Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and
Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA)

INQAAHE Talks Webinar
Reflections on Online Learning –
A Quality Assurance Agency Perspective

17 March 2022

Introducing OAAAQA

FAST FACTS – 17 MARCH 2022	
Most Common Academic Year	Sep to June
HEIs (Public + Private) in Oman	40
HEIs undergone ISA/ISR (for Accreditation)	25
Currently Accredited HEIs	11

Key
ISA/ISR: Institutional Standards Assessment/Reassessment
HEI: Higher Education Institution
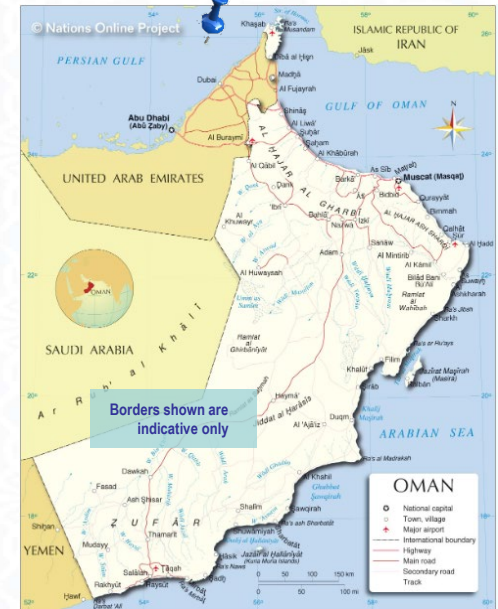**EQA:** External Quality Assurance

Studying in Oman

Online Learning Accelerated by Covid
- Initial challenges with security of assessments
- Ongoing challenges in equal access to internet
- Practical elements of programmes impacted
- Faculty had to adapt quickly and innovatively
- Resources stretched due to economic downturn
- HE campuses now reopened after Covid
- New normal embraces elements of distance learning

© Nations Online Project

Borders shown are indicative only

OMAN

OAAAQA is an independent government entity established by Royal Decree to provide confidence to the public that the quality of higher education in Oman meets international standards, and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. Our mandate was expanded to cover schools in 2021.

'Keep Calm and Carry On'

Insitutional Accreditation Ceremony hosted by Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation

Panel of International External Reviewers Engaged in Typical OAAAQA EQA Visit

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Response 1

Postponed all EQA activities for one year in 2020 to allow HEIs to focus on adapting to distance learning

Response 2

Interacted with State Council and international agencies on QA approaches to distance learning

Response 3

Catered for virtual and hybrid visits allowing continuation of international expertise in our EQA activities
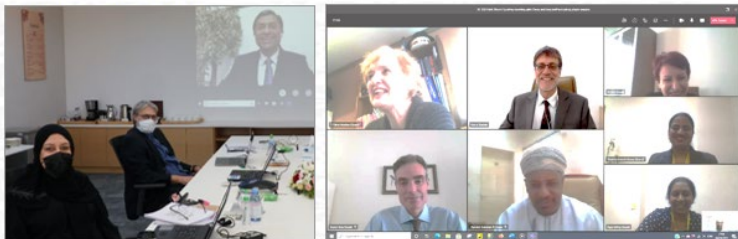
Learning to be hybrid in supporting the sector

Virtual Visits in B3 and B4 Mode

Further changes in CHEQA

With a return to 50% attendance in the office due to Covid, CHEQA staff had added challenges in facilitating April's pre-Ramadan EQA activities. The good news has been the successful use of technology in running hybrid Visits with the ERDs carrying out the role of digital gatekeeper in addition to their more familiar responsibilities. Many thanks to ITD and TSS for making Plan B happen without too many hiccups!

If you're wondering what hybrid Visits running in Plan B3 and B4 m look like, then see MEC GFPQA (4-8 Apr), BC ISR (4-8 Apr) an MUC Pilot PSA (28 Mar-1 Apr) Visits above (clockwise from top l

PB1
- **No Travel Restrictions into Oman**
- All PMs and RD attend Visit
- Strict social distancing and masks required in all Visit activities

PB2
- **Some Travel Restrictions into Oman**
- Those international PMs that can travel attend Visit through virtual means, facilitated by the HEI
- Locally-based PMs and RD visit HEI in person

PB3
- **Return to Partial Lockdown in Oman**
- International PMs attend Visit through virtual means, facilitated by the HEI
- Only locally-based PMs and RD visit HEI in person

PB4
- **Return to Full Lockdown in Oman**
- All interviews conducted through virtual means, facilitated by the HEI
- HEI prepares video tour for Panel Members

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Leaning on our Values to review online learning

Since the 'Renaissance' in Oman, commenced in 1970 under the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos, education has been made accessible to all regardless of gender, means or location.

Integrity
We believe in fairness, honesty and respect and we adhere to the highest standards of integrity in interacting with all stakeholders.

Commitment to international Good Practices
We strive to ensure that all our work processes comply with international good practices.

Professionalism
We apply our skills, knowledge and best judgment in order to carry out our mission effectively.

Collaboration
We value input from all stakeholders to ensure that our work remains responsive to their needs.

Transparency
We ensure all stakeholders have relevant accessibility to our processes and decisions while respecting confidentiality where applicable.

Accountability
We believe that we are accountable to all our stakeholders in ensuring that our mandate is achieved.

Reflectiveness
We employ reflection to inform continuous quality enhancement in all our processes.

Diversity
We respect diversity of professional opinion while encouraging innovation and creativity.

Response 1

EQAs
Postponed

Response 2

Sharing QA
Experiences

Response 3

Virtual Visits
in 'Plan B'

Response 4

Review of
ISA
(and ISR)
Indicators

Reflecting on the outcomes of our Indicator Review Project

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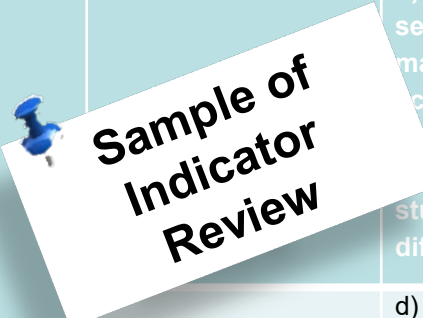
Institutional Standards Features

- The nine ISA standards (and 79 criteria) are generic in nature.

- Benchmarked against 30 international models

- Cover systems, focusing on effectiveness and sustainability.

- They encompass all modes of delivery, assessment and support.

- Criteria are supplemented with non-mandatory indicators.

- Indicators have been amended to be more explicit of range of delivery methods, including online learning.

9 Standards

① Governance & Management
② Student Learning by Coursework
③ Student Learning by Research
④ Staff Research & Consultancy
⑤ Industry & Community Engagement
⑥ Academic Support Services
⑦ Students & Student Support Services
⑧ Staff & Staff Support Services
⑨ General Support Services & Facilities

Sample of Indicator Review

6		b) Academic support services planning and management takes into account the specific needs of students in non-standard modes of study and/or studying in different locations.	b) Academic support services planning and management takes into account the specific needs of students in non-standard modes of study, online or distance learning, and/or studying in different locations.	Non-standard modes of study are usually interpreted as part-time or evening study. Online/distance learning has been added to emphasise virtual modes of study which need to be catered for.
	6.1	d) The HEI undertakes ongoing analysis of the profile of its student population to inform strategic decision making and longer-term planning and development of academic support services.	a) There are effective mechanisms and processes for analysing the profile of the student population and identifying the learning needs of students; these are implemented and used to inform strategic decision making and longer-term planning and development of academic support services.	Indicator has been extended to be more specific and include the need for mechanisms to analyse student profile data and identify student learning needs. This also brings the indicator in line with indicator a) in Criterion 7.1.
	6.2	a) The HEI's student registration procedures are efficient, and use appropriate data recording and retrieval systems adequate for accurate reporting requirements.	a) The HEI's student registration procedures are efficient and accessible, and use appropriate student management systems adequate for accurate reporting requirements.	Accessibility has been added to ensure that students can register even if they are not on campus. 'Data recording and retrieval systems' has been replaced with 'student management systems' as a more encompassing term.

Explicitly covering online learning where relevant

Risk Management
- Covers Force Majeure more specifically
- This now gives guidance on how to comment on pandemic risk

1.8

Graduate Attributes and SLOs
- Now specifically cover multiple modes of delivery
- Makes it clear that the criteria is generic enough to cover online T&L

2.1

Teaching Quality
- Range of teaching methods specifically referred to
- Gives HEIs confidence that distance learning is included

2.4

Academic Integrity
- Important revisions to reflect use of essay mills
- Reflects the problems facing HEIs in full virtual learning mode

2.6

Academic Advising
- Now specifically references online learning rather than study mode
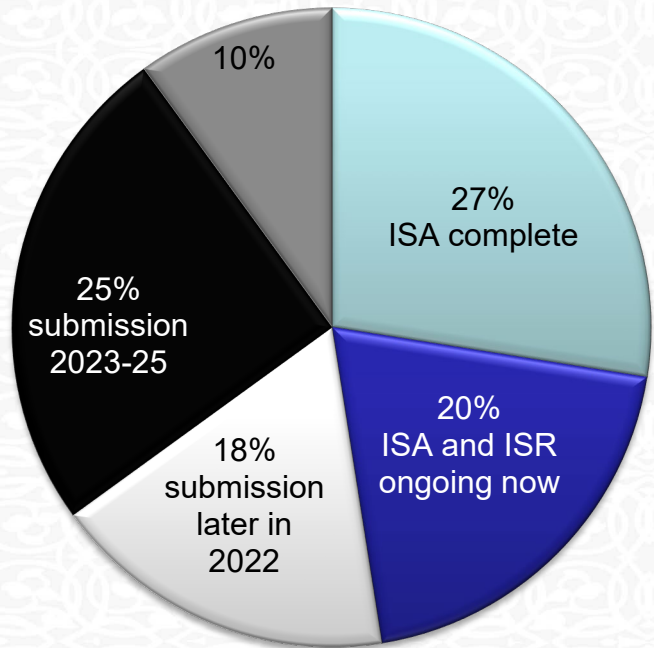- Helps make distinct from evening classes

6.5

Student Planning and Management
- Online services specifically included rather than non-standard study mode
- Helps make distinct from evening classes

7.1

Inviting HEIs and ERs to ensure standards still fit for purpose in major ISA review

ISA/ISR Cycle 1 (40 HEIs)

27%
ISA complete

20%
ISA and ISR
ongoing now

18%
submission
later in
2022

25%
submission
2023-25

10%

☐ Completed ■ Ongoing ☐ In 2022 ■ In 2023-25 ■ Not Scheduled

Institutional Reaccreditation (IR) Commencing End of 2023

Continuing to reflect international best practice in supporting hybridity

The New Normal Reflected in Business as Usual

HEIs invited to reflect online experience in major review of ISA

Our knowledge enriched by INQAAHE and national QA network

International ERs add further global experience to our practice

Experience shared through frequent OAAAQA training events

Good practices of all TLA circulated through our EQA reports

Support for diversity given through IEQA endorsement system

Public trust earned in national register of recognised IEQA agencies

Soon-to-be-launched PSA and OQF embrace diversity and hybridity

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Thank you for your kind attention

www.oaaaqa.gov.om