

Address by Dr Adnan Al Haj Director-General of Private Universities and Colleges,
Ministry of Higher Education
To the INQAAHE Workshop 22 March 2004

Excellencies, INQAAHE Board Members, Honored Guests and Delegates, it is my great pleasure on behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education to welcome you to the third workshop of INQAAHE.

We are very happy that INQAAHE accepted our invitation to hold the workshop in Muscat as this highlights the importance of Quality Assurance for the Gulf Region where our systems of Higher Education are relatively new and expanding quite rapidly.

In the year 2001, Oman established an Accreditation Board and developed a comprehensive document setting out the standards for a system of Quality Assurance for all institutions of Higher Education in the Sultanate. The requirements are based on best practice internationally.

We are now in the process of implementing the new system of Quality Assurance with the first formal accreditation of a local university college. The External review panels arrive for the institutional and programme reviews in May of this year; and the accreditation process will be completed this summer.

There is currently a proposal to establish a GCC Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. This reflects the understanding that a regional approach to Quality Assurance in Higher Education offers the possibility of reducing national costs and improving both national and regional competitiveness in the global market.

The benefits that can result from a regional approach include the pooling of resources, cooperative determination of standards, sharing of expertise and best practice, improved student mobility, facilitation of links among accrediting bodies; and, most importantly, the development of a regional culture of Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

In the beginning, the focus of the Gulf network will be on building national systems to carry out sovereign accrediting functions. It is possible that, in the future, the introduction of this Network may facilitate the establishment of a regional accrediting agency, but the initial goals of the Network, as with INQAAHE, are centered on sharing, support and cooperation.

There is also a proposal that the GCC Ministers establish a process to determine standards for professional programmes, such as those for medical doctors, engineers, accountants and teachers. The outcome would be one common set of regional standards established for all professional programmes in the GCC countries.

Among the benefits expected from this initiative to establish professional standards for the GCC are: the strengthening of professional programmes to better serve society; the establishment of international

benchmarks, improved systems of quality assurance, regional cooperation, professional mobility, certification and professional development.

We hope that you will take advantage of the opportunity to meet representatives from other Gulf countries to discuss their experience and goals with respect to Quality Assurance in Higher Education; and, naturally to share your own experience as well.

With delegates from over thirty countries outside the Gulf, covering all continents, except Antarctica, this should be an exciting and productive workshop.

We hope especially that you will enjoy your stay here in Oman, our beautiful country. We have provided the opportunity for some interesting tours of Muscat, including our finest museum, *Bait Al Zubair*, and Muttrah's ancient market or *Souq*; and we extend to you the best Arabian Hospitality, with every good wish for a great conference - and good memories of Oman and of the Gulf people, to take home with you to various parts of the world.