



AGENTUR FÜR  
QUALITÄTSSICHERUNG DURCH  
AKKREDITIERUNG VON  
STUDIENGÄNGEN E.V.

## FINAL REPORT

SULTAN QABOOS UNIVERSITY

# **SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK**

SOCIOLOGY (BACHELOR OF ARTS)

SOCIAL WORK (BACHELOR OF ARTS)

SOCIOLOGY (MASTER OF ARTS)

SOCIAL WORK (MASTER OF ARTS)

February 2024



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## DECISION OF THE AQAS STANDING COMMISSION ON THE STUDY PROGRAMMES

- “SOCIOLOGY” (BACHELOR OF ARTS)
- “SOCIAL WORK” (BACHELOR OF ARTS)
- “SOCIOLOGY” (MASTER OF ARTS)
- “SOCIAL WORK” (MASTER OF ARTS)

### OFFERED BY SULTAN QABOOS UNIVERSITY, MUSCAT, OMAN

Based on the report of the expert panel, the comments by the university and the discussions of the AQAS Standing Commission in its 20<sup>th</sup> meeting on 26 February 2024, the AQAS Standing Commission decides:

1. The study programmes “**Sociology**” (**Bachelor of Arts**) and “**Sociology**” (**Master of Arts**) offered by **Sultan Qaboos University, Oman** are accredited according to the AQAS Criteria for Programme Accreditation (Bachelor/Master).

The study programmes comply 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.

2. The study programmes “**Social Work**” (**Bachelor of Arts**) and “**Social Work**” (**Master of Arts**) offered by **Sultan Qaboos University, Oman** are accredited according to the AQAS Criteria for Programme Accreditation (Bachelor/Master).

The accreditations are conditional.

The study programmes essentially comply 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.

The conditions have to be fulfilled. The fulfilment of the conditions has to be documented and reported to AQAS no later than **31 March 2025**. The confirmation of the conditions might include a physical site visit within the time period of twelve months.

3. The accreditations for all programmes are given for the period of **six years** and is valid until **31 March 2030**.

#### Condition for the study programmes “Social Work” (**Bachelor of Arts**) and “Social Work” (**Master of Arts**)

1. A graduate profile and job description for Social Work must be distributed to stakeholders of the labour market, which ensures that employers understand the specific skill set of Social Work graduates.

The following recommendations are given for further improvement of the programmes:

All study programmes “Sociology” (Bachelor of Arts), “Social Work” (Bachelor of Arts), “Sociology” (Master of Arts), “Social Work” (Master of Arts)

1. To facilitate the access to international exchange, it is recommended to encourage students to improve their English skills and communicate more in English as well as work more with English texts, also to provide them with an international perspective of their field of studies.
2. It is recommended to strengthen the programmes’ connection to stakeholders from the labour market. Possibilities to achieve this are
  - a. a formalised approach to meetings with written notes,
  - b. a feasibility study with labour market representatives of all study programmes to ensure that the graduates qualifications match the needs of the labour market.
3. To prepare the students better for their future responsibilities and task in their positions, it is recommended to strengthen the aspect of practice in the study programmes, e.g., through more case studies, lectures from guest lectures, role plays, etc.
4. The study programmes should strive for further international visibility, internationality, and academic connections to other departments of Sociology and Social Work. One tool to achieve this aim is the implementation of courses taught in English.
5. A diploma supplement or similar document detailing the students’ gained skills and competencies must be provided upon graduation.
6. To allow further internationalisation, it is recommended to incentivize and support teaching staff in international endeavours, such as research cooperations, international conferences, etc.
7. It is recommended to better separate the career information for Sociology and Social Work graduates, respectively, and to properly inform them about their career prospects, and additionally about possible limitations to their career.
8. To allow equal opportunities to all students, it is recommended to put additional efforts to provide more guidance and support for female students in academic careers, e.g., through specific advisors, student groups targeting female students, or workshops to train female students in this field.

Additionally for “Sociology” (Bachelor of Arts) and “Social Work” (Bachelor of Arts)

9. To prove the programmes academic standard and to prepare graduates for a potential Master’s degree, it is recommended to implement a short thesis at the end of the study programme.

Additionally “Social Work” (Bachelor of Arts) and “Social Work” (Master of Arts)

10. To portray the whole spectrum of Social Work and prepare students for different issues they might face in their later career, it is recommended to offer courses concentrating on family issues, addiction, mental health, or diversity. Therefore, it might be necessary to hire additional staff specialised in these fields.

Additionally for “Social Work” (Bachelor of Arts)

11. It is recommended to strengthen the qualitative aspect of Social Work in the courses, such as course content on mental health, diversity, family issues or addiction, which should also be stated in the course handbook, to provide students with a well-rounded view of Social Work. For the same reason, more courses on topics such as behavioural therapy or psychology and counselling skills should be implemented.

12. For applicants, it is important to have a clear understanding of what their future career might entail. Therefore, it is recommended to include practical experience in this field of work as a prerequisite to an application if state regulations allow for it.

Additionally for “**Social Work**” (Master of Arts)

13. To be able to build the specific academic profile of the students of Social Work, it is recommended to offer a wider range of elective courses and develop more of specialisations in fields of Social Work, such as family and addiction.
14. It is recommended to replace one of the research methods courses on statistics with a course focussing on recent developments and trends in academic approaches to social work or cultural competence communication skills to best prepare graduates for their future employment.

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



## I. Preamble

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AQAS – Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes – is an independent non-profit organisation supported by more than 90 universities, universities of applied sciences and academic associations. Since 2002, the agency has been recognised 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 higher education institutions' teaching. In line with AQAS' mission statement, the official bodies in Germany and Europe (GAC and EQAR) approved that the activities of AQAS in accreditation are neither limited to specific academic disciplines or degrees nor a particular type of higher education institution.

## II. Accreditation procedure

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This report results from the external review of the degree programmes "**Sociology**" (**Bachelor**), "**Sociology**" (**Master**), "**Social Work**" (**Bachelor**) and "**Social Work**" (**Master**) offered by Sultan Qaboos University.

### 1. Criteria

Each programme is assessed against a set of criteria for accreditation developed by AQAS: the AQAS Criteria for Programme Accreditation (Bachelor/Master). The criteria are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) 2015. To facilitate the review each criterion features a set of indicators that can be used to demonstrate the fulfilment of the criteria. However, if single indicators are not fulfilled this does not automatically mean that a criterion is not met. The indicators need to be discussed in the context of each programme since not all indicators necessarily can be applied to every programme.

### 2. Approach and methodology

#### *Initialisation*

The university mandated AQAS to perform the accreditation procedure in November 2021. The university produced a Self-Evaluation Report (SER). In March 2022, the institution handed in a draft of the SER together with the relevant documentation on the programmes.

AQAS checked the SER regarding completeness, comprehensibility, and transparency. The accreditation procedure was officially initialised by a decision of the AQAS Standing Commission on 29 August 2022. The final version of the SER was handed in July 2023.

#### *Nomination of the expert panel*

The composition of the panel of experts follows the stakeholder principle. Consequently, representatives from the respective disciplines, the labour market, and students are involved. Furthermore, AQAS follows the principles for the selection of experts defined by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). The Standing

Commission nominated the aforementioned expert panel in August 2023. AQAS informed the university about the members of the expert panel and the university did not raise any concerns against the composition of the panel.

#### *Preparation of the site visit*

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

#### *Site visit*

After a review of the SER, a site visit to the university took place on 16-18 October 2023. The experts interviewed different stakeholders, e.g. the management of the higher education institution, the programme management, teaching staff, as well as students and graduates, in separate discussion rounds and consulted additional documentation as well as student work. The visit concluded by the presentation of the preliminary findings of the group of experts to the university's representatives.

#### *Reporting*

After the site visit had taken place, the expert group drafted the following report, assessing the fulfilment of the AQAS Criteria. The report included a recommendation to the AQAS Standing Commission. The report was sent to the university for comments.

#### *Decision*

The report, together with the comments of the university, forms the basis for the AQAS Standing Commission to take a decision regarding the accreditation of the programmes. Based on these two documents, the AQAS Standing Commission took its decision on the accreditation on 26 February 2024. AQAS forwarded the decision to the university. The university had the right to appeal against the decision or any of the imposed conditions.

In April 2024, AQAS published the report and the result of the accreditation as well as the names of the panel of experts.



### III. General information on the university

Sultan Qaboos University is the leading higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman, which started in 1982, while the first students were enrolled in 1986. The university commenced with five colleges: Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture, Education and Science. The College of Arts and Social Sciences was established in 1987, followed by the College of Economics and Political Sciences, which was developed in 1993. The College of Law joined the university in 2006, and the College of Nursing was finally established in 2008. The nine university colleges currently offer 63 undergraduate programmes, 62 Master's and 34 PhD programmes. Furthermore, the university has nine support Centers: Centre for Community Service & Continuing Education, Centre for Information Systems, Centre for Educational Technology, Centre for Human resources development, Centre for Preparatory Studies, Centre for Career Guidance, Student Counselling Centre, Independent Learning Centre, and Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The university also counts ten research centres: the Centre of Excellence in Marine Biotechnology, the Communication and Information Research Centre, the Earthquake Monitoring Centre, the Centre for Environmental Studies and Research, the Oil and Gas Research Centre, the Omani Studies Centre, Remote Sensing and Geographic Information System, Water Research Centre, Humanities Research Centre, and Earth Science Research Centre.

The College of Arts and Social Sciences is comprised of twelve departments: Arabic Language and Literature, English Language and Literature, Archaeology, Mass Communication, History, Geography, Information Studies, Tourism, Social Work and Sociology, Philosophy, Theatre, and Music and Musicology. The twelve departments offer eleven Bachelor's programmes, ten Master's and three PhD programmes. The Bachelor's programmes in Archaeology, Theatre and Philosophy were frozen due to the low employment rates of graduates. Studies at the Department of Sociology began with the College of Arts and Social Sciences opening in 1987. In 2001, Social Work was introduced as a second subject alongside Sociology. Thus, the department had two programmes in two different specializations, and the department's title was changed to the Department of Sociology and Social Work.

### IV. Assessment of the study programmes

#### 1. Quality of the curriculum

##### **Bachelor's/Master's degree**

*The intended learning outcomes of the programme are defined and available in published form. They reflect both academic and labour-market requirements and are up-to-date with relation to the relevant field. The design of the programme supports achievement of the intended learning outcomes.*

*The academic level of graduates corresponds to the requirements of the appropriate level of the European Qualifications Framework.*

*The curriculum's design is readily available and transparently formulated.*

[ESG 1.2]

#### **General aspects**

##### Bachelor's Programmes

According to the SER, students enrolled in the College of Arts and Social Sciences are required to complete Sultan Qaboos University general education courses, which consist of the Foundation Programme, University Requirements, and College Requirements and are shared with other departments. The Foundation Programme includes a set of courses such as Basic Mathematics, Advanced Mathematics for Social Sciences,

Intensive English, and Information Technology. The University requirements take place in the areas of Cultural Orientation, Commitment to Society and Strong Moral Achievements, whereas College requirements include Arabic language skills 1 & 2, Critical thinking and Solving problems, Computer skills, or college electives.

## **Description**

### 1.1 Sociology (Bachelor's)

According to the university, the main objective of this study programme is to train students to become professionals capable of understanding and treating social phenomena, as well as being able to predict needs due to cultural problems or socioeconomic change and reacting to them.

To graduate, a Bachelor of Sociology student must complete 120 credit hours, which are divided into university requirements (six credits), university electives (six credits), college requirements (17 credits), college electives (three credits), major requirements (55 credits), minor requirements (21 credits), major electives (nine credits) and minor electives (three credits), as the SER states. The credit system in Oman differs from the one in the European Higher Education Area which counts the complete workload of the students. In the Omani system one credit hour can either equal one contact hour of lecture, two contact hours of laboratory work, tutorials or field placement or three hours of workshops, according to the SER.

The SER names four learning objectives and student learning outcomes of the Bachelor's Programme in Sociology: Preparing national social researchers with high scientific and practical competence to deal with social phenomena and problems in the Omani society and the applied skills necessary for the scientific study of social issues and concerns; enhancing students' social communication skills and developing their skills to move in social environments where graduates' lives and work are socially connected and can affect their professional and social areas; deepening students' knowledge of the structure of Omani society, recent developments and the renaissance of Omani society; training students to solve problems creatively through critical thinking and group work.

Following the university's statement in the SER, many graduates find employment in different ministries in Oman, such as Health, Defense or Social Development or the Police Force as well as NGOs or other universities or research facilities.

## **Experts' evaluation**

The study programme is designed to achieve the intended learning outcomes. It is well planned, structured and clearly described. The quality shows itself essentially due to two aspects: Firstly, the content taught in the courses: The courses offer a solid introduction into sociological knowledge and research methodology, and they intertwine this content with a strong focus and the transmission of knowledge on Omani society, the institutions, policies, laws etc. The teaching formats allow for a student-centred approach, which is also linked to the practical sphere (lecture, group work, practical exercise, contacts with the field, e.g., ministries etc.).

Secondly, the quality of this study programme is due to what one might call the "deductive-inductive approach" within the courses, which always aims to apply general sociological knowledge and internationally known concepts to specific phenomena and social problems of one's own country and vice-versa.

While the Bachelor programme does this on an introductory and basic level the Master programme (cf. below) deepens this competence and allows its independent usage. This approach to and reflexive appropriation of sociology as a science is convincingly and persuasively translated into a course programme which is rounded up by courses with contents on philosophy and sociology of knowledge. According to the teachers in the sociology programmes the contents of the courses are continuously renewed in order to consider new issues: Sociology of knowledge and as well English elements and a careful examination of English terminology are more strongly considered now.

Formats and contents of the courses address problem-solving skills as well communication skills. With these skills the graduates of the sociology programme are promising candidates and an important knowledge capital for the labour market, most often the ministries (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Development). Students educated in this way can undoubtedly be recognized on the international job market and in possible subsequent courses of study abroad.

To prove the programme's academic standard and to prepare graduates for a potential Master's degree, the experts recommend implementing a short thesis at the end of the study programme (**Finding 1**). This can also demonstrate that the students can apply their knowledge to solve problems and it can possibly lead to attractive and socially usable results. Furthermore, it is recommended to encourage students to communicate more in English to give them more practice and confidence (**Finding 2**). This will facilitate their access to international exchange.

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

### Description

#### 1.2 Social Work (Bachelor)

According to the SER, to graduate from the Bachelor's Degree in Social Work, students have two options to complete 120 credit hours: Major in social work without minor subjects or choose the main subject social work and other minor subjects from another department with university requirements. In addition to their university courses, social work students train their future professions for about 360 hours. They are said to also participate in summer activities such as student group activities, community service, trade fairs, and work on campus. For the first four semester, the curriculum is the same for all students, independent if they choose minors from another department or not.

Within the study programme, the university names seven objectives and student learning outcomes, the Bachelor's Programme in Social Work should achieve: Acquiring basic knowledge of the profession of social work, including the acquisition of definitions, principles and philosophy, as well as basic concepts; imparting basic scientific knowledge and theories in which graduates can recognise basic knowledge of social work; providing students with knowledge, skills and theory of social work practice at different levels and which helps them to participate, assess, intervene and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities and acquire and practice the necessary skills; acquiring knowledge and skills related to social work; providing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare, design and conduct social research by the values and ethics of scientific research; enabling students to apply knowledge, scientific theories and methods of social work in practice; identifying and planning to confront the design and analysis of social policies around phenomena and issues in Omani society.

After graduation, the SER mentions, many students find employment work as school social workers, and are employed by the Ministry of Education as such or are employed by other ministries.

### Experts' evaluation

The intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for the BA of social work programme are adequate for the academic degree aimed at and achieved. They are clearly formulated and promote students' engagement. Furthermore, they reflect scientific and labour market requirements. A relation between the Social Work programme and the community is given. The ILOs' achievement has been demonstrated throughout the online visit, e.g., when interviewing students, who demonstrate a clear ability to describe, interpret and explain the social work domains, or through the teaching staff's involvement, e.g., during their practical stages of the field work.

Additionally, the graduation project connects issues of concerns to their communities. Apart from the achievement of ILOs, this also demonstrates that ILOs are updated according to local needs.

SQU receives feedback from ministries, especially when developing the curriculum. Because of this mechanism, the curriculum is kept up to date and has additions every five years. Examples are the recently added topics of gender and women in social work and online intervention, which are now included in existing courses while courses on these topics specifically are prepared and organised.

The curricular structure of the programme supports the achievement of the ILO and the learner's progression. Students start with a theoretical approach, then focus on the field training, continued connections with the labour market, voluntary work and participating with community centre working projects. Furthermore, the curriculum covers subject-specific and cross-subject knowledge as well as subject-related, methodological, and general skills. Content covered in courses includes management, human rights, or research skills, amongst others. However, it is recommended to strengthen the qualitative aspect of social work with course content on topics such as addiction, family issues, mental health or diversity, rather than only statistics researching social work to provide students with a well-rounded view of Social Work (**Finding 3**). For the same reason, more courses on topics such as behavioural therapy or psychology and counselling skills should be implemented. All these courses benefit from using English texts and references, which are already available in the library, e.g., through subscriptions, and that also provide an international perspective on Social Work (**Finding 2**) as well as help students train their English skills.

The field training supports the students in linking their theoretical knowledge with current issues in their society and prepares them to practice within interdisciplinary teams, especially in schools, the Ministry of Social Development, local community centres and hospitals. The BA allows the development of students' potentials through its teaching curriculum as well as field training. Graduates work as social workers and in the labour market of social work, in different domains such as schools, community and the Ministry of Social Development.

The workload of the programme is correctly and transparently allocated to the different courses/modules. Most courses run for 3 hours per week – in a whole students take 15 – 18 (max.) credit hours per week/semester.

Finally, the experts applaud the development and establishment of Social Work as an academic discipline in itself at SQU. However, as a new study programme in Oman, the distinction concerning job profiles, possible fields of employment and responsibilities for Social Work graduates and Sociology graduates is still not as sharp as it needs to be. A graduate profile and job description for Social Work must be distributed to stakeholders of the labour market, which ensures that employers understand the specific skill set of Social Work graduates. This will also benefit Sociology graduates, who will not be overwhelmed in critical situations and risk service users are adequately cared for as well as support the reputation of Social Work programmes (**Finding 4**).

## Conclusion

The criterion is partially fulfilled.

## General aspects

### Master's Programmes (Sociology and Social Work)

As stated on the university website linked within the SER, credit hours for coursework are 24 in addition to research leading to a six-credit-hour thesis. For the thesis, the candidate must carry out the necessary literature research, carry out the research, analyse the results, write the report and communicate the results in an oral defence. This work does not necessarily have to be original research but should be a new application of

ideas. As a rule, students identify the research problem in consultation with the supervisor in the second semester. Registration for the thesis takes place in the third semester after at least twelve credits have been achieved.

## Description

### 1.3 Sociology (Master)

The SER states that students have to complete 24 credit hours to graduate from the Master's study programme, which they receive after having passed eight courses. Seven of these are mandatory, one being an elective, which can be chosen from three offered electives. Additionally, students have to write a researched focused thesis counting for six credits. Students should complete the coursework specified in the curriculum with a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of at least 3.00. For the thesis, the candidate must carry out the necessary literature research, carry out the research, analyse the results, write the report and communicate the results in an oral defence.

The courses needed to fulfil the study programme's requirements are usually attended in the first two semesters. In the first semester, the offered courses are: Advanced Approaches in Social Research, English Readings in Sociology and Social Work, Advanced Social Statistics as well as Civil Society Organisation. This is built on in semester two with the courses Modern and Contemporary Sociological Theories, Applied Sociology, New Trends and Fields in Sociology as well as one of the courses Social Policy and Planning or Sociology of Culture or Human Development. Semesters three and four are, according to the SER, solely dedicated to researching and writing the final thesis.

Students in this programme, according to the university's statement, often work already on a part-time or full-time basis, but benefit from a Master's degree. After graduating, most of them become Social Researchers in domestic institutions.

Even though students are encouraged to find work in the private sector, most work for state organisations or ministries. Whereas the university itself does not see the Master's degree as a prerequisite to find employment, it qualifies graduates for senior job levels.

## Experts' evaluation

The Sociology Master's programme is a "Y-programme", i.e. it has a common stem of sociology and social work in the first semester. The courses enhance graduates' knowledge in social theory and social scientific methods (quantitative and qualitative). Given the commitment of the whole study programme to issues of social development in the Omani society, they shall as well enhance the cultural sensitivity in order to qualify future social scientists. Students will, in turn, be able to make valuable contributions to the country's development. The final two semesters are focused entirely on the preparation of the Master thesis. This corresponds to the great importance of application-oriented research which students are expected to undertake for their thesis and is, therefore, an adequate solution. The MA programme is clearly structured and the qualification of the students at the end of the study program – such the impression conveyed by the available Master theses – is comparable to the international level.

Given the need to create a corpus of sociological knowledge for the country's developmental needs, it is a very good idea to assemble all these contributions as they are achieved in the theses and to bring them together systematically. This is done in the MA-courses and also in actual meta-analyses. This is an appreciation and visibility of their work and means a motivation for students to strive for excellency in their research.

Combining the curriculum, Master theses and the difficulties a predominantly "Western" science like Sociology means to a very fast developing society like Oman, the results of this study programme are to be applauded. The Master dissertations focus on relevant issues of this country and do so in appropriate approaches. The

alumni of the study programme are in important positions of the labour market. Relevant and solid results of Omani sociology dealing with social problems and social development in Oman can be found in international data bases and scientific journals, focusing on education, child maltreatment or adverse childhood experiences, gender issues, family and divorce – to give just some examples.

The ILOs are transparent throughout the study structure and study content. Content and assessment allow for them to be reached and assessed. This Master's programme aims at the qualification of application-oriented social researchers, who are able to do their work in a context-sensitive manner and with a high level of commitment to the development of this society on the one hand and orientated to the international standards and debates of the Social Sciences on the other hand. After reviewing this programme, it is fully suited to achieve this purpose.

More fluency of the students in communication in English language might be important to encourage students to profit of guest semesters abroad; this is for the MA programme even more valid than for the BA (see **Finding 2**). A PhD programme after the MA programme might be a good enhancement of the MA programme (cf. below).

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## Description

### 1.4 Social Work (Master)

As in the Master's study programme of Social Work, students have to complete 24 credit hours to graduate from the Master's study programme, which they receive after having passed eight courses. Seven of these are mandatory, one being an elective, which can be chosen from three offered electives. Additionally, students have to write a research focused thesis counting for six credits. Students should complete the coursework specified in the curriculum with a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of at least 3.00. For the thesis, the candidate must carry out the necessary literature research, carry out the research, analyse the results, write the report and communicate the results in an oral defence.

The mandatory courses take place during semester one and two: Advanced Approaches in Social Research, English Readings in Sociology, Advanced Social Statistics and Civil Society Organisation in semester one and Contemporary Theories and Trends in Social Work, Social and Psychological Counselling, Professional Practice of Social Work and one elective (Managing Social Welfare Organisation, Issues in Social Work or Social Policies and Planning in Social Work) in the second semester. Again, the third and fourth semester are dedicated exclusively to conducting the final thesis.

## Experts' evaluation

The ILOs for the MA of Social Work are clearly and transparently formulated, assessable and achieved. They reflect the scientific and labour market requirements. The same can be said about the curriculum of the study programme, which is transparent and clear, is directed towards the ILOs and connects its theoretical teachings to practical aspects. Additionally, students are exposed to international aspects of their academic field through international literature in their courses as well as the newly added course "Social problem", which connects local and international issues. The workload of the Master's programme Social Work is correctly and transparently allocated to the different courses/modules, the credits are assigned to all elements of the curriculum.

The curricular structure of the programme supports the achievement of the ILO and the learner's progression. Starting with theoretical backgrounds, then focusing on practical aspects through the field training, connections



with the market, voluntary work and participating with community centre working projects, students are immersed into interactive learning. Furthermore, the curriculum covers subject-specific and cross-subject knowledge as well as subject-related, methodological and general skills. Topics cover knowledge in policy and management as well as human rights and research skills in statistics. Still, it is recommended to strengthen the qualitative aspect. This will be an added value to more in-depth understanding of the social work studies (see **Finding 3**). All courses benefit from using English texts and references, which are already available in the library, e.g., through subscriptions, and that also provide an international perspective on Social Work (see **Finding 2**) as well as help students train their English skills.

Generally, curricular modifications take place regularly and transparently contribute to the development of the programme quality. Improvements are reflected in updated information. Students themselves are able to discuss their learning needs and even exams. They attest that exam methods and assignments are clear from the beginning of the course. This is also valid for the students' internships, which are reflected adequately and defined transparently in the design of the curriculum as well as the idealised typical course plan. It includes the curricular elements courses/modules including their functions, their compulsory or elective character and their usage/exclusiveness.

However, for students to be able to build their specific academic profile, it is recommended to offer a wider range of elective courses and develop more of specialisations in fields of Social Work, such as family and addiction (**Finding 5**). Additionally, the experts suggest replacing one of the research methods courses on statistics with a course focussing on recent developments and trends in academic approaches to social work or cultural competence communication skills (**Finding 6**).

Field training and classes taught prepare students to practice within interdisciplinary teams, especially in the field of schools, the Ministry of Social Development, local community centres and hospitals. Most of the students are already involved in the labour market, working the field of social work.

It is commendable that students, that fail the Social Work Master's programme, receive a higher diploma degree, which ensures that the study time spent still cumulates in a certificate, if not a Master's degree.

To give graduates of the Master's programme in Social Work the perspective to further deepen their studies, the experts encourage SQU to consider opening a PhD programme in Social Work. Still, as the study programme is a rather new one, the experts recommend strengthening the programme's connection to stakeholders from the labour market.

As a new study programme in Oman, the distinction concerning job profiles, possible fields of employment and responsibilities for Social Work graduates and Sociology graduates is still not as sharp as it might be needed. A graduate profile and job description for Social Work must be distributed to stakeholders of the labour market, which ensures that employers understand the specific skill set of Social Work graduates. This will also benefit Sociology graduates, who will not be overwhelmed in critical situations and risk service users are adequately cared for as well as support the reputation of Social Work programmes (**Finding 4**).

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 2. Procedures for quality assurance

### Bachelor's/Master's degree

*The programme is subject to the higher education institution's policy and associated procedures for quality assurance, including procedures for the design, approval, monitoring, and revision of the programmes.*

*A quality-oriented culture, focusing on continuous quality enhancement, is in place. This includes regular feedback mechanisms involving both internal and external stakeholders.*

*The strategy, policies, and procedures have a formal status and are made available in published form to all those concerned. They also include roles for students and other stakeholders.*

*Data is collected from relevant sources and stakeholders, analysed, and used for the effective management and continuous enhancement of the programme.*

[ESG 1.1, 1.7 & 1.9]

### Description

As stated in the SER, the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, which assesses the universities on the national level, was established by Royal Decree in January 2021, amending the name of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority and reporting to the Council of Ministers. The Central Quality Assurance Office at Sultan Qaboos University (QAO) was established in 2010. The QA office on the central level is interlinked with various colleges and university centres, including the College of Arts and Social Sciences.

In line with the university's efforts, the College of Arts and Social Sciences is said to ensure the academic accreditation of the programmes in various departments by having set up a permanent Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Unit in 2016. The unit's tasks are: Implementing the academic accreditation roadmap for the college and departments; following-up on the implementation of the requirements of local and international academic accreditation institutions; following-up on the recommendations of the institutional and programme accreditation institutions; suggesting training and qualification programmes related to quality assurance and academic accreditation; implementing training programmes and workshops for quality and academic accreditation. In July 2016, the college and several departments obtained a six-year academic accreditation from the AQAS, which is currently in the process to be renewed.

Between 2000 and 2010, the SER states that the Department of Sociology and Social Work took a variety of actions to ensure programmes were delivered at the appropriate level, through review by Canadian academic experts, the Curriculum and Study Plans Committee of SQU, and a review of the proposed curriculum at both Arabic level (Cairo University, Helwan University and Damascus University) and global level (Ohio State University, Colombia University, New York University and University of California). In the second phase, from 2011 to the present, the Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Committee was established as part of the department's vision and mission.

According to the SER, evaluation methods are provided for measuring the achievement of objectives for all courses in the curriculum. The evaluation consists of course descriptions, course reports, the student evaluation of the course and the graduate survey results. Programmes of the Department of Sociology and Social Work are reviewed internally and externally. All data from various sources are analysed, while suggestions and recommendations are presented to the Faculty Council to create an action plan on those recommendations. The new policy of undergraduate academic programmes requires accurate information on teaching strategies, programme evaluation, technology review and expected employment goals. Following the SER's statement, it also includes information on programme objectives, learning outcomes, content and learning



resources, authorities concerned, local and supportive technologies, and the process of benchmarking programmes at the international level. Postgraduate programmes go through several stages, from their proposal by the concerned department to their approval by the university council.

### Experts' evaluation

Procedures of quality assurance both for the entire university as well as the department of Sociology and Social Work are in place and are part of the day-to-day life of the department, its employees and students. Many different groups of university life like teaching staff, students and alumni etc. are part in the constant reflection and enhancement of the programmes.

SQU and the Department of Sociology and Social Work understand themselves as a learning institution and are striving to be the best university in Oman. There is an overall vision in place for the College of Arts and Social Science. The Department Sociology and Social Work constantly works on improving its programmes. The programmes and the output of the courses are always tested and monitored on a regular basis.

One example of conducted evaluation is the student satisfaction survey, which is established. Students are surveyed on three different stages of their studies: while studying, while graduating and after graduation. Proof of such a questionnaire was handed to the experts. Due to this survey, it became evident that the students' satisfaction with studying at SQU and in the programmes has increased over the last years.

Student societies and student participation instruments are in place, allowing their involvement as stakeholders. Additionally, procedures for complaints against assessment results and the like are in place and transparently communicated to students.

Nevertheless, the connection between the Department Sociology and Social Work and the labour market as external stakeholder seems in need of improvement. Even though there seem to be informal meetings, a formalised approach with written notes is recommended. There seems to be a lack of correspondence, especially concerning the qualifications of graduates and the labour market's needed skills. For this reason, it is recommended to conduct a feasibility study with labour market representatives of all study programmes (**Finding 7**).

Academic integrity is part of the department's concern. Students' projects are checked with Turnitin. In the future, SQU plans to use AI, for example to prevent academic fraud.

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

### 3. Learning, teaching and assessment of students

#### **Bachelor's/Master's degree**

*The delivery of material encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.*

*Students are assessed using accessible criteria, regulations, and procedures, which are made readily available to all participants and which are applied consistently.*

*Assessment procedures are designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.*

[ESG 1.3]

## Description

According to the SER, teaching staff uses various teaching and training strategies to achieve the course objectives and outcomes, such as traditional lecture format, role plays, group work, case studies, portfolios, simulation, PowerPoint presentations and electronic teaching (e-learning). Practical experiences in the classroom are a cornerstone of Social Work and Sociology education. Qualified and technologically experienced faculty members assist their peers in using university-approved e-learning platforms such as Moodle, Google Meet and Zoom to facilitate online teaching and taking electronic exams.

The learning process aims to complete the professional preparation stages for Sociology and Social Work students, the university claims. Therefore, two paths are required, theoretical preparation achieved through classroom teaching and lectures and practical preparation achieved through field training in various institutions such as schools, hospitals, welfare agencies and social work institutions and studying social problems in the local community and Omani society. Training projects should be related to community service and participation in the exhibition of training activities organised at the end of the semester. Students also receive hands-on training in statistical analysis using the SPSS Social Science Statistics package in a computer lab dedicated to statistics.

The number of credit hours students can register for one semester at the Sociology and Social Work programmes is calculated based on the student's cumulative average, as it is the leading indicator that reflects the student's abilities and shortcomings. According to university regulations, students with a GPA of less than 2.0 can register for only twelve credits per semester. Students with a GPA of more than 2.0 can register for 20 credits per semester.

All students can register for the courses they wish to study through the Electronic Student Information System (SIS) managed by the Deanship of Admission and Registration. The system provides students complete details of their academic plans and courses, grades obtained in different courses, credit hours, and attendance statistics. It facilitates the selection, addition and deregistration of courses, the curriculum management, the course catalogue, information on examinations and grades, and the cumulative average, as the SER states. It also provides information on student support such as course guidance and advisory, faculty working hours and various communication options between faculty members and students. The department also organises practical training forums with interested entities in the public and private sectors to enhance the quality of field training provided to the department's students. Assessments depend on the ILOs of each course as well as the teaching methods used. They aim to prepare students to the diversity of their future employments by using role plays, taking over sessions to act as a teacher, presentations or quizzes on Moodle.

The department offers an integrated programme to guide students from entering the department through graduation, according to the SER. Each student is assigned an academic advisor selected from among faculty members. In turn, the advisors provide advisory services related to the educational programme, curricula, and academic achievements and policies to students, the university, the college, and the department.

## Experts' evaluation

While the documentation provided beforehand lacked certain information regarding different teaching methods it became clear during the virtual visit that across all programmes that different modes of teaching and assessments are used. It was shown that the modes of teaching and assessment differ depending on the ILOs. Furthermore, the use of digital media and teaching methods is becoming increasingly important and significant. To counter plagiarism the university uses the programme Turnitin. To provide certain information (teaching methods, forms of examination, etc.) in a more uniform manner, the experts suggest using a uniform template, which should be provided by the faculty.

In addition to the practical experience, the teaching staff of SQU across the different programmes highlighted their intention of including the practice already in the 'theoretical' lessons e.g., by providing insights into the 'reality of society' to connect with the theory in class. To further prepare students for their practical field experience, where appropriate, the teaching staff also uses teaching methods such as 'role play'. This, however, is more applicable for the study programmes of B.A./M.A. Social Work. More towards the end of their studies students also have so-called 'fieldwork' courses where they are actively engaged in a real-life scenario fitting with their study field. Here the examination is done not only by the responsible academic supervisor but the responsible person at the institution where the fieldwork is taking place. Students confirmed that they are well informed about their assessment. Dates are available in the schedules of their courses with further information given by their teachers. Components of what they are assessed on are transparent to them.

Even though all stakeholders confirmed the students' exposure to practical parts of their future careers, it still became obvious that they lack experience. Different groups, e.g., the labour market and the students themselves, wish for a better preparation of the practical aspects of their job profiles. Therefore, it is recommended to strengthen the aspect of practice in the study programmes, e.g., through even more case studies, lectures from guest lectures, role plays, etc. (**Finding 8**).

During the review of the provided documents and also in the discussions during the virtual visit the experts noted a lack of classes taught in English. While some contents might be better taught in the Omani language it is the experts' opinion that to achieve further internationalization of the programmes and to connect the academic society meaningfully in the disciplines of Sociology and Social Work with the English-speaking academic world more courses should be offered in English (**Finding 9**). The experts were pleased to see and hear that the study programmes had already made efforts here and planned to continue to do so.

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

### Bachelor's/Master's degree

*Consistently applied, pre-defined, and published regulations are in place which cover student admission, progression, recognition, and certification.*

[ESG 1.4]

## Description

### Bachelor Programmes (Sociology and Social Work)

Applicants, who would like to study one of the Bachelor's programmes have to hold a secondary school leaving certificate, and either the Omani citizenship, or – with a nominal tuition fee – come from a country of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League or a qualified Asian country. Once admitted to SQU, students can be admitted to one of the Bachelor's programmes as stated in SER, after passing the foundation programme. Students are distributed into departments based on programme choices based on the criteria: student choice, seats available in each programme, and English placement test, while the Arabic language is the official medium of instruction in the Department of Sociology and Social Work.

The academic grade is a statement of a student's academic progress that includes all the courses the student studies each semester with their codes, numbers, credit hours, the obtained grades, the values, and the regulations of those grades. The record also shows the grade point average (GPA), cumulative grade point

average (CGPA), and total credits earned. Student's performance in the courses is evaluated through the midterm exam and assignments semester (40-50%) and the final exam (50-60%).

Processes are in place for transferring credits from a different university as well as within SQU from one college to another. The number of credits that can be transferred is limited, according to the SER, as well as the times a student can transfer from one major to another.

To qualify for graduation, students should complete the curriculum requirements of their degree programmes of 120 credit hours with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.00, fulfil any additional requirements specified by the degree plan, and clear all encumbrance from all concerned university units. The graduation certificate will show both the major and minor subjects, where applicable.

#### Master's Programmes (Sociology and Social Work)

According to the SER, admission requirements for a Master's degree are in place and transparent to interested parties.

Prerequisites to be admitted to the Master's programme in Sociology or Social Work at SQU are as follows:

- The applicant should have a bachelor's degree in Sociology or Social Work in a related subject from Sultan Qaboos University or another recognised University with a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of at least 2.75 on a 4-point scale.
- Mandatory two years of work experience for candidates with a CGPA between 2.5 and 2.74 in their Bachelor's degree.
- Applicants who have a Bachelor's degree from a recognised institution and a postgraduate diploma in a related specialisation from a recognised higher education institution with a minimum CGPA of 3.00 on a 4-point scale or equivalent.
- Candidates from other disciplines may be asked to attend additional bridging courses before starting the programme.
- Applicant must submit a release letter, or a study leave from employer for full-time study or no objection letter for part-time study, addressed to the dean of postgraduate studies at SQU. An unemployed applicant must submit a statement from the Ministry of Labour documenting the applicant's unemployment status.
- Before starting the programme, the admitted candidates should submit an English Proficiency Test Certificate band (4.5) or higher in academic International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic or a score of (49) or higher in the International TOEFL-IBT.
- There is an interview for all applicants who pass the admission exam.

Students must receive eight courses (24 credits) in two semesters (or in four semesters for part-time). After passing the courses, they must enrol for two semesters to write a thesis in Sociology or Social Work.

#### **Experts' evaluation**

The formal requirements for admission and specific prerequisites for individual study programmes clearly defined and made available to prospective students. The selection procedure follows defined criteria and steps, which are transparently communicated to prospective students. Especially Social Work can lead to positions, which can be psychologically stressful and directly influence lives. For applicants, it is important to have a clear understanding of what their future career might entail. Therefore, it is recommended to include practical

experience in this field of work before starting their studies of Social Work. The experts, therefore, recommend a short period of practical work as a prerequisite to an application if state regulations allow for it (**Finding 10**).

During the virtual visit, the experts had the opportunity to have an exchange with representatives of the labour market. During this exchange, it became apparent that there had been cases in the past where people from e.g., Sociology programmes were hired for positions more appropriate for graduates of Social Work programmes and vice versa. While this could be viewed as a problem of the labour market, it proves that uncertainties may occur concerning the graduates' qualification. These must be prevented by providing a 'diploma supplement' or similar document (**Finding 11**). As the university knows best which skills and competencies their graduates possess after successfully graduating the programmes, the university simply needs to list these skills and competencies to provide the labour market with a more detailed basis for decision-making when hiring new staff. This also gives students a better idea of the jobs they are suited for with their degree. A positive point concerning the certification to be commended is the higher diploma degree students of the Master's programme receive, if they fail the study programme, which still provides them with a written document of the time spent on their studies.

Due to the implementation of more and more practical aspects of their future careers, which built upon the theoretical learnings of the first semesters, a progression of students throughout their studies is given. A procedure to recognize credits, which were achieved in a different institution, is in place and known to students.

## Conclusion

The criterion is partially fulfilled.

## 5. Teaching staff

### Bachelor's/Master's degree

*The composition (quantity, qualifications, professional and international experience, etc.) of the staff is appropriate for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.*

*Staff involved with teaching is qualified and competent to do so.*

*Transparent procedures are in place for the recruitment and development of staff.*

[ESG 1.5]

## Description

The university strives to recruit highly qualified Omanis. As the SER mentions, the university's top graduates are sent abroad to conduct their Master's and PhD degrees before being appointed assistant professors. The implementation regulations specify the qualifications, experience, and specialist knowledge of the scientific staff suitable for employment, as the university states. The recruitment procedure for international staff is set in place and available to interested parties.

According to SER, the ratio of students to staff in the autumn semester of the academic year 2021 is 30 for Sociology and 14 for Social Work, with 2119 students for Sociology and 785 for Social Work. The number of students and the student/staff ratio are high in the Sociology programme since the staff not only convey the university requirements in the main subject of Sociology but to all students at the university.

In 2010, the university started an appraisal system for teaching staff to provide quantitative and qualitative data on teaching, starting from the faculty through the department and then the college. The university also operates annual best Teacher awards to promote good teaching practices.

The Centre for Educational Technology, the Centre for Human Resource Development and the Centre for Information Systems provide many opportunities for the faculty's professional development to improve the staff's skills and the quality of teaching. They support the use of teaching media and e-learning services. They regularly organise workshops, seminars, consultations, short training courses and advice on the design of effective teaching materials and the use of educational media and telecommunications.

### **Experts' evaluation**

The university provided a full list of its teaching staff involved in the programmes reviewed, including their academic qualification, their research and other relevant qualifications. These qualifications match those needed to teach and be active in the study programmes, which were reviewed in this accreditation procedure.

All academic staff are involved in the academic teaching. For the practical training, the university counts with three practice assessors to supervise the training. The number of teaching staff is appropriate for the size of the student body. Contracts are all for full-time positions and have a duration that guarantees a smooth continuation for at least the next six years, i.e. the duration of the accreditation. The teaching workload of twelve credit hours per assistant or associate professor, allows them to also do their own research. This is additionally incentivised as the teaching workload can be reduced, if teaching staff conducts a project. The same goes for teaching staff, which takes on administrative work, which can reduce teaching workload from twelve hours to three per semester.

Even though the teaching staff is sufficient in number and adequate in its qualifications and experience, the experts still would like to initiate the diversification of teaching staff concerning their academic expertise. Specialists concentrating on family issues, addiction, mental health, or diversity, who also have a degree in Social Work, will add further value to the study programmes in Social Work. It is, therefore, highly recommended to look for personnel specialised in these fields when vacancies in this programme need to be filled (**Finding 12**).

If new teaching staff needs to be hired, the recruitment procedures are defined and transparent. Additionally, SQU incentivises young teaching staff with a Master's degree to pursue their PhD. While the experts commend this sustainable approach to educating its own teaching staff, incentivising and supporting them to pursue this degree in a more diverse pool of countries and especially in a programme taught in English.

This idea ties in with the recommendation to put more emphasis on international exposure and experience of the teaching staff. Whereas there are a few publications, they are not deemed enough, especially in an international context. To build more connections and allow further internationalisation, it is recommended to incentivize and support teaching staff in international endeavours, such as research cooperations, international conferences, etc. (**Finding 13**).

Existing staff is encouraged to participate in trainings and workshops with certificate. They are offered by the university's Centre for Training.

### **Conclusion**

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 6. Learning resources and student support

### Bachelor's/Master's degree

*Appropriate facilities and resources are available for learning and teaching activities.*

*Guidance and support is available for students which includes advice on achieving a successful completion of their studies.*

[ESG 1.6]

### Description

The Department of Sociology and Social Work achieves the standard for constant modernisation of the educational process at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels through two Units of Information Technology and multimedia support available in the college. As stated in the SER, there is also an Academic Support Unit for students with disabilities, which includes several facilities such as Braille guiding boards, side latches (ramps), electric speaking elevators, automatic opening doors, ground steps guides, assistive technology lab and academic content production office. In 2009, the college established a special need Lab with full facilities and equipment to serve their needs. Moreover, the department has a committee specialising in annual identifying the necessary educational resources (books, software etc.). Classrooms are adequately equipped with electronic educational media and adequate seating.

Classrooms and associated equipment are said to be maintained and provide students with the possibility to achieve programme educational goals and outcomes. The department utilises two seminar rooms, one in the department itself and the other on the second floor (the college seminar room). The department's students can use three public computer labs in the college and a computer lab for students with special needs.

Moreover, there is a technical support unit with specialised technicians as the university states. Students can also use the computer labs available in the teaching buildings near the college, which include devices equipped with the basic programmes they need. The labs are equipped with desktop computers, LCD projectors, and printers. All computers are mainly used for instructions and writing of study papers and internet assistance, which students can use unlimitedly. Sultan Qaboos University provides wireless internet connection through Wi-Fi technology. This service is available to employees, students, and official visitors of Sultan Qaboos University.

The university's main library contains a complete collection of books, journals, indexes, videos and computer software, and several electronic library full-text databases. The library in the College of Arts and Social Sciences, established in 1996 as a specialised library in the arts and humanities, contains approximately 11,000 books referenced using the US Library of Congress system. The library is linked to other libraries on the campus through the library system, which aims to update, report, and facilitate access to library resources. Both libraries are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, during the final exams.

The student-counselling centre provides support services to assist students in their adjustment to university life. The centre is affiliated with the International Association of Counselling Centres. Consultants at the centre practice under international counselling guidelines and codes of ethics. The university has many departments and units that support students and faculty members, e.g., the Dean's Office for Academic Affairs, which mainly strives to integrate new students into various activities, and the Dean's Office for Graduate Studies, which offers academic services and educational workshops. Postgraduate study scholarships are available to candidates who wish to apply by completing the scholarships section in the electronic application form and being competitive according to the Dean's Office website requirements.



Sultan Qaboos University states to follow a policy of equality, justice, and equal educational opportunities for both sexes and student admission, employment, and appointment opportunities. All students enjoy equal rights, privileges, and opportunities in education, training, and degrees. The university's administration provides students of special needs with opportunities to enrol in departments and colleges that suit their disabilities. The number of students with special needs at the university in the academic year of 2021-2022 is about 60, and many prefer to study in the Sociology programme. Each student with special needs is assigned two academic supervisors instead of one; the first supervisor is specialised in the field of study, while the second assists them in various issues and topics of interest when guidance is needed.

### Experts' evaluation

The university provides the students with a wide variety of facilities and resources. These facilities and resources cover academic (e.g., writing centre) and non-academic (hospital, housing) affairs. Female students are provided free housing and full board on campus, while male students get an allowance and are living in facilities around the campus. As it was explained during the virtual visit, the separation is mainly based on the fact that the university has grown in the last years and cannot provide sufficient housing for everyone. For Omani students, there are also no study fees, which the experts found very commendable.

The learning resources, such as library, classrooms and computer labs allow students to study under adequate conditions. The students are able to use a very comprehensive online library which is easily assessable via the website. They are also able to access all necessary students' services via the website. All rooms that students use during their studies are sufficiently equipped and maintained to be kept up to date.

Every student also gets assigned an academic advisor from the same department that serves as an initial contact point for all sorts of questions. Depending on the problem, there is a hierarchy system in place that deals with more serious issues or issues that could not be solved at a lower level.

As there are only a few international students the support is mainly done on an individual basis. As the university plans to enrol around 100 international students every year, these support services will probably need strengthening. For non-Arabic speakers the university offers Arabic courses.

Noticeable is also the culture of so-called student societies or associations. These self-organisation units of the students cover a variety of topics and are also involved in the self-organisation of the university.

A current and yet also a future topic is supporting students in learning digital skills. Here, the university and the departments are striving to equip students with more advanced possibilities (e.g., VR technology). The experts welcome these plans and encourage the university to do so.

While there already seems to be some sort of career advisory facility or resource in place, the experts would like to highlight (see also Chapter 5) that students should be properly informed about their career prospects and additionally about possible limitations to their career (**Finding 14**). While the student population over the programmes is overall gender balanced, the academic level is not. The experts therefore also recommend additional efforts to provide more guidance and support for female students in academic careers (**Finding 15**).

Special support is available for handicapped students, such as additional academic advisors and technological aids, e.g., Braille keyboards, allowing them to study under equal opportunities.

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.



## 7. Information

### Bachelor's/Master's degree

*Impartial and objective, up-to-date information regarding the programme and its qualifications is published regularly. This published information is appropriate for and available to relevant stakeholders.*

[ESG 1.8]

### Description

Public information is shared on social media platforms and the university's homepage to keep all stakeholders, as well as the interested public up to date, as the SER states.

Furthermore, the College of Arts and Social Sciences has an annual performance report that focuses on the strategic direction of the college and its alignment with the university's mission, objectives and strategic plan. The information includes an assessment of the college strategy and targets, teaching and learning, research and consulting, community service, resources and facilities, and risk management. The college also publishes an annual report that includes detailed information on activities, achievements, and initiatives in teaching and learning, research, and community service.

### Experts' evaluation

The University has a well set up online presence in form of a well-structured and very comprehensive website. So far, all information is provided in Arabic and English, with being automatically guided to the English language website of SQU. The navigation is well structured and easy to use. All relevant information is transparent and seemingly up to date on the website and easily to find from students' admissions, online library, or titles of theses. The website of SQU is providing a good service for students and others interested. Also, the university is represented on social media. There is also a comprehensive annual performance report as well as a college annual report.

However, the website displays a very homogeneous picture of mostly male students / people in university life. Women or international students are under-represented on the website, although the virtual visit painted a different picture with a vast amount of female students studying at SQU and in the department of Sociology and Social Work. It would be appreciated to see a more diverse representation of students on the website, not least in order to attract more international students.

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## V. Recommendation of the panel of experts

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The panel of experts recommends accrediting the study programmes “Sociology” (Bachelor), “Social Work” (Bachelor), “Sociology” (Master) and “Social Work” (Master) offered by Sultan Qaboos University with conditions.

### Commendation:

Students find a vast variety of learning resources at SQU. The student support is commendable, in personal support as well as financial one. Especially the support for handicapped students, who receive additional academic advisors and benefit from specialised equipment such as Braille keyboards is to be applauded. The university’s approach to further educate its teaching staff and train it as future staff in higher positions is very positive. Even though the study programmes are held in Arabic, a well-rounded overview of the programme they are interested in.

### Findings:

13. To prove the programmes academic standard and to prepare graduates for a potential Master’s degree, it is recommended to implement a short thesis at the end of the study programmes.
14. To facilitate the access to international exchange, it is recommended to encourage students to improve on their English skills and communicate more in English as well as work more with English texts, also to provide them with an international perspective of their field of studies.
15. It is recommended to strengthen the qualitative aspect of social work in the courses of the Social Work Bachelor’s programme, such as course content on mental health, diversity, family issues or addiction, which should also be stated in the course handbook, to provide students with a well-rounded view of Social Work. For the same reason, more courses on topics such as behavioural therapy or psychology and counselling skills should be implemented.
16. A graduate profile and job description for Social Work must be distributed to stakeholders of the labour market, which ensures that employers understand the specific skill set of Social Work graduates.
17. To be able to build the specific academic profile of the students of Social Work, it is recommended to offer a wider range of elective courses and develop more of specialisations in fields of Social Work, such as family and addiction.
18. It is recommended to replace one of the research methods courses on statistics with a course focussing on recent developments and trends in academic approaches to social work or cultural competence communication skills to best prepare graduates for their future employment.
19. It is recommended to strengthen the programme’s connection to stakeholders from the labour market. Possibilities to achieve this are
  - a. a formalised approach to meetings with written notes,
  - b. a feasibility study with labour market representatives of all study programmes to ensure that the graduates qualifications match the needs of the labour market.
20. To prepare the students better for their future responsibilities and task in their positions, it is recommended to strengthen the aspect of practice in the study programmes, e.g., through even more case studies, lectures from guest lectures, role plays, etc.

21. The study programmes should strive for further international visibility, internationality and academic connections to other departments of Sociology and Social Work. One tool to achieve this aim is the implementation of courses taught in English.
22. For applicants, it is important to have a clear understanding of what their future career might entail. Therefore, it is recommended to include practical experience in this field of work as a prerequisite to an application if state regulations allow for it.
23. A diploma supplement or similar document detailing the students' gained skills and competencies must be provided upon graduation.
24. To portray the whole spectrum of Social Work and prepare students for different issues they might face in their later career, it is recommended to offer courses concentrating on family issues, addiction, mental health, or diversity. Therefore, it might be necessary to hire additional staff specialised in these fields.
25. To allow further internationalisation, it is recommended to incentivize and support teaching staff in international endeavours, such as research cooperations, international conferences, etc.
26. It is recommended to better separate the career information for Sociology and Social Work graduates, respectively, and to properly inform them about their career prospects and additionally about possible limitations to their career.
27. To allow equal opportunities to all students, it is recommended to put additional efforts to provide more guidance and support for female students in academic careers, e.g., through specific advisors, student groups targeting female students or workshops to train female students in this field.