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Understanding Culture as One Key to Quality

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Abstract: One important aspect of creating a quality learning environment is the explicit discussion of inter-cultural communication. In this paper I describe how to ensure and assess the quality of positive multicultural interactions in the classroom in three steps. At the beginning of the semester, cultural understanding should be added as a component of new teacher and new student orientations programs. As the semester progresses, experienced teachers could check in on the new teachers about issues that have come up; these points can then be explicitly integrated into the next round of orientations. At the end of the semester, teachers could be asked to reflect on what they have learned. Implementing this system would not involve hiring new staff or even changing the existing infrastructure but would result in more cross-cultural understanding and hence enhanced teaching and learning.

The Role of Psychometric Testing in Enhancing Quality Within Higher Education Institutes

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Abstract: Offering career advice and matching future employment opportunities purely on preference or perceived status does little to benefit wider society, or indeed the individuals concerned. A more holistic approach, including the use of psychometric testing to better inform decision making of students in both academic and vocational programmes, is essential if the educational and economic development of the country is to be aligned. Although the scope of psychometric testing is wide ranging this paper focuses on the Higher Education sector. Research suggests that the use, and impact, of psychometric testing in Higher Education is extremely low. Although the field of psychometrics can offer many benefits and has a direct relationship with quality, it continues to suffer from bad press with little traction in establishing momentum to exploit the positive benefits. There is a wealth of possibilities within the scope of psychometric testing that Higher Educational

Institutes are potentially missing out on. With realistic, tangible and meaningful results possible, Educational Institutes can use the tests to enhance their quality management system, provide students with more informed choice, to better select and develop staff and improve the success rate of their programmes. This paper aims to identify, through detailed research, the reasons why elements of psychometric testing is not being used in most HEIs, and focuses on what benefits could be achieved through more wide spread use of psychometric testing and how this links to the quality management system and student enrichment. Looking externally, the paper discusses how the link between HEI and its external customers – Industry and wider employment sectors – can work together to better align their graduates requirements with the academic and vocational programmes being offered to strengthen the country's development and its Omanisation programme.

Assuring Sustainable Quality in Educational Technology: Extending to the Global Landscape

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Abstract: The expansions of learning activities in the social media coupled with the trends in interoperability of technology emphasize the need to find solutions for sustainable global development in Educational Technology. To guide the College of Education (COE) accreditation process, the Instructional & Learning Technologies Department seeks to include Global Digital Citizenship (GDC) competencies throughout the curriculum. This paper follows the evolutionary growth of the Instructional & Learning Technologies (ILT) Department's strategic curricular plan to help better prepare students to become competent global digital citizens. The development of this action plan considered sustainable indicators to assure the process is ongoing and extends into the multi-dimensional global landscape. The action plan with the GDC goals informed a prototype of the curriculum under consideration. A strategic model for implementation is the next step in the process which to date, has not yet taken place. This investigation is scalable to expand beyond its present scope to inform policy and practice for others who face the challenges of assuring quality in cross-border higher education.

Student Participation in Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education: Panacea or Placebo?

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Abstract: The debate on the appropriateness of various approaches to quality management in Higher Education (HE) largely remains unresolved. Nonetheless, Total Quality Management (TQM) is considered to be highly relevant as it takes into account student participation as customers in quality assurance. However, the very concept of students as customers in higher education is intricate, multifaceted and unique. It is rare that the suppliers evaluate the customers and as the students undergo a transformation process due to longitudinal nature of their learning experience their perceptions and expectation may change. Therefore promotion of student participation in quality management and enhancement (QME) may be constrained due to the very nature of student experience and customer-supplier relationship in higher education. Therefore it calls for greater empirical evidence to support and justify student engagement in QME in higher education, which this study sets out to achieve.

Originality/Value: The study identifies that the student participation in QA depends on students' perceptions and expectations of academic instructions and outcomes. The study concludes that students' engagement with QA is largely dependent on continuing interactions with HE members rather than at end-point or with definitive outcomes. The study builds a case for promotion of student's engagement in QA and reinforces, by the reference of its findings that students' participation QA contributes to the enhancement of TQM in HE.

Quality in Teaching Through Self-Assessment

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Abstract: Students are central in the core business of institutions of higher learning. Due to the increase inter alia in competition, the value of teaching is increasingly becoming a determining factor of whether students will opt for one education institution or the other. This leaves teachers with a burden to enhance quality in teaching by reason of enriching student experience. This paper reports the exploration of utilising diary entries in conjunction with student feedback as means of self-assessment. These diary entries were started in the beginning of the semester, recording teacher's experience with teaching materials and student reactions to the materials and teaching approach. Student feedback was also conducted during the course of the semester on different timelines:

some at the beginning of the semester and some towards the end of the semester. The results reveal students' attitude towards teaching methodology and the clash between course expectations and students' envisaged experience. The paper argues that students' expectations are largely influenced by past educational experiences, which they use as yardstick to measure success or failure in their current experience. Furthermore, the paper postulates that teachers' frustrations are impacted by expectations that are matched against students' experiences. The paper's main conclusion therefore is that quality teaching stands to improve when course delivery and outcomes are a negotiated process, taking into consideration students' experiences without compromising the envisaged course outcomes.

Measuring Against Expectations: Development of a Multidimensional Profile of University Readiness of Omani Higher Education Intake 2011 – 2013 (Case of SQU)

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Abstract: A team of eight researchers has begun a project at Sultan Qaboos University to understand: (1.) the knowledge, motivation, skills and attitudes of students entering Omani higher education institutions in 2011-2013; (2.) the differences in academic performance between students who have followed the General Education curriculum and students to have completed 12 years of the new Basic Education curriculum; and (3.) the knowledge and

skills that contribute positively to higher education academic success. This is an analytical, descriptive and correlational research study that examines quantitative and qualitative data from several tests and surveys to identify statistically significant correlations between and among factors related to student success in higher education. This paper presents the research protocol, an analysis of challenges encountered during the pilot and first year implementation, as well as preliminary analysis of the pilot data. While the analysis from SQU will inform SQU administration about its students and will help faculty in course preparation, the study should be expanded to provide an in-depth understanding of a more broad range of Omani university students. Thus, a goal of this paper is to share the research protocol with other Omani higher education institutions that would benefit from a replication of this study. The expanded database would more effectively provide data for dialogues at different levels of educational system in Oman. The findings would also provide insights about elementary and secondary curriculum alignment with higher education entrance requirements and most importantly, would help ensure that the future Omani workforce is ready to perform as expected to meet the country's strategic social and economic goals.

Entry in to Engineering Programs – Performance Comparison of Foundation Students with Direct Entry Students

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Abstract: In many universities and colleges, foundation programs serve as a bridging course between the qualifications the students might have and the course they would like to register for further studies. However if the student has done well in the qualifying exams he could be granted exemption of the foundation program and is given direct admission in to the main program. This essentially creates two groups of students – Direct entry students and the foundation students both entering the main program. The purpose of the foundation is to reinforce the basics and enhance

the student's abilities in English, Mathematics and Science so that they become on par with the direct entry students. In this paper, the two groups of students are clearly identified and this paper studies the performance of these two groups of students by analyzing their academic records over a period of three years. The group of students are from Oman and the main program of their study is Engineering. Both groups have opted to study the same Engineering program in Caledonian College of Engineering and their marks for each module is taken in to consideration while working out the parameters of comparison. All The modules the students take during the period of three years are taken for comparison of the students' performances. The modules taught also include unique modules like Educational and Professional Development (*EPD) modules that are taught in each year for the first three years to enhance the quality of students in terms of writing, communication and other soft skills. The analysis shows the direct entry students have a significant advantage over the foundation students in soft skills (in EPD modules, earlier referred as PPD –Personal and Professional Development modules) but not in any other modules.

Quality Audits in Oman:

A Review of the Process and the Findings of the First 25 OAAA Reports

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Abstract: The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA; formerly the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC)) has developed a two-stage institutional accreditation system (Quality Audit followed by Standards Assessment). The system is designed to support Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with their continuous quality improvement efforts and to provide means of holding HEIs accountable to society. The first formal quality audit was carried out in 2008. Since then, twenty-six HEIs in the public and private sector in Oman have been through the quality audit process and 25 quality audit reports have been published on the OAAA website. This paper presents analysis of audit reports findings and what has been learnt from actual quality audit process itself. The authors provide a thematic analysis of the formal conclusions (Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations) presented in the audit reports in areas of governance and management; student learning by coursework; research; industry and community engagement; academic and student support services; staff support services; and general facilities. The OAAA itself has also been learning from the implementation of its quality audits process: it has

regularly reviewed the process with an aim to increasing its overall effectiveness and ensuring that it is appropriate for the Omani higher education sector. Conclusions from this thematic overview show that there are clear trends in terms of areas of strength and opportunities for improvement across the higher education sector in Oman. The initial findings also show that quality is not related to whether HEIs are publicly or privately funded. Feedback from the sector also suggests that the impact of preparing for the quality audit has been as valuable as the process of going through the audit itself.

Learning about Challenges to Medical Professionalism in Oman: A Culturally Contextualized Approach?

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Abstract: In addition to the need for students to be more professional in their behavior and in carrying out their duties, we as professional educators in higher education also need to be more professional about our approach to enhancing the quality of the educational experience that we provide to students. Too often in countries with an emerging higher education sector, there is a tendency to copy, mimic or borrow ideas and educational materials from more established countries. In doing this it is essential that the appropriate attention is given to the cultural context that these ideas and materials are being brought to. This study provides one example of an analysis of the cultural context into which an investigation of students' understanding of challenges to medical professionalism is carried out. 164 students completed Barry's Challenges to Professionalism questionnaire. This involved students deciding on the most appropriate professional behavior in six clinical scenarios. Each scenario contains a different challenge to medical professionalism. The students in this study differ significantly from those in the literature in terms of which behaviors are considered as 'most professional'. This tool has been used extensively in several different countries, however this is the first time that formal qualitative analysis has been used to assess the reasons for the differences between students studying in Oman and students from other countries. The role of cultural values in determining attitudes to professionalism is discussed. This study shows that there is a need for a more professional approach to understanding cultural contextualization within higher education and in the teaching of professionalism in Oman.

Hadrian Wall's Divide: Teaching Faculty's Quality of Work Life differences in Oman Private and Public Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: This empirical research proves the relationship/ association between Quality of Work Life (QWL) and employee job related outcomes in higher learning institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. Further, this study reveals significant differences between the Quality of Work Life and Performance level of teaching faculty in Private and Public Higher Education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. Work-Time Pressure is a significant QWL factor which determines the job satisfaction and performance level of faculty. Faculty member's perception on Skills discretion, Job Security and Managerial support significantly differed between the Private and Public Higher education institutions. This research emphasizes the need to create Quality of Work Life standards for teaching faculty in the Public and Private higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

Academic Staff Perception of the External Audit: Al-Musanna College of Technology

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Abstract: Al-Musanna College of Technology has completed one year since its first external audit. This study is designed to measure the impact of the external audit on the college as perceived by the 114 academic staff members. The staff answered a questionnaire consisting of 28 questions, based on the 5-point Likert scale. The questions were grouped into four main areas: quality of teaching, students' performance and services, college resources, and handling staff issues and concerns. Among the four areas investigated, the highest impact was found on the quality of teaching. External audit was also found to have increased the staff awareness of their responsibilities. Those staff that have been surveyed prefer the internal audit to the external audit because the former concentrates more on teaching practices while the latter involves a large amount of paperwork and documentation. The findings of this study show that external audit together with internal can improve the performance of the college over a period of time.

Initiating Quality Assurance Mechanism: Challenges and Prognosis of the Maiden Year's Experience

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Abstract: First step is often the most important in any undertaking. And, as we conclude our maiden year (2010-11) at the Preparatory Year Program, Jazan University, we experienced numerous challenges in not just initiating an efficient quality assurance system but also in trying to keep it viable and in accordance with the prescribed standards of National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA). Through this paper, we intend to document, assess and address the challenges as we tried to put in place a credible quality assurance system in our maiden year at the Preparatory Program, which may serve as a reference point. With about 4,500 students, some 200 faculty members, and seven separate disciplines in the very first year, the Preparatory Year Program at Jazan University presented a very diverse case where the stakeholders were either totally ignorant or knowing little about the very notion of quality assurance, leave alone its nuances that often go with things dealing with the dialectics of policies and practices. It was quite a task therefore to remove the taboos and apprehensions, first of all. Spread of a positive air about 'quality', as we gathered, is most important as people often misinterpret it as something guarding or watching them overhead. This paper tries to deal with all, from the very inception to an efficient implementation of quality assurance policies and practices that we had in the first year of the Preparatory Year Program. We have tried to underline the issues, right from preparing a mission statement to student's evaluation, to generating a general awareness and interest among all concerned. Our maiden experience and its prognosis in this study would help in enhancing further our pursuit of achieving excellence in quality assurance management in higher education, in general.

Faculty Members' Perceptions of Effective Appraisal in Oman: the Balance between Accountability and Development

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Abstract: Enhancing quality in teaching and learning is the goal of all higher educational institutes (HEI) in Oman. There are many aspects to be considered one of which is the standard of teaching. The teacher's role has changed recently with more focus on what is

taught; how it is taught; and why it is being taught? This increase in accountability means feedback on how teachers are performing is vital, so areas of strengths and weaknesses can be identified and addressed. Many HEIs in Oman utilise appraisal systems to provide this feedback, but does the system enhance quality? What makes the appraisal effective – the purpose? Which system is the most effective – why? As literature states, there are two fundamental purposes for carrying out teacher appraisal: accountability and developmental. The dilemma facing HEIs in Oman is achieving the right balance between these two purposes. Some researchers state these purposes cannot be achieved through one system; others disagree. Some researchers believe that purpose should be weighted more to evaluation; others to professional development. This paper deals with teacher appraisal in Oman. It aims to identify whether teachers perceive the purpose of the appraisal system as effective as for it to be effective, the purpose must be understood. It also looks at whether participation in the development of the appraisal criteria used to evaluate leads to a more effective system. In order to find out how this applies to Oman, a mixed approach survey was used on a sample of teachers in an engineering college. Findings suggest that the teachers' perceptions of effective appraisal support findings from literature with the appraisal purpose being perceived as a balance of accountability and developmental with a good awareness of the criteria used. Participation in the development is supported by staff although not all were given an opportunity.

Giving Voice to the Voiceless: Learner Autonomy as a Tool to Enhance Quality in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Oman

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Abstract: Research findings suggest that some prevalent beliefs and practices still exist in schools and higher education institutions in Oman albeit the recent educational reform. For example, education is still viewed as a process of transferring information to the learners in a mechanical way in which learners continue to play a passive role. In addition, learning is largely exam-driven and classrooms are teacher-fronted while most learners lack autonomous learning and independent thinking skills. Ideally, teaching should aim to encourage learners to develop a capacity for critical thinking and taking control over their own learning while at the same time assuming responsibility for all the decisions concerning their learning. In other words, it is no longer enough for students to sit and listen, test and forget. Learners of today need to become autonomous learners, thinkers and planners who are able to sustain learning and attain long-term success. Unfortunately, many of the current beliefs and practices in our schools and higher education institutions are not autonomy supportive. Helping learners become autonomous has

therefore been globally recognised as a desirable and feasible goal for any reform in educational. This paper problematizes some of these prevalent practices and their underpinning beliefs in education in Oman and argues for a pedagogy for autonomy in higher education which integrates principles of learner autonomy into teaching, learning, assessment practices as well as teacher development plans as an alternative to the existing model, which is largely characterized by spoon-feeding and missing voice of the learner.

Outcomes-Oriented Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract: In higher education, achieving learning outcomes, thereby desired graduate attributes is the culmination of internal as well as external quality assurance process. For that end, a vast array of quality management procedures must be coordinated beginning with thoughtful formulation of intended learning outcomes and ending with assessment of their attainment and the ensuing evaluation-directed rethinking process. Within this process, quality of teaching and learning is a cornerstone for producing the desired outcomes. As higher education's stakeholders are seeking competent graduates having not only subject-specific skills, but also a wide range of general skills and fulfilling higher-order thinking learning outcomes, the traditional, passive, teacher-centered approach for teaching, though it contributes to knowledge acquisition and lower-order thinking learning outcomes, can't yield the desired graduate attributes. On the other hand, adopting the currently-advocated, student-centered, active teaching and learning approach, though highly demanded, have inherent challenges which may impede its successful, productive application. Inexperienced staff, student's reluctance and time management are examples of these challenges. The focus of this paper is to featuring the approach of active learning through documenting its learning contexts, strategies, impediments, and management. This will facilitate the paradigm shift from passive to active learning, contribute to a more meaningful learning experience, and ensure the attainment of desired attributes of higher education's graduates.

Abbreviations

AL, active learning; ATs, assessment tasks; CA, constructive alignment; ILOs, intended learning outcomes; OBTL, outcomes-based teaching and learning; PBL, problem-based learning; TLAs, teaching and learning activities

Quality Enhancement of Teaching and Learning A Student-Teacher Perspective

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Abstract: Teachers and students are key and complementary components in the establishment of successful higher education systems. Both the student and teacher's involvement and interaction in the academic system are of equal importance for the evaluation and development of the quality of teaching and learning. This paper aims to highlight the concepts of Reflective Practice, Communities of Practice (CoP), and Personal Development Plans (PDP)s from the stand-point of the author's experience as a student in a UK-based university and as a lecturer, QAEC and policies coordinator in an Omani-based college. This paper also discusses the implications of incorporating these practices into the college's curriculum. A shared observation amongst majority of academics and non-academics within the country and the MENA region is the "copy-paste" approach in the submission of projects and assignments. This occurrence may be attributed to one or more of the following factors, which include inherited learning culture from primary education, student's lack of understanding of the taught material, non-stringent plagiarism related policies, discouraged creativity and confidence in expressing their viewpoint and the capacity and competence of teachers as modern educators. Furthermore, employers expect graduates to have transferable skills which are not solely occupational but also interpersonal. Academic institutions have a responsibility to train the students to demonstrate and transfer such "soft skills". Reflective practice, CoPs and PDP may be exploited as tools to assist in this approach. The means for improvement may not necessarily match traditional approaches. Challenges are expected and need to be addressed. Nurturing a "thinking culture" requires both time and a scrutinized approach. It is nevertheless an essential practice to equip students with the tools they require to synchronize local knowledge with world-class practices, to guide the students in critically defining their personal and professional goals and to create an environment which nurtures creativity, and reflective mind-sets.

A Modelling Approach to Validating Program Review Indicators in Bahrain Higher Education

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Abstract: As part of a national education project that aims to increase the skill level of Bahrainis by developing education and training, Bahrain has put in place a comprehensive system of QA in higher education following the explosive development of private higher education in the last ten years. The Quality Assurance

Agency for Education and Training (QAAET), and the Higher Education Council (HEC) have been the centre pieces of this QA edifice along with a number of other projects and initiatives that are meant to improve the standards of higher education in the country. This paper looks at one of the most visible artefacts of the QA edifice in Bahrain, namely program reviews. Program reviews form the dominant component of QAAET work as it seeks to cover all fields of study. They are summative evaluations that deliver a verdict on the program along a three level evaluation: Full-confidence; limited confidence; or no-confidence. The QAAET issued 22 programme review reports (almost half of which had a no confidence evaluation). For the rest, there is an equal number of confidence and limited confidence (6 each). Only one institution with initial limited confidence judgment was upgraded to 'confidence.' Given the large number and dire consequences of negative reviews on the concerned HEIs; yielding an automatic suspension of student admissions, the review methodology has to be validated beyond the initial benchmarking and adaptation exercise that took place during its inception. This paper will (1) define standard constructs for program reviews and propose a conceptual program review model; (2) reverse engineer the QAAET review methodology into the conceptual model; and (3) recommend changes to the QAAET review methodology using a deductive process from the conceptual model to the methodology. Implications will be drawn for the validity of the current review methodology and further validation work proposed in light of additional threats to validity. The major contribution of the paper is a revised structure for program review indicators which can be further validated empirically through reprocessing the results of past evaluations or using the revised methodology for new evaluations.

Assuring Quality in Promoting Generic Skills in the Higher College of Technology (HCT), Muscat: Challenges & Realities

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Abstract: This paper explores EFL teachers' perceptions in relation to the pedagogical and conceptual challenges that they face in promoting generic skills in the Higher College of Technology (HCT), Muscat, in the context of post foundation level provision. A questionnaire was administered to 17 EFL teachers at HCT, at post foundation levels to investigate their views and beliefs about challenges in assuring quality in promoting generic skills. The study reveals that assessment and teaching provide the most obvious pedagogical challenges; whereas teachers' understanding and interpretations of generic skills are the most common conceptual challenges. Recommendations on how generic skills could be enhanced and promoted and how these challenges can be overcome are presented.

Peer Evaluation or 'Fear' Evaluation: in Search of Compatibility

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Abstract: Quality assurance system is a state-of-the-art fashion and paradigmatic shift in the teaching profession at the present time. Researchers, teachers and practitioners have been engaged into tailoring and exploring the best teaching practices and innovations that may lead to better outcomes. Such a fact is realized by Biggs and Tang (2007) who state that "the new agenda for universities, to sell education and to provide for market needs, makes them like any other corporation that sells a product" (p.3). In this context, teaching for quality learning has become one of the prime objectives for higher learning institutes in recent years. In addition, an awareness of this concept, together with other sets of quality assurance requirements, is deemed an essential criterion for teacher personal and professional development. For such a purpose, a number of procedures have been introduced for the enhancement of teaching such as peer evaluation or peer assessment, teaching feedback survey, students' feedback, and self- assessment among others. However, peer evaluation or peer assessment, is sometimes approached with trepidation and with feeling that this process may not be fair and free of bias. This paper examines the process of peer assessment as a teaching for quality enhancement and the perceptions of the parties involved in it. Tutors' perceptions and understanding of the practice were examined in order to see to what extent such a process has effects of whatsoever type on the quality of teaching, teachers' belief of teaching, choices, decision making and involvement in the whole teaching operation and process. A questionnaire was designed and distributed among 40 tutors in 2 higher learning institutes in the Sultanate of Oman. The study drew significant results pertaining to the value of peer review or peer evaluation for teaching quality enhancement as perceived by the participant teachers.

Keywords: peer review, quality assurance system, quality teaching, subjectivity, professional development

Common Approach to QA in Diverse Higher Education Systems

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Abstract: In the late 1950s immediately after many Arab states achieved their national independence, the Higher Education sector began its continuous development. Since then and for a period of thirty years, it has been dominated by a public education system monopoly. Since the mid 1980s and due to the sizable failure of public universities in the Arab world to meet the demand

for highly qualified university graduates needed for social and economic development, and as a natural response to the spread of globalization's ideas, privatization, and openness to foreign cultures, the number of private and international universities and colleges has exceeded several hundred and attracted a large number of students. Nowadays, in the majority of Arab states, the Higher Education (HE) sector (as with the educational sector in general) is facing high level of diversity inside HE systems and among different curricula existing within the same countries. This fact creates a huge problem in policy development, especially in QA regulations. To overcome such problems, Europe has established the "Bologna process" of the harmonization of HE systems.

However, in spite of diversity, it is necessary to define and introduce common areas of Quality Assurance expected to be acquired. Common categories of accreditation standards will be discussed to explore similarities. Besides that, issues should cover policies (at international and national levels), strategic approaches, stakeholders' responsibilities and main external QA procedures. Networking among Arab states is of the utmost importance, thus ANQAHE activities should be considered and experience is expected to be used. Those issues should be followed with a range of variations in accordance with specificities in particular HE institutions (e.g. separate or co-ed student groups, national or international curriculum, academic or vocational education, duration of studies etc.).

Using Internationally Recognised Business Improvement Quality Standards to Improve Teaching & Learning

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Abstract: Governments and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) across the world are concerned with enhancing the quality and effectiveness of their academic endeavours. This paper introduces the unique Quality Standard of Investors in People (IiP) for improving business performance through developing and engaging employees and explains how this Standard is being used by HEIs in the UK to further improve academic quality. Could the IiP Standard be of relevance to HEIs in Oman, in their efforts to ensure an effective educational quality management system and enhance their academic quality? IiP provides a Standard that serves as an international model of non-prescriptive good business practice suitable for adoption by any size and any type of organisation. My examination of three UK university case studies provides evidence that in implementing the IiP Standard, the HEIs attribute considerable improvement in such areas as Business Performance, Leadership and Management, Communication, Employee Recruitment, Engagement and Retention, Staff Development, Teaching and Learning and Student Outcomes. Moreover, the analysis of these stated benefits, against the IiP Indicators and

themes, demonstrates there is a direct correlation between the above areas and the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority's (OAAA) Quality Audit Manual Institutional Accreditation: Stage 1 Audit Topics of: 4.1 Governance and Management; 4.2 Student Learning by Coursework Programs; 4.8 Staff and Staff Support Services; 4.9 General Support Services and Facilities (especially communication). Although the selected case studies provide no direct evidence that the IiP Standard had a demonstrably positive impact on the three UK universities'

activities which could correlate with the remaining OAAA Audit Topics, nonetheless, in addition to the positive impact implementation of the Standard may have on Quality Audits, HEIs have benefitted in numerous ways in all aspects of their business processes.

Keywords: Investors in People Standard, OAAA Quality Audit, Educational Quality Management, Enhancing Academic Quality

General Foundation Program in Higher Education Institutions in Oman National Standards: Implementation & Challenges

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Abstract: Following the decision of the Higher Education Council No.13/2008, HE the Minister for Higher Education issued a Ministerial Decision No.72/2008 stating that the General Foundation Program standards should be adopted by all public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operating in the Sultanate of Oman (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA, 2008). The academic year 2008/2009 was the first year for implementing the national academic standards for General Foundation Programs in HEIs. These standards are considered to be a quality enhancement tool (Carroll et al., 2009). However, implementation of such standards and aiming to achieve quality is not an easy task for program providers. HEIs are faced with a number of challenges and there are a number of factors that can affect the quality of the General Foundation Program (GFP) in the HEIs in Oman. The standards' document does not provide a magic wand that enables program providers to achieve target levels and prepare students for their academic studies. Rather, it is a framework that sets the minimum requirements that programs of study are expected to attain and addresses the minimum structural and resourcing requirements (Carroll et al, 2009). Challenges facing HEIs in implementing academic standards for General Foundation Programs are discussed in this paper. The paper will also set a number of recommendations for HEIs for better implementation of GFPs.