

ANALYSING THE QUALITY ASSURANCE IN RESEARCH PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN OMAN

Halibas, Alrence¹, Cordova, Ronald¹, Leyte, Percia¹

¹Faculty of Computing Sciences, Gulf College, Muscat

INTRODUCTION

Oman HE

- ▶ The higher education system in Oman is fairly young as compared to its GCC counterparts.
- ▶ The first public university, Sultan Qaboos University, was established in 1986 and eight (8) years thereafter paved the way for the opening of private colleges
- ▶ Majority of the HEIs in the Sultanate are affiliated with overseas partner universities that provide various internationally recognized academic and specialized programmes

INTRODUCTION

The OAAA

- ▶ Royal Decree No. 74/2001 was released in 2001 directing an accrediting agency to instil and promote quality culture in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) formerly Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) was established in response to this decree (Oaaa.gov.om, 2016).
- ▶ Methods to assure quality education in academic institutions include quality audit, quality assessment and accreditation (Goodlife & Razvi, 2008).

INTRODUCTION

HEI Research

- ▶ Research contributes to global knowledge and affords environmental, social and economic benefits and drivers to economic progress and development.
- ▶ HEI roles: Acquisition of academic and professional skills, improving the quality of teaching and learning, knowledge production and transfer of research.
- ▶ HEIs are encouraged to conduct staff and student research to a certain degree and maintain a rich research culture and environment.
- ▶ Most high-profile HEIs have established assurance processes to maintain research quality and ensure continuous improvement in their research activities.

INTRODUCTION

Classification of HEIs in Oman

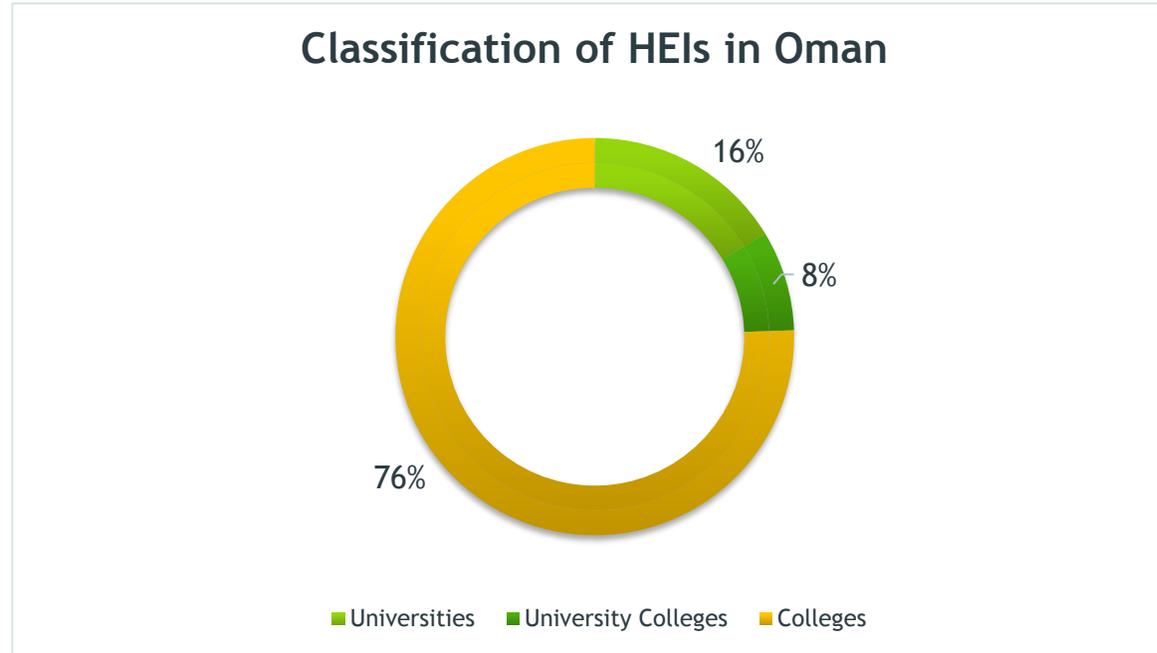


Figure 1 - Classification of HEIs in Oman (Source: oaaa.gov.om, 2016)

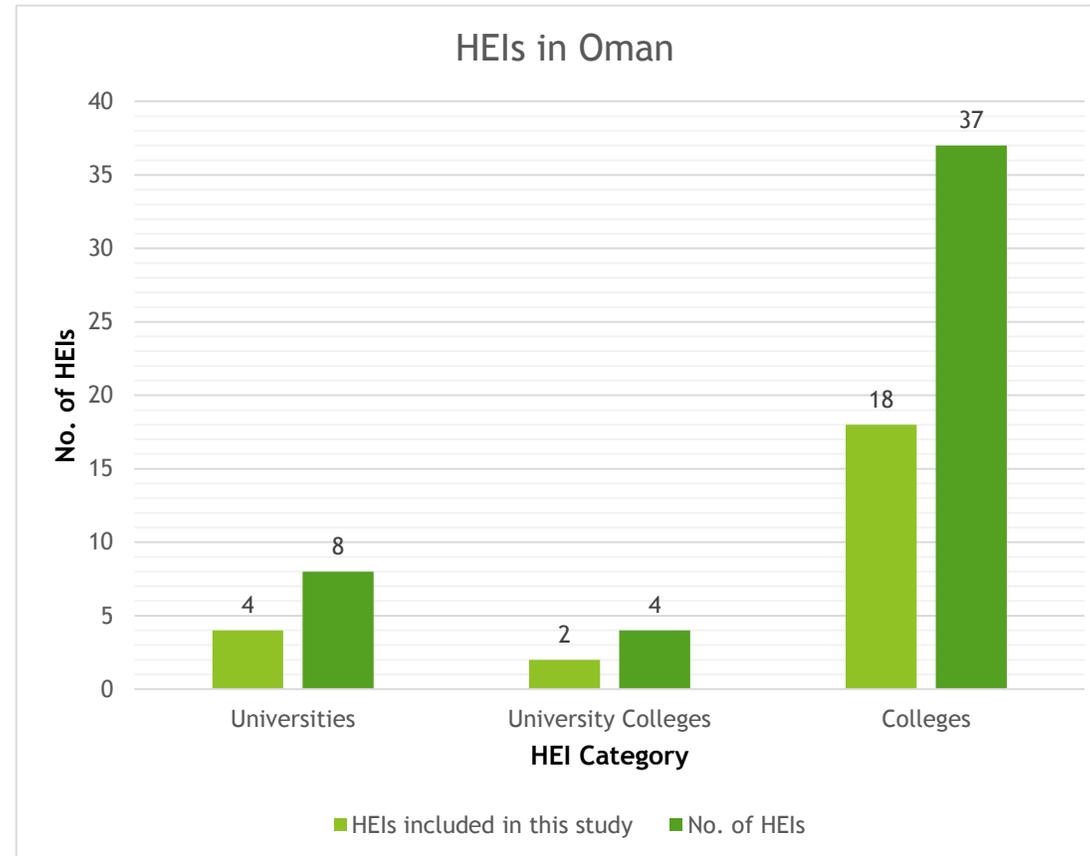
OBJECTIVES

This research study looks at the quality assurance in research planning and management of selected HEIs in Oman

- ▶ Perform document analysis of HEIs practices using OAAA Quality Audit reports through thematic coding and categorising;
- ▶ Identify best practices and gaps in the same areas and report it in a collective and summative manner; and
- ▶ Assess the current situation in the area of research and consultancy based on the inferences and extrapolations in the Quality Audit reports.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

- ▶ The reports included in this study are from four (4) universities, two (2) university colleges and 18 colleges totalling 24 HEIs in Oman.



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

- ▶ The graph shows that there are four (4) research areas among universities that garnered commendations.
- ▶ Research planning and management received the highest number of commendation in universities.
- ▶ None of the colleges and university colleges received commendations from the panel of examiners.

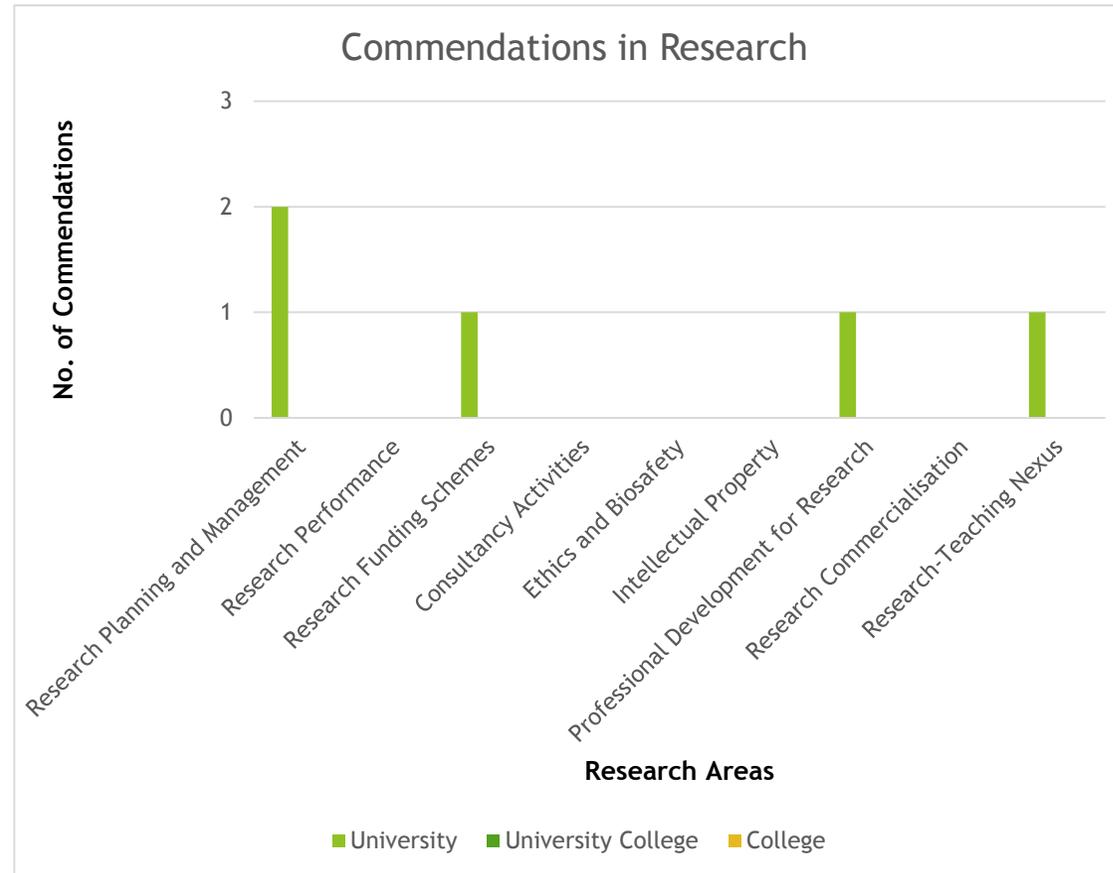


Figure 3 - Commendations in Research

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

- ▶ Significantly, a high number of recommendations on research planning and management among Colleges.

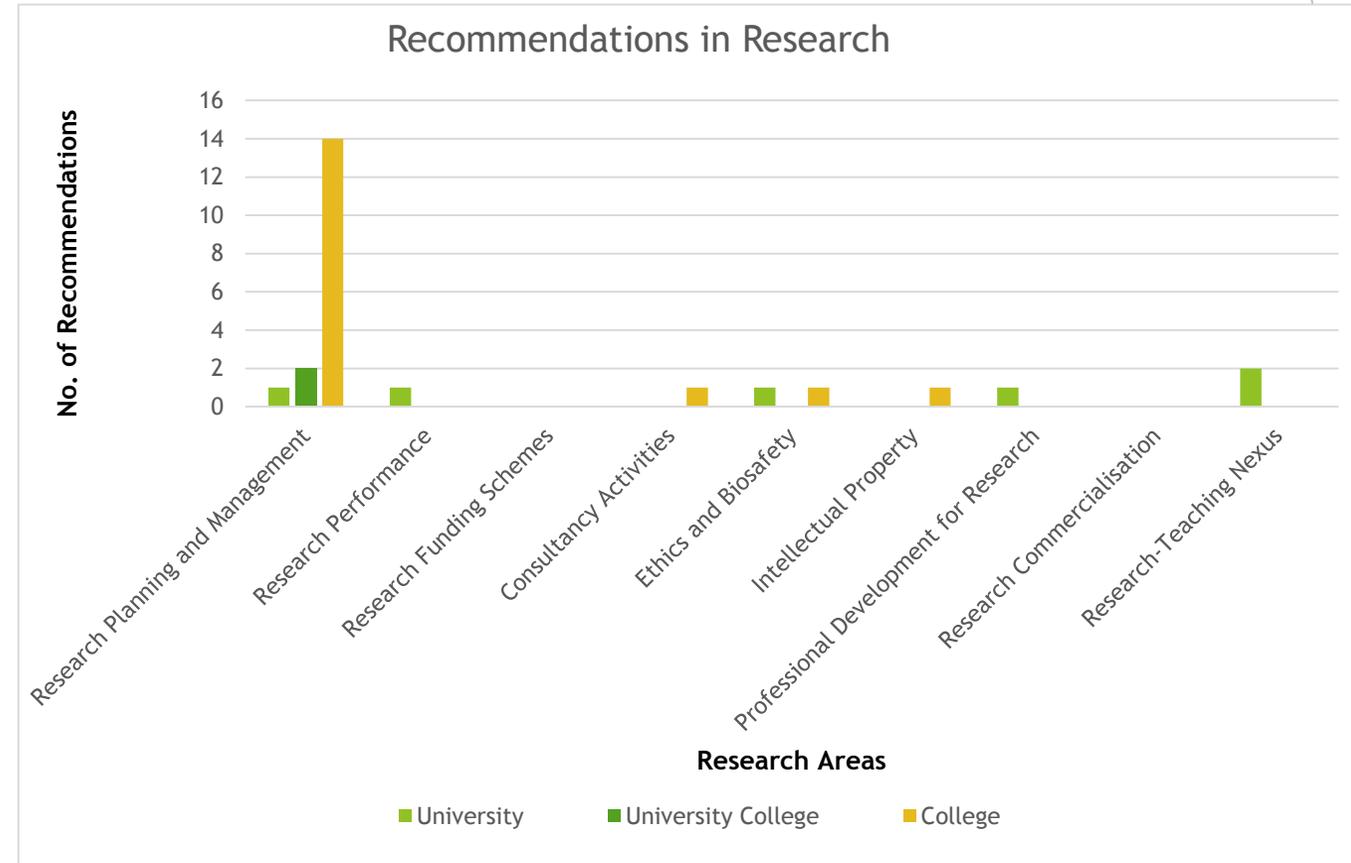


Figure 4 - Recommendations in Research

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The primary focus of Colleges is teaching and not research; this area has not been given its due importance in relation to teaching.

The comments of the panel of examiners on this research area points on the need to develop a comprehensive plan to address all relevant aspects of research and consultancy to include:

- ▶ the identification of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), targets, and strategies;
- ▶ alignment of the strategic and operational plans in support of the vision and mission; and
- ▶ implementation of research activities that are meaningful to the institutional plans (OAAA, 2016)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Panel of Examiners' Comments:

- ▶ Structures and resources (61%)
- ▶ Review effectiveness to research planning and management (31%)
- ▶ Monitoring and review of research performance (8%)

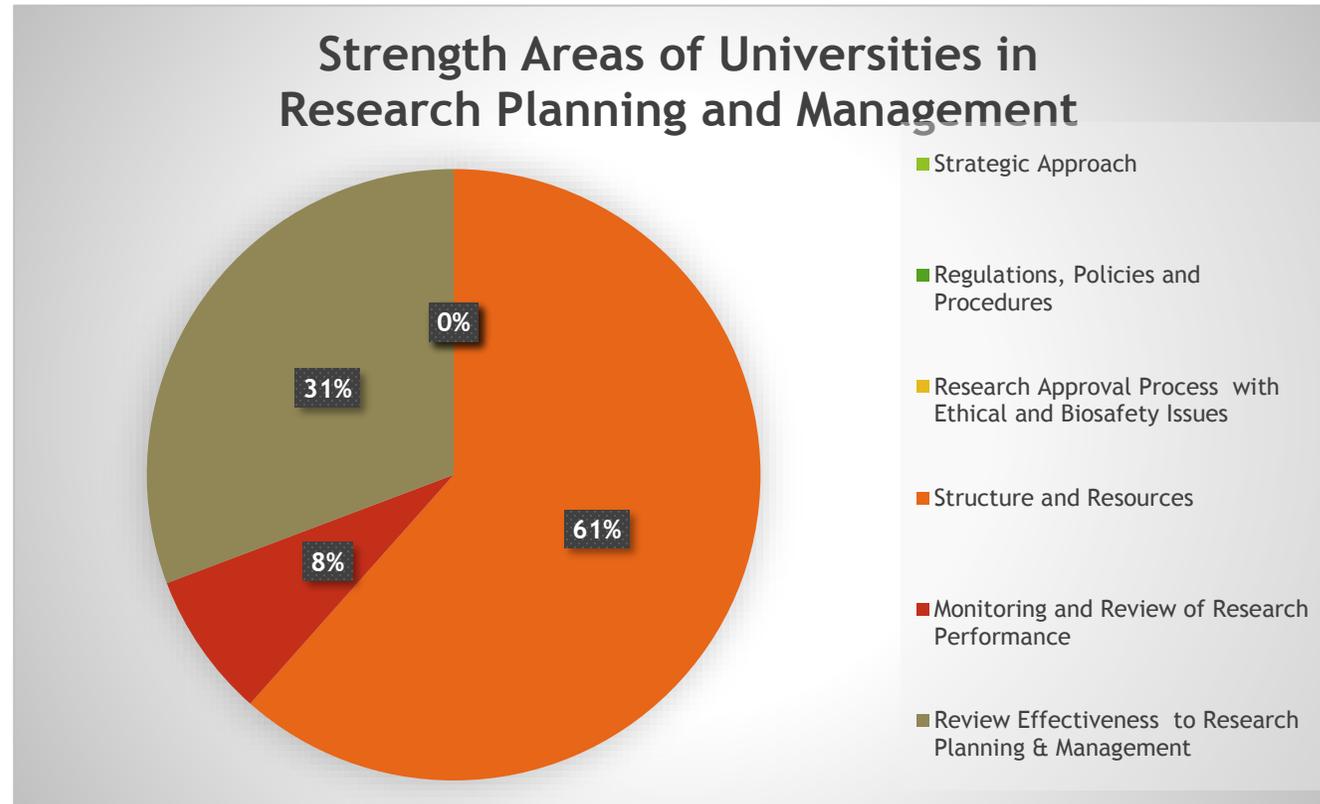


Figure 5 - Strength areas of Universities in Research Planning and Management

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

POSITIVE COMMENTS

- ▶ Universities promote a research culture that includes recruitment and retention of staff with excellent track record in research, strong professional staff development.
- ▶ Universities foster research collaborations and partnerships with other academic institutions, funding agencies, and private enterprises.
- ▶ Universities established research committees that overlook research activities and research centres that facilitate research collaborations.
- ▶ Staff are encouraged to engage in research activities and provided with support through research funding, participation in research conferences, research publications and access to library and other research resources.
- ▶ Universities have developed sound research plans and strategic objectives which are aligned to its institutional mission, and formulated policies that led to successful outcomes. Thus, monitoring and reviewing shows a continuous growth in staff research performance.
- ▶ Universities were commended for establishing strong foundation for research and development and implementation of research initiatives, infrastructure and support systems in the achievement of its strategic objectives and institutional aims.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Panel of Examiners' Comments:

- ▶ Structures and resources (39%)
- ▶ Strategic Approach (24%)
- ▶ Review Effectiveness to Research Planning & Management (21%)
- ▶ Monitoring and Review of Research Performance (12%)
- ▶ Regulations, Policies and Procedures (4%)

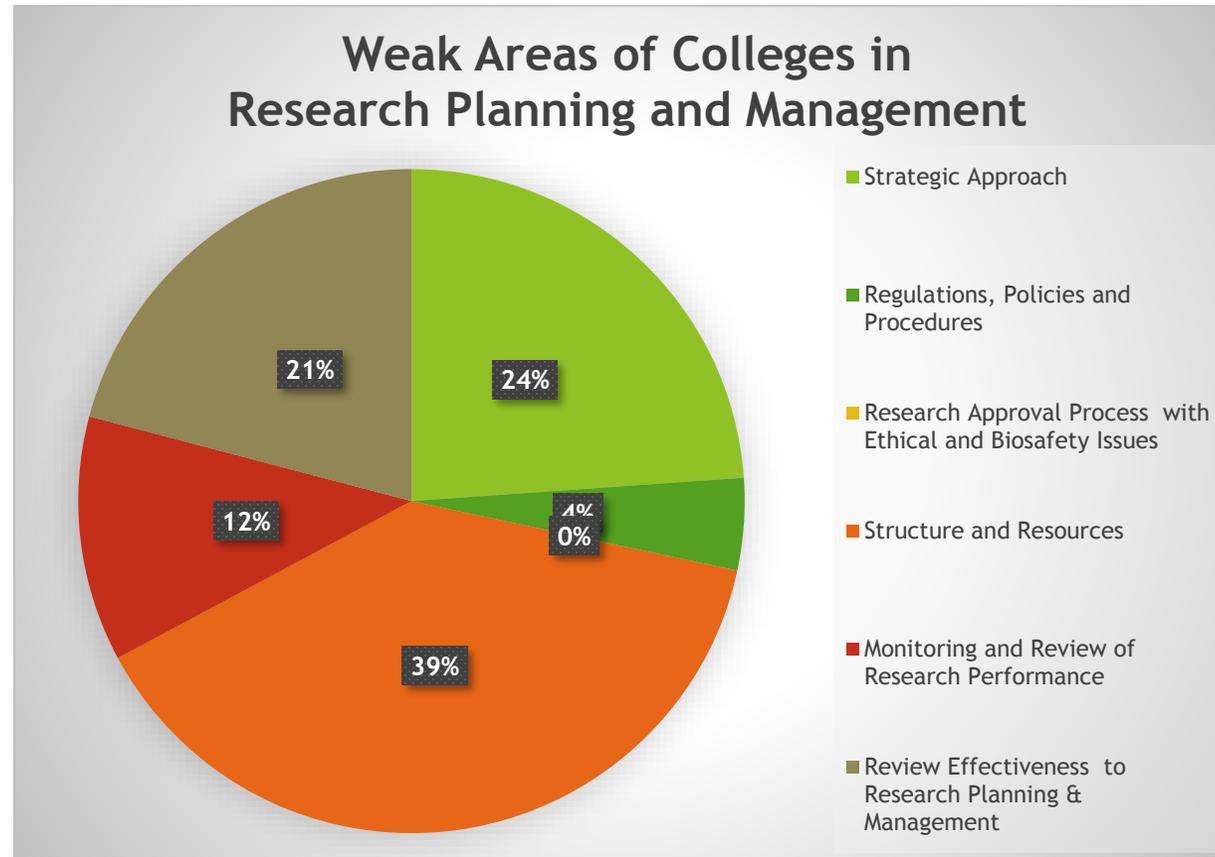


Figure 6 – Weak areas of Colleges in Research Planning and Management

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

NEGATIVE COMMENTS

- ▶ Colleges need to develop research plan that includes KPIs and strategies that are aligned with their institutional vision and mission. For most colleges, research planning and management is still at an early stage and a comprehensive plan at both strategic and operational levels need to be formulated, implemented and reviewed for effectiveness and sustainability.
- ▶ Workload that limits teachers to engage actively in research and other scholarly activities.
- ▶ There is less collaboration with externals, insufficient funding, limited library and other research resources, less support in the staff professional development and research incentives.
- ▶ The research culture in colleges is primarily dependent on staff members' initiative and interest as research is not their primary function.
- ▶ The research performance of these colleges showed minimal instances of staff engagement in research activities. Teaching function is still the primary focus of every staff member's work.
- ▶ As for research policies, there are no formal research policies and guidelines to promote research activities.

There were eight (8) out of 18 colleges that did not provide an institutional research and consultancy profile. These HEIs shared the same weaknesses with the colleges.

CONCLUSION

- ▶ Quality in HEI means excellence in the delivery of teaching, research and community engagement.
- ▶ The HEIs are judged by their research performance including ranking and international reputation (Kothaneth, 2016).
- ▶ Quality assurance is a vital process that can help improve the quality of higher education.
- ▶ Research activities not only positively contribute to academic outcomes and improvement of the curriculum but also address economic, social and environmental issues. The researches produced by educational institutions are drivers to economic progress and development. With this, HEIs in Oman are pressured to provide high academic standards which are relevant and responsive to its societal needs.

CONCLUSION

- ▶ HEIs are expected to develop a research culture and implement a comprehensive and effective research plan coupled with strategies and policies to support quality research outcomes if they were to advance teaching and learning.
- ▶ The development of a research culture in HEIs in Oman cannot happen overnight; there must be careful planning and development (Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta, 2016).
- ▶ HEIs must provide the necessary research infrastructure, services, facilities, and resources to support its research activities. HEIs must consider also right governance, monitoring and review to achieve its research targets. These research areas must be carefully planned, implemented, managed, reviewed and improved by the HEIs.
- ▶ Research management especially in Colleges must be articulated in their institution's overall plan and made part of their evaluation framework.

REFERENCES

- ▶ Alkhafaji, S. and Sriram, B., 2012. Higher education institution quality assurance management system-“modeling and design”. *EXCEL International Journal of Multidisciplinary Management Studies*, 2(7), pp.18-31.
- ▶ Baldwin, G., 1997. Quality assurance in Australian higher education: The case of Monash University. *Quality in Higher Education*, 3(1), pp.51-61.
- ▶ Cullen, J., Joyce, J., Hassall, T. and Broadbent, M., 2003. Quality in higher education: from monitoring to management. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 11(1), pp.5-14.
- ▶ Goodliffe, T. and Razvi, S., 2008. Quality Audits in Oman: potential drivers of change?. *Oman Quality Network*, p.131.
- ▶ Institutional Standards Assessment Manual (ISAM). (2016). 1st ed. [e-book] Muscat: OAAA, p.15. Available at: <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/InstitutePdf/ISAM%20Book%20Final.pdf> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2016].
- ▶ Kothaneth, L. (2016). “Concern over research funding in Sultanate”. *Oman Daily Observer*. [Online] Available at <http://omanobserver.om/concern-over-research-funding-in-sultanate/> [Accessed 15 Sep. 2016]
- ▶ Oaaa.gov.om. (2016). *OAAA - Oman Academic Accreditation Authority*. [online] Available at: <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#Vision> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2016].
- ▶ OAAA, (2016). *Quality Audit Reports. 2011-2016*. [online] Muscat: OAAA. Available at: http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_ReviewDwnld [Accessed 15 Sep. 2016].
- ▶ Quality Audit Manual. (2008). 1st ed. [ebook] Muscat: OAAA. Available at: http://www.oaaa.gov.om/QAM_2008_FINAL2.pdf [Accessed 12 Sep. 2016].
- ▶ Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ROSQA). (2016). 1st ed. [e-book] Muscat: OAAA, p.10-19. Available at: http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Oman_ROSQA%20%28all%20part%20one%29.pdf [Accessed 12 Sep. 2016].
- ▶ Clemeña, R.S. and Acosta, S.A., 2007. Developing research culture in Philippine higher education institutions: perspectives of university faculty. In *Regional Seminar Competition, Cooperation and Change in the Academic Profession: Shaping Higher Education’s Contribution to Knowledge and Research, September 18-19 in Hangzhou, in China*.
- ▶ Sanyal, B.C. and Varghese, N.V., 2006, November. Research capacity of the higher education sector in developing countries. In *Second International Colloquium on Research and Higher Education Policy, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris*.

