Experts' Report

on the bachelor degree programme:

"Tourism- and Hospitality Management" (B.A.)

offered by the Sultan Qaboos University

Visit to the University: 17th to 19th of April 2016

Panel of Experts:

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1. Introduction

This report results from the external review of the Bachelor programme in Tourism and Hospitality Management offered by the College of Arts and Social Science (CASS), Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

The programme is checked against a set of criteria for programme accreditation developed by AQAS. The criteria are based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2015. To facilitate the review each criteria features a set of indicators that can be used to demonstrate the fulfilment of the criteria.

The University produced a Self Evaluation Report (SER). The accreditation procedure was officially initialized by a decision of the AQAS Accreditation Commission on 22./23.02.2016. The Accreditation Commission nominated the before mentioned expert panel and the University did not raise any concerns against the composition of the panel.

After a review of the Self Evaluation Report, from 17th to 19th April 2016 a site visit to the University took place. On site, the experts interviewed different stakeholders in separate discussions and consulted additional documentation as well as student work. The visit concluded with the presentation of the preliminary findings by the group of experts to the University representatives.

Following the site visit the expert group drafted the following report, assessing the fulfilment of the AQAS criteria for programme accreditation. The report was sent to the Department for comments. The report together with the comments of the department forms the basis for the AQAS Accreditation Commission to make a decision regarding the accreditation of the programme.

2. General Information

The education system in Oman is divided into three main levels: preschool, school and higher education. School education consists of twelve years of formal study. After completing grade twelve of high school, a student can join one of the higher education institutions by applying online to the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) which is responsible for ensuring that students receive fair treatment and are given the best available opportunities, based on their preferences and achievement in high school.

Sultan Qaboos University is the largest higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman. It aims to take a direct and effective role in the social and economic development plans for the Omani society by contributing to the development of its productive capabilities and the best use of its resources.

While the construction of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) started in 1982, the first students were enrolled in 1986. The University commenced with five colleges: Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture, Education and Science. Furthermore, the College of Arts and Social Sciences was established in 1987. Today the nine university colleges offer 63 undergraduate programmes, 62 Master and 34 PhD programmes.

Sultan Qaboos University facilities include teaching classrooms, lecture theatres, conference halls, libraries, staff and student residences with separate male and female sport facilities, accommodation for students with special needs, staff and student recreational facilities, SQU Hospital, and a mosque. A newly established SQU Cultural Centre houses the University's main library,

the Omani Studies Centre, Al-Faham lecture hall and the Grand Hall with a seating capacity of 5,000 people.

Sultan Qaboos University aims to contribute to the development of tourism in the Sultanate of Oman through its Tourism Department in the College of Arts and Social Sciences. The Department offers a BA Degree programme in Tourism that commenced in fall 2001.

3. Policy and Procedures for Quality Assurance

> 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.

Following the information provided in the Self Evaluation Report the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) developed quality indicators and practices to address its unique institutional needs and relevance within Omani's higher education context. In October 2011, the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (QAAC) was formed. QAAC comprises representatives from all academic programmes in CASS, under the direct supervision of the Dean and Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies and Dean of CASS. The QAAC has a permanent office, rapporteur and staff to execute duties and follow-up administrative tasks. The committee was charged with developing quality indicators, practices and procedures. Their first assignment was to develop a road map for institutional and programme accreditation in CASS.

Revision and assessment criteria are based on the principles of total quality management and continuous improvement. Several tools are utilized for assessing employers´ and market needs:

a) Advisory Committee: The Department Advisory Committee input shall ensure an up to date level of education. Members of the advisory committee are: key external stakeholders and consultants selected from the local industry, business community, and government. The committee also includes faculty members with expertise in the field of teaching and research. The Tourism Department relies on leaders and innovators from the tourism and hospitality industry to aid in the development of its programmes, to generate training opportunities, and to assist in the placement of graduates.

b) Employers' Survey: A survey was distributed to current employers in the tourism industry (spring 2012), in addition to several focused meetings held at the Department with several employers and stakeholders seeking their advice, opinions, and requirements regarding graduates' skills and competences.

c) Joint National Committees: The Department staff members are involved in different national-level committees working on tourism planning. This includes but is not limited to the Omani Tourism Strategic Plan (e.g. Omani Tourism Strategic Plan 2020 – 2040), Marketing Plans, Muscat Theming plan, etc. In addition, a new joint committee has recently been officially formed embracing senior members from both the Ministry of Tourism and Sultan Qa-

boos University to centrally look after all the current and potential aspects of mutual cooperation. Such extensive involvement and detailed, frequent, long discussions with the industry and governmental representatives and decision makers provides the Department staff members with a valuable mechanism for assessing the current market as well as potential needs.

d) Alumni Feedback: An alumni survey was conducted in 2013 to get feedback regarding the courses and programmes which they have studied during their academic life and the extent to which these programmes and courses are in line with the market needs based on their work experience. Results were transferred to the further development of the programme.

e) Course Evaluation: Students of each course are required to assess each course separately using a unified online 'Course and Teaching Survey' at the end of each semester. The survey is designed by the university to assess different aspects including the course design, materials, presentation as well as the lecturer's quality, communication with students, etc. By the end of each semester, course instructors as well as the Head of Department can access the results via their personal SQU portal.

f) Students' Liaison Committee: The students are officially invited at the end of each semester to meet together (via the Students' Liaison Committee) and report their feedback about all the academic aspects including their concerns, as well as the programme merits and demerits.

Experts' Evaluation

It became obvious to the experts that the responsibilities within the programme and for the different programme-elements are clearly defined within the department. Also the expectations towards students are outlined and available to them. The documentation of the curriculum is up-to-date and it was well explained by the department how the programme can be updated when appropriate. The process is clearly embedded in the structures of the College and SQU, however it also allows for the required flexibility for adjustments on a smaller scale. Recognizing the size of the department, the number of staff and students the experts positively conclude that the quality assurance mechanisms in place are comprehensive and appropriate for the study programme. It involves instruments with different scopes like the course evaluations, and programme evaluations. In a less direct way also student workload is evaluated.

The group of experts was impressed by the level of information that is available on the progression of students and their success rates. Beyond this well-rounded system for the collection of data it shall also be recognized that the active exchange between teaching staff and students allows for a very direct feedback towards the management of the department on potential needs for adjustment in the teaching process.

The labour market is involved in the procedures through an advisory committee. This also allows the department to react to changing societal needs which are of particular importance for the tourism and hospitality sector in Oman.

It can be concluded that the procedures in place are fit for purpose and lead to a continuous improvement of the programme. However, it should be recognized that the results of evaluations are not shared with the students in a way that they learn how their feedback leads to concrete adaptations. During the site visit students reported that the open door policy in the department

helps addressing issues directly. While this indicates a cooperative atmosphere between teaching staff and students, it should not lead to hesitation towards discussing the results of prior evaluations with students to demonstrate that their opinion is part of the enhancement process and quality culture in the department. To continue this line of thought the experts encourage not only discussing with students in informal procedures, but to include them and document their participation in all relevant steps of the quality assurance cycle.

Due to the good contact between teaching staff and students as well as graduates the department also knows about graduates´ careers and their progression. From time to time graduates are even involved in the teaching process. Recognizing the size of the department and the open culture of communication this method of following graduates' careers seems sound. However, in the long run it might be helpful to actively follow graduates more systematically in order to generate knowledge beyond individual contacts. This could identify patterns or even gaps that remain unrecognized if data is not combined and systematically analyzed.

4. Quality of the Curriculum

> 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.

The University uses a Credit Hour (CH) system that can easily be transferred into ECTS. University-wide all curricula consist of a number of courses that are included in all programmes – so called University Requirements. These are accompanied by a number of elective courses on the level of the University. Subjects typically are Arabic or Omani & Islamic Civilization. For these two types of courses the offer is the same for all students, independent from the programme they chose. The same principle is repeated at the level of the College of Arts and Social Sciences while naturally the courses offered in College Requirements or College Electives are a bit more specific to the field of Social Sciences and Arts. The remaining parts of the curriculum are then filled with courses specific to the individual programme. Consequently for the Tourism and Hospitality the curriculum consists of University Requirements (6 CH), University Electives (6 CH), College Requirements (11 CH), College Electives (3 CH), Major Requirements (34 CH), Major Electives (24 CH), and Specialization Requirements (36 CH).

Part of the Major Requirements that are specific to the programme are two summer internships that are credited as well.

After finishing their initial four semesters, students will then proceed toward receiving the Specialization Requirements courses, which include 12 courses (36 CH) in one of the Department´s specializations (Tourism Management & Hospitality Management) for four semesters.

The programme outlines five intended learning outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate unique knowledge related to operating a Tourism and Hospitality business in a diverse and global business environment.
- Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills and creativity required to effectively function in the tourism and hospitality industry.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to conduct all the duties required for working in the different Departments of tourism and hospitality institutions.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to define, identify, and evaluate ethical versus unethical business practices.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to employ proficient written and oral communication skills, including the appropriate usage of technology for effective customer service and teamwork.

To realize these learning outcomes the courses specific to the programme cover aspects like "Event Management", "IT Applications in Tourism", "Economics of Tourism", "Airlines Operations and Management", as well as "Service in Hospitality", "Front Office Operations and Management", and "Managerial Accounting for Hospitality".

Experts' Evaluation

The five general learning outcomes listed above, which are published in the course files summary as well as in other documents, include interdisciplinary as well as subject-specific skills. They are suitable and linked to the different parts of the programme and its activities. The experts positively found that the course descriptions clearly define learning outcomes for each course, which are derived from the general learning outcomes. A typical course plan is available for (potential) students in the course files summary and it is also transparent which courses are compulsory and electives, respectively. As discussed with the Department while on site, the electives are also used in a suitable way to adapt to new or changing requirements from the labour market.

On a very positive note the experts recognize that general skills are developed in specific courses as well as during many subject-specific parts of the programme (e.g. role plays, presentations, projects). Different types of assessment are applied, which are linked to the specific learning outcomes of the respective courses in a suitable way. The overall workload is reflected in credit hours that are allocated to the different courses in a transparent way. Following the review of the documentation and also based on the discussion with students during the site visit there is no indication that the overall workload might be too high or allocated in an inappropriate way.

The programme aims at combining general management knowledge with specific skills required in the tourism and hospitality industry. Based on a thorough review of the course outlines as well as considering the discussions with the Department, it seems to the panel of experts that more emphasis is given to operational and practical issues of the tourism and hospitality industry. The course descriptions reflect strongly on the intended outcomes in this field. As a result, the graduates are qualified to work in operational areas of the tourism industry (the department booklet puts 'tour leader' on the first position of a list of potential occupations), which was also confirmed by representatives of the labour market during the site visit. However, in order to work in superior management positions, a broader knowledge of general management concepts and instruments would be essential. Moreover, considering the requirements of the Bachelor Level of the European Qualifications Framework, the explicitly academic parts of the programme clearly should be enhanced. This will also help to better prepare graduates for a potential Master's programme. While – strongly based on the discussions on site – the experts have full con-

fidence in the potential of the Department to identify its own way to strengthen the required academic foundation of the programme, a number of points discussed on site should also be recognized to be considered by the Department in its redesign of the curriculum which is envisioned for the next years:

- As an option courses on general management, especially in the first half of the curriculum (e.g. Introduction to Management, Marketing, Organization, Personnel, and Accounting) should be considered. Based on a general management qualification, specific applications to the tourism industry can be added at a later stage, also leading to a stronger proficiency in using the general management skills. This approach allows for a broader academic perspective and contributes to an increasing flexibility of graduates in the labour market.

- Currently, there are only three courses which explicitly cover methodological skills and methods (Semester 1: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Semester 4: Research Methodology in Tourism and Hospitality, Semester 7: Statistics for Tourism and Hospitality). It did not become fully clear why the only course on statistics is placed in the last year of the programme. Already in previous courses at least descriptive statistics are used to a large extent. Discussions with the Department showed that there was no particular reason for this position of the course and on a substantive side the experts agree to the notion of the Department that it seems more reasonable to place this course earlier in the curriculum.

- The programme does not include a final thesis, but a comprehensive graduation project which typically covers a practical application or example. The project reports which could be reviewed during the site visit show that the graduates are able to develop innovative ideas based on a suitable analysis of general and sector specific concepts. However, more emphasis might be given to formal academic requirements, especially referencing. A (short) introductory course for the graduation project might be helpful to better prepare students for writing the project report.

- Without contradicting the required need of strengthening the academic qualification within the programme, it might also make sense to increase the intensity of applied practical skills required by the industry, e.g. by extending the duration of the internship.

As already mentioned above, the Department is in a process of continuously reviewing and adapting the current programme (small scale adaptations), which hasn't changed its basic structure since 2010. The Department uses many instruments to assess the suitability and timeliness of its programme, including occasional surveys and formal as well as informal contacts to representatives of the labour market and to alumni. Moreover, members of the faculty are involved in several research and consultancy activities, providing them also with additional information on recent practical as well as academic developments. Particularly based on the discussions with the Department and stakeholders on site, the experts are highly convinced that the responsible staff seriously considers external advice of the different stakeholders in their continuous enhancement process and will also adapt the described suggestions to the context of the programme at SQU.

5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Students

> 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.

The Department provides a detailed chart outlining which intended learning outcome of the programme is covered by which course of the curriculum. Beyond this, for each course the specific assessment methods are outlined to present how they are linked to the intended learning outcomes. Assessment regulations foresee that in each course different types of assessment are used, enabling students to continuously receive feedback on their achievement.

Teaching methods include activities aiming at the application of the acquired skills and knowledge whenever possible: e.g. in language courses students have to guide tourists in the foreign language, combining language training with the acquisition of new competencies in the field of the tourism sector.

The SQU Undergraduate Academic Regulations organize the examination process. The College Examination Committee is responsible for supervising the University & College requirements examinations and ensuring that these examinations are conducted properly and in accordance with SQU regulations. The Head of Department and the Department representative in the College Examination Committee are responsible for monitoring the examination process on the Departmental level.

Experts' Evaluation

As mentioned above working in the tourism industry also requires knowing practical skills and working with different kinds of people and nationalities. The programme prepares its students for this industry with a variety of appropriate learning, teaching and assessment methods and tools. The documentation as well as discussions with students revealed that different ways of teaching and learning are applied in the different courses: For instance group work (which can also be perceived as leadership skill training), presentations or case studies. Methods match content, as can be seen from field excursions and role plays in a course like "Tour Guiding", a hotel planning project in "Tourism Management" or even the task to guide real foreign visitors in the foreign language courses. These activities also show the implication of an interdisciplinary approach that manages to combine learning with implementation.

Further possibilities for transferring knowledge from classroom to real life are provided during two summer internships, each lasting six to eight weeks. As discussed above, the learning experience for the students could even be intensified by extending the length of these internships. Additional value could be added by placing these internships in the tourism season of Oman.

Clearly beneficial and an appropriate preparation for the tourism industry is the final year project where students work on a specific tourism related subject in small teams. Talking to university staff, students and industry representatives demonstrated that those projects have lead to industry contacts and cooperation with companies that were useful after graduation.

Discussions with graduates confirmed this positive view by explaining where they work after graduation: Many of them are in the tourism industry; numerous on their way to upper management positions. Most graduates agreed that what they learned prepared them for their current job.

Due to its practical nature, the programme demands a high degree of student commitment. Talking to students revealed that most of them like working and interacting with people. Including the above mentioned activities like tour guiding simulations and site visits in the courses not only motivate the students, they also give them the chance to reflect whether their expectation of the future job meets reality. This process is also an important part of both internships. The experts recognize a high motivation of students to go abroad for the internships. Since there is only a limited number of places for these internships for the top achievers, this is perceived as another motivation factor by students and teaching staff.

Currently internships abroad are the most visible link to international mobility in the programme. As this capacity is limited by the number of available placements in foreign countries, the experts see large but at this point unused potential by making use of exchange agreements with universities in other countries. While on the structural level the arrangements are theoretically in place, currently there is no practical utilization of mobility instruments. Particularly in the field of tourism mobility – incoming or outgoing – will be beneficial to the achievement of the learning outcomes. Consequently the department should consider utilizing the existing structures and supporting academic mobility of students on a practical level by entering agreements with other universities.

It is appreciated by the experts that students find all the information on evaluation and grading rules and procedures in the Undergraduate Academic Regulations by SQU. Examination and assessment types vary from course to course and range from participation, oral presentations, mid-terms up to the final exams. In the discussion with teaching staff it was obvious that the teaching staff is quite free in their choice of assignments and that they try to find the best way to assess their students appropriately. The course "Tourism Companies and Travel Agencies" for example contains PowerPoint presentations, oral discussions, visual presentations and field visits. Since teachers discuss the course outline, course objectives, grading scheme, teaching approaches and assignments in the first lecture, students are informed about the upcoming course. Students find detailed information about each course in the Course File Description, which contains an overview about all exams for the respective module. The assessment methods are appropriate, as shown in the language courses, where oral and written parts are combined.

The final exam of each course is given a higher weight compared to the other assignments taking place throughout the semester. From the experts´ point of view it is good that the overall grade does not only rely on one final exam, but is spread between the various types of assessment. The final exams take place within the two-week period at the end of each semester which is announced in the University Calendar of Events.

Students know well in advance that at the end of each semester the two week examination period comes up, allowing everyone to plan accordingly and to start preparing early enough. In case students fail a course, they may repeat it twice within three semesters. Further attempts require special permission, which seems a fair regulation.

The grading scales are documented in the Undergraduate Academic Regulations. They range from A (Exceptional Performance) to F (Unacceptable Performance). Every Grade is attributed a numeric value, e.g. 4.00 points for an A, 3.70 for an A-, 3.30 points for a B+ up to only 1.00 for a D. Everything below D means failure of the course. The regulations are transparent and available to student at all times.

A mandatory "Foundation Programme" (FP) was introduced for all students who want to attend SQU since the academic year 2010/11 to reduce the number of failed courses. This FP ensures that students are qualified in English language, maths, IT skills and general study skills. It could be demonstrated that since the introduction of the FP failure rates declined substantially and the academic qualifications of students increased. Also the FP is a useful pre-selection for the tour-

ism programme in terms of English skills that are an indispensable qualification on the labour market for graduates.

Particular recognition should be given to the good support mechanisms for students with special needs, especially for students with reduced eyesight. A laboratory with braille sense language and other support mechanisms are available and enable students to study at the same level as their co-students while their special needs are considered by adapting the teaching tools.

The last comment regarding the organization of the learning process should cover the rules regarding attendance of courses, which generally is mandatory. However, students can attend extracurricular activities in case they ask for approval in advance of the event. To the expert group this seems like a fair rule.

6. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

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

Before entering the programme all students undergo the so-called Foundation Programme. This year is required for all students studying at SQU. The Foundation Programme (FP) at Sultan Qaboos University became a mandatory introduction for study in all the university's colleges as of the academic year 2010/2011. The programme has been designed to better prepare undergraduate students who have been accepted in the University to fully achieve the required entrance requirements in accordance with the Omani academic standards. The programme qualifies students in English language, mathematics, and information technology, as well as study and learning skills.

Based on the information provided in the Self Evaluation Report admission to the Tourism Department relies upon SQU and College of Arts and Social Sciences admission regulations and rules. This indicates that the University admits the best students from the school leavers of Oman strictly by merit. The students are distributed to departments based on the following enrolment requirements:

- Student interests
- Number of seats available in the programme
- English exit test results
- English placement test results
- The Tourism Department enrols students after passing the Foundation Programme and achieving level six in English.

The University´s academic regulations require that each course at SQU, with possibly some exceptions, have at least three components (not exceeding 60% of the total): Quizzes, In-term tests, Assignments, Seminars, including a mandatory final exam.

Student's performance is monitored at different levels. Each student is assigned an Academic Advisor, who advises regarding the individual study plan and makes sure students adhere to the rules and procedures set by the University, College and the Department. Together with the student he/she also coordinates in case of any situations that might impact the smooth progression of a student. The Advisor system is complemented by the Department Administration and the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies who monitor all official interaction and serve as a link between the Department and the Deanship for Admission and Registration.

Regulations for mobility are in place in order to facilitate exchanges within the College, between Colleges and also with other Universities.

Experts' Evaluation

First and foremost it has to be recognized that rules and regulations regarding admission criteria, as well as recognition regulations are well established, processed and monitored on the central level of the University. The formal requirements for admission are clearly defined and available at the homepage of the University. Specific prerequisites relevant for an individual study programme (e.g. language skills, professional experience, artistic ability) reflect substantive qualities needed for a successful completion of the programme and are included in the published admissions criteria.

Based on the data available on the last cohorts the admission criteria seem appropriate. Clearly the introduction of the Foundation Programme helped to adapt the study entrance phase to the qualification of the incoming students. Data is available on the admission procedures of past cohorts.

It can be positively mentioned and confirmed that the available regulations for recognition are made in a way they enable mobility. However, the extremely limited use of these regulations in the Department has to be recognized. Particularly when considering the existing cultural limitations for the tourism sector in Oman, mobility – either incoming or outgoing – might be a helpful mechanism and the Department should enforce their efforts to create actively utilized agreements.

For students leaving the University appropriate documentation explaining the qualification and context of their education is provided.

7. Teaching Staff

> 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.

The Department employs 16 academic staff members, language lecturers, researchers, and co-ordinators. Six of them hold Professor positions. A full list of department staff members including their profiles has been made available for the review as part of the documentation. All department members hold PhD, Master and Bachelor degrees from USA, UK, Germany, France, Australia, Egypt, and Oman. For language courses, the Departments mainly relies on native speakers of the respective languages.

The recruitment policy for Omani staff follows the idea that the best graduates of the University are appointed as Demonstrators and sent abroad for their Masters and PhDs before their appointment as Assistant Professors. Beyond this, SQU outlines that it actively recruits international staff members to complete the academic staff portfolio.

Experts' Evaluation

It became obvious to the panel of experts that the academic faculty members are experts in the tourism and hospitality industry with a comprehensive international background. They are involved in high quality research and they are consulted as experts by the government as well as by the industry. Therefore, without any doubt they are highly qualified and competent to teach in the tourism and hospitality programme. All faculty members are absolutely fluent in English which is essential for a programme that to a large degree is taught in the English language. The language teaching staff includes German and French native speakers. Moreover, it should be pointed out that all members of the department are highly motivated and committed to their tasks as teachers and students' advisors. Teaching staff is encouraged by the university, the college, and the department to further enhance their didactic skills. Resources are provided for these activities and staff members are actually making use of these opportunities.

From a quantitative perspective, the personnel resources are sufficient. Courses provided by the department are offered according to the curriculum within relatively small groups. There are no open positions at the moment. A formal and transparent recruitment process that actively includes recruitment abroad has been established based on general regulations of the university.

8. Learning Resources and Student Support

> Appropriate facilities and resources are available for learning and teaching activities.
>
> Guidance and support is available for students to advise them on achieving successful completion of their studies.

Financially, SQU outlines it is a free University. No fees are paid as all undergraduate academic services are for free. All the students additionally receive a monthly financial allowance to ensure their ability to focus on education without any financial constraints. All the students receive daily meals as well as in-campus transportation. All female students as well as male students with special needs are allowed to live inside the campus where five residential complexes are available.

The classrooms that the Department uses vary in their sizes, ranging from 15 to 35 students per class. All of the classrooms are equipped with a whiteboard, overhead projector, LCD projector, and computer. Some classes are also equipped with a TV and a DVD player.

The students can use the college library or the main library. Both libraries provide literature related to the programme. The collection of the main library is much bigger than the college library however. The library systems allow students to borrow five books for three weeks, which may be extended if no other student requires the book.

Student Advisors, who are also responsible to monitor student progression, serve as primary support structure for students for all questions regarding their studies. In an introduction to the programme happening in the welcoming week students are assigned their Advisor. Beyond the formal structures the Department implements an open door policy allowing students to address questions directly to the responsible staff member.

Experts' Evaluation

Feasibility of the programme

The programme consists of eight semesters, including two summer internships between semester four and five and between semester six and seven. Each is awarded with three Credit Hours. However, talking to students and professors made clear that the programme is flexible enough to allow students to extend their internship to a longer period if students and their placement company see this as being beneficial. The programme is then extended for the required number of semesters. This flexibility is a great opportunity for active students who want to gain more practical experience than provided in the curriculum. As data shows, usually students can finish "on-time" after eight semesters. This was also confirmed when interviewing students. As long as students don't need to repeat an exam and all of a sudden are "behind" their fellow students, the timetable allows students to attend every offered course. This is obviously no issue of concern.

Detailed information about each module is provided to students in the Course File Descriptions. Based on the discussions with the students on site they do not miss information about the programme and their anticipation regarding course content and workload generally corresponds with what is expected from them.

Learning Resources

The Tourism Department offers vast resources, inside and outside the University, to cater for the practical and theoretical parts of the programme. Talking to students revealed that they receive a financial allowance that enables them to concentrate on their studies. If students take up part time jobs, for example as a visitor guide ("meet and greet") at the airport of Muscat, this is more in order to get job experience and contact to future employers than for the actual need of money. Good connections of the teaching staff outside campus can also be seen as very valuable learning resource for the students, such as connections to embassies or German speaking visitor groups, which are tour guided by SQU tourism students.

Students can use a variety of laboratories, such as computer or electronic publication labs. They have user friendly opening hours from 8 am to 6 pm and are even equipped with printers. Even better are the opening hours of the main library during the three weeks prior to the examination periods: They are open 24 hours a day and offer coffee and cookies. Clearly the support of the learning process recognizing real learning patters of students is facilitated this way.

The tourism students have access to manifold options of literature, meanwhile mainly electronic. But there is also a tourism section inside the main and the college library which covers the relevant books for the subjects taught in the courses. The amount of accessible literature, especially with regard to the online databases, probably succeeds the requirements of the programme and would even cover the needs for a degree that requires a higher degree of academic research.

Student support and advice

SQU and the Tourism Department have introductory offerings for new and potential students. During the site visit the expert panel happened to meet one of those school classes that got an orientation tour which is part of the helpful orientation programme. In addition future students are given the chance to meet with the Head of Department, the Dean, staff and current students. All these activities seem very suitable to provide future and new students with the information they might need for their decision and to have a smooth transition from school to the Foundation Programme and the Tourism Department.

Every student is assigned a supervisor who advises the students in the pre-registration phase and during opening hours throughout the semester. Beyond this, discussions with students and teaching staff revealed that their relationship is mostly characterised by open communication; students visit professors and lecturers in their office whenever it is required. The open door policy that is in place proofs to be very helpful and is valued by the students. Even calling teachers on their cell phones, writing text messages, or sharing information in WhatsApp is practiced. Indeed, the Tourism Department is a small entity which facilitates this approach. It is nevertheless not self-evident and positive to have this vivid exchange between students and teaching staff.

So far there haven't been incoming students to the programme, but the HOD explained, that the department would be open for them anytime and would enable special offerings, which is plausible and also stated in the Undergraduate Academic Regulations. The overall friendly and welcoming atmosphere on campus and curiosity towards visitors is convincing, inviting and gives a hint that also incoming students would probably feel welcome in the programme. As the majority of its courses are taught in English, integrating incoming students in the programme should be easy with regard to potential language barriers.

Also the expert panel recognizes that the department offers different ways to students towards finding internships. The department provides a list with companies accepting interns; also graduates provide their experiences and companies even approach the department for interns and later for graduates. Beyond this students explained that they also look for placements themselves, in Oman and abroad. All this underlines that there is a variety of feasible and good options for finding internships for all students. From a student's point of view, particularly the experiences provided by the "older" students are very valuable, as they provide true, unadorned experiences and not only factual information.

9. Information

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

Based on a stakeholder analysis, the Department outlines that information is collected from different sources and stakeholders including to the following:

- Students (Academic Advising, Students' liaison committee) ,
- The Department Board Meetings and related Departmental committees,
- The College Board Meetings and related college committees,
- Tourism Department Alumni,
- Internal and external quality and inspections and reports,
- The Department Advisory Board,
- The SQU / Ministry of Tourism Joint Committee,
- Participation in the industry official and unofficial boards and committees,
- Employers' field studies.

On the other hand, stakeholders are informed about the Department major progressions whether ideas are initiated by them or not. Several events are annually organized to update the Department´s major stakeholders regarding their concerns and how their ideas have been dealt with.

These events include hosting official meetings (e.g. the Omani Chamber of Commerce monthly meeting; the SQU /Ministry of Tourism meetings) or organizing exhibitions, seminars and workshops.

Experts' Evaluation

Due to the good interactions with the labour market - mainly through many joint committees - some information on labour market requirement is collected and analysed. This information shows a clear and comprehensible description of potential employment fields for graduates. At present most graduates are employed in the government or semi government sectors, such as ministries, government entities and military or police clubs. However, there is yet no indication on how this information is systematically collected and analyzed.

Based on the information provided, it seems that graduates show little interest in joining the private sector, mostly due to job security, remuneration, and working hours. There are 362.000 job vacancies in the tourism sector as expected in Oman's Tourism Strategy 2016-2040. This projection creates big challenges for the sector and it will raise the question how the Tourism Department at SQU will react to such huge demand, especially in view of the fact that graduates show very little interest to work in the industry.

Despite the good relations, the labour market is not very actively involved in creating or reviewing the Department's curriculum. The curriculum thus shows the clear tension between practical orientation and theoretical foundation. On the one hand students need more practical training in programmes and skills that are actually used in the industry. If training on specific software such as travel-booking-systems, hotel/restaurant management, etc. is provided prior to their internship students will be better prepared and confident joining the market. To some extent some training is available while students are on their internship but stakeholders are actually not very much involved when it comes to systematic inclusion and development based on performance of the interns. A more coordinated approach of exchange between teaching staff and the industry might help to have a better understanding of the market requirements. On the other hand, strengthening the practical aspects of the curriculum would require a strict monitoring of the academic foundations that should not be weakened in the programme at all. Finding the focus best fitting the SQU Department will be one challenge the leadership will have to manage in the future adjustment process of the programme.

Documentation on graduates' data, their study programmes, duration of study is all available and well documented. Despite cultural and family issues, analysis indicates that students change study programmes due to their level of English, Mathematics and Computer skills, but to little extent culture or family restrictions. Vice versa there are a few students who changed their study programmes from medicine, law etc and joined the Tourism Department. It's also observed that the aim of most graduates is the Bachelor degree. Very few graduates continued with a Master or PhD programme.

Information on study programmes, intended learning outcomes, selection procedures, qualifications awarded and all other teaching, learning and assessment procedures are provided and also available for the public. Formal requirements for admission are clearly defined and available in published forms. Specific pre-requisites relevant for an individual study programme reflect substantive qualities needed for a successful completion of the programme are also included in the

published admissions criteria. Selection procedures for the study programme follow defined criteria and procedures and are publicly available. (also see above)

Appendix a:

Criteria & Indicators for Institutional Accreditation by AQAS

1. Policy and Procedures for Quality Assurance

> *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.*

1. Responsibilities and expectations within the programme and programme elements are clearly defined and available to students.	√
2. Curriculum documentation is up-to-date and updated regularly, with clearly defined expectations.	√
3. A quality assurance system is in place which is appropriate for the relevant study programme. It is documented and comprehensive. It involves instruments with different scopes:	√
a. course evaluations.	√
b. programme evaluations.	√
c. evaluations of student workload.	partially compliant
d. progression & completion rates.	√
e. evaluations of changing societal needs.	√
f. evaluations of the learning environment and support services.	√
4. Students and the labour market are involved in the quality-assurance procedure for the programme.	√
5. Experiences from student advisory bodies/groups are used for the enhancement of the programme.	√
6. The results of quality-assurance procedures lead to concrete measures to enhance quality / resolve identified conflicts.	√
7. Documentation on changes and adjustments made to the programme since the last accreditation / in the past is available.	n.a.
8. Evaluation results are shared with teaching staff and students.	partially compliant
9. Recommendations from past accreditations/evaluations have been considered.	n.a.
10. The career progression of graduates from the study programme is followed and data on alumni experiences are considered during further development of the study programme.	√

2. Quality of the Curriculum

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.

1. Desired qualifications to be achieved during the programme are presented as Intended Learning Outcomes. They are both subject-specific and interdisciplinary in nature.	√
2. Intended Learning Outcomes are shown to be appropriate. Proof of their appropriateness can be provided through evaluations, graduate surveys, and/or feedback from the labour market.	√
3. The Intended Learning Outcomes are/were updated according to current developments in the academic/scientific field or/and labour market.	√
4. The academic degree awarded to the graduates corresponds to the learning outcomes and the requirements of the appropriate level of the European Qualifications Framework.	substantially compliant
5. The curricular structure of the study programme supports the achievement of the learning outcomes. All curricular elements (courses/modules) and their functions are documented. The curriculum defines which elements are compulsory and which are electives. There is an idealized typical course plan available. The order of curricular elements supports the learner's progression.	√
6. The curriculum covers subject-specific and cross-subject knowledge, as well as subject-related, methodological, and general skills. This is documented on the level of the Intended Learning Outcomes.	√
7. The curriculum defines which elements/courses are offered exclusively for the programme and which parts are used in other programmes.	√
8. Curricular modifications are documented in a transparent manner and contribute to an improvement in programme quality.	√
9. If the programme has a specific profile (distance education etc.), specifics of this profile are reflected in the design of the curriculum and documented.	√
10. The final thesis / exams demonstrate that the intended level of qualification has been achieved after completing the programme.	√
11. All elements of the curriculum are assigned a certain number of credits directly related to the expected workload. The total programme workload is allocated to the different courses/modules.	√

3. Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Students

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.

1. Methods of teaching and learning are appropriate to and correspond to the Intended Learning Outcomes.	√
2. Methods of teaching and learning respect and take into account the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.	√
3. Didactic methods stimulate student motivation, self-reflection, and engagement in the learning process.	√
4. Assessment regulations and procedures are defined and made readily available in published form to students.	√
5. Assessment methods for each course/module are appropriate for the learning outcomes as defined in the course/module description.	√
6. The programme design ensures that every student is familiarised with an appropriate spectrum of examination types over the course of the studies. If students have a choice among different methods for individual examinations, a mechanism is in place to ensure that students must take the desired spectrum of exam choices over the course of the programme.	√
7. Requirements for the examinations are transparent and made known to the students.	√
8. Changes to the examination concept are documented and explained.	n.a.
9. Responsibilities and structures related to the organisation of exams are clearly defined. The timing of exams is organised appropriately and examination dates are announced in a timely manner. Suitable opportunities to re-sit an exam are offered as necessary.	√
10. There are transparent and published regulations to compensate for disadvantages, illness, absence, or other mitigating circumstances that may affect a student.	√
11. Long-term data regarding the number of failed course/module examinations in the study programme are used for evaluation and to improve the programme.	√
12. Grading scales and the distribution of grades is documented and assessed.	√
13. The programme enables students to transfer their knowledge to situations outside the university context. Methods of teaching, learning, and assessment support an interlacing of theoretical and practical aspects.	

4. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification

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

1.	Formal requirements for admission are clearly defined and available in published form. Specific prerequisites relevant for an individual study programme (e.g. language skills, professional experience, artistic ability) reflect substantive qualities needed for a successful completion of the programme and are included in the published admissions criteria.	√
2.	The selection procedure for the study programme follows defined criteria and procedures that are publicly available.	√
3.	Admission requirements are shown to support the objectives of the study programme. Admission requirements are or have been adjusted when necessary.	√
4.	Qualitative and quantitative data is available on the admission procedures of past cohorts.	√
5.	Regulations for recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, previous periods of study, and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are in place. These regulations are documented in legally binding form and are available to students.	√
6.	Learning agreements are used to facilitate mobility of students.	partially compliant
7.	Graduates receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including context, level, and status of the studies (diploma supplement).	√

5. Teaching Staff

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 the staff.

1.	Required resources are checked with regard to the capacity of the institution. The successful completion of this check is documented.	√
2.	All human resources involved in teaching within the programme are documented, including their academic and other relevant qualifications as well as quantitative involvement (teaching hours) in the programme. If their teaching hours include offerings open to other programmes, this is transparent.	√
3.	It is ensured that long-term accounting of the teaching hours is available for the period of accreditation.	√
4.	Teaching staff positions are either filled, are being advertised, or are in the middle of appointment proceedings. If contracts expire in the next five to seven years, the intent is to fill the position anew or there is a continuity plan in place.	√
5.	If there are associate/part time lecturers involved in the programme, procedures are in place to ensure the qualifications of these lecturers. Lecturers are	√

	to be made familiar with the requirements of the programme.	
6.	Transparent recruitment procedures for teaching staff are in place.	√
7.	Procedures are in place to ensure and/or develop appropriate didactic qualifications of the teaching staff.	√

6. Learning Resources and Student Support

Appropriate facilities and resources are available for learning and teaching activities.
Guidance and support is available for students to advise on achieving successful completion of their studies.

1.	Course/module descriptions are available to students. These documents contain the Intended Learning Outcomes, methods of learning and teaching, assessment methods, and the expected workload (self-study and in-class hours).	√
2.	Strategies are defined to ensure that course offerings are coordinated on both content and organizational levels to avoid overlap. The programme is implemented in such a way that students are able to complete their studies within the expected period of time as defined in the curriculum.	√
3.	Appropriate material resources (finance, computer workplaces, laboratories etc.) are available for the study programme as necessary to achieve the Intended Learning Outcomes.	√
4.	Sufficient facilities are available with regard to room and space required for the number of students in the programme.	√
5.	Access is provided to an appropriate amount of literature, journals, and academic sources to enable the achievement of the learning outcomes.	√
6.	The equipment in laboratories and dedicated workspaces reflects current professional standards and is appropriate for the Intended Learning Outcomes.	√
7.	Introductory offerings are available for new and potential students.	√
8.	Institutionalized student advisory services are available to students. These services are offered consistently and information on these services is made available to students in an adequate way; specialized information sessions are offered regularly.	√
9.	Individualized advising for specific programmes/programme content is provided. Teaching staff members offer frequent consultation hours and are available to students.	√
10.	Specific offerings are available for exchange students / incoming students.	partially compliant
11.	If the study programme includes practical phases/internships, credits are awarded for these and students are given support in finding practical placements.	√
12.	Student diversity is considered when allocating, planning, and providing learning resources and student support.	√

7   Information

Data is collected from relevant sources and stakeholders, analysed, and used for the effective manage-ment and continuous enhancement of the programme.

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

1. Information on the labour market requirements are collected and analysed. A clear and comprehensible description of potential employment fields for grad-uates is available.	√
2. Information is available in which sectors graduates are employed and how many graduates continue in further education programmes (Master, PhD pro-grammes etc.).	√
3. Information from other relevant sources is collected and used as required.	√
4. Information on the composition of the student body of the study programme is available.	√
5. Information on the duration of studies is available. The analysis of this infor-mation can lead to changes in the study programme, the consequences of which are documented..	√
6. It is documented how many students do not complete their studies. The rea-sons for non-completion are also documented.	√
7. Information is provided to the public on:	√
a) the programme,	√
b) Intended Learning Outcomes,	√
c) selection procedures,	√
d) qualifications awarded, and	√
e) teaching, learning and assessment procedures.	√

Visit to the Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat
Tourism and Hospitality Management B.A.
Date: 16. to 20. April 2016

16 April – Day 1 (Saturday)
Arrival of the expert panel to Muscat

17 April – Day 2 (Sunday)	
09.00	Transfer from hotel to SQU
09.30 – 10.00	Short welcome at the Tourism Department
10.00 – 12.30	Internal discussion of the expert panel (experts only)
12.30 – 13.45	Lunch
14.00 – 15.30	Discussion with the Management of SQU Participants from SQU: • **SQU Management** ▪ Prof. Amer Al-Rawas (Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Community Service) ▪ Sheikh Dr. Khalid Al-Hinai (Advisor to the Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University for Environmental Affairs and Community Service) • **University Quality and Accreditation Office** Dr. Rima Al-Zadjali (Quality Assurance Office - Deputy Director for Academic Affairs)
15.30 – 16.00	Break
16.00 – 17.15	Discussion with CASS Deanship & Head of Tourism Department Participants from SQU: • **College Deanship & College Quality and Accreditation Office** ▪ Dr. Abdullah Al-Kindi (Dean of the College of Arts and Social Sciences) ▪ Talal Al-Awadhi (Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies) ▪ Yassine Charabi (College's Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee) ▪ Ms. Omama Al-Lawati (College's Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee) • **Tourism Department HoD and Quality and Accreditation Team** ▪ Dr. Galal Hamza (Head of Tourism Department) ▪ Dr. Masooma Al-Balushi (Tourism Department) ▪ Dr. Tamer Atef (Tourism Department)
17.30	Transfer from University to hotel

18 April – Day 3 (Monday)	
09.00	Transfer from hotel to University
09.30 – 11.00	Guided tour through the relevant parts of the campus
11.00 – 12.15	Discussion with teaching staff & support staff **Participant from SQU:** • Three academic staff members • Three language lecturers • One administrative staff member
12.15 – 13.30	Lunch Break
13.45 – 14.45	Review of presented evidence

14.45 – 15.15	Break
15.15 – 16.30	**Discussion with representatives of the labour market:** • Six representatives from Government and Private Sectors
16.45	Transfer to hotel
evening	Work-dinner and Internal meeting of the expert panel (experts only)

19 April - Day 4 (Tuesday)	
08.30	Transfer from hotel to University
09.00 – 10.15	Discussion with students and graduates of the programme
10.15 – 10.30	Break
10.30 – 11.00	OPTIONAL discussion with HoD
11.00 – 12.30	Internal discussion of the expert panel (experts only)
12.30 – 13.00	Feedback to the Department
13.00 – 14:30	Lunch
14:30	Transfer to hotel & departure