

QUALITY ASSURANCE AT AOU

Quality Assurance & Accreditation Department

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In preparing this 'Brief Guide to Quality Assurance at AOU' many sources of information were referred to such as the Arab Open University Statutes and Bylaws, University Policies, Branch and Institutional Self Evaluation Documents, The Open University – United Kingdom (OU-UK) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) websites.

PREFACE

Arab Open University was conceptualized in 1996 and founded in 2001 as a non-profit University providing educational opportunities to students irrespective of their age, gender, language, nationality, religion or economic backgrounds. The University contributes to the development of the scientific, social and cultural spheres of the Arab world.

The uniqueness and relevance of the University in today's society is based on the foundation on which it rests. AOU brings the possibility of education to a wide range of aspiring students in a manner that accommodates the demands of the individual's personal and professional lives. AOU accomplishes this by adopting flexible learning systems, e-learning, and flexible tutorial hours stretched over a period of four to eight years.

Arab Open University works in partnership with the Open University UK (OU-UK) and primarily offers Bachelor level programmes in Business Studies, English Language and Literature and in Computer Sciences, as well as Education programmes in the Arabic language. Since the beginning of 2012 the University has begun to offer in some of its branches the Master of Business Administration, and Masters in English Literature and in Software Developments.

Arab Open University, consisting of eight branches located in Egypt Bahrain Jordan Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, is governed by set standards of University procedures and systems. Arab Open University singles out as one of the largest universities in the Arab World.

The University mission is to develop and disseminate knowledge, and build expertise according to international quality standards without time or geographical barriers for the sake of contributing and preparing manpower for development needs, as a pioneering University dedicated to building the science and knowledge society.

Chapter No	Content	Page No
1	Quality Assurance Structure	1 - 12
2	Quality Assurance of Monitoring Procedures	15 - 21
3	Quality Assurance of Academic Governance	25 - 32
4	Quality Assurance of Assessment Procedures	35 - 42
5	Quality Assurance of Student Support	45 - 50
6	Quality Assurance of Research, Planning and Development	53 - 54
7	Quality Assurance of Administrative Governance	57 - 59



Quality Assurance Structure

- **Introduction to Quality Assurance Structure**
- **Quality Assurance Strategy**
- **Quality Assurance Framework**
- **Quality Assurance Structure**



Introduction

This brief guide to Quality Assurance at AOU is intended to provide information on the quality assurance framework, structures and policies within which Arab Open University operates and offers its services. This guide may be used in conjunction with such other University publications as the University Statutes and Bylaws, Programme handbooks, and guides for students and tutors etc. AOU's Bylaws and Policies are mapped against QAA code and the guidelines set by the partner institution (OU-UK) and the local accrediting institutions in the countries in which the branches are located.

This guide aims to provide information on the policies and principles within which AOU operates. It sets forth the framework within which the responsibilities are to be met by all stakeholders. The guide is divided into a number of sections, each detailing on the important requirements that set quality standards and underpin the mission and vision of the University while maintaining impartiality and equal opportunities for all. The information given here is applicable to all of the University's branches and is governed by the Open University bylaws and regulations.

This guide may be used in reference to all academic and administrative procedures that govern and regulate the teaching and learning environment of the University. It serves as an important tool for staff and students in reflecting on their compliance with the University's systems and procedures. Compliance is assessed through the annual monitoring process. The branches are required to manage their teaching and learning environment in compliance with the relevant QAA code and AOU Quality Assurance Framework.

Quality Assurance Strategy

The quality assurance strategy is a statement of the University's commitment to assuring quality of its services to students and staff. It is in congruence with the larger institutional strategic plan that places pronounced emphasis on increasing partnership opportunities with other external stakeholders, in widening the learning and teaching opportunities for staff and students. It provides goals and objectives for implementing the University Quality Assurance Policies and comprises systems and mechanisms that contribute to quality enhancement.

Strategic Aims:

1. To develop a robust Quality Assurance system governing the operational academic and administrative functions of AOU.
2. To enable the University to achieve the necessary local, CICP and any other international accreditation for all its branches
3. To ensure consistency of operation in the implementation of University Rules and Regulations and maintenance of AOU standards across all branches.
4. To support those faculty initiatives which are likely to enhance academic standards, student learning experience and staff development.
5. To assure that AOU student support strategy is fully implemented.
6. To develop AOU's course materials and introduce new programs that are responsive to the local market needs and constructively contribute to existing course resources.
7. To develop internal procedures for periodic peer review, courses / programme review and internal self –assessment processes.
8. To establish professional links with regional and international quality assurance agencies so as to incorporate internationally accepted QA standards.

9. To revisit the structure and responsibilities of the University committees at both strategic and branch level with a view to developing effective implementation strategies.

Quality Assurance & Enhancement Mechanisms:

The notion of quality underpinning the framework adopted by AOU is of fit for purpose. The quality assurance systems and mechanisms ensure that its approaches objectively review, monitor and reflect on the efficacy and relevance of the Programmes structure and the relevant teaching and learning provisions. The Quality Assurance system ensures that the teaching and learning environment and University's overall provision are fit for purpose. The quality assurance systems apply to all Branches and Faculties and to both academic and support staff through and cuts across the socio-political settings within which they operate.

The Arab Open University's quality assurance systems and mechanisms can be classified as internal and external and that include:

Internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement:

Internal quality assurance mechanisms are continuous and shall be consistent with the quality assurance framework set forth in the University policies and shall include mechanisms to assess the following areas:

- Quality of programmes and courses
- Quality of academic provisions
- Quality of academic staff
- Quality of teaching and learning experience
- Quality of student assessment: Internal moderation
- Quality of administrative and infrastructural support services
- Quality of resources and facilities
- Quality of research and community service

Regular internal reviews are conducted to ensure that the Quality Assurance strategy is implemented. Through the University Council and Central Quality Assurance Committee, AOU determines and approves any additional quality management frameworks for all Branches and Faculties that may be deemed necessary.

External Quality Assurance and Enhancement:

External Quality Assurance and Enhancement mechanisms are usually based on the internal quality assurance measures and mechanisms (self-evaluation and internal monitoring procedures), to ensure that high quality standards are maintained. The following external mechanisms are periodically utilized:

- External Examiners
- Validation and Accreditation through CICP
- External Professional bodies in the Branch countries
- Local accreditation bodies in the Branch countries
- Employer and graduate feedback

Quality Assurance Framework

The following are the guiding principles for the implementation of the Strategy:

- All teaching, learning and administrative activities are to be in compliance with the University bylaws and policies.
- All academic and administrative activities to eventually lead to achieving of the mission and goals of the University.
- The quality assurance monitoring activities reflect and ensure uniformity and consistency of implementation of AOU policies and procedures throughout the University.
- Faculties to remain informed about the needs of current and potential students and take them into account in the development, design or acquisition of new modules and programmes of study.
- Ensuring that the results of surveys and quality monitoring activities enhance the design and delivery of courses and the assessment of students.
- Encouraging and supporting Faculties by conducting periodic evaluations of their academic programmes by a group of experts in the field to ensure that they are current, relevant and responsive to the community needs (for example staff, employers, graduates, community and other stakeholders).
- Monitoring and supporting the application of electronic technology to improve and enhance the University's blended learning system.
- Providing the necessary support, for example training workshops, to all academic staff to enable them to deliver good teaching and conduct assessment according to the rules and regulations of the University.
- Disseminating knowledge and awareness about quality

assurance and enhancement among members of each Branch and Faculty through orientation programmes, training workshops and QA manuals.

- Enhancing communication between Branches and Faculties to share ideas, good practices and experiences in solving problems through video-conferencing, electronic forums, organized annual meetings and staff exchanges, etc.
- Continuous monitoring and adoption of evaluation processes that inform and stimulate student support strategies.
- Improving methods and means of communicating feedback to students through electronic newsletters, website announcement, student representatives etc.
- Reviewing and updating the rules and regulations of AOU to take into account the local and international accreditation requirements.
- Ensuring the continuous development of student information system (SIS) which will improve the data collection and data analysis upon which a robust QA system is dependent.
- Supporting and training Academic Staff in the relevant coordination, monitoring and induction activities.
- Developing links with leading regional and international QA bodies in higher education to judge outcomes and processes against the highest external standards and benchmark with comparable open learning institutions.

Quality Assurance Structure

The University's quality assurance structure comprises:

- Central Quality Assurance Committee
- Quality Assurance & Accreditation Department
- Branch Quality Assurance Committees
- Branch Quality Assurance Units

Central Quality Assurance Committee (CQAC):

The Central Quality Assurance Committee (CQAC) is an overarching body constituted for the purpose of ensuring the effectiveness of the University's quality assurance systems and practices. The Committee is chaired by the Rector. The overall objective of the CQAC is to assist members of AOU's management in the effective conduct of their responsibilities by providing them with objective analyses, appraisals, recommendations, and pertinent comments concerning quality issues and activities reviewed. The CQAC provides objective reviews of the AOU's faculties and processes. The committee works with all staff on quality matters, and receives reports on the regular internal reviews carried out at different levels of operations, which are then assessed at the institutional level. Any service or operation in the AOU is subjected to a regular review to establish that it is operating an appropriate and resource efficient manner.

Membership of the Committee :

The Quality Assurance Committee is chaired by the Rector, and its membership is as follows:

- Deans of Faculties
- One Branch Director, serving on a rotational basis and appointed by the Rector
- Director of the Quality Assurance Department

- Director of the Human Resources Department
- Director of Examination Office
- Director of the Department of Instructional Material & Educational Technologies.
- Two Branch Quality Assurance Coordinators serving on a rotational basis as nominated by the QA Director

Functions of the committee:

The main tasks entrusted to the Central Quality Assurance Committee are:

- To establish and administer a coordinated, University-wide programme for quality improvement in support of tutoring, research, and student service mission.
- To provide support, consultation and facilitation for achieving standards of excellence and creating a service-oriented culture.
- To oversee the work of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department and to receive reports on local surveys of students, tutors and administrative services from every Branch Quality Assurance committee.
- To examine how information from these assessments may be used to influence decision making and to continually improve programmes.
- To liaise with other AOU committees and bodies (such as and particularly the Student Affairs Committee and Examinations Committees) on issues of mutual concern arising from the University's academic standards processes.
- To apply the AOU's policies in relation to the AOU's standards procedures.

- To report periodically to the University Council on the maintenance of AOU standards and to make recommendations on amendments to procedures and/or policy where appropriate.
- To ensure compliance to CICP and local QA bodies.

Mode of Operation:

- The CQAC convenes on regular basis, twice per semester.
- Prior to its regular meetings, the CQAC receives a “Progress Report” prepared by the Director of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department. The progress report is endorsed by the Committee Chair before being circulated to the Committee members.
- The CQAC submits its reports, in which its decisions and recommendations are included, to the Rector.
- The Rector presents for endorsement the CQAC decisions and recommendations to the University Council.

Quality Assurance & Accreditation Department (QAAD):

The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department is the central body that implements, monitors and oversees both the academic and administrative quality assurance systems and practices at HQ and Branch level. The QAAD is invested with investigative powers to scrutinize and report into matters that may compromise the quality of services or violate the University’s policies and bylaws both at the HQ and branch level.

Functions:

- The develop, apply, and evaluate organizational quality improvement frameworks, principles, and practices.
- To determine the needs of the students and staff in order to

design systems of addressing them.

- To commission survey research to measure all aspects of services to students and tutors and where appropriate to propose remedial action.
- To undertake an annual Internal Review of operational practices and procedures at Branch level and to feedback the analysis to Branch and Faculty Councils and primarily to the CQAC.
- To examine the quality of the student learning experience and student achievement within the context set by the AOU's mission and programme aims and objectives
- To develop and set performance indicators for academic and administrative services.
- To advise on and monitor the effective implementation of evaluation procedures at course and programme levels within each Faculty.
- To oversee and facilitate activities in compliance with local and international requirements.

Branch Quality Assurance Committee (BQAC):

The Branch Quality Assurance Committee (BQAC) is chaired by the Branch Director and functions like the CQAC at the branch level. It is one of the most important committees in ensuring compliance with quality standards.

Membership to the committee:

- The Branch Director chairs the committee.
- Head of the Branch Quality Assurance Unit (as committee Secretary).
- Assistant Director for Academic Affairs (as member).

- A faculty member with sufficient experience in education and instruction (as member) – to be appointed for one year in rotation.

Functions of the committee:

- Overseeing all aspects of the operations and services in the Branch to ensure quality standards are met.
- Supervising the implementation and follow-up on the University Council decisions in relation to quality assurance.
- Managing the internal review process on an annual basis, implementing any necessary changes to local practice and reporting findings to the Central QA Committee.
- Providing suggestions and proposals to the Central Quality Assurance Committee with a view to improving quality based on local monitoring and evaluation of operations and services.
- Fostering the development of a ‘quality culture’ amongst all staff in the Branch.

Mode of Operation:

- The BQAC meets twice per semester.
- Prior to its regular meeting, the BQAC receives a “Progress Report” prepared by the Head of Quality Assurance Unit, who also acts as the Committee’s Secretary. The progress report is endorsed by the Committee Chair before being circulated to the Committee members.
- The Branch Director presents the BQAC decisions and recommendations to the QAAD for endorsement.
- The BQAC submits its reports, in which its decisions and recommendations are included, to the CQAC.

Quality Assurance Unit (QAU):

The Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) at each branch conducts its operations in liaison with the QAA department at HQ -Kuwait. At the branch level it is responsible for supervising and monitoring all quality assurance aspects at academic and administrative level. In particular, it monitors all quality assurance performance indicators according to AOU Quality Assurance Strategy. It also follows up closely the implementation of the Branch annual action plan.

Quality Assurance of Monitoring Procedures

- **Introduction**
- **Internal & External Monitoring Procedures**
- **Quality Assurance Standards**

Introduction

The Quality Assurance of the University's teaching learning and administrative environment is maintained through well-designed monitoring procedures. At any given time AOU systems and procedures are subject to both internal and external monitoring systems that are detailed in this chapter.

The external quality assurance procedures across the eight branches vary in terms of the number of external bodies monitoring them. In some branch countries, AOU has to comply with the rules and regulations of the local Quality Assurance Agency or Ministry of Higher Education together with those of the Arab Open University. However, all branches are primarily and uniformly governed by the OU's quality assurance measures. The University complies with the monitoring requirements of local Ministries of Higher Education and/or local quality assurance agencies without compromising on its underlying philosophy of teaching and learning. This varies according to the requirements of the host countries and AOU seeks to meet these quality assurance requirements in each Branch country.

Monitoring is an evolving and ongoing activity within the University's quality assurance procedures and system. Annual monitoring procedures entail a range of activities including the physical inspection of systems and procedures, feedback from staff and students and the production of annual monitoring reports. These monitoring process not only help understand the efficacy of the teaching and learning environment but also helps assess shortcoming in the quality assurance systems and tools. Often these process help in crafting the quality assurance tools and mechanism that are fit for purpose. These quality assurance and monitoring procedures are detailed below in the chapter.

Internal & External Monitoring Systems

Curriculum Review:

University Faculty periodically review the curriculum content drawing upon student and tutor feedback, external examiners' reports and quinquennial reports from academic reviewers on the relevance of the course to the given context and time. The curriculum review includes an in-depth analysis of the relevance of the learning outcomes.

Student survey:

At the end of every semester, a well-crafted student survey is placed online for students to provide their feedback on the course material, course delivery, tutors and the facilities of the teaching and learning environment. The survey is conducted across branches and the feedback is analyzed for the purpose of enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. Student survey is an essential quality assurance instrument in eliciting beneficiary feedback.

Tutor survey:

Tutor surveys in parallel to the student survey complement the feedback process. Tutor views on the student experience, curriculum, assessment systems and the supporting physical infrastructural are elicited every semester. This feedback from tutors, coupled with that from students, gives a clearer picture of areas where there is dissatisfaction and a need for enhancement.

Peer review:

Peer review is an important feedback mechanism on the delivery of a course. Peer review or tutorial monitoring mainly entails a tutorial visit by the Branch Course Coordinator and that of any colleague teaching the same course. The reviewers assess the tutorial in terms of strengths and weaknesses and provide their comments on the prescribed official tutorial monitoring form. This exercise is more collegial and less rigid

as the tutor can request for a feedback on a certain component of the tutorial and similarly the time of the tutorial can also be mutually decided.

Appraisals:

Appraisals are an important aspect of ensuring the quality of human resources. AOU has an appraisal system implemented annually both for administrative and academic staff. The appraisal is designed on a range of indicators that are a two-way process, whereby the evaluation is conducted against the standards set by the appraisee and by the University's performance indicators.

Institutional Overview:

Every five years, AOU is subject to both institutional and programme review by the Open University's Centre for Inclusion and Partnerships. This is a rigorous process encompassing all aspects of the institution and its academic programmes, and it includes audits of the University's infrastructure, administration and student services. The University's contribution to the process includes the production of a self-evaluation document and the consideration of the OU reports by AOU committees.

Annual Monitoring Report (AMR):

The Annual Monitoring Report is a comprehensive document produced at the end of every academic year. The AMR focuses on the developments and challenges concerning all matters of the teaching and learning environment. The evidence it contains is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The respective Faculties give an account of all the matters concerning their Faculty and this includes statistical data supported by the qualitative analysis of the student enrolment, withdrawal, progression, achievement and failure trends. The AMR includes an analytical commentary of the course material, assessment design, and student learning outcomes, tutor performance, appeals and complaints, grievance systems, student and tutor feedback, external examiners' comments and responses to external examiners' reports.

Essentially, the AMR documents the evolution of a programme and an evidence-based case for any policy changes that may be required.

The AMR involves the production of Institutional Overview that delineates the performance at the institutional level and that of the programmes at branch and institutional level.

Quality Assurance Standards

The University has mapped the relevant chapters of QAA code into its bylaws and policies specifically those that are related to teaching and learning provision and student support. AOU has adapted the relevant quality assurance indicators as benchmarks set in the quality code. The mapping process listed below evolves periodically in accordance to the modification of the QAA Code.

External Examining:

The University has in its provisions the appointment of External Examiners in consultation with the CICP as per the need of the requisite programme.

- **Threshold Academic Standards:** The AOU bylaws stipulate that the 'quality' of knowledge and skills (both general and subject specific and any work based or work related aspects) demonstrated by the students is aligned with the agreed subject benchmarks of the QAA.
- **Enhancement of Quality:** Quality enhancement of programmes and assessment procedures is assured through external examiners feedback on good practice and innovation relating to course assessment as observed by the external examiner.
- **Appointment of External Examiners:** The University deals with the appointment and termination of the external examiners as per the regulating policies and procedures and in consultation and approval of the CICP. External examiners are appointed for a period of four years.

- **Responsibilities of external examiners:** External Examiners are appointed for a specific period of time towards specific modules/ programmes and /or awards. External examiners are responsible for endorsing tutor marked assignments, mid-term assessments and final examinations. This includes approval of the questions and curriculum covered, marking guidelines and of mark/pass lists prior to their publication to students. AOU provides the External Examiners with sufficient evidence to complete these tasks within the stipulated timeframe.
- **Consideration of reports by the institution:** At both the institutional and subject/programme level, AOU gives serious and full consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports. The University's committees (Central Examination Committee, Faculty Examination Committee, and Academic Standards Committee) are responsible for the consideration of external examining outcomes.

Academic Appeals and Student Complaints:

The University has standard appeals and complaints policy and a centralized system that ensures fair, effective and timely intervention in response to student appeals and complaints. The University Council ratifies the procedures for Appeals and Student Complaints. Students are entitled to appeal and complain at any time and without disadvantage, as stated clearly in the appeals and complaints policy and the in the Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity Policy. The information concerning appeals and complaints procedure is publicly available on the University website and in relevant University documents. Students are informed about appeals and complaints procedures clearly so as to be able to conduct it in a timely and reasonable manner. Student complaints are dealt with in accordance with the University Bylaws and AOU Appeals and Complaints Policy, whose procedures are transparent. All student complaints are processed within a specified timeframe.

The University has a reporting and monitoring system in place that ensures appropriate action is taken following an appeal or a complaint. AOU provides students and staff with adequate face-to-face and online orientation towards appeals and complaints procedures. The Head of Student Affairs has the overall responsibility for ensuring that guidance is offered in each Branch. Student Affairs and the Quality Assurance Units in the Branches and at HQ monitor and evaluate the overall practice. Briefing and support is provided by Students Affairs and at each Branch.

Assessment of Students:

The general principles are based on the fact that the University Council issues the Bachelor's Degree Rules and Regulations and other guidelines that provide the general framework of AOU policy designed to ensure that all courses leading to an award adopt the same standards of performance informed by identical standards of assessment. Standards of performance, graduation requirements, and all examination and assessment related issues are set by the University Council on the recommendation of the Academic Committee. AOU assessment regulations stipulate that all taught courses must have a minimum of two equally weighted independent assessment components: a continuous assessment component (TMAs and MTAs) and an examinable component (one final examination.)

The effectiveness of the overall assessment strategy of a course is monitored and reviewed by the Branch Examination Committee, the Faculty Examination Committee, and the Central Examination Committee. Necessary changes to the examination regulations must be endorsed by the Academic Committee and University Council.

The Faculty Examination Committees (including the external examiners) meet at the end of each presentation of a course to assure the consistency of implementation of assessment practices. External examiners are sent samples of marked course work during each presentation of the course. External examiners' reports are taken seriously and receive due attention. Student final course results are subject to a standardization process endorsed by the central Examination Committee on the

recommendation of the Faculty Examination Committee. External Examiners also approve examination questions and marking guidelines.

Assessment information and guidance is available in AOU Policy Documents and in course materials (assignment booklets, and tutor guides) issued to registered students and tutors. Validity of assessment is assured by AOU assessment policy, and reliability is confirmed by the Central Examination Committee.

AOU encourages assessment practices that promote effective learning. This is monitored by external examiners. The terms of reference and membership of Examination and Assessment committees (including Branch Examination Committees) are set in the Bachelor Award Examination Bylaws.

AOU ensures that assessment is conducted with rigor, probity and fairness and with due regards to the quality assurance security standards. Information concerning the conduct of assessment is provided in student assignment booklets, and in tutor guides. It is also provided in the Bachelor Award Examination Bylaws, and Quality Assurance documents.

The scheduling and amount of assessment of a course is determined by the course team and informed by the University Council guidelines. The central assessment strategy is approved by the Academic Committee on the recommendation of the Faculty Council. The overall assessment strategy of a course in each year of its presentation is the responsibility of the Branch, and by the Course Assessment, Faculty and Central Examination Committees.

AOU has transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and for moderation. All marking guidelines are published in student assignment booklets, tutor guides, and their policy documents. All information related to rules and regulations for progressing from one stage of a programme to another and for qualifying for an award is published in the University official documents.

The quality assurance monitoring procedure are also subject to scrutiny and are periodically revised.

Quality Assurance Of Academic Governance

- **Introduction**
- **Management Structure**
- **Quality Assurance Of Academic Governance**

Introduction

The University offers three OU-UK validated graduate and undergraduate programmes across eight branch countries and has a huge student population supported by proportionate staff strength to manage the delivery of these programmes. The academic governance of programmes is of crucial importance. It is therefore imperative that all aspects of programme management be subjected to rigorous monitoring.

AOU, despite its centralized approach in the management of programmes across its eight branches, makes provision for the branches to exercise a degree of independence within the parameters set by the University. AOU has clear and defined channels of communication at all levels within the branches and with HQ, so as to maintain consistent standards of academic quality across the institution.

Academic governance is managed through quality assurance systems that ensure that the structures in place conform to the quality assurance requirements and the Bylaws of the University. The management of programmes is delivered through a multi-layered governance structure as described in this chapter.

Management structure

The management and the committee structures are governed by the terms of reference and memberships as set out in the University Statutes¹.

Board of Trustees:

The Board of Trustees is the highest approving body of AOU for all matters related to academic and administrative management. The Board of Trustees comprises 19 well-acclaimed members from governmental, private, national and international organizations and it is chaired by HRH Prince Talal Bin Abel Aziz.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for the final approval of policies, strategies and finances. It is also responsible for the appointment of the University Rector and such senior positions at the Rectorate level as the Vice Rectors for Administrative and Financial affairs, Academic Affairs, Research, Planning and Development. The Vice Rector for Academic Affairs is responsible for overseeing the academic management of the programmes across branches.

Deanship (Faculty Council):

The Deanship (Faculty Council) is responsible for all matters pertaining to the Faculty programmes delivered in all the University's branches. Deanships are responsible for the management and supervision of course delivery, teaching and assessment, tutor recruitment etc. The course teams also form part of the Faculty Council and through the course assessment committees put forth comments and recommendations. The Deanships work in close association with the Branch Programme Coordinators.

Director:

The Directors head the branches and report directly to the Rector or his/her nominee on all academic and administrative aspects of the branch. The Director of the Branch chairs the Branch Council and she or he has

1 Arab Open University Statutes 1992

significant responsibilities for such matters as the issue of academic degrees and certificates in accordance to local ministry requirements.

General Course Coordinator (GCC):

The GCC is generally a tutor with considerable years of experience and preferably a PhD holder. Whilst this position lies within the Deanship structure the GCC could be physically located in any of the branches. The GCC works in close association with the Deanship. External Examiners and the Programme Coordinators especially in regard to the exams, course assessment and grades.

Branch Programme Coordinators (PCs):

The PCs are responsible for managing their programmes at the branch level. PCs in consultation with the Deanship implement programme and specific course delivery modules. The PCs also provide feedback on programme delivery based on the feedback that they receive from students and tutors.

Branch Course Coordinators (BCC):

The BCCs coordinate all aspects of a specific course at the branch level. They work in close association with the GCC for that particular course and co-ordinate with the GCC through the relevant Programme Course Coordinator. BCCs are responsible for monitoring the delivery of a specific course, tutorials, tutors and assessment, adherence to the course calendar etc. They along with the PCs also engage in the peer monitoring of teaching.

Tutors:

The primary responsibility of a tutor is the delivery of the course and management of his or her allotted students. Tutors report to the BCC on the progress and challenges in the delivery of their courses. Tutors are entrusted with the responsibility of encouraging students to understand the University's blended learning systems of education and to develop self- learning skills.

Committee structures:

Although the Board of Trustees is the University's ultimate governing body, in all matters related to academics, it is directed by the advice it receives from the University Council. The membership of the University Council comprises the Rector (Chair), Vice Rectors, Deans, Branch Directors, and teaching staff representatives from each of the branches. The Statutes of the University also provide for a number of permanent committees acting under the authority of the University Council. These include the:

Academic Committee:

Chaired by the Rector (or his/her nominee) with a membership comprising the Vice Rectors, Deans and three of the Branch Directors (serving on a rotational basis). The wide-ranging responsibilities of this committee (which include all aspects of academic management, including recommendations to changes in the academic administration) reflect its function as the senior standing committee of the University Council.

Central Examination Committee:

Chaired by the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs and membership comprises the Chief External Examiners, the Deans, and the Directors of Student Affairs, Admissions and Registration, and of Examinations. The Committee co-ordinates all matters relating to examinations, including the format of exams, the assessment strategy, marking guidelines and procedures, grades, and the administration and security of the assessment process.

Central Quality Assurance Committee (CQAC):

This Committee reports directly to the University Council and is chaired by the Rector. The membership of the Committee includes all Deans, one Branch Director, and the Director of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department, Director of Instructional Material and Education Technology, and Director of Admission and Registration

Department. CQAC's primary responsibility is to bring to the fore all quality assurance issues, promote the enhancement of services and recommend appropriate changes. CQAC's also considers and approves the University's Annual Institutional Overview report. Each branch has its own Quality Assurance Committee which reports to CQAC.

Central Research and Development Committee:

one of the committees that is instrumental in flagging research and developmental proposals, this body is chaired by the Vice Rector for Research, Planning and Development (with the Vice Rector Academic Affairs as its Deputy Chair). The membership of the Committee also includes two Deans, two Branch Directors and representatives of the Deanship and branch research committees as its members. With the exception of the Chair and the Dean of Post Graduate Studies, all positions are held on a rotational basis.

Some of the other committees that perform essential functions but do not appear in the in the Statutes are:

Academic Standards Committee:

ASC advises the Academic Committee on proposed curriculum changes, assessment (including external examiners' reports and responses to them), admissions and registration, and credit transfer arrangements. The Committee was introduced to strengthen the linkage between the University and activities within the branches and Faculties.

Course Assessment Committees (CAC):

The CAC was established in response to a recommendation of the Taylor-Palmer Report ². CACs, chaired by the relevant General Course Coordinator and attended by the course external examiner(s), are established for every Level 2(5) and Level 3(6) course. These committees oversee the design and operation of TMAs, MTAs and final examinations, ensuring the standardisation of students' results across all branches and making recommendations to Faculty Examination Committee.

² Taylor. P. and Palmer, B, Report on the Academic Audit of Assessment Procedures at the Arab Open University, 23 - 25 January 2008.

Branch and Faculty Examination Committees:

Branch Examination Committees (BECs) oversee the management and administration of student assessment and they forward provisional results to the CAC and Faculty Examination Committees. The Faculty Examinations Committees (FECs), which are chaired by Deans and attended by the external examiners, receive and consider the results submitted by BECs and CACs and once students' grades have been agreed they are forwarded by the FECs to the CEC. BEC and FEC also look into mitigating circumstances of academic appeals.

Management systems and information:

In addition to its committees, the University's information systems make a vital contribution to the flow of formal communications and the effective exercise of control, both laterally (across the branches) and vertically (between senior management and junior staff, and between Headquarters and the branches).

The University has a Centralised Student Information System that integrates data obtained from the branches' student databases. The SIS comprises security, student information, financial, academic advising, online registration and Headquarters reporting modules. In effect, it serves three functions: maintaining student records, recording student transactions, and producing student data reports.

Quality Assurance of Academic Governance

The AOU quality assurance function, in addition to a wide range of monitoring responsibilities, contributes to the quality assurance of academic governance through the Branch Quality Assurance Coordinators who conduct regular staff and student surveys, ensure compliance with examination regulations, monitor the students' Personal Development Plans and the staff appraisal processes, manage the Branch Quality Assurance Committee and undertake a variety of other actions in support of the development of a 'quality culture'³. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department (QAAD) works closely with the Branch QA Coordinators to discharge these responsibilities. Monthly meetings are held using the University's video conference facilities for the purpose of identifying issues that need to be addressed and instances of good practice for wider dissemination.

The University complies with the OU-UK academic infrastructure and, in particular, those parts of the QAA Quality Code which have a direct bearing on the maintenance of academic standards, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

QAAD is responsible for ensuring that the University's quality assurance policies and procedures are effective and support the enhancement of the student learning experience. The Department manages key processes including the Annual Monitoring Report, student and tutor feedback systems, departmental services, arrangements and support for external reviews (Open University institutional review and revalidation activities as well as local accreditation). It also monitors the application of the University's regulations, policies and procedures by the Faculties, departments and sections. The Department coordinates the production of the University's Annual Institutional Overview report to CICP -Open University, drawing upon information generated by the University's branches and Faculties. Branches are also responsible for meeting the annual reporting requirements of their local accreditation agencies.

³ Duties and responsibilities of Branch QA Coordinators, Quality Assurance Department (2010) .

The production of the Annual Programme Evaluations (APEs) by the three Faculties at the Branch and Deanship level provide with an analysis of student progression and performance, assessment, external examiners feedback and overall programme performance that is closely monitored for quality assurance purposes. At branch level, specific monitoring activities include the tutor and student feedback surveys, and the analysis of progression, retention, withdrawal and other trends.

The University has arrangements for providing feedback to students on the decisions made by Branch Quality Assurance Committees (BQAC) and, in particular, on the outcomes of BQACs' consideration of the results of student and tutor surveys. In each branch, the quality assurance unit produces a progress report on the implementation of BQAC decisions and this information is disseminated informally through tutorial sessions and office hours, and more formally through the Learning Management System, display boards, the University web-site and through student meetings convened by the Branch Directors and Programme Coordinators.

Quality Assurance Of Assessment Systems

- **Introduction**
- **Quality Assurance of Assessments**
- **Monitoring Assessment Procedures & Systems**

Introduction

As an academic institution, the quality of pedagogical knowledge and academic growth is gauged through the level of learning outcome that students meet. The assessment policies and systems therefore form a crucial component of the University's teaching and learning activity. AOU has a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system that examines assessment practices at all levels of compliance to assessment design, grading, external examining and other compliance to examination rules.

The University is fully committed to operating a policy that delivers assessments that are demonstrably fair, valid and consistent. The assessment policy ensures that students are kept informed of what is expected of them, their progress, and their academic achievements. This policy for the assessment of students is consistent with those aspects of the Quality Code that deal with assessment and academic standards, and with the University bylaws. The nature of the assessment process for any particular module (or course) is considered in the normal module approval process and reviewed periodically as part of the programme review process.

Each course typically consists of multiple assessment components (summative and formative), in a combination of coursework and the final course examination. The coursework component consists of Tutor Marked Assignment and a Mid- Term Assessment. All required assessment components are clearly communicated to students in the course calendar. The relevant syllabus and course material for each subject a student undertakes is distributed at the beginning of the semester along with the programme study plan. The coursework specification includes a description of the assignment, the mark breakdown, submission date and other relevant information.

Examination and assessment regulations are published in the student prospectus, programme handbook and it is also posted on the University website. These regulations cover all aspects of assessment including the conduct at examinations, marks and programme standards, rules governing the submission of coursework, procedures relating to extensions and deferrals, and guidance on plagiarism.

The chapter delineates various quality assurance mechanisms to ensure assessments conducted meet the benchmarks.

Quality Assurance of Assessments

Assessment Mechanisms:

All assessments components are centrally prepared by the respective Course Chair/General Course Coordinator and are validated internally by the Dean and externally by the course External Examiner. The General Course Coordinator/Course Chair is responsible for preparing the coursework assessments and final examinations for their course(s). All assessments are written to reflect the subject syllabus and to examine the extent to which students have attained the learning outcomes. The External Examiner is responsible for the evaluation of the assessment ensuring that it is of appropriate standard and satisfies the requirement of the course objectives and the relevant learning outcomes. The final decision regarding the design of assessment components rests on the Deanship and its Course Assessment Committees. This includes an examination of the assessment instruments to ensure that they facilitate the achievement of the relevant assessment and grading criteria.

Preparation of Assessment:

An important responsibility of the General Course Coordinators is the writing and preparation of course continuous assessment and final examination papers. Course Coordinators in all branches are required to draft course assessment papers by a date specified by the General Course Coordinator. The purpose of this is to allow course presentation teams to participate in the assessment process and to ensure the fair and standardized assessment of students. Teams are also required to submit a marking scheme along with their assessment exam paper. In the drafting of assessment papers, they are required to consider the learning outcomes for the subject and to ensure that the format of each component is consistent with that of previous years.

Submission of Assessments:

Cut-off dates for tutor marked assessments are specified in the course calendar. Students are requested to submit their TMAs electronically through the University Learning Management System (LMS) by the due date. The schedule of mid-term assessments and final examinations is included in the Academic Year Calendar of the University.

Assignment Marking and Grading:

Fairness and transparency in marking is essential. Each Course Tutor is required to provide detailed written feedback for each assignment showing where marks were awarded and lost. The main purpose of such feedback is to enable the student to make effective use the assignment process in their learning and in preparation for their final exam. The Course Coordinator monitors and reviews the assignment grades and feedback for quality control purposes.

Assignments and examination papers are made available to external examiners and to relevant examination committees to review where or as requested, and to ensure the transparency of the assessment process. Results and feedback from assessed work are posted as soon as is practicable on the LMS which student can access by using their student identity numbers. Final examination results are posted to students immediately after being endorsed by the Central Examination Committee.

Monitoring of Assessment Systems

Monitoring plays an important part in the quality assurance and enhancement of the assessment process. Monitoring of Assessment Marking is compulsory for all taught courses in the AOU. All Academic Staff members should be aware of the purposes and procedures of assessment monitoring.

Aims of Monitoring of TMAs, MTAs and Final Examination Scripts:

- Checking whether a tutor's grading is both fair to students and in line with the marking criteria, comparable with other tutors as well as with the intentions of the Course Team and the Examination Board.
- Ensuring that the tutor has provided an adequate quantity and quality of feedback on students' scripts, showing an understanding of students' needs;
- Giving tutors feedback on the quality of their work and offering positive suggestions for improvement where needed.
- A fourth aim, of particular benefit to GCCs and course teams is to evaluate the assessment themselves and to aid the consideration of all relevant aspects of the course.
- The role of the monitors (CCs and GCCs) is to fulfill those aims and to provide helpful reports to tutors, BPCs and Faculty Examination Boards on the basis of their monitoring to ensure that group marking is done and monitoring grade entry on SIS.

External Examiners:

The University is keen to improve the equity, efficiency and effectiveness of its assessment methods. The feedback of external examiners is viewed by all programmes as highly significant and as a crucial component of the programme quality assurance mechanism. External examiners should be able to provide carefully considered advice on the academic standards

of the awards, programmes and/or courses to which they have been assigned, and they can offer advice on good practice and opportunities to enhance the quality of these courses. They should also be able to offer an informed view on how standards compare with the same or similar awards at other higher education institutions (primarily in the UK) of which they have experience. Samples comprising a sufficient number of TMA, MTA and final exam scripts are sent to the relevant external examiner at least one week before the date of the Course Assessment Committee meeting. The exam script samples should include all borderline and fail cases for each subject. Other documentation for the External Examiner includes:

- Cover letter from the Dean including the date of the CAC meeting
- The completed Grade reports
- A copy of the grade sheets containing all assessment results
- A blank external examiner's feedback template (Provided by CICP)

External Examiners check all assessments samples and prepare their comments and feedback to be discussed by the Course Assessment Committee. The external examiner also completes the external examiners report template and submits it to the Dean of the Programme. Feedback from External Examiners is communicated to the relevant course coordinators and course tutors. Any feedback from this process is discussed at the Faculty Examination Committee. Additionally, the Programme Chief External Examiner is required to submit a detailed report to the Chair of the Central Examination Committee.

The procedures for examination committees and the consideration of course grades and results are in compliance with the University bylaws and in line with OU (UK) assessment policies and procedures.

Full details of the procedures relating to the appointment of external examiners, and the related terms and conditions are contained in the University Examination Regulations and External Examiners Handbook.

Security of Exams:

The security of examination materials is of the utmost importance for the University. All academic programmes have standard procedures in place to communicate with academic staff and external examiners, as well for the storage of examination papers and scripts before and during the examination process. The Registration and Examinations Office at HQ is in charge of photocopying and the safe keeping of examination papers. The Vice Rector for Academic Affairs (VRAA) office and QAAD monitor the relevant procedures to ensure the rigour and integrity of the whole process and they regularly review the relevant policies.

AOU runs a tiered Examination Board structure. There are four relevant committees:

- Branch Examination Committee (BEC) is an operational group that deals with the process of examination administration, monitoring of marking, script sampling and student grades at each branch.
- Course Assessment Committee (CAC), one for each level 2 (5) and 3 (6) and course and held at the HQ in Kuwait. External Examiners attend for the purpose of viewing student work and providing feedback on individual modules.
- Faculty Examination Committee (FEC) considers all courses presented by the Faculty. Chief External Examiners attend and faculty wide feedback is provided to AOU. Module grades are approved by the FEC.
- Central Examinations Committee (CEC) considers at a high level all examinations issues. The Chief External Examiner attends this board. The award and progression of students is considered and approved by the CEC.
- The examination committee structure with its various levels and tasks ensures that effective and robust measures are in place.

Quality Assurance Of Student Support

- **Student Induction and Advising**
- **Student support services**
- **Student representation**

Introduction

The Quality Assurance systems at AOU, from the time of a prospective student's entry to the completion of their degree, ensure that sufficient support is provided to make the environment at AOU conducive to learning. Quality assurance systems closely monitor these support services with a view to their enhancement. AOU ensures that quality assurance of student support is maintained so as to enhance student learning experience.

Induction:

Students receive a general induction session prior to the commencement of each academic year, familiarizing them with all aspects of academic and social life as a student of AOU. In addition course specific workshops are arranged and delivered by Course Coordinators and Course Tutors to orient students to their courses of study. Student guides are also distributed during the induction programme. Induction is the first gateway to the formal and personalized information provided to students and the process is closely monitored for quality assurance purposes. The branch quality assurance systems are required to monitor and report on the induction process. Student feedback is also elicited.

Academic Advising:

Academic advising is seen as a crucial step in charting the academic journey of a student at AOU. An academic advisor is allocated to every student. Academic advisors offer academic advising to their assigned students from choosing a course to following up on their academic progress regularly against the individual Learning Plan. During the registration period the academic advisors help students in the selection of courses according to programme's study plans. They intervene to help students at critical points on their course of study and to reduce the possibility of dropout.

The critical points at which intervention is likely to help have been identified as:

- The start of the course.
- TMA submission deadlines.
- Before examinations.

Quality assurance systems closely monitor academic advising systems through feedback from both student and tutors.

Career Advising:

All University students have access to career information and advice services provided.. Career advising offices in every branch offer many services to students including job fairs and internships and assistance with development of job application skills to help them to gain employment and pursue their careers. Some branches organize “one day recruitment“ in which local companies and organizations help students meet potential job providers. Job vacancies are announced on the University notice boards and website. The University Personal Development Planning Package (PDP) is intended to help students to acquire the skills that are needed to pursue career goals.

Student Support Services:

Student views:

The quality of student support is monitored by the University's student feedback systems. All students have the opportunity to complete at key times during the semester a student satisfaction survey covering all important aspects of the student experience. Quality assurance systems monitor and take into consideration these feedbacks for further enhancement.

Appeals and Complaints:

The University bylaws and codes of practice recognize that students have the right to fair, valid and reliable assessment decisions and to the provision of clear and constructive feedback on their performance. Therefore students have the right to pursue an academic appeal where they feel any of the above criteria have not been met. The University also operates a specific complaints policies relating to issues not covered by the appeals procedure. Complaints may involve issues such as alleged discrimination, non-professional practice, complaints regarding the facilities. There may also be an issue regarding the decisions of the disciplinary committee, support services or staff members, or a certain action or policy of the University. Details of appeals and complaints procedures are publicized in the student prospectus, programme handbooks and on the University website.

Quality Assurance monitoring activities include the collection and processing of data on appeals and complaints as an important quality indicator of the University provision and its support to the students. In order to overcome any limitations and to improve data collection and monitoring mechanisms, the University developed a transparent online appeals and complaints system that can be monitored centrally. The system is equipped with an alert system to ensure prompt responses to appeals and complaints. Students can freely access the system and logon to their complaints. The system provides the students with guidance on the process and they can easily follow up their case at each stage.

In the case of academic appeals, the Branch Examination Committee reviews all evidence and students' assessment records in order to consider the appeal and act accordingly. Similarly students' complaints are reviewed by the relevant departments. A decision should be made within 10 working days.

If a student is dissatisfied with the decision of the appeals or complaints committees, he/she has a right to take complaints to a higher level that is the offices of the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs (VRAA) or Vice Rector Administrative and Financial Affairs (VRAF). If the student is still dissatisfied with the decision, the complaint proceeds to the final stage. The third and final stage involves the right of complaint to the University Rector and to the CICP.

Learning Management System:

The University is committed to the flexible delivery of learning and teaching, using technology to promote flexibility and responsiveness to student needs. The Learning Management System provides an online scholarly environment for students to access learning resources and opportunities. It also allows students to interact with their colleagues and tutors through forums and live chat-room facilities.

Library:

All University students have access to electronic library services including some of the best and globally recognized data bases. In addition, in every branch there is a library that is well equipped to support students' learning needs. QA Monitoring activities aim to ensure that each branch library meets the following criteria:

- Sufficient copies of all teaching materials for each course, including text books and reference books.
- An efficient borrowing process
- Sufficient study space with comfortable seating arrangement
- Opening hours that cater for the needs of all students

- internet access, sufficient e-library resources including e-access to OU-UK library, e-databases together with sufficient hardware to access these resources
- Professional advice for library users.

Disability Service:

Students with a disability are provided with a receptive and supportive environment, so they have the same opportunity to choose, access, participate and succeed in their studies. The Equal Opportunity and Respect of Diversity policy ensures that students with special needs are not disadvantaged in any way and that they are given the necessary support. Quality assurance monitoring procedures ensure that special arrangements are in place for disabled students including special arrangements during the admission, registration and examination periods. Quality assurance systems ensure that disability of any kind does not disadvantage the students.

Student Fund:

The 'AOU student fund' was established for the purpose of supporting students in financial need as well as honoring distinguished students by through grants and bursaries or returnable loans. Quality assurance systems ensure that equal opportunities principles govern the provision of student fund opportunities.

Student Representation

Student Council:

The University recognizes that student engagement is crucial in supporting of the University's mission and in enhancing the student learning experience. Student representative bodies are responsible for ensuring that the student voice is heard and exerts some influence on the University planning process. Students Councils allow students to raise issues of concern that are identified in each branch of the University. Students are represented in the Branch Council through free elections or nominations according to the local conditions that prevail in each branch. In addition students are also represented in such University committees as the Academic Committee and the University Council. Student Representatives attend committee meetings, and so they are familiar with how the University/Faculties run, and they are up to date on issues that are of concern to their constituents. The University has developed a new policy to extend student representation to other committees and to ensure that students from all branches are represented on a rotational basis. Additionally various student societies are established in every branch to enable students to participate actively in social activities and community service.

Quality assurance systems ensure that adequate participation and representation of the student community is in line with the University bylaws.

Alumni:

AOU graduates can be a real source of help for the University and for their colleagues, especially those who have established their own business and are seeking to recruit their fellow graduates. The alumni association was established to bridge the gap between the University and its graduates and to provide them with the opportunity to re-establish links, and to exchange ideas and experiences. An alumni website was also created in order to keep alumni informed on the latest AOU developments and activities.

Quality Assurance of Research, Planning & Development

- **Research**
- **Planning & Development**
- **Quality Assurance of Planning & Development.**

Introduction to Research

AOU's mandate to provide equal opportunities for continuing education includes a responsibility for contributing to social development through its research and development activities. AOU therefore has established an office for planning research and development. AOU's research and development goals are set in accordance with the Arab Gulf Program for United Nations Development Organization (AGFUND) and other local and regional institutions that support scientific research in the Arab world, especially in the countries in which AOU branches operate.

The quality assurance indicators that govern AOU research, planning and development are closely monitored and reported through the University's quality assurance mechanisms.

AOU is in continuous pursuit of expanding and developing its research activities and it promotes staff research at two levels: institutional and individual. Since research forms an integral part of staff development, primary objective is to promote a culture of investment. Academic staff in particular are encouraged to contribute to research and are provided with all the necessary support and assistance, including the opportunity to participate in joint research programmes with external agencies. The University also encourages its staff to engage in institutional research so as to be able them to contribute meaningfully to the development of the institution and to the wider society.

Planning and Development

AOU, with its vision of making a significant contribution in the area of research and development, has a robust five years strategic plan that encompasses all aspects of research planning and development. Strategic planning for staff development includes training, the promotion of conference attendance and other activities and incentives and that include excellence awards.

Quality Assurance of Research, Planning and Development

The quality assurance systems at AOU monitor and report the development of staff research activities. The University monitors all aspects of research, planning and development including the work of the committees with a remit for research and development. It ensures that staff research and development activity is duly acknowledged in the performance appraisal process, and that all research and development activities are aligned with the University strategy bylaws. The quality assurance systems ensure that the University has adequate capacity (in terms of subject expertise and resources) to execute research and development activities.

Quality Assurance of Administrative Governance

- **Introduction**
- **Planning and organizational Structure**
- **Human Resources**

Introduction

This chapter deals with the University's administrative policies. AOU believes that the quality of its services is a direct byproduct of the quality and strength of its human resources. It believes that it is essential that human resource services are honed to promote the development of a quality oriented culture. Through its planning and evaluation processes, AOU's quality assurance systems assure the quality and promote the enhancement of the University's human resources.

One important foundation for AOU operation is the Equal Opportunities and Respect for Diversity policy, both for the staff and students. HR policies clearly reflect this equal opportunities policy with respect to the selection and recruitment of staff, and in the provision of opportunities and in meeting staff needs. Such quality assurance mechanisms as surveys and feedback ensure that this area of administration adheres to this policy.

Similarly AOU takes every measure to ensure that equal opportunities are provided to all members of AOU irrespective of their age, sex or nationality. AOU takes specific care in ensuring that staff and students with special need are in no way disadvantaged. The Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity Policy "prohibits discrimination, harassment or victimization against a student (current, prospective or past), a male or a female member of staff (potential, current or past) or a woman or man visitor to the University on the ground of their disability, whether perceived or actual." University Bylaws take into consideration the provision of means allowing students with special needs to fully participate in the University's academic and social activities.

Besides equal opportunities the AOU also considers the health and safety of AOU students and staff as of utmost importance. The Health and Safety policy ensures that relevant standards are met at the highest level of compliance and to this end Health and Safety Officers are appointed in all branches. Health and Safety Officers ensure compliance with the University's policy and issue periodic reports on compliance to the University's Headquarters. AOU Health and safety requirements, apart

from providing the necessary infrastructure, includes the provision by branches of an infirmary staff by a professional nurse providing first aid and other primary health care services. All members of the University have free access to the infirmary during working hours.

Planning and Organizational structure

As a large institution spread over eight countries, AOU has a sizeable and complex staffing requirement, and this means that the staff appropriation and budget requirements need to take account of longer term plans. For this reason, the University's quality assurance system ensures that the Human Resource Department has a clearly defined and appropriate strategic plan. It also ensures that a strategic plan is in place for filling any provisional positions that may be required as a result of staff losses or new staffing requirements. Quality Assurance systems closely monitor the implementation of the human resources action plan every academic year and more frequently.

Despite the size and complexity of the institution as a multi campus University, AOU has to ensure a degree of uniformity in its structures across its branches and with the Headquarters. The quality assurance systems ensure that there is compliance to bylaws in the recruitment of all staff and that the job specifications in the organizational structure are clearly listed. Any provisional amendments made to the structure of the organization are monitored and reported for compliance and efficacy by the quality assurance systems.

Human Resources

A Human Resource Department without staff development is inoperable. The importance of staff development is emphasized in the University's bylaws, and the priorities identified by the AOU Human Resource Department are to recognize staff development needs through surveys, feedback systems and appraisals, the provision of adequate budgets and resources, and the formulation of a skills development plan. The HR Department ensures the development of enabling policies and procedures, the establishment of a conducive work environment and clearly defined consultative communication channels, effective operation of grievance and disciplinary procedures and the creation of opportunities for staff to consider the impact of change. Compliance in this area is closely monitored and reported by the QA monitoring mechanisms. The University's quality assurance systems ensure that the Human Resources Department makes adequate provision for staff development.

AOU believes in valuing its staff by providing the most competitive of remuneration packages in accordance with existing market conditions. This involves the provision of intrinsic and extrinsic incentives for staff in the form of salaries, fiscal incentives, training opportunities, leave entitlements, and other health and social allowances. The University's quality assurance systems ensure that the Human Resource Department uses these possibilities to motivate staff, and to facilitate recruitment and retention.

Quality Assurance Systems closely monitor and evaluate all aspects of administrative management so as to facilitate the academic management of programs and enhanced teaching and learning environment.

Contact us

Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Department - HQ

Arab Open University

E-mail: q.a@arabou.edu.kw