Winning the Attention

It is the duty of a researcher to ensure that his research reaches the widest possible audience. Whenever one publishes his research, it is important to promote it through media professionals, within the limits of the regulations of the institution and the funding agency. What is the advantage of publishing research in the media? First of all, it is an effort to make the research accessible to the general public; and it helps to get your name known. What is the wider objective? The amount of media coverage that different subjects receive can affect public knowledge and opinion on that issue, which in turn can influence policy makers and legislators, both in terms of setting the agenda and influencing its direction. The same principle applies to media coverage for research and science journalism.

Thanh-Lan Gluckman is a PhD student in the Department of Zoology at the University of Cambridge. Explaining how she won international recognition for her for one of her research articles with a carefully prepared awareness campaign, Thanh-Lan Gluckman said that she prepares media releases about her research and publications and keep contact with the media office of the university where she is working. “I believe it is down to the scientist to spend time making the work intelligible to the media professional, which paves the way for making the research accessible to the general public. Similar to the review process, you will need to bounce a few different versions of the media release between you to get the story right, as well as ensure that it is accurately represented. It’s really important to remember that this is a partnership to drive the profile of your work, and the output of your university”.

According to Thanh-Lan Gluckman, as soon as a scientist hears their paper is going to be published, they need to decide to drive its impact by working with media. To promote solid reporting of science, researchers need to do their part. Doing so includes being accessible to reporters, presenting content to them in ways well suited for general audiences, and being willing to work with public information staff to promote high-quality coverage. Be enthusiastic about getting your message out there and respond to every media request you get, no matter how big or small. Above all, have fun talking about your research!

Horizon invites contributions from SQU members of staff and faculty. Contributions in the form of articles, news, travelogues, stories of unique and interesting experiences, encounters, etc., are welcome. Contributions may be edited for the sake of clarity and length. Please send your contributions to horizon@squ.edu.om preferably, as MSWord attachments. Authors will be suitably credited.

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Phone: +968 244141045
E-mail: horizon@squ.edu.om
Meet Discusses Latest Trends in Pediatric Oncology

The Pediatric Oncology East and Mediterranean (POEM) Group organized its First Scientific Meeting under the theme “Oman 2017, Reach Out to Heal” in Muscat on January 26-28, 2017. The meeting was inaugurated on January 26, 2017 at Al Bustan Palace under the patronage of Her Highness Dr. Mona Bint Fahad Al Said, Assistant Vice Chancellor for External Cooperation at Sultan Qaboos University. The meeting was attended by above 200 professionals in General Pediatrics, Pediatric Oncology and Hematology, Surgeons, Pathologists, Pharmacists, Nurses and other healthcare professionals. The meet discussed scientific advances in the treatment of Pediatric Cancer, in addition to update on POEM Group activities and plans.

During the opening ceremony, Dr. Abdul Hakim Al Rawas, Chair of the Organizing Committee, Oman representative member in POEM Group Board of Directors and Senior Consultant in Pediatric Hematology / Oncology & HSCT at the Department of Child Health, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, gave a welcome speech. Then Dr. Hassan El Solh, Vice-Chair of POEM Group, gave an overview of POEM Group initiation, achievements and strategic plans under the title “POEM Group: Past, Present and Future”. Dr. Sima Jeha, Regional Director of Eastern Mediterranean Region at the International Outreach Program at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis Tennessee USA, presented St. Jude role and vision for collaborative groups like POEM Group that aims at improving the care for children with cancer in the East and Mediterranean region. At the end of the Opening Ceremony Dr. Yasser Wali, Chair of the Scientific Committee and Professor and Head of the Pediatric Hematology Unit at Child Health Department at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and Dr. Al Rawas presented a short video on the Development of Hematology/Oncology Treatment in Oman. The Scientific Meeting sessions were divided into two days: January 27 and 28, 2017 where high caliber international and regional presenters gave lectures on updates in the treatment of the different cancer diagnoses.

Cystic Fibrosis Conference Held

The First Middle East Cystic Fibrosis Conference, organized by the Middle East Cystic Fibrosis Association, in collaboration with the College of Medicine and Health Sciences-SQU, and Oman Respiratory Society, was held in Al Bustan Palace Hotel, Muscat, from 2 to 3 February 2017. The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of HE Dr. Ali bin Talib Al Hinai, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Health for Planning. Cystic fibrosis is an inherited disease that affects many organs in the body and the child will be affected only if both of his/her parents carry the abnormal mutation (CFTR). The symptoms of the disease appear early in the infant life in the form of failure to gain weight and chronic diarrhea. Also, it affects the respiratory system where the affected child will have repeated attacks of respiratory infection and blocking of his air passages with sticky mucus secretions that will lead to severe compromise of his breathing and early death if it is not diagnosed and treated on time.

This conference featured 22 international and regional expert speakers in the field of cystic fibrosis coming from the USA, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, KSA, Qatar, Iran, Palestine, and UAE, as well as from the Sultanate of Oman. As many as 150 delegates from inside and outside the sultanate including physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals participated in the conference.

SQU Council Meets

The second meeting of the Sultan Qaboos University Council for the academic year 2015/2016 was held at the university council’s meeting hall, under the patronage of H.E Dr. Rawya bint Saud Al Busaidi, Minister of Higher Education and Chairperson of the Council, in the presence of the council members. The agenda included a number of topics that took appropriate decisions. The council discussed the most important points of the summarized report of the main committee of the national project for the harmonization of higher education outputs with labor market needs in the Sultanate of Oman, which has been implemented by a team of specialists from the university in collaboration with other relevant government agencies, commissioned by the Education Council.

The summarized report includes five chapters, the first chapter talks about the establishment of the project database, while the second chapter focused on the Oman’s labor market needs of skills. The third chapter summarized the harmonization of higher education outputs with labor market needs, the fourth chapter discussed the most important recommendations, and the fifth part discussed the summary’s conclusion. In addition, the Council praised the accomplished efforts. Moreover, the report was praised by the Council and raised the result of the project to the Board of Education.

The council also adopted the proposal of representing students at the specialized councils at the university after studying the current situation of student representation. In addition, the council discussed different topics related to the academic path at the university. The council adopted the proposal of increasing the number of times of student withdrawal through the student’s study and extending the period of the allowed withdrawal to ten weeks. The council approved the fees for the issuance of academic documents for undergraduate and graduate students.
Fostering a Culture of Research

The Vision of the Deanship of Research at Sultan Qaboos University is to facilitate the development of a vibrant research culture and, in doing so, make the university a top research institution in the region. Its mission includes strategic planning, policy formulation and implementation, fostering activities designed to promote outputs of research nationally and internationally, and raising external funding. In order to achieve this, the Deanship’s structure involves three departments. These are: the Research Department which is responsible for financial and administrative management of the projects funded internally and externally; the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Department which facilitates and provides guidance, support and resources to all SQU personnel for translating creative work into intellectual property; and, the Academic Publication and Outreach Department which is responsible for administrative and financial matters related to the publication of academic books and journals, conference attendance, and publicizing SQU’s activities through internal and external media.

SQU is a comprehensive university. Its faculty members conduct research on humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering and medicine. Members of the university are always encouraged to perform multidisciplinary research, as research at interfaces of disciplines is an important driver for innovation. The University has 10 research centers, which are Remote Sensing & GIS, Omani Studies, Environmental Studies, Oil and Gas, Water Research, Marine Biotechnology, Humanities Research, Earthquake Monitoring, Communication and Information, and Earth Science. Work is going on to establish a new center on “sustainable energy” which is intended for unifying individual efforts in energy, including energy production, transformation, usage, efficiency, coordination and management systems, and alternative and renewable energy. The university houses two research chairs; one on petroleum geosciences funded by Shell international and the other one is on nanotechnology applications in desalination funded by “The Research Council”. There is also a plan to introduce a new chair on solid waste management.

Funding Sources

Funding sources for the university’s research activities include internal grants, His Majesty’s Trust Fund grants, TRC grants, collaborative grants, external grants, and consultancy services. From their inception, SQU has allocated more than $ 20 million in internal grants for 84 projects. Thus far, 82 projects have been supported by His Majesty’s trust fund donation with a total value of $ 19 million. Since 2010, members of the university have conducted 91 TRC projects with a total value of $ 30 million. Since 1995, SQU has received 502 consultancy grants worth around $ 53 million. All this research activity has resulted in 9,000 academic publications with SQU affiliations, with these heightened levels of activity being one of the reasons why SQU is often considered one of the premier universities in the region.

Industry-Academia Linkage

Although SQU’s research engagement continues to develop at a good rate, there is always room for improvement. Perhaps one important area for improvement that we are currently working on in the Deanship is commercializing the outcomes developed in research projects. A recent Government-Industry-Academia Panel Discussion conducted at the Gulf Intelligence R&D Summit held in Muscat concluded that the alignment between Oman’s industry and academia must be improved for the country to enhance its research and innovation efforts. SQU is fully aware of this, and is working to address it through such initiatives as establishing a center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and through the efforts of the Academic Innovation Assistance Program (AIAP) which is funded by TRC. This direction is supported by another major initiative from TRC that will hopefully see the light soon which is the establishment of the Innovation Park Muscat (IPM). IPM is Oman’s newest and most ambitious science and technology development. Initially, focusing on companies with the Energy, Food and Biotechnology, Health, Water and Environment sectors, IPM will provide vital access to outstanding facilities, services and talent – creating an environment that inspires innovators and entrepreneurs to develop extraordinary ideas and companies.

Research Groups and Seed Fund

Moreover, we are currently working on establishing research groups at SQU. One important indicator of university’s research activity is the number and size of research groups and their levels of activity. A research group is formed in order to identify and coordinate a particular research activity within academic department(s) and, thereby, to promote that activity, solicit funding and facilitate communication among interested members. Because they are often multi-disciplinary in nature, research groups can offer a variety of perspectives on a particular issue and can be quite flexible and dynamic in their approaches. The Deanship of Research together with DVCPSR office has prepared the proposal and set the procedure and terms and conditions for the formation of research groups within and among disciplines. Besides, we wrote a proposal to introduce a new award called “SQU Award for the Most Active Research Group”.

Also, Deanship of research together with DVCPSR office is working on introducing new fund called “the SQU Research Seed Fund”. Seed funds are generally short-term in nature, usually offering support for around one year, and often have relatively small available budgets when compared to full research funding. The research supported by this fund will be of a relatively small scale, though may form the basis of future research studies of a more extensive nature.

GCC Grant

Despite the economic difficulty the region is facing, we started this year a new collaborative grant that is the GCC grant. In the first cycle, three projects from Colleges of Engineering, Medicine and Science were selected for co-funding with other universities in the gulf countries. Also, a month from now, announcement will be sent to all SQU members calling for research proposals for the first cycle of the SQU-South Africa Universities collaborative grant.
The Sultanate of Oman is one of the fast developing countries in the region. Literacy rates among males and females have been increased over the years. Omani women are educated, able to take self-decisions and are participating in personal, social and country’s economic development. However, adequate attention is not given in preventing congenital diseases, because Omani women respect their culture and traditions and practices of country. This results in inevitable consanguineous marriages and may produce children with genetic disorders. “The high prevalence of blood disorders in Oman can be attributed to the practice of marrying a close relative, leading to consanguinity,” an expert in the Hematology Department at Sultan Qaboos University said.

According to the latest statistics obtained from the Sultan Qaboos University hospital, nearly 60% of the population of Oman carries a gene for genetic blood diseases. Most common congenital diseases observed in Oman are Thalassemia, Sickle cell anemia, G6PD, and many more. However, Oman is the pioneering country among MENA countries to initiate Premarital Screening Services through health care facilities.

Taking care children with genetic diseases is a major issue because they pose heavy load to the society. Genetic blood disorders constitute a major challenge to the economic and social system of the countries. Health care costs of caring for sickle cell and thalassemia patients are burdening the health care system in Oman. The increased demand for painkillers in emergency departments combined with the need for trained nursing staff are critical issues that need to be evaluated. It is a challenge to the government to provide required treatment and rehabilitation services to these patients.

Premarital Screening Services

Premarital test are tests to individuals planning to get married for various genetic or acquired disorders. The aim of this screening is to provide medical consultation that helps prevent transmission of such diseases to partners and future children. Now, the Oman policy for prevention of genetic disorders includes early identification and prevention of genetic risk including the avoidance of marriages between carriers of the same genetic disorder.

The services given to the needed people through trained personnel include consultation on types of hereditary disorders, its prevalence and challenges faced. This will enable the individual to choose the partner based on the risk factors involved. When couples are screened, they can learn the probability of bearing a diseased child. The decision is then left to the couple either to proceed with the marriage plan, or to not proceed.

Premarital tests will identify couples at high risk, by subjecting all couples intending to marry for screening by evaluating the history, physical examination and laboratory investigations. Accordingly, advice is provided in the form of further investigation or referral to secondary level if needed, treatment advice, health education and promotion, and counseling regarding their health status. Pre-marital tests are currently limited to inherited blood disorders, but there is a proposal to make screening available for all genetic disorders known in Oman.

Blood investigations are done to identify screening for genetic diseases, and screening for sexually transmitted diseases. To make premarital tests successful, there should be effective coordination between the laboratories with the doctors who care for the beneficiary of this service, there should be civil and religious laws and regulations related to mandatory testing to make it legally binding and premarital screening should only be done in government and pre-approved medical centers and hospitals.

The Ministry of Health has been offering premarital screening services 1999 and the services were expanded to regional hospitals across Oman since 2001. There are very few studies conducted in Oman to know about utilization of premarital screening services in the country. Therefore, it is vital to raise awareness on the importance of premarital screening and to alert young generation to make use of the facility. Prevention through early screening is an important step towards limiting the spread of genetic blood disorders. Health personals from different sectors are expected to inform, educate and empower communities, raising awareness about Pre-marital screening through educational campaigns and media programs should be considered for mass outreach.
Forum on Projects Funded by His Majesty’s Trust Fund

The Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies and Research at Sultan Qaboos University is organizing the “Forum on Projects Funded by His Majesty’s Trust Fund for Strategic Research” on 8 March 2017, at the Conference Hall, SQU. Strategic Grants are funds generously donated by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos that are used to support long-term, multidisciplinary strategic research projects of importance to the Sultanate. The aim of these projects is to generate new knowledge and discoveries that lead to substantial socio-economic benefits for Omani society. The aim of the forthcoming forum is to communicate the achievements and highlight the results of these research projects to a variety of interested parties including academics, researchers, students, industry representatives, and decision makers. The forum will also highlight how SQU’s strategic research serves the interests of the country by contributing to its social and economic development. The topics of these projects are varied and they include research in the fields of health, engineering, agriculture, environment, education, sciences and arts and humanities.

In the context of organizing this event, Dr. Rahma Al-Mahrooqi, SQU Deputy Vice Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies and Research, met with researchers whose strategic project will be featured in the forum. The meeting discussed the event details, including the presentation program and the compilation of a book of abstracts and other published works. A publication to emerge from the event is “New Media and Socialization” by Dr. Anwar Al Rawas, the former Head of the Mass Communication Department at the College of Arts and Social Sciences and one of the researchers participating in the forum. The book originated from the work of the research team led by Dr. Anwar. The title of their project is “The Impact of the New Media on Socialization: An Interdisciplinary Study on Oman”. It is planned that all of these books will be distributed to participants at the forum.

Vice Chancellor Meets Czech Minister

H.E. Dr. Ali bin Saud Al Bimani, the Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University received in his office, H.E. Martin Tlapa, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, who is currently visiting the Sultanate. They discussed about enhancing cooperation between SQU and Czech higher educational and research institutions through exchange of staff and students, and undertaking collaborative research in different fields. Major areas identified for academic and research cooperation include medical science, biotechnology, and development of smart cities. The meeting was attended by H.H.Sayyida Dr. Mona bint Fahad Al-Said, SQU Assistant Vice Chancellor for International Cooperation, and Prof. Khalifa Al-Jabri, Head of the Civil and Architectural Engineering Department.

The meetings of H.E. Martin Tlapa in Oman focus on issues of bilateral relations, further development of economic cooperation and current international issues in the region. Deputy Minister Tlapa was accompanied by the business delegation organized by the Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic and will launch Czech-Omani Business Forum.

Talk Highlights New Technologies in Aquaculture

The Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies & Research at SQU organized a talk on “Marine Biotechnology: Contribution to Sustainable Economy”, delivered by Dr. Madjid Delghandi, Senior Researcher, Centre of Excellence in Marine Biotechnology at SQU.

Oman has embarked on an ambitious path to expand and diversify the fishery through aquaculture – the farming of fish, molluscs, crustaceans and seaweed. In support of future aquaculture development in Oman, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Wealth (MoAFW) has conducted extensive surveys of potential sites, developed a comprehensive guide to better management practices for Oman aquaculture, developed a national strategic plan and in collaboration with FAO and Sultan Qaboos University has published a critical review of food safety and environmental issues.

The successful development of modern aquaculture, which currently accounts for more than half of all seafood consumed, has been driven by scientific and technological innovation. It is widely recognised that emerging biotechnologies hold the key to future expansion through their direct applications in the critical areas of fish reproduction, health and nutrition. The applications of modern tools have led to spectacular gains in the production of traditional crops and farm animals. Dr. Delghandi said that in aquaculture, there has been limited application of new biotechnologies and most farmers, including those in Oman, are working with wild stocks collected from the capture fishery. “New biotechnology-linked resources are needed in Oman if advanced selective breeding programs are to be developed and the potential genetic gains realized for the economic benefit of fish farmers”, he said.

Center of Excellence in Marine Biotechnology at Sultan Qaboos University undertakes currently a multi-disciplinary research approach to bring new research focus to the challenges of in fisheries and developing marine hatchery protocols for the selective breeding and mass rearing of indigenous species of juvenile fish and shellfish. This is a vital component of all future commercial fish farming and fishery enhancement programs.

“A successful management will ensure a sustainable exploitation of marine resources in Oman and contribute to diversification of economy, generate wealth, foreign currency earnings via export as well as increase well-paid skilled employment and the domestic supply of healthy seafood. All these will be of long-term benefit to the citizens of Sultanate of Oman”, Dr. Delghandi said.
It may come as a surprise but fish can grow lettuce and mint! All they need is our help for designing an aquaponic system for them. That’s exactly what my students and I did at Sultan Qaboos University. This is a story of how we did it.

The idea was simple. The ‘wastewater’ produced by growing tilapia is actually not a waste, it serves as fertilizer because it contains important nutrients that can be used by plants for their growth. This can be achieved in an aquaponics system. Aquaponics is a combination of aquaculture (growing aquatic organisms like fish) and hydroponics (growing plants only in water, without the use of soil). It is a culture system in which the uneaten feeds and wastes produced by the reared fish provides nutrients for the plants which take up the nitrates converted from nitrites and ammonia by the system. This is an environment-friendly way of growing fish and plants as the wastewater is not discharged into the environment but rather used for the growth of plants. This how we started our aquaponics research project.

Using the start-up grant from the Dean’s Discretionary Fund, we tried growing lettuce and tilapia at different fish stocking densities in a recirculating aquaponic system, non-recirculating aquaponic system, and non-aquaponic system (fish only, without plants). We successfully produced lettuce and tilapia using the recirculating aquaponics system at the highest fish density of 20 per tank (80 x 40 x 40 cm).

After the initial success, we wanted to test other plants. For this research, we successfully obtained funding from the Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research Program (FURAP) of The Research Council (TRC). Mint, lettuce, cabbage, eggplant and chillis were all tested in our aquaponics system versus growing on soil. Mint was found to survive and grow well in an aquaponic system even in summer when temperatures go up to 50°C.

Mint is a plant that has so many uses. Its fresh leaves are used in teas and as flavoring in beverages and dishes. It is also used as an ingredient in toothpaste, candies, ice creams, chewing gum and others. The oil extracted from mint is used to treat stomach ache, chest pains and irritable bowel syndrome. Mint oil is also used for aromatherapy and as room deodorizer. There are several varieties of mint but the most commonly cultivated types are the spearmint and peppermint. Peppermint has a bold and strong flavor while spearmint has a sweeter and more mild flavor than peppermint.

Mint are harvested by cutting the plants near the base which grow again and ready for harvest after only 4 weeks. In 4 weeks, the plant grows to a length of around 40 cm and from each tank with a surface area of 80x40cm, around 200 g of mint can be harvested.

Tilapia can be stocked at 30-50 fish per tank (100 liters) and can be harvested after 10-12 weeks at a marketable size of around 200 g each, grown from an initial size of 40 g.

Several undergraduate students have conducted their research projects on aquaponics. Currently, Aiman Al-Maimani, Ahmed Al-Azwani, Zaher Al-Barashdi, Salim Al-Mamari and Mohammed Al-Qarni are growing mint with tilapia and barramundi (another species of fish). In addition to mint, strawberries are being tested as a potential fruit crop this winter-spring season. This research could contribute to Oman’s aquaculture and agricultural development.
WTO’s Efforts towards Capacity Building

Ms. Bridget Chilala

Ms. Bridget Chilala is the Director of Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation, World Trade Organization. She attended the closing ceremony of the third edition of the Regional Trade Policy Course (RTPC) for the MENA countries conducted by WTO in collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University. In this interview, she speaks about the importance of RTPCs and how the participants are benefitting from this unique program of WTO.

Horizon: WTO is focussing on trade related technical assistance and capacity building in multilateral trading system. How would you comment on this?

Chilala: WTO Members recognised at the Doha Ministerial Conference and reiterated in subsequent Ministerial Declarations that trade-related technical assistance and capacity building are core elements of the development dimension of the multilateral trading system. Members acknowledge the importance to support domestic efforts for mainstreaming trade into national plans for economic development and strategies for poverty reduction in pursuing the UN Sustainable Development Goals. One way in which the WTO contributes to these objectives is through its trade-related technical assistance, which has become over the years a core function of the Organization and one, which is of critical importance to the Members and Observers. WTO Members recognise that a well-functioning multilateral trading system requires trading rules that are equitable and fair; they also recognise that a thorough understanding of such rules and procedures is essential in order for its Members, especially the most vulnerable ones, to fully benefit from their WTO membership and from the gains that trade provide. In this respect, WTO trade-related capacity building programmes are designed to enhance the human and institutional capacities of beneficiaries to take full advantage of the rules-based Multilateral Trading System (MTS), to deal with emerging trade challenges and to enforce the rights and obligations that the WTO sets out.

Horizon: In today’s rapidly changing world, does WTO periodically review and improve the training programs?

Chilala: Training and Technical Assistance programmes are constantly reviewed and improved in order to better focus on the needs of beneficiary countries and reflect the priorities and mandates adopted by Members. The Progressive Learning Strategy, Results Based Management, and E-Learning are just some of several examples of how the Secretariat is innovating its training and technical assistance with the aim to better target the needs of its Members, facilitate auditing and accountability by improving its monitoring and evaluation methodologies, and maximise the outreach of its programmes through the use of information technology.

Horizon: How would you highlight the importance of the Regional Trade Policy Courses (RTPCs)?

Chilala: RTPCs are one of the WTO flagship training programmes. Launched in 2002, RTPCs aim to build trade capacity by deepening government officials’ understanding of the WTO Agreements and by strengthening their ability to undertake WTO work. RTPCs are unique among WTO technical assistance programmes in placing a specific focus on the regional trade policy context an objective which is pursued by forging partnerships with selected trade-related institutions in the host country and by inviting regional academics and trade-policy specialists to share their views on the challenges and opportunities posed by the WTO Agreements at the national and regional level. The RTPC provides the participants with a unique opportunity for “hands-on” learning about the multilateral trading system and the Arab/Middle East regional trade context. WTO officials and regional trade policy experts discuss with the participants, the legal and economic aspects of the WTO Agreements and explore the linkages between the WTO disciplines and your country’s trade-policy interests. The knowledge, skills, and experience imparted by this RTPC have provided the participants with solid foundations on which to build and further enhance their knowledge and expertise on WTO issues.

Horizon: How would you comment on SQU’s support in organizing RTPCs?

Chilala: Among their various objectives, RTPCs also serve to strengthen cooperation with universities and trade-related institutions engaged in WTO research and analysis. The partnership with selected Universities, as in this case the Sultan Qaboos University, is essential to implement the RTPC, achieve its objectives and safeguard the regional dimension of the course. Through these partnerships, the WTO seeks to build synergies with trade-related institutions across the world with the aim to promote and encourage trade policy dialogue at the national and regional level long after the tenure of the RTPC. I would also like to thank Dr. Houcine Bouhannani, RTPC Academic Coordinator and WTO Chair Holder, as well as members of staff of the Sultan Qaboos University for all the efforts invested in making this RTPC a success year after year.