented across the University to support communication and the effectiveness of these is evaluated through staff and student surveys.

The Panel heard that staff access most of the information they need (job description, leave, etc) from the QWiki platform. Students indicated that the University communicates with them effectively on day-to-day matters through emails and SMS. To further improve the communication between the University and both staff and students, myGutech portal has been introduced and the Panel confirmed that training on this for staff and students is ongoing. The University identifies scope for the conduct of some Departmental and Steering Committee meetings to improve (Portfolio, pp.111-112) and the Panel encourages efforts to ensure practices are adopted to achieve this.

9.4 Facilities Management

The University established an Infrastructure Unit (INFRA) prior to the movement to Halban Campus to be responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of physical facilities (Portfolio, p.112). This Unit is now part of Facilities and Support Services (see Section 9.1). The University is encouraging staff to report requests for services using the Infrastructure Support Website now available through myGUtech. The system allows both staff and the University to track the status of the request (Portfolio, p.112). A draft operational plan for the INFRA Unit has been developed (see Affirmation 14). Effective implementation of an appropriate plan will be critical to maintaining the new campus and GUtech acknowledges that INFRA will require more staff to cope with the maintenance needs of the new campus (Portfolio, p.112).
APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

Professor Ian Cumbus (Chair)
Commissioner
Commission for Academic Accreditation
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Abu Dhabi
UAE

Dr Achim Hopbach
Director
Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation
Austria

Dr Serge Herzog
Director, Institutional Analysis
University of Nevada, Reno
USA

Dr Saleh Al Busaidi
Director of the Language Centre
Sultan Qaboos University
Oman

Dr Maha Kobeil
Dean
Majan College (University College)
Oman

Susan Trevor-Roper (Executive Officer)
Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
APPENDIX B.  ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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

A-Level ......................................... Common term for the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level also termed the GCE Advanced Level – an academic qualification taken by some students (e.g. in the United Kingdom) completing secondary or pre-university education.

AAA............................................. Academic Affiliation Agreement

ACQUIN........................................ A ccreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (Germany)

ADRI............................................. A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising:
Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement.

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

BoD................................................ Board of Directors

BoG................................................ Board of Governors

BSc ................................................ Bachelor of Science

CA.................................................. Collaborative Agreement

DAAD............................................ Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst – the German Academic Exchange Service

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.

Direct-entry students ..................... Students who join GUtech Bachelor degree programmes directly without undertaking one or both of GUtech’s Pre-University Programmes (Intensive English Programme/ Foundation Year Programme)

DRAA ............................................ Deputy-Rector for Academic Affairs

DRAF............................................. Deputy-Rector for Administration and Finances

EAC ............................................... External Advisory Committee

ERP ................................................ Enterprise Resources Planning (software)

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.

FA ................................................ Finance and Accounts Department

FYP ................................................ Foundation Year Programme

GUtech .......................................... German University of Technology in Oman (http://www.gutech.edu.om)

HEI................................................ Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider)

HoD................................................ Head of Department
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.
RWTH............................................ Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule (RWTH Aachen University - http://www.rwth-aachen.de)

SP ................................................... Strategic Plan

System............................................ In this Report, system refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.

TLP ................................................... Teaching and Learning Plan