

**AN NAJAH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

***EVALUATION REPORT***

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## **1. Introduction**

This report is the result of the evaluation of An Najah National University, Palestine. Following a request from the President of the University, the Steering Committee of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme appointed a team for the institutional quality evaluation of the University. The purpose of the evaluation of An Najah National University is to contribute to the advancement of the strategic management of the University and to its organisational development, and to enable the University to strengthen its capacity to anticipate and address change. In its deliberations, the IEP Team assessed and focused on the University's strategic priorities and used this as a basis for making recommendations for the future.

### **1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme**

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture.

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement.

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic planning
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision making and strategic planning as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions:

- What is the university trying to do?
- How is the university trying to do it?
- How does the university know that it works?
- How should the university change in order to improve?

### **1.2 Institution and National Context**

An-Najah National University (ANU) has its origins in the establishment, in 1918, of An-Najah Nabulsi School. In 1941 it became An-Najah College, and in 1965 it was functioning as an Institute dedicated to preparing teachers, and awarded degrees in various fields of study. By 1977 the institution had evolved to become An-Najah National University, with two faculties, Arts and Science. In the same year ANU became a full member of the Association of Arab Universities. In 1978 the faculties of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Educational Sciences, and Engineering were established. Today, as a public university, in accordance with the law relating to higher education organisations in Palestine, ANU is largely autonomous in terms of budgetary and planning matters, and the general operation of the University. Government financial support is limited and the involvement of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) is concerned mainly with the accreditation and approval of new academic programmes that ANU may wish to offer.

### **1.3 The Self-Evaluation Process**

In accordance with the IEP methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the first visit, a 28-page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of the University was sent to the evaluation team. The SER analysed the University's institutional context, vision, mission and goals, its organisational structure and quality management and quality assurance arrangements, as well as its strategic management and capacity for change. The SER was accompanied by seven annexes, including the University's Strategic Plan (2011/2015) and a SWOT analysis undertaken in preparing the self-evaluation. Also included, as annexes, were organisational charts, information on institutional councils and committees, and institutional data.

The self-evaluation process was directed by a Self-Evaluation Commission appointed by the President, and chaired by the President's Assistant for Planning, Development, and Quality, Dr Allam Mousa. Members were selected from amongst the University's Vice Presidents, Deans and Directors, and President's Assistants, reflecting the University's view that the involvement of and input from all units of ANU was important to the process of preparing the institutional self-evaluation. The self-evaluation methodology involved analysis against objectives as stated in the University's *Strategic Plan*. The self-evaluation process also included regular meetings of the Self-Evaluation Commission, information collected from various academic and administrative units of the University, and meetings with groups of students and staff. The SER was also published on the University's intranet, with an invitation to comment and provide feedback. The IEP team greatly appreciated the work done in the SER and the accompanying documentation, and found it to be of great assistance in enabling them to undertake their deliberations.

### **1.4 The Evaluation Team**

The evaluation took place during two visits. The Team undertook a first visit to the University from 22 February to 24 February 2011, and a second visit from 26 April to 30 April 2011. For its second visit, the Team requested some additional information and documentation regarding ANU's strategic planning, organisational structures, quality review and evaluation, research, learning and teaching committees and groups, and external links. Further clarification on a number of matters was also requested. These requests related to issues discussed during the first visit but which were not fully reflected in the SER. This additional information was provided two weeks in advance of the second visit and covered the issues identified by the IEP Team in an extremely helpful manner.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Tove Bull, former Rector, University of Tromsø, Norway (Chair);
- Eric Froment, former President, Université de Lyon, France;
- Tatjana Volkova, former Rector, BA School of Business and Finance, Latvia;
- Moritz Maikämper, ESU Student Experts Pool, Germany;
- Jethro Newton, Dean of Academic Quality and Enhancement, University of Chester, UK (Team Coordinator).

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the ANU President, Professor Rami Hamdallah, for the welcome and hospitality provided during their two visits.

Special thanks are also offered by the IEP Team to Dr Allam Mousa, Chair of the Self-Evaluation Commission, for his excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process, and to all other members of his team for their kind support.

## 2. Setting strategic directions: vision, mission, and general context

The University's norms and values are illustrated in its vision and mission. ANU's vision reflects its aspiration to achieve a 'global reputation', to be prominent in 'scientific research', to provide 'community service and leadership', and to contribute to 'sustainable development'. Its mission places strong emphasis on the development of 'human resources', the 'scientific knowledge, skills and abilities' of ANU's students and graduates, and their 'ability to compete' in the wider market place. The University's mission also highlights the importance of 'contributing to scientific research globally', 'meeting community needs', and 'preserving cultural and religious heritage and traditions' of Palestine and its people.

The feeling of the IEP Team is that, in seeking to achieve its vision and mission, ANU is playing a leading role in Palestinian society, and is to be congratulated for its dynamism and the clarity of its commitment in this regard. The Team learned of the considerable constraints placed upon the university by its operating environment, including financial unpredictability and the serious political restrictions imposed from outside. Despite such factors the University has developed good infrastructure, including an impressive new campus, and sets a good example to other Palestinian universities and to higher education institutions across the wider Arab world. The members of the IEP Team were deeply impressed by ANU's unique strengths as a cohesive academic community. By being the first university in Palestine to invite a team of independent IEP experts to evaluate its organisational arrangements ANU has shown itself to be a pioneering and forward-looking university.

The IEP Team learned that, notwithstanding the University's strengths and its achievements to date, there is acknowledgement by the institution of the need for further transition to assist the future development of ANU, its strategic direction, and the effectiveness of organisational arrangements. The emphasis placed by the University upon an appropriate degree of centralisation, and the continued institutionalisation of key structures, systems, committees, and governance arrangements, will be important for future progress. In connection with this, the IEP Team were interested to find that the university has recently developed a new *Strategic Plan*, containing a range of goals and objectives. In the view of the Team, there is more work to be done by the University to operationalise this Plan, and the ability to measure progress needs to be strengthened. Accordingly, the IEP Team would encourage the University to reflect on how vision and mission can be translated more clearly into measurable goals. (Matters relating to strategic planning are addressed more fully in the next section of this report).

In addressing future challenges, the IEP Team identifies five strategic priority areas for the University to consider. The first of these – 'Setting strategic directions: vision, mission, and general context' – has been described in this present section. The other areas are the subject of subsequent sections of this report; they are:

- Governance, management, strategic planning, and organisational issues
- Third Mission, knowledge transfer, and community service
- Developments in learning and teaching
- Quality assurance, quality management, and quality culture.

### **3. Governance, management, strategic planning and organisational Issues**

#### ***Governance, management, and academic organisation***

ANU is one of thirteen universities in Palestine, of which one is private, two are governmental, and the others public. The University is the largest in the West Bank. The University's academic organisation is quite extensive, structured as it is into seventeen faculties, and fifty three departments, of which one is a hospital. In 2000 ANU opened a new campus, 3km to the West of the old campus. A third campus, in the industrial zone of Nablus, houses the Hisham Hijawi College of Technology which offers a two-year vocational diploma, while the Khadouri campus, located in Tulkarm, hosts the faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine. ANU also has fourteen Scientific Research Centres, promoting research and knowledge transfer, and providing a range of services to the community. At the time of the IEP Team's visit, there were 20,537 registered students, of which 19,352 were undergraduate (BA) students and 1,185 were following Masters or Doctoral degree programmes. ANU is the only university in Palestine to offer a PhD programme, in Chemistry; approval is being sought for two other programmes, in Physics and Mathematics. In 2010/2011, there were some 1,385 academic and administrative staff, of which 656 are listed as 'academic', falling into the categories of Full, Associate, and Assistant Professor, and Lecturer, Instructor, and Teaching Assistant.

Although the MoEHE is responsible for managing governmental universities and for supervising private educational institutions, for governance purposes, as a public university, ANU is largely autonomous. In terms of planning, the influence of the Ministry is relatively indirect and is limited to the accreditation of a new faculty or new curricula. Otherwise, ANU enjoys complete financial, managerial and administrative autonomy. The University is largely dependent on student tuition fees for its income, with additional reliance also on income generation and, for capital projects, on donations. Government funding is very limited and completely unreliable, and accounts for no more than 10% of ANU's income.

For the purposes of governance, management, and decision-making, there are three main bodies at the top of the organisation: the Board of Trustees, the Deans' Council and the University Council. The Board of Trustees and its Chair are appointed by the President of Palestine, and are responsible for overseeing the appointment of the University President. As ANU is a public university, in strategic matters, the Board of Trustees is the highest decision-making body, with responsibility for managing and supervising the University and approving the President's recommendations on strategic matters. With the exception of the University President, there is no representation from the wider academic community. The Board is empowered to establish faculties, departments, and Institutes, and to oversee the recruitment of administrative staff. The Board of Trustees is also responsible for the development of financial resources and approval of the University's budget. However, external Board members do not undertake fund-raising work on behalf of the University. This is undertaken exclusively by the ANU President.

Other decision-making bodies are the Deans' Council and the University Council. The former, chaired by ANU's President, and including the Vice President for Academic Affairs and all Deans, is responsible for reviewing the University's academic policy, including proposals from faculty (college) councils on matters such as study plans and programmes of study. The Council also considers for approval recommendations on the appointment of academic staff. The University Council includes all members of the Deans' Council, together with heads and directors of academic and administrative departments. It considers general University issues and makes decisions on administrative matters

In addition to other strategic and management responsibilities, the University President makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees on appointments for Vice President, Dean, and Heads of Department. The President's work is supported by three Vice Presidents (for academic affairs; administrative affairs; and community affairs), and three Presidents' Assistants (for planning and quality assurance, graduate affairs, and international relations).

At faculty and department level, the University's deliberative and management processes are supported by a system of Faculty Councils and Department Councils. The Faculty Council is responsible for the academic and administrative affairs of the faculty, for coordination of departments within the faculty, and for links with other faculties and departments. The Council makes recommendations to the Dean for consideration by higher bodies within the University's governance and decision-making structures. Department Councils, which include all teaching staff, are responsible for curriculum plans and scientific research activities within the department, and for making recommendations on matters to be raised at the Faculty Council. Each faculty and department also has a Quality Council.

The University's portfolio of academic programmes is oriented towards meeting local, regional, and international (especially Arab world) labour market needs. The portfolio is markedly vocational, with the needs of business, industry, commerce, and the professions being addressed by ANU's faculties and departments. In the view of the IEP Team, the extent to which ANU successfully serves both the local and regional community, and Palestinian society, is striking. Recent developments include the opening of An Najah Teaching Hospital, an important resource both for the city of Nablus, and for the University's medical and health students. The University has a number of agreements and links with a range of strategic partners. These include collaboration with the private sector, NGOs, the Palestinian Authority, and local organisations, such as schools. This also includes a developing range of international links, fostered particularly by the Scientific Centres on a joint project basis. Relations and networks reflect ANU's international and global aspirations and the desire to open up and continue to extend cooperation with European and North American universities, and to diversify beyond its traditionally strong links with universities in the Arab world.

In considering the foregoing structures and activities, and other features of ANU as an organisation, it was apparent to the IEP Team that in a number of matters, such as infrastructure, finance, personnel, procurement and inventory management, there was a strong measure of central control. This was balanced in other areas, such as the provision of community services, by an appropriate degree of devolved authority. The Team learned that a number of factors contributed to the achievement of a greater degree of harmonisation in the management of administrative systems, processes, and procedures. For example, the University's commitment to and use of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) methodology appeared to be bringing tangible benefits in terms of administrative efficiency at the level of central and local departments. Moreover, the functioning of the University Council and the Deans' Council also seemed to contribute to centralisation, harmonisation, and organisational cohesion. Also, from discussions with academic staff, including senior managers at faculty level, it appeared to the IEP Team that in academic matters any centralisation of decision making presented no significant obstacles or dissatisfaction in terms of access or communication and was not experienced as overly bureaucratic or too hierarchical.

While noting that these particular arrangements seemed to work well for the University, from their consideration of institutional documentation, and through discussions in various meetings at all levels, the IEP Team formed a view of a seemingly complex organisational structure with a relatively large number of faculties, departments, administrative units, and cross-University coordinating departments. For example, the Team experienced some difficulty in interpreting the University's

organisational chart and, from it, in understanding the functioning and workings of the organisation. This led the Team to explore, through discussion with the University, whether the present organisational structure, including the configuration of faculties and departments was optimal and whether consideration had been given by the University's top structure to the benefits of review and modification of governance and organisational arrangements. This appeared to the IEP Team to be an important matter in terms of fitness for purpose and future organisational efficiency and effectiveness and, indeed, from the point of view of financial efficiency. The Team members were interested to learn that these matters were currently under consideration by the University's top structure, that the need for modification was recognised, and that this was an emerging priority, including at the level of the Board of Trustees. It was apparent to the IEP Team that rationalisation of faculties and departments is on the University's agenda, that the organisational chart is under review, and that departments were being merged or closed, where appropriate, in an effort to meet market needs and to achieve economies of scale. The Team members also heard of plans to reduce the number of Scientific Units from fourteen to six, and this appeared to the Team to be a step in the right direction.

In summary, the IEP Team wishes to encourage the University to reflect further on faculty and other organisational structure. From reviewing the university's complex organisational chart and related matters, the IEP Team believes that present governance, organisational, and strategic planning arrangements may need to be adjusted to support the effective future development of ANU in meeting its strategic aspirations. The IEP Team advises the University to continue its work towards the streamlining of organisational structures, including reducing the number of faculties and departments, to secure greater transparency and organisational efficiency and effectiveness. The IEP Team also recommends that ANU should pursue the opportunities available to it for clustering the number of Scientific Centres and bringing them together into fewer units.

### ***Strategic planning and organisational development***

The noteworthy achievements the university has made to date are helpfully set out in the SER and other documentation provided to the IEP Team. Discussions during various meetings with University staff were also helpful in this respect. Future plans are also discussed in the SER, to which was appended the University's *Strategic Plan* for the period 2011/2015, together with a brief but helpful SWOT analysis. The IEP considered this documentation in some detail and noted that the planning document identified four strategic goals, supported by objectives, strategic statements, and standards. Nevertheless, as observed in the previous section of this report, the IEP Team noted the apparent absence of clearly stated priorities in the setting of strategic goals. The SER points to the importance of such matters as improving the quality of the University's academic and administrative services, and the need to address human resources capacity building to support higher quality teaching and research. However, the *Strategic Plan* as presented did not appear to the IEP Team to contain measurable goals or clearly stated targets, or the means whereby progress against goals and objectives (or strategic statements) could be easily assessed. The Team heard of many initiatives and developments that show ANU to be a flourishing University, but believe that this energy needs to be harnessed by ensuring that the main priorities and goals are clearly identified and fully understood across the University. The Team formed the view that an action plan would be useful in this respect in enabling an assessment to be made of how best to make the goals achievable.

The members of the IEP Team took the opportunity in various meetings, with staff at all levels, to explore levels of awareness of the *Strategic Plan* and to assess the extent to which it was becoming a living document for the University. The Team were encouraged to learn that, in addition to recent discussion by the Board of Trustees, discussion was taking place at the Deans' Council, Faculty Councils, and Department Councils with the aim of assessing change and improvement on various

aspects of the *Strategic Plan*. Moreover, a group of teaching staff whom the IEP Team met also indicated that there was opportunity to consider the Plan in faculty meetings and to provide views and feedback. The IEP Team were informed that the purpose of the discussions at faculty and department level was to enable the development of local level plans which had, as their reference point, the ANU institutional-level *Strategic Plan*. In addition, during the Team's helpful meeting with Vice Presidents and President's Assistants, the Vice President (Academic Affairs) and the President's Assistant (Planning, Development, and Quality Assurance), in describing their respective responsibilities in following up issues and developments set out in the University's planning documents, confirmed that work was underway to develop institutional-level measures, indicators, and values for assessing progress. The IEP Team were interested to hear of the role being played here by the Institutional Research Unit in the development of suitable indicators. In considering these developments, and the current functions at the top of the organisation, and from discussions with the team of senior staff, the IEP Team advises the University to reflect on whether there may be advantages in establishing a University Executive Management Group to monitor and review the implementation of strategy, policies, and university priorities. Such a group, chaired by the ANU President, would include the Vice Presidents and Presidents' Assistants.

### ***Finance and resourcing***

The IEP Team noted that, under the overall supervision of the University's President, and in accordance with the requirements of ANU's financial charter, there is strong central oversight of budgetary and financial matters. Use is made of a 'cost centre' approach. Budget priorities are discussed and agreed annually by the Budget Committee of the Board of Trustees, membership of which includes the President, the Director of Finance, and the Head of the Finance Committee of the Board. Recommendations are then made to the full Board. This decision-making process is informed by the work of the Vice President (Administrative Affairs) who, in addition to supervising the budgets of departments, works closely with the President on financial and budgetary matters. For the purpose of building the budget he also consults with the Vice President (Academic Affairs) in advance of the President's deliberations with the Board of Trustees. The annual budget-building process, which ends in September, commences in April of each year when the Finance Department requests information on the projected non-capital and capital needs of each cost centre of the University. Following discussions between the Director of Finance and the heads of the various departments and faculties the process enters the final stages, with discussions between the Director of Finance and the President prior to submission of a draft budget for consideration by the Budget Committee of the Board of Trustees. Subsequently, under the oversight of the President, acting on the authority of the Chair of the Board, operational responsibility for executing the budget and for monitoring finances, resides with the Director of Finance, reporting to the Vice President (Administrative Affairs). Matters relating to the capital budget are dealt with by the President and Vice President (Administrative Affairs).

From the documentation received, and through discussions at various meetings, it appeared to the IEP Team that the arrangements described worked well. Nevertheless, as was alluded to earlier in this section of the report, given the acute dependency on student fees for some 70% of its operating budget, from time to time the University faces budgetary shortfalls. Any income instalments from the state, modest as they are, are unpredictable. This places a heavy burden on ANU, and introduces an *ad hoc* element into budgetary and financial management. It makes long term planning and budgeting difficult. This set of circumstances requires that the University's leadership is adaptable and careful in its financial management actions. It also necessitates that increasing emphasis is placed on the diversification of income sources, through the provision of services to local businesses, through investments, and through successfully pursuing opportunities for involvement in international projects. Given the importance to the local economy and society of the employment

provided by ANU, conventional measures for reducing costs are not viewed as desirable options. This matter was fully understood by the IEP Team. The Team also considered the issue of fund-raising and external donations, and the role played by the President in this regard. For capital projects and major building works, such as campus development, this dimension is vitally important to the University. While the Board of Trustees is formally responsible in this area, it was apparent to the IEP Team that, in practice, fund-raising was undertaken solely by the ANU President.

In reflecting across all of these matters, the IEP Team noted that given the circumstances described and the reliance on student fee income, student loan arrangements, and external donations and fund-raising, the University faces considerable constraints in implementing key elements of strategy. Equally, the Team members wish to place on record their view that ANU makes good efforts to manage this challenge. Nevertheless, the IEP Team also formed the view that members of the Board of Trustees should take a proactive role alongside the President in the external work necessary for fund-raising purposes.

#### **4. Third Mission, knowledge transfer, and community service**

In the documentation provided for the IEP Team's visits, and in meetings with staff at all levels, the University indicated the top priority it accorded to research. This was also stressed by the ANU President. The Team noted that the second goal of the ANU *Strategic Plan* highlights the 'promotion of scientific research'. Alongside this, the IEP Team also noted that the third strategic goal stresses the University's role in serving the community and society. The IEP Team was informed that the link between research and business was an area that the University wished to continue to strengthen. As the Team's deliberations progressed, and as further discussions were held with representatives of the University and with prominent persons external to ANU, the significance of the linkage between 'applied research' and 'service to the community' became increasingly apparent to the IEP Team. Indeed, the Team observed that, in addition to the presence of the teaching and research activity that is characteristic of a university, ANU's contribution and service to society and community through its Third Mission activities is a distinctive feature and a marked strength. The IEP Team learned that this applied research and knowledge transfer capability is delivered under the aegis of the University's Community Services Programme (CSP) which plays a key role as a driver to ANU's external links through its civic engagement. This Programme helps to stimulate the activities of the University's increasingly well-established Scientific Research Centres (SRCs). The IEP Team formed the view that the overall CSP and the various SRCs have come to symbolise the vision of ANU, which has its origins in the establishment of the University, to serve the development of Palestinian society through the three elements of education, research and community service. This provides the underlying rationale for the establishment of, and continued support for, the SRCs. The IEP Team learned that the part played by the Centres has come to be an increasingly vital factor in the developmental role played by ANU in the context of the Israeli occupation and the consequent difficulties created for the Palestinian Authority through the absence, otherwise, of specialised institutions necessary for economic and societal development.

The remit of the SRCs is to provide a bridge between the University and the community by facilitating the application of academic research within local and regional society and Palestine more broadly. The IEP Team noted that, to achieve this objective, the Centres cooperate closely with local government and non-governmental organisations and with the private sector, providing expertise for the development and implementation of various projects, services, and consultancies. The research expertise is drawn from within ANU, from other universities, and from within the community. Around 65 researchers are ANU-based, while some 40 researchers come from the latter two categories. Each SRC has a Board which includes community representatives; some 40% of members are non-ANU people. The IEP Team saw an extensive list of organisations, including international, with which SRCs have undertaken joint projects or agreements. These are funded by various external sources, some international (such as USAID, the EU, and Arab countries). ANU complements this investment by contributing the necessary infrastructure support. In some cases this generates income for ANU who receives in return a proportion of the project budgets.

The IEP Team came to the judgement that the importance of such development work to Palestinian society cannot be underestimated. It was apparent to the Team that projects in areas such as renewable energy and conservation, engineering, toxicology research, and disability, have become an indispensable feature of the work and profile of An Najah National University, and expose ANU researchers to practical societal problems to which solutions are found. This work in forging links between applied research, ANU faculties and other sources of expertise, and organisations in civil society, is facilitated by the Coordinator of Scientific Research, whose remit is supervised by the Vice President (Academic Affairs). All services and project work is recorded and documented centrally through the office of the Vice President (Community Affairs). The IEP Team formed the view that the arrangements whereby the SRCs are linked to faculties, but are structurally and administratively

separate, have the support and approval of faculty Deans, and that agreement is reached by negotiation for the release of faculty to the SRCs on a fractional basis. The view was expressed to the IEP Team by senior ANU managers that this model was more efficient than delivering knowledge transfer activity directly through the faculties. The Team also learned of the University's intention to achieve further efficiencies by grouping the Centres into six fields.

The IEP Team also explored the extent to which research is undertaken on a faculty-specific basis, within the various academic departments. The Team learned that, though the level of research activity varied between departments and between individual members of staff, the overall volume was relatively modest. Members of the Team were also informed that insufficient partnerships with international institutions constituted a constraint on research and on the ability to pursue research projects. The Team also noted that constraints on research included financial resources, the inability to purchase necessary equipment, limited mobility for academic staff (including due to external reasons), and limited access to various resources. However, outside the context of the SRCs, the University has particular research strengths in science. This is due in part to the doctoral programme in Chemistry, and those planned for Mathematics and Physics, though even here there is a degree of dependency on accessing the research and laboratory facilities of universities outside Palestine with whom ANU staff have good collaborative links. In other faculties, historically, the research capability has been lower. The IEP Team also heard from staff that high teaching loads have been a contributory factor in constraining the level of research, and that the number of full professors is lower than the University would wish. Nevertheless, the University is gradually seeking to address these matters through seeking to attract well qualified incoming academic staff, and through its scholarship scheme whereby ANU's best graduates and qualified graduates of other institutions are supported in pursuing PhD studies at universities in Europe and elsewhere. The purpose of this scheme is to build capacity and to upgrade both research and teaching capability and, over time, to reduce the pressure on individual teaching loads. From meetings with staff, the IEP Team were encouraged to learn that this policy was showing clear signs of working. It is also evident that, as ANU's Masters programmes grow, the requirement for supervision of student research will also make a good contribution in this area. This will complement the existing supervision capability of ANU staff who supervise postgraduate doctoral studies, albeit with students who are based at other universities. The IEP Team learned that time allowance is available for supervision duties.

The IEP Team were also interested in the evidence presented to them of the encouragement, motivation, and support for non-research active staff, and for individual members of academic staff who wish to publish their personal research, attend international conferences, undertake technical study visits, or to obtain sabbatical leave. International connections and collaboration of various kinds are also encouraged. Research is also incentivised through ANU's academic staff promotion policy. Allied to this, reward and recognition for research is supported through schemes such as the An Najah Award whereby the best research in the region is acknowledged.

Responsibility for organising, managing and coordinating the activities described, whereby research undertaken is faculty-based, falls within the remit of the Dean of Scientific Research. Working under the overall authority of the Vice President (Academic Affairs), the Dean facilitates research and researchers in a number of ways. This includes helping researchers to secure financial support for their activities from external sources, reflecting priorities of Palestinian society. The Dean also exercises oversight of the editorial boards for the ANU research journals for Natural Science and Humanities that are distributed and disseminated throughout the Arab world. The activities of the Dean are helped by an Advisory Committee and committees for Scientific Research, and for Sabbatical Leave.

While noting the various constraints on the University's research aspirations, both internal and (notably) from the external environment, the IEP Team observed the determination of ANU to address these challenges. Further, though acknowledging the emphasis placed on the University's global aspirations in the ANU vision and mission, in the judgement of the IEP Team, a unique feature of An Najah University lies in its regional and national role, and in its knowledge-based approach to the community. Indeed, in the view of the Team the Third Mission dimension can be used by ANU as a flexible tool for building its global reputation. Here, the IEP Team viewed this as a capability that is much stronger than can be found in most European universities and beyond, and an area of strength that can enable ANU to enhance significantly its reputation beyond Palestine. In summary, the IEP Team were greatly impressed with the Third Mission activities and community and societal role of ANU. In relation to this, the Team viewed positively the contribution of the Scientific Centres in enabling the University to contribute to the well-being of the economy and society, and to the development of both the immediate region and the wider Palestinian context. It also appeared to the IEP Team that this relationship between 'research' and 'society', as manifested in ANU's Third Mission activity, should be made even more prominent and visible in the University's Mission and strategy. The Team feel that the significance of this positive dimension was under-emphasised in the SER and other documentation. The IEP Team believe that this is an asset that can be used as a 'brand' for the purposes of marketing the University. Therefore, the Team would urge the university to take measures to project this strength more clearly in the corporate image and positioning of the organisation, both nationally and globally.

## 5. Developments in Learning and Teaching

### ***Enhancement of learning and teaching***

The IEP Team were made aware of the great importance attached to education generally, and to higher education particularly, in Palestinian society. This became evident to the Team in many ways through discussions at the University. It included the significant role played by ANU in holding society together during the period of Intifada. The University continues to face on-going challenges due to the constraints and restrictions imposed on Palestinian society from outside, as referred to earlier in this report. The impact of this in the context of learning and teaching became apparent to the IEP Team through numerous practical examples provided by students and staff of the University. This included matters such as limits on free movement to attend the University for study and work purposes; prevention of field-work study excursions; delays and restrictions on the purchase and delivery of educational materials; and visa difficulties for out-going and incoming academic visit and study purposes, including non-Palestinian visitors. The IEP Team members were impressed by the quiet and dignified determination of the ANU academic community to conduct their learning and teaching activities in as normal a manner as possible in these circumstances.

The IEP Team was informed that ANU is attractive to students, with some 10,000 applications received each year and 4,000 being offered places. In Palestine as a whole, around 50,000 students qualify for university entry for the 35,000 available places. ANU is keen to attract Palestinian students from Israel and Gaza should this be possible. It appeared to the IEP Team that those students who are successful in gaining a place at ANU find a good range of student support services. For example, students are supported by student advisors who provide personal support and guidance. This is organised through the leadership of the Dean of Student Affairs. This support is on-going, but particular emphasis is placed on such support at strategic points of the year. The ANU Student Handbook, updated annually, provides comprehensive information to students on university regulations, policy and procedures. The IEP Team noted that various services are available to ensure that students with disabilities are integrated into the life and educational processes of the University. Financial support is also available through the Disabled Students Scholarship Fund. From various meetings with staff and students, and through considering the documentation provided, the IEP Team was interested to know of the various other initiatives under way to enhance learning and teaching. An emphasis on this theme was evident in the first strategic goal of the ANU *Strategic Plan*, and also several of the objectives supporting that goal. The IEP Team were interested to note that students appreciated the emphasis now being placed on 'learning to learn', a development being progressed through the Education Learning Centre. The University also makes available various workshops for students between semesters.

For staff, the IEP Team noted that an E-Learning Unit has been established to support staff in the use of technology to enhance teaching practice. The University also has in place a valuable scheme for sharing and observing pedagogic practice. This 'Good Friend Scheme' was viewed by staff as providing a helpful opportunity for giving and receiving feedback on approaches to teaching and classroom practice. The IEP Team also learned that the University was taking positive steps to address the need for capacity building in the area of human resources. This was especially important given the identified need for strengthening the qualifications and age profile of teaching and research staff. The Team members were encouraged to note that, under the ANU Graduate Scholarship Scheme, some 150 of ANU's best graduates were being supported in PhD and Master's studies at universities in Europe and elsewhere. They were contractually obliged to return to the University and, on completion of their studies, they would bring much needed expertise back to ANU. This support, and the various ways in which ANU rewards its research active staff (as discussed in the previous section of this report), is, in the view of the IEP Team, of great importance for the

future development of the University. As the University seeks to strengthen its research profile and to enhance learning and teaching, the IEP Team encourages ANU (as finances allow) to increase the scholarship scheme for graduate students and to strengthen reward and recognition for the research activity of more experienced staff.

The University's leadership were keen to stress the importance of service to the community as a feature of the student experience, and as a distinctive element of efforts to ensure that the curriculum addresses the needs of society. As part of the national role of ANU, all students undertake voluntary work as active citizens through their community service course. The IEP Team learned from students that internships under this scheme also led to employment opportunities. Senior University managers also drew the IEP Team's attention to other ways in which the curriculum was being adapted to improve students' contribution to society, and to improve their skills as graduates. The Team also heard from external stakeholders and from members of the Board of Trustees various testimonies to the ways in which ANU has worked to improve the communication skills and competitiveness of ANU graduates, and their attractiveness to national and international employers.

In noting such evidence of initiatives to improve the employability and continued academic achievement of ANU graduates the IEP Team were particularly interested to explore the role and remit of the Competency Development Board (CDB). The Board was established in October 2010 and, at the time of the IEP Team's visit, had held four meetings. This competency development initiative, led by the President's Assistant for Graduate Affairs, used the principles of competency-based learning which have been influential in the higher education systems of North America and many European countries. The Board's membership is drawn from representatives of Palestinian private, government, and non-government organisations, and ANU Deans, and includes a student member. The IEP Team noted that it acts as an advisory body to the University and is linked to the Deans' Council through the cross-membership of Deans and the President's Assistant. The main purpose of the CDB is to provide ANU graduates with a competitive edge in the labour market through strengthening links between the academic and external worlds. As noted above, the IEP Team heard evidence from various external sources of impact in this area, with confirmation from external partners and stakeholders of the employability of ANU students, their attractiveness to employers, and their achievements at regional, national, and international level. It appeared to Team members that the CDB provided a valuable forum for obtaining and acting upon feedback on the skills and competencies of ANU students and graduates. The Team learned that ANU is the only Palestinian university to have adopted such an initiative and to be benchmarking its practice in this way.

The IEP Team noted with interest that this initiative was viewed as providing a means whereby awareness might be raised throughout ANU's faculties and academic departments, of the agenda of employability, competence-based learning, and a learning outcomes approach. But, while the President's Assistant informed the IEP Team that he worked with the faculties to address issues around student skills, it was apparent to the Team that there was no direct involvement in the curriculum or course design. The IEP Team formed the view that, in terms of the need for continued curriculum reform, and the potential contribution of the CDB initiative to curriculum change, this might be a missed opportunity. In exploring these matters further, the IEP Team learned of a proposal, considered by the Competency Development Board, and by the Deans' Council, for the possible adoption of a model, based on five phases, that could be integrated into the curriculum. In reflecting on these matters, the IEP Team proposes that, in its future work on curriculum design and development, the University should maximise the opportunities available to it to embed both learning outcomes and competency based learning approaches into all curricula and programmes of study.

In exploring the broad area of enhancement of learning and teaching, the IEP Team paid particular attention to the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), recently formed as part of an 18-month project funded through USAID and involving a partnership with two North American universities and two Palestinian universities. This CELT initiative enables ANU to make progress in the professional development of its academic staff and in facilitating a transition to a learner-centred paradigm in teaching and research. The intention is to achieve this through encouraging faculties to develop and implement their own local-level plans. The members of the IEP Team were impressed and encouraged by the enthusiasm of the Director of CELT. The Team learned that specific planned developments included workshop and training sessions in three key areas: course design, including the use of a learning outcomes approach; pedagogic methods including use of technology, and problem-based learning; and improvement of assessment methods, both formative and summative. To date, though some scepticism and resistance to change has been experienced, the IEP Team were advised that the initiative is being well received by staff, and that participation in meetings has been encouraging. The Team were able to confirm this positive picture in its meetings with groups of ANU staff.

In considering the remit and planned activities of the CELT, and looking across other, linked, needs and developments in the ANU learning and teaching agenda, the IEP Team gave further consideration to three matters: the role of the Centre in relation to curriculum change and reform; its potential contribution to the encouragement of research informed teaching; and the longer term sustainability of the CELT.

On the first of these matters, the IEP Team noted that ANU had no immediate plans to harmonise its credit framework or to standardise the study hours for programmes across the University. Leaving that matter aside, the IEP Team were surprised to learn that the CELT had no formal remit in relation to curriculum reform and that development in this area was being taken forward by the Quality Assurance Unit. In view of ANU's plans to undertake curriculum revision, it appeared to the members of the IEP Team that consideration might be given, perhaps through the CELT Advisory Board, to whether the Centre might be given a more direct role in contributing to curriculum reform. In the view of the Team members this might also help to add greater clarity and cohesiveness to the University's learning and teaching strategy generally, and to the objectives of curriculum reform more specifically. Therefore, with reference to this and other related matters, as ANU seeks to benchmark itself against developments in the external world of higher education, the IEP Team encourages the university to agree on what its objectives in learning and teaching are, and to embed this across all faculties.

With regard to the second area of interest, research informed teaching, the documentation provided for the IEP Team referred to plans to introduce innovative teaching grants, and to the goal of promoting research in teaching and learning. In view of the growing emphasis being placed by ANU on enhancing both the student learning experience and the research and teaching capabilities of staff, the IEP Team welcomed the University's initiative to establish a Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching that is focused on enhancing the pedagogic effectiveness of ANU teachers. But the Team also formed the view that the Centre should include a focus on research informed teaching.

Finally, the IEP Team noted that the Centre has an Advisory Board, whose membership includes the Vice President (Academic Affairs), Deans, and a representative of the Quality Assurance Unit. The Team also noted the University's top-level commitment to the continuation of the CELT beyond the period of external funding. Indeed, the IEP Team would reinforce this by encouraging the University

to secure the longer term sustainability and purposes of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.

### ***Student issues***

The IEP Team wishes to record the marked pride in the University displayed by ANU students and staff. During their visits the Team members met with a range of students from various disciplines. Students spoke well of the quality of their learning experience, good relations with teachers, and the accessibility and support, both of faculty and of senior managers. The Team heard many positive views expressed, including favourable comments on the extent to which they feel listened to by the staff of ANU. As the Team observed for themselves, and as students described, the new ANU campus has added a high quality learning environment to the overall facilities of the University. The overall impression gained by the IEP Team was that for the most part the University satisfies the requirements of students.

Nevertheless, the IEP Team was made aware of a number of student concerns and areas where internal improvements might be made. Undoubtedly, these were a mixture of localised concerns and more general matters relating to the wider student experience. It will be for ANU to assess how it might wish to address them. They include references by students to an over-emphasis on formal examinations and over-assessment; insufficient opportunities for research and investigation at Masters level; some out-of-date facilities; inappropriate or out-of-date data bases or teaching materials in some courses; and lack of communication between some academic departments. The Team also heard reference made to overcrowded classrooms, preventing full student involvement in class presentations, and also a shortage of full-time and/or fully qualified faculty in some areas.

The IEP Team noted that the matters which were of greatest concern to students were also those which were largely influenced by factors external to the University. The difficult labour market conditions mean that finding employment poses great challenges both for students and for ANU. The Team were assured that every effort is made by the University to secure a good match between the curriculum and course portfolio and local and regional labour market needs. The most intractable issue for students is that of financial support and this was a central concern in all meetings held with ANU students. Students indicated that they found the level of fees very challenging. The IEP Team learned that students financed their education through support from family and friends or through the loan system administered by the University on behalf of the Ministry of Education. In some cases, charitable and voluntary organisations were able to provide financial assistance. For some students (such as the most needy, or students with a disability, and those with highest grades) fee reductions were made available through a scholarship grant system. In such cases the University, through its special committee for making decisions on such matters, decides the percentage loan. However, the upper limit for such support is not likely to be more than 40%. It is understandable that students would wish to see this scheme extended, with more scholarships being made available to ANU students. Equally, the IEP Team should also place on record that the University is acutely aware of the situation described and noted that almost 70% of students receive financial support through the loan scheme. The Team members also noted that these problems are common throughout all Palestinian universities.

### ***International dimension***

From the documentation provided, and from various meetings with students and staff, the IEP Team learned of ANU's wish to compete with universities beyond Palestine and to improve its position and reputation globally. The IEP Team noted a range of international contacts, agreements, and partnerships in the Arab world and in Europe and North America from which the university benefits.

The University's President stressed to the IEP Team the importance he attached to wider collaboration, and referred the Team to the good research and academic links enjoyed with European universities, and to the positive attitudes of partners from which ANU benefited. In these discussions the Team also learned of the desire to increase the number of bilateral agreements in exchange arrangements. Currently, much of this activity is undertaken on a unilateral basis, with ANU staff and students going abroad, but quite low levels of activity in the other direction.

The IEP Team noted that to assist ANU's strategic aspirations in this area, and to respond to the growing need for collaboration, the University established its International Relations Office, led by the President's Assistant for International Relations. This office facilitates international exchanges (staff and students), builds network links to support internationalisation of ANU, assists student in obtaining scholarships to pursue higher studies abroad, and works with many international and non-governmental organisations. The IEP Team took note of involvement in various EU-funded projects (e.g. Tempus; Erasmus; FP7), US and Canadian initiatives, good links with Korea, and the range of Memoranda of Understanding that ANU has with foreign universities. From this, the IEP Team formed the view that ANU is working hard to make progress with its internationalisation agenda. However, as highlighted at the beginning of this section, and elsewhere in this report, there are very real challenges in this area, principally external to the University. Although ANU students and staff do take up opportunities to study abroad, or to undertake sabbatical leave, the constraints imposed upon ANU externally results in relatively low numbers of visiting faculty and incoming exchange students and, in reality, activity is very minimal. There are also internal limitations due to the costs involved in financing international academic visits. While acknowledging these challenges, the IEP Team wishes ANU well in taking forward its internationalisation programme and make the observation that future potential partners will find in ANU a committed academic community that is keen to engage in mutually beneficial activities.

A further aspect of the international dimension which featured in documentation considered by the IEP Team, and in discussions with ANU staff, relates to the Bologna Process. The IEP Team were interested to explore the extent of the University's interest or involvement in these matters. The Team noted that a number of elements of Bologna principles and philosophy were apparent in recent and on-going developments at ANU. The emerging emphasis on independent learning and lifelong learning, a concern to review student contact hours, discussions on assessment practices, consideration of three-year degree programmes, the adoption in one faculty of a first and second cycle format for courses, and growing European links and networks, all pointed to an interest in keeping up-to-date with key aspects of the Bologna agenda. The Team learned though, that at present, the University's position is that it is awaiting the outcomes of the national government's deliberations on a policy with regard to the Bologna Process.

## **6. Quality assurance, quality management, and quality culture**

### ***Quality assurance and quality management***

Developments in quality management and quality assurance provided the IEP Team with further insights into ANU's focus on the institutionalisation, modernisation and harmonisation of administrative arrangements and service provision, and the strengthening of organisational cohesion and effectiveness. The IEP noted from the SER the strategic emphasis being placed on the "need to focus efforts on improving and enhancing the quality of the University's services, academic and administrative".

The emphasis being placed by the University on the development of a quality culture was also noted by the Team. In their deliberations, and based on documentation provided, and their discussions with staff and students, the IEP Team identified three important dimensions of 'quality' at ANU: initiatives for enhancing organisational and administrative quality; changes underway in student representation and involvement in quality processes, including student evaluation; and arrangements relating more broadly to academic quality assurance, such as the establishment of a Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), and the introduction of processes for external and internal review and evaluation.

The IEP Team noted that the principal focal point for the institutionalisation of organisational and administrative quality is the University's engagement with the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) initiative. This is designed to enable ANU to assess the performance and quality of administrative services and processes. The training for EFQM was completed in January 2011 and, at the time of the IEP Team's Second Visit, an evaluation process was underway that the University expected to complete by June 2011. Thereafter, it was anticipated that an application would be made for certification of ANU's 'Commitment to Excellence' (C2E). The Team learned of the University's intention, subsequently, of making sufficient progress with its continuous quality improvement approach to administrative processes, to enable an application to be made by the end of 2011 for EFQM certification under its 'Recognised for Excellence' (R4E) scheme. From discussions with staff and senior managers, the IEP Team formed the view that this initiative, led by the QAU, is helping to meet ANU's objective of achieving greater standardisation and harmonisation of administrative procedures, for both non-academic and academic service departments.

It was apparent to the IEP Team that the establishment of the QAU in 2005, and the creation of the post of President's Assistant for Planning, Development and Quality, were important steps for the University in developing a capability in quality assurance. The President's Assistant oversees all quality improvement initiatives, both organisational and academic, and the remit of the QAU is a broad one. Its oversight extends across academic, administrative, and service quality and also scientific research processes. The IEP Team noted that the QAU is outward-facing in its approach, and in its work it takes into consideration various international developments and reference points. Within ANU the QAU promotes quality in various ways, including: the publication of guidance on policy and procedures; seminars, workshops, and training events; and other activities designed to encourage a quality culture amongst all employees. From the documentation provided, and through meetings and discussions, the IEP Team was able to gain a good picture of the role played by the QAU in coordinating both external and internal review and evaluation processes, and in identifying standards to be implemented by programmes, departments, and faculties.

To facilitate and underpin the implementation of arrangements for academic quality assurance, the University has also established quality councils at both department and faculty levels. Though there remains work to be done in developing the maturity of these committees, the IEP Team formed the view that progress is being made in strengthening the operation of these important bodies. The

Team noted the role played by the councils in the scrutiny of quality review and evaluation reports for programmes, courses, and teacher performance, and in addressing the requirements of the national quality agency. This is assisting the gradual development of a culture of self-evaluation at ANU, and is supporting institutional efforts towards improvement of processes and of the academic experience. The IEP Team was informed of the University's intention to establish similar quality councils in non-academic departments.

The SER, together with additional documentation provided, helpfully described arrangements at national level in Palestine for quality assurance and accreditation. The national quality system is overseen by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC), an autonomous body which acts under the aegis of the Ministry (MoEHE). With overall responsibility for improving the quality of higher education institutions and the programmes they deliver, the AQAC has powers to license and accredit new institutions, and also implements the criteria and processes for the accreditation of new programmes and the evaluation and review of existing provision. The IEP Team noted that the AQAC achieves this through undertaking visits to institutions and by scrutinising documentation submitted by institutions. The follow-up work and recommendations from the Commission are intended to assist institutions in enhancing quality. The IEP Team was interested to explore how ANU engages with the AQAC in meeting the national agency's requirements. Responsibility for this resides with the President's Assistant and with the QAU. Following internal approval of the curriculum by the Deans' Council, each application for a new programme is evaluated by the QAU who make the final preparations for an application for accreditation. Final AQAC approval is granted as soon as the agency is satisfied that the initial delivery of the programme meets the necessary specifications. The AQAC also undertakes the periodic review of all programmes on a recently introduced five-year cycle. The IEP Team learned that, at the time of their second visit, the QAU was making preparations for the external periodic review of some 40 ANU degree programmes across all faculties. The Team noted that the QAU has developed processes to support faculties in meeting the requirements of external periodic review, including guidance on preparing a self-evaluation. Visiting review teams are drawn from amongst academic specialists in the relevant fields.

The IEP Team also considered the internal quality processes developed by the University, through the QAU, for the purpose of course and programme evaluation and related matters. The Team learned that the main development in this area had been the introduction of processes, guidance, and forms for the purpose of quarterly and annual evaluation of courses, programmes, and faculties' academic provision (Forms A, B and C). While the QAU exercised oversight of the overall process, with outcomes being considered by the President's Assistant and by the Vice President (Academic Affairs), the IEP Team noted that the responsibilities of course coordinators, and Department and Faculty Quality Councils' were central to making this framework operate successfully. The Team identified three components of this approach to internal review and evaluation. For the purpose of course-level evaluation, each course coordinator (instructor) completes an evaluation form on a quarterly basis; this considers intended learning outcomes; data on student performance; teaching methods; and assessment and examination arrangements. Improvement planning is also undertaken. At programme level, the Department Quality Council considers an annual evaluation report for each programme. The relevant form is again focused on self-assessment and draws together information and issues from course reports. The report covers student and staff issues, facilities and resources, employer feedback, and improvement plans. Student feedback and evaluation is also considered. At faculty level, evaluation is undertaken by the Quality Council of the faculty and focuses on staff, student, and resource matters at a faculty level, and also strengths and weaknesses. When each of these three components has been completed, and when the quality committees have completed their work, the QAU undertakes a round of meetings to consider recommendations and the quality performance of academic programmes. Here, the Dean has an

important role in taking issues arising to the Deans' Council, or for further discussion with the Vice President and President's Assistant. Where necessary, matters may also be raised with the ANU President. The IEP Team formed the view that these arrangements were beginning to work well, and are functioning as intended by the University.

A further feature of the University's approach to the evaluation of teaching and learning that the IEP Team considered is the annual evaluation of teacher performance. The Team noted that there are several aspects to this. First, the use made of on-line, end-of-semester feedback from students, in which the performance of each member of staff is evaluated on matters such as teaching methods and assessment. Teachers are awarded a merit score. (Student evaluation is discussed more fully below). Secondly, each Head of Department evaluates and grades the performance of individual faculty, commenting on extra-curricular activities, scientific activities and conferences, attendance, and community service. This is supplemented by merit scores being awarded by the relevant Dean and the Vice President (Academic Affairs). The IEP Team learned that the outcome of this process is an assessment of the performance of the teacher and an identification of strengths and weaknesses, with the latter being addressed through development and training, or through use of the 'Good Friend' scheme.

The Team also explored matters relating to course structures, student contact hours, and credit for study of courses. It appeared to the Team that there were differences in these areas between programmes, departments, and faculties, and quite noticeable inconsistencies across the University. The Team was informed that the QAU has developed a template to assist the achievement of greater consistency in the design of the syllabus and structure for courses, including credit, contact time, setting objectives and learning outcomes, and assessment. However, though aware of this development, faculty Deans indicated that this was not yet embedded. The IEP Team encourages ANU to make further progress in this area.

In completing their discussions in meetings with ANU staff, the IEP Team were interested to obtain a clear picture of how staff viewed the quality assurance system which had been developed during the previous six years. The Team wished to know if the system was now accepted, whether it had helped departments and faculties to introduce improvements, particularly in teaching and learning. They were encouraged to hear that, while staff acknowledged that challenges remained, and that work on quality demanded close attention and time to be spent on it, there was a general feeling that the arrangements and processes had been accepted. Although the pace of change was uneven, and varied between faculties, the Team heard various examples of where improvement and enhancement had taken place, including: transparent processes; improved course content, course design, and teaching materials; increasing use of new methods; and better performance of teachers. The Team was also informed that the QAU had introduced a common vision across academic departments and had helped departments to improve. In reflecting the developments described, the IEP Team views positively the work of the QA Unit, and its remit to exercise developmental oversight over academic and administrative quality, and notes the degree to which quality initiatives are seen by staff to have brought benefits to the improvement of learning and teaching

### ***Student representation and involvement in quality processes***

The IEP Team focused some of their enquiries on arrangements for student representation in institutional processes. From the documentation provided, and from discussions with students and staff, the Team was able to explore this in some detail. Students were also invited to indicate whether they felt that they were represented, and could express their views through involvement in councils or through other ways. The Team heard that students were generally satisfied that the informal channels open to them, such as raising matters of concern with their teachers, or with the

head of department, worked well and that faculty and senior managers were accessible and approachable. It was also noted that the President emphasised the open-door policy he operated for students. The Team concurred with the view of the University's senior managers that the successes of ANU are premised to a notable degree on the good relations it has with students, and the effective work of the Student Affairs Office. However, some students whom the IEP Team met did indicate that they would appreciate more information on quality assurance processes and the ANU quality system. This is no doubt a matter that the University will wish to consider as it works towards building a quality culture throughout the entire ANU academic community.

During their deliberations the IEP Team also considered the work of the Students' Council. They noted that this is an officially elected body, recognised by the University and that it plays an important role in the activities of students. The Council's principal contribution is in the provision and organisation of extra-curricular activities, including awareness campaigns relating to employment opportunities, and it acts as a focal point for liaison with the University on various matters, including student concerns. The Team formed the view that the Council has good working relations with the office of the Dean of Students. Similarly, the ANU President meets with Council members to discuss and respond to their various needs and requests.

The IEP Team was particularly interested to learn that while, until relatively recently (due partly to restrictions in the University's regulations), students were not involved in any formal academic councils (committees), the University has begun to make changes. In this regard, the IEP Team learned that ANU is breaking new ground by being the first university in the Arab world to include students as members of academic councils. Faculties and departments commenced the introduction of student representation onto Faculty and Department Quality Councils about two years ago and, from the first semester of the 2010/2011 academic year faculties are including one student in Faculty Council meetings. The IEP Team noted from the SER, however, that this seems to apply principally where there were student-related issues on the agenda. It was not clear whether representation on faculty councils was a formal, unconditional, entitlement for students. And, from discussions at meetings, it appeared to the IEP Team that students do not have voting rights on all faculty councils. Further, though noting that the University is giving consideration to the matter of how students will be selected, in the view of the IEP Team, in preference to current arrangements whereby students are selected by academic staff, students themselves should be permitted to elect those who represent them on the various councils. The Team took the view that good student involvement in committees at programme level is important, particularly to enable effective discussion of learning, teaching, and assessment matters to take place. The Team acknowledges that the University's regulations do not permit student representation on the Deans' Council, and that, in matters such as decisions regarding student fees and academic standards, it is the responsibility of the University alone to make decisions.

The SER indicated that the overall issue of student involvement and representation in council meetings is still under discussion and needs to be improved. Moreover, the SER indicated that the broader issue of student and other stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes at University level also remains under consideration. The IEP Team formed the view that representation and involvement in faculty and department councils is becoming more systematic and formalised and that progress is being made across the University, albeit on an uneven basis. In relation to this, the University will be interested to know that students' willingness and desire to be represented at department and faculty councils is high, and that they wish to express their views and to be involved in discussions. In the view of the IEP Team, students are a great asset to ANU and greater use can be made of the commitment to society and community that they share with the University. The IEP Team would therefore encourage the University to make early progress in

increasing and widening the opportunities for student involvement in committees and councils and their decision-making processes, at all levels, and including female students.

### ***Student evaluation and feedback***

The IEP Team also considered formal arrangements and opportunities for students to provide evaluation of their experience, and also for obtaining feedback on issues raised. Several processes were explored. As noted, the Team learned that student views were obtained as part of the process for evaluating teachers' performance as described above. This feedback is solicited on-line at the end of each Semester and enables students to comment on each faculty member with whom they have had contact for teaching and learning purposes. Comment is invited on performance, skills and teaching practice. Student views on learning and teaching matters are also sought as part of the process of course and programme evaluation described earlier (e.g. Forms A and B, 'Academic Courses' Quality Reports'). However, it was not apparent to the members of the IEP Team whether or how students were provided with feedback at the end of this process to make them aware of how issues that they raised were being addressed. The IEP Team formed the view that the University should satisfy itself that appropriate mechanisms are in place, and consistently applied across all departments, for 'closing the loop' in this way. From documentation provided, the IEP Team were also interested to learn that the University plans to supplement course evaluation by implementing a University Student Survey. The survey will ascertain the opinions of students following degree programmes on issues such as the learning experience at ANU and also matters relating to non-academic services. The Team understands that the data will be used to inform the overall annual monitoring process, including the outcomes that are reported to University-level committees.

In conclusion, the IEP Team observes that ANU has pioneered the introduction of quality systems in universities in the region. Indeed, in 2008, the evaluation of the University undertaken through the United Nations Development Programme commended ANU's arrangements for assuring academic quality as a model and template for all other Palestinian universities. While noting this, the development of quality assurance arrangements and the creation of a quality culture remain at a relatively early stage, and the IEP Team advises the University to take steps to ensure that quality procedures do not become over-elaborate. In noting that work in developing a quality culture has been under way for six years, the Team formed the view that this will need to be kept under review and adjustments made, as appropriate, in order for progress to be consolidated and to ensure that students and academic staff at all levels are fully engaged.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The IEP Team's conclusions have been reached after full consideration of the work being undertaken by An Najah National University, and the processes that underpin the operation of the University. The Team members have also noted the significant constraints and restrictions placed upon ANU, and the difficulties therefore faced by the University in undertaking the work which is typical of a university community.

The recommendations of the IEP Team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the University's future success and strategic development.

### ***Setting strategic directions: vision, mission, and general context***

- The IEP Team would encourage the university to reflect on how vision and mission can be translated more clearly into measurable goals.

### ***Governance, management, strategic planning, and organisational issues***

- The IEP Team advises the university to continue its work towards the streamlining of organisational structures, including reducing the number of faculties and departments, to secure greater transparency and organisational efficiency and effectiveness
- The IEP Team recommends that ANU should pursue the opportunities available to it for clustering the number of Scientific Centres and bringing them together into fewer units
- In their deliberations on the current functions at the top of the organisation, and from discussions with senior staff, the IEP Team advises the university to reflect on whether there may be advantages in establishing a University Executive Management Group to monitor and review the implementation of strategy, policies, and university priorities
- The IEP Team also formed the view that members of the Board of Trustees should take a proactive role alongside the President in the external work necessary for fund-raising purposes.

### ***Third Mission, knowledge transfer, and community service***

- The IEP Team have been impressed with the Third Mission activities and community and societal role of ANU. The Team would urge the university to take measures to project this strength more clearly in the corporate image and positioning of the organisation, both nationally and globally.

### ***Developments in learning and teaching***

- As ANU seeks to strengthen its research profile and enhance learning and teaching, the IEP Team encourages ANU (as finances allow) to increase the scholarship scheme for graduate students, and to strengthen reward and recognition for the research activity of more experienced staff
- The IEP Team proposes that, in its future work on curriculum design and development, the university maximises the opportunities available to it to embed both learning outcomes and competency based learning approaches into all programmes of study
- As ANU seeks to benchmark itself against developments in the external world of HE, the IEP Team encourages the university to agree on what its objectives in learning and teaching are, and to embed this across all faculties
- The IEP Team would encourage the University to secure the longer term sustainability and purposes of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.

### ***Quality assurance, quality management, and quality culture***

- The IEP Team would encourage the university to make early progress in increasing and widening the opportunities for student involvement in committees and councils and their decision-making processes, at all levels
- The IEP Team observes that ANU has pioneered the introduction of quality systems in universities in the region; while noting this, the development of quality assurance arrangements and the creation of a quality culture are at a relatively early stage, and the IEP Team advises the University to take steps to ensure that quality procedures do not become over-elaborate.

## **8. Envoi**

The IEP Team wishes to thank the University for the excellent arrangements made in preparation for its visits and in support of the work undertaken by the Team, and for the generous hospitality and welcome extended by the University and its staff and students. The IEP Team has enjoyed learning about the unique characteristics and distinctive societal and community role of ANU. We commend its pioneering spirit as the first Palestinian university to engage with the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme. Team members have undertaken many such evaluation visits and will look with special interest at the future development of An Najah National University. It has been a great pleasure to discuss with staff, students, and external stakeholders, the challenges faced by ANU and the University's determination to overcome constraints. The IEP Team hopes that the University finds their comments and suggestions helpful and supportive in its planning for the future. We believe that ANU has the capacity and cohesiveness to be successful in its next stage of development and beyond, and we wish the institution well in this.