



AGENTUR FÜR
QUALITÄTSSICHERUNG DURCH
AKKREDITIERUNG VON
STUDIENGÄNGEN E.V.

FINAL REPORT

DHOFAR UNIVERSITY, OMAN

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND APPLIED SCIENCES

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

June 2023



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**DECISION OF THE AQAS STANDING COMMISSION
ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF THE
▪ COLLEGE OF APPLIED ARTS AND SCIENCES
AT DHOFAR UNIVERSITY, SALALAH, OMAN**

Based on the report of the expert panel, the comments by the university and the discussions of the AQAS Standing Commission in its 17th meeting on 22 May 2023, the AQAS Standing Commission decides:

1. The **College of Applied Arts and Sciences of Dhofar University, Salalah (Oman)** is accredited according to the AQAS criteria for Institutional Accreditation.

The accreditation is conditional.

The College essentially complies with the requirements defined by the criteria and thus the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current version. The required adjustments can be implemented within a time period of twelve months.

2. The condition has to be fulfilled. The fulfilment of the conditions has to be documented and reported to AQAS no later than **30 June 2024**.
3. The accreditation is given for the period of **six years** and is valid until **30 June 2029**.

Condition:

1. CAAS must include regulations in its QA system assuring transparency for transferring local credits into the ECTS.

The following **recommendations** are given for further improvement of the quality assurance system of the institution:

1. CAAS should demonstrate how the PDCA cycle is finally completed by increasing transparency and potentially streamlining the quality assurance processes in place.
2. CAAS should implement measures that assure that graduate attributes translated into learning outcomes at the programmes' levels are specific and measurable.
3. CAAS should develop formats that actively involve students and labour market representatives in the decision-making process of relevant procedures.
4. CAAS should also monitor student workload as part of its quality assurance system.

With regard to the reasons for this decision the Standing Commission refers to the attached experts' report.

EXPERTS' REPORT
ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION
OF THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND APPLIED SCIENCES OF DHOFAR UNIVERSITY,
OMAN

Visit to the university: 15 – 18 January 2023

Panel of Experts:

Prof. Dr. Alexander Bergs	Dean of the Faculty of Language and Literature Sciences, Deputy Head of the Institute for English & American Studies, University of Osnabrück, Germany
Prof. Dr. Gulsen Musayeva Vefali	Professor of Applied Linguistics (ELT), Cyprus International University, Former Vice Rector Final University
Prof. Diana Abdul Karim Aljahromi, PhD	Professor of Linguistics, Director of the Unit for Teaching Excellence and Leadership, University of Bahrain
Dr. Mathias Pätzold	Secretary General of the Academic Commission of the Federal State of Lower Saxony, Hannover, Germany (representative of the labour market)
Cecilia Akibaya	Student of Cultural Sciences and Philology (BA) at the University of Potsdam (Germany) (student expert)
Coordinator: Ronny Heintze	AQAS, Cologne, Germany

I. Preamble

AQAS – Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes – is an independent non-profit organisation supported by more than 90 member institutions, higher education institutions (HEIs) and academic associations. Since 2002, the agency has been accredited by the German Accreditation Council (GAC). It is, therefore, a notified body for the accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes in Germany.

AQAS is a full member of ENQA and also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) which confirms that our procedures comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), on which all Bologna countries agreed as a basis for internal and external quality assurance.

AQAS is an institution founded by and working for higher education institutions and academic associations. The agency is devoted to quality assurance and quality development of academic studies and teaching in Higher Education Institutions. The activities of AQAS in accreditation are neither restrained to specific academic disciplines or degrees nor a particular type of Higher Education Institution.

II. Accreditation procedure

This report results from the external institutional review of the College of Arts and Applied Sciences of Dhofar University, Oman.

Approach and methodology

Within the institutional accreditation procedure by AQAS, the quality assurance system of a university, faculty, or college is assessed against the AQAS criteria for institutional accreditation, which are aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, version 2015). The ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. The ESG are non-prescriptive while providing guidance and covering the vital areas for the successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education.

In line with the ESG the AQAS criteria for institutional accreditation are based on the following four principles for quality assurance:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance,
- Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students,
- Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture,
- Quality assurance considers the needs and expectations of students and all other stakeholders and society.

AQAS developed a set of criteria and indicators relevant for institutional accreditations. Based on these accreditation criteria, AQAS also provided the university with guidelines for writing a self-evaluation report (SER). AQAS follows the core idea that it should be assessed if the mechanisms the institution chose to secure the quality of its study programmes are appropriate within an external assessment. Therefore, AQAS focuses on the overarching mechanisms to secure an adequate level of the learning process of Higher Education Institutions. Beyond this, the aims formulated by the university in the SER have an impact on the assessment of the panel of experts as applications need to be seen in the light of the strategic goals of the institution. In the accreditation procedures, AQAS follows the peer-review principle. Based on AQAS' long-lasting experience

with external quality assurance procedures and its involvement in international networks when working with experts, AQAS acts according to the ECA Principles for the Selection of Experts.

Internal Phase/Basis for the assessment of the panel of experts

Dhofar University delivered a SER describing the main characteristics of the institution. The SER explained how the quality management system works and how learning and teaching are organised. Additionally, Dhofar University sent appendices to provide more detailed material, give evidence to the self-report statements, and demonstrate how procedures are organised and put into practice.

The appendix included documents such as student retention rates, DU educational offers, undergraduate teaching and undergraduate admission regulations, quality assurance policies and mechanisms, information on graduate profiles, or procedures for drafting and updating study plans.

AQAS scrutinised the application originally received in 2021 for sufficiency so that the final version of the SER was delivered in April 2022.

External phase/panel of experts

Following the AQAS principles for institutional accreditation, the composition followed the basic principle that the panel consists of two experts from university management/from one of the disciplines offered by the higher education institution under review, one expert for quality assurance/labour market and, one student expert. At least one panel member has experience in the region.

On 29 August 2022, the AQAS Commission officially initialised the procedure.

AQAS informed the university about the expert panel members, and Dhofar University had no objections.

Within the institutional accreditation procedure, the study programme "English Language" was chosen to be reviewed and serve as a programme sample for the institutional review. An additional SER provided the necessary information on the programme sample following the guidelines for AQAS programme reviews as DU chose to extend the programme sample to a full programme review.

The experts reviewed the application and submitted a short preliminary statement, including open questions and potential needs for additional information. AQAS forwarded these preliminary statements to the university and the other panel members to increase transparency in the process and the discussions during the site visit.

During the site visit, discussions were held with the university management, the QA unit, the Deans of the faculties, teaching staff, students, and labour market representatives. At the end of the site visit, the experts presented short feedback on the main findings to representatives of Dhofar University. The experts highlight the constructive atmosphere of the discussion and underline that generally, the experts hope that their observations will be helpful for the institution and can be applied in the particular context of DU.

In spring 2023, the expert panel drafted the assessment report, including a recommendation to the Standing Commission of AQAS. AQAS forwarded the report to DU, providing the opportunity to comment on the report.

Based upon the expert panel's report and the University's comments, the AQAS Commission decided on the institutional accreditation in May 2023. AQAS forwarded the decision to the University. The University had the right to appeal the decision.

AQAS published the report and the result of the accreditation and the names of the panel of experts.

III. National context

Dhofar University (DU) was established in 2004 based on a ministerial decree that allowed the privatisation of the higher education system in Oman. The University is in Salalah, the central city in the Dhofar governorate. The self-evaluation report (SER) outlines that the University is the first private university accredited nationally by the national legal authority (Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance; OAAAQA) in December 2018. On the international level, the University obtained accreditation by the Accreditation Services for International Schools, Colleges and Universities (ASIC) in April 2019. The SER also states that the University is the first Omani university to achieve a five-star overall ranking by the QS Intelligence Unit in 2021, positioning DU among the 121-130 universities in the Arab Region, the number one private university in Oman and the 16th in the Arab world for International Research Networks.

At the time of the submission of the SER (July 2022), the latest number of enrolled students was around 5,570, with most Omani citizens and a minority of expatriates. The University has four colleges: The College of Arts and Applied Sciences (CAAS), which is part of this institutional review, the College of Commerce and Business Administration (CCBA), the College of Engineering (CE) and the College of Law (CL). The students are distributed in the four Colleges of DU. CCBA has 2689 students, CE has 790 students, CL has 690 students, and CAAS has 1401 students. DU is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, who represents DU. The Vice-Chancellor reports to the Board of Trustees. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research supports the Vice-Chancellor, and each college has college deans, assistant deans and department chairs. On the administrative side, it is defined that individual units within DU are responsible for defined tasks, e.g., Department of Financial Affairs, Department of Human Resources, Department of Public Relations and External Cooperation, Department of Quality Assurance (QAD), and alike. The duties and responsibilities are defined in the DU By-laws. The SER outlines that in 2021 the Department of Postgraduate Studies and the DU Office for International Cooperation had been established. In addition, the SER describes that the highest decision-making body within DU is the University Council. The Vice-Chancellor chairs the council. Further members are the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Deans of the Colleges, the Foundation Programme Directory, the QA Department Director, and the Director of the Department of Research. Additional members are representatives of the Colleges, non-academic staff representatives and the president of the Student Advisory Committee.

The University offers, in general, two-year diploma programmes, four-year bachelor programmes, and two-year master's degree programmes, out of which the majority are offered in English. In addition, DU offers a so-called Foundation Programme as a preparation programme before entering study programmes. This depends on the applicant's proficiency in English and the placement test result. In total, DU offers 54 programmes in 18 academic departments.

Looking at the faculty level of the College of Arts and Applied Sciences (CAAS), the SER clarifies that CAAS has six departments (Department of Computer Science, Department of Education, Department of English Language and Literature, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Department of Social Sciences, and the Department of Mathematics and Science). As of July 2022, CAAS offers five diploma programmes, eleven bachelor programmes, eight master programmes, and one postgraduate diploma programme. The majority of the programmes offered at CAAS are long-running programmes. The documentation provided also indicates the last review process on the national level. CAAS currently has 60 full-time and 15 part-time faculty members and ten non-academic staff (seven secretaries and two lab technicians).

IV. General Information on the University

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V. Assessment of the College

1. Policy and Procedures for Quality Assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. [ESG, 1.1]

Description

Following the SER, the University links the formal Policy Management System (PMS) to DU's current strategy (2021-2031), which strives to enhance PMS's quality and ensure good governance. It is stated that the rules and regulations applied at DU are in line with the Omani Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) and OAAAQA.

The SER defines clear steps for making new policies on the institutional level (Pre-Development – Development – Implementation – Review), which is also linked to the college level. In case there is an urge for new policies, relevant stakeholders are aware of a prescribed form which will be forwarded to the quality assurance department and presented to the University Council to decide on the implementation (Pre-Development). In the next step, an ad-hoc committee will draft a policy for further discussion within the University Council (Development). According to the SER, the implementation of new policies is assured by prescribed formats and a line of communication to all stakeholders to raise awareness of the new or adapted policy. Each policy has, in addition, a custodian to assure the correct implementation of the respective policy (Implementation). All policies are periodically reviewed. The quality assurance department administers this process. Within this step, an ad-hoc committee of faculty members is composed to discuss and review the respective policy before it is taken to the University Council for final approval (Review).

As of July 2022, DU's PMS includes 43 policies which can be differentiated as academic policies (covering, e.g. assessment, teaching load, academic integrity, academic programmes development and reviews or learning support), administrative policies (e.g. policy management system, student code of conduct, student grievance, student employment, data protection or student feedback), research policies (e.g., ethics, biosafety or research ethics), and human resources policies (e.g., recruitment, staff induction, professional development, succession planning or faculty appraisal). The QAD has a representative in each college to make the policies functional on a day-to-day basis.

Each college has a specific action plan that aligns with the national education strategy and DU's overall strategy. The SER outlines that DU follows a bottom-up approach, meaning that each College Council is responsible for the framework of the college's action plan, which the respective faculty members will discuss. Each action plan covers research, teaching and learning, community service, professional development, internationalisation, and quality assurance topics. Based on these action plans, key performance indicators and responsibilities are developed and assigned to increase transparency and to be able to measure progress. The College Councils are responsible for monitoring the action plans.

The self-evaluation report highlights that DU's quality assurance system considers data collected from the faculty and student results. In consequence, the SER points out the strengths of the QA system but also identifies challenges for the system, such as lack of external consultancy or difficulties in benchmarking with international standards. In addition, the SER gives an example of DU's efforts to close the PDCA cycle within the University (via the nationally wide applied Approach-Deployment-Review-Improvement cycle (ADRI), a similar approach to the PDCA cycle).

According to the SER, the example shows how the intended learning outcomes on the programme level are defined and implemented via the Omani Qualifications Framework and industry feedback and how DU and, consequently, CAAS maintains a flow of communication to external stakeholders. In this step, it is said that generic intended learning outcomes applicable to all programmes and derived from DU's Vision, and Mission statement are integrated into the programmes (Plan).

Within the Do step, the systematic structure for all programmes offered at the University is focused. This includes generic intended learning outcomes, the intended learning outcomes on the programme level, and consequently, the intended learning outcomes on the course level, all outlined in the course syllabi and communicated to students by academic advisors (Do).

The SER states that course work is evaluated by students periodically via surveys. An alignment between intended learning outcomes (ILO) on the programme and the course level is also included in each course syllabi. The course instructors submit the feedback results, its analysis and an alignment matrix at the end of every semester (Check).

To raise the awareness of changes in the courses amongst students, the results are communicated Students Advisory Committee, who, consequently, informs the student body and shares with the course instructors to act accordingly. Also, special sessions are arranged to foster knowledge about DU's current policies (Act).

Experts' Evaluation

Dhofar University – and for this review specifically the College of Arts and Applied Sciences has successfully established a complete and holistic system of Quality Assurance of high transparency, flexibility and a high grade of participation and interaction within in a few years. The expert group shows its deep respect since the university has been founded in 2004, i.e., less than twenty years ago. The processes of accreditations having taken place on the national and the international level in the recent past and the obtained ranking results proof witness of this impressive development. Therefore, the expert group, formed by AQAS, considers the request of the College of Arts and Applied Sciences of Dhofar University for one more accreditation process (concerning one college and one study programme within this college as a sample) as an attempt to obtain an extra layer of external recognition as well as a way to improve its performance even more. This all may contribute to a stronger and more competitive standing within the Omani system of higher education which is mostly dominated by state funded academic institutions whereas Dhofar university is a private (but non-profit oriented) university.

Dhofar University follows a strategy bridging one decade (2021 through 2031) that has one goal to improve the quality of the formal and existing Policy Management System, PMS, and to ensure an approach of good governance. From the experts point of view the system of Quality Assurance can definitely be considered as a central and integral part of this strategy.

Dhofar University has proved being successful in designing and establishing a Quality Assurance Organisational Structure, in defining Quality Assurance Scopes and in developing a data-based Quality Assurance Process with closed cycles for an annual review and a medium-term review of 3 to 5 years. All levels, structures and cycles have been summed up in an organogram that shows a coherent structure. The expert group carefully reviewed the different layers and elements of the system and during the site visit a visualization could be presented that enabled the expert group to better understand the interactions between different units and processes. After careful analysis the panel would like to recommend that the organogram of the QA cycles be made less complex to make the processes more streamlined. In addition, the expert group would like to encourage CAAS to clarify how these cycles are closed. With a complex system being in place and many improvement-oriented activities a simple conceptual assurance and clear evidence was missing in the end. From

the panel of experts there is a clear chance by questioning complexity and thus improving the quality of the process without losing impact (**Finding 1**).

A high level of awareness for the topic of Quality Assurance in the sense of maintenance, renewal and further development can therefore be confirmed. The central position of a Department of Quality Assurance like a spider in its web (located between the Vice Chancellor and the academic and administrative units) speaks for its importance and relevance. The expert panel learned that the QA Office works on developing the strategic plan but works also on the operational implementation including stakeholder involvement. On the long run it seems advisable that the visibility of the strategic plan is further enhanced to ensure the inclusivity of the external stakeholders. Further on, the expert panel learned about the system of regular reviews between all units concerned. It is however important to ensure that the review takes into account the removal of any possible redundancies between programmes within CAAS to avoid possible overlap in the graduate attributes, and hence the learning outcomes.

The existence of 43 QA policies (academic, administrative, research, human resources), mentioned in the self-evaluation report, however, may lead to the question of how coherent such an abundance can be and how practicable and functional it is to handle on a day-to-day basis. This remark may be seen against the background of a rather small university of about 5.000 students and 4 colleges. However, the expert panel learned that the four fields of the QA policies are in the move and that the biggest changes are currently happening in the field of research policy. The expert panel appreciates this development as a logical and necessary step in the development of a young university that cannot start with excellence in research. The expert panel points out that the field of research requires own indicators and criteria and encourages the university and its colleges to continue on its way to broaden the spectrum of Master programmes, to develop Ph.D. programmes and to draft and to implement a concept of research groups. As the focus of this review lies on the institutional quality focussing on teaching and learning at this point the College can only be encouraged to continue its development in the other relevant areas as well.

Since all colleges are part of this structure all processes and procedures apply naturally to the College of Arts and Applied Sciences, CAAS, i.e. the college under review. For the expert panel there was no surprise that each college, in this case CAAS, has a specific action plan that goes along with the overall strategy of Dhofar University (besides a national strategy that could not be taken into focus). A bottom-up approach makes sure that it is the college resp. the College Council itself that is responsible for the framework of the college's action plan that covers various areas like teaching and learning, research, professional development, transfer activities, aspects of internationalization and QA issues.

The expert panel could confirm that as a result of the implemented policies each programme within the college had its graduate attributes and learning outcomes. However, a careful study of the presented evidence and publicly available information showed that while overall being appropriate and well phrased, the graduate attributes and the learning outcomes at the programmes' levels within CAAS could be further improved to better ensure that they are specific and measurable (**Finding 2**). In addition, CASS's QA System could be further enhanced to include more reliable mechanisms to measure the achievement of the learning outcomes other than surveying students' views on such an achievement. Within a well working system a more constructive alignment between the graduate attributes the learning outcomes should be warranted throughout the QA System. This is seen as an opportunity for the future development of the system of CAAS.

An area that should gain increased attention in the future is the estimation and evaluation of student workload. As part of an increased internationalization and the intention of the college to attract incoming students but also send students abroad data on student workload will facilitate ECTS allocation to courses and thus enable an easier recognition both ways. Based on the discussions with the faculty leadership the panel of experts is confident that the College already started its path towards this direction.

The expert panel could satisfy itself of finding a QA system at the college level that supports the development of a quality culture in which internal and external stakeholders are involved, for instance whenever a new programme is being developed the college systematically collects labour market input. Besides this advisory boards exist on a continuous level. The expert panel could also witness that there is also a student council and student advisory body that frequently provides suggestions and proposals. There is also a non-academic staff advisory committee. The expert panel concluded that all the groups of stakeholders are well informed about the strategies, procedures, and the quantitative and qualitative results of QA processes, although the experts would like to recommend a more active involvement of the stakeholders (especially employers and students) in the decision making and in the work of different committees (**Finding 3**). The results of continuous evaluations are shared with the teaching staff and the students. Last but not least the expert panel recognizes the awareness, the efforts and the positive outcome of strategies against discrimination and strategies fostering academic integrity.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

2. Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. [ESG, 1.2]

Description

The SER outlines that the procedures and processes to implement new programmes follow the ministry regulations in Oman. In general, it is stated that all programmes are based on national and international standards in the respective field of study. Furthermore, national priorities are also taken into account. The study programmes follow a prescribed composition of university requirement courses, core courses, major elective courses, and general elective courses. With this setup, DU strives to set a defined foundation of knowledge applicable to all programmes while considering the uniqueness of the study field. As mentioned above, DU and CAAS have policies in place to ensure the cyclical review on the macro and micro level, the adequacy of the curricula according to the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF) and the integration of external stakeholder's feedback on the study programmes.

When developing new or reviewing programmes, DU follows a policy called "Academic Programme Development and Review Policy" (APDRP), which specifies details in the procedure and is annexed to the self-evaluation report. Following the policy, the colleges at DU would set up an "Academic Programme Development and Review Committee" (APDRC) in discussion with the College Council.

When developing new programmes, the policy includes that this procedure has to be carried out according to the respective level of the programme, national and international demands, and with benchmarks with at least three higher education institutions with reputation. The Dean of the respective college will appoint a Programme Development Team that assures, on the one hand, structural aspects such as duration, contact hours or exit awards, but, on the other hand, the team is also responsible for the consideration of graduate attributes in the ILOs on the programme and on the course level and the integration of external feedback. After this step, the SER points out that the APDRC discusses the proposal, and further amendments can take place if deemed necessary. The Committee also considers internship placement where needed, e.g., in social work or

education programmes. The SER states that the OQF is currently in its implementation phase, and DU is one of the piloting higher education institutions in Oman participating. Thus, the correct alignment of intended learning outcomes on the programme and the course level is closely monitored by MoHERI.

The general structure of study programmes is nationally wide harmonized. Diploma programmes are 60 credit hour programmes, bachelor programmes are 120 credit hour programmes, and master programmes are 33 to 36 credit hour programmes. Each module has three credit hours. Diploma and Bachelor's students are expected to enrol in four to five courses per semester, while master's students are required to enrol in three courses each semester. The documentation of student progression happens in the online system. Via the online system, students can access all study programme-related information, e.g., course syllabi, ILOs on the programme and the course level, teaching and learning methods or the student handbook.

Experts' Evaluation

Dhofar University stipulated that its study programmes on offer constitute the core of the institutional mission. Over the years, the university has developed a comprehensive set of policies, "Academic Programs Development and Review Policy" (DU-AC-008) being one of the Academic Policies. The University and thus the College have also established and implemented related mechanisms for processes on Programme Design and Approval to effect.

The educational objectives of Dhofar University require all academic units to reflect the afore-mentioned alongside Intended Learning Outcomes across the curricula development respectively. It should be noted however that the generic graduate attributes of the institution are related not only to knowledge and skills but also values which might be challenging to assess (**see Finding 2**).

The university curricula comprise University and College required general elective courses and major core and elective courses. These envisage providing students with cross-subject and subject-specific knowledge as well as developing their generic, subject-specific and practical skills. The Institutional Handbook including Modular Information provides evidence of Intended Learning Outcomes targeting the afore-mentioned knowledge, skills and competencies.

For purposes of programme design, the College Committees (APRDC) and Programme Development Teams set up by the Dean of the College in discussion with the College Council are assigned their respective responsibilities. The Committees and Teams are supposed to follow the established procedures for programme development that are clear and transparent to all those concerned.

Specifically, the Committees and Teams involve student representatives in the developmental process and ensure that newly designed programmes meet the requirements of the Oman Qualifications Framework in terms of degree, demand and benchmarks with well-established higher education providers on the national and international level. Also, the Programme Development Committees and Teams consider subject-matter requirements of degree programmes and include theoretical and applied (Internship) components accordingly. They also design programmes in such a way that students are provided with adequate opportunities to smoothly progress from commencing year towards graduation.

At Dhofar University and respectively at CAAS, programmes in general and courses in specific are assigned standard local credits reflecting students' workload in the classroom (without independent learning). First initiatives at College level to progress with an ECTS translation /alignment that also reflects students' workload outside the classroom is underway and is highly valued by the panel of experts. This procedure will increase the transparency to ensure the correspondence of the DU Associate, Bachelors and Masters programmes to levels 5, 6, 7 of the European Qualifications Framework respectively as well as enable students' mobility.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

3. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned. [ESG, 1.9]

Description

The periodic review of programmes is foreseen in the national accreditation procedures and DU's processes. The process for existing programmes differentiates between major, minor, and course content changes. According to the MoHERI guidelines, major changes include changes of more than 30%. Usually, the periodicity for review is six years (undergraduate programmes) and four years (diploma and graduate programmes). However, the SER states that the policies allow changes before the scheduled time, but the MoHERI needs to approve these changes. Minor changes can be implemented annually to keep the curriculum up to date. However, MoHERI has to be informed about changes as well. The SER clarifies that these changes might include course codes and titles, modifications in the course descriptions, changes in the course composition, and alike. Changes in the course content are usually done between the course instructor and the head of the department. The SER outlines that this procedure usually happens annually to align the course content with the course descriptions and the ILOs on the course level. Generally, the SER states that reviews involve cross-university faculty members because it is believed to strengthen the teaching capacities within DU.

After the internal review, the SER outlines that each programme is benchmarked with Sultan Qaboos University and other higher education institutions inside and outside Oman. Once done, the programme review team submits the documentation of the study programme to the "Academic Programme Development and Review Committee" (APDRC), which will appoint a team of external peers as a reviewer team. Typically the team is composed of two experts (one from a higher education institution in Oman and another from the industry of the relevant field). After the external review, their considerations are considered and merged into the final documentation for a study programme. This documentation will be forwarded to the Vice Chancellor's Office and sent to MoHERI. In case of approval, the changes will be implemented in the upcoming academic year. The SER explains that seven aspects must be considered during the reviewing process. This includes that the study programmes are up to date, the society changes are considered, the student workload is realistic, the intended learning outcomes on the course level reflect the ones on the programme level, student expectations are met, and the programme has been externally reviewed, and the study programme has the correspondent learning environment and support services.

DU's aspirations to become a university of "preferred choice" in the Sultanate of Oman are written down in a "DU Horizon 2020" document. This document refers to DU's mission and vision of providing high-quality programmes, including academic integrity, strengthening entrepreneurship and student work placement, effective assessment tools, and alike. In addition, DU has set up an advisory board, including external stakeholders, to collect input from this external stakeholder group.

Experts' Evaluation

DU and CAAS emphasize the importance of high-quality, diverse teaching methods, including the use of new media, and, most importantly, student-centredness. This is, for instance, manifested in various policies that are concerned with teaching and learning. While the intended learning outcomes are not always very specific or easy to operationalize, the methods of teaching and learning certainly are generally appropriate in this context and support student development. Especially the peer learning centre is of great importance and value in this respect. CAAS has implemented a strict and coherent procedure for the evaluation of study programmes and individual courses, including annual student satisfaction surveys. The cycles for this evaluation and actual implementation correspond to what is possible in the national framework. Individual course content can be modified in much shorter intervals, following evaluation procedures by students and in close collaboration with the head of department. However, due to the timeline of these evaluations, the students affected do not always receive direct feedback on the outcomes of their evaluations. The panel of experts encourages the College to consider implementing additional evaluation/feedback loops during the actual course, the results of which can be discussed with the class affected and involved. This might impact student motivation to participate in evaluation and reflect their active role and responsibility in / for the learning process even better.

CAAS regularly monitors and reviews its study programmes and curricula. This takes into account both current research developments, societal changes, and the interests of all stakeholders involved. However, as student workload is not systematically assessed, this is not part of the picture. The panel of experts therefore recommends the systematic monitoring of actual student workload, especially since this could then also be reflected in ECTS (**Finding 4**). There are figures on the progression of students and the completion of study programmes in a timely fashion, and this is taken into account. Assessments are regularly discussed and cross-checked among colleagues in the individual lines of study, and there is strong interest in student expectations, needs, and satisfaction, which are checked both in institutionalized evaluations and in ad-hoc feedback sessions with various members of the study programmes, departments, and the college. For this part, all stakeholders are involved in the process, though institutionalized student involvement could still be improved, for example by systematically implementing more student involvement in committee work (**see Finding 3**).

The intended learning outcomes are amended, if needed, in the longer cycles, usually in line with developments in academia. The panel of experts also observed that CAAS attempts to reach out to representatives of the (local) labour market and set up advisory committees who at the time of the site visit had not developed its full potential yet as they were established shortly before / during the pandemic and had just experienced their inauguration meetings. The expert panel encourages CAAS to make full use of the potential feeding into their system by engaging labour market representatives.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

4. Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Students

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.
[ESG, 1.3]

Description

Learning and teaching

The SER states that DU's teaching and learning approach focuses on a teaching model that puts the student in the centre. DU imparts methods to enable students to acquire problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and inquiry-based learning by providing life skill scenarios. In addition, DU state that they deploy a practical assessment policy to outline the assessment methods, weightings, forms of continuous assessment, or guidelines for practical components within the study programmes transparently. In addition, DU uses a feedback-based assessment approach that strives to start a self-reflection phase of potential weaknesses in students. A moderation policy also backs this up. According to the CAAS, faculty members use various teaching methods that align with the respective course and its context. This covers, e.g., lectures, tutorials, practical tasks, seminars, field trips, guest lecturers, case studies or class presentations. However, CAAS states that they encourage its members to deploy additional resources. To follow up on the adequacy of teaching and learning methods used in the courses, students have the chance to provide feedback at the end of the semester. Potential fields for improvement will be discussed by the department chair and individual faculty members. The results of these discussions are included in the annual faculty activities report.

CAAS organises meeting sessions at the beginning of the semester to give students a voice apart from the feedback. These meetings are designed to provide their opinions to the management of the college. During the semester, teaching staff and course coordinators meet regularly to exchange experiences related to teaching. In addition, the Centre of Teaching and Learning organises workshops to further develop staff members' teaching capacities.

The SER points out that several policies concerning teaching and learning support academic management. This includes the academic integrity of students (see Academic Integrity Policy). In cases of academic misconduct, the University describes that these cases are discussed at the Student Affairs Committee (SAC), which the Assistant Dean heads. The policy includes the possibility of appealing against the outcome of the SAC's decision. Appeal cases will be discussed in the College Council meetings. Following the policies included in the SER, it is explained that DU offers an appeal and grievance resolution system, where students can submit their appeal against the results of assessments or exams, missed final exams, request for re-sitting the exam, or the withdrawal of the course.

Assessment

All CAAS courses follow a three-step assessment procedure, including a continuous assessment, mid-term exam(s), and a final exam. In comparison, the continuous assessment activities might consist of quizzes, assignments, homework, presentations, projects, portfolio, fieldwork, or lab work. To increase student transparency, the required assessment procedures are included in the course syllabi and approved by the department chair. A course assessment scheme is given to students at the beginning of each semester. According to the annexe submitted to this SER, the intended learning outcomes on the course level are aligned in a matrix to the assessment questions. Course syllabi generally include the ILOs, the weekly outline, and the assessment scheme. The content of each course will be explained to students at the beginning of each course. The SER explains that CAAS follows the DU Moderation Policy that includes a pre-assessment international moderation of exams and a post-moderation of the evaluated exams.

The assessments are regulated by three policies (moderation, assessment, and examination). It is said that these allow stakeholders to have an overview of the internal moderation process, the assessment forms, how to align the assessment to the intended learning outcomes on the course level, the preparation of examinations and how to handle academic conduct.

Experts' Evaluation

The SER states that in accordance with the adopted institutional approach CASS designs all programmes to focus on and encourage teaching staff to implement student-centered learning. This approach is reflected through a variety of instructional delivery modes as well as different instructional methods as stated in the SER and Appendices and reported in interviews with teachers and students.

The appropriateness of the classroom practices across CASS programmes and their implementation are ensured and monitored by the College through the established institutional procedures. The variety of the teaching and learning methods on offer take into account the diversity of student profiles in terms of their needs, learning difficulties, areas for improvement as well as their employability prospects (e.g. flexibility in terms of student selection of major elective courses for preferred job options). This is also supported by the Advisor's guidance (DU-AC-003) and teachers' facilitative role within the spirit of mutual respect.

Formal requirements for admission are clearly formulated to prospective Omani students. Specific prerequisites relevant to an individual study programme (e.g. language skills, relevant experience, artistic ability) reflect knowledge and skills needed for a successful completion of the programme. In particular, if there are gaps in this respect, the 1-year Foundation Programme which must be completed before the start of a degree programme plays an important role.

It should be noted that the issue of student-centred learning is treated differently on different levels of the QA-system. The institutional policy and priority of student-centred learning is evident in the elements of student-centred learning considered in the designing new programmes as well as in already established programmes (e.g., different modes of delivery, a variety of pedagogical methods). However, students do not always seem to be clear about their active role, except in terms of thematic discussions within the classroom. Student-centred learning is therefore understood as participation in the classroom, rather than students having an active role in lesson planning or their own management of learning - but this depends strongly on the course and teacher. There still seems to be potential for development in terms of a common understanding and greater transparency concerning student-centred learning (**see Finding 3**).

There is a high attendance requirement for the courses, which limits individual learning paths. Nevertheless, the institution mostly assures that methods of teaching and learning respect and consider the diversity of students and their needs in order to enable flexible learning paths to a certain extent. This is done in particular for disabled students on personal and institutional levels respectively. However, in the long run CAAS should also consider implementing more flexibility for students in terms of programme design independent of disclosure of personal circumstances, especially regarding the required courses. This would also open possibilities for part-time students which at this time is at an early stage of institutional awareness.

In addition to student-centered learning and teaching, student-centered assessment regulations and procedures are implemented in accordance with the established institutional policies (DU-AC-004-005-006). The SER annexes document alignment of programme/course ILOs to assessment scheme. In accordance with the Institutional Policies, assessment is regulated through moderation and evaluation of assessment forms, preparation, changes, if any, alignment and implementation.

Upon commencement of every academic semester, students are provided with their respective course syllabi including weekly plans, Intended Learning Outcomes and assessment schemes reflecting both continuous (quizzes, presentations, assignments, discussions, portfolios) as well as formal assessment (percentage breakdown, marking criteria).

Thus, assessment procedures, assessment and grading criteria as well as assessment method are made readily available in a published form to students. Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner. The regulations also enable and encourage to combine assessment with feedback to students and

if necessary, link to advice on the learning process. The students can ask for feedback on their written exams in a certain period of time after getting their results. Also, there is personal guidance if there are severe problems regarding the learning process.

There are different procedures for dealing with student complaints and feedback. Students are mostly involved in joint reflection on teaching activities through surveys including a feedback form after every semester. However, at this stage the students do not get transparent feedback on the changes and developments of the courses based on the feedback form. Another form of dealing with student complaints is the discussion between students and the dean which seems helpful for students and faculty members, though the panel of experts points out that in such meetings it is not entirely clear if every individual voice is heard. The issue was carefully discussed during the interviews on site, and it seems to the panel of experts that the current approach is inherent in the institutional culture. However, in the long run it might be advisable to observe if this approach remains fit for purpose. Also, students can use office hours of academic staff to raise issues and depending on the teacher they get oral and online feedback on their assessment. Yet, students and (most) teachers are not aware of how much time the students need to invest in each course. The inclusion of the assessment of student workload in the QA system is yet missing (see Finding 4).

The development of DU over time is clearly visible, it is characterised in particular by constant evaluation and teaching as main cornerstones besides research. Through the Institutional Professional Development Scheme (DU-HR-004) teaching staff are provided with opportunities to keep abreast of contemporary educational developments. To promote good teaching practice, various awards have been developed including the teaching excellence award.

CAAS has also established regulations which take into account students' mitigating circumstances and compensating them accordingly through other assessment options.

Labour market stakeholders expressed that they can see an impressive development in skills of the graduates. At the same time, rare internship opportunities for the students are reported from several stakeholders. Importantly, learning is becoming more and more internationally oriented all over the world, and this can also be observed at CAAS and DU. A slowly developing but still growing international exchange can be seen here (staff and student mobility). In this respect, the international office has been an enrichment to DU for a year now.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

5. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification. [ESG, 1.4]

Description

Admission

The SER states that the entry requirements and standards for all academic programmes refer to the standards set by MoHERI. These standards are generally set to assure that potential students have the necessary prerequisite knowledge, skills and competencies for the respective programme. The standards also regulate a clear communication flow, consideration of students' mobility, and recognition of prior learning.

DU describes that the University follows two pathways for student enrolment and differentiates between national and international students. The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) administers Omani students. This system is aimed to enable all Omani students holding General Education Diploma (GED) or equivalent certificates to apply to the different public HEIs, external and internal scholarships and grants by submitting one electronic application. Admitted applicants can also complete their registration procedures at the HEIs through this system. MoHERI will administer international applicants. Despite these two administrative paths, applicants for undergraduate programmes have to do a placement test which covers English, Math, and IT competencies. Depending on the result, applicants qualify either directly to the study programme they wish to enrol in or have up to three semesters of remedial work. The results must be at least 60 points for English and Math and at least 70 points for IT to be admitted directly. The admission procedure for graduate programmes at CAAS follows a different principle with specified entry requirements, which allows potential students to be enrolled directly. A written test and/or personal interview will be carried out to create a short list of applicants. All programmes delivered in English require a minimum of IELTS band six language competencies. The programme-specific requirements are outlined in the DU Postgraduate Studies Catalogue for the respective academic year. The SER states that there are multiple ways to assure potential new students are familiar with the admission regulations and procedures: the DU student handbook, the introduction day, and the advising possibilities to allow interaction between faculty members and students.

Progression

According to the SER, students' progression is monitored at the college level, including programme level data and aggregation to detect specific student progression trends. The indicators for progression cover the retention rate, the progression rate, and the completion rate. The SER gives an overview of the past two academic years with an analysis of petitions at CAAS. A low progression rate might lead to the programme's closure, and the national accreditation becomes invalid if a college decides to close a programme. On a micro-level, the academic advisors of students follow up on the progression of their advisees. If a timely progression is hindered due to examination failure, the college may agree to repeat the exam.

The University has implemented a specific unit for students with disabilities (visual, hearing or physical disability). This unit can support students with disabilities by providing additional services or support. In addition, the SER outlines that CAAS has started a diploma programme in computer science for students with hearing impairments. To enable more students to enrol in these programmes, the University has offered five full scholarships per academic year. DU has implemented a policy for students with disabilities to smoothen the process and to provide a transparent procedure.

Recognition

The SER states that an equivalence procedure is in place at the university level to recognise students' prior learning within the MoHERI regulations. Students may transfer to DU if MoHERI recognises the university of origin. From an administrative side, potential students have to meet the residence requirements, saying that at least 50% of the study programme has to be taken at DU, and the equivalency criteria, stating that all relevant documents need to be submitted at once, the course content needs to be equivalent to at least 70% and with the same number of credits. The procedure is supported by an equivalency committee that monitors all recognition procedures.

Certification

DU issues a degree certificate along with a transcript of records that specifies the courses completed by the degree holder.

Experts' Evaluation

The university and CAAS specifically and clearly outline the different pathways to admission. Depending on students' individual strengths and the results of their placement test and English language competence different lines of study, including remedial work, are available. The admission criteria are clearly identifiable, communicated transparently, and applied consistently. Respective policies are in place and appropriate.

New students are introduced to the institution and their study programmes by individual lecturers, academic advisors as well as various publications and special events. Their progression is monitored carefully through electronic QM systems (on a macro level) as well as regular talks with academic advisors, in which students may get detailed feedback on their performance and how to best design their course of studies (on a micro-level). The culture of communication between instructors/advisors and students is something that is regarded as particularly positive by the accreditation committee.

DU and CAAS put special emphasis on supporting students with disabilities, i.e., students with visual or hearing impairments by creating a special unit and even a special diploma program in computer science. The expert panel wishes to encourage DU and CAAS to strengthen their efforts in this respect and work towards full integration of students with disabilities into their regular study programmes.

International student mobility at CAAS is somewhat limited at the moment, and there is no institutionalized integration of the ECTS, for example. The accreditation committee strongly encourages that CAAS develop more institutionalized support for international exchange of students, both incoming and outgoing, and that it implements (at least) a reliable and binding conversion system for credit points at CAAS and ECTS. At this point the QA system is not designed in a way that it assures transparency on conversion in ECTS (**Finding 5**). The college might even want to think about ways to encourage and promote mobility, for example awards for gifted students that wish to go abroad.

DU and CAAS have policies in place that regulate recognition of academic achievements only within the Mo-HERI system. An equivalency committee is in place that monitors all recognition processes. The documentation of academic achievements at CAAS is in line with international standards and requirements and details all necessary qualifications.

Conclusion

The criterion is partly fulfilled.

6. Teaching Staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their academic staff. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff. [ESG, 1.5]

Description

DU states that an essential factor for the University is the effective teaching of its students. Thus, DU strives to hire highly qualified academics with relevant qualifications and different levels of experience to support DU in becoming a highly recognised HEI. Having a centralised approach, it is said that CAAS comply with the university-wide regulations manifested in respective policies. The SER outlines four essential components that strive to foster the academic body: Staff Selection Process – Induction – Professional Development – Effective Teaching, and Research.

Human resources-related matters of the College are monitored together with the DU leadership. To plan academic matters, the College meets with the academic departments to discuss the needs for the upcoming semesters. Based on this discussion, the College assures, on the one hand, a timely staffing procedure and, on the other hand, a follow-up on the development at the department level. The process includes that the Human Resources Team sends a shortlist to the dean after possible candidates have submitted their applications to open job announcements. After the department has screened the applications, shortlisted candidates will be invited for an interview by the respective dean. The interview team includes the dean, the assistant dean and the department chair. CAAS and the Human Resources Team ensure equal circumstances for the interviews. After this process, the University follows the recruitment policy, which includes communication between the dean and the Human Resources Team and a recruitment form by the Vice-Chancellor.

According to the SER, newly appointed staff will benefit from the systematic induction programme that includes information on the workplace, job duties and responsibilities, colleagues and the DU's code of conduct. The University has a special handbook for the induction of staff that is part of the annexe of the SER. The process is based on the staff induction policy that defines the overall objectives of the induction process and differentiates between the induction activities before and after the arrival at DU. The University strives to support new staff with any kind of administrative matters, including visa application, documentation, or alike. Once new staff members have arrived at DU, an induction committee explains rules and regulations, assessment strategies, financial matters, or the annual action plan. Apart from this formal induction, the induction strategy at DU includes a mentoring programme, which connects new staff members with more experienced staff members at the department.

The SER outlines the systematic enhancement of non-academic and academic competencies of staff members. DU's Professional Development Policy manifests this principle. The SER provides evidence on areas for improvement, carried out CTL workshops, budget allocation for professional development, and feedback on the CTL workshops. The policy outlines a guide for analysing department needs, professional development activities, and development opportunities for individual stakeholder groups. The identification of development needs is based on the annual performance appraisal, student feedback, and new development in the respective discipline. DU offers in-house professional development and outside activities. In-house activities are organised by the CTL unit in cooperation with the Research Department and the Continuous Education Centre. CTL publishes an annual schedule available to staff members. External professional development activities may include regional and international conferences, seminars, webinars, workshops, or symposia. DU allows a paid five-day leave for these activities. Longer stays are discussed on an individual basis. Non-academic staff members have the opportunity to enhance competencies based on the potential identified by their supervisors (usually during the annual appraisal) or based on their assessment. All workshops for non-academic staff members are organised by the Community Service & Continuous Education and Centre (CSCEC).

To impart teaching and research activities of high quality, DU and consequently CAAS follow a system of continuous quality assurance of teaching, learning and research based on intended learning outcomes on the programme and the course level, the teaching approach outlined above, and the recruitment and induction policy.

Experts' Evaluation

CAAS implements regulations by Dhofar University (DU) and has clearly set clear goals and measures to ensure the sustainability of its faculty professional development. Goal 6 in the DU's strategic plan for the years 2021-2031 primarily focuses on the enhancement human resources capabilities and productivity in a conducive work environment. This goal sets out 6 objectives, mainly attracting and recruiting duly qualified faculty and staff; strengthening professional development activities; providing an attractive work environment for

faculty and staff; ensuring regular, systematic and fair appraisal of faculty and staff; and ensuring fair, impartial, and transparent resolution of faculty and staff grievances. Accordingly, the roles of the teaching staff at Dhofar University are well defined.

Recruitment is done in a fair and transparent manner whilst using specific criteria and conditions. Faculty turnover is one of the strengths of DU and more specifically of CAAS. Hence, DU enjoys a high level of onboarding. DU strives to ensure high quality in recruitment which is directly related to the research nexus. Students are equally engaged in research either through the research segments within their curricula or through jointly collecting data with their instructors in addition to the provision of nationally funded research schemes and programmes. The Expert panel in this regard would like to encourage DU to provide opportunities for international faculty exchanges.

DU has an inclusive Rewards and Incentives Policy for its faculty. The quality of teaching is acknowledged through the annual Teaching Award Scheme. Excellence in teaching based on self- and peer evaluation is recognized and awarded at the college levels in DU.

The research environment within DU, aided with the Rewards and Incentives Policy and its focus on research and publications in addition to research awards, research chairs, and research groups and governed by the Research Policy, allows for the production of quality research that foster promotion opportunities. As a result, DU has received the Certificate of QS Award for international research networks.

DU enjoys a Faculty Appraisal Policy that monitor teaching excellence and ensures that the quality of teaching is directly linked with the faculty's annual performance results. Follow-up meetings are conducted to ensure that students' evaluation outcomes are communicated to the designated faculty and action plans are put and monitored. Faculty members use students' feedback provided in the online course evaluations to further enhance their pedagogy and assessment.

DU ensures that new faculty joining it are provided with the support needed through a bi-annual induction programme. At the CAAS level, the outcomes of the programme are followed up and for each new faculty member a mentor, who is a colleague, is assigned to provide constant collegial support, guidance, and cultural insights during the first semester.

It was evident to the Expert panel that faculty at CAAS are aware of the relevant policies which are made accessible to them and that they are involved in different committees, including QA-related ones at the college and university levels. There are college faculty representatives in the University Council. Their viewpoints are collected using a faculty survey that investigate their satisfaction rates with governance and management, learning by coursework, staff research and consultancy, general, academic, staff, and student support services, and industry and community engagement.

The development of faculty pedagogy and academic practices follows a robust "Professional Development Policy" which regulates the training faculty receive based on their annual performance appraisal results, student feedback, research, specializations, and recent pedagogical trends. The list of the professional development workshops facilitated by international and local experts, organized by DU's Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and attended by its faculty suggests that the CAAS deems it highly important that innovative and technology-based instruction that is student centered and inclusive is adopted and practiced.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

7. Learning Resources and Student Support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided. [ESG, 1.6]

Description

In order to meet the teaching expectations stakeholders, have of the programmes, the SER outlines that learning resources and services can be easily accessed if needed. Each semester the college can submit requests for new equipment needed to the DU management. It is said that the new campus of DU is equipped with state-of-the-art technologies and equipment for the study programmes, including classrooms, computer labs, specialised labs, and a library building. Currently, the library has around 27,000 titles (a total of 38,000 copies), 40 copies, and around 600,000 electronic books, journals or theses.

The Department of Student Affairs (DSA) covers and coordinates all activities related to student support, including orientation of new students, student clubs, sports activities, and cafeterias. The SER outlines that the counselling and career guidance services at DU are essential for university-student interaction. Also, DU offers student employment opportunities (with a maximum of ten hours per week). The University also offers opportunities for international students and housing support. As a unique support service for Omani private HEIs, the SER highlights an initiative for the inclusion of students with disabilities supported by MoHERI. In addition, the University offers student support options, training sessions for faculty members, particular textbooks, and an amended examination policy to accommodate students with disabilities.

Experts' Evaluation

The university is continuously being evaluated and changing, also with respect to learning resources and student support. There are processes in place to assure the availability of material resources for the study programmes which are offered by the institution. Each semester the college can submit requests for new equipment needed to the DU management. Respective policies are in place and the visit confirmed their implementation.

The implementation of the policies in place also assures that there is an appropriate provision of literature, journals, and information sources. There are a lot of resources available to the student and access to a broader spectrum is widened continuously. The resources are fit for purpose, accessible and students are informed about the service available to them.

The institution has feedback mechanisms to assess if the needs of its study population are considered when allocating, planning and providing learning resources. Especially needs of persons with disabilities are taken into account.

Furthermore, there is a central student advisory service available to students at the institutional level. For students with disabilities, students with special circumstances and disabled students there are consultation offers. Students can find a student support centre at the library. Also, the administrative staff are trained for their tasks and is supported in developing their competences.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

8. Information

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities. [ESG, 1.7]

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible. [ESG, 1.8]

Description

The University has a centralised information management system that follows underlying policies to have effective university management. This includes information on the study programmes (supported by the respective policy), communication to external stakeholders via the advisory board and internal stakeholders such as students and staff. The SER outlines that the collection of information covers an analysis of the student profiles, employability of graduates, progression and retention of students, and risk analysis. Evidence is given in the self-evaluation report submitted.

Furthermore, DU details that the public relations office is responsible for promoting programmes, activities and achievements to the stakeholders outside and inside the University's context. The SER highlights a media coverage document focusing on the public relations and marketing department.

Experts' Evaluation

In the opinion of the expert panel, Dhofar University and its academic and administrative units have succeeded in establishing a functioning, feedback-driven central information management system in a short period of time. This information management system is part of the general university strategy and part of the QA management system. In various processes and procedures, data from internal and external sources are collected, processed and made usable for the improvement of the overall system and made visible both internally and externally. All relevant internal and external stakeholders are involved on a regular basis. An office of public relations and marketing is responsible for the external and internal presentation of the university and colleges.

The expert panel was able to see for itself that the university and its colleges, particularly CAAS, have selected their own key performance indicators, which are applied in six core fields. The order of these core fields given in the self-report, starting with research & scholarly activities, does not yet correspond to reality, in which the core field teaching & learning is understandably in the foreground for a still very young university. Nevertheless, the expert panel appreciates the already visible vision to develop into an efficient and competitive institution also in the field of research in the future.

The university, and thus also the CAAS, has an elaborate information management system for the quality assurance of existing study programmes as well as for the development of new programmes (and also for the discontinuation of programmes). Reviews are carried out regularly, and both internal stakeholders (students, teaching staff) and external stakeholders are systematically involved via advisory boards. The procedures are clearly outlined and documented.

It was found that special attention is paid to student monitoring. On the one hand, the conditions for admission to a degree programme (or in advance to a foundation programme) are clearly and transparently regulated; on the other hand, there is information management for each degree program with regard to retention rate, progression rate and completion rate. These results, as well as regular surveys on student satisfaction, are used to monitor the study programmes and their further development. The data are compiled from the bottom up and analyzed by the QA Department and processed for the management level.

In particular, the expert panel appreciates the support services at the university and particularly at the CAAS. According to the SER and confirmed by interviews, each student usually has an academic advisor. There is an established system of special support for students with performance issues, such as the peer-assisted scheme supervised by the Learning and Skills Council, LSC. Of particular note is a system of performance incentives to perform tutoring activities for the aforementioned clientele.

As a central value of the university and the college (and an important part of its mission statement), employability became visible to the expert panel. In addition to ensuring the quality of the study programs and their further development as the most important prerequisite for successful entry into the job market, the university has developed tools to facilitate this transition from study to work, for example through career guidance (the university has its own Career Guidance Section), through the organization of job fairs, or through and with the help of alumni activities. In the opinion of the expert panel, the specifics of the labor market in the city, government, country and region can be addressed even more visibly. In particular, the expert panel finds that the representatives of the local labor market should be integrated more systematically into the university evaluation and decision procedures so as to ensure that graduates can be equipped with skills needed by the particular labor market.

The university provides various learning resources. The expert panel was able to convince itself of their quantity, quality and availability. It can also confirm that there is a strategy to expand and modernize these resources. In particular, the university library with its dedicated service to students and its availability of electronic resources deserves special praise, as does the IT-department, which was (and still is) to cater to the particular needs of students and researchers on a macro- and micro-level, even at times of crisis, such as the COVID-pandemic. Moreover, the peer-learning center is seen by the expert panel as a very important and special place that is of special importance to students and their individual learning processes.

Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

VI. Recommendations of the panel of experts

The panel of experts recommends accrediting the College of Arts and Applied Sciences at Dhofar University with conditions.

Findings:

1. CAAS should demonstrate how the PDCA cycle is finally completed by increasing transparency and potentially streamlining the Quality Assurance processes in place.
2. CAAS should implement measures that assure that graduate attributes translated in learning outcomes at the programmes' levels are specific and measurable.
3. CAAS should develop formats that actively involve students and labour market representatives in the decision-making process of relevant procedures.
4. CAAS should also monitor student workload as part of its quality assurance system.
5. CAAS must include regulations in its QA system assuring transparency for transferring local credits in ECTS.