



# BEST UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES FOR RECRUITMENT

An OER-ABQ Education Group Survey





# DISCOVERING YOU PROGRAM



ABQ's unique DYP road map prepares tomorrow's leaders through robust mentorship, building of vital 21st century skills, and strengths-based career guidance.



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& COLLEGES  
FOR RECRUITMENT**

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# REFRAMING THE LEARNING PARADIGM

The OER-ABQ Education Group 'Fresh Graduates Survey' gives higher education institutions, employers and students a clear signpost on how to prepare a future ready workforce in line with Oman Vision 2040

**A**lvin Toffler, the celebrated futurist and author of the bestseller, 'Future Shock' predicted way back in the 1970's that the, "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn." This rings true today than ever before. The disruption unleashed by technology, shifts in consumer preference and economic challenges necessitates an ability to constantly learn and adapt.

If this was not daunting enough, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a massive shift as companies experienced the advantages of remote working and outsourcing. On the flip side, a record number of people are leaving their jobs post pandemic aspiring for a better work-life balance. According to consultancy firm PwC's 'Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey' carried out in March 2022, one in five workers globally are planning to quit in 2022. The 'Great Resignation' has thus intensified the war for talent.

The pandemic has also shown how critical skills required for a job is shifting rapidly and this is probably just the beginning. The coming decades will witness rapid changes necessitating employees to acquire new skills to remain relevant. Thus anyone who thought working from home or offering

customers digital solutions as a marked change, needs to think again.

## National priority

Since the beginning of the Blessed Renaissance in 1970, Oman has focussed on education as a key pillar for development. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is according the highest priority to education. Oman's Vision 2040 plan identifies learning, developing scientific research and promoting national talent as a national priority. These are been enshrined into the People and Society pillar of the Vision document.

The endeavour is to develop human resources and equip the current and future generations with the knowledge, skill and competencies that will enable them to compete globally economic and contribute positively to national development. In pursuance, the National Strategy for Education 2040 was designed to create a new framework for education, capacity building, transfer responsibilities to educational institutions and the adoption of an outcome-based approach.

The onus of preparing generation next for the workplace lies primarily with the education sector. In an effort to ascertain the needs of the job market and preparedness of students, OER along with the ABQ Education

Group carried out a 'Fresh Graduate Recruitment Survey.' The results highlight the Universities and colleges preferred by employers for various job functions. In addition it gives an in-depth view on qualitative factors which play a crucial part in the recruitment of students. For example – the reasons why recruiters select students from a particular college range from the overall quality of students, their technical and practical skills to past experience.

A big revelation are the skills which Omani graduates need to work upon. These are skills which are looked at closely by companies while hiring and students need to start working on them early on. Industry leaders and HR professionals interviewed echo the primacy of certain skills. Says Mohammed Moosa Al Balushi, Deputy Manager HR & OD, Muscat Overseas Company, 'Communication skills are very important. They (students) need to get adept in business communication, e-mail communication plus their English writing skills also need to improve. Overall, they should be more creative and innovative.'

As mentioned, educational institutions play a cardinal role in preparing students for the future. Graduate students need to be acquire versatile skills and knowledge including academia, technical, information





technology and an ability to work in teams. Attitude and temperament is one area which is a top draw for employers. HR professionals believe in the credo 'recruit for attitude, train for skills.' Thus being flexible, adaptable, having good interpersonal skills and commitment to continuous learning is an essential trait which every young Omani graduate needs to acquire.

In addition students also expected to have problem solving abilities, critical and analytical thinking, resilience and motivation. This would require education institutions to become more experiential in their teaching. Universities and colleges need to create opportunities for students to apply their skills and knowledge in real world situations. Job shadowing or internship opportunities will go a long way in helping students sharpen their skills apart from giving them insights into what employers are looking for. A closer connect between academia and industry

will create an eco-system for young graduates to flourish.

Says Humayun Kabir, CEO, ABQ Education Group, "It goes without saying that educational institutions should prepare graduates with the expected curriculum and technical knowledge in the field of study chosen. However, to succeed in the job market requires some critical non-academic skills and traits. First is passion for the career choice. Here the educational institutions should take active interest in understanding the strengths, weaknesses and natural inclination of each student. This effort should be supported by standard personality and career choice tests, career guidance sessions, internships, job shadowing etc."

The good news is that today educational institutions have a cross section of tools which they can leverage to raise the bar. Venkatesh Palakkad, Director and Principal Consultant – RAB

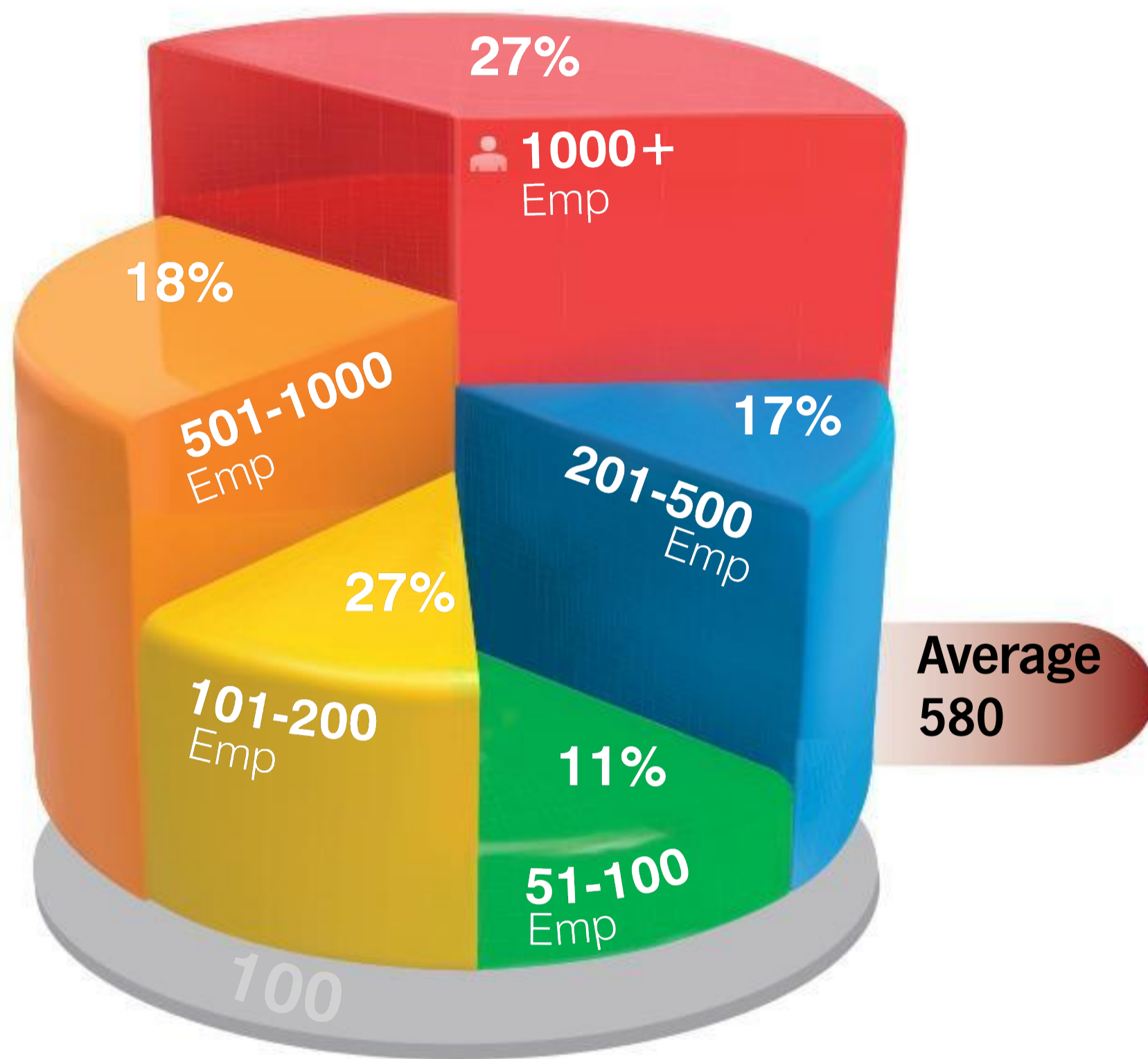
Consulting avers, "We should leverage on technology, education and skills and create a highly employable workforce with skills needed by the industry and trade. Oman should focus more on skill based vocational education rather than just academic degrees. The government and private sector should jointly create and develop a skill pool of talent which could be tapped and used by the Industry as and when needed without really poaching talent from one another. Continuous learning and development opportunities should be made available to the workforce without any restrictions or barriers."

Overall, the progress and development of Oman needs to be fuelled by a steady stream of talented young graduates. Oman's Vision 2040 has set a clear roadmap for this to be achieved. It's now time for everyone across the value chain – students, educational institutions and the corporate sector - to join hands to fulfill that promise.

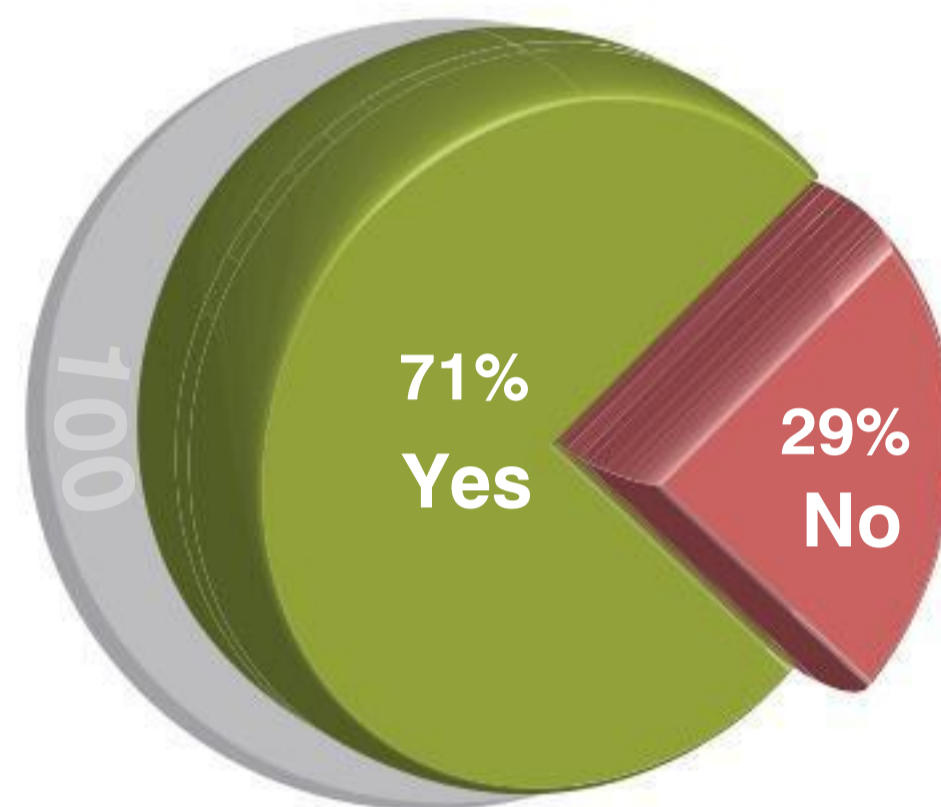


**TOP 10 COLLEGES**

**Total Employees - Size of Organisation's held in the survey**



**During the last one year, did your organisation recruit fresh college graduates for any full time position?**



**During the last one year in which job functions were fresh graduates recruited**

Job Categories	% of Companies who recruited
Highly Specialised jobs specific to the industry	13
Administration /Human Resources	27
Sales & Marketing	37
Accounts & Finance	33
IT and Computers	28
Logistics/Supply chain	26
Civil Engineering	12
Mechanical Engineering	16
Electrical Engineering	13
Petroleum Engineering	6





## COLLEGES RANKED BY SIMPLE PREFERENCE

Name of the Institutions	1st Preference	2nd Preference	3rd Preference	4th Preference	5th Preference	Cumulative	Rank
Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)	60	20	7	6	1	94	1
Higher College of Technology	3	19	17	6	4	49	2
College of Banking & Financial Studies	6	13	4	16	9	48	3
GUtech	3	15	10	7	10	45	4
Majan College	5	8	12	8	9	42	5
Middle East College	6	5	10	7	9	37	6
National University of Science & Technology	6	0	7	12	4	29	7
Modern College of Business & Science	0	2	10	7	9	28	8
Oman Tourism College	5	1	5	3	3	17	10
Arab Open University	0	3	4	4	6	17	10
Muscat University	0	5	0	3	9	17	10

## COLLEGES RANKED BY WEIGHTED RANK SCORE

Points (Weightage assigned)	5	4	3	2	1	Score	Rank Score
SQU	300	80	21	12	1	414	85.0
Higher College of Technology	15	76	51	12	4	158	32.4
College of Banking & Financial Studies	30	52	12	32	9	135	27.7
GUtech	15	60	30	14	10	129	26.5
Majan College	25	32	36	16	9	118	24.2
Middle East College	30	20	30	14	9	103	21.1
National University of Science & Technology	30	0	21	24	4	79	16.2
Modern College of Business & Science	0	8	30	14	9	61	12.5
Oman Tourism College	25	4	15	6	3	53	10.9
Arab Open University	0	12	12	8	6	38	7.8

### Weighted Ranking Explained





TOP



COLLEGES PREFERRED FOR VARIOUS COURSES



**Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for Sales and Marketing**

SQU
College of Banking & Financial Studies
Majan College
Modern College of Business & Science
GUtech
Middle East College
Arab Open University
Higher College of Technology
Muscat University
Muscat College

**Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for Administration/HR jobs**

SQU
Majan College
Modern College of Business & Science
Higher College of Technology
College Banking & Financial Studies
GUtech
Middle East College
Arab Open University
Oman Tourism College
Muscat University

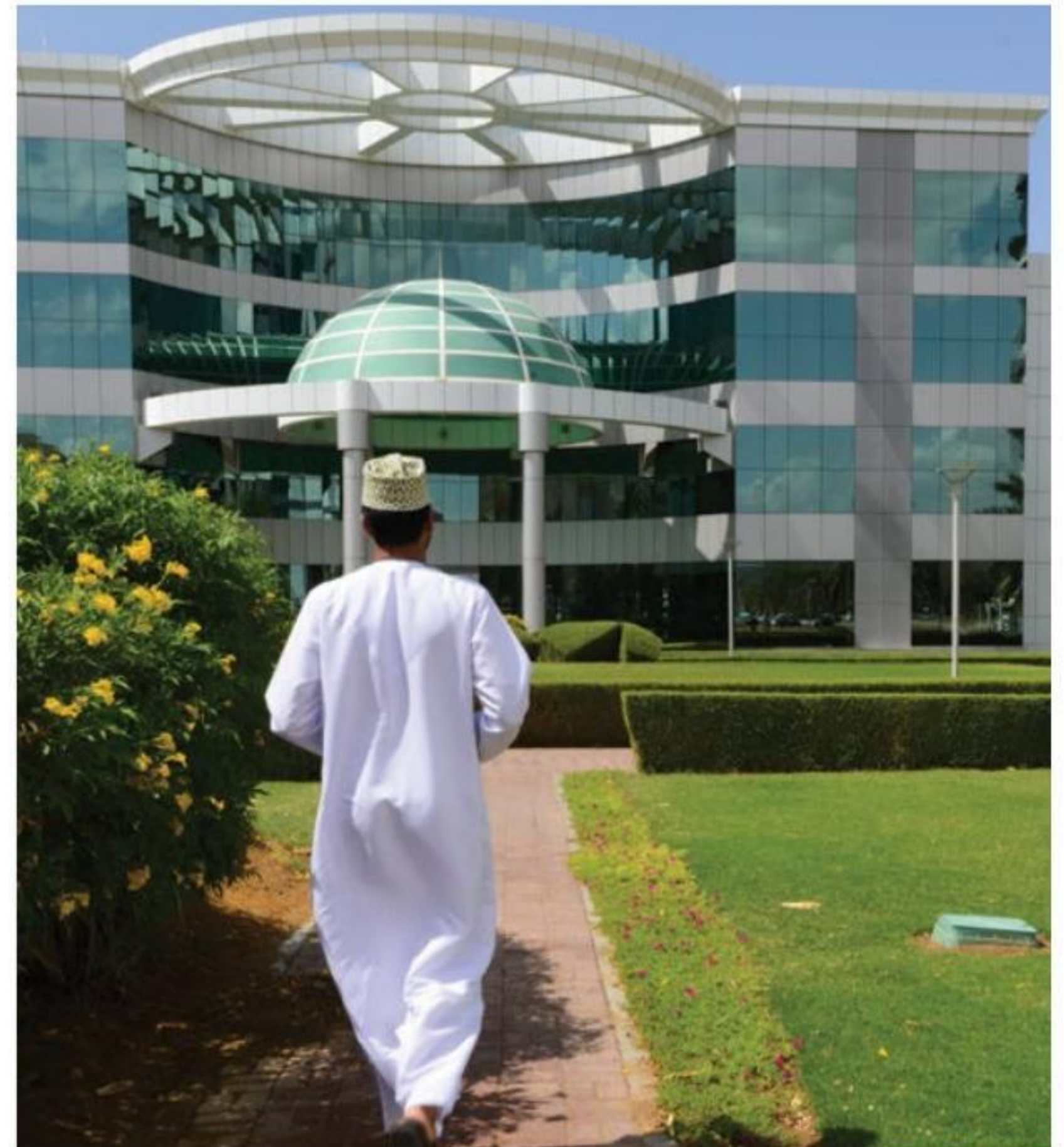
**Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for Accounting and Finance**

SQU
College of Banking & Financial Studies
Modern College of Business & Science
GUtech
Majan College
Higher College of Technology
Middle East College
Muscat University
Arab Open University
Oman College of Management & Technology



### Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for IT and Computers

SQU
Higher College of Technology
Middle East College
GUtech
National University of Science & Technology
Modern College of Business & Science
Majan College
Global College of Engineering & Technology
Muscat College
Muscat University



### Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for Logistics and Supply Chain

SQU
College of Banking & Financial Studies
Middle East College
Majan College
GUtech
Modern College of Business & Science
Oman Tourism College
Higher College of Technology
Muscat College
Sohar University

### Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for Civil Engineering

SQU
Higher College of Technology
GUtech
Middle East College
National University of Science & Technology
Global College of Engineering & Technology
Muscat University
Sohar University
Nizwa University
Dhofar University



TOP



COLLEGES PREFERRED FOR VARIOUS COURSES

**Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for Mechanical Engineering**

SQU
Higher College of Technology
National University of Science & Technology
GUtech
Middle East College
Global College of Engineering & Technology
Sohar University
Dhofar University
Muscat University
Nizwa University

**Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for Petroleum Engineering**

SQU
GUtech
Higher College of Technology
Middle East College
Dhofar University
Global College of Engineering & Technology
Sohar University
National University of Science & Technology
Sharqiyah University
Arab Open University

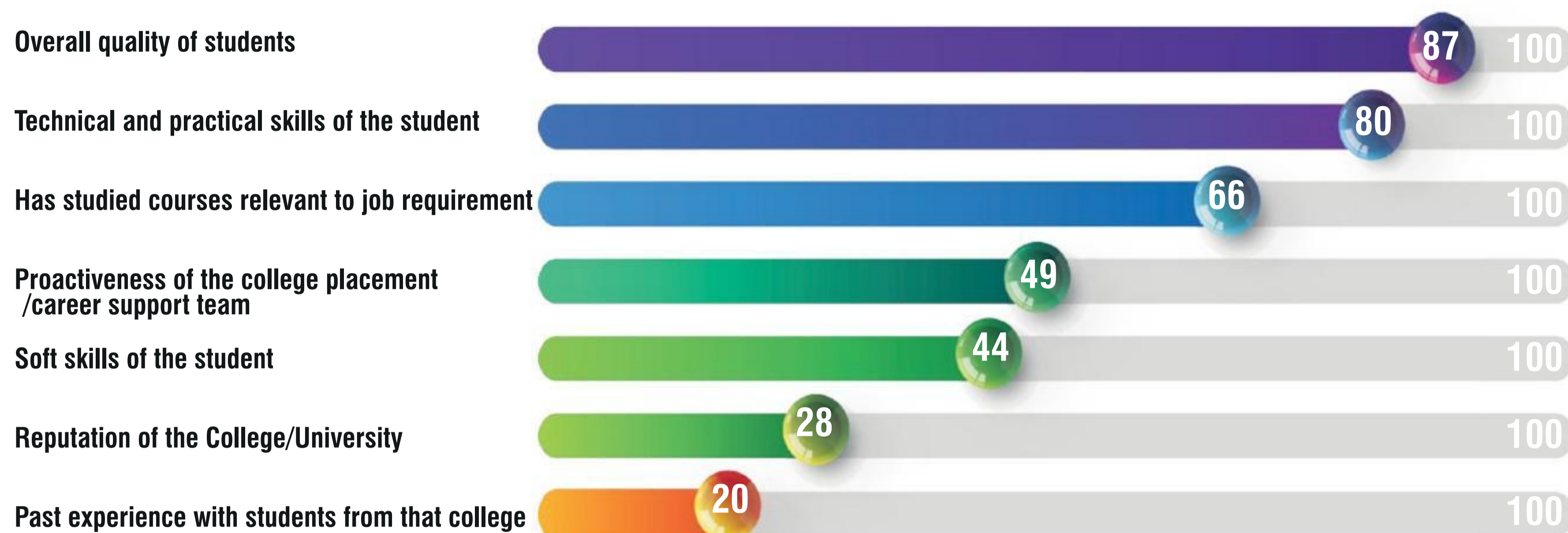
**Universities and colleges preferred by recruiters for Electrical Engineering**

SQU
Higher College of Technology
National University of Science & Technology
Middle East College
Global College of Engineering & Technology
Nizwa University
Sohar University
Dhofar University
Muscat University
Gulf College

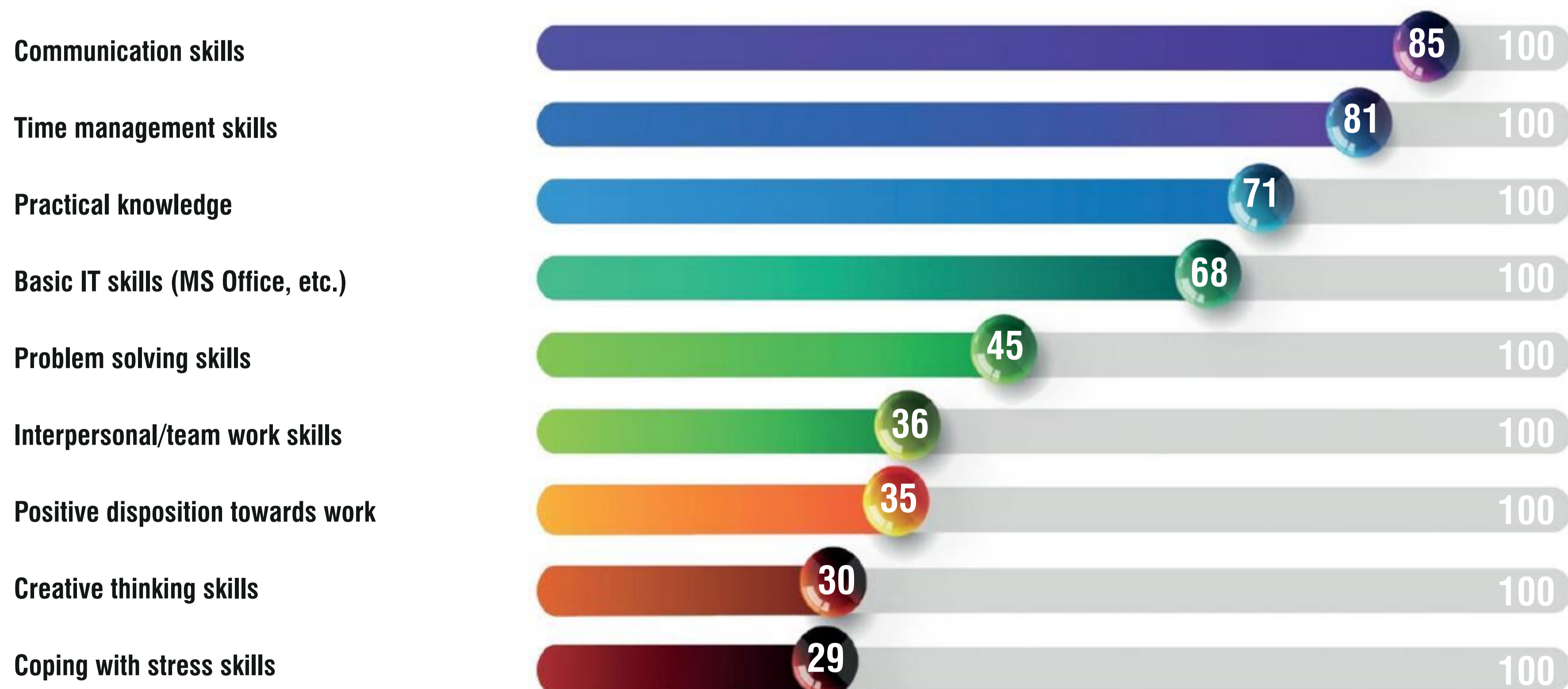




## Reasons why recruiters select students from a particular college



## What are the skill sets that are lacking in students coming out of colleges?





## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Phase 1- Secondary Research

Extensive Secondary research was conducted to identify all the colleges available in Oman and ascertain the courses being offered by each college

- Overall, 30 Colleges were ranked in the survey

### Phase 2- Quantitative Survey

- A structured questionnaire was prepared in consultation with industry as well as HR experts
- Interviews were conducted with senior HR executives/ decision makers in large organisations across 20 different industry segments
- The sample size for the study was 100
- Interviews were conducted face to face with the respondents

## Sample by Industry

Base	100
Construction	7
Retail	7
Wholesale & Distribution	7
Oil & Gas - upstream/downstream	7
Manufacturing	6
IT & related	6
Ministries	6
Automotive	5
Tourism & related industries	5
Facility Management	5
Banks	5
Insurance & other financial institutions	5
Real Estate - property managers and developers	5
Corporate business House/Family Business	5
Logistics	4
Large Industries	4
Utilities and related industries	3
EPC Contractors	3
Services	3
Telecom	2

**The OER-ABQ Research Survey was conducted by SIMPA Marketing Research and Consultancy**



SIMPA Marketing Research is a full-service agency founded in 1996 in the Sultanate of Oman. It has extensive experience of over 25 years in consumer research as well as feasibility studies and is the first local firm of its kind in the country with an excellent understanding of the region's cultural nuances. SIMPA is primarily focused on catering to the needs of the Omani market and has a team of qualified and experienced market researchers in the country.



# A CREATIVE ETHOS

Mohammed Moosa Al Balushi, Deputy Manager HR & OD, Muscat Overseas Company stresses on creativity and innovation as prerequisites for the success of fresh graduates. Mayank Singh reports

## What are the skills which you and Muscat Overseas Group look at while recruiting fresh Omani graduates?

We look at creative and innovative candidates who can add new ideas to the business for long-term business success. It is very important for us to recruit candidates who have a positive behaviour and personality. If the person's personality and behavior is proper, it is very easy to groom them, teach them and to give them responsibilities.

These traits can be judged during the interview process based on his or her past experience. We carry out a reference check on candidates before hiring a person and this gives us a clear idea of his background. A candidate should build in himself an ability to work in a team and should be able to communicate with people properly. If they have good communication skills, behavior and an ability to work in a team, it can help the company or the department to achieve their goals and objectives.

## How do you train and skill fresh graduates once they are recruited?

We have professional people who work in every department and we give candidates on the job training and they are trained by professional people in the respective departments such as accounts, HR or administration etc. If any additional training is required we refer them to a good training institute.

## Are there certain skill sets which graduates lack or need to work upon?

I think, communication skills are very important. They need to get adept



in business communication, e-mail communication plus their English writing skills also need to improve. Overall, they should be more creative and innovative.

## How can educational institutes i.e. colleges and Universities equip students better for the job market?

There should be a very good academic evaluation system to assess whether students are well prepared for joining the local market. It should be a very professional system. This will help in ascertaining whether these students are capable and have the right skills to join the market.

## His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Said's vision is to give every young Omani the education and opportunity to achieve his or her potential. How can this vision be actualised?

This requires cooperation between the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE)

and local Universities. The role of MoHE is to increase the number of scholarships to local people. From the college side there are a few subjects which are not currently available and then there are some specialisations which are not required by the market currently. So there is a need to remove some subjects and to substitute them with other specialisations or to add the latter to the curriculum.

For example, the local private colleges and universities need to add agriculture and aquaculture specialisations as the market highly requires these skills and experience. The cost of education in Oman is very expensive and colleges should look at reducing the cost of education so that more people can afford a higher education. The number of students being enrolled every year is very small and there is a need to increase this capacity to give more Omani students an opportunity to get an education. **OER**



# BENCHMARK AGAINST THE BEST

Humayun Kabir, CEO, ABQ Education Group shares his thoughts on the changing dynamics of the job market and how educational institutions can prepare students to succeed in an interview with OER.

**The war for talent is a term which is being increasingly used nowadays. Why is this of crucial importance for organisational success?**

The importance of the war for talent has been driven by three main forces. First, research has consistently shown that top 15-20 per cent of the staff in any organisation contribute disproportionately to its success. Basically, another example of the Pareto Principle in action. Second, with land, location and capital becoming less important or more abundantly available in the modern economy. It is the third factor of production i.e. labour that can be used powerfully to differentiate a business from its competitors. And lastly, with previously hard to get information and knowledge now easily available on a global basis, it is the top tier talent that will enable any business to create a sustainable competitive advantage. Hence, there is good reason for the global war for talent as organisations seek to compete and win in national, regional and global opportunities.

**COVID-19 has shown how organisations can tap into a global pool of talent virtually. Is this a threat or an opportunity, please give reasons?**

A hybrid version of onsite and virtual work is a model that is now here to stay. COVID-19 basically acted as a catalyst to fast forward this long emerging trend.





Like anything it is a threat to some and opportunity for others.

It is a threat to firms who will not change their thinking on virtual work compared to their competitors in the same industry. Such firms will not remain competitive or survive in the medium to long term. It is also a threat to employees who will not develop skills to be an effective operator in the hybrid work environment. It is almost a mandatory skill now.

In contrast, it is an opportunity for firms and individuals who wish to lead in their sectors especially if they have ambitions for a regional or global expansion.

### **How can educational institutions in Oman prepare students to succeed in the job market?**

It goes without saying that educational institutions should prepare the graduates with the expected curriculum and technical knowledge in the field of study chosen.

However, to succeed in the job market requires some critical non-academic skills and traits. First is passion for the career choice. Here the educational institutions should take active interest in understanding the strengths, weaknesses and natural inclination of each student. This effort should be supported by standard personality and career choice tests, career guidance sessions, internships, job shadowing etc.

Second, educational institutions should develop students critical thinking and problem solving skills. A career these days, in many ways, is nothing but a continuous stream of problems and challenges to be overcome with creativity, application and skill.

Third, communication and collaboration skills are at premium in the real world. They should be nurtured throughout the educational journey.

And last, but not least, is teaching students the importance of drive, perseverance and patience as critical success factors in any endeavour.

I firmly believe that students should enter the workplace with the belief that no one is responsible for their career but themselves.

### **Given your experience with the corporate sector, what in your opinion are the top 3 skills which organisations are looking for in young Omani recruits?**

The top 3 skills in my view would be communication, collaboration, and self-discipline.

### **‘Catch them young’ is a phrase which is often cited in terms of inculcating the right habits, skills and values in students. In what ways is ABQ working on equipping students with the right skills and attitude?**

At ABQ, the Discovering You Program (DYP) has been our most ambitious effort over the last four years. DYP has two facets. One, is to develop the 12 Critical 21st Century skills that are needed irrespective of the career choice any individual makes. These skills are Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Media Literacy, Technology Literacy, Flexibility, Leadership, Initiative, Productivity and Social Skills. This element of DYP starts in Grade 3 so we are really catching them young!

Second, DYP has a rigorous personality and career testing and guidance programme starting from Grade 8. By the time our students graduate, they have a very good idea of their strengths and areas of interest and passion.

In DYP, every student in our schools has a designated DYP mentor and a DYP report is generated and shared with parents two times a year.

### **As an institution does ABQ have career counseling, interaction with industry professionals etc. to give students a better idea of the opportunities ahead?**

Indeed. Our DYP Program caters for all these needs. We have guest speakers from different professions and industries, visits to organizations for

students to learn about their operations. To further strengthen this area, we have recently partnered with PrepUp, a start-up focused on providing students with job shadowing and internship opportunities.

We really want our students to discover their passions and make informed career choices.

### **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Said’s vision is to give every young Omani the education and opportunity to achieve his or her potential. How can this vision be actualised?**

I really feel that His Majesty’s vision beautifully crystallises the ultimate objective – for each individual to achieve his or her potential.

On the education front, my humble advice is simply, given the fact that we live in a digital and interconnected world, we must start benchmarking our educational outcomes to international standards. It will allow us not only to set specific and measurable goals but also guide us in allocating resources in areas where we need to catch up. A second important aspect in successfully operating in the global economy is the English language skills of our workforce and perhaps it is worthwhile to look at the options to fast track the development of this critical skill.

In terms of job opportunities for our graduates, I feel that they have to come from the growth of the private sector and that is more likely to happen if we continue to implement a business friendly environment that attracts foreign investment in money and skills. I also feel that a more concerted focus on the knowledge and tech economy will help in creating valuable jobs and spawning Omani companies that can become regional and even global powerhouses in this sector. I would like to add that we adopted the 21st Century Skills model to be in resonance with the Oman Education Vision 2040 - a truly worthwhile goal. **OER**



# Oman's Vision 2040, the Pandemic and Future Skills



**Venkatesh Palakkad**

The author is Director and Principal Consultant – RAB Consulting

It has become very evident that the pandemic has been a tipping point from an HR Perspective. A lot of initiatives which were on the back burner came to the fore and one very positive outcome is that HR has been asked to fast track a lot of strategic initiatives and the relevant stakeholders are supporting it overwhelmingly.

The Post Pandemic Work space is not without its inherent challenges. We can summarise the challenges in broadly the following categories

- Organisations are struggling with their ability to manage hybrid working
- Employees are expected to do more with less resources
- Major challenges to upskill and reskill employees as digitisation of work processes are happening at a very fast pace
- With no clear demarcation of work and personal time with the advent of online working employees are facing a burnout issue
- This has led to some critical employees quitting their jobs which has created challenges for organisations
- Employees are demanding more flexible work schedules and work arrangements

It would be interesting to note that the Oman Vision 2040 document provides solutions for the above challenges. Let's discuss some key aspects of Vision 2040 and how they are relevant to tackle the challenges mentioned.

## Focus on skill development

The People development pillar of Vision 2040 extensively deals with upskilling and reskilling the work force to be ready to embrace the workplace world order. By enshrining within its policies and practices lifelong learning, employability skills and inclusive education it focuses on the ability of the Omani workforce to do more with less by embracing digitisation in all aspects of work.

The vision document sets a tall order by setting a goal of being within the Top 20 countries for global talent and Top 10 countries in terms of the global competitiveness Index.

## Value proposition pillar

The Value proposition pillar also speaks about making Oman attractive for expat investors and skilled workforce for whom Oman will be a destination of choice with very attractive lifestyle and ease of living proposition.

So, what can we do now is to be ready for 2040 and in the process mitigate the challenges posed by the pandemic

- We need to foster a culture of results rather than a culture of tasks. Organisations should move towards a results based KPI system which is tied at a corporate level to the KPI's of Vision 2040
- The key focus needs to be on execution. We need to prepare ourselves as good executioners of strategies and policies and in the process remove hurdles, barriers and a bureaucratic mind set
- We should leverage on technology, education and skills and create a highly employable workforce with skills needed by the industry and trade. Oman should focus more on skill based vocational education rather than just academic degrees
- The government and private sector should jointly create and develop a skill pool of talent which could be tapped and used by the Industry as and when needed without really poaching talent from one another. Continuous learning and development opportunities should be made available to the workforce without any restrictions or barriers
- Focus on improving digitisation in all aspects of work and side-by-side also improving the digital skills of the workforce





# CHOOSE EXCELLENCE



With close to 60 years of cumulative school operating experience and 300+ educators, ABQ has a wealth of knowledge and expertise within the Group. ABQ Schools continue to shape the future with our revolutionary approach to learning.

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