



# Developing Standards-based Accreditation in Oman

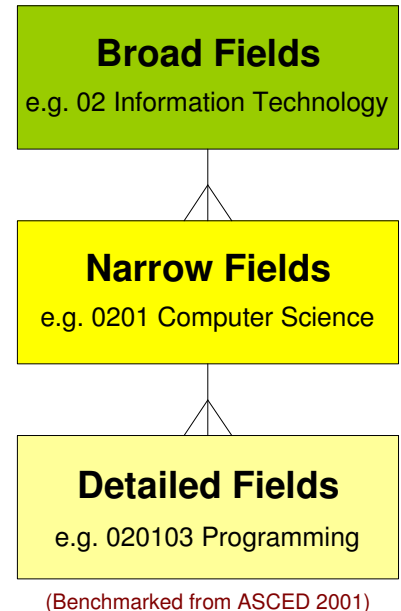


Oman is a developing country of 3 million people with a dynamic and rapidly growing higher education sector. It has a legacy of nationally developed and imported programs of higher education. One of the consequences of this is that there are numerous quality assurance systems being utilized.

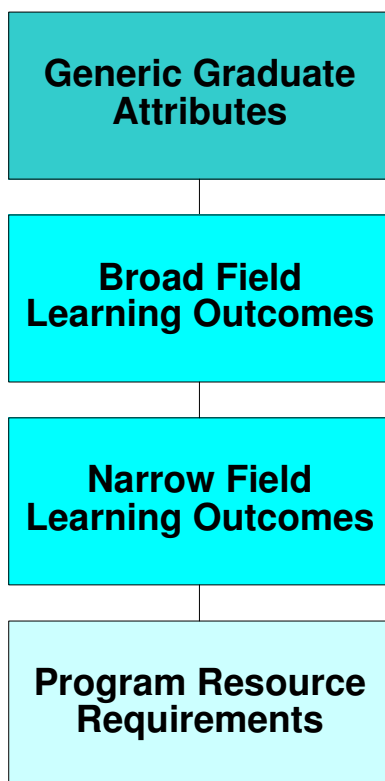
In response, Oman is developing a set of national academic standards for the approval of higher education programs. These academic standards will be developed based on a comprehensive standard classifications system of education (such as the Australian Classification of Education system ASCED 2001, depicted right).

Broad Fields of Study are distinguished from each other on the basis of theoretical content and the broad purpose for which the study is undertaken. Each Broad Field consists of a number of Narrow. Each is distinguished from other Narrow Fields in the same Broad Field on the basis of the objects of interest and the purpose for which the study is undertaken. Detailed Fields are subdivisions of the Narrow Fields. Each is distinguished from other Detailed Fields in the same Narrow Field on the basis of methods and techniques, tools and equipment, and a stricter application of the criteria used for Board and Narrow Fields.

International working groups are being established to develop sets of academic standards defined at the Narrow Field of Study level.



The national academic standards will have four components: Generic Graduate Attributes; Broad Field Learning Outcomes; Narrow Field Learning Outcomes; and Program-specific Resource Requirements. The first three concentrate on outcomes, the fourth recognises the importance of considering inputs.



Generic Graduate Attributes are the attributes, skills and knowledge that any graduate of an Omani degree is expected to have developed or acquired during their course of study. Some will be international in flavour, such as problem solving skills and critical thinking capabilities. Others maybe Omani-specific, such as developing an understanding and appreciation of Omani heritage, religion and customs. In this way, academic standards play a vital role in nation-building. There may be up to ten Generic Graduate Attributes.

Learning Outcomes are the core academic attributes, skills and knowledge that a graduate of a particular program is expected to have developed or acquired during their course of study. Some will be at the Broad Field of Study level (e.g. all Engineering graduates ought to have achieved certain learning outcomes) while others will be at the more specific Narrow Field level (e.g. all Civil Engineering graduates ought to have achieved specific learning outcomes).

Some will be internationally benchmarked and internationally applicable/transferable; others will relate to Oman's specific context. There may be any number of Student Learning Outcomes.

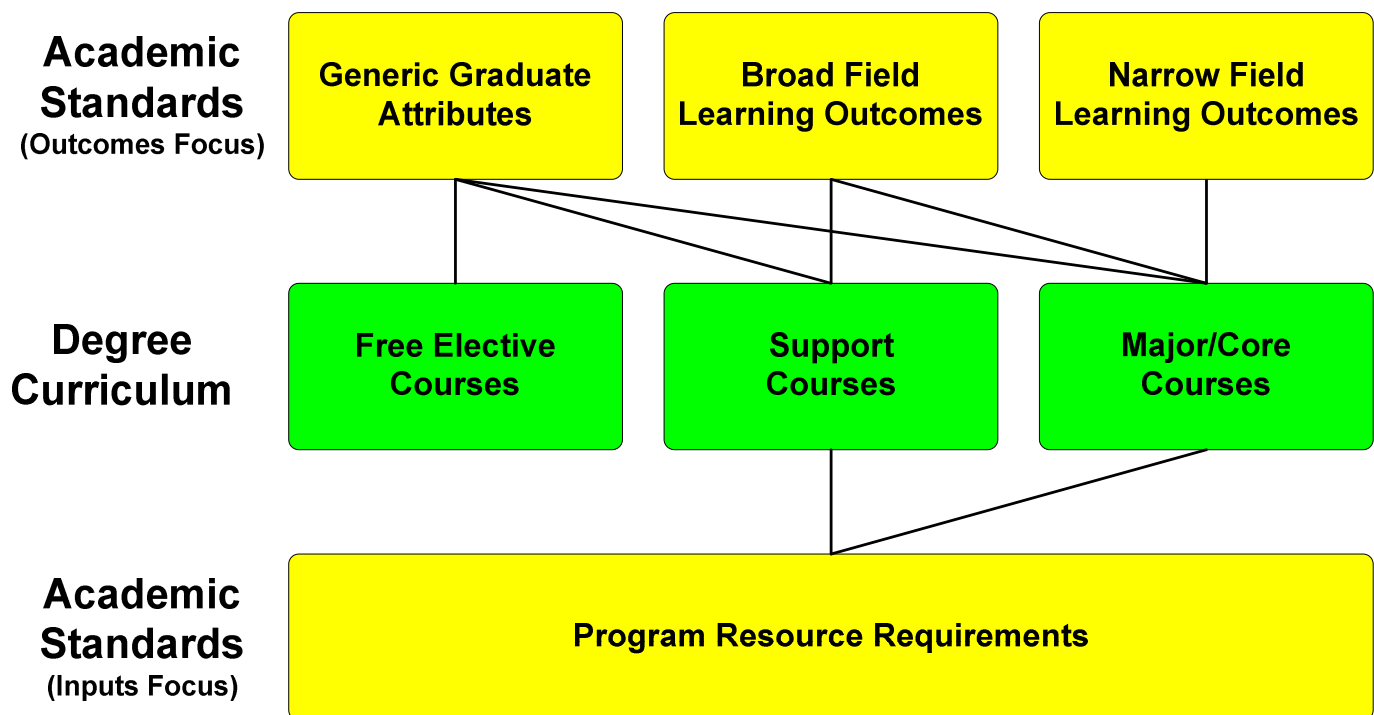
Many programs will have certain minimum resourcing requirements, such as relating to laboratory facilities, IT resources etc. There may be any number of Program Resource Requirements. They are set in the context of a particular Narrow Field of study, but may translate into other sets of standards where they relate to a shared course (e.g. a common first year course).

# Applying Standards to Program Accreditation

National academic standards serve a number of useful purposes, such as the following:

- Assistance for higher education providers in developing and revising curricula.
- Greater synergy between program licensing (conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education) and program accreditation (conducted by the Oman Accreditation Council).
- Greater transparency of licensing and accreditation analytical and decision making processes.
- Improved consistency of higher education standards across Oman.
- Facilitation of national and international credit recognition and credit transfer.
- Greater transparency for employers seeking to understand the meaning of higher education qualifications held by job applicants.
- Student learning outcomes designed to be consistent with national needs.

Curriculum developers, program licensing panels and program accreditation panels will use standards to guide their processes. The relationship between standards and curriculum is shown in the following diagram.



For any given program, there are four dimensions to the academic standards: Generic Graduate Attributes; Broad Field Student Learning Outcomes, Narrow Field Student Learning Outcomes; and Program Resource Requirements.

The *Generic Graduate Attributes* are common to all degree programs. It is expected that the possible combinations of all courses in a program curriculum will, cumulatively, assist the student in achieving these attributes. *Broad Field student learning outcomes* apply to all programs in that Broad Field. It is expected that the combination of major courses and support courses in a program curriculum will, cumulatively, assist the student in achieving these outcomes. *Narrow Field student learning outcomes* are specific to programs in that Narrow Field. It is expected that the major courses in a program curriculum will, cumulatively, assist the student in achieving these outcomes. Where there are specific *resourcing requirements* for a program then they will be developed as part of the overall standards for a Narrow Field of Study.



For further information contact the Oman Accreditation Board

Phone: +968 24475170 Email: [enquiries@oac.gov.om](mailto:enquiries@oac.gov.om)

Fax: +968 24475168 Web: [www.oac.gov.om](http://www.oac.gov.om)