

**Muscat**

Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge  
im Bereich Gesundheit und Soziales  
Accreditation Agency for Study Programs  
in the Area of Health and Social Sciences



## **Assessment Report**

**for the Application of  
Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Muscat, Oman,  
College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS),  
Department of Sociology and Social Work (DSSW)  
for the Accreditation of the Study Program  
Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in "Social Work"**

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<b>Decision</b>	July 25, 2017

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<sup>1</sup> The expert listed in italics did not participate in the On-Site Visit.

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## 1 Introduction

The Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Health and Social Sciences (AHPGS) is an interdisciplinary and multi-professional organization. Its mission is to evaluate Bachelor and Master programs in the fields of health and social sciences, as well as in related domains, such as medicine and healthcare. By implementing accreditation and recommendation procedures, AHPGS contributes to the improvement of the overall quality of teaching and learning. However, the higher education institutions also remain responsible for assuring quality.

Since 2004, AHPGS has been a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). In 2006, AHPGS joined the ENQA; in 2009, it became a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Since 2012, AHPGS has been a member of the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). Moreover, AHPGS has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) since 2009.

The University states that Omani legislation allows for the University to be accredited by a foreign external organization such as the AHPGS.<sup>2</sup>

In carrying out accreditation procedures, the AHPGS follows the requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). In the present case, the decision regarding the accreditation of the study program is carried out by the AHPGS Accreditation Commission based on the following accreditation criteria<sup>3</sup>:

1. Program aims and learning outcomes
2. Curriculum design
3. Human resources
4. Facilities and learning resources
5. Study process and student assessment
6. Program and quality management
7. Gender equality and equal opportunities

The external assessment procedure is carried out in the following four steps:

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<sup>2</sup> AOQ Overall 1, with more information available at <http://www.educouncil.gov.om/en/page.php?scrollto=start&id=46>

<sup>3</sup> Approved by the AHPGS Accreditation Commission

## **I. The University's application**

The AHPGS verifies the sufficiency of the documents submitted by the University, namely the self-evaluation report and its corresponding annexes, which exist to fulfill the assessment spheres as well as the AHPGS standards. As a result, the AHPGS drafts a summary (see Sections 2.1-2.4), which is to be approved by the University and subsequently made available to the expert group, together with all other documentation.

## **II. Written review**

The main documents are reviewed by the expert group assigned by the accreditation commission of AHPGS. This is done in order to verify the compliance of the study program with the applicable accreditation criteria valid in Oman. Consequently, the experts compose a short summary regarding the study programs.

## **III. On-site visit (peer-review)**

The experts carry out an on-site visit at the University. During this visit, discussions are held with members of the University, which include University and department administration, degree program management, instructors and students. This provides the expert group with the opportunity to learn more about the study program and furnishes it with more in-depth details than written documents alone can provide. The experts' tasks during the on-site visit are to verify and evaluate the objectives of the program and its projected study results, structure, staff, material resources, course of studies and methods of assessment (selection of students, assessment of achievements, students' support etc.). The experts also assess the efficacy of the program's management (the program administration and external assurance of study quality).

Following the on-site visit, the expert group issues an expert report. This report is based on the results of the visit, the written review of the study programs, and the documents submitted by the University. The experts then submit their report to the University, which has an opportunity to state a response opinion.

Finally, the expert report, the University's response opinion (if applicable) and all other provided documents are submitted to the accreditation commission of AHPGS.

#### **IV. The AHPGS accreditation decision**

The accreditation commission of the AHPGS examines the documentation made available in the process of application, namely the University's self-evaluation report, its annexes, the summary comprised by the AHPGS, the expert report, as well as the University's response opinion. These documents represent the basis for the commission's decision regarding the recommendation for the accreditation of the study program, the accreditation of the study program with conditions, or the denial of accreditation of the study program.

## 2 Overview

### 2.1 Procedure-related documents

The Sultan Qaboos University of Oman delegated the task of accrediting its Bachelor of Arts study program "Social Work" to AHPGS.

The self-evaluation report for accreditation<sup>4</sup> of the aforementioned study program (hereinafter the Self-Evaluation Report or SER) of the Sultan Qaboos University (hereinafter the University) was submitted to the Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in the Area of Health and Social Sciences (AHPGS e.V.) in electronic format on October 17, 2016.

On March 14, 2017, the AHPGS forwarded the open questions and explanatory notes (hereinafter OQ) pertaining to the Application for accreditation for the study programs to the University. On March 21, 2017, the University submitted the answers to the open questions and explanatory notes (hereinafter AOQ) to the AHPGS in electronic format.

The present document presents the summary of the AHPGS for the Bachelor of Arts study program "Social Work".

The application documentation submitted by the Sultan Qaboos University follows the outline recommended by the AHPGS. Along with the application request towards accreditation of the Bachelor study program "Social Work", the following additional documents can be found in the application package (the documents submitted by the University are numbered in the following order for easier referencing):

Specific documents for the study program B.A. "Social Work":

Annex	Description
1	Summary of Social Work Program Plan and Courses (Major/Minor)
2	Summary of Social Work Program Plan and Courses (Pure)
3	Social Work Program Matrix
4	Course Portfolio Example
5	Teachers' CV's
6	Course Descriptions

<sup>4</sup> In this instance, accreditation without the awarding of the official seal of the Accreditation Council of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programs in Germany

7	Sample B.A. Social Work Transcript
8	B.A. Social Work Internship Training Manual

Alongside the study-program-specific documents, the following documents pertain to all study programs submitted by the University for external evaluation by AHPGS:

Annex	Description
A	Undergraduate Academic Regulations
B	Acronyms
C	Congruence between University, College and Department
D	University - College - Department - Program Vision Mission Objectives
E	Postgraduate Academic Regulations
F	Disabilities Guide
G	Exam Instructions for Students with Disabilities
H	Program Accreditation Roadmap - SQU
I	Program Accreditation Roadmap - CASS
J	Internship Agreement (example)

The Summary, the Expert Report as well as the decision of the Accreditation Commission build the basis for the present Assessment Report.

## 2.2 Study program

### 2.2.1 Structural data

Figure 1: Structural Overview	
University	Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Muscat, Oman
Faculty	College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS)
Department	Sociology and Social Work (DSSW)
Title of the study program	"Social Work"
Cooperation partners	- Ministry of Social Development - Ministry of Education - Ministry of Health - Ministry of Defense - NGOs and Civil Society Institutions
Degree awarded	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)
Language of study	Arabic



Type(s) of studies	Two study options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Social Work Major + Minor (Plan A)</li> <li>➤ Pure Social Work (Plan B)</li> </ul>								
Form(s) of studies	Full-Time								
Organizational structure	Sunday to Thursday, 08:00 to 18:00								
Period of education	8 semesters (4 years) + previous Foundation Program (1 year)								
Credit Points (CP) according to the Credit Hour model	120 CP, with varying composition depending on students' selection of Pure or Major/Minor study options, plus Foundation Courses (in which no CP are earned)								
Hours/CP	<p><b>Lectures and seminars:</b> 1 contact hour per CP</p> <p><b>Laboratory work:</b> 2 contact hours per CP<sup>5</sup></p> <p><b>Tutorials, studio work, field or work placements:</b> 2 contact hours per CP</p> <p><b>Workshops and internships:</b> Approximately 3 contact hours per CP (assessed and determined by Department)</p> <p>The following workload estimates were calculated assuming <b>2 self-study hours per contact hour</b>.</p> <p>Thus, this study program contains the equivalent of approximately 223-268 ECTS.</p>								
Workload	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 60%;"><b>Total:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>6,690 hours</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contact hours:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2,190 hours</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Individual work:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4,380 hours</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Training/Internships:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">120 hours</td> </tr> </table>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>6,690 hours</b>	Contact hours:	2,190 hours	Individual work:	4,380 hours	Training/Internships:	120 hours
<b>Total:</b>	<b>6,690 hours</b>								
Contact hours:	2,190 hours								
Individual work:	4,380 hours								
Training/Internships:	120 hours								
CP for the final thesis	3 CP in the form of a 3-credit research topic course								
Launch date of the study program	Academic year 2001/2002								
First accreditation	Program has not yet been accredited								
Time of admission	Each fall semester								
Number of available places on the program	Approximately 60-70 students per year; exact quota set annually by Department and College Boards								
Number of enrolled students to date	1,066 <sup>6</sup>								
Number of graduates to date	794 <sup>7</sup>								

<sup>5</sup> When warranted by nature of the course material, the requirement for laboratory work may be raised to 3 or 4 credit hours per CP by the Head of Department (HoD) and Deanship of Admissions and Registration

<sup>6</sup> AOQ B.A. "Social Work" 1

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Number of dropouts to date	12 <sup>8</sup>
Admission requirements	<p>Being under 25 years old; holding Omani citizenship, or, under limited circumstances, being granted a scholarship as either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A national of “brotherly and friendly countries,<sup>9 10</sup>” which the University defines as being countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Arab League, and certain Asian countries<sup>11</sup>; or</li> <li>- A non-Omani child of a University staff member.</li> </ul> <p>Students’ secondary grades (General Education Diploma, International Baccalaureate, or similar), as well as their performance in any postsecondary studies, if applicable, are used to allocate places in the cohort.</p>
Tuition fees	<p>Free for all Omani citizens;</p> <p>Non-Omani students pay nominal tuition fees (40 OMR per credit at College of Arts and Social Sciences);</p> <p>students are entitled to free meals and either accommodation (female students) or transportation (male students) to the University, if their families live within 100km of the University;</p> <p>SQU contributes in educating candidates from non-Omani faculty holding the title of Assistant Professor and higher and medical staff grade and higher and occupants of the special schedule and the teaching faculty at the Language Centre</p>

### 2.2.2 Qualification objectives and employment opportunities

As students are able to choose between a major/minor degree (Plan A) or a pure degree (Plan B) in the field of “Social Work,” qualification objectives can vary slightly within the study program. According to the University, those earning the major/minor degree (Plan A) will be given the chance to gain insights into an interdisciplinary field of study by choosing a second (minor) subject within the portfolio of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, such as “Arabic Language and Literature”, “English Language and Literature”, “Archeology”, “Mass Communication”, “History”, “Geography”, “Information Studies”, “Tourism”, “Theater” or “Music and Musicology”. Students graduating

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> SER B.A. “Sociology” p.10 §1.1.11 as well as Annex A: Undergraduate Academic Regulations p.4 §A1

<sup>10</sup> Students may not transfer out of the Sociology program into the College of Medicine and Health Sciences if they were admitted on the basis of being “of brotherly and friendly countries” or non-Omani children of university staff. SQR Undergraduate Academic Regulations p.9 §A4-2.2.3

<sup>11</sup> AOQ Overall 2

with a “pure” (Plan B) degree will have attained additional skills in different fields of professional Social Work practice, such as social work with youths, the elderly and the addicted.<sup>12</sup> The latter focus prepares students to work in these developing fields of practice in Oman and widens students' opportunities in the labor market.

According to the University, all students will gain certain general competences regardless of their choice of study plan. These skills include knowledge and understanding of basic skills regarding social work, professional skills regarding social work, research skills in their field of study and general skills regarding human interaction.

Regarding the labor market situation and career opportunities, the University describes the situation in Oman as very attractive for Department graduates, most of whom should have a high chance of working for the Ministry of Education, which employs roughly 1,100 school social workers. Moreover, graduates should be able to find stable work placements at the Ministries of Health, Social Development (including in the Depts. of Family and Child, People with Special Needs, Social Security and Reformatory Institutions), and Defense as well as with the Royal Oman Police.

Currently, the Department of Social Work aims to reinforce ties with several institutions in Oman in order to secure graduates' career opportunities. In the last five years, the following organizations have become cooperative partners with the Department:

- private schools which are convinced by the significant role of school social workers;
- the Sultan Bureau;
- Various departments of Military Social Services;
- Various departments of the Ministry of Labor;
- Various departments of the Ministry of Health; and
- Various departments of Ministry of Religious Affairs.

### **2.2.3 Modularization and exam system**

The program is comprised of 43 courses which must be completed in order to obtain the degree of Bachelor of Arts in “Social Work.” Of these, 6 courses

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<sup>12</sup> SER B.A. “Social Work” p.11 §1.2.1

are University requirements, 7 are College requirements, and 30 are major and/or minor required and elective courses. The study program should be completed within 8 semesters. Students may choose from two different paths to complete their studies:

- Major/Minor (Plan A): Students obtain a Bachelor degree in “Social Work” (major) and a minor specialization in another discipline (another discipline offered at the College of Arts and Social Sciences). The student will have to complete 22 required and elective courses in “Social Work”, as well as 8 required and elective courses in their minor.
- Pure (Plan B): Students obtain a Bachelor degree in “Social Work” by completing 30 required and elective courses in the field of “Social Work.”

During the study program, students are required to complete two internships (listed as SOWK 3210 and SOWK 4120), which take place in the sixth and seventh semesters.

The University recommends that students structure the fulfillment of these requirements according to the following study plan. The left column displays Plan A (Major/Minor) whereas the right column displays Plan B (Pure).

Figure 2: Study Plan <sup>13</sup>				
Sem.	Plan A (Major & Minor)		Plan B (Pure)	
	Course (CP)	Cat.*	Course (CP)	Cat.*
1 (Fall)	Arabic Language (3 CP)	UR	Arabic Language (3 CP)	UR
	Omani Contemporary Society (1 CP)	UR	Omani Contemporary Society (1 CP)	UR
	Oman & Islamic Civ. / Culture (2 CP)	UR	Oman & Islamic Civ. / Culture (2 CP)	UR
	<i>University elective course (2 CP)</i>	UE	<i>University elective course (2 CP)</i>	UE
	Critical Thinking & Problem Solving (3 CP)	CR	Critical Thinking & Problem Solving (3 CP)	CR
<b>Total CP in Semester 1: 11</b>				
2 (Spring)	<i>University elective (2 CP)</i>	UE	<i>University elective (2 CP)</i>	UE
	Arabic Language Skills I (3 CP)	CR	Arabic Language Skills I (3 CP)	CR
	Intro. to Social Work (3 CP)	AR	Intro. to Social Work (3 CP)	AR
	<i>Intro. to another specialization (3 CP)</i>	CR	<i>Intro. to another specialization (3 CP)</i>	CR

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

	<i>Intro. to another specialization (3 CP)</i>	CR	<i>Intro. to another specialization (3 CP)</i>	CR
<b>Total CP in Semester 2: 14</b>				

<b>3 (Fall)</b>	Computer Skills (2 CP)	CR	Computer Skills (2 CP)	CR
	Arabic Language Skills II (3 CP)	CR	Arabic Language Skills II (3 CP)	CR
	Intro. to Psychology (3 CP)	AR	Intro. to Psychology (3 CP)	AR
	Mgmt. of Educational & Social Institutions (3 CP)	AR	Mgmt. of Educational & Social Institutions (3 CP)	AR
	Social Work Practice with Individuals (3 CP)	AR	Social Work Practice with Individuals (3 CP)	AR
<b>Total CP in Semester 3: 14</b>				

<b>4 (Spring)</b>	<i>University elective (2 CP)</i>	UE	<i>University elective (2 CP)</i>	UE
	<i>College elective (3 CP)</i>	CE	<i>College elective (3 CP)</i>	CE
	Social Work Practice with Groups (3 CP)	AR	Social Work Practice with Groups (3 CP)	AR
	Operations & Applications of Social Work with Individuals (3 CP)	AR	Operations & Applications of Social Work with Individuals (3 CP)	AR
	Social Work Practice with Communities (3 CP)	AR	Social Work Practice with Communities (3 CP)	AR
<b>Total CP in Semester 4: 14</b>				

<b>5 (Fall)</b>	Guidance & Social Counselling (3 CP)	AR	Guidance & Social Counselling (3 CP)	AR
	Research Methods in Social Work (2 CP)	AR	Research Methods in Social Work (2 CP)	AR
	Social Work in Health Services (3 CP)	AR	Social Work in Health Services (3 CP)	AR
	School Social Work (3 CP)	AR	School Social Work (3 CP)	AR
	<i>Minor course (3 CP)</i>	IR	Social Psychology (3 CP)	AR
	<i>Minor course (3 CP)</i>	IR	Social Problems (3 CP)	AR
<b>Total CP in Semester 5: 17</b>				

<b>6 (Spring)</b>	Human Behavior & the Social Environment (3 CP)	AR	Human Behavior & the Social Environment (3 CP)	AR
	Fieldwork Training (3 CP)	AR	Fieldwork Training (3 CP)	AR
	Social Work & the Disabled (3 CP)	AR	Social Work with Youth (3 CP)	AR
	Social Work & Volunteers (3 CP)	AR	Social Work & the Disabled (3 CP)	AR
	<i>Minor course (3 CP)</i>	IR	Social Work & Volunteers (3 CP)	AR
	<i>Minor course (3 CP)</i>	IR	Tests & Measures in Social Work (3 CP)	AR
<b>Total CP in Semester 6: 18</b>				

	Statistics for Social Work (2 CP)	AR	Social Welfare Services in Oman (3 CP)	AR
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			CP)	
	Advanced Fieldwork Training (3 CP)	AR	Social Work & Local Community Development (3 CP)	AR
	Social Work with the Family (3 CP)	AR	Statistics for Social Work (2 CP)	AR
	<i>Major elective (3 CP)</i>	AE	Advanced Fieldwork Training (3 CP)	AR
	<i>Minor course (3 CP)</i>	IR	Social Work with the Family (3 CP)	AR
	<i>Minor elective (3 CP)</i>	IE	Social Work and Addiction (3 CP)	AR
<b>Total CP in Semester 7: 17</b>				

<b>8 (Spring)</b>	English for Social Work (3 CP)	AR	English for Social Work (3 CP)	AR
	Social Policy & Social Planning (3 CP)	AR	Social Policy & Social Planning (3 CP)	AR
	Special Topic in Social Work (3 CP) (Thesis Course)	AR	Social Work & the Elderly (3 CP)	AR
	<i>Minor course (3 CP)</i>	IR	Special Topic in Social Work (3 CP) (Thesis Course)	AR
	<i>Minor course (3 CP)</i>	IR	<i>Major elective (3 CP)</i>	AE
<b>Total CP in Semester 8: 15</b>				

<b>Total CP in Study Program: 120</b>
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\*Category abbreviations: UR=university requirement; UE=university elective; CR=college requirement; CE=college elective; AR=major requirement; AE=major elective; IR=minor requirement; IE=minor elective.

The catalog of course descriptions<sup>14</sup> contains information about all aforementioned major courses and major electives pertaining to

- clerical information, name and course number;
- course level and the semester(s) in which it is offered;
- total number of credit hours, including information on how many of these are derived from lectures;
- language of instruction;
- detailed enumeration of learning goals, skills and outcomes for each module/course;
- composition of each module/course, i.e. a list of covered themes and topics; and
- an explanation of how students are evaluated, including what students' final grades are comprised of.

<sup>14</sup> Annex 7: Course Descriptions

The primary method of instruction in the B.A. "Social Work" program is through lectures. Through the eight semesters of study, courses in the program build on one another in the following ways:<sup>15</sup>

In the **first semester**, students begin their studies by fulfilling the general required courses at the University, purposed to conduce students' integration into and understanding of their University, language and culture.

Thereafter, in the **second semester**, students take a further Arabic course and a University elective, as well as their official introduction to Social Work. These are taken concurrently with two introductions into other subjects offered at CASS, intended to foster students' interests and abilities in other fields and help them make the upcoming decision of which Social Work study plan to follow.

In their **third semester**, students take another Arabic course and a Computer Skills course, both of which improve their professional literacy in different contexts. These are supplemented by an Introduction to Psychology, a subject with a large bearing on Social Work; a course in Management of Educational and Social Institutions; and Social Work Practice with Individuals. This semester marks the formal beginning of the in-depth review of Social Work in various contexts.

The **fourth semester** is the last in which the coursework for Major/Minor and Pure students is the same; the side courses taken up until this point should have given students an idea of which path is better for them. In this semester, students take University and College electives, as well as courses regarding practice and application of Social Work with groups, communities and individuals.

The **fifth semester**, for all students, consists of courses in Guidance and Social Counseling and Social Work in Health Services and Schools. The theories presented in these courses are intended practically, and students exercise their ability to implement them in the concurrent Research Methods course. Students in the Major/Minor program take two minor courses this semester; students in the Pure program take courses in Social Psychology and Social Problems.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Next, in the **sixth semester**, all students learn about Social Work in the context of dealing with the disabled and volunteers. These two courses are supplemented by one in Human Behavior and the Social Environment as well as the first practical Fieldwork Training, furthering students' practical experience and abilities. Students in the Major/Minor program take two more minor courses in, whereas those in the Pure program take Social Work with Youth as well as Tests and Measures in Social Work.

In the penultimate **seventh semester**, students take Statistics for Social Work and Social Work with the Family. Advanced Fieldwork Training is also required, giving students the last piece of hands-on experience necessary to earn their degree. Students in the Major/Minor program take a major elective, a minor course and a minor elective; students in the Pure program take courses about Social Welfare Services in Oman, Social Work and Local Community Development and Social Work and Addiction.

Finally, in the **eighth semester**, students fulfill their thesis requirement through completion of the course Special Topic in Social Work. Alongside this, the courses Social Policy and Social Planning and English for Social Work shall be taken. Those in the major/minor program finish their degree requirements with two minor courses, whereas those in the pure program finish off with a major elective and a course on Social Work and the Elderly.

The University announced its intentions to modify the Social Work program based on the recommendations of staff members and liaison/advisory committees. Some already agreed-upon proposed modifications include the replacement of the Sociology of Social Change course with an Introduction to Psychology course, making Introduction to Special Education an elective instead of a requirement, making Human Behavior and Social Environment a requirement instead of an elective, and adding additional elective courses including Methods of Communication in Social Work, Social Work in the Environment, and Generalist Practice in Social Work.

The University's Center for Information Systems (CIS) is responsible for providing hardware, software and network support for students throughout all of these courses, as well as for maintaining online systems such as "Moodle" and certain other infrastructural services which allow for the easy and accessible retrieval of information about assignments, courses, grades, transcripts and other administrative matters. The University indicates that its investment



has resulted in the integration of electronic and multimedia educational technology in three capacities, namely

- the usage of a large infrastructure of programs, networks and equipment, with accompanying technical and academic support staff;
- the availability of an in-depth program of lectures, workshops etc. regarding e-learning, multimedia and IT in order to help develop skills of students and faculty members alike; and
- the outfitting of all classrooms, lecture theaters and conference rooms with multimedia systems for use in teaching.

In order to satisfy its objective of providing its graduates with the high degree of competence necessary to provide social services, the University has implemented a two-stage internship requirement into the sixth and seventh semesters of its B.A. "Social Work" program. For the total 6 CP earned from both internship courses, students expend a total of over 400 practical hours at two different social institutions. Students study theoretical courses over three days and attend field training in social institutions over two days. They work at least 12 hours a week, and more than 200 clock hours in training institutions each semester.<sup>16</sup> In the first such Fieldwork Training course, students become affiliated with a social institution such as the Department of Family Care or the Ministry of Social Development<sup>17</sup> and are encouraged to apply their learned knowledge and skills into real situations under the supervision of academic and institutional supervisors. In the second Advanced Field Training, students increase their familiarity with said social institutions to raise the number of cases with which they deal and to enhance the precision of their work. To ensure effectiveness in the training courses, the number of students per training institution does not exceed 3.

Quality assurance of the internships is achieved by upholding the criteria set by the College and Department regarding setting and necessary qualifications. The internship is carried out under the supervision of an academic and an institutional supervisor. Professional instructors must hold a Master's degree or higher in the field of Social Work or related fields. Students meet, usually fortnightly, with their supervisors for updates and feedback. Records about internships are kept by the Dean Assistant of Training, and agreements between the College and the training agencies act.

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<sup>16</sup> Annex 8: Social Work Internship Manual

<sup>17</sup> AQQ "Social Work" 6

To ensure the internationality of the B.A. "Social Work" program, the University states that curricula are developed according to international standards of competency established by bodies such as the USA's Council of Social Work Education, the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work and the University of Helwan's School of Social Work. In addition to quality control of the course material, improving cultural diversity and transculturism were supplied as justification thereof. Because their degree program meets these international standards, the University provides that students can easily succeed in international postgraduate studies.

According to the University, students are recommended to go abroad, provided that they meet certain conditions. Successful applicants can spend up to one complete academic year of full-time study at their chosen partner institution. Credits earned during exchanges do not affect students' cumulative GPAs at the University, and in order to be counted in a student's credit total, these must be approved by the University and have been passed with a grade of C (2.0) or better. No B.A. "Social Work" students have yet done exchanges.<sup>18</sup>

According to the University, most courses in the B.A. "Social Work" program are closely linked to completed and ongoing research by faculty members, who are supported, monetarily and otherwise, by the University for their research engagements. The courses Research Methods in Social Work and Social Statistics in the sixth and seventh semester serve as an introduction for students to the principles of social research; the course Tests and Measures in Social Work in the seventh semester adds competences in the design and application of data collection mechanisms; finally, the Thesis course (Special Topic in Social Work) places students in small groups, has them design and carry out a research study, and evaluates the ensuing research report. Student participation in research activities, such as seminars, workshops, conferences and research studies is also encouraged, especially when hosted or conducted by faculty members.

Student skill and competency is the primary evaluative target of midterms and final course examinations. The evaluation component of each course consists of

- a final written exam, generally accounting for 40-60% of the final grade;

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<sup>18</sup> AQQ „Social Work“ 3

- a midterm exam, generally accounting for 20-25% of the final grade; and
- assignments of quizzes, tests, projects, presentations, homework assignments, case reports and classroom discussions, generally accounting for 25-30% of the final grade.

In a 15-week semester, midterm examinations are held in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> week. Final examinations are generally held in the 15<sup>th</sup> week. The duration of final exams cannot exceed three hours.

Students must thus complete an average of 5 final written exams per semester and a total of 40 in the entire study program;<sup>19</sup> this is true for students in both study plans A and B. The Fieldwork Trainings are concluded with an oral exam. Missed midterm exams may be repeated or not at the discretion of the course instructor on a case-by-case basis. Students who miss formal final exams for “legitimate reasons” must apply to the College Examination Committee for re-examination. With the exception of extenuating circumstances, such as illness or death in the immediate family, students who miss or fail an exam may not re-sit the test and must instead repeat the course or take an equivalent course. One special exception applies to students who have passed all degree requirements except for one failed exam in their last two semesters of study. With the recommendation of the Instructor and the approval of the faculty, such students can be granted a re-sit opportunity for a maximum grade of C (2.0).<sup>20</sup>

Students wishing to transfer programs within the University are to apply within their own degree program and are evaluated on that basis. Those wishing to transfer to the University from an external higher education institution (HEI) are governed by certain regulations.<sup>21 22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> AQQ B.A. “Social Work” 8

<sup>20</sup> AQQ Overall 5

<sup>21</sup> Transfer applicants must be Omani citizens 25 years of age or younger; be transferring from a recognized HEI; provide a “No Objection” letter from their current HEI, if studying at a Government HEI, or from their sponsor, if receiving a scholarship; complete at least 60 credits of their degree program with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.3 (3.5 for the College of Medicine and Health Sciences); have not dropped out of their previous study program more than one year prior; have passed all transferred courses with a “C” or better; and provide a certificate of completion for the Foundation Program or other evidence attesting thereto. Source: Annex A: Undergraduate Academic Regulations pp.10-12 §§A4.2-A5

<sup>22</sup> Transfer applicants will be ranked primarily by GPA and secondarily by GED percentage; be admitted to the College and not a specific major (the latter is dependent on students’ fulfillment of prerequisites for that major); and be granted up to 50% of the credits required for

After placing students' previous eligible coursework under assessment and ascertaining that the work covered is equivalent in content or objectives to corresponding courses at the University, the University can grant students Transfer Credit, which counts toward degree CP requirements but is not itself graded. Should a student have amassed a significant amount of Transfer Credit, the University may designate him/her as being in Advanced Standing and thus able to commence the study program in a semester above the first<sup>23</sup>.

#### 2.2.4 Admission requirements

According to §A1 of the Undergraduate Regulations, the broadest requirement for admission to the University is holding Omani citizenship; under limited circumstances, admission is possible through being granted a scholarship as either

- a national of a state party to the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG), aka the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC);<sup>24</sup>
- a national of "brotherly and friendly countries"<sup>25</sup> (certain Asian nations<sup>26</sup>); or
- a non-Omani child of a University staff member.

Additionally, all students must hold secondary grades (General Education Diploma, International Baccalaureate, or similar). Students' performance in any postsecondary studies is also used to select students for places in the cohort.

Also required to begin studies in the B.A. "Social Work" program is the successful completion of the University's Foundational Program (or similar program at another institution with proof thereof) and subsequent entrance examinations. Courses include Intensive English Language, Mathematics and IT. This is to ensure that objectives and outcomes are matching program requirements and study needs of students. Foundation program courses are taught by a special unit at the SQU. Credits earned within the Foundation Program do not count toward the 120 CP required for the B.A. "Social Work" degree.

Incoming and outgoing exchanges are also possible to/from the University for students in good academic standing (GPA  $\geq 2.7$ ) who have already completed

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their selected degree program at the university. Source: Annex A: Undergraduate Academic Regulations pp.10-12 §§A4.2-A5

<sup>23</sup> Annex A: Undergraduate Regulations, §A5.

<sup>24</sup> AOQ Overall 2

<sup>25</sup> SQU Undergraduate Academic Regulations p.4 §A1

<sup>26</sup> AOQ Overall 2

at least 60 credits of their requisite degree programs. Those incoming to the University may take any courses in any department for which they meet the prerequisites.

The University, College and Department have non-discrimination policies for disabled students and have admitted students with visual, auditory or physical disabilities to the B.A. "Sociology" program in the past.<sup>27</sup>

## **2.3 Study conditions and quality assurance**

### **2.3.1 Human resources**

Within the B.A. "Social Work" program, there are 1 full professor, 7 assistant professors, 1 associate professor and 1 visiting professor, for a total of 10 professors. Two further lecturers are on leave, for a total of 12.

Out of the 120 CP required for graduation, 64 (53%) are taught by full/associate/assistant professors, each holding a PhD, in lecturers in Plan A (Major & Minor); in Plan B (Pure), 88 (73%) are taught by these instructors.

At full enrollment capacity utilization (282 students), the B.A. "Social Work" program has a faculty-to-student ratio of 28:1.

According to the University, staffs are provided with opportunities to attend various scientific and educational workshops, and are rewarded materially for the publication of journal articles. Attendance of academic conferences and application for grants is also encouraged and assisted by the University. Staffs also are offered in-house opportunities for professional development through the Center for Staff Development, the Center for Education Technology and others.

### **2.3.2 Facilities**

Within CASS and the Department, available facilities include

- classrooms of various size, accommodating between 15 and 50 students and featuring a whiteboard, overhead projector, LCD projector and computer; certain classrooms also contain TVs and DVD players;
- seminar rooms, including one in the Department and one in CASS;

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<sup>27</sup> SER B.A. "Social Work" pp.19-20

- offices for the Head of Department and Coordinator; all professors share their offices with one other colleague; the extension of the CASS building is scheduled in the University's five year operational plan 2016-2020 in order to add more space to professors' offices;
- computer laboratories with academic software, totaling 7 around campus including 4 in the student dormitories (open from 8am until midnight); certified on-site IT support is available, as is campus-wide Wi-Fi access; and
- a specialized technology laboratory for students with special needs, featuring devices such as Braille printers, support software etc. which help visually impaired students.

Students have access to further University facilities including libraries, residences with gender-segregated sport facilities, accommodation for students with special needs, recreational facilities and a mosque. The largest lecture hall has a capacity of 5,000.

The University states that it has a non-discrimination policy for disabled students, as do the College and Department, and has adapted most of its facilities to be accessible to disabled students. The College also works to provide its course materials in Braille through the use of assistive technology.

In addition to University Deanships, offices of Public Relations and Information, Procurement, Legal Affairs, Administration Affairs, Personnel Affairs, Technical Affairs, Financial Affairs, Projects and Maintenance, Housing, University Print Shop and Planning and Statistics provide administrative university services and, when relevant, assist students.

The main University Library contains a total of 359,788 books, 40,356 periodicals and 1,323,847 theses,<sup>28</sup> as well as access to 37 databases, of which approximately 25 are relevant for the field of Social Work.<sup>29</sup> It is reasonably accessible to students during semesters, and is open 24 hours during examination weeks.

CASS also maintains its own library, specialized in the Arts and Humanities and containing about 11,000 books categorized using the Library of Congress catalog.

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<sup>28</sup> These totals include both printed and electronic media. For more information, see Table 11, SER B.A. "Social Work" p.49

<sup>29</sup> AOQ B.A. "Social Work" 11

In order to acquire new materials relating to Social Work, the Department forms a committee to examine purchase applications and either approve or deny them. These are then forwarded to college administrators for funding.<sup>30</sup>

Each department does not have a specific budget; rather, they submit financial requests to their requisite College, which allocates funding at its discretion.

### **2.3.3 Quality assurance**

The College has taken the following organizational steps to assure quality assurance within its programs.

- Establishment of a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (QAAC);
- Establishment of a Quality Assurance and Accreditation unit which belongs to the Dean's assistant of Undergraduate Studies;
- Establishment of a Student-Department Liaison Committee;
- Extension of the CASS building in order to create a positive working environment;
- A training plan for e-learning course design to foster the deployment of e-learning in CASS;
- A common course portfolio template and online data warehouse for archiving documents; and
- Adoption of a Departmental Quality Assurance Action Plan which lists the department Periodic Activities to be done to assure adherence to quality standards.

Within CASS, the QAAC is responsible at the highest level for monitoring of all quality assurance and accreditation issues. QAAC's role is to advise and support departments to ensure congruence of quality and processes with the University's mission and strategies. From top to bottom, the oversight hierarchy for quality assurance is the QAAC, Deans, Assistant Deans for Undergraduate Studies, Rapporteurs, Officers, Heads of Department, Department Accreditation Members and the Department Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee.

The B.A. "Social Work" program assures its quality by the following means:

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<sup>30</sup> AQQ B.A. "Social Work" 10

- The program's accreditation committee confers with CASS' Quality Assurance unit for all quality assurance measures;
- Each course has a delegated coordinator who is responsible for ensuring that the major course objectives are congruent with the objectives of the program, department, college and University
- Assessment methods measure the objective achievement of all courses. These methods include course specification and reports, as well as surveys conducted on students, alumni and employees. These surveys have shown a general satisfaction with course difficulty, content, teaching methods, professional ethics, etc.<sup>31</sup>

Course evaluation is done as a continuing process; one of the course instructors is duly nominated as a coordinator, with clearly defined duties and responsibilities.<sup>32</sup> Each course's file is inspected by an ad hoc group formed from the CASS Quality Assurance Committee for content, assessment methods and compliance with learning objectives. Final examinations are compiled by course coordinators from model question papers prepared by the respective instructors. At the end of each course, course coordinators unify and summarize the course reports, used to analyze course strengths and weaknesses. Student feedback is also taken into account through online surveys and through interviews with the Student-Department Liaison Committee.<sup>33</sup> This committee consists of the HoD, a Sociology faculty member, a Social Work faculty member, two Sociology students (male and female) and two Social Work students (male and female).<sup>34</sup>

The Department Board is furnished with recommendations made from analyzed feedback from graduate students, their employers, the Advisory Committee, student surveys, alumni surveys and supervisors for internships. An action plan is then prepared by the Board.<sup>35</sup>

For more information, refer to the University's Quality Assurance Roadmap (Annex H).

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 13-14

<sup>32</sup> SER B.A. "Social Work" p.35 §1.6.3

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> AOQ Overall 10

<sup>35</sup> SER B.A "Social Work" p.35 §1.6.4



Student workload is evaluated by the Department at the end of each semester; students' cumulative GPAs are used as indicators of difficulty in terms of content and workload.

According to statistics about student enrollment provided by the University,<sup>36</sup> a total of 1,066 students were enrolled into the B.A. "Social Work" program since 2002 with an average of 71 per year, varying from 34 to 169 students per year. 12 students dropped out.<sup>37</sup> Students drop out because of mandatory (academic or disciplinary reasons) and optional (medical reasons and transfer to another program within SQU or to another university) reasons.

Students under academic probation are monitored and assessed by a special committee, which reports its findings to the Department Board so that an action plan can be formulated. Students are assigned an academic advisor, who can provide tailored assistance to students as necessary. All students may register online but students under probation have to visit their advisor in order to register and to discuss the courses that should be taken (again). Furthermore, the University states that the appropriateness of students' workload is assessed through student course surveys and periodic reviews of course materials.<sup>38</sup>

According to the University, students are provided with a full orientation of departments in CASS and continuing, consistent support in the form of academic counseling. Promoting an open-door policy, heads of department and other College members can be approached outside of office hours if necessary. Other offices and programs provide various forms of student support, including the Language Center, the Center for Career Guidance and the hosting of Annual Career Days.

Students have constant access to an online portal through the Deanship of Admission and Registration which provides them with complete details of academic requirements, their academic performance and attained credit hours, attendance statistics and a full academic plan. This portal facilitates course selection, registration or deregistration, auditing of study plan and schedule, and the retrieval of information about grades and cumulative GPA. Information regarding counseling, faculty office hours etc. is also furnished. Students with

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<sup>36</sup> AOQ B.A. "Social Work" 1

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> AOQ Overall 7

disabilities are informed of special procedures and compensation measures in documents pertaining to students with disabilities<sup>39</sup>.

The University states that SQU applies an equal-opportunity policy, including the admission policy; male and female students are not segregated academically and enjoy the same rights, privileges and opportunities. According to the University, parents, foreign exchange students, students with an immigrant background, people from educationally deprived backgrounds and other traditionally discriminated groups are all afforded equality of opportunity.<sup>40</sup>

Since 1997, the College has admitted increasing numbers of disabled students and has ensured their support through the establishment of a Special Needs Technology Laboratory, which furnishes disabled students with computers, Braille printers and other specialized devices for visually impaired students.

## 2.4 Information about the University

The Sultan Qaboos University, situated in the Al-Khodh neighborhood of the city of Muscat, was founded in 1986 with five Colleges (Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture, Education and Science) and grew in 1987, 1993, 2006 and 2008 with the respective additions of the Colleges of Arts and Social Sciences, Commerce and Economics, Law and Nursing.<sup>41</sup> Until 2000, the Sultan Qaboos University was the only university in Oman and is today the only public university in Oman, besides five private universities.

At present there are 17,824 students at the University, of whom 9,359 (52.5%) are female and 8,465 (47.5%) are male. Of these students, 16,281 (91.3%) are enrolled in undergraduate study programs.<sup>42</sup>

In total, the University offers 64 undergraduate degree programs, 62 Master programs and 34 doctorate programs. Since inception, the University has awarded 37,032 Bachelor degrees, 1,826 MDs, 4,241 Diplomas, 2,281 Master's degrees and 28 doctorate degrees.

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<sup>39</sup> Annex F: Guide to Students with Disabilities; Annex G: Instructions for the Participants in Supervising the Exams of Students with Disabilities and in Filling their Exam Answer Sheets

<sup>40</sup> AOQ Overall 17

<sup>41</sup> SER B.A. "Social Work" p.50 §3,1,1

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Research is stated as being one of the core features of the University. It has established ten research centers in various scientific and humanities fields and holds three research chairs: the UNESCO Chair in Marine Biotechnology, the Shell Chair in Carbonate Geosciences and the Chair in Nanotechnology for Water Desalination. Up to 2014, the University undertook 1,810 research projects with a total value of OMR 46m (USD \$119m; EUR €111m). Since 1995, the University has also marketed consulting services to various private and public sector organizations on 453 occasions with a budget of over OMR 17.6m (USD \$46m; EUR €43m). The number of University journal articles increased 185% between 2000 and 2013 up to 1,193 in the latter year, while journal articles saw an increase of 188% over the same time period, increasing to 728.

The University mechanizes research funds and leave, conference attendance, sabbatical leave, research awards and journal publication awards in order to incentivize its colleges to engage in research. Additionally, the College of Arts and Social Sciences publishes its own academic journal and hosts a biennial academic conference.

The College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) is the University's largest college, having been formed in 1987, one year after the founding of the main University. It contains eleven Bachelor programs, nine Master programs (including B.A. "Social Work") and three doctoral programs.

The Department of Sociology and Social Work was also established in 1987. Currently, there are 24 programs of study within the College of Arts and Social Sciences, of which 4 belong to the Department (B.A./M.A. Sociology/Social Work, respectively). The Social Work program was founded in 2001.<sup>43</sup>

Currently, 3,180 students are enrolled at CASS, 448 are in the Department and 282 are in the Social Work program.<sup>44</sup>

The Department and College seek to integrate complex systems instruction and more advanced learning approaches/technologies into their future development, in accordance with its "clear and articulated strategic plan" for the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp.53-54 §3.2.1

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

years 2016-2040. Finally, the department is preparing a proposal to begin offering doctorate programs in Sociology and Social Work.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> SER B.A. "Social Work" pp.53-54 §3.2.1

### 3 Expert Report

#### 3.1 Preliminary remarks

The Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences (hereinafter, the AHPGS) was commissioned by the decision of Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman (hereinafter also referred to as “the University”) for the accreditation of the Bachelor study program “Social Work,” which offers the degree Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in “Social Work,” as well as for the following study programs:

- the Master program “Social Work,” which offers the degree Master of Arts (M.A.) in “Social Work”;
- the Bachelor program “Sociology,” which offers the degree Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in “Sociology”; and
- the Master program “Sociology,” which offers the degree Master of Arts (M.A.) in “Sociology.”

The on-site visit of the Bachelor study program “Social Work,” as well as of the Bachelor program “Sociology” and the Master programs “Social Work” and “Sociology,” all of which are offered at the Department of Sociology and Social Work, College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS), Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman, was carried out on April 10 and 11, 2017.

The documents submitted by the University, the feedback from the experts to the documents and the results of the discussions with the representatives of the University during the on-site visit serve as bases for the statements made in this expert report.

The following experts were appointed by the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS for the evaluation of the aforementioned study program.

#### **As representatives of higher education institutions and professional practice:**

***Prof. Petra Deger***<sup>46</sup>

*Professor of Sociology, Heidelberg University of Education, Germany*

**Prof. Dr. Andreas Geiger**

Former Rector and Professor of Sociology and Community Medicine,  
Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences, Germany

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<sup>46</sup> Italicized experts did not take part in the On-Site Visit.

**Dr. Rolf Heusser, MPH**

Director, National Institute for Cancer Epidemiology and Registration, Zürich, Switzerland

**Prof. Dr. Christine Meyer**

Professor of Social Work, University of Vechta, Germany

**Prof. Dr. Martina Ritter**

Professor of Social Work and Social Management, Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

**Prof. Dr. Peter Schäfer**

Professor of Family and Youth Welfare Law in the Context of Social Work, Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences, Mönchengladbach, Germany

**As a student representative:*****Mr. Alexander Bordan***

*Student, University of Bonn, Germany*

The on-site visit of the experts was carried out in accordance with the *Criteria for the assessment and accreditation procedures of study programs at foreign higher education institutions*, which were developed by the AHPGS in close accordance with both the existing criteria and requirements valid in the Federal Republic of Germany and the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG), established by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). After the announcement of the accreditation decision, the expert report will be published as part of the final Assessment Report.

**3.2 Basic information about the study program**

The main objective of the Bachelor study program "Social Work," offered at Department of Sociology and Social Work at the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman, is to train students to become professionals who are capable of applying the social welfare system, who identify people in need of support and care and whose activity aims at providing appropriate social services to individuals, families, groups or communities in order to develop their abilities to carry out social functions and improve the quality of life in Oman. The focus of the study program is the identification and analysis of social problems and phenomena in Omani society.

The study program requires the obtainment of 120 credit points (CP) according to the credit hour system. One credit point is equal to either (a) one contact hour of lectures, (b) two contact hours of laboratory work, tutorials, studio work, field placements or work placements, or (c) three contact hours of workshops or internships. Every contact hour requires an estimated two hours of self-study. The total workload of the program constitutes 6,690 hours, of which 2,190 are contact hours, 120 are internship hours and 4,380 are self-study hours.

The Bachelor study program "Social Work" is a full-time study program with a regular duration of eight semesters (four years). Students choose between two study plans in the program: Plan A (Major/Minor), in which students make a minor specialization into a second field to complement their social work studies, or Plan B (Pure), in which students focus solely on their major coursework. Both plans consist of 43 courses and 120 CP; students in both plans take the same courses for the first four semesters and conclude their studies with a Bachelor thesis.

The admission requirements of the program include a secondary school certificate (General Education Diploma, International Baccalaureate or their equivalents). The program is open to Omani students, nationals of brotherly and friendly nations such as those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League, and children of University employees. Tuition fees are not charged at the University, and nearly all students receive free accommodation, meals and/or transportation to the University, depending on their gender and how far away they live. Before starting the "Social Work" study program, students must complete the one-year Foundational Program at the University. There are approximately 60-70 study places available annually in the program; admission takes place each fall semester. Upon completion of the study program, students are awarded the academic title "Bachelor of Arts in Social Work." The first cohort of students was admitted to the program in the academic year 1987/1988.

### **3.3 Expert Report**

On February 13, 2017, the application documents of the University were made available to the expert group for written evaluation. The expert group assessed the Bachelor program "Social Work" based on the aforementioned

*Criteria for the assessment and accreditation procedures of study programs at foreign higher education institutions.*

The on-site visit was carried out on April 10-11, 2017, at the University's campus in Muscat, Oman, according to the previously agreed-upon schedule. Representatives from the head office of the AHPGS accompanied the expert group.

The expert group met on April 9, 2017 for preliminary talks in preparation for the on-site visit. They discussed the submitted application documents, the results of the written evaluation and the arisen questions. Furthermore, they prepared the plan of the on-site visit at the University.

In the course of the on-site visit, the experts conducted discussions with the University management, with representatives of the College of Arts and Social Sciences and the Department of Sociology and Social Work, and with the teaching staff of the Bachelor study program "Social Work" as well as with current students and alumni. Furthermore, they inspected the learning premises, including the library.

This expert report is structured in compliance with the accreditation criteria of the AHPGS, as approved by the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS on September 30, 2015. The study program will be described and analyzed in a comprehensive manner below. The documents submitted by the University, the experts' feedback to the documents, the observations made during the on-site visit, and the results of discussions with the representatives of the University, the College of Arts and Social Sciences, the Department of Sociology and Social Work and with the students serve as the bases for the statements made in the expert report.

### **3.3.1 Program aims and their implementation**

The study program pursues specific and clearly defined professional qualification objectives. The students become equipped with knowledge, skills and necessary techniques needed to be a successful social worker in various community facilities. The study program aims to empower students with the skills needed for social guidance and work in the various institutions of society, including skills in professionally dealing with individuals and groups from different social strata in the Omani society to contribute to the continuity of a



safe and healthy societal structure. Moreover, the students are to become qualified to propagate a culture of community participation and voluntary work and to promote the spirit of belonging and loyalty to the country in the sectors in which they operate. On site, the instructors of the study program explained that the discipline receives the philosophical and theoretical background from their departmental neighbor discipline, Sociology. The experts appreciate the collaboration and exchange with their neighbor discipline. Nevertheless, they strongly recommend pursuing the development and establishment of Social Work as an academic discipline in itself and to strengthen Social Work-specific theories.

During the on-site visit at the University, the experts were provided with more information regarding specific qualification objectives and how these prepare students for future employment capacities and situations. It became obvious that the study program's specific qualification objectives have been developed in accordance with the overall strategy of the University - that is, to support the process of Omanization, meaning the retention of graduates in the Omani society and the encouragement of development of their social and cultural heritage. However, the program's representatives clarify that the program has both a global and a local focus. The study program strives to reflect international standards, perspectives and practices in social work in order to give its students an adequate global background, in turn developing Oman's ability to solve its social issues by means of educated professionals.

While the rationale behind the establishment and implementation of the study program, as well as its mission and objectives, have indeed been clearly elucidated, the experts recommend starting to work toward a process of internationalization which does not impede the mission of Omanization. The experts recommend promoting and encouraging exchanges and mobility of staff and students and fostering English language skills; especially the latter would make international literature more accessible to the students. The experts also value the international backgrounds of the program's instructors very highly and support the plans to offer particular courses in English language.

Students in the Bachelor program "Social Work" must satisfy both the requirements of their degree program as well as those stipulated by the University and College. The latter, which include courses such as "Arabic Lan-

guage," "Omani Contemporary Society," "Islamic Culture," "Scientific Thinking & Problem Solving," "Arabic Language Skills I and II" and "Computer Skills," augment students' specialized social work knowledge with important general skills and awareness of their academic, technical and cultural environments. Thus, the experts confirm that the study program focuses on specific qualification objectives that cover both professional and interdisciplinary aspects, and particularly refer to the domain of academic competences.

The University showed its strong commitment to the personal development and social responsibility of the students. Furthermore, it is also committed to the enhancement of independent thinking and a comprehensive awareness which enables the students to make informed and socially responsible choices in agreement with their academic, professional and life goals. By being qualified to identify and analyze social problems, potentially within the scope of a governmental institution, the experts point out the chance to develop an Omani Social Work that meets the particular needs of the Omani society.

Also discussed on site was the question of which problems Social Work focuses on in Oman, given that certain issues, such as addiction to alcohol and other drugs, are not as prevalent as in, for example, Europe. The program representatives admit that Oman does not face the same manifestation of social problems as Europe and, thus, has the responsibility to protect the society from growing problems. As a consequence, the program focuses on preventative measures and seeks information through the cooperation with the Omani Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and even the Ministry of Defense.

This approach is highly appreciated by the experts, who encourage the program representatives and the College itself to continue to publicly promote the significance and tasks of Social Work in a society. By doing so, the University may also contribute to more acknowledgement of Social Work and, thus, easier employability of the graduates in the Omani labor market.

Generally, the experts affirm that the graduates of the Bachelor program "Social Work" are prepared to work in social institutions that are mostly run by the government, such as the Ministries of Education, Health, Defense and Social Development (especially the Departments of Family and Child, People with Special Needs, Social Security and Reformatory Institutions). Currently,

most of the graduates are employed in schools in order to individually support students with special needs or to develop support concepts. Furthermore, the University offers a Master program in "Social Work" through which holders of the B.A. "Social Work" degree can further enhance their professional skills and credentials.

Overall, the experts had the impression of a significant and proportional study program during their on-site visit at the University.

The experts point out that the Bachelor study program "Social Work" displays strengths in that it focuses on the needs of the Omani society and thereby facilitates the employability of the program's graduates. However, potential opportunities for improvement could be found by fostering the development of international perspectives, not only theoretically but also by encouraging staff and student exchanges and foreign language skills.

Overall, in sight of both the professional development objectives and the measures taken to encourage students' social awareness and citizenship that can be found within the qualification objectives of the Bachelor study program "Social Work," the experts consider the requirements of the criterion to be fulfilled.

### **3.3.2 Structure of the study program**

All students in the Bachelor study program "Social Work" are required to complete 120 credit points (CP) of coursework after satisfying the admission requirements, including the completion of a Foundation Program (an uncredited basic cluster of courses for all undergraduate study programs which is intended to give students useful competences and skills for the rest of their studies).

The study program itself consists of mandatory and elective University courses, mandatory and elective College courses and mandatory and elective Departmental or program-specific courses. Thus, students supplement their specialized knowledge and professional and methodological competences in Social Work - which range from "Introduction to Social Work" through "Research Methods in Social Work" and to more applied subjects such as Social Work with groups, communities, individuals, in schools and health services, with the disabled, addicted, families and volunteers - with courses offering

generic competences, such as “Arabic Language Skills”, “Computer Skills”, an English language course (8<sup>th</sup> semester), and subject-related interdisciplinary methodological competences in the area of management (“Management of Educational & Social Institutions”), politics and social sciences (“Social Policy & Social Planning”, “Social Work & Local Community Development”, “Social Welfare Services in Oman”) and psychology and educational sciences (“Human Behavior & the Social Environment”). These are additionally supplemented by University, College, Major (and Minor) Electives to complete an individual study profile according to particular interests.

For the first four semesters (two years) of the Bachelor study program “Social Work,” all students follow the same study plan. However, beginning in the fifth semester, students must choose to follow either Plan A (Major/Minor) or Plan B (Pure). Respectively, these entail studying social work alongside a second field of smaller focus and studying social work alone in a more in-depth manner. Students electing to follow Plan A (Major/Minor) have a choice to minor in the fields of Arabic, Sociology, History, Tourism, Media, Archaeology, Geography or Theater. In their selected field, seven required courses and one elective must be completed. The experts find that the option of choosing a minor is useful for aspiring social workers who want to specialize in a particular subject or have diverse interests.

Generally, the experts determine that the combination and succession of the courses are consistent with the intended learning outcomes.

The Bachelor study program “Social Work” consists of 43 courses, each of which are completed within one semester. The course descriptions contain all necessary information, such as level/semester, credit hours, learning outcomes and examinations. The regular study period is eight semesters (four years). The University’s calculation of student workload follows the Credit Hour System that focuses on lecture or contact hours per week. Following the University’s calculation that a contact hour requires two self-study hours, the overall study program workload is estimated to be 6,690 hours. The University’s explanations of their credit hour system showed the equivalence of the program’s 120 CP to a European Bachelor program; workload calculations are comparable. However, in order to facilitate transfers into/out of Oman, as well as potential graduate studies at European universities, the experts suggest

presenting the applied credit point system in ECTS units in order to more accurately reflect students' workload. The Bachelor certificate should be supplemented by a diploma supplement that contains the conversion to the European Credit Transfer System.

The program curriculum and its qualification objectives comply with the requirements of the higher education level. The sequence of courses provides students with a foundation in the theory of social work before building thereon with courses providing students with knowledge of social work in many different contexts (e.g. addiction, families, youth), as well as contemporary research and trends in social work, before concluding with a personal thesis project. In particular, the experts find that the course handbook reveals a coherent structure and continuously increasing complexity of learning material and students' competence level, with the focus on specialization courses in the final stages of the education.

Not least through the talks with the very involved students, the experts concluded that the study program is student-centered and encourages students to take an active role in creating the education process. However, the experts support the students' wish for less classical teaching and the intensifying of interactive didactic methods. As a consequence, the experts encourage the University to promote and extend project work that may also be linked to the students' practical experiences. In addition to that, the experts echo the students' wish for more practical experience as well as more room for theoretical-practical transfer in their courses and internships.

A major facet of the Department of Sociology and Social Work evident in the study program is the existence and maintenance of cooperation agreements with various institutions. These include organizations where students can carry out their field work (internships) under professional supervision, as well as organizations in which graduates of the program often work. The University's cooperation partners relevant to the Bachelor study program "Social Work" program include NGOs, civil society institutions and the Omani Ministries of Social Development, Education, Health and Defense. On site, the teachers reported regularly inviting guest lecturers from social institutions to contribute to certain courses. The current system of combining theory and

practice within the modules is excellent from the experts' point of view and should be retained.

From the experts' point of view, the requirements of the criterion are fulfilled.

### **3.3.3 Admission and Feasibility**

In order to be admitted to the Sultan Qaboos University, students must hold a secondary school leaving certificate (including, for example, a General Education Diploma, an International Baccalaureate or an equivalent thereto). Approximately 60-70 students are admitted to the Bachelor study program "Social Work" each year (the exact quota is set annually by the Department and College Board). Enrollment into the program is contingent on students' completion of a Foundation Program, which provides students with basic skills in areas such as intensive English language, mathematics and information technology. The experts understand that this requirement exists to mandate certain standards in the program and to provide students with skills which they will need later in their studies.

The program is open and free for all citizens of Oman, and is open with nominal tuition fees for citizens of "brotherly and friendly countries" (members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, and some Asian nations) and children of non-Omani University staff. The admission procedure and requirements are properly documented in the "Undergraduate Academic Regulations" and made publicly available.

The experts appreciate that the College of Arts and Social Sciences, although being the only college at Sultan Qaboos University to do so, admits disabled students to its programs. On site, the experts were impressed about how the College accommodates the special needs of disabled students, providing them with supportive technology and making sure that lectures take place in barrier-free rooms.

Additionally, all students receive free meals and either free accommodation at the University or free transportation to the University (depending on gender and students' homes' distance away from the University). The experts find the admission requirements, the lack of tuition fees and particularly the support provided to students in the form of housing, food and transportation to be outstanding.

The experts have determined that the University assesses the feasibility of its curriculum and its examinations. Course surveys are conducted on students every semester, and the feedback obtained from them is used to make improvements. Compared to European standards for examination systems, the experts determine a relatively high amount of exams to be passed during the study program as there is at least one midterm exam in every course plus a final examination at the end of the course/semester. However, students asked during the on-site visit said that they consider the workload, the amount of examinations and the examination cycle to be appropriate. The type as well as the timing of the different examinations is defined and communicated to the students transparently and at the beginning of each course. Moreover, every student is assigned to an academic advisor at the beginning of their studies who verifies the student's choice of courses each semester and assists the student in exploring alternative paths to the degree if, for any reason, the normal pace of the degree is disrupted. Students with a cumulative Grade Point Average below 2.00 are placed on probation, which means that the student's course load is reduced to an individually manageable level until the academic difficulty is resolved. The student's difficulties and corrective measures are discussed with the academic advisor. In case of personal or health problems, the University provides a Student Counseling Center and a Health Clinic.

The experts conclude that students are provided with superb and intense academic and social support and guidance required for the accomplishment of the program-related assignments and acknowledge the University's strong endeavors to ensure that all students successfully complete their studies. Thus, the feasibility of the study program is guaranteed, the amount of student workload is appropriate and, as a whole, the organization of the education process and the support given to the students ensure the successful implementation of the study program.

From the experts' point of view, the requirements of the criterion are fulfilled.

#### **3.3.4 Examination system and transparency**

The University uses a continuous assessment process to ensure the quality of education for its students and graduates. This is achieved by evaluating the

performance of the student through a series of exams and tests that are scheduled during the academic semester in the faculties.

The experts have found that students must pass a relatively high number of exams to complete the program. Each course has a midterm and a final examination, resulting in a total of 86 exams for each student. (for both Plan A and Plan B students). These, and all other coursework, are graded using a letter grade and GPA (grade point average) scale. An A, or 4.0, is a perfect result; a D, or 1.0, is the minimum passing grade, and an F, or 0.0, denotes a failed course. Students' final GPA in each course is multiplied with the number of credit points (CP) of that course, and then all these products are added together and divided by the total number of attempted (passed or failed) credit points. The result is a Cumulative GPA (CGPA), which serves as students' primary indicator of performance. Students who miss or fail exams may retake them, repeat the course or take a different, equivalent course. Additional considerations are possible for provably ill or bereaving students. If students fail to meet courses' attendance requirements or fulfill other conditions, this is recorded on their transcripts. Conversely, if students are beset by illness or a death in the family, they may receive extensions to their coursework and resit their examinations. The evaluation and grading system is determined in the University's Undergraduate Academic Regulations.

Students are informed about each course's assignment requirements and the dates of exams at the beginning of each semester. They also have regular access to guidance offices in case problems or questions arise. The experts find that the University maintains a high degree of transparency within its examination system, and that this system is appropriately challenging and relevant for the determination of whether the envisaged qualification objectives have been met. The outstanding student support allows the students to cope with the amount of exams (see also Criterion 3).

In terms of compensation measures for students with disabilities and chronic illnesses, the University has a host of assistive devices which are made available to, for example, the visually impaired. With these devices, they can record lectures, transcribe them to Braille to review for exams, and perform similar tasks.



Strategic documents and handbooks containing information on administrative procedures and other University matters are distributed to students at the beginning of their studies. The University's Undergraduate Academic Regulations are available online on the website of the Deanship of Admission and Registration.

From the experts' point of view, the requirements of the criterion are fulfilled.

### **3.3.5 Teaching staff and material equipment**

The teaching load in the Bachelor study program "Social Work" is managed by 12 faculty members. These include one full professor, one associate professor, nine assistant professors and one visitor (who holds the title of Assistant Professor or higher and is contracted by semester). All of these faculty members hold a Ph.D. in their fields. As shown by the curricula vitae submitted by the University, the experts find that these faculty members have considerable firsthand experience in the field of social work. During the on-site visit, the experts judged the human resources of the Bachelor study program "Social Work" to be highly motivated and dedicated to their teaching tasks.

The experts also note that the faculty in the program is provided with considerable support and resources by the University in order to encourage scholarly engagement. The University bears the financial burden of its faculty's organization of conferences and workshops on various levels, participation in conferences and scientific symposia, research projects, and leaves of absence for research. Grants and rewards for scientific publications are also made available to the faculty.

However, from the experts' point of view the program would strongly benefit from one or two additional full professorships, especially considering the professional and academic background and the dedication of the faculty members that should be met by more opportunities for internal progression. Additionally, further full professors would enrich the development and implementation of the study program by plurality in opinions.

In summary, from the experts' point of view, the teaching staff of the program is appropriately qualified and experienced to provide students with theoretical knowledge and practical skills. They are also adequately compensated and rewarded to encourage continuous academic activity and engagement.

During the on-site visit, the experts had the chance to visit student and faculty premises used for the implementation of the study program, including the central library. The University has appropriate funding to provide the necessary learning resources and material equipment, and can guarantee the sufficiency and accessibility of books, databases, electronic resources and periodical publications. Faculty members have the possibility to suggest book orders. The library carries out regular analyses of user behavior in order to adjust their inventory based on student needs.

To conclude, the Bachelor study program "Social Work" has excellent facilities at its disposal for the teaching and learning requirements.

The experts thus consider this criterion as being fulfilled.

### **3.3.6 Quality assurance**

Quality management processes at Sultan Qaboos University are under continuous monitoring and control coordinated by the Quality Assurance Office (QAO) at the university level and the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committees (QAAC) at both the college and departmental levels. The QAAC regularly conducts surveys among students and teaching staff and advises and supports the departments to ensure congruence of quality and processes with the University's mission and strategies. The University itself adopted a Strategic Plan 2016-2040 in order to meet the Omani national higher education strategy which focuses on training a highly-educated generation of academics, researchers and graduates to meet the needs of Oman in terms of specialized cadres in all disciplines. On the College level, this strategic plan is put into practice by Departmental Quality Assurance Action Plans, each of five year duration, which list periodic activities to be done to assure adherence to quality standards.

To monitor and develop the quality of the study program itself, each course has a delegated coordinator who is responsible for ensuring that the major course objectives are congruent with the objectives of the program, department, college and University. Assessment methods measure the objective achievement of all courses. These methods include course specification and reports, as well as surveys conducted on students, alumni and employees. Student feedback is also taken into account through the Student-Department Liaison Committee which consists of the Head of Department, a Sociology

faculty member, a Social Work faculty member, two Sociology students (male and female) and two Social Work students (male and female). Student workload is evaluated by the Department at the end of each semester, using the students' Grade Point Averages as indicators of difficulty in terms of content and workload. Support is given by the Academic Advisors assigned to every student. The surveys have shown a general satisfaction with course difficulty, content, teaching methods, professional ethics, etc. At the end of each course, course coordinators unify and summarize the course reports, used to analyze course strengths and weaknesses. Each course's file is inspected by an ad hoc group formed from the CASS Quality Assurance Committee for content, assessment methods and compliance with learning objectives.

For continuous adjustments of the program according to developments in the society, on the labor market and in the scientific community, the Department of Sociology and Social Work established an Advisory Committee composed of academic staffs and external stakeholders from the labor market, and Joint Committees with main stakeholders from government sectors as forum to promote cooperation.

Finally, the Department Board, consisting of all faculty and training supervisors, is furnished with the findings and recommendations made from the analyzed feedback from the Advisory Committee, student surveys, alumni surveys and supervisors for internships (field training) and transfers them into an action plan.

From the experts' point of view, the University maintains a well-functioning quality assurance system which is implemented by all internal stakeholders and leads to quality improvement and program development plans.

Moreover, the experts find that the University carries out not only internal but also external quality assurance procedures on a cyclical basis. Besides accreditation for each of its programs, the College of Arts and Social Sciences itself went successfully through a process of institutional accreditation in 2016 which confirmed that the College's quality assurance system is based on well-defined processes, leaving no doubt that a quality culture is present at all levels of the College.

Overall, the experts' opinion of the program's quality assurance mechanisms is very positive. The experts got the impression of a strong commitment to quality management and quality assurance in higher education at the College. However, the expert group recommends that the College representatives keep the quality assurance system as lean as possible and to focus not only on processes of quality assurance but also on quality enhancement, through further promoting of the quality culture in the College.

As such, the experts consider this criterion as being fulfilled.

### **3.3.7 Gender equality and equal opportunities**

On site, the experts got the impression that the College of Arts and Social Sciences commits itself to provide an embracing environment for academic creativity and development, while respecting diversity and a multicultural understanding. The Sultan Qaboos University strives to uphold equal opportunity for all, including those in historically discriminated-against groups such as the disabled, immigrants, student parents, etc. Generally, the experts are impressed by the support that is given to students with particular living circumstances but also of the excellent study conditions as a whole. Sultan Qaboos University does not charge tuition fees for Omani students in undergraduate studies and provides either free accommodation on the campus (for female students and students whose families live beyond 100 kilometers from the campus) or free transportation for students who live within 100 kilometers of the University.

So far, the College of Arts and Social Sciences is the only college at the University which admits disabled students. To support students with special needs, the College launched a "Guide to Students with Disabilities". Especially students with visual and mobility impairment find facilities as classrooms and offices, bathrooms, prayer rooms and cafeterias provided with signs in Braille system and access ramps or elevators. The Assistive Technology Laboratory gives students with special needs the opportunity to use specialized electronic devices in order to fulfill their academic needs. On site, the students with special needs confirmed that their learning environment is conducive to their needs.

On site, the experts had the opportunity to speak to male and female students who are taught jointly at Sultan Qaboos University. Students with children reported that the University's Nursing and Day Care Center greatly helps them to manage their studies. Overall, the experts observe that the University maintains an environment in which male and female students of all backgrounds have equal opportunities to achieve academic success.

Therefore, from the experts' point of view, the requirements of the criterion are fulfilled.

### **3.4 Summary**

The experts' overall impression of the Sultan Qaboos University, the College of Arts and Social Sciences, the Department of Sociology and Social Work and the degree program Bachelor of Arts in "Social Work" is very positive. The University convincingly presents itself as a dynamic institution being able to react on national and international educational and social developments. Among the University's strengths, the qualified and dedicated instructors and the excellent infrastructure and study conditions must be named, as must the meticulously designed study programs and educational concepts that show a strong commitment to personal development and social responsibility of the students. The study program is tailored to meet the Omani national development goals on the one hand, and to meet the Omani society's needs on the other hand and, thus, promises a high employability of the graduates.

Based on the information from written documents and the results of the on-site visit, the experts came to the conclusion that the study program Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in "Social Work" offered at the Sultan Qaboos University, College of Arts and Social Sciences, fulfills the aforementioned accreditation criteria. Hence, the experts have decided to submit a recommendation to the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS for a positive decision regarding the accreditation of the study program.

For the continuous development of the study program, the experts have outlined the following recommendations:

- The development and establishment of Social Work as an academic discipline in itself and strengthening Social Work-specific theories should be pursued.
- The College and the Department should continue to publicly promote the significance and tasks of Social Work in a society.
- The University should start to slightly work toward a process of internationalization which does not impede the mission of Omanization. Exchanges and mobility of staff and students as well as the fostering of English language skills should be encouraged and promoted.
- The applied credit point system should also be presented in ECTS units. The Bachelor certificate should be supplemented by a diploma supplement that contains the conversion to the European Credit Transfer System.
- The teaching staff should intensify and vary interactive teaching and learning methods.
- Opportunities to engage in practical-theoretical transfer should be extended in students' courses and internships.
- The Department of Sociology and Social Work should offer more opportunities for internal progression of the faculty members and benefit from one or two additional full professorships.
- The College of Arts and Social Sciences should keep the quality assurance system as lean as possible and focus not only on processes of quality assurance but also more explicitly on quality enhancement.

## **4 Decision of the accreditation commission**

### **The decision of the Accreditation Commission of July 25, 2017**

The resolution of the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS is based on the University's application, as well as the expert review and the on-site visit covered in the expert report. Moreover, the Accreditation Commission takes into account the response opinion of the University regarding the study program.

The on-site visit of the University took place on April 10-11, 2017, according to the previously agreed-upon schedule.

The accreditation decision is based on the Accreditation Criteria developed by the AHPGS. The Accreditation Criteria are developed by the AHPGS in close accordance with the existing criteria and requirements valid in the Federal Republic of Germany and based on the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG), established by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The regulated study period in the program "Social Work" is four years/eight semesters. The study program may be studied as a pure program or as a major in combination with a minor. The study program requires the obtainment of 120 credit points (CP) according to the University's credit hour system. The study program comprises 43 courses, covering mandatory and elective University courses, mandatory and elective College courses and mandatory and elective Departmental/Program-specific courses. The bachelor study program "Social Work" is completed with the awarding of the academic degree "Bachelor of Arts."

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS discussed the procedural documents and the vote of the expert group and the response opinion of the University regarding the expert report.

The University's response opinion shows that the University already took the experts' recommendations into consideration.

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS considers that all Accreditation Criteria are fulfilled and adopts the following decision:

The Bachelor study program "Social Work" is accredited for the duration of five years, until September 30, 2022.

For further development and enhancement of the study program, as well as of the University as a whole, the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS supports the recommendations articulated in the expert report.