



Oman Accreditation Council

**Report of an Audit of
Ibra College of Technology**

May 2010

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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 Accreditation Council (OAC) of Ibra College of Technology (ICT). It comments on ICT'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 ICT's activities, and constructive feedback to ICT to assist with its ongoing improvement efforts.

The Quality Audit commenced with ICT undertaking a self study of its Mission, Vision and systems. The results were summarized in its *Quality Audit Portfolio* (the 'Portfolio'). This document was submitted to the OAC by the due date of 20 December 2008.

The OAC 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 18 March 2009 to consider ICT's Portfolio. Following this, the Audit Panel Chairperson and Executive Officer undertook a planning visit on behalf of the Panel to ICT on 26 April 2009 to clarify a number of 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 ICT's activities. Two submissions were received and considered.

The audit visit took place over 30 May – 1 June 2009. During this time, the Panel spoke with approximately 120 people, including governing authorities, staff, students and external stakeholders. It also visited a selection of venues and reviewed a selection of additional materials.

No information provided after 1 June 2009 (being the last day of the audit visit) was taken into consideration for the purposes of this audit, other than pre-existing items specifically requested by the Panel in advance.

The Report contains a summary of the Panel's findings, together with formal Commendations where good practices have been confirmed, Affirmations where ICT's ongoing quality improvement efforts merit support, and Recommendations where there are significant opportunities or 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 ICT.

The Panel's audit activities and preparation of this Report were governed by regulations set by the OAC Board. This Report was approved for release by the OAC Board on 1 May 2010.

The OAC was established by Royal Decree No. 74/2001. Among its responsibilities is the external review of higher education providers (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman. For further information, visit the OAC website (<http://www.oac.gov.om>). Full details of the Quality Audit process are available in OAC's *HEI Quality Audit Manual* (available from <http://www.oac.gov.om/qa/HEI/>).

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

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

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

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

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

Ibra College of Technology (ICT) is located in the Al-Sharqia region of Oman. It is one of the seven Colleges of Technology (CoT) under the Ministry of Manpower (MoM). These Colleges have been established to provide technological education for post secondary students leading to Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma level qualifications in the fields of Business, Information Technology, and Engineering (Portfolio, p.1). The Higher College of Technology in Muscat is the only College to offer B.Tech qualification. The CoTs are governed by common College Bylaws developed by the MoM. As such, governance and management at ICT are shared between the MoM and the College in relation to specific roles and responsibilities, which are clearly defined in the Bylaws. This relationship creates both unique opportunities (e.g. knowledge transfer, benchmarking, sharing best practice) and challenges (e.g. degree of autonomy) for ICT. Although there are many areas of commonality between the seven Colleges, each College undergoes its own separate quality audit. Therefore, the conclusions in the resulting Report may vary from College to College.

ICT's Portfolio was developed after a self-review process which was based on the ADRI cycle (refer to Appendix B) and a range of specific information was provided. The Portfolio reflects the College's general commitment to quality and improvement. The management of the College is the responsibility of the Dean with the support of the College Council. A number of committees have been established to support the activities of ICT but a clear organizational chart needs to be developed to reflect the reporting lines of the structures within the College. In terms of planning, Strategic Plans are developed and approved centrally by representatives from the CoT and the MoM, and form the basis for the management and planning structure at ICT. ICT has made a good effort to establish its key performance indicators (KPIs); however, many of them are set at a low level and need to be reviewed, externally benchmarked and updated. The College needs to work on aligning its strategic and operational plans and ensure that there is an alignment between what is documented and what is actually happening in practice. ICT is beginning to develop activity and entity review systems, supported by the MoM's Quality Assurance Department (QAD) and now needs to develop a variety of instruments for data collection and analysis.

The Panel found that ICT is making good progress in ensuring a quality education for its students; this includes providing appropriate and timely feedback to students on their work. In terms of teaching quality, the College has plans to develop an educational framework but this has yet to be approved. ICT is in the process of reviewing its Foundation Program in line with Oman's national standards and is also putting in place plans to tackle the issue of plagiarism. ICT recognizes the challenges it faces with regard to graduate employment and is implementing measures to improve in this area.

As teaching is at the core of ICT's activities, there is limited research activity at the College. None of the programs at ICT require students to undertake research as a subject of study. The Panel found that staff members at the College engage in limited research activities, and that these are primarily driven by individuals rather than by an institutional research agenda. The College needs to ensure that its Vision (which refers to research) and strategic objectives are aligned. ICT recognizes the importance of building a strong relationship with industries and the community at large and has identified it as a way to contribute to the future development of Omani society as a whole. Although one of the College's strategic goals is to foster a positive relationship with its external stakeholders, ICT needs to establish an overarching plan to co-ordinate its activities in this area. The Panel recognizes that the College has had

success in establishing relationships with some industry, for example through procuring investment from Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Company for learning resources. The external stakeholders interviewed by the Panel appreciated the active role that ICT plays in the community. The Panel also acknowledges the efforts that ICT is taking to engage its alumni, such as developing an alumni database. However, these activities need to be part of an overall plan.

The College offers a broad range of academic support services to students through various centers and departments within ICT. The Panel noted, however, that the various centers and departments work separately and concluded that the approach may be more effective if there was an overarching operational plan for academic support services, developed by all the stakeholders involved. The College is taking steps to improve its library provision and to provide more information technology (IT) support through its helpdesk. There is an academic advising system in place but this system needs to be more formalized through the introduction of a College-wide handbook. The Panel supports ICT's intention to review its current provision of student support services and encourages the College to provide further opportunities for students to contribute to the decision-making process. In all support areas, the College would benefit from a more robust data collection and analysis process.

The Panel found that there was a need for an overall human resources management plan in order to underpin ICT's approach in this area. As there are a number of different parties involved in the recruitment and selection process, ICT needs to play a more active role in order to ensure that its staffing requirements are met. The Panel heard that a staff induction process was in place and that many new staff appreciated this. The College needs to review how different aspects of human resources are handled across departments and ensure that there is a consistent approach throughout the College. ICT also needs to ensure that staff promotion is managed equitably and that the staff grievance and severance approaches are reviewed. The Panel supports the College's efforts to align its performance appraisal and professional development activities.

The College recognises that general support services and facilities are an integral part of its overall institutional development and the Panel supports ICT's efforts to develop new facilities on campus in order to meet the needs of its growing student population.

It is acknowledged that this Report has been published some time after the audit visit which took place at the end of May 2009. The College may already have responded to some of the Recommendations and Affirmations listed below.

Summary of Commendations

A formal Commendation recognises an instance of particularly good practice.

1. The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for its active involvement in the development of the Strategic Plan and for the inclusive process used to develop appropriate sub-goals for the College. 13
2. The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for its efforts to provide appropriate and timely feedback to students on their work in order to improve the overall student learning experience. 21
3. The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for the diligence of its academic assessment and academic security processes. 22
4. The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for the success of its fundraising efforts to equip its laboratories which has improved the student learning environment. 26
5. The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for establishing its IT helpdesk and its online IT maintenance system to more effectively support users. 29

6. The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for holding monthly student forums which are appreciated by students, used effectively as a mechanism for responding to student issues and complaints and act as drivers for change..... 32
7. The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology's induction program for students for effectively supporting new students and providing a positive start to their involvement in the College community. 33

Summary of Affirmations

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

1. The Oman Accreditation Council agrees that Ibra College of Technology needs to review and update its key performance indicators and supports its efforts to progressively set more challenging targets..... 13
2. The Oman Accreditation Council agrees with Ibra College of Technology that external input is important to ensure program relevance and supports its efforts to incorporate external stakeholder feedback into the curriculum..... 19
3. The Oman Accreditation Council agrees with Ibra College of Technology that its Foundation program needs to be reviewed in line with Oman's National General Foundation Program Standards and supports its efforts in this area 20
4. The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's actions to increase the level of alumni involvement in College activities and its plans for establishing an alumni association. 27
5. The Oman Accreditation Council agrees that Ibra College of Technology's library resources need to be improved and supports its initiatives in terms of staffing, hard copy and online collections to meet the needs of staff and students..... 29
6. The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's efforts to regularly review and improve its student services provision..... 31
7. The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's efforts to address and improve the employment outcomes of its graduates, through the introduction of its Careers Fair and other measures to increase employment. 34
8. The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's efforts to procure a specific budget for student activities. 36
9. The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's initiatives towards improving professional development for staff and linking it to a formal staff performance appraisal process..... 40
10. The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's ongoing construction of new facilities on the campus in order to meet the needs of the College community..... 42
11. The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College's efforts to improve its approach to marketing to raise its profile in the local community..... 42

Summary of Recommendations

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

1. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of its governance and management structures..... 11
2. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop a comprehensive organizational chart showing reporting lines, committees and communication channels and that this chart is communicated to all stakeholders and reviewed regularly to ensure that it accurately reflects the College's organizational structure..... 12
3. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a systematic planning process which aligns strategic, operational and resources planning and is regularly reviewed..... 14
4. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology align its financial management process to support its strategic and operational objectives..... 14
5. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a consistent set of policies together with a policy management system which is communicated throughout the institution and regularly reviewed. 15
6. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a systematic approach to the collection and analysis of data to support its internal review systems..... 16
7. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a formal student grievance policy and procedures which are communicated throughout the College. 16
8. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop an overall health and safety plan which is communicated to the College community and is regularly reviewed. 17
9. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology ensure that learning outcomes for all courses are clearly linked to graduate attributes and that the attainment of these are included as part of the assessment process..... 18
10. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a systematic approach to dealing with plagiarism which is subject to regular review 21
11. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a system to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its 'On the Job' provision..... 21
12. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology address the issue of student retention and develop strategies to improve in this area..... 23
13. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology review its vision in order to ensure it aligns with the College's strategic direction in the area of research..... 25
14. The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology establish an overall plan for engaging with industry, employers and the community to enhance all areas of activities in line with its strategic goals..... 26

15.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement an overall plan for academic support services which is supported by adequate resources.....	28
16.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop a comprehensive guide for academic advising for teaching staff and students to ensure a consistent College-wide approach in this area.	30
17.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology improve student involvement in decision making and policy development on matters affecting them.	32
18.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology systematically monitor the effectiveness of its policies and processes for managing student misconduct and provide further support to prevent re-offence.	33
19.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology be more proactive in monitoring and, where justified, intervening to ensure that the arrangements for student accommodation are operating satisfactorily and that students' needs are being met.....	34
20.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a comprehensive, long-term human resources management plan which includes all related functional areas, is aligned with its mission and strategic plan and is reviewed on regular basis.....	37
21.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology take on a more active role in recruitment and selection of staff, to ensure that its staffing profile is aligned with the College's strategic goals and operational plans.....	38
22.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop a planned, consistent and inclusive approach to staff induction, promotion, grievance and severance which is consistently implemented and regularly reviewed.	41
23.	The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology ensure that all relevant communication and documentation are accessible to all stakeholders.....	43

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Ibra College of Technology (ICT) is one of seven public Colleges of Technology (CoT) in Oman overseen by the Ministry of Manpower (MoM). These Colleges are governed by common College Bylaws developed by the MoM. As such, governance and management at ICT are shared between the MoM and the College in relation to specific roles and responsibilities, which are clearly defined in the Bylaws. This relationship creates both unique opportunities (e.g. knowledge transfer, benchmarking, sharing best practice) and challenges (e.g. degree of autonomy) for ICT.

Strategic Plans are developed and approved centrally by representatives from the CoT and the MoM and form the basis for the management and planning structure at ICT. The latest Strategic Plan for ICT (2009-2012) was approved in March 2009 and will be implemented from September 2009.

The College's first Strategic Goal is to "achieve excellence in governance and administration, and act at all time according to strong ethical principles" (Portfolio, p.4). The governance structures are shared by all the CoT and supervised at the MoM level. The management of the College is the responsibility of the Dean with the support of the College Council. A number of committees have been established to support the activities of ICT but a clear organizational chart needs to be developed to reflect the reporting lines of the structures within the College. Individual departments have developed operational planning mechanisms and ICT should build on these to develop a consistent College-wide approach. The strategic and operational plans need to be aligned with financial resources. ICT is beginning to develop activity and entity review systems, supported by the MoM's Quality Assurance Department (QAD) and now needs to develop a variety of instruments for data collection and analysis. ICT has made good efforts to establish its key performance indicators (KPIs); however, they need to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

1.1 *Mission, Vision and Values*

The ICT Strategic Plan 2006-2008 states that the Vision of the College is:

"to become the "College of Choice" for students and industry by providing demonstrably high quality teaching, learning and research that makes a significant contribution to ongoing national development" (Portfolio, p.4).

The Mission Statement focuses on achieving and sustaining "a strong reputation for excellence in learning and teaching" (Portfolio, p.4). The Vision, Mission and Values of ICT are identical to those of all the other CoT in Oman, and set out by the MoM, together with the Colleges' objectives. While this consistency and uniformity at the national strategic level facilitates effective management and planning, it also poses a challenge for the individual Colleges in developing into a distinctive "College of Choice".

The Panel heard that the Mission, Vision and Values were reviewed during the MoM workshop conducted with representatives from all of the CoT in 2005. The Panel noted that CoT had an opportunity to participate in this process and provide their input into defining and evaluating their joint mission, vision and values. Although ICT shares the same core Values, Mission and Vision as the other CoTs in Oman, ICT should tailor its strategic approaches to fit its own context and available resources.

1.2 Governance

As per the College Bylaws (issued under Ministerial Decision 72/2004), ICT is governed by a Board of Trustees (BoT) which is responsible for all seven CoT in Oman. The BoT is chaired by the Minister of Manpower and includes the Undersecretary for Vocational Training; representatives from Ministries and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Director General for Technological Education; two College Deans and representatives from industry.

The seven Deans of the CoTs are all members of the central MoM Technical Committee, which is chaired by the Director General for Technological Education. The Technical Committee looks at issues arising from the implementation of programs and the practical requirements and makes recommendations to the Undersecretary. The College Council is responsible for the day to day management of ICT (see section 1.3 below).

ICT stated that the “BoT is responsible for setting up the strategies and policies in the College [...], discussing periodical reports, promoting academic research, and encouraging academic cooperation” (Portfolio, p.9). The Panel did not find evidence to support this statement as there was no indication of the BoT’s involvement in setting up policies or procedures, in the recruitment of Deans, or in developing the Strategic Plan for ICT. The Panel found that most of these issues are dealt with by the MoM directly. However, the Panel did note the specific intentions of the BoT to take on a more active role in the governance of the CoT but this intention needs to be formalized and supported at the highest levels of the organization. The Panel concluded that mechanisms need to be developed and implemented in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the governance and management structures of the College.

Recommendation 1

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of its governance and management structures.

1.3 Management

According to the College Bylaws, the operational management of ICT rests with the College Council which “will meet upon invitation from the Chairman, at least once a month or whenever deemed necessary” (Bylaws, p.23). The Panel heard that, as external members of the College Council found it difficult to attend regular meetings in Ibra, a College Academic Council (CAC) was formed in March 2007.

The CAC has the same membership categories as the College Council, excluding the external members. Therefore, the two Councils are essentially the same management body. While this arrangement may be more practical for ICT, the limited participation by external members has implications for the effectiveness of the College Council, particularly in relation to their responsibility of “Promoting the college relationship with the local community and private sector” (Bylaws, p.24). The Panel acknowledged the reasons for having two Councils but this situation could be reviewed in the future to avoid duplication of effort.

The ICT organizational chart provided in the Portfolio (p.10) is based on the College structure set out in the Bylaws and aims to specify the roles and responsibilities at ICT (Portfolio, p.13). The Panel found, however, that the organizational chart does not reflect the actual structure at ICT. For example, it does not show the CAC or the committees that exist within the College. The College should consider developing a single, complete and consistent organizational chart which is made available to all staff members at ICT.

In addition to the CAC, a number of committees have been established to deal with different functions at ICT. The ICT QA Manual states that College committees are sub-committees of the

College Council. It also lists a number of other committees formed at ICT. The Panel did not find a specific document which defines the committee structure and committee reporting lines at ICT. In addition, the 'terms of reference' for some committees considered by the Panel (e.g. the Health and Safety Committee) provide only membership details or decisions to establish a committee, but not complete terms of reference. The College needs to address the discrepancy between what is documented and what actually happens in practice in order to support its management structures.

Recommendation 2

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop a comprehensive organizational chart showing reporting lines, committees and communication channels and that this chart is communicated to all stakeholders and reviewed regularly to ensure that it accurately reflects the College's organizational structure.

The CAC meets on a monthly basis to discuss a variety of academic and administrative issues. The Panel reviewed the agendas and minutes of the CAC meetings but found limited evidence of CAC decisions and actions being filtered through to lower organizational levels. For example, specific action points for departments from CAC meetings were not found in department meeting minutes. The College needs to improve the flow of information from decision-making bodies to staff in order to create a quality culture of inclusiveness.

As mentioned previously, ICT is governed by the Bylaws set out by the MoM. While ICT is responsible for the operational aspects, the MoM sets the overall strategic framework, provides the funding and handles staff recruitment for all of the Colleges, amongst other things. In order for this relationship to be effective, close co-operation, regular communication and alignment between ICT and the MoM are required. In interviews, the Panel heard that ICT has limited autonomy, that better communication is needed between the MoM and ICT, and that the BoT needs to have a more active role (see section 1.2). The post of Assistant Dean for Administration and Financial Affairs (ADFA) had been vacant for eight months prior to the Panel's visit. Such delays in the appointment of a senior member of staff have a potentially negative impact on the overall management of the College. The Panel is of the view that the growth of ICT in the long term may be affected unless these relationship issues between ICT and the MoM are addressed.

1.4 Institutional Affiliations for Programs and Quality Assurance

As mentioned earlier, ICT is one of seven CoTs. The MoM's Quality Assurance Department (QAD) has an active role in evaluating the effectiveness of ICT's programs and operations. This role and the relationship between the QAD and ICT are discussed in section 1.10 below. Apart from this, ICT has no institutional affiliations with other HEIs or accreditation bodies that impact upon its provision of programs or operations.

1.5 Strategic Plan

The CoTs have a common Strategic Plan (2006-2008) which was developed through the MoM's QAD and in consultation with representatives from the seven Colleges. The Plan has nine Strategic Goals (Portfolio, p.4). At the time of the audit visit, ICT presented the latest Strategic Plan (2009-2012) which was approved in March 2009 for implementation from September 2009. Eight of the nine strategic goals are as they were in the previous Strategic Plan. The goal relating to developing an applied research profile has been removed. For the 2009-2012 Strategic Plan, each College will develop their own sub-goals, strategies and KPIs, as required by their own set of circumstances.

In a number of interviews with staff members and in a variety of documents, the Panel found evidence of high levels of involvement from ICT staff in developing the sub-goals for the 2009-

2012 Strategic Plan, indicating that an inclusive process was used. ICT takes full advantage of the process set out by the MoM and ensures that its staff members have an active role in developing the strategic sub-goals appropriate for the College.

Commendation 1

The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for its active involvement in the development of the Strategic Plan and for the inclusive process used to develop appropriate sub-goals for the College.

ICT has set different KPIs in its Strategic Plan to measure the level of achievement of the sub-goals in the different areas of activity. The Panel heard that the College Quality Committee sets the KPIs but it was not clear to the Panel on what basis the KPIs were set as there was no evidence of external benchmarking. The College's QA Manual indicates that there is an intention to exchange performance data with other HEIs to support benchmarking. The Panel supports ICT's initiative in developing a benchmarking agreement with the Nizwa CoT in the near future.

The QAD provides feedback to ICT about its KPIs, although the Panel was informed that, as the process is relatively new, there is no mechanism in place to compare KPIs across all of the Colleges. The Panel heard that initially lower KPIs were set in order to enable these to be achieved. In interviews with a number of staff members, it was evident to the Panel that they recognized the need to set more challenging KPIs progressively in order to raise their performance standards and better reflect their commitment to quality. There is already evidence of this in the new Strategic Plan (2009-2012) which shows that higher KPI targets have been identified compared to the previous Plan (2006-2008).

Affirmation 1

The Oman Accreditation Council agrees that Ibra College of Technology needs to review and update its key performance indicators and supports its efforts to progressively set more challenging targets.

1.6 Operational Planning

ICT states that "different departments...produced their operational plans based on the College strategic plan, stating clearly how each of the department [*sic*] intends to achieve the various strategic goals of the College, with clear KPIs" (Portfolio, p.11). Nonetheless, during the audit visit, it became evident that the process for developing and aligning operational plans with the Strategic Plan is not well defined. The cascading of goals from the strategic level to the operational level was not carried out using a systematic planning process. ICT could consider including mechanisms to regularly review achievement against these goals to ensure that the operational plans are aligned with the Strategic Plan.

The Panel considered a number of department action plans and heard that the purpose of these plans was to outline the weekly or day-by-day actions that needed to be carried out over a period of six months. It was not clear to the Panel how and when these action plans were reviewed. To develop an effective planning process, ICT needs to review its planning framework in order to align its approach with actual practice.

The ICT QA Manual states that each HoD produces a standardized annual report for the Dean which forms the basis of a new College Action Plan. However, the sample report reviewed by the Panel was not in a format compatible with the QA Manual template or an operational plan. This hinders the planning process as a clear relationship between goals and outcomes is difficult to establish due to the use of inconsistent planning instruments. ICT recognizes this, as it states that "ICT will design a new format for generating the Annual Reports based on the quality cycle"

(Portfolio, p.15). This needs to be part of an overall review of the College's operational planning processes.

Recommendation 3

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a systematic planning process which aligns strategic, operational and resources planning and is regularly reviewed.

1.7 Financial Management

ICT's budget is approved by the MoM which allocates funds to all of the CoT based on "the needs analysis, approved development plans, and the previous year actual expenditures" (Portfolio, p.11). Funding is allocated according to pre-specified 'bands' (relating to the different areas of College activities). The Panel heard that, to some extent, funds from one band could be used to support activities in another band, with prior approval from the MoM, suggesting a limited level of flexibility in the financial management process. No funds are allocated for student activities (see section 7.10 below). All financial transactions are audited and reviewed by independent auditors who are appointed by the MoM. The Panel was informed that the financial planning process is not aligned with the academic year (September to June), and that funds sometimes 'run out' by October as the end of the financial year approaches. In this instance, ICT requests additional funds from the MoM or raises funds through other means such as fundraising activities and grants (Portfolio, p.14).

Each department at ICT puts forward their funding requirements for the financial year, which are routed via the CAC and the Dean to the MoM. The Panel was informed that these requirements are linked to the relevant strategic and operational goals. However, it was not made clear how this was ensured. For example, the financial management KPIs (Portfolio, p.14) do not reflect ICT's plans and goals as specified in the documentation reviewed by the Panel nor was there an explicit alignment between financial resources and the strategic and operational plans of ICT. The College needs to consider how to address this issue.

Recommendation 4

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology align its financial management process to support its strategic and operational objectives.

1.8 Risk Management

ICT has identified possible risk areas and is making efforts to address these. ICT also aims to develop a "comprehensive risk management plan" (Portfolio, p.15) and makes specific references to the risk management of technology infrastructure, which is critical for their technical mission. The Panel supports the initiatives planned by ICT in this area and its early efforts to develop a risk management plan.

1.9 Policy Management

ICT states that it "prepares different policies from the approved strategic plan to reach the target" (Portfolio, p.12). The Panel heard that Bylaws were used as reference point for policy issues. Reference is made in the QA Manual to the availability of policies but the Panel found that policy management at ICT is at an embryonic stage with a complete policy framework yet to be developed. The Panel concluded that a comprehensive policy management system needs to be implemented at ICT and properly disseminated across the institution. This is an area that the College needs to address.

Recommendation 5

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a consistent set of policies together with a policy management system which is communicated throughout the institution and regularly reviewed.

1.10 Entity and Activity Review Systems

In order to review its activities, ICT has an internal Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and the MoM QAD also plays an active role in reviewing the College's activities on a regular basis. The QAD conducts regular, scheduled visits to ICT, and provides a detailed feedback report to the College Dean, which is discussed at CAC meetings. In addition to regular audits, the QAD is responsible for providing training in quality processes to all of the Colleges. The Panel found evidence that this takes place in practice, through interviews with ICT and QAD staff members, as well as supporting documents, such as meeting minutes.

Although ICT claims that the institutional quality process is relatively new to the College, the Panel found a high level of awareness about quality assurance and the audit across the institution. The Panel also considered documents, presentations and other supporting documentation which show that strong efforts were made to communicate the quality message across the organization. It was noted that the quality practices are at an early stage and heavily reliant on support from QAD. The Panel heard that QAD visited ICT three times in the last year and provided guidance for the preparation of the ICT Portfolio. In interviews, the Panel noted that staff members were able to discuss quality, but not give examples of how the quality process operates at ICT and what it means to them in practice. The QA Manual was referred to by staff members as a document they used, but, as described elsewhere, the approach described in the manual at times differed from the practices observed by the Panel.

One of ICT's strategies is to "require an annual self-assessment report from units/departments" (Portfolio, p.14). This strategy does not appear to have been fully successful as evidence states that "actions have been identified and implemented but cannot be measured according to the targets" (Portfolio, p.14). ICT needs to take steps to ensure that, in addition to QAD audits, regular self-reviews are conducted throughout the institution to measure the achievement of strategic and operational goals.

The Panel examined the process by which data is collected and analyzed in order to measure whether KPI targets were achieved. While survey instruments are used primarily with staff and students, in some instances the data capture process was not clearly defined (Portfolio, p.14). Furthermore, the Panel found that different instruments (using different scales) were used to measure similar outcomes. The Panel found some degree of overlap in different surveys, which poses a problem for analyzing the data collected and feeding it back into the quality improvement cycle to ensure 'closing the loop' and ongoing improvements. Although claims were made in interviews that data collected is analyzed and reviewed, the Panel did not find evidence in the documents of such analysis and revision taking place (e.g. results of student survey on student services contained no analysis).

To ensure a sound foundation for ICT's decision making, a systematic data collection process is required which may include a list of planned surveys (or other data collection methods) for each year and an indication of how the results of these will be analysed and linked back to specific goals and KPIs in the strategic and operational plans. This process will need to be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis.

Recommendation 6

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a systematic approach to the collection and analysis of data to support its internal review systems.

1.11 Student Grievance Process

ICT claims to follow an “open door policy for student grievances” and that “ICT conducts meetings with students regarding their grievances” (Portfolio, p.12). The related KPI (Portfolio, p.15) indicates that monthly meetings are held with students and that “80% of valid student cases were addressed”. No opportunities for improvement were identified by ICT in this area.

In interviews with staff and students, the Panel heard that a monthly meeting (student forum) was held for students to air their general complaints (see section 7.3). Although this forum was felt to be successful for dealing with general areas of complaint, there was no specific information available to show how the individual student grievance process operates, how it is documented, how the outcomes are communicated back to students and how it is reviewed.

Student complaint and grievance procedures follow those laid out in the Bylaws but it appeared to the Panel that these might be further developed. The Panel suggests that the College might give consideration to the distinction between everyday student complaints and suggestions – which it handles responsively - and more serious individual concerns and grievances, which it may not handle as effectively. ICT needs to develop a formal policy for student grievances in place of the ad hoc approach currently used at ICT. Minutes of the CAC meeting state the need for student grievance procedure. This needs to be preceded by a comprehensive policy which is appropriately communicated to all students at ICT.

Recommendation 7

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a formal student grievance policy and procedures which are communicated throughout the College.

1.12 Health and Safety

ICT states that faculty members are responsible for “ensuring a healthy environment” and that the Health and Safety Committee (HSC) conducts periodic inspections (Portfolio, p.13). Attention to health and safety is also set out in the QA Manual as a requirement in the College. ICT states that an internal inspection of labs and workshops by the internal QAC was not achieved (Portfolio, p.15).

The Panel viewed a number of course files in the Engineering Department, which contain comprehensive Health and Safety information for students. The Panel was also provided with a folder containing health and safety reports and the 2007/2008 Health and Safety Manual. The HSC was appointed in October 2008 but no terms of reference were provided. According to ICT (Portfolio, p.16) the committee was “reconstituted” in 2008/2009 but there was insufficient evidence of its level of activity to date.

Although there is evidence to suggest that issues of health and safety are addressed by different departments, a single health and safety plan which outlines the activities of the HSC is needed to integrate all of the different reports, manuals and procedures in this area. This is identified as an area of improvement (Portfolio, p.16) but ICT needs to now take action to implement this initiative.

Recommendation 8

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop an overall health and safety plan which is communicated to the College community and is regularly reviewed.

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

ICT does not oversee any associated entities.

2 STUDENT LEARNING BY COURSEWORK PROGRAMS

The College offers three specialist programs in Business, Engineering and IT, all currently taught to Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma level. A Foundation Program is also offered through the English Language Center (ELC). Student learning is the responsibility of the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA), who reports to the Dean, and according to the College Bylaws, is responsible for ensuring that the programs are pursued through the HoDs.

One of ICT's Strategic Goals is to:

“Offer to all students high quality teaching and learning opportunities in line with the requirements of the labor market so as to provide society with graduates who are skilled, knowledgeable, confident and capable problem solvers”
(Portfolio, p.17)

As previously indicated, academic departments are responsible for translating the Strategic Plan into operational plans (see section 1.6). Action plans are developed by the departments in order to measure performance in relation to the strategic goals. The Panel found that ICT is making good progress in ensuring a quality education for its students, including providing appropriate and timely feedback to students on their work and through the diligence of its academic invigilation procedures. ICT is in the process of reviewing its Foundation Program in line with Oman's national standards and is also putting in place plans to tackle the issue of plagiarism. ICT recognizes the challenges it faces with regard to graduate employment and is implementing measures to improve in this area. There are areas, such as in monitoring student retention, where systematic data collection and application of a quality improvement framework, such as the ADRI method, would further enhance ICT's quality management efforts.

2.1 Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Objectives

ICT's aim is to impart the desired attributes to the graduates so that they are competent to be employed (Portfolio, p.18). The intended graduate attributes are presented in the 2009-2012 Strategic Plan (p.79) and are common for all seven CoT. The Panel reviewed course materials and found that the learning outcomes of these courses were not linked to the College's graduate attributes. The College claims to assess graduate attributes internally and externally (Portfolio, p.26) although there was no evidence that this assessment is part of an overall evaluation process. Although ICT recognizes that it could better incorporate the graduate attributes into the curriculum and provided examples of the ongoing process (Portfolio, p.26), this area needs to be systematically addressed throughout the College.

Recommendation 9

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology ensure that learning outcomes for all courses are clearly linked to graduate attributes and that the attainment of these are included as part of the assessment process.

2.2 Curriculum

ICT offers specialized programs through three academic departments: Engineering, Business and IT (Portfolio, p.19) with programs at Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma level. ICT claims that its programs are aligned with its strategic goals and the requirements of the labour market to provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities.

As ICT only offers programs to Higher Diploma level, a student who wishes to progress to a B.Tech degree has to transfer to the Higher College of Technology in Muscat, which is the only CoT offering degree-level qualifications. This sometimes poses problems for students whose families do not wish them to leave home.

The current programs offered in ICT were developed by a committee involving academic and industrial experts appointed by the MoM (Portfolio, p.19). This committee held a workshop in 2003, collected input from the market and industry, and spent one and a half years designing the programs. This was to ensure that the programs offered were consistent with the requirements of the labour market. External stakeholders were consulted on curriculum, took part in a graduate survey, and provided input on the market needs. Specialisation Program Committees (representing all CoT) are in place in order to review the content and assessment of individual courses and programs. Proposed changes can be forwarded to the MoM for comment and/or approval (Portfolio, p.17). The Panel was informed that there was a degree of flexibility for each College to adapt courses for local needs. The College has sought feedback from external stakeholders on the quality of its graduates (see section 2.11) and the Panel supports ICT's efforts to analyse and incorporate this feedback into the curriculum.

Affirmation 2

The Oman Accreditation Council agrees with Ibra College of Technology that external input is important to ensure program relevance and supports its efforts to incorporate external stakeholder feedback into the curriculum.

In their meetings with the Panel, students expressed their satisfaction with the curriculum. They were all given a course outline at the outset of each course, which the teacher went through. However, there was a concern that for some courses the full syllabus could not be completed within the semester, so the exam questions were adjusted accordingly. The College needs to investigate the underlying problems regarding this issue and take steps to address them, rather than only adjusting the assessment. The learning outcomes and syllabi for individual courses need reviewing to ensure that there is sufficient time to cover all the material in line with the overall learning outcomes of the program.

2.3 Student Entry Standards

Newly enrolled students sit a placement test and, based on the score, are placed at different levels in the Foundation program (Portfolio, p.21). As per the College Bylaws, students are eligible to enroll in their specialisation if they successfully pass the Foundation program and achieve the required marks for TOEFL. It appears that only English language ability is tested to determine which program students enter. The Panel was informed there is a plan to add speaking skills to the placement test, which is primarily grammar-based. The College could consider exploring adding other criteria apart from TOEFL scores for pre-selection of students entering Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma programs.

ICT states that certain criteria are set for distributing students to different disciplines within the academic departments (Portfolio, p.21). Students are able to prioritize their choices through specialisation forms. Based on the students' performance on the Foundation program, they are allotted the specialisation of their choice subject to availability of places and order of priority. However, according to the Bylaws, a student requires a specific TOEFL score to progress to Higher Diploma level on exit from the Foundation program. The focus on English skills only may need to be reconsidered in light of the new Foundation program learning outcomes (see section 2.4).

Although it is appreciated that student entry standards are standardized across all Colleges, there were no results presented in the Portfolio in relation to student entry standards. The College

plans to carry out a benchmarking exercise (Portfolio, p.31) and could consider including the area of student entry standards in order to compare its performance with other Colleges.

2.4 *Foundation Program*

The Foundation program offered at the ELC consists of four levels; Pre-elementary, Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. ELC also trains the students for the TOEFL exam, which is a prerequisite for entering into post Foundation programs. The students are allocated to the different streams of the Foundation program based on the results of the placement test. The curriculum and textbooks for all levels of the Foundation program have been approved by the central English Department at the MoM and distributed to all the Colleges of Technology.

The Panel was informed that the ICT students find the English language requirements of the ICT Foundation program challenging. A number of Foundation students thought that a further semester was needed to achieve the required outcomes. The ELC participated in a workshop involving all CoT to review the provisions of the English language program and evidence was provided to show that plans to add a new level to the Foundation program was in preparation. The draft proposal also shows how the College plans to align its Foundation program to the national standards that have recently been developed.

Affirmation 3

The Oman Accreditation Council agrees with Ibra College of Technology that its Foundation program needs to be reviewed in line with Oman's National General Foundation Program Standards and supports its efforts in this area

2.5 *Teaching Quality*

The College claims that: “the teaching quality is achieved through proper planning, sharing of best practices, use of modern technology and conducting student surveys” (Portfolio, p.21). The Panel was informed that a plan has been prepared through the College Council to develop an educational framework but has not yet been approved by the MoM. ICT does prepare Academic Year Plans which, once approved by the MoM, are cascaded down to weekly teaching plans (Portfolio, p.22).

The principal measurement of teaching quality is through student questionnaires, which are administered each semester for each course delivered. The results are consolidated by the HoDs and transmitted to the ADAA for discussion with the staff as part of the appraisal process. Overall, there is general satisfaction with the quality of teaching amongst students; as mentioned in Affirmation 1, the College needs to review its KPIs in order to provide more robust data on its teaching and learning. There is a plan to benchmark student satisfaction with other CoT (Portfolio, p.27). However, to date this has not been achieved.

The courses are allotted to the lecturers based on their expertise in the respective fields. The lecturers are also given an opportunity to choose the courses they would like to teach during a semester through the course preference form (Portfolio, p.22). Each lecturer is required to maintain a course file for each of the courses they handle, which are updated each semester. The Panel reviewed a number of course files which indicated that clear teaching records are kept.

Within the teaching programs, the students are given feedback on individual pieces of coursework. The Panel was informed that this is normally delivered within one week, and sometimes in a matter of days. The students considered the feedback to be of good quality and, in the majority of cases, delivered in a timely manner. The Panel noted the considerable efforts

being applied by the College to enhance the student learning experience by providing appropriate and timely feedback.

Commendation 2

The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for its efforts to provide appropriate and timely feedback to students on their work in order to improve the overall student learning experience.

2.6 Plagiarism

ICT has developed a plagiarism policy which is available on the ICT website. A workshop on academic integrity and tackling plagiarism was conducted for all the teaching staff of ICT in June 2008, and workshops are regularly held for students. ICT does not, however, appear to have a policy or plan on how to deal with plagiarism once detected. The staff confirmed that there is a need for anti-plagiarism software to assist them in the detection of plagiarism.

Reviewing the evidence available, the Panel concluded that ICT needs to develop a more systematic approach to monitoring cases of plagiarism and the consistency with which they are handled throughout the College. ICT has identified this as an area for improvement (Portfolio, p.31) but needs to develop further initiatives to address the issues in this area.

Recommendation 10

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a systematic approach to dealing with plagiarism which is subject to regular review

2.7 Student Placements

All students (apart from those studying to Certificate level) undertake eight weeks of On the Job Training (OJT) in accordance with the College Bylaws in order to develop the necessary workplace skills (Portfolio, p.23). ICT has an OJT Department which, along with the academic departments, the College claims is committed to finding appropriate placements pertaining to the students' field of study. The College has to make strenuous efforts to comply with this Bylaw, which it does, but it is often difficult due to a shortage of OJT places. The placements are chosen on the basis of specialisation and closeness to Ibra but much of the industry in Oman is centered in Muscat or in Sur, which is around 150 kms away. The Panel was informed that, overall, 85% of students have OJT experience before the end of their program, and any delays are often due to time delays with confirmation by industry. However, all students complete OJT before they graduate.

The students interviewed by the Panel appreciated the OJT program, and thought it gave them very valuable workplace skills. The employers interviewed by the Panel were all supportive of this form of training. However, the results of the OJT program only show student numbers and, as yet, there does not appear to be evidence of measuring the effectiveness of OJT and the Enhancement Training Program. The College is strongly encouraged to develop strategies for doing so.

Recommendation 11

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a system to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its 'On the Job' provision.

2.8 *Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation*

The general guidelines for assessment are laid down in the College Bylaws. The College uses a range of assessment methods including quizzes, assignments, tests, practical exams, presentations and viva voce examinations (Portfolio, p.23). The type of assessment for each course is standardized, depending on the course make up i.e. theory-based or practical-based and in line with the learning outcomes of the courses. As mentioned in Recommendation 9, graduate attributes also need to be considered when assessment tasks are designed.

All students are provided with feedback after each quiz, test or assignment. After the assessment, the test papers are distributed to the students to enable them to verify their marks and to understand their mistakes. The College claims that an open door policy is followed for any clarification the student may require with respect to the marks they have received for a particular test (Portfolio, p.23). The students confirmed that they are satisfied with the feedback mechanisms.

Evaluation of assessment methods is done periodically. Questionnaires used for course feedback contain questions on the assessment method followed for that course (Portfolio, p.24). Surveys carried out by ICT indicate that the students are satisfied with the assessment methods followed in the College. However, there is, as yet, no benchmarking process for assessment methods, and an inter-departmental benchmarking exercise is planned for 2009-10. The Panel supports the College's efforts to evaluate its assessment methods.

2.9 *Academic Security and Invigilation*

According to ICT, there is a comprehensive and rigorous examination preparation process in place (Portfolio, p.24). The Examination Committee monitors the assessment and evaluative process in the academic departments. This moderation process is fully documented. As per the Bylaws, students are allowed to appeal for review of their results within three days after the results are formally announced. Staff confirmed that the process for examination paper preparation and moderation is a regular process. There is currently no benchmarking required by the MoM, but the College is developing a process, and there is a plan for the possible introduction of external examiners in 2009-10.

It is stated in the Portfolio that strict actions are taken for academic malpractice, and data for 2007-8 was provided (Portfolio, p.25). Evidence was given that the College has taken significant steps to counter cheating in examinations on the initiative of the Dean, including enhanced invigilation and extensive closed-circuit television (CCTV) in examination venues. The Panel concluded that this was an area of strength in the College, and ICT should be commended for this.

Commendation 3

The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for the diligence of its academic assessment and academic security processes.

The Panel was of the opinion that the Disciplinary Committee could play a greater role in monitoring academic malpractice and cheating in exams in order to monitor the long-term effectiveness of the College's current approaches in this area.

2.10 *Student Retention and Progression*

The programs at ICT are structured so that the students exit the program at various levels based on their performance. This is consistent with the objective of the program to supply skilled labor to various segments of industry (Portfolio, p.25).

To avoid students staying in a particular level for a lengthy, possibly unproductive period, two probation warnings are issued. As per the College Bylaws, in case of failing to achieve the requirement of a GPA>2.0 (out of 4) after the second probation, the student exits the program (Portfolio, p.25).

The data submitted on student progression (Portfolio, p.29) shows high dropout rates. However, there is no detailed breakdown as to the reason for this. The Panel concludes that ICT should perform a detailed analysis of the dropouts, and formulate policies to improve student retention.

Recommendation 12

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology address the issue of student retention and develop strategies to improve in this area.

2.11 Graduate Destinations and Employability

The KPIs that ICT has set on student employability have overall targets of 80% employability for males and 50% for females (Portfolio, p.30), whereas the employment rates were 70% and 16% respectively. There are significantly different employment rates between different specialisations. It was stated that the reason for the low rates in Business and IT is due to the relatively larger numbers of female students (see section 7.5 below).

The meeting with employers showed that they generally regard the College as producing good quality students, and one regarded the higher Diploma students more useful to the business than many graduates. Although employers reported some problems with the standard of English and commitment to work, there was a shared view that there had been progress made over the past five years, especially in the areas of communication and academic skills. The Panel was informed by staff that efforts are being made to obtain feedback from employers and this is consolidated by the HoDs. The College needs to develop a more robust mechanism to collect feedback from employers. This would complement ICT's intention to incorporate external stakeholders' feedback into the curriculum (see Affirmation 2). The Panel noted that there is an initiative being developed to benchmark employment rates between the CoTs in order to evaluate trends and establish a graduate follow-up department, linked to the MoM.

3 STUDENT LEARNING BY RESEARCH PROGRAMS

At the time of the quality audit, ICT did not offer research programs *per se* so this section is not applicable in this Report.

4 STAFF RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

Teaching is at the core of ICT's activities, and therefore there is limited research activity at the College. The Portfolio states that "ICT, being a public institution at the College level, is currently focusing only on teaching and learning" (Portfolio, p.32). Although ICT has not been "involved actively in research and consultancy [...] the capabilities of taking up research and consultancy works in the future have been identified" (Portfolio, p.32).

The College Vision refers to research as a function of the Colleges and the 2006-2008 Strategic Plan refers to research sub-goals; however, the Portfolio states that a recommendation was made and accepted to exclude research from the new Strategic Plan (2009-2012) due to an inability by the College to "take up any measures for the implementation" (Portfolio, p.32). However, the College needs to realign its Vision to reflect its focus on teaching and learning.

Recommendation 13

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology review its vision in order to ensure it aligns with the College's strategic direction in the area of research.

The Panel found that staff members at the College engage in limited research activities, and that these are primarily driven by individuals rather than by an institutional research program. In interviews, the Panel heard that staff were given opportunities to conduct research and supported in doing these activities, although there was no other evidence forthcoming to support these claims. Although research is not one of the College's strategic goals, ICT needs to consider the role that research has to play in supporting the professional development of academic staff and enabling them to keep up to date with developments in their relevant fields of interest. This could have a positive impact on teaching and learning activities. ICT needs to clarify its policy position in this regard.

As research is not included in ICT's current strategic direction, the sections on Research Planning and Management, Research Performance, Research Funding schemes, Ethics and Biosafety, Intellectual Property, Professional Development for Research, Research Commercialisation and the Research – Teaching Nexus have not been included in this Report.

4.1 Consultancy Activities

ICT has made progress in this area, although it is primarily for the purpose of promoting community engagement and industry interaction, rather than research and consultancy. The Panel suggests that ICT consider engaging in consultancy or applied research activities (within its areas of strength) by forming partnerships with local businesses, which would support its vision to become a "College of Choice" and facilitate industry and community engagement.

5 INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ICT recognizes the importance of building a strong relationship with industry and the community at large and has identified this as a way to contribute to the future development of Omani society as a whole (Portfolio, p.33). The Panel recognizes that the College has been successful in establishing relationships with industry, for example through procuring investment for learning resources. The external stakeholders interviewed by the Panel appreciated the active role that ICT plays in the community. Although one of the College's strategic goals is to foster a positive relationship with its external stakeholders, ICT needs to establish an overarching plan to coordinate its activities in this area. The Panel acknowledges the efforts that ICT is taking to engage its alumni.

5.1 *Industry and Community Engagement Planning & Management*

ICT has set a goal in its Strategic Plan (2009-2012) to foster an open and fruitful relationship with public and private sector organizations and with the community at large (Portfolio, p.33). HoDs, centers and sections heads are responsible for carrying out various activities related to industry and community engagement. The College formed a 'Community Engagement Committee' in 2008 to improve external relations with the community. The committee was subsequently split into two committees; namely the External Relation Committee for Public Sector and Private Sector and the Community Engagement Committee for Community Relations (Portfolio, Appendix 4.8). However, the Panel noted that there are neither terms of reference nor indications of the reporting line for the committees. The Panel also found that there is no single comprehensive industry and community engagement plan that is fully incorporated into the operational plan.

Recommendation 14

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology establish an overall plan for engaging with industry, employers and the community to enhance all areas of activities in line with its strategic goals.

5.2 *Relationships with Industry and Employers*

The College Council includes three external members from the private sector who serve on the Council for a period of three years, as stated in the College Bylaws. However, as noted in section 1.3, the College Council meets irregularly which may limit the effectiveness of the external members' contributions. ICT has developed a strong relationship with local industry and employers. It has organized several industrial visits by students from various departments and hosted guest lectures delivered by industry experts (Portfolio, Appendices 4.3, 4.4 & 4.5), despite the difficulty getting industry experts from outside Ibra due to the distances and costs involved. The Panel acknowledged that ICT has established a good relationship with Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Company. LNG sponsored a network infrastructure project for establishing laboratories worth OMR 150,254 in the academic year 2007-08 (Portfolio, p.34).

Commendation 4

The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for the success of its fundraising efforts to equip its laboratories which has improved the student learning environment.

5.3 *Relationships with Professions*

The Panel noted that there is no formal system in place at ICT to encourage staff and students to participate in any local or international professional bodies. Although the College is considered to be a relatively small and only offers qualifications up to Higher Diploma, the participation in professional societies should be encouraged.

5.4 *Relationships with Other Education Providers*

ICT has a collaborative agreement with International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) and the MoM has an agreement with CISCO to offer IT fundamentals courses to improve the IT skills of the students (Portfolio, p.36). ICT has only a limited relationship with other education providers, despite being part of a network of seven Colleges. However, the Panel noted that ICT is in the process of signing a MoU with Nizwa CoT for benchmarking purposes.

5.5 *Relationships with Alumni*

The department of Counseling and Graduates Follow Up at ICT reports to the Assistant Dean for Students Affairs (ADSA) on matters related to alumni and it is tasked to direct graduates to job market opportunities as stated in the Bylaws. The department also maintains a database of alumni (Portfolio, p.36). Furthermore, section 8.8 of the ICT QA Manual stresses the importance of tracking ICT graduates and in establishing a close relationship with them (see section 2.11).

The College recognizes that there is a need to have effective interaction with alumni to encourage their active involvement in the College activities (Portfolio, p.38) and has begun to put mechanisms in place, such as data gathering instruments. The Panel heard during interviews with alumni that the College is still in the early stages of developing long lasting relationships with them and that the alumni wish to keep in touch with the College. The Panel supports the College's initiatives in this area.

Affirmation 4

The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's actions to increase the level of alumni involvement in College activities and its plans for establishing an alumni association.

5.6 *Relationships with the Community at Large*

The Panel examined documents relating to the relationship of ICT with the community such as the 2007-2008 Report from the Community and External Relations Group. The Panel was also informed by students and employers that ICT has conducted a number of activities involving the community and industry; these include industrial visits, career fairs, blood donation, Open Days, inviting guest lecturers to ICT, and ICT staff giving lectures to the public.

ICT plays a useful role in the local community by permitting their use of College resources such as the multi-purpose hall, and also by inviting the local community to attend various activities that take place at the College (Portfolio, p.37). The College provides the local community with other services such as short training courses in Information Technology such AutoCAD as well as courses in other disciplines. The schools in the locality use the College internet labs to access the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) website for online registration. The Panel recognized the efforts the College was making in building relationships with the community at large. However, these could be further enhanced if they were included in an overall plan in this area (see Recommendation 14).

6 ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

The College offers a broad range of academic support services to students through various centers and departments within ICT. The Panel noted, however, that the various centers and departments work separately and concluded that this approach may be more effective if there was an overarching operational plan for academic support services, developed by all the stakeholders involved. The College is taking steps to improve its library provision and to provide more IT support through its helpdesk. There is an academic advising system in place but this needs to be more formalized through the introduction of a College-wide handbook. ICT also needs to develop mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of its approach to supporting its students.

6.1 *Academic Support Services Planning & Management*

At ICT the Academic Support Services are aligned to the strategic plan, with goals and sub-goals (Portfolio, p.46). The College Dean assigns responsibilities for various aspects of the Academic Support Services to different centers and departments within the College, which includes the Student Affairs Department (SAD), Educational Technology Center (ETC), Academic Departments and the Administrative and Financial Affairs Department (Portfolio, p.39). The policy and procedures for student academic matters are based on the College Bylaws and the QA Manual.

The Panel noted that various units of academic support services work separately in providing wide range of services to the students and faculty. There is therefore a need for a collective and comprehensive plan that synthesizes the work of all academic support services units.

Recommendation 15

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement an overall plan for academic support services which is supported by adequate resources.

6.2 *Registry (Enrolment and Student Records)*

New students are allocated to ICT through a centralized admissions process managed by the Higher Education Admissions Centre (HEAC) (Portfolio, p.49). Enrolment and registration processes are handled at campus level by the Admission and Registration Department in collaboration with the relevant departments, according to the Bylaws and to the procedures laid out in ICT's QA Manual. Records are kept on a central Technical Colleges Data System maintained by the MoM, to which the College has password-protected access. ICT has been improving its capacity for extracting student enrolment data but appeared to the Panel to have only fairly limited capacity at present to interrogate this data for planning and improvement, as opposed to funding, purposes. This is an area that should be strengthened.

Registration processes are managed by the Admission and Registration Department. The Panel heard that while on-line registration is available to students on campus, technical problems have caused ICT to cancel off campus registration. It is desirable that these be resolved so that off campus registration can be made available in future. The Panel noted that satisfaction surveys have been carried out in this area; ICT now needs to develop action plans in response to the feedback from staff and students.

6.3 *Library*

ICT has a relatively small library with variety of learning materials to cater to the needs of various programs with access to computer and instructional CDs. A Wi-Fi facility is also

available to access the Internet in any location covered by the access points (Portfolio, p.40). At present there are two library staff, and the library opening hours are 8am until 8pm, Saturday to Wednesday. There does not, however, appear to be any system to monitor library usage by staff or students.

The results of the ICT survey carried out on student satisfaction with the library services indicate that student satisfaction is low. In order to monitor user feedback in future, ICT needs to also include staff. The ETC Operational Plan includes a number of goals to improve the library provision in line with ICT's Strategic Plan. The College has implemented an e-library with 327 e-books from semester III 2007-2008. The College library also plans to acquire 200 titles of books with five copies each for different specialisations to be more aligned with College programs. ICT also plans to introduce online access to learning materials once approval from the MoM has been received (Portfolio, p.48). Overall, ICT is aware that the library resources need to be improved and the Panel supports the College's initiatives to improve in this area.

Affirmation 5

The Oman Accreditation Council agrees that Ibra College of Technology's library resources need to be improved and supports its initiatives in terms of staffing, hard copy and online collections to meet the needs of staff and students.

6.4 Information and Learning Technology Services

The IT services at ICT are provided by the ETC in coordination with various departments of the College (Portfolio, p.41). The entire ICT network is connected to a number of servers with the maximum Internet speed available in the Ibra area. ICT has a free access lab to encourage students to develop their IT skills. Oman LNG has supported ICT in building three new labs and provided network infrastructure to the IT resources at ICT (see section 5.2).

In December 2007 ICT established a helpdesk in order to provide immediate solutions to problems and queries related to IT services. ICT has also developed an online maintenance system that has been set up for registering technical service requests from staff and students. In interviews with staff and students, these development have been well received by the College community. The Panel commends the College for its efforts in this area.

Commendation 5

The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for establishing its IT helpdesk and its online IT maintenance system to more effectively support users.

ICT has several plans to improve the IT infrastructure of the College including strengthening of the IT online resources, introducing an Asset Tracking System, acquiring new computers, improving the back-up system and improving the Engineering labs (Portfolio, p.48). The Panel noted that there is no formal IT replacement system in place; however, the College has intentions to develop this. The College also plans to increase internet speeds, dependent on local provision. The Panel agrees that there is a need to improve the quality of service provided by ICT in this area and review the service provided regularly.

6.5 Academic Advising

All students are assigned to an academic advisor who is responsible for tracking and monitoring progress and each department maintains a database of its students with the assistance of the academic advisors.

The Panel noted from the meetings with various academic staff and students that there were regular meetings between advisors and students, and evidence showed that probation students were given special attention. The College claims that “the academic advising system is appropriate...” (Portfolio, p.29) but the Panel found no evidence of a mechanism to monitor the effectiveness of the current process. There is a lack of a consistent approach in this area which could be supported by a comprehensive guide for academic advising for staff and students.

Recommendation 16

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop a comprehensive guide for academic advising for teaching staff and students to ensure a consistent College-wide approach in this area.

6.6 *Student Learning Support*

ICT recognizes the importance of conducting extra-curricular activities, and forms departmental societies managed by the students and guided by the academic staff (Portfolio, p.43). The Panel noted that the ICT has conducted several workshops, seminars and cultural events that support student learning. However, the Panel heard from students that there is a need for more activities that enhance student learning. ICT recognizes the importance of taking more effective steps to improve and strengthen student learning support services and to make it more aligned with learning requirements (Portfolio, p.48). The Panel supports this intention.

6.7 *Teaching Resources*

The Administrative and Financial Affairs Department, along with the ETC, are the main units responsible for ensuring that the College has adequate teaching resources. ICT has classrooms, lecture theaters, Engineering labs and specialised workshops (Portfolio, p.43). ICT also has a Self-Access Center to equip students with necessary English skills.

The Panel noted from the meetings with students and staff that not all classes are equipped with OHPs and LCD projectors although the basic teaching resources are available to the faculty upon request. ICT states that the College has a need to enter into an annual maintenance contract to maintain and repair the machines and equipment in the Engineering labs and workshops (Portfolio, p.47). The Panel supports this initiative.

There had been considerable financial input from local major employers to update the laboratory provision in IT and electronics, which is very encouraging (see Commendation 4). A tour of the laboratories showed that health and safety notices were prominently displayed. However, as noted in section 1.12, lab health and safety needs to be considered as part of a consistent College-wide approach.

7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The Student Affairs Department (SAD) takes its direction from the College's Strategic Plan, which includes a goal of providing first-rate services to students (Portfolio, p.4). The SAD aims to achieve two sub-goals: to set up effective channels of communication between students and the SAD and keep students fully informed; and to regularly review and improve student services (Portfolio, p.49). The Panel supports ICT's intention to review its current provision of student support services and encourages the College to provide further opportunities for students to contribute to the decision-making process. The Panel noted the degree of student satisfaction within the College and ICT's monthly meeting which provides a forum for students to air their views. The Panel considered evidence that the students' views were being taken seriously and included on the agenda of the College Council meetings. ICT's efforts to support the career placement of its students are to be recognized.

7.1 *Student Support Services Planning and Management*

The SAD is led by the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (ADSA) and has four areas: Admission and Registration; OJT; Counseling and Graduate Follow-up; and Housing, Student Activities and Graduation (Portfolio, p.49). The work of the OJT Department is discussed in section 2.7 above. The work of the other three areas is discussed below, together with general comments on the activities of the department. The Panel was informed that, in addition, there are College Council guidelines relating to student affairs, and that some matters, such as student discipline, are escalated to the College Council for action.

The Panel was able to examine SAD's 2008-09 Operational Plan, which reformats the ICT Strategic Plan using an ADRI template, with as-yet unused provision for "review of results" and "improvement action"; and its current action plan, which sets out a week-by-week schedule of planned work for 2008-09. The department aims to align its action plans to the Strategic Plan and to evaluate the achievement of its KPIs at the end of each year (Portfolio, p.49). The Panel noted a completed annual report template, which reflected progress with respect to defined targets. The systematic approach adopted seems promising.

The SAD intends to establish benchmarking relations with other colleges in the region to enhance its evaluative capabilities (Portfolio, p.55). The department relies on student feedback, provided through annual surveys, to evaluate its performance. The Panel heard that a sample of 20% of the student body is surveyed annually, with the results analysed and discussed with the relevant department, and reported to the College Council. The College now needs to give more attention to closing the loop on the feedback it gathers. The Panel supports ICT's approaches to review and monitor the effectiveness of its student services provision.

Affirmation 6

The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's efforts to regularly review and improve its student services provision.

While the Panel was impressed by the College's efforts to seek student feedback on the delivery of educational and support services and on day-to-day matters affecting them, it was unable to find evidence of comparable opportunities for student input into planning decisions and policy development, for example, through a forum such as a student representative council or through student membership on the College Council, which at present does not include a student voice. In this context, the Panel notes that many decisions affecting students are made at the MoM rather than at College level (e.g. those resulting in changes to student accommodation arrangements, discussed below) and considers that the student voice needs also to be heard at higher levels of governance.

Recommendation 17

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology improve student involvement in decision making and policy development on matters affecting them.

7.2 *Student Profile*

All ICT students are Omanis. Although some come from further afield, most are drawn locally from the different wilayats of the Al Sharqia region, thus potentially giving ICT a “community college” role. The MoM determines the College’s annual intake quota. Enrolments have grown from a grand total of 1585 in 2005-06 to 3319 in 2008-09 (Portfolio, p.50). The Panel heard that the College was happy with these increases but is aware of the implications for staff workload and physical resources.

7.3 *Student Satisfaction and Climate*

Overwhelmingly, the ICT students whom the Panel met reported that they were happy with their experience at ICT. Although that the Panel formed the impression that many of their answers had been scripted and rehearsed for the audit, the Panel was nevertheless persuaded that there was a good level of student satisfaction at the College.

The Panel considers that the SAD is making good progress towards the achievement of its sub-goal of setting up effective channels of communication and keeping students fully informed. It confirmed the use of such information channels as plasma TV and, especially, the establishment of monthly meetings with students at which information is shared and students are able to provide feedback and raise issues requiring attention. These meetings are open to all students and voluntary. Following the meeting, students’ complaints are subsequently raised at College Academic Council meetings indicating an ad hoc resolution process. Interviews with students highlighted that opportunities to discuss their complaints were available at ICT, primarily through direct and personal contact with a relevant position of authority although concerns were voiced by the students about the follow up and resolution process. In interviews with staff, the Panel were informed about specific actions taken by ICT to resolve student concerns (an often cited example was the food supplier being replaced in the cafeteria in response to student complaints). Action subsequently taken on student requests and complaints is reported back at the following month’s meeting.

Commendation 6

The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology for holding monthly student forums which are appreciated by students, used effectively as a mechanism for responding to student issues and complaints and act as drivers for change.

7.4 *Student Behaviour*

Students commencing their studies at ICT appear to be well provided with information and induction activities to assist them to understand what is expected of them while at the College. Printed information is provided, in both English and Arabic, in the form of a Student Handbook. ICT claims that three quarters of the students consider that the handbook provides them with adequate information about academic and College regulations in order to succeed in their studies at ICT (Portfolio, p.54). The Panel formed the impression that the handbook is adequately comprehensive, and heard from students that they found it useful.

The SAD organizes an induction program in conjunction with the ELC for each new student intake. The Panel reviewed the induction materials and found them to be informative and appropriate. Students to whom the Panel spoke confirmed that the induction program had been helpful and that staff were approachable. The Panel concluded that the College's approach to student induction was effective and enhanced the student learning experience.

Commendation 7

The Oman Accreditation Council commends Ibra College of Technology's induction program for students for effectively supporting new students and providing a positive start to their involvement in the College community.

The College has identified the need to develop induction programs for each specialisation (Portfolio, p.55), and the Panel heard that this was now being done at department level.

The Bylaws sets out a student code of conduct and disciplinary procedures for misconduct. There is a Disciplinary Committee which convenes at the request of the Dean or at the instigation of the Director General at the MoM to discuss individual cases and review student files. The College maintains data on the number of cases heard by the Committee; most commonly, these involve late reporting for course registration or flouting of the dress code. The penalties for misbehavior are set out in the Bylaws and the Committee has no flexibility to vary them in individual cases. Students who are not satisfied with the responses they get are able to appeal directly to the MoM. Reportedly, there have been difficulties in scheduling meetings of the committee, and it apparently does not presently have any mechanisms for evaluating its effectiveness, for example, by monitoring whether students have misbehaved again, although the Panel heard from a member of the committee that there is provision for follow-up counseling.

Recommendation 18

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology systematically monitor the effectiveness of its policies and processes for managing student misconduct and provide further support to prevent re-offence.

7.5 Career Guidance and Employment Services

Figures provided in the Portfolio (pp.30 and 54, and Appendix 6.3) indicate that employment outcomes for ICT graduates are relatively low, with only slightly under half of all graduates finding employment. Of these, most are male; female graduates are very significantly under-represented among those who find jobs. The Panel heard from staff, students and some employers that this is largely attributable to limited employment opportunities in the Ibra region, and also, in the case of women graduates, to cultural and family preferences. However, the economy in the region was reported to be strengthening and new companies moving in, and staff in the SAD were optimistic that improved job opportunities would follow.

An External Relations Committee was established in 2008 (Portfolio, Appendix 6.2), and plans are being progressed for the establishment of a Careers Center by September 2009. Strategies, such as sending SMS messages about job vacancies to graduates, are being implemented. The OJT program was seen by both students and employers to be a job recruitment pathway. A Careers Fair, organized with employer sponsorship, was held earlier in 2009 to provide a venue for employers to meet students, and 22 companies attended. The Panel heard from both students and employers who had participated that the event was successful in bringing all stakeholders together.

Affirmation 7

The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's efforts to address and improve the employment outcomes of its graduates, through the introduction of its Careers Fair and other measures to increase employment.

The Panel also heard from students that, while they were given training in job search skills and the preparation of CVs as part of the certificate and diploma level curriculum, career counseling and interview skills training were lacking. It was also suggested that students could be helped to be better equipped for pursuing self-employment.

7.6 Student Finances

Students receive government grants for accommodation and transport, according to their situation. The Panel did not investigate the management or adequacy of these arrangements, although it heard anecdotally that the housing allowances may no longer be adequate in light of the privatization of student accommodation.

7.7 Accommodation, Catering and Transport

Student housing was not addressed in the Portfolio, and appeared to the Panel to be a problem area. The Panel learned that the MoM, confronted with a significant increase in the demand for student housing, had taken the decision to close College-run residence halls and instead to fund students to rent privately-run accommodation in the local community. Female students whose families do not live locally are accommodated in supervised hostels, while male students share private apartments. Implementation of the new accommodation arrangements has apparently been relatively gradual, in tandem with the entrepreneurial development of new residential facilities in the community around the campus.

The Panel met students from outlying areas who live in student hostels or apartments, a number of whom expressed dissatisfaction with their living arrangements. Complaints included noise, poor standards of cleanliness and poor supervision arrangements in the female student hostels; the expense and a shortage of apartment accommodation, leading to severe overcrowding for male students in particular. Students also considered that they had been unsuccessful in gaining assistance from the SAD in locating adequate housing or resolving disputes with housing providers. Members of the BoT advised that the situation with respect to availability of student accommodation was under review and that steps are being taken to acquire more land and enter into agreements with the private sector to build additional accommodation. Although the College no longer has direct responsibility for providing student accommodation, students' problems could have a negative impact on morale and, potentially, student retention. The College needs to consider possible approaches (within its remit) to support students in this area.

Recommendation 19

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology be more proactive in monitoring and, where justified, intervening to ensure that the arrangements for student accommodation are operating satisfactorily and that students' needs are being met.

The Panel was unable to ascertain whether the MoM has taken any steps to monitor the impact of its decision on student satisfaction and welfare, and considers, based on the anecdotal evidence it heard during the audit, that follow-up is needed.

Although the Panel heard positive comments from students about the provision of restaurant facilities for male and female students, the quality and cleanliness of food services were identified

by 71% of students as a major source of dissatisfaction in surveys (Portfolio, p.68). The Panel heard that the SAD had recently taken steps to address this by changing its outsourcing arrangements to another caterer.

7.8 *Medical and Counseling Services*

Student surveys record moderate levels of satisfaction with the medical services on offer at the College (Portfolio, p.68), but good levels of satisfaction with counseling services (Portfolio, p.54). The campus clinic provides nursing services but reportedly has not been able to attract the services of a doctor and must therefore send students requiring such medical attention to a regional hospital. The Panel accessed an online survey during the audit visit which indicated significant student dissatisfaction with the medical services, but was not able to identify actions ICT is taking to address their complaints. The staff concerned suggested to the Panel that students perhaps had unrealistic expectations as to the level of medical services the College could reasonably be expected to provide. This situation should be clarified for all concerned.

The SAD provides general counseling services to assist students facing both personal and academic difficulties. The roles and responsibilities of the Head of Guidance and the counselors are set out in ICT's QA Manual. ICT claims that the success of these services is monitored annually through an online survey, with the following year's action plan for the Counseling and Graduate Follow Up Department based on the survey results from the previous year (Portfolio, p.54). In addition, the specialisation departments provide academic counseling and special counseling support for students on academic probation, and the Panel heard from the HoDs that "at risk" students are monitored by department committees.

7.9 *International Student Services*

This section does not apply to ICT as it does not enroll international students.

7.10 *Social and Recreational Services and Facilities*

There is a fairly wide range of recreational opportunities available to ICT students, including sporting and community outreach activities. Some are organized by the SAD and others by the students themselves, through student societies based around the academic specialisations (Portfolio, p.43). The Panel met with representatives from the student societies and found that these were quite active, sponsoring competitions, activities in local schools and open days. They also ran Ramadhan activities intended to encourage and support learning and community service. Action plans are developed at the beginning of each semester to decide on the activities to be carried out, and these are publicized in student magazines and on notice boards.

Students are generally not charged fees for participation in social and recreational activities, although sometimes small fees are collected and used for charitable donations, for example, during Ramadhan. The Panel heard that the College provides rooms and staff advisors for student societies, although students reported that there was a lack of facilities, such as common rooms, where students could meet and socialize informally and that recreational space for female students was inadequate.

The Panel was told that the College does not receive funding for student recreational activities such as sports. Efforts have been made to seek external sponsorship, with some success. It was also learned that representation has been made by ICT to the MoM for earmarked funding for student activities, and that the College is optimistic that some support may be received in the next financial year.

Affirmation 8

The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology's efforts to procure a specific budget for student activities.

8 STAFF AND STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES

The staff and staff support services at ICT involve a number of different stakeholders and arrangements. The Human Resources (HR) function is the responsibility of the Assistant Dean of Administrative and Financial Affairs (ADFA) and the broad framework for HR management and planning is outlined in the College Bylaws. ICT's Strategic Goal no. 7 is:

“to develop its staff, offering opportunities for professional and personal growth and development, rewarding hard work and fostering leadership skills and innovative thinking” (Portfolio, p.4).

The Panel found that there was a need for an overall HR management plan in order to underpin its approach to all areas of human resources. As there are a number of different parties involved in the recruitment and selection process, ICT needs to play a more active role in order to ensure that its staffing requirements are met. The Panel heard that a staff induction process was in place and that many new staff appreciated this. However, the Panel noted that staff induction was handled differently by different departments and the College would benefit from harmonizing its approach. The College also needs to ensure that staff promotion is managed equitably and that the staff grievance and severance approaches are reviewed. The Panel supports the College's efforts to align its performance appraisal and professional development. ICT's efforts to meet its Omanisation targets are also recognized.

8.1 *Human Resources Planning & Management*

According to ICT's QA Manual, the College provides a HR planning and management system as per the College Bylaws with the support of a full fledged HR Department (p.66) with the Dean and ADFA jointly responsible for this area (Portfolio, p.56). As has been noted in Chapter 1, the ADFA position is vacant and the Dean has taken an acting role in this capacity. The HR role, in fact, involves three different stakeholders (ICT, the MoM and a number of employment/recruitment agencies) which adds an element of complexity to HR planning and management. In order to develop an effective HR planning and management system, the roles of these stakeholders need to be balanced and subjected to regular reviews.

HR planning at ICT relies on identifying staff requirements on an annual basis and submitting these requirements to the MoM to initiate the recruitment process. The review of the HR function is based on a set of operational KPIs which do not reflect this function as a strategic area. Based on the evidence submitted to the Panel and interviews with staff members, the Panel found that HR planning and management at ICT are underdeveloped and there is no long-term HR plan which encompasses various HR activities such as staff development, performance appraisal and recruitment to meet the specific growth needs of the College. As planning is done on an annual basis only, it tends to be centered on staff recruitment to fill teaching positions as required. There are no HR policies and procedures in place to supplement the relevant articles in the Bylaws.

Recommendation 20

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop and implement a comprehensive, long-term human resources management plan which includes all related functional areas, is aligned with its mission and strategic plan and is reviewed on regular basis.

8.2 *Staff Profile*

ICT has provided details of its staff profile (Portfolio, p.56), comparing the number of Omani and expatriate staff members at the College, as well as gender ratios and staff categorizations by

qualification, to show the heterogeneous background of staff at ICT. The Panel was also provided with updated statistics on employment. It is not clear to the Panel how the staff profile information collected is being used at ICT to support the planning process. There is no evidence of statistical analyses to review whether the staffing profile is optimally aligned with the College's Strategic Plan. The Panel suggests that ICT develop appropriate measures and instruments to collect data about staff profiles on a regular basis and analyse this data with a view to integrating it into a formal HR planning and management system (as described previously in section 8.1)

8.3 Recruitment and Selection

The recruitment process at ICT involves several stakeholders. Vacancies in the senior management of the College are filled by the MoM. The process for appointment of academic staff generally is described in the Portfolio (p.59) and ICT's QA Manual. Each HoD forwards their academic staffing requirements to the Dean who then submits an integrated list to the MoM. The MoM has a formal agreement with five private employment agencies to recruit staff in accordance with the MoM's procedures. On receiving CVs from the agencies, the MoM decides on the candidates it considers suitable for interview and an interview panel is formed with representatives from the CoT. Offers are made to successful candidates, following approval from the Dean. Successful candidates are hired on three different types of contracts depending on whether they are classified as MoM, agency or special project staff. The recruitment process for non-academic staff is handled by the Ministry of Civil Services.

The KPIs for the recruitment process have been identified (Portfolio, p.65) for identifying staff shortages promptly, and producing clear procedures for identifying staff shortages. There are no KPIs related to evaluating the recruitment process or ensuring that the right candidates have been selected for a specific position. The only area for improvement identified by ICT (Portfolio, p.66) relates to the use of a video conferencing facility for overseas interviews in order to improve the "efficiency of the process" and "verify the authenticity of the candidates".

During interviews with a number of staff members and representatives of the recruitment agents, the Panel was able to verify the process described in the Portfolio (p.59). It should be noted, however, that the recruitment process is done jointly for all of the CoT, rather than individual colleges, with short-listed candidates 'pooled' unless there is a specific requirement for a particular College. The Panel also heard that the Dean has the authority to make an appointment to an acting position in order to fill a vacancy temporarily. Vacancies are advertised by the agents through several channels including direct ads, job recruitment websites, personal references, sub agents, and direct head hunting. Agents reported difficulties with recruiting staff for locations such as Ibra as they are not viewed as desirable by candidates, who prefer larger cities such as Muscat. As a result, the Panel heard that ICT has faced staff shortages.

As stated above, the College relies on agents to recruit teaching staff, yet in interviews the Panel heard that there is no quality assurance process in place at the agent level (by the MoM or ICT) to ensure the right staff are sourced and selected. Positions are advertised using a diverse range of channels, but ICT does not have control or input into this process. Since the recruitment is carried out jointly for the Colleges, the MoM has a very significant role compared to individual Colleges such as ICT but the Panel believes that this arrangement may impinge on the effectiveness of staff recruitment. It advocates a more active role by ICT in the recruitment and selection of staff to ensure that the College can meet its strategic goals and ensure a good match between its staff and organizational aspirations.

Recommendation 21

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology take on a more active role in recruitment and selection of staff,

to ensure that its staffing profile is aligned with the College's strategic goals and operational plans.

8.4 Induction

ICT states that all new staff members are “formally inducted [...] through a well-defined policy and procedure based on the Bylaw” (Portfolio, p.60). The College describes a series of induction activities including an individual induction with the HR Department, a group induction at department level and an academic induction about matters relating to teaching and assessment.

The Panel was provided with copies of induction packs (staff handbooks, slides, etc.) used during the staff induction process. The Panel was informed that the recruitment agents conduct a separate induction process for international teaching staff members prior to their arrival in Oman as part of a familiarization process, while a formal induction program is organized after arrival in each department.

Members of academic staff were very supportive of the induction program, such as the “buddy system” in the English Department where the new staff learn from other staff members. The Panel noted that staff induction processes vary across departments and suggests ICT consider a standardized approach as part of developing a HR planning and management structure at ICT (see Recommendation 20).

8.5 Professional Development

ICT states that it considers professional development to be “a very important factor in improving the quality of academic delivery” and “arranges internal and external professional development programs to suit the staff requirements” following a training needs survey which identifies the training requirements of individual staff members (Portfolio, p.60). In addition to the provision of a number of internal development programs (Portfolio, p.61), ICT specifies the support provided to staff members for external professional development activities such as conference leave, dissemination of conference findings. A KPI target has been set for providing in-house training of “80% of staff attend at least one workshop or seminar” (Portfolio, p.66) and the Panel was informed that this target has been achieved.

The Panel reviewed the staff training needs analysis, which represents a useful exercise in HR planning and management. Although there was ample evidence to show that staff workshops are held on a regular basis at ICT these seem to be organized on an ad hoc basis and there was no indication of how the training needs analysis has been used to date. The Panel reviewed evidence that supported the claim that Omani staff undertake further study as part of their professional development (Portfolio, p.66). It should be noted that this is under the patronage of the MoM and not ICT.

In interviews with staff members, diverging levels of satisfaction were reported, with some staff members stating they were satisfied with the professional development opportunities provided while others believed more initiatives could be put in place and more challenging training programs could be implemented. The Panel noted that professional development at ICT was not linked directly with performance planning and review, which is discussed in the next section (see Affirmation 9).

8.6 Performance Planning and Review

The staff appraisal procedure is not specifically defined in the Bylaws or the QA Manual (how it is done, what parameters are looked at, what performance standards are used). Nonetheless, ICT outlines the components of the staff appraisal process at ICT for different categories of staff members (Portfolio, p.62). A comment is made that “peer review is not a general practice at ICT”

and that it is “only applied to staff with persistent performance issues” (Portfolio, p.62). The Portfolio also states that performance evaluation is undertaken by HoDs and serves as an input into staff development, rewards, warnings and terminations. A goal has been set to “link staff appraisal to staff development” (Portfolio, p.66); however, the Portfolio notes that this is “yet to be achieved”. Another target KPI of 100% staff appraisal being carried out has been set and achieved (Portfolio, p.65).

The Panel viewed forms used in the staff appraisal process carried out in March 2009 which provided feedback to staff members about their teaching performance based on student surveys. In interviews, the Panel noted that staff members did not always receive these forms following the appraisal process. There is also a system of classroom observations in place. Staff members are observed twice during the probation period and this feedback is provided to the recruitment agents, who employ the staff member.

ICT’s QA Manual states that “a mechanism of 360 degree staff appraisal system is followed for staff performance planning” (p.70). The Panel did not find any evidence of such a system in operation. The Panel notes that although various ad hoc staff appraisal techniques are used, there is no formal system in place which is based on the staff profile and feeds into staff development and promotion. This opportunity for improvement has been identified by ICT and steps are already being taken to implement such a system (as evident in the College Academic Council meeting minutes). This system will need to be reviewed on a regular basis.

Affirmation 9

The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology’s initiatives towards improving professional development for staff and linking it to a formal staff performance appraisal process.

8.7 Promotion and Other Incentives

ICT refers to an “annual incentive system” at ICT and a corresponding KPI of rewarding excellent performance by staff (Portfolio, p. 66) with five staff members being awarded the “Staff of the Month” award. The staff promotion and performance appraisal policy and guidelines submitted to the Panel explain the requirements for each position but not the promotion processes.

During interviews, the Panel found that promotion opportunities are available to staff appointed by the MoM, while there is no formal promotion process for staff contracted to the agents. The Panel is of the view that ICT would benefit from a formal staff promotion policy, aligned with the requirements of the MoM, that spells out clearly the opportunities, processes and criteria for promotion for the different categories of staff (see Recommendation 22).

8.8 Severance

The procedures related to severance and termination at ICT are grounded in Omani labour law and related Bylaws. There are no KPIs associated with this area. The claim that the staff retention rate was around 90% in 2007/2008 (Portfolio, p.63) is supported by evidence provided by ICT. According to data provided, the majority of the staff who left ICT in 2008 did not resign but had their contracts terminated. The severance process is related to the feedback provided to the agents about the performance of staff members at the end of the one year contract with the termination notice period being one month.

The Panel did not find evidence of a formal termination process supported by standard HR practices, for example, a system of warnings for staff who do not perform satisfactorily or exit interviews. The Panel did hear that staff whose performance was unsatisfactory were subject to

additional teaching observations. In the Panel's view, this is inadequate, and transparent formal processes should be established (see Recommendation 22).

8.9 Staff Organisational Climate and Retention

ICT states that it takes "adequate measures" to ensure a positive climate for staff members (Portfolio, p.63). The staff retention rates shown support the statistics provided by the recruitment agents in interviews with the Panel. Staff retention ranges from 93% in the Business Department to 76% in the ELC, with the College average being 83%.

Teaching staff recruited by agents reported a sense that they were working for the College, but reporting to the recruiting agency, that is to say these staff members feel the pull of two 'masters' which blurs the lines of authority and responsibility. For example, there is no clear procedure for dealing with staff grievances. In some instances staff will raise issues with the HoD or the Dean, in others they will go directly to the agent as it is the agent who pays the staff member's salary. The Dean may intervene on behalf of staff members with the agent as required. The Panel also heard that agents visit the Colleges three or four times annually to meet their staff, and their representative is available on specific days for staff to raise grievances. While there are options for staff to pursue in raising a grievance, these are ad hoc and do not reflect a systemic method for receiving grievances, documenting them, resolving them and providing staff members with feedback. The College needs to develop and implement formal staff grievance and severance processes which are communicated to all staff.

Recommendation 22

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology develop a planned, consistent and inclusive approach to staff induction, promotion, grievance and severance which is consistently implemented and regularly reviewed.

8.10 Omanisation

The Portfolio states that ICT implements the Omanisation policy as per the MoM's requirements and recruits Omani nationals for a variety of positions. The College also supports Omani staff members in undertaking further studies in Oman and abroad to gain higher qualifications, although this is sponsored through the MoM. There is no related KPI for this area, although it is identified in the Portfolio as an area for improvement. ICT proposes to have a committee or individual responsible for career and succession planning for Omani staff members to support Omanisation (Portfolio, p.66). The Panel supports ICT's Omanisation initiative.

9 GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND FACILITIES

The College recognises the importance of general support services and facilities as an integral part of its overall institutional development. One of its Strategic Goals aims to:

“Ensure that college facilities are well managed, effectively used and innovatively developed” (Portfolio p.67).

ICT undertakes to ensure that the ancillary services (identified in the QA Manual) are delivered efficiently and cost-effectively. The Panel supports ICT’s efforts to develop new facilities on campus in order to meet the needs of its growing student population. ICT is currently reviewing its marketing plan to improve its efforts in this area. The Panel concluded that ICT needs to reconsider its approach to internal communication within the College to ensure inclusivity.

9.1 *General Support Services and Facilities Planning and Management*

The ICT general support services and facilities are aligned to the strategic plan, with two goals and five sub-goals (Portfolio, p.67). Furthermore, ICT’s QA Manual covers issues related to the maintenance and upgrading of the College equipment and facilities. The Administration and Finance Department prepares yearly operational plans for managing the General Support Services and Facilities. A ‘service and in charge table’ is prepared to help the College to improve its record keeping and for necessary follow up (Portfolio, p.67). The Assistant Dean for Administration and Financial Affairs (ADFA) is responsible for conducting regular reviews to assess the accomplishment of General Support Services and Facilities Operational Plan.

The Panel confirmed that there is no specific written policy for the repair or replacement of furniture or IT equipment. The Panel also noted that there is no committee or department that directly oversees the maintenance of the College equipment. However, ICT conduct regular audits of class rooms, workshops, library etc. to check the need for replacement of furniture (Portfolio, p.71). ICT invites tenders for restaurant and cleaning services and states that the selection of these subcontracting services is driven by cost rather than quality (Portfolio, p.68). ICT buildings are old and College administrators are aware of the problem. Steps have already been taken to construct new buildings (Portfolio, p.72). The Panel supports this initiative.

Affirmation 10

The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College of Technology’s ongoing construction of new facilities on the campus in order to meet the needs of the College community.

9.2 *Public Relations and Marketing*

ICT states that it gives much importance to public relations and marketing to build good relationships with the community at large (Portfolio, p.67). It views public relations as a bridge between the community and the College. The ICT has recently established a marketing committee (Portfolio, p.72), and the representatives from the marketing committee informed the Panel that the strategy is to promote the College to the community through various activities and events. Progress has been made and the Panel supports the College’s efforts in this area.

Affirmation 11

The Oman Accreditation Council supports Ibra College’s efforts to improve its approach to marketing to raise its profile in the local community.

9.3 *Communication Services*

ICT facilities for communication include both voice and data communication joined in one network. All faculty and staff have personal workstations which are linked to the network and an exchange server provides for internal communications. Along with these, circulars, LCD screens and notice board displays are used for ensuring communication within the College (Portfolio, p.69). The Panel also noted that all staff and students have email accounts and exchange information using them.

One of the College's strategic sub-goals is to "*ensure that information is accessible for all college stakeholders*" (Portfolio, p.6). However, the Panel found that this was not actually the case. The Panel noted that some of the documents such as amendments to the Bylaws and administrative decrees are not translated. Furthermore, the Panel heard from academic staff, recruited by different agencies, about the inadequacy in the distribution of information. The Panel concluded that although channels for communication are in place, the College needs to review its approach in this area in order to ensure that relevant information and documentation is accessible to all.

Recommendation 23

The Oman Accreditation Council recommends that Ibra College of Technology ensure that all relevant communication and documentation are accessible to all stakeholders.

9.4 *Facilities Management*

ICT claims that it prepares a list of maintenance work to be carried out and implemented regularly (Portfolio, p.70). ICT has developed KPIs to measure its performance in this area which includes surveying students on their satisfaction with the general support services and facilities. The College notes that student satisfaction is below the desired target but it is not clear to the Panel what action is being taken as a result of this. The Panel noted that ICT plans to monitor the usage of facilities and supports its plans to improve in this area.

APPENDIX A. AUDIT PANEL

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Mr. Abdullah Rashid Mohammed Al Ma'awali (Observer)
Head of Specifications Division.
Quality Assurance Department
Directorate General of Private Universities & Colleges
Ministry of Higher Education
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Tess Goodliffe (Executive Officer)
Oman Accreditation Council

APPENDIX B. ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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

ADRI	A four step, cyclical model for analysing a topic, comprising: Approach → Deployment → Results → Improvement.
ADAA.....	Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs
ADFA	Assistant Dean for Administration and Financial Affairs
ADSA	Assistant Dean for Student Affairs
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.
BoT	Board of Trustees
B.Tech.....	Bachelor of Technology degree
CAC.....	College Academic Council
Call Back Interview	An interview conducted by the Audit Panel towards the end of the Audit Visit for which it has invited specific people, usually at short notice, to respond to particular issues on which the Panel will require assistance.
CCTV.....	closed circuit television
CISCO	Computer Information System Company (www.cisco.com)
CoT.....	College of Technology
CV.....	curriculum vitae
Deployment	The second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a HEI's plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not.
ELC.....	English Language Center
ETC.....	Educational Technology Center
Executive Officer.....	An OAC staff member assigned to an Audit Panel to provide professional guidance and support.
External Reviewer	A Member of the OAC Register of External Reviewers; a person approved by the OAC Board to participate as a member of the OAC's various external review panels.
GPA.....	Grade Point Average
HEAC	Higher Education Admissions Centre, a centralized body for managing student entry into all HEIs.
HEI.....	Higher Education Institution (also known as HEP – Higher Education Provider)
HoD	Head of Department
HR.....	Human Resources
HSC	Health and Safety Committee
ICT.....	Ibra College of Technology

Improvement.....	The fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how effectively an organisation is improving its <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i> for any given topic in order to achieve better <i>results</i> .
KPI.....	Key Performance Indicator
LNG	Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Company
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education (www.mohe.gov.om)
MoM.....	Ministry of Manpower
MoU.....	Memorandum of Understanding
OAC Board	The governing body of the Oman Accreditation Council
OAC	Oman Accreditation Council (www.oac.gov.om)
OFI.....	Opportunity for improvement.
OJT	On the Job Training
OQF	Oman Qualifications Framework
Panel Chairperson	The Chairperson of the Audit Panel.
Panel Member.....	An OAC External Reviewer who is a member of an Audit Panel.
Portfolio	see <i>Quality Audit Portfolio</i> .
QAC.....	Quality Assurance Committee
Quality Assurance	The combination of policies and processes for ensuring that stated intentions are met.
Quality Audit.....	An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the system and processes by which a HEI sets, pursues and achieves its mission and vision.
QAD.....	Quality Assurance Department (in Ministry of Manpower)
QAM.....	ICT's Quality Assurance Manual
Quality Audit Portfolio	The report produced as the result of a self study. Also forms the main submission made to the OAC by the HEI being audited.
Quality Audit Report.....	A public report published by the OAC which presents the findings and conclusions of the Audit Panel's External Review of a HEI.
Quality Enhancement.....	The combination of policies and processes for improving upon existing <i>approach</i> , <i>deployment</i> and <i>results</i> .
Random Interview.....	An interview conducted <i>in situ</i> by individual Panel Members during the Audit but separately from the main interview sessions.
Results.....	The third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's <i>approach</i> and <i>deployment</i> .
SAD	Student Affairs Department
System.....	In this Report, <i>system</i> refers to plans, policies, processes and results that are integrated towards the fulfilment of a common purpose.
The College.....	Ibra College of Technology
TOEFL.....	Test of English as a Foreign Language

