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

17 March 2022
Online Learning Accelerated by Covid

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

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

Response 1
Postponed all EQA activities for one year in 2020 to allow HEIs to focus on adapting to distance learning

Response 2
Interacted with State Council and international agencies on QA approaches to distance learning

Response 3
Catered for virtual and hybrid visits allowing continuation of international expertise in our EQA activities
Learning to be hybrid in supporting the sector

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

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

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

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

CHEQA NEWS – April 2021
Virtual Visits in B3 and B4 Mode
Further changes in CHEQA

With a return to 50% attendance in the office due to Covid, CHEQA staff had added challenges in facilitating April’s pre-Ramadan EQA activities. The good news has been the successful use of technology in running hybrid Visits with the ERDo carrying out the role of digital gatekeeper in addition to their more familiar responsibilities. Many thanks to ITD and TSS for making Plan B happen without too many hiccups!
Since the ‘Renaissance’ in Oman, commenced in 1970 under the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos, education has been made accessible to all regardless of gender, means or location.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Diversity**
We respect diversity of professional opinion while encouraging innovation and creativity.
Reviewing our Standards to ensure appropriate QA of online learning

Response 1: EQAs Postponed
Response 2: Sharing QA Experiences
Response 3: Virtual Visits in ‘Plan B’
Response 4: Review of ISA (and ISR) Indicators
Reflecting on the outcomes of our Indicator Review Project

Institutional Standards Features

- The nine ISA standards (and 79 criteria) are generic in nature.
- Benchmarked against 30 international models
- Cover systems, focusing on effectiveness and sustainability.
- They encompass all modes of delivery, assessment and support.
- Criteria are supplemented with non-mandatory indicators.
- Indicators have been amended to be more explicit of range of delivery methods, including online learning.
## Sharing the revised indicators with the sector

### 6.1 Academic Support Services Planning and Management

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<td><strong>b)</strong> Academic support services planning and management takes into account the specific needs of students in non-standard modes of study and/or studying in different locations.</td>
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<td><strong>d)</strong> The HEI undertakes ongoing analysis of the profile of its student population to inform strategic decision making and longer-term planning and development of academic support services.</td>
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<td><strong>a)</strong> There are effective mechanisms and processes for analysing the profile of the student population and identifying the learning needs of students; these are implemented and used to inform strategic decision making and longer-term planning and development of academic support services.</td>
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### 6.2 Student Registration

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<td><strong>a)</strong> The HEI's student registration procedures are efficient, and use appropriate data recording and retrieval systems adequate for accurate reporting requirements.</td>
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<td><strong>a)</strong> The HEI's student registration procedures are efficient and accessible, and use appropriate student management systems adequate for accurate reporting requirements.</td>
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**Sample of Indicator Review**

- **Non-standard modes of study** are usually interpreted as part-time or evening study. Online/distance learning has been added to emphasise virtual modes of study which need to be catered for.

- Indicator has been extended to be more specific and include the need for mechanisms to analyse student profile data and identify student learning needs. This also brings the indicator in line with indicator **a)** in Criterion 7.1.

- Accessibility has been added to ensure that students can register even if they are not on campus. ‘Data recording and retrieval systems’ has been replaced with ‘student management systems’ as a more encompassing term.
Explicitly covering online learning where relevant

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

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

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

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

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

**Student Planning and Management**
- Online services specifically included rather than non-standard study mode
- Helps make distinct from evening classes
Inviting HEIs and ERs to ensure standards still fit for purpose in major ISA review

ISA/ISR Cycle 1 (40 HEIs)

- 27% ISA complete
- 25% submission 2023-25
- 20% ISA and ISR ongoing now
- 18% submission later in 2022
- 10%

Institutional Reaccreditation (IR) Commencing End of 2023
Continuing to reflect international best practice in supporting hybridity

The New Normal Reflected in Business as Usual

- HEIs invited to reflect online experience in major review of ISA
- Our knowledge enriched by INQAAHE and national QA network
- International ERs add further global experience to our practice
- Experience shared through frequent OAAAQA training events
- Good practices of all TLA circulated through our EQA reports
- Support for diversity given through IEQA endorsement system
- Public trust earned in national register of recognised IEQA agencies
- Soon-to-be-launched PSA and OQF embrace diversity and hybridity
Thank you for your kind attention

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