



A Road Map to UNWTO. TedQual Certification A Processual Approach

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Abstract

In 2013, the Tourism Department of Sultan Qaboos University crossed a milestone by being the first Middle Eastern tourism department to achieve the UNWTO.TedQual certification, which was then renewed in 2015 until September 2018, and for three years from January 2019 until January 2022. One of the most distinguishing privileges of accreditation is its role in sharing experiences and learning from others, a matter should then lead to learning by example. Benefiting from the cumulative experience gained during the process of acquiring the UNWTO.TedQual certification and its renewal, this research aims to share a best practice case, which could be utilized as a benchmark model for tourism and hospitality institutions seeking quality assurance and accreditation for its undergraduate programs.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the number of tourism and hospitality educational programs has increased rapidly all over the world which raised concerns regarding the quality of those programs (Robbins, 2005; Horng *et al.*, 2006). One of the methods applied to enhance education quality is "Evaluation", which entails appraising the educational system to point out its merits and demerits and accordingly would provide recommendations of improvement to attain educational goals and objectives (Scriven, 1999). However, implementation is not that simple as a major challenge for higher education is to develop a valid instrument to measure the quality of education (Rao *et al.*, 1999).

Accreditation serves many constituents and for a variety of reasons. It attempts to measure the quality of a program that prepares people to pursue a specific job or profession (Hail *et al.*, 2019). There are several positive impacts of external quality evaluation: embracing the culture of evaluation, increasing communication and transparency, providing useful information and sharing good practices, improvements based on audit recommendations, and engaging stakeholders in maintaining education quality (Pham, 2018).

The importance of tourism education has been emphasized through the creation and maintenance of UNWTO.TedQual certification, a program which was introduced in the 1990s to apply total quality management to tourism education (UNWTO, 2013).

There are currently eight education and training institutions providing tourism related programs in Oman (UNWTO and Omani Ministry of Tourism, 2011):

1. Colleges of Higher Education
2. German University of Technology in Oman

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3. Gulf College
4. Khimji Training Institute
5. Majan College
6. National Hospitality Institute
7. Oman Tourism College
8. Sultan Qaboos University

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the leading higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman, contributes to the development of tourism through its Tourism Department in the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS). The department was established in 2001 and currently offers two specializations: Tourism Management and Hospitality Management. Quality has always been a major conviction for Sultan Qaboos University, College of Arts and Social Sciences, and the Tourism Department. In 2013, the Department crossed a milestone by being the first Middle Eastern tourism department to achieve the UNWTO.TedQual certification, which was then renewed in 2015 until September 2018, and for three years from January 2019 until January 2022.

One of the most distinguishing privileges of accreditation is its role in sharing experiences and learning from others, a matter should then lead to learning by examples. Benefiting from the cumulative experience gained by the Tourism Department of Sultan Qaboos university during the process of acquiring the UNWTO.TedQual certification and its renewal, this research aims to share a best practice case, which could be utilized as a benchmark model for tourism and hospitality institutions seeking quality assurance and accreditation for its undergraduate programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

All over the world, higher education institutions are keen to establish quality assurance systems. The growing interest in higher education quality was mainly due to the rapid growth of student numbers, programs, and institutions (Green, 1994; Eaton, 2012; Stensaker and Maassen, 2015).

Even though education quality can't easily be defined, it could be viewed as a set of elements that constitute the input, process and output of the educational system and the systematic services provided to fulfill stakeholders' expectations and needs (Cheng and Tam, 1997; Becket and Brookes, 2005). The term "Quality" itself has different meanings based on different perspectives, for example, quality has been defined as being about value (Feigenbaum, 1983); conformance to standards, specifications or requirements (Levitt, 1972; Crosby, 1988; Luthans and Davis, 1990; Tellis and Gaeth, 1990); fitness for use or purpose (Juran, 1988); quality as degree of excellence (Peters and Waterman, 1982); the consistent delivery of services and products based on established standards (Rey and Wieland, 1987); meeting or exceeding customers' expectations (Gronroos, 1983; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Rabbitt and Bergh, 1994), and Fulfilment of an institution's aims and objectives (Harvey and Green, 1993).

Furthermore, different groups have different views on the quality of education: academics and students focus on quality of the educational process, while employers focus on graduates' quality (Segers and Dochy, 1996). According to Green (1994), a high-quality institution is one that clearly states its vision, mission and capable of accomplishing its objectives. The multifaceted nature of quality assurance applications in higher education has driven the trend towards accreditation of educational programs (Anderson *et al.*, 2000; Thobega, 2010).

In this regard, four key terms are broadly linked to quality (Salmi, 2000; Odera-Kwach and Ngulube, 2013; Ramsay, 2013):

- Quality control: The operational techniques and activities, which an institution uses to meet the quality requirements.
- Quality assurance: The systematic quality approach which ensures that the outputs remain always at the required standards.
- Quality audit: An internal systematic examination or review of activities and procedures to assess if they have been applied as planned and promised.
- Accreditation: An external inspection used to scrutinise colleges, universities and higher education programs for quality assurance, where an accrediting agency certifies that the program standards are appropriate for the award to which it leads.

Referring to the link between these four terms, Castelluccio and Masotti (2006) and Nkiko *et al.* (2015) argue that the purpose of “Quality Audit” is to monitor the “Quality Assurance” applied through the “Quality Control” tools to ensure that an education process of acceptable academic standards is provided, which may lead to acquiring “Accreditation”. Finally, “Quality Audits” and “Quality Accreditation” are usually merged under the term “Quality Assessment”.

Closely related to the above explained terms is “Competence Assessment Program” (CAP), which can be defined as a combination of assessment forms, in which the actual combination used depends on the goals of the educational program. No exact combination of forms of assessment can be given to standardize a CAP, as the contents of a CAP depend on the competences being assessed and the breadth of the educational program (i.e., a specific course, a semester, a year, etc.). A CAP should cover all educational goals (Bartman *et al.*, 2007).

Brennan and Shah (2000) investigated the impact of quality assessment on higher education institutions and concluded that the impact could occur at the 4 levels: The individual, the unit, the institution, and the national system, and through three mechanisms: rewards, adjusting policies and structures, and changing higher education culture.

Several researchers believe that within the progress of the quality movement in higher education, the attention moved from focusing on “Quality Audits” which is internally managed by universities to “Accreditation” which is controlled by external agencies (Anderson *et al.*, 2000; Rosa *et al.*, 2012; Abou-Warda, 2014). Emphasis is upon assessment and improvement rather than regulation and control (Brennan and Shah, 2000).

The term accreditation is broad, as it includes many types and levels of application; thus, it calls different meanings to different people including positive thoughts such as elitism, measure of sanctification, or negative ones such as undue barriers, and excess expense and effort (Ramsay, 2013). It has been seen as a voluntary process in which recognition is granted to educational programs which meet or exceed established standards of educational quality (Tanke, 1986), or as a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement (Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), 2002). Finally, Anderson *et al.* (2000) defined accreditation as a process whereby an authority, recognised by institutions and government, determines that an institution offering courses in higher education may become self-accrediting, or offer its own higher education awards subject to periodic reviews.

Institutions are compelled to produce a self-study report and a SWOT analysis in their efforts to improve their programs, and then capture in a summative report and site visit their academic quality. The goal is to take a closer look at student outcomes and the best practices used to reach those outcomes (Hail *et al.*, 2019). Accordingly, it could be concluded that the whole philosophy behind accreditation is premised on the need for a functional mechanism

that guarantees institutional efficiency. Accredited status assures stakeholders that an institution/program meets certain standards regarding its faculty, curriculum, students, and other educational components and services (Brittingham, 2008; Eaton, 2014), and that graduates have achieved the necessary skills, knowledge and behaviours required by their chosen profession (Ramsay, 2016).

Accrediting organizations develop standards as a measurement framework for quality. Periodic review of how an institution is meeting the standards forms the basis for continued accreditation (Eaton, 2012). Basically, accreditation focuses on creating a process by which programs can present evidences of the level to which their students meet the minimum professional standards as well as evidences of the processes used to sustain continuous quality improvement (Hail *et al.*, 2019). The need for evidences justifies why documentation is an inevitable feature of nearly all accreditation bodies (Uzumeri, 1997).

In the same vein, researchers (Bogue and Hall, 2003; Martin and Stella, 2007) argue that the foremost purposes of accreditation in education institutions are quality assurance and institutional improvement, as offering quality education entails the provision of advanced learning facilities and infrastructure, research oriented faculty, an excellent curriculum and training, activity oriented pedagogical tools, generating employability and a very strong industry interface (Jauhari, 2013). Thus, professional organizations have historically viewed accreditation as a tool for enhancing business professionalism through improving educational programs. An argument was then made that a higher degree of professionalism is achieved by those professional fields affiliated with an accrediting body (Tanke, 1986).

It is worth noting that, the impact of quality assurance system application may involve resources reallocation, restructuring of quality assessment system, teaching and learning, and organizational reidentification. Consequently, external quality assurance might not be able to drive the change of educational institutions quality practices, if the quality assessment system is poorly designed, and if the institution lacks proper resources, funds, and initiatives (Liu *et al.*, 2015).

Tourism-wise table 1 shows some of the most recognised accreditation bodies such as the Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA), the TedQual Certification by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which have provided various sets of criteria to assess the quality of hospitality, tourism and leisure programs (Horng *et al.*, 2009).

Table 1: Sample international accreditation systems for tourism and hospitality programs

System	US ACPHA	UNWTO.TedQual certification	British QAA subject review in HLRS and T (2000-01)	US NRPA
Organization	CHRIE	UNWTO	QAA	NRPA
Date	1988	1995	1997	1974

Adapted from: Horng *et al.* (2009).

METHODOLOGY

To fulfill the research aim, a case study approach was adopted. Case study is recognized as a tool in many social science studies, the role of case study method in research becomes more prominent when issues with regard to education, sociology, and community-based problems were raised (Grassel and Schirmer, 2006; Gulsecen and Kubat, 2006; Johnson, 2006).

The features of a case study comprise three aspects. The first aspect is that it deals with technically distinctive situations. The second describes that there are several informational

resources which merge by triangulation and thirdly that the case study method can direct the collection and analysis of data by setting up theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014). Case studies are attributed with the ability to enhance understanding and to establish cause and effect (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). It is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin *et al.*, 1991).

This research draws on the Tourism Department experience with the UNWTO.TedQual certification, allowing for analysis, discussion, and interpretation of various pertinent issues to achieve the study aim.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

For several reasons, the decision to initiate the accreditation process is not easy. Firstly, accreditation is an exhausting, time consuming task, which requires firm commitment from those directly involved in the process as well as the support and collaboration of all the institution affiliates. Secondly, to leave one's comfort zone and embrace mechanisms of change is a demanding endeavor, which cannot be forced. Thirdly, to willingly and voluntarily put your own work under scrutiny and inspection is inconvenient for some academics. Fourthly, building a team that has the dedication and ability to sacrifice a significant amount of time to accomplish the accreditation project is not easy. However, knowing these challenges, several factors encouraged the Tourism Department to head towards accreditation:

1. The Department desire to:
 - a. Achieve its vision to be internationally recognized.
 - b. Gain an advantage over competitive institutions locally and regionally.
 - c. Fulfill its dedication to quality practices and continuous improvement.
 - d. Enhance the educational services provided to students.
 - e. Boost graduates' employability opportunities.
2. The University and College financial, administrative and logistical support.
3. The dynamic nature of the tourism sector and therefore the ever-changing stakeholders' needs.
4. The team spirit that prevails among department members, and the obvious ability to perform and excel under pressure.

AN EARLY STEP

The department started the first steps towards continuous quality improvement and consequently accreditation with "Program Review" in Spring 2007, when an eminent professor in the field of tourism was invited to review the undergraduate program. The reviewer's report pointed out the merits and demerits of the educational system. Based on the report findings, the conceptual model adopted was amended and several tactical and strategic decisions were made which led to major changes in the program study plan. This early "Program Review" step stressed the benefits of external assessment and consequently program accreditation.

Program study plan development

The tourism department study plan was initially formulated in 2001, before being modified and updated twice (Atef, 2018):

1. In 2007 the study plan was modified to what is known as "2007 study plan", the modifications were courses related.
2. In 2010 the study plan was modified to what is known as "2010 study plan". Major amendments were introduced regarding the courses, credit hours, and plan structure. This study plan considered the balance between operational and managerial courses with

an emphasis on languages (6 levels instead of only 4) and industry practical experience acquisition (Internship courses and Practical Courses).

Tourism department study plan (2010 study plan)

At the time being, students are registering in the tourism undergraduate program study for four years (eight semesters). The undergraduate academic plan is composed of 120 credit hours, see Table 2, including seven course categories as follows:

Table 2: Course Category and Credit Hours

	Course Category	Credit Hours
1	University Requirements	6
2	University Electives	6
3	College Requirements	11
4	College Electives	3
5	Major Requirements	34
6	Major Electives (6 course levels of the chosen foreign language and 2 Elective Courses)	24
7	Specialization Requirements	36
Total		120

CHOOSING AN AGENCY: WHICH AGENCY IS BEST FOR YOUR PROGRAM?

The department spent a significant time evaluating accreditation agencies to select the most appropriate one, guided by the following criteria:

1. Accrediting Agency Philosophy/Mission/Vision
2. Average length of accreditation process
3. Actual process involved and workload
4. Cost and financial requirements
5. Post accreditation services and follow-up

Academic institutions/programs are always concerned about changes that accrediting bodies might force on them that might affect their philosophy and reason of existence, such concerns were raised during the selection period in the form of questions:

- Is it possible that a change in our vision and mission statements could be asked for?
- What about our culture?
- Are we going to change our templates and forms?
- Will the Department be forced to change its study plan? courses?
- How much changes are usually required to align the educational program to the agency standards (consider the elements of time and effort).
- Are those changes going to be an addition to the substance and quality of the program?
- What's in it for us?

These questions and concerns should be discussed clearly with the potential accreditation agencies. It is crucial to see how the accrediting agency system works-out, meticulously check the agency standards and checklists, ensure that the system requirements will not affect the philosophy of the program, and above all, to ensure that the potential accreditation agency is approved by the institution higher management to avoid any future disagreements which may affect the flow of the accreditation process or even end it. In view of the above-mentioned criteria and discussions, the UNWTO.TedQual certification was found to be the most appropriate.

THE UNWTO.TEDQUAL CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The UNWTO.TedQual certification process could be classified into six stages: (1) Request for information, (2) application form completion, (3) self-study preparation, (4) preparation for in-situ audit, (5) in-situ audit, and (6) post in-situ audit discussions and results. The certification process focuses on evaluating the program from two perspectives:

- Compliance with the quality criteria defined by UNWTO.TedQual based on five areas: employers, students, curriculum, faculty, and management.
- Incorporation of the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in the educational system.

FIRST: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

The first approach with the UNWTO.TedQual Program Director was made in March 2012 by the Head of the Department (HoD) requesting information about the certification system and requirements. The Department promptly received a reply clarifying the process in detail, a manual, the related costs as well as an application form. All the data received from the UNWTO.TedQual director was straightforwardly shared with the College and University upper management to ensure their approval and support considering the details, conditions and procedural requirements mentioned by the UNWTO.TedQual; and a positive reply was received.

SECOND: FILLING OUT THE APPLICATION FORM

A team of five Department academic members was formulated, headed by one of the members under the supervision of the HoD, to jointly handle the UNWTO.TedQual requirements starting with filling in the application form; two weeks later the application form was sent to the UNWTO.TedQual Program Director. The idea of the form is to introduce the department and the educational system adopted to the agency as a first step before a decision is made to accept the department request and initiate the certification process. Then late in April 2012, an initial approval was received from the UNWTO.TedQual as well as a self-study template. The first two stages took approximately seven weeks to be accomplished.

THIRD: SELF-STUDY

According to the UNWTO.TedQual certification rules; the department self-study should cover five principle areas plus a section on the accomplishment of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (UNWTO, 2013):

- **The Employers:** To verify that the program has taken into consideration the views and needs of the future public and private employers.
- **The Student:** To verify that the program has enabled efficient mechanisms for communication and coordination with the students (before, during and after graduation). It also seeks to assess students' performance and their satisfaction with the program.
- **The Curriculum and Pedagogical System:** To verify the curriculum content coherence, effective pedagogical methods are being used, and the existence of and accessibility to pedagogical resources.
- **The Faculty:** To verify the existence of transparent mechanisms to select the faculty, as well as favorable work conditions that promote their professional development.
- **The Management:** To verify the existence of an organizational structure as well as supportive tools for monitoring the program's quality.
- **Accomplishment of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism:** To assess how the purposes and principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism are incorporated into the program reflecting on the above five areas.

The head of the team was responsible for assigning tasks and following up on the accomplishment of each task, review reports, and setting work time plans. The HoD was responsible for assuring that all material needed by the team members were available (logistics), in addition to taking care of official correspondences. On the other hand, each member was responsible for writing a section of the five self-study sections (including applications of the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism within the scope of the section) and at the same time, collecting relevant evidences. The HoD was intentionally made responsible for the management section of the self-study. It took the Department five months and six versions till the self-study was internally approved and sent to the UNWTO.TedQual Program Director.

The first step before initiating the self-study writing process was to conduct a reading session of the UNWTO.TedQual certification manual to assure a full understanding of the document and to clarify any ambiguities. A deadline was set for the first draft completion and relevant evidences collection. The head of the team was assigned the task of reviewing the draft, evidences relevancy verification, and writing style harmonization and unification. The document (draft Two) was then given to the team members for a round of review then back to the head of the team for necessary amendments based on the team members comments. The product was “draft three” which was then sent to the department members to review and comment on. All comments were considered then “draft four” was sent for editing. “Draft five” was reread by the team members then the final product “Draft six” was sent to the UNWTO.TedQual Program Director in September 2012. To start writing a comprehensive self-study document, it is important to have available the following (See Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7):

1. Mission - Vision - Objectives (Department and Program) and Intended Learning Outcomes (Program)
2. Study Plans
3. Course Files for all program study plan courses
4. Program Matrices
5. Quality Assurance Plan

Table 3: Tourism Department - Program Vision, Mission, and Objectives

	Tourism Department	Tourism Undergraduate Program
VISION	The Tourism Department aspires to become a leading national, regional and international centre of excellence in tourism and hospitality teaching, research and community service.	The Tourism Department strives through excellence in teaching, to provide an outstanding tourism and hospitality education for its undergraduate program students, according to the international standards.
MISSION	The Tourism Department is committed to academic excellence, and distinction in research and community service through the provision of stimulating educational programs and learning activities in an environment that foster creative and critical thinking, effective communication skills and freedom of expression and social responsibility. Graduates are prepared to engage in life-long learning and to carry out tourism and hospitality career responsibilities with competence.	The Tourism Department undergraduate program is committed to academic excellence, integrity, and ethical behaviour through the creation and dissemination of knowledge related to tourism and hospitality in an environment that fosters creative and critical thinking, effective communication skills, freedom of expression, and social responsibility.

OBJECTIVES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide a high standard education suitable for individuals seeking employment as professionals in tourism and hospitality. 2. Supply the national, regional, and international tourist market with the professional human resources required in different fields of tourism and hospitality. 3. Cultivate in graduates the ability to communicate and work effectively in multicultural environments. 4. Study current cultural, economic, and social issues that shape and affect tourism and hospitality. 5. Assume a leading role in community service and social responsibility nationally, regionally, and internationally. 6. Provide students with opportunities through training to develop their skills, capacities, and creativity for personal and professional development. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide students with academic foundation and real-life experience for a successful career in tourism and hospitality. 2. Improve students' ability to exercise judgment and critically analyse situations and develop alternatives. 3. Develop students' leadership and management skills, capability for career planning, goal setting, and team-building. 4. Develop students' understanding of tourism and hospitality laws and ethical aspects. 5. Improve students' written, oral, and non-verbal communication skills and usage of information technologies.
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Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Table 4: Mapping of courses to student outcomes matrix (Sample)

Course Information			Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3	Outcome 4	Outcome 5
Course Code	Course Title	Level	Level	Level	Level	Level	Level
1	TOUR1001	Introduction to Tourism	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce
2	TOUR2050	Tourism Resources in Oman	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce
3	TOUR4300	Tourism Marketing	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize
4	TOUR3231	Front Office Operations and management	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce	Reinforce
5	TOUR4220	Graduation Project for Hospitality	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize	Emphasize

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Table 5: Student outcomes assessment matrix (Sample)

Course Information			Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3	Outcome 4	Outcome 5
Course Code	Course Title	Assessment	Assessment	Assessment	Assessment	Assessment	Assessment
1	TOUR1001	Introduction to Tourism	Written Exam	Project	Project	Project	Project
2	TOUR2050	Tourism Resources in Oman	Project	Project	Project	Project	Project
3	TOUR4300	Tourism Marketing	Project / Quiz	Project / Participation	Quiz / Participation	Quiz / Participation	Project / Presentation
4	TOUR3231	Front Office Operations and management	Written Exam	Project	Project	Project	Project
5	TOUR4220	Graduation Project for Hospitality	Project / Oral Exam	Project / Oral Exam	Project / Oral Exam	Project / Oral Exam	Project / Oral Exam

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Table 6: Quality Assurance Plan (Periodic Activities)

No.	Activity	Type	Semester		Frequency
1	Department community service Report	CS	FL		1/Y
2	Department community service plan	CS	SP		1/Y
3	Research activities report	RC	FL		1/Y
4	Department research plan	RC	SP		1/Y
5	Best researcher appointment	RC	SP		1/Y
6	Department committees' formulation	SA	FL		1/Y
7	Department representatives at college committees' appointment	SA	FL		1/Y
8	Appraisals and report compilation	SA	FL		1/Y
9	Department advisory committee meeting preparation	SA	FL		1/Y
10	Students extracurricular activities plan	SA	FL		1/Y
11	Strategic plan tasks progress review	SA	FL	SP	Continuous
12	Continuous improvement and accreditation meeting	SA	FL	SP	Continuous
13	Department board meeting	SA	FL	SP	As Needed
14	Department progress review according to Mission, Vision, and Objectives	SA	FL	SP	Continuous
15	Department and college committees work follow-up	SA	FL	SP	Continuous
16	Students' liaison committee meeting	SA	SP		1/S
17	Department members training needs report	SA	SP		1/Y
18	Department book update and review	SA	SP		Continuous
19	Summer training assessment meeting	TL	FL		1/Y
20	Training plan and budget preparation	TL	FL		1/Y
21	Schedule and teaching load sheet	TL	FL	SP	1/S
22	Courses files collection and review	TL	FL	SP	1/S
23	Student academic advising status report	TL	FL	SP	1/S
24	Midterm and Final exams needs assessment	TL	FL	SP	1/S
25	Pre-results grades review meeting	TL	FL	SP	1/S
26	Grades report review meeting	TL	FL	SP	1/S
27	Teaching survey report	TL	FL	SP	1/S
28	Best teacher appointment	TL	SP		1/Y
29	Courses books status and needs assessment meeting	TL	SP		1/Y
30	Study plans review and update	TL	SP		Continuous
31	Summer semester schedule and teaching load sheet	TL	SP		1/S
32	Summer training plan and distribution list	TL	SP		1/Y

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Note: 1/S=Once per semester, 1/Y=Once per year, CS=Community service, RC=Research and consultancy, SA=Steering activity, TL=Teaching and Learning

Table 7: Quality assurance Plan (Key Performance Indicators - KPIs)

KPI	Benchmark
1.TEACHING AND LEARNING	
1.1. Percentage of course section with 30 or less students	80 %
1.2. Percentage of courses assessed and evaluated	100 %
1.3. Growth in the total number of students enrolled	-
1.4. Percentage of undergraduate students achieving CGPA < 2.7	60 %
1.5. Percent of undergraduate students on probation	10 %
1.6. Percentage of student graduated within expected period of graduation of concerned cohort	75 %
2.RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY	
2.1. Number of published articles in refereed journals per year	1 / Faculty Member
2.2. Number of refereed conference papers publications per year	1 / Faculty Member
2.3. Number of published books including book chapters over a period of 5 years	1 / Department
2.4. Number of International conferences organized over a period of 5 years	1 / Department
3.COMMUNITY SERVICE	
3.1. Number of training courses and workshops organized by the staff per year	1 / Faculty Member
3.2. Number of articles published, or talks given in the public media by staff per year	1 / Faculty Member
3.3. Number of staff participations in national, regional and international committees per year	2 / Department
3.4. Memberships in regional and international Professional Societies	1 / Faculty Member
4.DEPARTMENT STEERING ACTIVITIES	
4.1. Number of students' extracurricular activities done per year	2 / Year
4.2. Number of Department meetings per year	6 / Year
4.3. Number of college committees (regular) participated in by staff per year	2 / Faculty Member
4.4. Number of college committees (Ad-hoc) participated in by staff per year	1 / Faculty Member
4.5. Number of students' liaison committee meetings per year	1 / Year
4.6. Number of stakeholders' advisory board meetings per year	1 / Year

Adapted from: Tourism Department (2012)

Incorporating the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism into the Program

To inform the department affiliates about the principles of the global code of ethics for tourism (Ten Codes), the program invited a UNWTO representative to conduct a workshop about the principles. The department team members worked on designing an action plan for the implementation of the global code of ethics in the five major areas of concern. The main goal was to design a clear set of actions that could be implemented, controlled, and evaluated. One major challenge was the transformation of some of the codes into applicable actions in a tourism and hospitality higher education setting (see table 8).

Table 8: Implementation plan of the global code of ethics

The Employers	The Student	The Curriculum	The Faculty	The Management
Increasing department students' exposure to diverse communities and cultures through internal and external summer internship placements. [1]	Increasing department students' exposure to diverse communities and cultures through internal and external summer internship placements. [1]	The principles of the global code of ethics for tourism to be covered within some of the study plan courses. [1-10]	Conducting workshops, lectures and seminars on current and critical tourism issues. [1-10]	Prepare Self-evaluation report (Every Five Years). [1-10]
Hosting presentations by key tourism industry professionals illustrating their efforts for promoting the Omani local values and encouraging mutual understanding between tourists and local citizens. [1]	Conducting awareness campaigns: • Off-Campus. [1] [5] • On-campus campaigns for SQU students. [2]	A traditional lecture format, case studies, research papers, oral presentations, and discussions of best practices will be used to teach the principles. Students will also be tested on the principles through quizzes and examinations for positive reinforcement. [1-10]	Conducting awareness campaigns: • Off-Campus. [1] [5] • On-campus campaigns for SQU students. [2]	Prepare Annual Department Report. [1-10]
Conducting a graduates' employment survey. [2]	Tourism Festival to be annually organized by the tourism group [2]	Providing the library with books that deal with the global code of ethics and on current and critical tourism issues. [1-10]	Cooperating with the SQU Centre for Community Service and Continuing Education (CCSCE) in providing short courses to increase Community Awareness of Tourism. [1] [5]	Participating in tourism related committees on national and international levels. [1-10]
Providing short courses and consultancies to the governmental and the private sectors. [3] [4]	Continue to offer Sustainable Tourism course as college elective for the College of Arts and Social Sciences. [3]	Invite guest speakers from the governmental sector and the private sector to conduct lectures and help in teaching [1-10]	Conducting studies aimed at maximizing tourism benefits for local hosting communities. [5]	Advisory Committee Meeting to be held annually. [5]
Participating in activities organized by the tourism employers and other entities. [3] [4]	Field visits for Department Students to major tourism projects. [3]	Offer elective courses that fulfill prompt industry needs [1-10]	Carrying out studies about tourism at regional and international levels. [1-10]	

Note: Numbers between brackets indicate a code number

FOURTH: PREPARATION FOR IN-SITU AUDIT

Based on the external UNWTO.TedQual auditor review of the self-study a date was set for the in-situ audit. In the framework of the UNWTO.TedQual in-situ audit, the institution is requested to carry-out the following:

- Prepare the agenda for the in-situ audit. A list of individuals as well as public and private agencies/ institutions/companies, which permanently interact with the program is to be compiled. This list is to be used by the auditor to select a few of them to interview during the in-situ audit.
- Compile a set of documents and make it available for the auditors during the in-situ audit. This is to be used as evidence to support the information given by the program through the self-study.

Academic accreditation is an evidence-based process, which aims to assure the functionality of the educational system adopted and that the system sub-parts are harmoniously operating. A list of evidences required is provided by the UNWTO.TedQual before the audit. Basically, evidences and data pertaining to the following should be available and fully comprehended by all department affiliates:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Academic Advising | 2. History of the Unit |
| 3. Academic Coordination | 4. Scholar Activities |
| 5. Advisory Board | 6. Marketing Practices |
| 7. Budget | 8. Organization Charts |
| 9. Collaboration with Stakeholders | 10. Promotions - Incentives |
| 11. Communication Channels | 12. Quality Assurance Plan |
| 13. Community Service Activities | 14. Relationship with Alumni |
| 15. Courses Files | 16. Department Strategic Plan |
| 17. Department Booklet | 18. Students Enrolment Process |
| 19. Department SWOT Analysis | 20. Students Involvement in Quality Practices |
| 21. Faculty Involvement in Quality Practices | 22. Students Support and Performance Evaluation |
| 23. Faculty Qualifications | 24. Study Plans |
| 25. Students Activities and Extracurricular Activities | 26. Faculty Recruitment Process |
| 27. Department Statistics (Faculty- Students- Graduates- Employers) | 28. Infra and Super Structures (Labs- Classrooms) |
| 29. National, Regional, and International Collaborations | 30. Global Code of Ethics for Tourism Adoption and Application Mechanism |

Evidences were collected from the department archive, college administration, and various university deanships and support centres. The structure of the self-study template is clear and straightforward, there are standards and elements pertaining to each standard, each standard and its pertaining elements are numbered, therefore evidences were collected and filed following the same numbering scheme, which resulted in a smooth evidences collection and review process. The Tourism Undergraduate Program is a dual language program (Arabic - English), the majority of the courses are taught in English, and most of the department documents and correspondences are in English, whenever there was an Arabic written document or evidence, an English translation was provided. According to the UNWTO.TedQual system, to assure privacy and adherence to information security practices in dealing with official materials, evidences are to be presented only during the audit and not to leave the institution by any means.

FIFTH: THE IN-SITU AUDIT

A visit schedule was set for the in-situ audit. It was the responsibility of the HoD and the department coordinator to make sure that the schedule is on the right track. Phone calls were made, emails were sent to participants, confirmation emails were sought, email reminders and SMSs were sent three days before the meetings (interviews) and on the meetings day. The in-situ audit panel met with:

- University Administration
- University Quality Assurance Office
- College Administration
- Department Members (Excluding HoD)
- Head of Department (HoD)
- Department Quality Assurance Committee (Several meetings)
- Representatives of the Industry (Public and Private Sectors)
- Department Alumni
- Department Students

In addition to a campus orientation, which comprised visits to the Sports Facilities, Food Courts, Deanships and Support Centers, Main Library, Cultural Center, Lecture Rooms and Labs, and the Tourism Department.

During the several meetings with the department team, the self-study was fully discussed, and corresponding evidences were thoroughly checked. The audit panel head adopted a workshop style, where ideas, opinions and recommendations were exchanged. The audit lasted for three full days.

On the last day of the visit, the head of the audit panel gave feedback to the department team allowing them the opportunity for any closing explanations or comments.

SIXTH: ANALYSIS AND COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

In May 2013, a significant step was made on the Department's long trajectory of educational excellence and leadership. This step was the Department's reception of the UNWTO.TedQual certification for its undergraduate program as the first Tourism Department in the Middle East to receive this recognition. In October 1st, 2015 the accreditation was renewed for three more years till September 30th, 2018.

The department accreditation journey lasted for 20 months, started on September 2011 and successfully accomplished its aim on May 2013 (See Table 9).

Table 9: Department Accreditation Process Timeline

Phase	Choosing an Agency	Request for information	Application form sent/Process initiation	Self-Study Sent	Review of Self-Study and approval of in-situ audit	Compilation of documents required for the audit	The in-situ audit	Analysis and communication of results
Dates	September 2011	March 2012	April 2012	September 2012	November 2012	Done with Self-Study	7-9 January 2013	13 May 2013
Time Span	6 Months		5 Months		6 Months			
	20 Months							

Receiving the UNWTO.TedQual certification allows the Tourism Department a package of privileges including but not limited to:

- Inclusion of the Department in the UNWTO.TedQual exchange programs for students and faculty, internship and scholarship opportunities, joint research projects, and scientific publications.
- International promotion of the Department and its programs through the UNWTO's various communication tools and mechanisms.
- Membership of the UNWTO.TedQual Network- a platform where institutions share knowledge, good practices and technical support.
- Use of the UNWTO.TedQual logo on official stationery and promotional materials.
- Participation in the UNWTO.TedQual worldwide annual events.
- Reception of support for organizing and hosting scientific events such as conferences and workshops.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the mentioned benefits provided by the UNWTO.TedQual program upon attaining accreditation, the successful accreditation journey greatly reflected on the department at various levels. The following are some of the major benefits achieved for the department:

1. Possessing a thorough SWOT analysis which would guide the continuous quality improvement and assurance process.
2. Compiling a strong organized archive of the Department documents and correspondences.
3. Improving the Department educational system and quality assurance practices.
4. Attaining an international recognition.
5. Enhancing teamwork and ownership of the unit.
6. Accomplishing the Department vision.
7. The department to seek for another international accreditation³.
8. Improving the department graduates' employability opportunities, and international mobility of students and faculty.
9. Positioning the department as a model for all the university academic units and paving the path for other departments to seek for international accreditation.
10. Gaining a world-class experience in the accreditation process, which was reflected on the members' reputation leading to being invited to participate in quality and accreditation practices nationally, regionally, and internationally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Benefiting from the accreditation experience, the following points could be stated as general recommendations for future accreditations endeavors:

1. Carefully select an accrediting agency.
2. Select a highly motivated, hard-working team and appoint a dedicated team head.
3. Allow time for the team to pass through the normal team life cycle phases (Form- Storm- Norm- Perform).
4. Read and study the selected agency accreditation system manual.
5. Spread the culture and language of quality and accreditation within the department.
6. Involve all department affiliates in the process (Faculty- Staff- Students).
7. Make sure you have a quality assurance plan and implement it.
8. Set up a schedule with clear phases to accomplish accreditation tasks.
9. Write your story (self-study) carefully, admitting problems and suggesting solutions.
10. Make sure that proper communication channels with all those involved are adopted.
11. A strong archive is required to act as a guide to continuous quality improvement.
12. Regularly meet and report progress to all involved (Department members- superiors- stakeholders).
13. Evidences should be clear, concise, and valid.
14. Carefully prepare the audit schedule.
15. Appoint a person to arrange and organize audit panel meetings and to regularly remind meetings participants of dates, times, and venues.
16. Prepare a professional workspace for the audit panel.
17. During the audit don't be defensive just be transparent. Transparency is a MUST.
18. There is always a room for improvement, don't panic if non-conformities appear.
19. Once you start, do not stop. It will seem hard (IT IS NOT...).
20. Accreditation is the final product of a long and endless journey of quality assurance practices; Accreditation is not the utmost target, Quality is.

³ In 2016, the Department undergraduate program was accredited by AQAS (the Agency for Quality Assurance through the Accreditation of Academic Programs) until 2021.

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خريطة طريق لشهادة UNWTO.TedQual: منهج عملي

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المخلص

في عام 2013م، اجتاز قسم السياحة بجامعة السلطان قابوس مرحلة مهمة من خلال كونه أول قسم للسياحة في الشرق الأوسط يحصل على الاعتماد الأكاديمي لبرنامج الدراسات لمرحلة البكالوريوس من منظمة السياحة العالمية التابعة للأمم المتحدة "تيدكوال UNWTO.TedQual"، والتي تم تجديدها بعد ذلك في 2015 حتى سبتمبر 2018، ولمدة ثلاث سنوات أخرى من يناير 2019 حتى يناير 2022. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم تجربة قسم السياحة الناجحة كنموذج تستفيد منه مؤسسات التعليم السياحي المتوجهة للاعتماد الأكاديمي البرامجي.

معلومات المقالة

الكلمات المفتاحية

UNWTO.TedQual؛ الاعتماد الأكاديمي؛ قسم السياحة؛ السياحة؛ السلطان قابوس.

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