REPORT OF THE FIRST CYCLE QUALITY AUDIT OF OPEN UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS

March 2018
Tertiary Education Commission is a statutory body under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research. The Commission has as objects to allocate government funds, promote, plan, develop and coordinate tertiary education in Tertiary Education institutions under its purview in order to achieve an accountable and responsive tertiary system of international standards. Since 2005 the objects of the Commission has been extended to include the responsibility to promote and maintain high quality standards in post-secondary education through appropriate quality assurance and accreditation processes.
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Preface

Background of TEC

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) by virtue of its Act has the responsibility to ensure, promote and monitor quality in tertiary institutions in Mauritius. It has as objects to promote, plan, develop and coordinate post-secondary education in Mauritius and to implement an overarching regulatory framework to achieve high international quality.

Conduct of Quality Audits

Publicly-funded tertiary institutions are required to undergo institutional academic quality audits. These audits adopt the audit process stipulated in the Quality Audit Handbook for Tertiary Education Institutions (2nd Edition) published by TEC. The purpose of quality audit is to assess the strength of the quality culture and the actions undertaken by the institution to ensure continuous improvement. Audits are also concerned with the existence and effectiveness of the quality processes in place at the institution to achieve its set objectives and produce the desired outcomes.

Quality audits are undertaken by panels appointed by the TEC. The auditors are appointed on the basis of their expertise and experience, and they must hold or have held senior positions within their professions. The Terms of Reference for the auditors are as follows:

a) To make a commitment to act as a quality auditor for the institution identified as per the schedule worked out and participate in the pre-audit workshop and the audit.

b) To act within the scope identified in the Quality Audit Handbook.

c) To be objective at all times, ensuring that they are non-judgemental in their approach; that they are aware of possible personal bias.

d) To observe confidentiality.

e) To give full support to the Chairperson.
f) To work as a team, ensuring that members are working in harmony with a view to accomplishing a fact finding mission grounded on the Self-Evaluation Report.

g) To identify good practice as well as unhealthy practice and make necessary recommendations.

h) To ensure that there is agreement among the members on the conclusions of the panel.

i) To fully co-operate in getting the audit report ready within two months of the audit by writing the specific observations made and checking with the Tertiary Education Commission’s Secretariat to see that the report is a true reflection of the panel’s findings.

Executive Summary

This report provides the findings of the Audit Panel appointed by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) for the First Cycle Quality Audit of the Open University of Mauritius (OU or the University) held in March 2018. The Audit Panel’s results have been established within the scope elaborated in the Quality Audit Handbook published by TEC in 2010. The report consolidates the analysis of the self-evaluation report of OU, evidence gathered during the audit through interview sessions and additional documentary evidence supplied by the University. In addition to analysis and comments presented in the report, the Panel has formulated commendations of positive practices and recommendations for appropriate improvement.

OU is the only public Open and Distance Learning (ODL) University in Mauritius and it focuses on providing learners with a unique learning experience which is convenient to their own time and place. OU was established on 12 July 2012 under the Open University of Mauritius Act 2010. By the end of 2013, OU had more than 2000 learners in Mauritius and 60 in Rodrigues. It currently has a student population of 4813. The permanent staff population is 151 including 25 staff involved in academic processes. There are also 49 temporary administrative staff employed on full-time contract basis and the University also avails of the service of 345 part-time resource persons for programme delivery and other academic activities. OU delivers a variety of courses and programmes namely, short courses, Employability Skills courses, Foundation level programmes, Certificate/ Diploma level programmes, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, doctoral programmes as well as customized courses for the private and public sector.

In its short years of existence, the University has been successful in securing partnerships with other institutions such as Imperial College, London, Stockholm University, University of South Africa, Indira Gandhi National Open University etc. OU is also a member in the Association of Commonwealth Universities, International Council for Open and Distance Education, African Council for Distance Education, International Association of Universities amongst others. OU is commended for the number of external/ industry links made and which have helped the University grow in such a short time.
Through its flexible approach, OU has created new opportunities for students who otherwise may not have been able to pursue higher education studies. OU is commended on its outreach and support to students with very specific circumstances such as individuals who were offered an opportunity to start their studies while being incarcerated. Students have expressed their satisfaction with the learning environment, support received from staff, the flexibility of the programmes and the technology used in teaching and learning. The caring approach, availability and quick response to queries, range of learning and assessment approaches were praised by students.

Notwithstanding, the various issues observed by the Panel, the latter noted the involvement of OU’s staff in the development of the vision/strategic plan. The Executive Management also shares the same vision of where they want to take OU. Furthermore, the institutional mission and vision statements are displayed throughout the campus.

Throughout the audit, the Panel stimulated critical thinking and reflection on what it will take to realise OU’s vision “to be among the best open universities in the world”. A definition of what ‘the best’ means is necessary. It is recommended that OU devise clear goals and targets which will be aligned with the Strategic Plan. Specific indicators will enable the University to track its progress towards realising its vision and mission and the goals set out in the Strategic Plan.

In its pursuit to be the best, OU has recently set up a Research Unit. However, research policies, guidelines and frameworks need to be put in place before leaping into research so as to avoid risks, or alternative arrangements to oversee the ethical clearance process should be made. The Panel expressed serious concerns about the lack of oversight over the ethics review process for research done by Master’s and Doctoral students. It is recommended that the University urgently establish a qualified committee to oversee ethical review applications.

While the opportunities provided to young/new staff to start their doctoral studies are highly commendable, it is necessary for academic staff to balance teaching and research responsibilities in a fair manner. Disciplinary research should be equally valued and supported as teaching and learning. Appropriate resources are required for staff enrolled on a PhD and an adjustment of these staff workload and performance agreements and appraisals accordingly. Along the same line, the
Panel recommends a policy on workload of academic staff which clearly defines the time to consecrate to programme development, learner support, teaching and learning and research.

Considering the envisioned expansion of the University, a number of challenges and opportunities can be foreseen. To remain sustainable while growing, the OU Board should ensure financial sustainability amid the impending budgetary constraints. Moreover, the Panel recommends that the OU allocates additional resources for the formalisation of a dedicated student support strategy. With the intended growth in student numbers the University should also consider having dedicated programme managers whose task would be to specifically oversee programs. A clear cut delineation of academic and support staff roles regarding student enquiries is also necessary so as to ensure that neither academic nor support staff are stretched or act outside their mandate and/ or expertise.

While the transition from the Mauritius College of the Air to OU appears to be accomplished, the Panel recommends that the scheme of service of all staff which have remain unchanged be amended and additionally, to ensure that roles, responsibilities and career prospects be clearly defined.

With regard to infrastructure the Panel observed many aspects which are still manual e.g. the exams unit, library records etc. It is recommended that the IT infrastructure support fast growing digital systems. The physical campuses need to be maintained and updated to meet the challenges. The University should reconsider its approach to the Learning Management System for teaching and learning and consider its pedagogical model for online teaching.

Overall the Panel noted a commitment and awareness of the growing importance of quality assurance. However, there are many opportunities to better embed quality and use data to inform progress and future targets. The Panel recommends that OU formalise its institutional approach to quality assurance in a way that is apt to its context and vision and, at the same time, clear with regard to criteria, responsibilities, processes, capacity and line of reporting.

The Panel realises that OU is still a very young University which creates ongoing challenges but also many opportunities to develop. OU should seize this chance to establish the University it aspires to be.
1. Introduction

1.1 Audit Process

In November 2017, TEC appointed an Audit Panel to undertake the first cycle quality audit of OU.

On 15 December 2017, OU submitted its self-evaluation report (SER) which was then circulated to all panel members for an initial analysis. The Audit panel appreciated the narrative content in the SER. For future audit cycles, the institution can consider presenting the SER in a way that highlights the quality criteria and present the evidence per criterion. The Audit panel ensured that the specific context of the ODL character of OU was considered in applying the TEC criteria.

A pre-audit visit was held on 22 February 2018 by the TEC Auditor and the Audit Secretary to discuss the detailed arrangements of the audit. Prior to the start of the audit, the Audit Secretary liaised with OU regarding the requested documents, interview sessions, facilities and resources to prepare for the audit.

The Panel met for the first time on 27 March 2018 to finalise its plans for the conduct of the audit and to prepare the lines of enquiry for the interview sessions. The audit took place from 27 to 30 March 2018. From the time the Audit Panel started its work, during first face-to-face meetings, during the interviews and finalising the audit report, the following principles guided the Audit Panel:

- Without compromising on the official mandate and purpose of the institutional audit to evaluate and quality assure, the Panel aimed to provide safe and caring spaces for members of the Panel as well as for the staff of the OU to share experiences, progress and challenges.
- While the quality criteria of the TEC guided the process and interviews, the Audit Panel also aimed to hold the OU to account using their own vision, mission, strategic and operational plans. Throughout the process the Audit Panel aimed to stimulate critical thinking and institutional reflection on what it will take to be “among the best open universities in the world”.

Within the constraints of the process and time limitations needed to work through the evidence provided, the Audit Panel aimed to be transparent in what it did not understand and/or had enough evidence to make an informed and fair decision. Where possible, the Audit Panel requested more information and had additional interviews to clarify its own understanding.

The Panel assumed a developmental and utilitarian evaluative approach centred on situational sensitivity, responsiveness and adaptation of the questions and interviews. Without ignoring trends in international higher education, and specifically open distance learning, the Panel appreciated the importance of the specific geo-political, cultural, economic, legal and technological context of the OU. Utilisation-focused evaluation arises from the premise that the hallmark of a useful evaluation is its ability to provide context-appropriate pointers for actual use. No evaluation and no quality assurance (QA) audit is value-free. It was therefore important to do this audit in service of the OU’s vision to “be among the best open universities in the world.” The likelihood of the findings of this audit depends, to a large extent, whether the intended users of the audit has a sense of ownership of the evaluation process and findings. With this aim the Audit Panel tried to engage with the primary intended users of this report’s findings. It was crucial throughout the process that the Panel asked the questions the intended users wanted the answers for.

In all, the Panel interviewed approximately 125 persons in the course of the audit, including, the Director General, members of the OU Board and other committees, academic staff, non-academic staff, students and alumni. The audit was held in the main campus of OU at Reduit. During the audit, a campus tour was organised both at the Reduit campus and the Curepipe campus.

In addition to the interviews, the Audit Panel had access to the SER as well as additional documentation requested from the institution. While the OU staff was helpful in providing the additional information, the Audit Panel was often faced with not necessarily having access to requested information for a prolonged period of time, or within the time allowed for the on-site visit, nor had enough time to engage with all the documents provided. Where possible the Panel requested additional interviews from identified staff to either clarify provided information, or to
verbally address questions raised by the Audit Panel and the Audit Panel proceeded with the utmost care not to make unwarranted findings or claims.

The Panel acknowledges that some of the recommendations were explicitly acknowledged in the SER. In the light of the fact that the Panel only had access to a draft copy of the Operational Plan, the Panel was not able to verify if the gaps identified in the SER were, in fact, taken into account in the Operational Plan.

This report furthermore relates to the situation at OU at the time of the audit exercise and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently.

It is expected that OU will use the findings of the Audit Panel to strengthen its QA system and, thereby, facilitate the improvement of its core activities. The decisions about the manner in which this is to be done are the prerogative of OU. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the University’s activities within the scope of the audit, the report does not identify every aspect of the QA system, and their effectiveness or shortcomings. The OU will have to submit an implementation plan with timelines to the TEC and the implementation of the recommendations will be closely monitored.

The Audit Panel would like to thank Dr K Sukon, Director General, OU and his team for their cooperation during the audit process.

1.2 Introduction on Open University of Mauritius

OU was established on 12 July 2012 under the Open University of Mauritius Act 2010. The Mauritius College of the Air (MCA) which was established in 1971, has integrated the OU in July 2012. The focus of OU is to provide and enhance access to flexible and quality higher education at an affordable cost through ODL to learners from all social classes. It is the only public ODL university in Mauritius. The ODL and blended delivery allow a learning experience convenient to the learner’s own time and place.
By the end of 2013, OU had more than 2000 learners in Mauritius and 60 in Rodrigues. As at 31 October 2017, OU has a learner population of 4813. It has developed 68 programmes ranging from short courses, Employability Skills courses, Foundation level programmes, Certificate/ Diploma level programmes, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, doctoral programmes as well as customized courses for the private and public sectors.

The staff population of OU as at October 2017 was 151 permanent staff including 25 staff involved in academic processes. There are also 49 temporary administrative staff on full-time contract and the University avails of the service of 345 part-time resource persons for programme delivery, curriculum development and other academic activities.

Since the beginning of its operations, OU has organised an international conference which welcomed over one hundred delegates from the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA). Commonwealth of Learning Focal Points meeting and a workshop by Emerald Publishing Group have also been organised. In 2014, 38 local medical practitioners participated in the first Renal Medicine Symposium through web-streaming technologies organised by OU.

OU is now developing course materials for Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) and Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL).

In its short life span, OU has managed to get membership with the Association of Commonwealth Universities, International Council for Open and Distance Education, African Council for Distance Education, International Association of Universities amongst others. It also partners with foreign universities such as the Imperial College, London, Stockholm University, University of South Africa, Indira Gandhi National Open University etc.

As per the OU Act, the organisational structure comprises the following: Academic Affairs Division; Multimedia and ICT Services Division; Quality Assurance and Capacity Building Division; Open School Division; Administration Division; Finance Division; Confucius Institute and Language Institute. Out of the eight Divisions/ Institutes, there are four which are currently fully operational namely, Academic Affairs Division, Open School Division, Administration Division and Finance Division.
2. Commendations and Recommendations

2.1 Commendations

1. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on having involved its staff in the development of the vision stratégic plan. The majority of staff are aware of the mission and vision of OU. The institutional mission and vision statements are furthermore displayed throughout the campus.

2. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the ISO certification as it creates a quality conscious culture and sets a strong mechanism for continuous improvement.

3. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius for the fact that representatives of the Board, staff and students, in general, were appreciative of the way the Open University of Mauritius is governed. From the interviews it was clear that staff and students value the strong leadership and vision provided by the Director General and the Board.

4. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on clearly stating the aims and objectives of programmes and modules.

5. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius for the high calibre of resource persons and the invaluable role they play in the design and quality of learning experiences.

6. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on having in place a programme validation process.

7. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the allocation of scholarships for PhD to new recruits.

8. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the learning programmes which are effectively organised and managed.
9. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on making available a selection of past exams papers to students to assist in their preparation for examinations.

10. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on its teaching and learning strategies which are based on explicit learning outcomes and which are consistent with programme/course aims. Teaching methods are varied. Many staff make effective use of available facilities, equipment, materials and aids.

11. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on its outreach and support to some incarcerated individuals who were offered an opportunity to study.

12. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the support provided during the learning process of students. The caring approach, availability and quick response to queries, range of learning and assessment approaches were lauded by students. Student support is furthermore integrated in all the functions of the institution.

13. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the range of assessment methods used by academic staff to assess and monitor learning including coursework, projects, research, industry placements and examinations. The Panel also heard from students and staff about informal and regular feedback to students about progress and ongoing questions about coursework.

14. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the positive and successful students’ learning experiences.

15. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the clear process of exam preparation, printing, storage and moderation of exam scripts.

16. The panel commends that in general, staff across divisions and levels had a sense of the importance of the desired outputs and outcomes and the fact that they will be held accountable for the quality of their work. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the general commitment to excellence in teaching and learning, apparent in staff and student attitudes in all aspects of provision.
17. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the various MOU/As it has managed to secure over its short existence.

18. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the fact that it is valued by a range of stakeholders such as government, alumni, and employers.
2.2 Recommendations

1. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius include specific indicators in its Strategic Plan to enable it to track its progress towards becoming “one of the best open universities in the world.” The Operational Plan should then address each of the outcomes and indicators in the Strategic Plan providing detail on short-term goals and milestones that can provide an indication of how far the University is progressing towards realising its vision and mission and the goals set out in the Strategic Plan. The goals and objectives should be realistic and achievable.

2. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius decide on an agreed-upon timetable when the Strategic Plan can be revisited and if necessary adapted. This will prevent ad hoc changes that can impact negatively on operational efficiencies and staff morale.

3. The Panel recommends that the operational goals and objectives of the support units should clearly link to the institutional goals and objectives and contribute to identified milestones.

4. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a clear understanding and plan how the growth in student numbers and the arising complexities and interdependencies will be addressed between the institutional functions of, for example, administration, human resources, finance, admission, ICT, teaching, and support.

5. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius seriously consider and plan for the impact of increasing number of specifically part-time staff on the quality and academic offerings with the mission and vision and growth of the University.

6. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius formalise its institutional approach to quality assurance in a way that is appropriate to its context and vision, but
which is clear with regard to criteria, responsibilities, processes, capacity and line of reporting/oversight.

7. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a formal, cyclical process of benchmarking itself against international distance education institutions, and in particular, open distance learning institutions.

8. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius move towards an evidence-based or evidence-informed approach to quality assurance.

9. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius formalise institutional research by developing policies, procedures and capacity practices to ensure transparent, ethical and responsible collection, analysis, and governance of current and future data.

10. The Panel recommends that the OU Board develop a formal mechanism with well-defined criteria to ensure oversight of the performance of the Director General in providing leadership and ensuring operational efficiency and quality.

11. The Panel recommends that the OU Board ensure financial sustainability amid the envisioned expansion and looming budgetary constraints.

12. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius critically engage with its own commitment to being an open distance learning institution within the confines of its geopolitical legislative and regulatory environment.

13. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius broaden the processes and resources allocated to the admission process to include subject readiness assessment, workload assessment, readiness for ODL, career counselling as well as a reference system for students who need assistance with personal matters.
14. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius align its admission policy in terms of the number of students to a clear *pedagogical* strategy that defines the nature and intensity of interactivity between teaching staff, support staff, students and content, the cost implications as well as the impact on resources, capacity, and staff development.

15. The Panel strongly recommends that the Open University of Mauritius institute a student representative Council/Association.

16. Considering the intended growth in student numbers and academic offerings, the Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius allocate additional resources for the formalisation of a dedicated student support strategy - whether as a separate student support department or as embedded in the different divisions and functions of the institution.

17. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius establish, as part of a broader student support policy and strategy, a well-organised, appropriately capacitated and governed student welfare function and structure.

18. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius find ways to celebrate its alumni (e.g. a wall of fame), utilise the alumni as peer support for students, groom the alumni for positions at the University, involve the alumni in program/module evaluation and/or development and keep in touch with the alumni with regular communication and where appropriate, get-togethers.

19. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius schedule regular meetings with both staff unions and include and consult both unions in the matters of governance of the University.

20. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius take the necessary steps to amend the unchanged scheme of service of all the staff who are in a similar situation and to ensure that roles, responsibilities and career prospects be clearly defined.
21. The Panel recommends that the Director General and the OU Board, in consultation with staff, unions and the Ministry of Education (1) find permanent solutions for the current and short-term impact these vacancies have on a number of staff and divisions; and (2) consider the need for other new or expanded positions/functions in terms of the envisioned growth and start the necessary processes as soon as possible.

22. The Panel strongly recommends that the Open University of Mauritius continuously evaluate the scope of, and workload of programme managers and senior lecturers, to support and incentivise these staff so that they also flourish in their roles as teachers and researchers, according to their schemes of service.

23. The Panel recommends that research, publications and public scholarship be used as part of the criteria for promotion of full-time academic staff.

24. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius, after careful consideration of the impact of its envisioned growth in student numbers and offerings, consider having dedicated programme managers with the unique task to oversee the programs and teaching staff allocated to these programs in their care. The emphasis will be on operational and administrative duties without excluding a limited teaching role.

25. The Panel strongly recommends that the Open University of Mauritius reconsider the way and content of performance contracts of lecturers and senior lecturers are concluded at the start of the academic year.

26. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a comprehensive and integrated Human Resource Development (HRD) strategy and policy.
27. The Panel recommends that the necessary policy/framework, processes and institutional capacity be developed to ensure that the professional development needs of OU staff (academic and non-academic, full-time and part-time) are addressed.

28. The Panel recommends that as the Open University of Mauritius evolves and grows, that the appropriate steps be taken to ensure that staff members’ positions/schemes of service be aligned to the needs of the institution.

29. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius reconsider the function and scope of performance appraisal, transparency and fairness in the initial performance agreements and evaluations, the function of the annual increment as incentive for above average performance and find appropriate ways to provide incentives for staff or to reward staff who constantly performs above average.

30. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius establish a dedicated and appropriately resourced instructional design/learning design unit to ensure that aims and objectives be clearly articulated throughout the courses and that they be aligned with assessment and teaching and learning activities.

31. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius revise its design, production and delivery policies and processes to support online course and learning development.

32. The Panel recommends the establishment of a team approach comprising of appropriate expertise (e.g. instructional designers, subject experts, resource persons, industry, editors) with clear guidelines and processes for course content development.

33. The Panel recommends a clear-cut policy, rules, policies and processes on the identification of future programmes to be developed and for the phasing out of programmes.

34. The Panel strongly recommends that the Open University of Mauritius clearly map processes for the expedited approval, validation, design and delivery of modules and programmes in response to societal needs or identified gaps in the market, when needed.
35. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius institute the necessary rules and processes that will steer a cyclical, systematic review of all programmes and modules. The reviews should be based on criteria developed by the University. The Open University of Mauritius should furthermore ensure that the findings of these reviews be implemented in appropriate ways.

36. Considering the envisioned growth, the Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius revisit its needs in terms of technology and space.

37. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius reconsider its approach to the use of the Learning Management System for teaching and learning and consider its pedagogical model for online teaching.

38. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius allocate appropriate resources (full-time, part-time staff) to staff who are studying towards their PhDs and adjust these staff’s workload and performance agreements and appraisals accordingly.

39. The Panel recommends that there be a clear cut delineation of academic and support staff roles regarding student enquiries to ensure that neither academic nor support staff are overwhelmed or act outside of their mandate and/or expertise.

40. The Panel recommends developing a policy on the workload of academic staff which clearly defines the amount of time they need to dedicate to programme development, learner support, teaching and learning and research.

41. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius provide guidelines, capacity, and dedicated institutional support to accessing copyrighted materials.

42. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop clear guidelines to be used when additional materials, such as textbooks, are prescribed for courses.
43. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop an institutional policy, guidelines and processes to institutionalise the use and development of OER.

44. The Panel recommends that processes and policies (where appropriate) be developed to ensure a systematic and cyclical review of programmes that include liaison between the institution and industry, public agencies, professional bodies and other potential end-users.

45. The Panel recommends implementing regular opportunities for staff development specifically on context-appropriate and evidence-informed good practices in teaching and learning (e.g. innovative ideas, maximising use of the LMS for pedagogical benefit and a clear understanding of constructive alignment).

46. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure the necessary processes, capacity and oversight so that students receive appropriate, detailed and personalised feedback on all formative assessment. Considering that some students may fail the final examinations, the Panel strongly recommends that in the case where students have failed the final examination, appropriate, detailed and personalised feedback be provided to students.

47. The Panel recommends that regular feedback from students to teaching staff be embedded as part of the teaching and learning process. At present, there is currently an ad hoc approach for staff to receive feedback from students.

48. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius explore a variety of solutions to enrich and support the learning journey of students with particular attention to the needs of part-time students who cannot, necessarily attend face-to-face tutorial support opportunities.

49. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius institutionalise specialised student support services such as career counselling, general and psychological support and counselling.

50. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius formalise the moderation policy and processes with respect to assignments and/or continuous assessment. The
institution should ensure that assignments are at times moderated by peers who are recognised experts in the field of study. The OU should ensure that its internal moderation provide the assurance that the assessment criteria are applied appropriately for the different assessment modes.

51. At present, there is a lack of institutional capacity and goal to track students. The Panel recommends that student progress be carefully monitored, documented and tracked across all courses to provide valuable information to staff and course coordinators for future planning of teaching and learning decisions.

52. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a Student Charter or Tuition Policy wherein a rationale is provided for the collection and tracking of students as well as clear guidelines and procedures to ensure student involvement and oversight of how their data are collected, analysed and used.

53. The Panel recognizes that the Open University of Mauritius has two manuals on regulations available on the website, however, it is recommended that the Open University of Mauritius formulate an assessment and evaluation policy that provides an overview of the values and purpose of informing formative and summative assessment and that the scope and weighting of assessment schemes are clear and known to all concerned including procedures for resubmissions, late penalties and appeal procedures.

54. The Panel recommends that the Learning Management System is utilised more effectively for its pedagogical benefits such as various forms of assessments, as well as the possibility of automated feedback.

55. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius provide secure servers to departments such as examinations due to the sensitivity of the information. The Panel further recommends that backups not be stored in the same location as the OU but preferably in another institution on a secure server or in a cloud-based solution.
56. Specific quality indicators should be outlined under the key responsibility areas where the performance of the Open University of Mauritius is measured and periodically reviewed. The Panel recommends a good data collection method to generate evidence to inform improvement and accountability.

57. The Panel recommends a thorough re-assessment of the annual performance contracting of staffing in the light of the fact that current practice that not all key performance areas as per scheme of service are addressed in the annual performance contract, that there are not clear deliverables and milestones and quality criteria according to which the outcomes will be evaluated.

58. The Panel recommends that Open University of Mauritius, as a matter of urgency, ensure that the necessary rules, regulations and framework be put in place to facilitate the institutionalisation of external examiners.

59. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure that all external examiners be (1) from reputable institutions and have the necessary expertise and experience; and (2) be independent of the institution and be appointed for a specified period not exceeding three years.

60. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure that the terms of reference of external examiners be explicit and that they include the moderation of question papers and model answers, moderation of scripts and provide feedback on performance of students.

61. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure that feedback by external examiners on the curriculum is included in the next semester and if any drastic changes are required, that the module be earmarked for an expedited review.

62. The Panel expresses its serious concerns about the clear lack of oversight of the institution over the ethics review process for research done by Master’s and Doctoral students. The Panel expresses its serious concerns about the clear lack of oversight of the OU regarding a lack of an ethics review process for research done by Master’s and Doctoral students. The Panel recommends to the Open University of Mauritius as a matter of urgency the
establishment of an adequately qualified committee to oversee ethical review applications. A policy processes, structures and procedures should be developed as a matter of utmost urgency.

63. While the Panel also noted the passion and interest of Open University of Mauritius academic staff to do research, to participate in conferences and publish articles, the Panel recommends that Open University of Mauritius places a moratorium on all research where organisations, humans and/or animals are involved until the policy, processes and procedures to guide and oversee the ethical implications of research are in place (as per recommendation 62).

64. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure institutional capacity and oversight over all existing and new memoranda of agreement and understanding.

65. The Panel recommends the development and institutionalisation of proper guidelines and a code of conduct on the interaction between the Open University of Mauritius and industry to avoid any potential or real conflicts of interest. These guidelines and/or code of conduct should emphasise the proper delineation of the respective roles and responsibilities.

66. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a policy or guiding framework/policy to clarify the role that industry/professional bodies/NGOs could play in the development of the University. The framework/policy should formalise the need for regular meetings.

67. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a clear strategy and policy framework and processes to clarify its role in the surrounding communities and in the broader context of Mauritius.
68. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius put strategies in place on embedding community service and outreach in the curricula, pedagogies and assessment strategies of OU.

69. The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensures clear ethical guidelines and if needed, ethical clearance, when staff and/or students do community engagement and outreach.
3. Institutional Mission, Aims and Objectives

The OU has clear and explicit Vision and Mission statements. The Vision statement provides strategic focus to be counted as “one of the best open universities in the world”. The Mission statement states explicitly that OU will achieve its vision by using "technology and flexible mode of teaching to serve society, transform lives and high quality education, lifelong learning, and training accessible to everyone while promoting excellence." This is displayed everywhere from their website, banners around the campuses and on all the promotional materials.

Many staff were asked during the interview sessions about their involvement in the development of the institutional mission, aims and objectives and they commented that they met as a team to brainstorm ideas for the mission and goal of their respective section. They confirmed their involvement and feel that they were very much part of the plan in making it happen each day. The Panel recognises that the plan is visionary and aspirational, however, it is the attention to details in a strategic plan that ensure the vision can be realised.

The Audit Panel also had the mandate to evaluate whether the aims and objectives are keeping with the mission, and that these are realistic and achievable. The purpose of a strategic plan is to set overall aims for an organization and a detailed plan to achieve them. The reason for strategic planning is to agree on a way to improve the long-term performance of the organization. The Audit Panel assumed that a strategic plan refers to the aims and detailed plan on corporate or institutional level while an operational plan provide details on a functional level. As such a strategic plan normally maps an organisation’s long-term vision while an operational plan, usually, maps specific short-term deliverables and milestones. While the current Strategic Plan does provide long-term goals to achieve its vision, the Strategic Plan does not provide clear indicators and milestones to define evaluating any progress towards the stated goals. The Audit Panel had access to a draft of an Operational Plan that is in the process of being finalised. The draft operational plan that was provided covered 9 out of the 16 goals as stated in the Strategic Plan, and it is unsure what the rationale was for the inclusion/exclusion of indicators. In the light of the fact that the Operational Plan provided to the Audit Panel as a work-in-progress, the Panel could therefore not determine to what extent the aims and objectives are keeping with the mission, and how realistic and achievable they are.
During the interviews it was clear that OU wants to remain agile in its response to institutional, national and international developments and needs. Many interviewees mentioned that the Strategic Plan can be changed if a need arises. While the Audit Panel commends the institution’s commitment to remain agile, the Audit Panel would also like to flag the impact of too frequent changes to the Strategic Plan.

While the Panel commends OU on the level of support and collaboration among the staff, and support to students; institutional growth will add additional stress and risks on resources, systems and processes. Outsourcing key functions (short and longer term) to part-time staff increases the responsibility of OU to ensure the quality of provision of these services/functions, but also the effective administration thereof. There is a danger that as more part-time staff are appointed, the additional administration will be added to the workload of staff and specifically programme managers who may already be stretched to capacity.

The Audit Panel took note of the envisioned growth in student numbers of OU. While the growth in student numbers was clearly defined and quantified, there was not a corresponding commitment and quantification of how the admission, teaching and support functions will grow. The Panel would like to point to the fact that a ‘mere’ quantification of additional staff (permanent and contract) will not suffice. As OU grows, the complexities in the inter- and intradepartmental/divisional will also increase, necessitating very clear limitations of roles and responsibilities as well as a robust communication and management strategy.

**Commendation 1**
The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on having involved its staff in the development of the vision/strategic plan. The majority of staff are aware of the mission and vision of OU. The institutional mission and vision statements are furthermore displayed throughout the campus.

**Recommendation 1**
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius include specific indicators in its Strategic Plan to enable it to track its progress towards becoming “one of the best open
universities in the world.” The Operational Plan should then address each of the outcomes and indicators in the Strategic Plan providing detail on short-term goals and milestones that can provide an indication of how far the University is progressing towards realising its vision and mission and the goals set out in the Strategic Plan. The goals and objectives should be realistic and achievable.

Recommendation 2
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius decide on an agreed-upon timetable when the Strategic Plan can be revisited and if necessary adapted. This will prevent ad hoc changes that can impact negatively on operational efficiencies and staff morale.

Recommendation 3
The Panel recommends that the operational goals and objectives of the support units should clearly link to the institutional goals and objectives and contribute to identified milestones.

Recommendation 4
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a clear understanding and plan how the growth in student numbers and the arising complexities and interdependencies will be addressed between the institutional functions of, for example, administration, human resources, finance, admission, ICT, teaching, and support.

Recommendation 5
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius seriously consider and plan for the impact of increasing number of specifically part-time staff on the quality and academic offerings with the mission and vision and growth of the University.
4. Institutional Approach to Quality Assurance

The Panel recognises that the OU is still in its early stages of development and therefore many policies, procedures and details are still in their early phases. However, if the OU is to meet its vision and mission it is crucial that the OU defines clear and detailed targets as well as collect evidence to measure progress in achieving these targets. The QA committee recognised that it has a long way to go with regard to getting quality assurance in place. At this stage, it sees itself more of a ‘think-tank’ where it is coming together as a group to discuss ideas.

The OU used the ISO certification guide in its approach to the SER. The ISO certification in itself is not enough to demonstrate that the criteria stipulated in the TEC Quality Handbook have been met. OU has a Quality Assurance Unit and a Central QA Committee. From the interviews conducted, the Panel concluded that there was no formal quality assurance framework in place. Such a framework would assist the University in the development, coordination and monitoring of academic quality. It would also assist in the management of academic risk at different levels in the institution. OU needs a proactive approach to quality enhancement, planning and monitoring. The TEC criteria mention specifically a quality assurance handbook addressing all the total quality and efficiency of achieving the institutional vision and mission. The existence of such a comprehensive document could not be verified.

The Audit Panel took note of the initiatives and commitment of individuals in marketing, public relations and ICT (the corporate web pages) to communicate and foreground the OU as aspiring to, and to be recognised as an open university of note. The Panel recommends that it is essential that the unique and shared responsibilities between different departments such as marketing, PR, ICT and admissions be clarified and quality assured.

The Panel took note of the tracer study conducted by OU after the completion of its first cohort of students. Tracer studies usually are done retrospectively and contain an analysis of data to evaluate (long term) impact of intervention programs. Tracer studies are a very important element in
institutional sensemaking of how to improve the effectiveness and quality in processes and products. As such surveys and tracer studies should be well-planned to provide feedback on the achievement of operational goals and objectives. The OU should develop a clear and transparent approach to what data are collected, for what purposes, how the data will be governed, stored and used, and how staff and students can have access to data that affects them.

There is also evidence that data and evidence regarding the various operations and progress in achieving the objectives set out in the operational plan are scattered in various formats throughout the organisation. This severely curtails the ability of the OU to make evidence-informed decisions.

The Panel noted that OU does not have a fully structured quality assurance department which is adequately staffed. For the purpose of the quality audit, a team comprising of senior staff from various departments has been constituted for the preparation of the self-assessment report and to coordinate the activities of the audit. The staff involved in the quality assurance team have their own schedule of duties and are not dedicated to quality assurance at the level of the organisation. This ad hoc arrangement can weaken the quality agenda of the institution.

Currently many of the processes at the OU are paper-based, with varied integration with ICT systems. Ensuring security and governing access to paper-based systems has its own sets of challenges, and there is evidence the OU stores sensitive and other information appropriately and securely, as required. As the OU moves increasingly digital and online, the OU should ensure that data are stored securely, and that access is controlled and monitored.

Commendation 2
The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the ISO certification as it creates a quality conscious culture and sets a strong mechanism for continuous improvement.

Recommendation 6
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius formalise its institutional approach to quality assurance in a way that is appropriate to its context and vision, but which
is clear with regard to criteria, responsibilities, processes, capacity and line of reporting/oversight.

Recommendation 7
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a formal, cyclical process of benchmarking itself against international distance education institutions, and in particular, open distance learning institutions.

Recommendation 8
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius move towards an evidence-based or evidence-informed approach to quality assurance.

Recommendation 9
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius formalise institutional research by developing policies, procedures and capacity practices to ensure transparent, ethical and responsible collection, analysis, and governance of current and future data.
5. Administrative and Management Issues

5.1 Governance

The Panel appreciates the good relationships between the DG, the OU Board and the representative of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education & Scientific Research.

From the audit it is very apparent that the DG holds the fort and is well respected amongst his staff who they say has an “open door” policy. As per the OU Act 2010, most of the requisite committees required to support the work of OU are operational. The Panel could not determine if the meetings are being held regularly and follow up is being done.

The Board is the ultimate decision-making body at the OU and, as such, is responsible to govern and lead the OU to achieve its vision and mission. As such the DG reports to the Board and is accountable to the Board. The DG oversees the implementation of the approved strategic and operational plans. While the Audit Panel did not find any matters of grave concern regarding the relationship between the Board and the DG, and the efficiency of the DG in implementing the strategic and soon-to-be-finalised operational plan, the Panel noted that there is, currently, no formal performance review for the DG.

The Panel also did not engage with the internal management of funds, the internal auditing capacity and processes as well as the allocation of funds to ensure the realisation of the vision and mission of the OU. The Panel did hear evidence on more than one occasion of the impact of funding constraints and the possible impact of budget cuts. As the OU focuses on expanding exponentially in the next number of years, the Panel could not assess to what extent the OU plans to remain financially sustainable.

Commendation 3

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius for the fact that representatives of the Board, staff and students, in general, were appreciative of the way the Open University
of Mauritius is governed. From the interviews it was clear that staff and students value the strong leadership and vision provided by the Director General and the Board.

**Recommendation 10**

The Panel recommends that the OU Board develop a formal mechanism with well-defined criteria to ensure oversight of the performance of the Director General in providing leadership and ensuring operational efficiency and quality.

**Recommendation 11**

The Panel recommends that the OU Board ensure financial sustainability amid the envisioned expansion and looming budgetary constraints.

**5.2 Admissions**

In the context of international open distance learning institutions, it is clear that an institution’s openness with regard to admission criteria, depends on the regulatory, legislative and geopolitical environment of the institution. Open universities therefore differ in respect of their degrees of openness. It is also crucial to note that the main difference between being a distance education provider and an open distance learning institution is to be found in its admission criteria, policies and processes.

Being an open distance learning provider, and creating a variety of access opportunities to those (previously) excluded from pursuing full-time attendance, also necessitates a critical assessment of providing responsible access to educational opportunities. Providing access without ensuring that students have a reasonable chance of success is immoral and unjustifiable. While the institutional admission policy, regulations and processes were very clear, there is a lack of assessment of the readiness of students studying through ODL and queries regarding career paths and/or assistance with personal matters were allocated to programme managers and/or lecturers.
The OU broadens the processes and resources allocated to the admission process to include subject readiness assessment, workload assessment, readiness for ODL, career counselling as well as a reference system for student.

The OU has made its vision clear that it not only wants to grow in student numbers, but also be counted as one of the best open universities in the world. Increased access has to be considered in its relationship to cost and quality. Some open universities have become unsustainable due to the impact of increased numbers of students on the cost of delivery and support. Aspects to consider include, but are not limited to appropriate student:instructor/faculty ratios and the cost of supporting students who may not be ready for higher education and distance education as a mode of learning. The OU will have to balance the intention to grow with ensuring that the institution remains sustainable. The OU will also have to realise that as it grows in student numbers, so does its responsibility to ensure that access is coupled with a reasonable chance of success. Increased student numbers may also mean that more students need access to personalised academic, pastoral and technical support.

The higher education landscape in Mauritius is changing and the OU has implemented the Government’s policy for fresh school leavers. The Panel took note that OU is offering a range of foundation courses to those entrants who do not have ‘A’ levels.

**Recommendation 12**

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius critically engage with its own commitment to being an open distance learning institution within the confines of its geopolitical legislative and regulatory environment.

**Recommendation 13**

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius broaden the processes and resources allocated to the admission process to include subject readiness assessment, workload assessment, readiness for ODL, career counselling as well as a reference system for students who need assistance with personal matters.
Recommendation 14

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius align its admission policy in terms of the number of students to a clear pedagogical strategy that defines the nature and intensity of interactivity between teaching staff, support staff, students and content, the cost implications as well as the impact on resources, capacity, and staff development.

5.3 Students Council

The Panel met with undergraduate and postgraduate (current and past) students and was impressed by their ability to communicate their experiences. Students’ input can be of great value to the OU. The students are at the core of the OU and therefore must be included in decision making processes wherever possible. Furthermore, the OU Act 2010 stipulates in the Schedule no. 2 The Academic Council (1) (i) a representative of learners to be nominated by the Board, and at no. 15 of the schedule is an Association of learners - (i) any group of learners wishing to form an association .... The mechanisms are there and it is the responsibility of OU to inform the students of this possibility and encourage them to form their association.

The SER does acknowledge the fact that the OU does not have a formal Student Council in place. The main reason is to be found that in the fact that most OU students are full-time employees who “do not have enough time to devote to such activities” (p. 168). Despite the lack of a formal Student Council, the SER does indicate that students have a range of possibilities to address their concerns or give input, such as through the Programme Managers and/or administrative staff.

The Panel has concerns regarding students’ non-representation on decision-making fora at the OU. While the Panel notes the general satisfaction of students with the curricula, pedagogies and support offered by the OU, a Student Council is much more than a forum for addressing concerns or complaints. Students are an important, if not the most important stakeholder in any higher education institution. A Student Council goes beyond that. The purpose of a Student Council is to give students an opportunity to develop leadership by organizing and carrying out university activities and service projects. In addition to planning events that contribute to university spirit and community welfare, the Student Council is the voice of the student body. Its mandate goes well
beyond what the SER states and there is no reason for excuses as the students will definitely find the ways and means to do it, i.e. if they are allowed. During the Panel’s interviews with alumni and staff, there was an expressed interest to be part of the decision-making structures at the OU. It is clear that practice at other open universities, and in the views expressed by students, that the OU should engage with student representation on the OU Board and other committees as well as their own Council.

The OU has to make decisions that will impact the students, yet at present they do not have a formal, institutionalised voice. Other open universities that have formal forms of student representation include the Open University of the United Kingdom (OUUK) (https://www.oustudents.com/what-is-student-voice), Athabasca University (https://www.ausu.org/about-ausu/student-council/) and the University of South Africa (Unisa)(http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/About/Service-departments/Student-Affairs/Student-Representative-Council-(SRC))

**Recommendation 15**

The Panel strongly recommends that the Open University of Mauritius institute a student representative Council/Association.
5.4 Students’ Welfare

The alumni of the OU were unanimous in their praise and appreciation for the OU. From the interviews it was, however, clear that the alumni is a rich resource that the OU is currently not utilising. The OU Alumni forms an important part of the OU history and there are prospects for the Alumni to further enrich experiences for current and future students through multiple opportunities.

Presently, OU does not have an office for student welfare which is responsible for promoting students’ physical and psychological health. The Panel could not gather information on how students get assistance where finance is concerned or issues with child care, or even how to juggle work, study and home life, etc. It is clear that the scope and nature of this function should be capacitated by appropriately qualified staff. The University cannot rely on the academic or administrative staff to do this as it goes beyond their actual remit.

Offering a student welfare function at an open university necessitates that students who cannot access the campus to seek support, should not be excluded. There is therefore a need to develop a number of offline, digital resources or links to such resources and to make these available on the institutional web pages. The welfare office should also be available via telephone (preferable a toll-free number), email and video-conferencing.

As the welfare office will have access to, and store very personal data of students, ethical and governance issues are paramount in the establishment and operationalisation of such an office.

Recommendation 16

Considering the intended growth in student numbers and academic offerings, the Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius allocate additional resources for the formalisation of a dedicated student support strategy - whether as a separate student support department or as embedded in the different divisions and functions of the institution.

Recommendation 17
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius establish, as part of a broader student support policy and strategy, a well-organised, appropriately capacitated and governed student welfare function and structure.

**Recommendation 18**

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius find ways to celebrate its alumni (e.g. a wall of fame), utilise the alumni as peer support for students, groom the alumni for positions at the University, involve the alumni in program/module evaluation and/or development and keep in touch with the alumni with regular communication and where appropriate, get-togethers.

### 5.5 Staff Council

There was no mention of any Staff Council in the SER. However there is an OU Staff Union as well as an OU Employees Union. The Audit Panel can therefore not make any commendation or recommendation on the issue of the Staff Council.

### 5.6 Staff Welfare

While there is ample evidence of the positive work done by the Staff Welfare Association, the Panel would like to emphasise the fiduciary duty of the institution to create an enabling and supportive environment for all staff, whether they form part of the Staff Association or not. The OU acknowledges two staff unions currently exist and there is evidence that management engages with both unions. From the interviews with staff in general, and specifically the two unions, it is clear that management can engage more regularly with the unions, especially in formulating and implementing strategic and operational plans. Through the interviews the Panel received conflicting information about levels of communication within the OU and therefore the Panel recommends that clear communication processes are set out to ensure all staff and union representatives are informed about the OU decisions.

A Staff Welfare Association exists. It is open for all staff both academic and support. Staff who are members pay a membership fee of MUR25 per month. The Staff Welfare Association organises
various philanthropic and recreational activities for staff. Management gives staff permission to do activities like Music Day, Domino tournaments (during lunchtime), end-of-year lunch and team building activities, yoga/physical fitness activities after working hours on its premises. The Association conducts its meetings with staff during lunch time (which is only 30 minutes) and would appreciate if management could consider allocating time during normal working hours for such meetings.

There were some concerns expressed during the interview sessions about low staff morale among some individuals or even departments. Low morale was being attributed to factors such as misalignment of schemes of service with current job roles as a result of the evolution of the OU, a lack of training, opportunities for job enrichment, feelings of being ‘stuck’ in schemes of service and not having the required qualifications or experience to be promoted or progress. It has to be noted that while there does seem to be evidence of low morale in some cases, the Panel understands that this may arise in any institution, especially when considering the evolution and fast growth of the OU. The Panel believes that the various recommendations in this report may resolve some of these concerns.

Both unions expressed concern amongst other things about the state of a number of schemes of service that remained unchanged since the establishment of the OU and which does not reflect the current deployment in the organisation. The Panel noted that staff in some posts are performing duties at OU which are not spelt out in their scheme of service which dates back to the time they joined the MCA. Moreover, this situation is leading to unclear career paths for these staff.

The unions can play a crucial role in assisting the OU to achieve its vision and mission. Achieving the goals and aspirations of the OU without involvement of the unions will severely impact on achieving key milestones, or even, in some cases, severely hamper the realisation of the OU’s vision. Central to achieving identified goals and milestones, is the performance of staff. The processes guiding performance management should, at all times, be as transparent and fair as possible.

**Recommendation 19**
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius schedule regular meetings with both staff unions and include and consult both unions in the matters of governance of the University.

**Recommendation 20**
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius take the necessary steps to amend the unchanged scheme of service of all the staff who are in a similar situation and to ensure that roles, responsibilities and career prospects be clearly defined.

### 5.7 Staff Appointments, Appraisal and Promotion

The impact of the vacancies of senior management positions was raised a number of times during the audit and the Panel was assured that everything is under control and filling the vacancies is in progress. The Panel puts it on record that while the challenges in filling these positions are noted, these vacancies severely impact on the ability of the OU to achieve its mission.

From the documentation provided and interviews it is clear that the performance appraisal cycle includes that (i) heads meet with staff to discuss their targets for the year; (ii) mid-year they meet to discuss how staff is progressing; and (iii) at the end of the year heads meet with staff to report on progress. During the initial and final meeting, individual’s strengths and weaknesses are discussed as well as aligning division goals and objectives with the individual’s goals for the year. After the agreement, mid-year and final appraisals, the forms are then forwarded for HR unit to process. Based on the performance appraisal recommendations are made for further training, counselling and to grant an annual increment on salaries.

Staff performance should align with the individuals’ schemes of service, with the division’s objectives and deliverables for the year, as well as staff members’ strengths and aspirations. There is evidence that many staff feel that they are required to do much more and different tasks than stipulated in their respective schemes of service. There is also evidence that lecturers and senior lecturers feel that their teaching loads and disciplinary research are not taken into account at the
initial performance agreement and subsequent appraisals. As stated earlier, of specific concern is the workload and focus of lecturers and senior lecturers who are also Programme managers.

The Panel noted that some full-time academic staff also act as Programme Managers. While administration is part of the scheme of service for lecturers and senior lecturers, the increasing amount of administration of programs impacts negatively on the time available of the staff to do research and quality teaching as well as develop into researchers and scholars. Programme managers are required to do an increasing amount of administrative and support activities in conjunction with their teaching and research responsibilities. This impacts negatively on programme managers’ ability to keep their materials and learning experiences current and supportive, and to do research. It is crucial that the OU ensures that the teaching staff are allowed enough time, support, and incentives to excel in disciplinary research as well as the scholarship of teaching and learning. The Panel is concerned that the lack of opportunities and engagement in the research component will impact the internal and future mobility of the academic staff. Not only will the lack of attention to the time available for research by lecturers and senior lecturers adversely affect the vision of the OU to become research-intensive, this will also severely affect staff morale, their gravitas as academics and their future mobility.

During the interviews many staff expressed doubts and uncertainty regarding the transparency in the processes for staff appointments, appraisals and promotions. The Panel cannot determine if the respective policies are being implemented effectively due to the varying opinions voiced out in the interviews. The policies were not made available for viewing and cannot be concluded if reviews have been undertaken.

It is clear that without an adequately supported and valued teaching staff it is unlikely that the OU will achieve its vision to be among the best universities in the world.

**Recommendation 21**

The Panel recommends that the Director General and the OU Board, in consultation with staff, unions and the Ministry of Education (1) find permanent solutions for the current and short-term impact these vacancies have on a number of staff and divisions; and (2) consider
the need for other new or expanded positions/functions in terms of the envisioned growth and start the necessary processes as soon as possible.

Recommendation 22
The Panel strongly recommends that the Open University of Mauritius continuously evaluate the scope of, and workload of programme managers and senior lecturers, to support and incentivise these staff so that they also flourish in their roles as teachers and researchers, according to their schemes of service.

Recommendation 23
The Panel recommends that research, publications and public scholarship be used as part of the criteria for promotion of full-time academic staff.

Recommendation 24
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius, after careful consideration of the impact of its envisioned growth in student numbers and offerings, consider having dedicated programme managers with the unique task to oversee the programs and teaching staff allocated to these programs in their care. The emphasis will be on operational and administrative duties without excluding a limited teaching role.

Recommendation 25
The Panel strongly recommends that the Open University of Mauritius reconsider the way and content of performance contracts of lecturers and senior lecturers are concluded at the start of the academic year.

Recommendation 26
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a comprehensive and integrated Human Resource Development (HRD) strategy and policy.
Recommendation 27

The Panel recommends that the necessary policy/framework, processes and institutional capacity be developed to ensure that the professional development needs of OU staff (academic and non-academic, full-time and part-time) are addressed.

5.8 Staff Development

According to the SER, all staff receive on-the-job training when they assume their duties. The Immediate Responsible Officers ensure that new staff receive the training and orientation they need. There is also mention of “Staff Training and Development Plans” where the professional needs of staff are addressed and aligned with the operational needs of the institution. Specific mention is made of the resolution to revisit the Staff Development Plan in response to the previous TEC audit.

The SER furthermore makes reference to “All Academics and Management members have been offered scholarships to read at doctorate” and provide a list of staff involved in this initiative. There is also mention of a number of OU Staff who have also taken responsibility for “enhancing their skills and knowledge to improve their job performance and upgrade their qualifications at degree/postgraduate level through the partly sponsored scheme of OU or on self-funding initiatives from other universities.” HR “maintains a Training Register annually per staff on training opportunities provided to them. The key areas of training provided also enable the staff to update their knowledge and skills” and the number of staff attending workshops and training programmes are documented. The SER also states that “Academic, technical and administrative staff are provided with training to keep themselves abreast of changes and new skills and in all aspects of the application of appropriate technologies.” “There is an effective human resource development system to train, retain and motivate employees for enhanced performance of their roles and tasks.”

There is a Training and Development Unit (SERp.11) that falls under the Quality Assurance and Capacity Development Division. The SER also states (SERp. 69) there is a policy on PMS that refer to a Policy on Training and Development of staff that was approved by the Board in 2013. A
copy of this Policy was not made available to the Panel and in the light of the fact that it was approved by the Board in 2013, it may have been formulated in the very early stages of the development of the OU and would need reviewing.

In the draft Operational Plan the Panel had access to in the final stages of the on-site audit, the Plan included a list of proposed training for each section, the budget, equipment and infrastructure required. As far as the Panel could assess, there is no dedicated policy or framework, or processes for academic and non-academic staff (full-time and part-time) to address specific training needs. The Panel noted that through the HR and academic performance evaluation processes, staff are held accountable for performing according to their schemes of service, there is no evidence of how the OU currently addresses, or will in future address staff developmental needs.

**Recommendation 28**

The Panel recommends that as the Open University of Mauritius evolves and grows, that the appropriate steps be taken to ensure that staff members’ positions/schemes of service be aligned to the needs of the institution.

**Recommendation 29**

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius reconsider the function and scope of performance appraisal, transparency and fairness in the initial performance agreements and evaluations, the function of the annual increment as incentive for above average performance and find appropriate ways to provide incentives for staff or to reward staff who constantly performs above average.
6. Curricula and Programmes

6.1 Aims and Objectives

From the documentation provided as well as the interviews, the aims and objectives of the OU’s programmes and modules are clearly stated and communicated. The Panel appreciates the dedication, disciplinary expertise and passion of the OU’s teaching staff, as well as evidence of the input of industry on program and module content. International good practice in the context of open universities entails having a team approach to program and module development. These teams normally consist of, depending on the context, a dedicated instructional designer/learning developer, academic experts, editors, audio-visual expertise, and students. As the OU increasingly moves digital and online, the design, production and delivery processes may be affected. The current policies, rules and processes to guide course content and learning experience development will therefore need revision. The establishment of a dedicated and appropriately resourced instructional design/learning design unit will greatly enhance and lead efforts to support learning experience development at the OU.

Commendation 4

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on clearly stating the aims and objectives of programmes and modules.

Recommendation 30

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius establish a dedicated and appropriately resourced instructional design/learning design unit to ensure that aims and objectives be clearly articulated throughout the courses and that they be aligned with assessment and teaching and learning activities.

Recommendation 31

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius revise its design, production and delivery policies and processes to support online course and learning development.
Recommendation 32

The Panel recommends the establishment of a team approach comprising of appropriate expertise (e.g. instructional designers, subject experts, resource persons, industry, editors) with clear guidelines and processes for course content development.

6.2 Programme Design, Validation, Approval and Review

There is evidence that the OU attempts to be agile in curriculum development as the institution responds to changes in the disciplinary and workplace environments. Often the approval processes guiding the design, validation, approval and review of programmes stand in stark contrast to the need to respond in an agile and informed fashion. Throughout higher education and open distance learning institutions, responsiveness to changes in the environment or gaps in the market is frustrated by the often long and arduous institutional processes.

From the SER the Panel also noted that the OU plans to develop and implement a comprehensive manual to guide programme design and development, set up a dedicated Materials Development Unit, recruit full-time instructional designers and systematically review all programmes on a cycle of 5 years.

Programmes are designed with the students as the central focus and with due consideration to accessibility and flexibility. Programmes vary from employability skills, undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral degrees. There is flexibility in the entry requirement and consideration given to all learners who have either academic qualifications or work experience or a combination of both.

Programme validation at the OU goes through a three-tier process as explained by the academic staff and Advisory Committee during the interviews:

1. Upon identification of a programme to be developed, approval is sought from the DG. The respective program manager will then identify the resource persons needed for the program development through its database. Upon agreement with the resource persons the contract
is signed and work begins on its development. A program development team develops the program, formulate learning outcomes that meet the requisite NQF level and oversees that the assessments are appropriate for each module. Once everything is deemed satisfactory it is then submitted to the Advisory Committee. What was unclear to the Panel was the process to identify the programme – was it just a proposal by someone (“we need an MA in English”) or was there a proper feasibility study conducted to determine programme content, possible learner target group and sustainability of the programme. Panel members did not catch sight of a document where the proposal is submitted for approval to determine its initial content. Also, it was not easy to determine if OU goes for niche areas to develop its programmes. It was also not clear whether OU wanted to be the best in some specific fields of education and training or whether it will be known for its general offerings.

2. The Advisory Committee which is made up of subject experts and representatives of the industry will scrutinise the submission. If there are queries, the document is sent back to the development team, otherwise it is submitted to the Academic Council. With regard to the composition and role of the Advisory Committee the Panel could not determine during the 3-day audit, if industry, public agencies, professional bodies and other potential users meet to discuss programme development, teaching and learning or research issues. This was due to a lack of evidence available.

3. The Academic Council is the principal academic body responsible to have control and regulate teaching, examination and research. The Council will review the submission. Again, if there are queries the document is sent back otherwise approval is given for the programme to be run.

From the evidence before the Panel it appears as if a systematic and cyclical review of the programmes and modules is yet to be started. From interviews the Panel learnt that if, for whatever reason there is a need for a programme/module to be discontinued, the DG gives approval for it. It was also reported that programmes are just put on hold rather than removed completely. There is, as far as the Panel could assess, no mechanism in place regarding the processes on oversight of phasing out modules/programmes. The phasing out of programs and modules is an inherent and increasingly important aspect of open distance learning. The phasing out of programmes and
modules has, however, negative implications for students who are in the process of completing the programme or are repeating a module.

Academic staff mentioned the irreplaceable role of the resource persons in the development and delivery of programmes and modules. Evidence suggests that the OU has an extensive database of resource persons who assist on an ad hoc basis with program/module development, teaching and the search for appropriate resources.

**Commendation 5**

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius for the high calibre of resource persons and the invaluable role they play in the design and quality of learning experiences.

**Commendation 6**

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on having in place a programme validation process.

**Recommendation 33**

The Panel recommends a clear-cut policy, rules, policies and processes on the identification of future programmes to be developed and for the phasing out of programmes.

**Recommendation 34**

The Panel strongly recommends that the Open University of Mauritius clearly maps processes for the expedited approval, validation, design and delivery of modules and programmes in response to societal needs or identified gaps in the market, when needed.

**Recommendation 35**

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius institute the necessary rules and processes that will steer a cyclical, systematic review of all programmes and modules. The reviews should be based on criteria developed by the University. The Open University of Mauritius should furthermore ensure that the findings of these reviews be implemented in appropriate ways.
6.3 The Teaching and Learning Environment

The physical environment is being maintained in terms of safety, cleanliness, repairs and decor at present but will require ongoing maintenance. The building housing OUCC needs attention in spite of all the work already done there by OU. Major repair works can only be carried out with the permission of the Ministry of Education, Human Resources, Tertiary Education & Scientific Research. The OU recognises that the WIFI system needs to be reviewed and upgraded. There are two libraries, one at Reduit and one at OUCC and computer labs at both campuses. With regard to the library, staff and students have access to a large number of journals through appropriate subscriptions. There is also evidence of a good usage of online resources. OU has an Engineering and Technology Unit, an Audio Video Production Unit, a Graphics, Publishing and Printing Unit and an IT Unit.

While there is also evidence that the Institutional LMS is used by staff and students, evidence suggests that the LMS is not yet optimally used by lecturing staff. Currently the course pages on the LMS are used mostly to provide students with PDF copies of learning resources and additional resources such as audio-visual materials. The Audit Panel could not find evidence of the optimal use of the LMS at a site for high interactive and responsive teaching and learning. International examples include a range of nuanced approaches to online teaching and learning, ranging from highly interactive courses with low instructor:student ratios, to a correspondence model of online teaching where there is very little engagement. Research indicate that institutions need to consider student:instructor, student:content, and student:student engagements and ratios. Within the constraints of cost, access and quality, the OU will need to be very clear on its pedagogical model for online teaching and learning and allocate adequate resources for it.

Recommendation 36

Considering the envisioned growth, the Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius revisit its needs in terms of technology and space.
Recommendation 37
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius reconsider its approach to the use of the Learning Management System for teaching and learning and consider its pedagogical model for online teaching.

6.4 Staff Resources Ancillary

The University has opted for a model of low full time academic staff and a high number of part-time staff. The teaching staff is adequate to deliver the present cohort of learners enrolled. This may need to be revisited as the student population increases and considerations given to how staff development is addressed consistently to ensure quality program delivery and support is provided. The teaching staff is required to have a minimum of a Master’s level of education specialising in various fields where their expertise is required at OU. It could not be determined however, if any guidelines or policy exists with regard to having a level of qualification higher than the level at which one teaches applies and any impact or opportunity for promotion applies. Supporting structures are available and staff are happy with what currently exist.

The academic staff have to oversee program development (as emphasised by the senior lecturer) which staff indicated takes up to 90% of their time, to read and respond to emails and reply to students’ queries, do counselling, prepare and lecture and those studying for their PhD have to find time to “study” and complete the PhD within the 5 year timeframe and working full time. As per the scheme of service senior lecturers have to conduct research. The Panel was informed that students will call the lecturers every time rather than contact the administrative officers for basic things like their weekly schedule even outside working hours. Some staff expressed their wish that they would prefer to be doing some research rather than their majority of time being spent in program management/development.

Opportunities exist in that there is an operational plan for each division stating the training required and budget to implement it. What was not evident is the implementation of the plan and its effectiveness as the Panel was not provided with any evidence of post training evaluation or staff satisfaction report.
All academic staff on appointment are offered the opportunity to pursue a PhD if they do not have one already. This is a very good initiative. Subsequently it is rather blurred how staff development is planned due to a lack of evidence. There are workshops, seminars, conferences for staff to attend or training sessions conducted but how do they all fit into the bigger picture is not very clear. As with the operational plan above, it could not be determined if a training needs assessment was conducted at organisational, task and individual level to come up with the plan.

On the whole staff were unsure about their career path, their progression and what factors would lead to it. Some indicated that they had reached the limit of their salary scale and were unsure what would happen to them regarding their promotion prospects and progression on a higher salary scale. Communication with them would help them to dispel their fears.

With regard to training, the support staff appear to have had more on-the- job training. They expressed their wish to have more exposure to international good practice through study visits or attachments.

**Commendation 7**
The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the allocation of scholarships for PhD to new recruits.

**Recommendation 38**
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius allocate appropriate resources (full-time, part-time staff) to staff who are studying towards their PhDs and adjust these staff’s workload and performance agreements and appraisals accordingly.

**Recommendation 39**
The Panel recommends that there be a clear cut delineation of academic and support staff roles regarding student enquiries to ensure that neither academic nor support staff are overwhelmed or act outside of their mandate and/or expertise.
Recommendation 40
The Panel recommends developing a policy on the workload of academic staff which clearly defines the amount of time they need to dedicate to programme development, learner support, teaching and learning and research.

6.5 Learning Resources

Students and alumni expressed satisfaction for the availability and variety of learning resources. In the time allowed, and within the constraints of not having access to the full curricula and learning resources of all the programs/modules on offer, the Panel could not assess to what extent students are required to buy additional textbooks in particular disciplinary contexts.

In the development of curricula and learning resources, the issue of the use of copyrighted material came up several times. Evidence suggests that academic staff and where applicable, resource persons are responsible for getting permission to use copyrighted material. The Panel could not establish whether there is a prescribed process to assist academic staff/resource persons, and whether programme managers are allocated a budget to obtain the copyright for the use of copyrighted materials.

One of the key issues in the broader context of international higher education and in particular in open distance learning environments, is the cost of studies and in particular, the cost of additional prescribed materials. Should textbooks form an integral part of the curriculum and learning experience and students will not be able to participate in and pass the course if they do not have access to these materials, it significantly impacts on the costs of studying, and in many ways, goes against the grain of open distance learning.

We are fortunate to live in an age where the amount of information we have access to is astounding and this includes a variety of web resources and course materials that are often made available under a Creative Commons International Licence. Except in very specific disciplinary foci, a search on the internet will provide access to current materials that can be integrated into a learning journey as an alternative to prescribing a textbook. Published research however shows that faculty
prefers to develop and write their own course materials and prescribe their own (or their colleagues) textbooks rather than looking for freely available quality course materials. The Panel acknowledges that looking for appropriate materials is time-consuming, but in the light of the social mandate of public open distance learning, open distance learning institutions have a moral obligation to ensure that learning resources are, as far as possible, included in the paid-for course registration. As the OU sets out on the next phase of its evolution, aiming to be among the best open universities in the world, the OU can be a lodestar for other open universities in taking a principled stand on the way it uses Open Educational Resources (OER) and the production of OER.

**Recommendation 41**
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius provide guidelines, capacity, and dedicated institutional support to accessing copyrighted materials.

**Recommendation 42**
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop clear guidelines to be used when additional materials, such as textbooks, are prescribed for courses.

**Recommendation 43**
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop an institutional policy, guidelines and processes to institutionalise the use and development of OER.

**6.6 Programme Organisation and Delivery**

There was no evidence that programmes are reviewed in a systematic and cyclical way to ensure their currency and continued suitability. There was mention of surveys and feedback from industry but no evidence of an institutionalised, systematic approach. It is important that OU obtains regular feedback from employers and industry partners in the future to keep assessing the need for programmes and sustainability of courses.
Commendation 8

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the learning programmes which are effectively organised and managed.

Recommendation 44

The Panel recommends that processes and policies (where appropriate) be developed to ensure a systematic and cyclical review of programmes that include liaison between the institution and industry, public agencies, professional bodies and other potential end-users.

6.7 Teaching and Learning

From the available documentation and interviews with teaching staff, students and alumni, it is clear that the OU considers teaching and learning as its core function. Staff commented they go the extra mile to support students and ensure the efficient running of programmes, while students and alumni sang the praises of both academic and support staff and commented on the quality of the learning experience.

At present, the level of research and other scholarly activities is in its early phases of development and will require planning into the future.

With regard to assessment, the OU ensures that the formative and summative assessments are linked directly to the course aims and objectives. Past exam papers are also provided to assist students in their preparation for the examination. One of the most crucial aspects of teaching and learning in an open distance learning environment is the provision of detailed and personalised feedback on formative and summative assessments. Without appropriate, detailed and personalised feedback students are left to their own devices and may not know where to improve and what additional steps they can take to ensure their success. Several interviewees mentioned the fact that feedback on formative assessments are not always delivered on time and there were even cases where feedback on assignments were received after the examination has already started. It is crucial that the OU takes the necessary steps to ensure that the feedback is, indeed, formative and detailed, but also provided to students not more than three weeks after submitting the assignments.
Within the constraints of teaching in a digitally supportive mode and not yet fully online, the OU’s teaching and learning strategy seems healthy.

The Panel acknowledges the efforts of the OU to provide face-to-face as well as digital/online support and learning resources to students. The evolution of distance education has shown that scalability, cost, quality and access are crucial factors when providing additional support to students. Interviews with students and alumni, while appreciative of the care of the OU staff, provided evidence that not all part-time students can attend the face-to-face tutorial support. One possible solution would have been for the tutorial classes to be recorded and made available to all students which is currently the practice at OU. Research evidence suggest that this requires immense technology support and capacity and recording a lecture or a face-to-face session often impedes the form of pedagogy and instructional strategy in the classroom, especially when group-work, or flipped classrooms are used as strategy. There is also the reality that many students have mobile phones that can make recordings of proceedings in the classrooms, and take pictures of PowerPoint slides as a form of notetaking. The Panel therefore cannot and do not want to prescribe to the OU of how it should address the dilemmas many part-time students face. International trends indicate that studio produced educational videos and recorded lectures have a relative short life-span, long(er) production processes and are very costly.

Commendation 9

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on making available a selection of past exams papers to students to assist in their preparation for examinations.

Commendation 10

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on its teaching and learning strategies which are based on explicit learning outcomes and which are consistent with programme/course aims. Teaching methods are varied. Many staff make effective use of available facilities, equipment, materials and aids.

Recommendation 45

The Panel recommends implementing regular opportunities for staff development specifically on context-appropriate and evidence-informed good practices in teaching and
learning (e.g. innovative ideas, maximising use of the LMS for pedagogical benefit and a clear understanding of constructive alignment).

Recommendation 46

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure the necessary processes, capacity and oversight to ensure that students receive appropriate, detailed and personalised feedback on all formative assessment. Considering that some students may fail the final examinations, the Panel strongly recommends that in the case where students have failed the final examination, appropriate, detailed and personalised feedback to be provided to students.

Recommendation 47

The Panel recommends that regular feedback from students to teaching staff be embedded as part of the teaching and learning process. At present, there is an ad hoc approach for staff to receive feedback from students.

Recommendation 48

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius explore a variety of solutions to enrich and support the learning journey of students with particular attention to the needs of part-time students who cannot, necessarily attend face-to-face tutorial support opportunities.

6.8 Student Support

Students are well supported by both academic and support staff. The academic staff provide counselling for any issues related to the program, whilst the support staff assist in terms of IT support for access to LMS/library or downloading of documents. Students stated that information obtained at induction was adequate. They receive a learner pack which contains all the requisite information on the programme they are following, where and who to go for support, and a tablet.
Some ODL students suggested that face to face sessions should be recorded so that they could access it again and importantly those who missed the class could be able to follow what was discussed. The University holds an annual career fair. Work based experience is organised for full time students on some programmes where industry exposure to current practices is greatly required. Students stated that OU conducts employability skills courses e.g. interview skills for them.

The SER mentions examples of the services/outreach to offer educational opportunities to selected individuals in a correctional facility. There is also mention of support to bedridden students. The OU must be commended for these initiatives to support students with very specific needs.

With the evidence to the disposal of the Panel, it would suggest that student support is currently done on an ad hoc basis and integrated into all activities of the OU. While this is commendable, the Panel noted that in the light of the envisioned growth of the OU that the additional student numbers, the forecasted growth in international students in different geopolitical contexts, increasing in the complexities and numbers of academic offerings, that student support will become increasingly complex and place additional strain on resources, staff performance, and staff capacity. There is already evidence that admission and academic staff and programme managers provide personal, career, and psychological support, while laudable, may be outside the locus of expertise/knowledge of the staff.

The OU should also consider the impact of its growth on the capacity, performance contracts, as well as the workload of staff/divisions.

**Commendation 11**

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on its outreach and support to some incarcerated individuals who were offered an opportunity to study.

**Commendation 12**

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the support provided during the learning process of students. The caring approach, availability and quick response to
queries, range of learning and assessment approaches were lauded by students. Student support is furthermore integrated in all the functions of the institution

Recommendation 49

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius institutionalise specialised student support services such as career counselling, general and psychological support and counselling.

6.9 Monitoring and Assessment

Specific to this criterion, the SER states clearly that “Examination plays an important role in the teaching and learning process and is also an instrument that contributes to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning processes”. The OU Examinations Unit is responsible for ensuring “confidential, efficient and transparent assessment”. The SER furthermore acknowledges the impact of the OU’s growth on the complexities of the management of formative and summative assessments. There is also evidence in the SER of how the OU sees, plans and manages formative assessment in the form of, for example, assignments and self-assessments.

Interviews with staff and students confirmed that a range of assessment methods were used including coursework, projects, research, industry placements and examinations. The Panel also heard from students and staff about informal and regular feedback to students about progress and ongoing questions about coursework.

The Panel took note of the internal process for the moderation of assessments at OU. Moderators are appointed by programme managers upon approval of the DG and include internal and external academic staff. The Panel noted with concern that the moderation process is not fully formalised particularly with respect to assignments. The interview sessions revealed that assignments are at times moderated by peers who are not necessarily experts in the field of study. The Panel is of the view that the present arrangements for moderation is undermining OU’s ability to ensure and enhance academic quality. The OU should develop and implement a moderation policy which
ensures that its internal moderation provides the assurance that the assessment criteria are applied appropriately for the different assessment modes.

The collection, analysis and use of student data have become an integral part of ensuring effective learning experiences, not only in terms of student success, but also in terms of the effective and appropriate allocation of resources. Institutionalising a student tracking system is, however, fraught with a number of challenges such as institutional capacity, student consent to have their data collected and analysed, as well as the risk of bias and stereotyping of students who are found to be at risk.

Embedded in the tracking of students’ progress, is the important aspect that students should be informed of how their performance will be tracked, how the information will be used, by whom and under what conditions, how they as students will have access to this data, and how they can appeal to the institution when they have reason to believe that the information is incorrect, incomplete or wrongly interpreted and used.

Commendation 13
The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the range of assessment methods used by academic staff to assess and monitor learning including coursework, projects, research, industry placements and examinations. The Panel also heard from students and staff about informal and regular feedback to students about progress and ongoing questions about coursework.

Commendation 14
The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the positive and successful students’ learning experiences.

Commendation 15
The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the clear process of exam preparation, printing, storage and moderation of exam scripts.
Recommendation 50
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius formalise the moderation policy and processes with respect to assignments and/or continuous assessment. The institution should ensure that assignments are at times moderated by peers who are recognised experts in the field of study. The OU should ensure that its internal moderation provides the assurance that the assessment criteria are applied appropriately for the different assessment modes.

Recommendation 51
At present, there is a lack of institutional capacity and goal to track students. The Panel recommends that student progress is carefully monitored, documented and tracked across all courses to provide valuable information to staff and course coordinators for future planning of teaching and learning decisions.

Recommendation 52
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a Student Charter or Tuition Policy wherein a rationale is provided for the collection and tracking of students as well as clear guidelines and procedures to ensure student involvement and oversight of how their data are collected, analysed and used.

Recommendation 53
The Panel recognizes that the Open University of Mauritius has two manuals on regulations available on the website, however, it is recommended that the Open University of Mauritius formulate an assessment and evaluation policy that provides an overview of the values and purpose of informing formative and summative assessment and that the scope and weighting of assessment schemes are clear and known to all concerned including procedures for resubmissions, late penalties and appeal procedures.
**Recommendation 54**
The Panel recommends that the Learning Management System is utilised more effectively for its pedagogical benefits such as various forms of assessments, as well as the possibility of automated feedback.

**Recommendation 55**
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius provide secure servers to departments such as examinations due to the sensitivity of the information. The Panel further recommends that backups do not be stored in the same location as the OU but preferably in another institution on a secure server or in a cloud-based solution.

**6.10 Output, Outcomes and Quality Control**

While the SER does not specifically address this section, the SER does mention the monitoring of budgets and the mandate and role of the Planning and Monitoring Committee whose mandate is to “making immediate, medium- and long-term plans of OU and monitor the execution of all plans of OU as well as suggesting measures for quality assurance.” There is also mention of the monitoring of programme design and review, and the monitoring of the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Annexure 5 of the SER details the different ISO processes related to outputs, outcomes and quality control, but unfortunately the SER did not provide any additional information.

It was apparent that performance indicators are not regularly used to inform institutional assessment of achievement in relation to educational aims and learning outcomes. Results are monitored in-house but these are not recorded in any formal manner or analysed for appropriate action to be taken. There was no formal Quality Control arrangements at institutional, departmental, subject and/or course level. There were also no evidence that quality standards, policies and strategies were consistently applied and periodically reviewed within the cognate area. Whilst there is a general commitment to excellence in teaching and learning the provision of quality control, measurement and data collection is ad hoc or missing and should be addressed for continued improvement.
The Panel acknowledges that OU is a young University, however it should seek the opportunity to establish a sound and comprehensive quality assurance process. It should articulate the purpose of quality assurance to all stakeholders and place a strong emphasis on the culture of continuous improvement through accountability. Quality assurance is an evidence based activity and relies very heavily on data obtained from feed-forward and feedback loops. Quality standards, policies and strategies should be consistently applied and periodically reviewed within the cognate area.

Commendation 16

In general staff across divisions and levels had a sense of the importance of the desired outputs and outcomes and the fact that they will be held accountable for the quality of their work. The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the general commitment to excellence in teaching and learning, apparent in staff and student attitudes in all aspects of provision.

Recommendation 56

Specific quality indicators should be outlined under the key responsibility areas where the performance of the Open University of Mauritius is measured and periodically reviewed. The Panel recommends a good data collection method to generate evidence to inform improvement and accountability.

Recommendation 57

The Panel recommends a thorough re-assessment of the annual performance contracting of staffing in light of the fact that current practice that not all key performance areas as per scheme of service are addressed in the annual performance contract, that there are not clear deliverables and milestones and quality criteria according to which the outcomes will be evaluated.
7. External Examiners

The SER did not contain a dedicated section on External Examiners. The SER does mention that “Moderators, External Examiners and Programme Managers have the responsibility to assure that question papers are consistent with the programme document and are aligned with stated learning objectives/outcomes”. In reference to the previous audit, the SER does mention the intention to involve external examiners in “ensuring the quality of the assessment process and enhance the quality of programmes (Recommendation 35).

During the audit process, the Panel took cognizance that OU has started implementing an external examiner system. Consequently, at the time of the audit, reports of external examiners were unavailable and the Panel could not assess the mechanism that OU will put in place to deal with the recommendations of external examiners. Although the Panel appreciated the recent initiative of OU, it is noted with concern that there was no external examiner system in place to confirm the academic standards of all qualifications awarded so far.

Recommendation 58

The Panel recommends that Open University of Mauritius, as a matter of urgency, ensure that the necessary rules, regulations and framework be put in place to facilitate the institutionalisation of external examiners.

Recommendation 59

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure that all external examiners be (1) from reputable institutions and have the necessary expertise and experience; and (2) be independent of the institution and be appointed for a specified period not exceeding three years.

Recommendation 60

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure that the terms of reference of external examiners be explicit and that they include the moderation of question
papers and model answers, moderation of scripts and provide feedback on performance of students.

Recommendation 61

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure that feedback by external examiners on the curriculum should be included in the next semester and if any drastic changes are required, that the module be earmarked for an expedited review.
8. Research Degree Students

The SER refers to the fact that the OU organises a Research Seminar each year for its PhD and DBA learners on “interdisciplinary themes. The objective of this seminar is to create a forum for academic exchange. By bringing the learners together with scholars working in closely-related fields and by providing a formal structure for their interaction, this seminar aims at advancing the individual research goals of each participant.” Currently the OU offers two doctoral programmes namely the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and the Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA). The SER is very clear about the whole process of applying to register for a research degree at OU. The SER provide details with regard to prospective students submitting their initial proposal to OU for approval. If approved, students further develop their proposals. In the interim students seek for a supervisor and obtain permission from the site(s) where they will collect data. OU will approve the supervisor and students are informed via a formal letter that they can proceed with their studies.

With regard to research ethics and the ethical approval and oversight of research, the SER mentions that research ethics is part of the structured tutorial programme for its research students. There is also mention of a general Code of Ethics “approved by the Board in November 2017.” While the Panel received evidence pertaining to the approval to do research, the Panel found that research ethics applications are dealt with on an ad hoc basis, and there is no permanent Research Ethics board or committee, no policy and no processes and guidelines.

The SER refers to the fact that the OU acknowledges the challenge to find external supervisors and plans to set into place a number of MoUs and the regular amendment of the rules and regulations.

The PhD students were unanimous that OU was an excellent university with which to do a PhD despite the price being more expensive. Students interviewed were very happy with the support they get from OU especially the face to face sessions on research methodology and quantitative methods.
Recommendation 62
The Panel expresses its serious concerns about the clear lack of oversight of the institution over the ethics review process for research done by Master’s and Doctoral students. The Panel strongly recommends that while the research unit at Open University of Mauritius is in its infancy, the University does not compromise the ethics and the oversight of research. The Panel therefore recommends to the Open University of Mauritius to consider as a matter of urgency the establishment of an adequately qualified committee to oversee ethical review applications. A policy processes, structures and procedures should be developed as a matter of utmost urgency.

Recommendation 63
While the Panel also noted the passion and interest of Open University of Mauritius academic staff to do research, to participate in conferences and publish articles, the Panel recommends that Open University of Mauritius places a moratorium on all research where organisations, humans and/or animals are involved until the policy, processes and procedures to guide and oversee the ethical implications of research are in place (as per recommendation 62).

The OU has developed a number of collaborative arrangements with various prestigious international institutions and should be commended for this. This initiative can assist in the international recognition of the qualifications of OU. The Panel noted that OU is making use of these arrangements for the development of programmes, staff training and capacity building. It is also generating income by selling its expertise to other open universities of the region. Whilst it is a good initiative there is need for prudence in that OU does not lose sight of its mandate and become overburdened with the exigencies of the institutions. There is need also to ensure that OU staff gain the maximum out of these MOU/As through some sort of exposure.

The Panel noted the impact these collaborative agreements have on quality assurance and the workload of staff administering and monitoring quality in these arrangements.

Commendation 17
The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the various MOU/As it has managed to secure over its short existence.

Recommendation 64
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius ensure institutional capacity and oversight over these collaborative arrangements.
10. Industrial Links/ Work-based Experience

Whilst it is stated that industry representatives assist in programme development or are members of the Advisory Committee and, that some of the full-time students undertake work-based experience the panel could not find appropriate evidence to substantiate that OU interfaces with the industry for manpower planning and programme identification. It is also not known if they make up the full diaspora of the industry including NGOs or if certain sectors are not being involved. There is in the pipeline a Consultative Committee to be set up, so until then the engagement with the industry remains only for programme development rather than to oversee all other aspects.

There was no evidence of any interaction between OU and industry on norms/ guidelines required for the proper running of OU or for specific areas. Such a case could have been a collaboration with professional bodies e.g. the Medical Council of Mauritius to see how they go about with the issue of ethics, lessons could have been learnt and therefore replicated in their research ethics policy. However, this can still be something to pursue. In view of limited access to certain documents like minutes of meetings, this criterion could not be established.

The Panel also observed an ad hoc relationship between the Advisory Committee and the Board and would encourage increased communication on a regular basis to communicate needs and progress with industry partners.

Recommendation 65
The Panel recommends the development and institutionalisation of proper guidelines and a code of conduct on the interaction between the Open University of Mauritius and industry to avoid any potential or real conflicts of interest. These guidelines and/or code of conduct should emphasise the proper delineation of the respective roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation 66
The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a policy or guiding framework/policy to clarify the role that industry/professional bodies/NGOs could play in
the development of the University. The framework/policy should formalise the need for regular meetings.
11. Community Service and Good Citizenship

The SER makes mention of their Corporate Social Responsibility that, in 2013, comprised of offering 23 scholarships (including two to detainees and one to a bed-ridden student). The SER does not explicitly cover Community Service and Citizenship and outside of the evidence of the 2013 initiative, there is no further mention of ways in which the OU fulfills its social responsibility. Outside of the mention of these scholarships, there was no additional information presented during the interviews.

This is an area where OU needs to have a plan on how it intends to tackle its role in community service and promote good citizenship as part of its corporate social responsibility. There is need for OU through its staff and students to engage in community activities - do projects with the more vulnerable in society, engage in environmental projects, etc.

Commendation 18

The Panel commends the Open University of Mauritius on the fact that it is valued by a range of stakeholders such as government, alumni, and employers.

Recommendation 67

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius develop a clear strategy and policy framework and processes to clarify its role in the surrounding communities and in the broader context of Mauritius.

Recommendation 68

The Panel recommends that the Open University of Mauritius put strategies in place on embedding community service and outreach in the curricula, pedagogies and assessment strategies of OU.

Recommendation 69

When community engagement and outreach are done by staff and students, the Open University of Mauritius should ensure that there be clear ethical guidelines and if needed,
ethical clearance that specifies the potential of harm, as well as getting the consent of the communities in which students and staff want to do outreach.
12. Appendices

12.1 The Audit Panel

The Audit Panel

Prof Paul Prinsloo (Research Professor in Open Distance Learning), Department of Business Management, University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa (Chairperson).

Associate Professor, Rashmi Watson, Head (Research Education & Training Program, WA Health Translation Network), The University of Western Australia, Australia.

Dr Rosida Coowar, Retired Associate Professor/Associate Chair, University of North Carolina Charlotte (USA), Mauritius.

Ms Jill Anne Tirant, Seychelles.

Mrs Veena Balluck-Bhujun, Assigned Quality Assurance & Accreditation Officer, Tertiary, Education Commission, Mauritius.

Audit Secretary

Mrs Ansuya Sobhee-Runnoo, Programme Officer, Tertiary Education Commission, Mauritius
12.2 Acronyms and abbreviations

DG        Director General
LMS       Learning Management System
MCA       Mauritius College of the Air
MOU/As    Memorandum of Understanding/ Agreements
NGO       Non-Governmental Organisations
ODL       Open Distance Learning
OU        Open University of Mauritius
OUCC      Open University Curepipe Campus
QA        Quality Assurance
SER       Self Evaluation Report
TEC       Tertiary Education Commission