University Research Strategy

2022-2025

RS0011

Approvals

This document has been approved by

Name	Date
1. Board of Trustees	13 July 2023

Implementation and Responsibility

Document owner	Contact person	Date of Implementation
Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research	Chair of University Research and Enterprise Committee	13 July 2023

General provisions

- Any form of non-compliance with this policy/procedure makes those responsible open to University disciplinary measures.

- Any exception from this policy/procedure upon application shall have no effect against the University or others unless it has been approved by the Vice Chancellor or the Board of Directors and/or the Board of Trustees as the case may be.

Revision history

Version	Author/ Reviewer	Revision(s) made	Date
1	University Research and Enterprise Committee	The strategy has been revised and any references to the University strategic plan 2014-2020 have been removed. The strategy has been amended to ensure alignment with the new strategic plan 2020-2015. The key elements of the strategy remain unchanged.	9 May 2021
2	University Research and Enterprise Committee	The strategy has been revised in line with the Strategic Plan 2020-25 and the recent amendments to it. The following lists out the revisions made to the Research Strategy: 1. The background about RGSO and RITTC along with the role of UREC and UREBC is added. 2. The strategic sub-domains of research and consultancy under the strategic domain of Academic Excellence were added. 3. The table of university research policies was updated with the revised names of the research policies and the addition of the new research policies.	13 July 2023

		4. The University research themes, and research areas are updated. 5. The targeted KPIs of the strategy are updated.	

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 fall of 2022, the student population at ASU had exceeded 5,700 students. The University has high aspirations for the futureas 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.

The Research and Graduate Studies Office (RGSO) was established in February 2020 as the main entity for managing the University-level research activities. As stated in ASU's Organizational Structure, RGSO reports to the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research (DVCAAR). The role of RGSO is distinguished from that of the University Research and Enterprise Committee (UREC) chaired by the DVCAAR by stating that the RGSO's scope of work is more executive/operational while the one of UREC is more legislative/strategic. As such, RGSO implements procedures associated with research policies developed by UREC which hierarchically reports to the University Academic Board (UAB). In June 2020, A University Research Ethics and Biosafety Committee (UREBC) was formed to ensure that all research activities in the University involving human, animal or other genetic/biohazardous considerations are well-planned, managed and monitored. UREBC reports to UREC. RGSO coordinates the processes of reviewing research grant proposals to obtain ethical approvals as required by funding agencies.

In July 2022, a Research, Innovation and Technology Transfer Center (RITTC) was approved by the Board of Trustees (BoT) and to be operated in 2022/2023. The RITTC aspires to be a leading research management and development hub that contributes to building capacity and promoting innovation to support delivery of Oman Vision 2040. In addition, the RITTC seeks to develop and strengthen the research-innovation-technology transfer nexus through applied research that contributes to national and international socio-economic development.

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.

Vision

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

2. Integration of University's Research Strategy

The University's Research Strategy 2022-2025 underpins the University's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 and makes explicit its provisions in relation to research. It supports the University's Strategic Commitments to *"contribute to knowledge and innovation through applied research and scholarship in priority areas"* and to *"utilize our expertise and resources to provide consultancy services".* The Strategy reflects the University's values and commitment to research. It aligns with other strategies including the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Industry and Community Engagement Strategy. TheResearch Strategy guides the Institutional Research Journey at University, College, Departmental and Individual levels.

The University's Strategic plan 2020-2025 reflects the elements of the Balanced Scorecard and Strategic Commitment 3.3 and Commitment 3.4 relate to Research and Consultancy. ASU values research as a fundamental factor in enhancing its teachingand providing quality education informed by scholarly enquiry. As a consequence, the University aims tocreate and disseminate knowledge and to foster innovation which contributes to development of human capital and in turn, the country's social and economic development. This approach to research by ASU isenshrined in its mission and vision and is articulated in its five-year Strategic Plan.

Table *1* below shows the Strategic Commitments and Initiatives under the Subdomains RESEARCH and CONSULTANCY of the Strategic Domain ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE. Each college or department of ASU has its own operational plan that maps onto the University's Strategic Plan. College plans have actions that are designed to achieve College Research Objectives and ultimately the University's Research objectives. In addition, RITTC coordinates with colleges to implement the University Research Strategy and operates as a central hub for capacity building, providing research management services and sponsorships, and processing institutional-level research data.

Table 1: The Strategic Sub-Domains of Research and Consultancy under the Strategic Domain of Academic Excellence

STRATEGIC DOMAIN	STRATEGIC SUBDOMAIN	STRATEGIC COMMITMENT	STRATEGIC INITIATIVES
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE	RESEARCH	To contribute to knowledge and innovation through fundamental and applied research and scholarship in priority areas.	We will continue to build research capacity to enhance the University's research productivity, profile, online presence and ranking.
	CONSULTANCY	To utilize our expertise and	We will develop the University

		resources to provide consultancy services.	consultancy capacity and increase our income from consultancy projects.

3. University Research Policies

Since its inception in 2009, the University has developed several policies to guide its research activities. These policies have served the University well in enhancing its research outputs in terms of conference and journal papers and research income as exemplified in ASU's annual research reports. The full list of current policies is shown in Table *2* below with a brief description of the purpose of each policy.

Table 2: University Research Policies

Title	Policy No.	Purpose
Conference Support Fund Policy	RS0001	The purpose of this fund is to avail financial assistance to a faculty member or a student to present a research paper at a national, regional or international conference.
Research Collaborative Visit Policy	RS0002	The purpose of this policy is to encourage collaborations with external bodies which ASU regards as vital for advancing scientific knowledge and encouraging collaborative research activities.
Policy for Project Transfer of Research Project	RS0003	The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines on how to replace principal investigators and faculty members on research projects if they resign from the University.
Internal Research Grants Policy	RS0004	This policy is aimed as providing research funding from ASU resources to enable faculty in becoming competitive enough in securing external research funding and sponsorships.
ASU Rules and Regulations for Operation and Utilization of t h e Research Funds	RS0005	The aim of this policy is to set clear and transparent guidelines of how to deal with research funds in accordance with established procedures that meet the requirements of funding bodies.
Consultancy Policy	RS0006	The purpose of this policy is to encourage consultancy among ASU staff in order to support professional practices that will benefit individual members of staff, the University and the Community.

Research Ethics Policy	RS0007	The purpose of this ASU research ethics policy is to encourage and support quality research that adheres to international norms and standards in terms of ethics, transparency, integrity and regard for humans, animals and non-human natural life systems.
Intellectual Property Policy	RS0008	The policy aims to foster knowledge creation and to protect creator rights by establishing an environment that supports research, innovation and creativity.
Research-informed Teaching	RS0009	The purpose of this policy is to ensure the existence of a research-teaching nexus by embedding faculty research into ASU's curricula in order to establish a research-informed learning and teaching environment.
Research Publications Incentive Policy	RS0010	The aim of this policy is to motivate ASU researchers to enhance their research outputs and to publish high quality research papers in internationally recognized journals. Such high quality research publications will drive research paper citations, improve research collaboration, and enhance the University's ranking nationally and internationally.
Policy for Recruitment of Researchers on Sponsored Research Projects	RS0012	The purpose of this policy is to clarify the responsibilities and procedures for the process of recruiting researchers to undertake sponsored research projects. These include the responsibilities of the policy stakeholders and the detailed procedures of recruiting researchers under various modes and durations of research employment and research services for long or short terms.

4. SWOT Analysis

ASU is a relatively small private university and currently relies on MoHERI's Higher Education Admission Centre for most of its student intake. The University has made progress in attracting fee-paying private students. However, most of the revenue that the University currently generates comes from MoHERI students. The University acknowledges the need to diversify its income streams. Other possible income steams for development include: research and consultancy, short-course provision for industry, collaborative program provision and recruitment of international students.

The University seeks to improve further its research performance. This will help the University to raise its position in the national and international league tables. Furthermore, this will in turn help to attract more national and international students and high quality faculty. The following SWOT analysis presented in Table *3* provides a snapshot of ASU's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to research.

Table 3: Institutional Research SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Strong Executive Management support for research • Well-qualified and experienced national and international academic staff • Good conference attendance funding support • Availability of seed funding to pump prime research • Good policy framework that guides research activities • Journal publications incentive scheme that rewards research excellence • Excellent academic infrastructure	• High teaching workload compared to research intensive International Universities. • The University does not at the moment offer higher degrees by research • Financial constraints limit numbers of world class Professors that can be hired at ASU. • Low position in national and international University league tables
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Opportunity to improve its ranking in the national and international league tables; • Opportunity to offer Higher Degrees by Research; • Opportunity to collaborate with national and international Universities in research; • Opportunity to collaborate with industry in research; • Opportunity to bid for research and consultancy funding through platforms such as EJAAD; • Opportunity to bid for research funding from the TRC through the block funding program.	• Failure to meet the OAAA standard on Staff Research and Consultancy • Failure to retain or attract high quality research- focused academic staff. • Failure to improve its ranking in the national and international league tables;

5. Attributes of University Research Strategy 2022-2025

The University has identified the need to improve its research performance and outputs. This University Research Strategy 2022-2025 provides an outline of our current position and sets out achievements that we seek to deliver over the above period. Finally, the strategy proposes how we will achieve those objectives. This research strategy takes into account the external environmental factors that influence research including:

- Government Priorities articulated in the Oman Vision 2040;

- Sectors in the national program for enhancing economic diversification "Tanfeedh";

- The funding policies and priorities of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

- Increasing emphasis on Inter-disciplinary research, international collaboration and partnerships;
- Increasing competition for Research funding.

Over the course of the University Research Strategy 2022-2025, the University will pursue the following research strategies:

5.1 Research Staff Recruitment and Selection

Staff are the University's greatest resource. Academic staff play a crucial role in the academic and research success of the University. The University shall appoint, develop and retain the best research active academic staff and provide them with a working environment that is conducive for academic research. All academic, technician and research staff shall benefit from a program of research training, mentoring and professional development.

5.2 Health, Safety and the Environment

A'Sharqiyah University shall endeavor to provide a safe, secure and healthy work environment for all its students, staff and other stakeholders. Each member of academic staff, student, visitor or contractor has a primary responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others who are likely to be affected by their actions. All line managers in the University shall provide for the health and safety of all those under their responsibility. The University insists on and shall adhere to strict compliance with all legislative requirements governing occupational safety, health and environmental protection.

5.3 Research Leadership Roles

Full Professors and Associate Professors are research leadership positions. The University will appoint or promote academic staff to research leadership roles. Accordingly, the University will review its staffing structure to ensure that the proportion of full Professors and Associate Professors to full time academic staff is comparable or above the national average for all Private Higher Education Institutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

5.4 International Research Collaboration

The University will continue to support activities that promote international collaboration. International partnerships at individual, department or College levels are to be encouraged. At Institutional level, the University will continue to sign memoranda of understanding with international Universities with a view to knowledge exchange, undertaking joint research projects, joint supervision of research degrees and joint preparation of bids for funding of research projects.

5.5 Priority Research Areas and Research Groups

The national program in the Sultanate of Oman for economic diversification identified the following sectors for development under the "Tanfeedh" program. They are: manufacturing, agriculture and fisheries, logistics, tourism, and mining. The University will support research that targets implementation of projects in these five sectors. Furthermore, research projects that tackle issues in areas of national priority such as road accidents, red palm weevil, renewable energy, social

observatory as well as contemporary arts and humanity studies shall be encouraged and supported. Academic staff who wish to proceed and form Research Groups under these themes will be strongly encouraged and supported to do so. The University will continue to provide seed funding for projects in these areas and other research topics. In addition to the national programs and priority areas, the research themes of the University cover a broad range of vibrant research areas as presented in Table 4 based on the strength research areas of ASU faculty.

Table 4: University Research Themes and Research Areas

Research Themes	Research Areas
Advanced Applied and Health Sciences	• Materials Science • Bioactive Molecules • Nanomaterials • Electrochemistry and Sensors • Food and Medical Microbiology • Human Nutrition • Antioxidant, Antimicrobial and Anticancer-Activities of Plant, Algae and Fungi • Optimization of Enzymes Applications in Food Manufacturing • Fractional Calculus • Applied Mathematics • Biomathematics
Contemporary Engineering and Information Technologies	• Sustainability • Power Electronics • Renewable Energy • Wireless Communications • Water and Environmental Engineering • Construction Management and Engineering • Information Technology • Artificial Intelligence • Cybersecurity • Big Data
Innovative Business Administration and Entrepreneurship	• Innovation • Leadership • Human Resources Management • Strategic Management • International Business • Business Analytics • Marketing Research • Records Management • Archives and Archiving
Local and Universal Arts and Humanity	• Education • Psychology

Studies	• Linguistics
	• Social Science
	• Islamic studies
	• Political science
	• History and Culture
Law and Legal Studies	• Public Law
	• Private law

5.6 Securing External Research Funding

It is extremely important that academic staff secure external funding to support research. This is essential because it enables additional expertise to be brought in to support research activities. The University will encourage staff to bid for external sources of funding such as the MoHERI's Block Funding Program including Research Grants (RG), Graduate Research Grants (GRG), and Undergraduate Research Grants (URG); the Strategic Research Program (SRP); and industrial sponsorships through the EJAAD platform; and international research funding agencies. Academic colleagues will be supported and they are expected to bid for and secure external research funding within their areas of specialization.

5.7 Collaboration with Industrial Companies and Research Organizations

The University shall pursue opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange with industrial companies, private sector commercial enterprises, the public sector and other non-governmental organizations for mutual benefit. Industrials research collaboration opens the door for securing student internship opportunities, sharing of research facilities and equipment, and sources of research income and consultancy.

5.8 Research Informed Teaching

The university will strive to increase the number of students on postgraduate taught programs. All taught postgraduate programs at the University have a research or dissertation component. Better promotion and marketing of taught postgraduate programs should increase postgraduate student numbers and assist faculty in increasing their research publications.

5.9 Development of Doctoral Research Programs

The University will develop doctoral research programs (in cooperation with international Universities) to help generate research ideas which can be pursued and published in high impact reputable international journals.

5.10 Dissemination of Research Results

The university will provide financial support to ensure that results of research are disseminated at national and international conferences. The university shall also support publication of research results in nationally and internationally recognized journals. Indeed, the University has in place a research publications incentive scheme to encourage high quality research publications by academic staff. Colleges are encouraged to organize and host both national and international conferences and

workshops to promote networking and knowledge exchange.

6. Implementation of this Research Strategy

College Deans and Director of RITTC are responsible for implementation of this research strategy. College operational plans shall be prepared annually taking into account this research strategy. Research plans prepared by Heads of Departments, and Individuals must also take account of College Operational Plans and the University Research Strategy. Colleges' operational plans will be monitored annually. The institutional-level RITTC's operational plan shall also be prepared and reviewed annually.

At the end of each academic year, the Deputy Vice Chancellors for Academic Affairs and Research in consultation with the Director of Research, Innovation and Technology Transfer Center shall evaluate the University's research performance and prepare a report to the University Academic Board (UAB) on research progress taking into account the Strategic Research Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets presented in the **Error! Reference source not found.** which are in line with those of the .

Table 3: Strategic Research KPIs and Targets

No.	Research KPI	Target for 2022/2023	Target for 2023/2024	Target for 2024/2025
1.	**Number** of research conferences, symposiums, and forums organized annually.	1	2	3
2.	**Number** of recipients of research awards.	1	2	3
3.	**Average** research income from external funding agencies per academic staff in OMR.	1100	1200	1200
4.	**Expenditure** on research and development by the University as a **proportion** of total expenditure.	24%	25%	26%
5.	**Average number** of refereed journal publications per University academic staff **indexed in Scopus**.	1.3	1.4	1.5
6.	**Percentage** of papers published by University academic staff with co-authors affiliated to other institutions.	80%	83%	85%
7.	**Number** of innovative research project ideas coming from students & staff (URG, GRG, …) annually.	60	65	70

8.	The **number** of active consultancy contracts/ projects with the public and private sectors.	4	5	5
9.	Consultancy income as a **percentage** of total University income.	0.01%	0.02%	0.03%
10.	**Proportion** of academic staff member who are active in consultancy.	4%	5%	5%

7. References

- ASU Strategic Plan 2020-2025.
- Oman Higher Education Institutions Ranking Manual (Draft 2, December 2018).
- Oman Vision 2040, available www.2040.om accessed on 12th October 2022.