

جامعة الشرقية
A'SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY



University Innovation Strategy

2021-2025

GV0005

Approvals

This document has been approved by

| Name | Date |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Board of Trustees | 18 March 2021 |

Implementation and Responsibility

| Document owner | Contact person | Date of Implementation |
|-----------------|--|------------------------|
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1. Introduction

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) received formal approval of establishment in 2009 and admitted its first batch of students in Fall of 2010 with 211 registered students. By 2021 the student population at ASU had exceeded 4,600 students. The University has high aspirations for the future as articulated in its vision and mission. The University currently has five Colleges, specifically:

College of Applied and Health Sciences
College of Arts and Humanities
College of Business Administration
College of Engineering
College of Law

The University moved to its new campus in September 2017. The new Campus development has the capacity to accommodate up to 7,100 students.

2. Our Mission

ASU Advances knowledge through *innovative* learning and applied research that will contribute to the economic and social development of the region by providing a conducive environment enhanced by international collaboration.

3. Our Vision

ASU aspires to be a leading higher education institution in Oman that promotes authentic values, *innovation* and socio-economic development.

4. Our Values

Endeavour: We will seek to perform our best in everything that we undertake to achieve our individual and the University's collective goals.

Respect: We will treat our students, staff and all the University's stakeholders with consideration and regard.

Openness and Trust: We will be honest, sincere and trustworthy in all our dealings with the University's internal and external stakeholders.

Accountability: We will throughout the University be highly committed and responsible for our actions and performance.

Social Responsibility: We will consider the impacts of our actions and the University's activities on the welfare of our students, staff, the wider community and the environment.

Creativity: *we will seek new ideas, approaches, and opportunities for the benefit of our students, staff and the wider society.*

5. Graduate Attributes

The attributes of the A'Sharqiyah University graduate are these:

- Knowledge of a discipline
- Commitment to national development and Omani ethical values
- *Innovative Spirit*
- Global Insight

- Adaptability to changing environments

6. The University Context

The University's Strategic Plan 2014-2020 set out an explicit objective to “*Advance knowledge through innovative learning and applied research*”. In order to deliver this objective, the University developed a framework for developing and implementing innovative Programs which was approved by the Board of Trustees on 15th May, 2018. The framework provides guidance to the Colleges and clarifies that innovative programs at ASU are guided by six attributes including delivering good graduate employability, creative delivery of teaching and assessment, research-informed teaching, benchmarking of content and achieving professional accreditation, use of partnerships and delivering good overall student experience.

In the Strategic Plan 2020-2025, the University reaffirmed its mission and vision. In addition, the University agreed in Commitment 2.3, to promote an organizational climate of innovation, participation and engagement. The University set forth a strategic initiative to reinforce a culture of continuous improvement and to encourage faculty and staff to develop solutions to various challenges. The University therefore emphasizes *innovation* in all areas of activity including learning and teaching, research, industry and community engagement and in its overall service delivery to internal and external stakeholders.

The overall purpose of this Innovation Strategy is to provide further guidance to the Colleges, Centre for Language and Foundation Studies (CLFS) and service departments within the University on the strategies and initiatives which will transform ASU into a truly innovative higher education institution. These strategies are consistent with our values of *creativity* and the declared objective of the University to produce graduates with an *innovative spirit* as one of the distinguishing attributes. The strategies will also help to ensure that innovative approaches are embedded across the full spectrum of all academic and support functions of the University. This includes innovation in teaching and learning, research and consultancy, industry and community engagement, and academic and non-academic support services. This strategy will also guide the University to embed a culture of innovation in all aspects of its work and to support local firms.

7. The National Innovation Strategy

Oman's Science, Technology and Innovation Policy review conducted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and released in 2014 (UNCTAD, 2014) ranked Oman at 80th in the world based on the Global Innovation Index. The report highlighted the country's strengths in terms of high investment in human capital, research and development in line with other GCC countries, increasing number of graduates in science and technology, well developed institutions and infrastructure. Recommendations in the report included development of a National Innovation Strategy and communications with all stakeholders to present innovation campaigns and to facilitate cooperation and collaboration. The National Innovation Strategy released in 2020 sets a clear and unambiguous target to place Oman in the top 20 most innovative countries in the world by 2040. The vision of the National Innovation Strategy is for Oman to achieve a national innovation driven knowledge-based economy. The Strategy seeks to create an enabling innovation environment, diversification of the economy, creation of jobs and enhancement of living standards. The four pillars of the National Innovation Strategy are:

- Further development of human capital and enhancement of research and development, and scientific outputs;
- Institutional and social integration to ensure effective communication and cooperation;

- Protection of intellectual property and knowledge transfer;
- Economic diversification.

8. Embedding a Culture of *Innovation* in the University

Innovation can be defined in a variety of ways. Briefly, it involves the generation and implementation of new ideas to provide better products, processes or services. Innovation is both a process and an outcome. Innovation involves understanding the problems and issues facing stakeholders. This requires regular consultation with both internal and external stakeholders. The process of innovation is not complete until the new idea is implemented and it actually works. ASU will therefore continue to encourage and foster good communication and close working relationships with its key stakeholders including students, staff, employers, business and industry, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), etc. This will enable ASU to gather up-to-date information on stakeholder needs. All ASU leaders and staff are expected and required to reach out and find relevant information which will form the basis for designing, development and implementation of solutions to potential problems and stakeholder needs.

Within the context of shared governance in the University, all students and staff will be given a say in the formulation of plans and the decision-making processes on issues that affect them. All staff in the University will be empowered to contribute new ideas or new processes and ways of resolving student, staff or stakeholder problems, new methods of teaching students efficiently and effectively, new processes for staff training, etc. All staff will be encouraged to contribute ideas that add value and how these ideas can be implemented in practice.

The literature on strategy implementation suggests that seventy percent of all change efforts in organizations usually fail. ASU therefore recognizes that not all new ideas that are suggested by staff will succeed. The University will encourage risk-taking by its staff. Those who try new ideas even if they fail will be celebrated for doing so. Staff who take on risks (not necessarily financial risks but risks to their pride, status or motivation) will be recognized and rewarded by management before their peers and staff in the University. Examples of effective rewards will include public recognition within ASU on University Day and on the ASU Website, and presentations of new ideas to the University Academic Board, the Board of Trustees or the Board Directors

All ideas once generated will be expected to be implemented and transformed into new products or processes and improved ways of doing things. All leaders at various levels in the University will be expected to be innovation supporters because they set the tone for innovation. Leaders will also be expected to draw on the best talent from ASU to encourage innovation. Uncreative leaders who kill new innovative ideas shall not be tolerated. Leaders and managers in making recruitment decisions will be expected to recruit innovative talent. These are effectively staff who are both team workers but also non-conformists who will challenge the status quo by asking the right questions and supporting the processes of creating new ideas and implementing them.

All leaders in the University will be expected to encourage departmental and inter-departmental collaboration. It should be recognized that ideas that may well succeed could come from people working in different teams or departments. All leaders and staff should recognize that we are all responsible for one another's success and if ASU succeeds, all stakeholders win. The Vice chancellor and all senior leaders in the University are committed to embedding a culture of innovation in the University. It is recognized that this is a long-term and sustainable project.

Consistent with the National Innovation Strategy and in line with its declared aspirations to be an

innovative Institution, the University will pursue the following commitments:

- a. Conduct regular surveys to ascertain the state of innovation within the University and take steps to improve its innovation performance;
- b. Identify obstacles to innovation within the University and take steps to eliminate them;
- c. Encourage all its students and staff to contribute innovative ideas in all areas of University activity;
- d. Provide training and support to students in critical thinking, communications, research skills, and entrepreneurship to nurture new ideas, creativity and experimentation;
- e. Collaborate with national and international Universities in joint research and development programs to develop competitive advantage and critical mass of researchers and scientists in a selection of areas;
- f. Develop business incubators and provide support to students, staff, graduates and the youth to stimulate innovation and new business start-ups.
- g. Communicate innovative ideas particularly successful ones through social media, the internet and the University website for the benefit of its stakeholders;
- h. Provide leadership and inspiration and serve as an example for all its stakeholders and the community in the area of creativity and innovation.

9. *Innovation in Teaching and Learning*

Traditional classroom teaching delivery methods are becoming obsolete as the vast majority of University students are adept at using technology. Universities therefore need to continue to make improvements to their teaching delivery methods to accommodate these students. A'Sharqiyah University currently uses a range of technologies in teaching and learning and to communicate with students. These technologies include, the internet, emails, Moodle learning management system, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, MASADER, and various social media platforms. There are vast amounts of knowledge today in any discipline as Universities and companies can create and distribute knowledge very easily using modern methods of communication.

A'Sharqiyah University encourages all its staff to keep abreast with developments, innovations and use of these technologies in learning and teaching. Academic staff are encouraged to go further and to adopt these innovations and technologies to assist students to enhance their learning experience. Improvements and innovation in use of these technologies in learning and teaching will enable A'Sharqiyah University to effectively serve its students and to remain competitive.

In the context of this strategy, innovation in teaching and learning at A'Sharqiyah University will be widely interpreted to include doing something new in student registration, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses, continuing professional development training, etc. Other areas that are relevant and covered in this definition include student recruitment, academic advising and pastoral care and support, program and course curriculum design, development and review, program management, application of technology in teaching, and improving graduate employability. Any other novel approaches which lead to an overall sustainable improvement in student experience and supported with evidence are welcome.

10. Innovation in Research and Consultancy

The University's research publications performance has grown significantly over the last few years. This is because research active staff have been recruited and policies to encourage research have been enacted. These policies include financial support for conference attendance, international visits to other Universities and laboratories, seed funding to support research ideas in their infancy and the research publications incentive where staff are rewarded financially for publishing journal papers which are cited in internationally recognized research platforms.

The University encourages all faculty to pursue commercialization of their research ideas where possible and to undertake impactful research. The University will support faculty to communicate and showcase their research outputs from laboratories and journal papers through electronic pamphlets and visually engaging media to industry specialists. The Technology Transfer Office in collaboration with the Department of Media and Public Relations will assist Faculty to turn ideas in research articles into viable and scalable practical solutions that are of interest to commercial organizations.

The University will pursue impactful research and Faculty are particularly encouraged to evaluate the impact of their research and to pursue innovative ideas that will be impactful beyond academia. Faculty should undertake research and generate new ideas which will bring benefits to society, the economy and the environment. Solutions which contribute to delivery of Oman Vision 2040 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to 2030 are particularly encouraged.

All impactful research that is undertaken by faculty will be recognized by the University. This includes academic impact and also economic and societal impact. Academic impact is one where the research significantly shifts the boundaries of knowledge, understanding and advances research methods, theory and applications within a discipline. Economic and Social impact is one where the research makes a contribution to individuals, organizations and nations.

11. Innovation in Delivery of Services

There are many internal processes that support delivery of the value proposition in the University. These activities and processes are delivered by several non-academic departments. Their efficiency and effectiveness have a bearing on the quality of teaching and learning, research and other activities in the University. All departments in the University are strongly encouraged to continuously review their processes with a view to reengineering them and introducing innovative process developments. All support departments in the University have a contribution to make to improve further the experience of students along their journey. For example, the asset management department has role to play in improving the University's assets utilization. The procurement department can improve effectiveness of purchasing processes by deepening relationships with suppliers. The admissions and registration department can rethink improved processes for applications, student registration, adding and dropping courses, etc. to students. The finance department may bring further improvements by developing close working relationships with banks and other external stakeholders.

12. ASU's contributing to Innovation in Local Firms

Companies recognize the importance of innovation in order to improve their products and processes. It is through innovation that firms can improve their productivity and competitive advantage. Many companies very often seek to strengthen their innovative capabilities by developing partnerships with other companies

and local Universities.

A'Sharqiyah University has a unique opportunity to be a primary source of highly qualified people and new ideas for the local economy. Local companies should also look closely at A'Sharqiyah University to contribute to their research and development initiatives. As local companies recognize the importance of innovation and a highly skilled workforce for their competitiveness and prosperity, A'Sharqiyah University will no doubt be their natural partner for the social and economic development of the region. The University may also in due course attract other investments into the region from funding agencies, entrepreneurs and other educated people who may wish to relocate to the A'Sharqiyah region to exploit emerging business opportunities.

The University will take the initiative in catering for regional needs and will be a source of innovation and talent for agriculture, business and industry in the A'Sharqiyah region and thereby contribute to the social and economic development of the region. The University has strengths in a range of areas including telecommunications engineering, water and environmental engineering, nanotechnology, industrial chemistry, veterinary medicine, food science and human nutrition, law, education, and business administration. Students and staff in the College of Law may offer start-up companies legal advice relating to company registration. Legal clinics may also be offered to local SMEs in areas such as business contracts, employment law, negligence, health and safety law or other legal claims. Students and staff in Accounting and Finance may offer advice to local firms on sources of finance including loans and grants, venture capital, development of business plans, filing of value added tax or income tax returns, etc. Students and staff in management may offer SMEs business advice on development of effective marketing strategies. Students and staff in environmental engineering may offer local companies advice and support on their environmental sustainability and zero carbon programs, etc. In veterinary medicine, a clinic is planned to provide treatment for animals of farmers in the region.

The University will explore all possible pathways for transfer of knowledge and technology to business and industry through patents and licensing, consultancy work, publications, joint meetings with industrial partners, co-supervising of research projects, research collaboration, industrial secondments and internships, and of course hiring of University graduates by industry.

13. Celebrating Innovation in the University

Faculty, Staff and students who contribute to development and implementation of innovative ideas will be recognized by the University annually on University Day. The University has introduced four annual innovation awards:

- Award for innovation in Teaching and Learning
- Award for Innovation in Research and Development
- Award for Innovation in Service Process Improvement.
- Award for Contribution of an Innovative Idea to a Local Firm.

The Award for *Innovation in Teaching and Learning* will be conferred by the Vice Chancellor on the recommendation of the *University Learning and Teaching Committee* to a Faculty Member or a Team that develops and implements an innovative idea in teaching and learning.

The Award for *Innovation in Research and Development* will be conferred by the Vice Chancellor on the recommendation of the *University Research and Enterprise Committee* to a Faculty Member or Research Group that develops an innovative idea through Research and Development and brings it to commercialization or that is impactful.

The Award for *Innovation in Service Process Improvement* will be conferred by the Vice Chancellor on the

recommendation of the *University Students and Staff Services Committee* to a Staff Member, a Team or Department that develops and implements an innovative idea that leads to significant improvements in staff or student satisfaction.

The Award for *Contribution of an Innovative Idea to a Local Firm* will be conferred by the Vice Chancellor on the recommendation of the *University Industry and Community Engagement Committee* to a Staff Member, a Team or Department that contributes an innovative idea to a local firm.

14. Implementation of this Strategy

College Deans, Directors of Units and Heads of Non-Academic Departments are responsible for implementation of this Strategy. College, Departmental and Unit operational plans shall be prepared annually taking into account this strategy. All plans shall be monitored annually.

At the end of each academic year, the Deputy Vice Chancellors for Academic Affairs and Research shall evaluate the University’s performance in the area of Innovation and prepare a report to the University Academic Board on progress taking into account the Key Performance Indicators and targets in the table below.

| No. | Key Performance Indicators | Target for 2020/21 | Target for 2021/22 | Target for 2022/23 | Target for 2023/24 | Target for 2024/25 |
|-----|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Number of innovative research project ideas coming from students and staff (Innovative BFP, EJAAD, etc.) annually. | 10 | 10 | 15 | 15 | 20 |
| 2 | Percentage of Innovative initiatives coming straight from employees versus coming from management | 20% | 25% | 30% | 35% | 40% |
| 3 | Number of innovative initiatives in teaching and learning delivery | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 4 | Number of innovative initiatives developed in collaboration and support of local firms | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 5 | Number of innovative initiatives leading to service process improvements. | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

15. References

UNCTAD (2014), *Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Review: Oman*, United Nations, New York.

The National Innovation Strategy, 2020. Available at:

<https://www.trc.gov.om/trcweb/sites/default/files/2017-08/scientific%20insights.pdf>. Accessed on 4th April, 2021.