



هيئة ضمان جودة التعليم و التدريب  
Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training

# **Higher Education Review Unit**

## **Programme Re-review Report**

**Bachelor of Business Management Programme**

**Kingdom University**

**Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Date Reviewed: 1-2 December 2010**

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## Acronyms

BBM	Bachelor of Business Management
HEC	Higher Education Council of the Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Bahrain
HERU	Higher Education Review Unit
ILO	Intended Learning Outcome
KU	Kingdom University
QAAET	Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training
SER	Self-Evaluation Report

# 1. The Programme Review Process

## 1.1 The Programme Review Framework

To meet the need to have a robust external quality assurance system in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) has developed and is implementing two external quality review processes which together will give confidence in Bahrain's higher education system nationally, regionally and internationally. The first is the institutional review process which commenced in May 2008. The development of programme reviews, which complements institutional reviews, commenced in November 2008.

For the purpose of programme review an education programme is defined as one which admits students who, on successful completion, receive an academic award. Programme review applies to all education programmes in higher education institutions. Unlike institutional review, programme review addresses each education programme singly.

Programme Review has three objectives:

- (i) To provide decision-makers in the higher education institutions (the QAAET, relevant Ministries, parents, students, and other stakeholders) with evidence-based judgments on the quality of learning programmes;
- (ii) To support the development of internal quality assurance processes with information on emerging good practice and challenges, evaluative comment and continuing improvement;
- (iii) To enhance the reputation of Bahrain's higher education nationally, regionally and internationally.

A Framework for Evaluation is applied to inform internal and external programme review. This, together with a description of the method, is contained in the *Programme Review Handbook* published by the QAAET, which forms the basis for institutional self-evaluation and conduct of the site-visit by external peer reviewers, as well as the programme review report.

The *four* indicators used to measure whether or not a programme meets minimum standards are as follows:

### **Curriculum**

*Indicator 1:* The programme complies with existing regulations in terms of the curriculum, the teaching and the assessment of students' achievements; the curriculum demonstrates fitness for purpose.

### **Efficiency of the programme**

*Indicator 2:* The programme is efficient in terms of the use of available resources, the admitted students and the ratio of admitted students to successful graduates.

### **Academic standards of the graduates**

*Indicator 3:* The graduates of the programme meet acceptable academic standards in comparison with equivalent programmes in Bahrain and worldwide.

### **Effectiveness of quality management and assurance**

*Indicator 4:* The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance, give confidence in the programme.

Conclusions reached are in terms of minimum standards, and the summative judgment falls into one of three categories:

- (i) *The programme satisfies all four indicators and gives confidence, or*
- (ii) *There is limited confidence because up to two indicators are not satisfied, or*
- (iii) *There is no confidence in the programme because more than two indicators are not satisfied.*

## **1.2 The programme review process at the Kingdom University**

The programme review of the Bachelor of Business Management (BBM) at the Kingdom University (KU) was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. This report provides an account of the HERU programme review process and the findings of the Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by the KU, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit. The Kingdom University was notified by HERU/QAAET in June 2010 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its BBM programme during 2010. In preparation for the programme review, KU conducted its programme self-evaluation and submitted a SER with appendices on the agreed date in October 2010.

HERU/QAAET constituted a Review Panel consisting of experts in the academic field of Business and Management and in higher education who have experience of external programme quality reviews. The Panel comprised one regional and two international reviewers.

The quality review site visit took place on <sup>1st</sup> and <sup>2nd</sup> of December 2010 and this Report records the evidence-based conclusions reached by the Review Panel based on:

- (i) analysis of the SER prepared by the institution prior to the external peer-review visit
- (ii) analysis derived from discussions with various stakeholders (faculty members, students, graduates and employers)
- (iii) analysis based on additional documentation requested and presented to the Panel during the site visit.

It is expected that KU will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its BBM programme. HERU recognizes that quality assurance is the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. Hence it is the right of KU to decide how it will address the recommendations, contained in the Review Report. Nevertheless, three months after the publication of this Report, the Kingdom University is required to submit to HERU an improvement plan in response to the recommendations.

HERU would like to extend its thanks to KU for the co-operative manner in which it has participated in the programme review process. It also wishes to express its appreciation for the open discussions held in the course of the review and the professional conduct of the College in the BBM programme.

## **2. Overview of the Programme at the Kingdom University**

The Kingdom University was founded in 2001 and commenced its first degree programmes in 2004. It currently offers a range of degree programmes across five Colleges (Business Administration; Architecture Engineering; Information Technology; Art; and Law). Within the Business Administration College, five degree programmes are offered; namely Marketing Management, International Business, Finance and Banking, Finance and Accounting and the Business Management programme. In the early years of the programmes there is a substantial element of common curricula, which is typical of many Business Faculties. At the time of the site visit a total of 460 students were following programmes within the Business Administration College, 69 of whom were enrolled on the Business Management programme, approximately 70 per cent of whom were also in employment

### 3. Indicator 1: Curriculum

*The programme complies with existing regulations in terms of the curriculum, the teaching and the assessment of students' achievements; the curriculum demonstrates fitness for purpose*

- 3.1 The curriculum is offered in English and is composed of 129 credit hours. It is based on clearly defined programme aims and has clear progression from level to level. There is good evidence that the programme team have embedded the full range of skills in the programme; e.g. Knowledge; Intellectual Skills; Specific or Functional Skills; and Generic and Transferable Skills. The programme structure is sound. It offers students breadth as well as depth in the range of courses within it. There is opportunity for students to undertake two elective courses in each of the final two years of the programme. The programme structure is also strongly supported by a final year Graduation Project (or dissertation) worth three credits and a six credit Industrial Training Module, the latter jointly supervised and graded by a member of the academic faculty along with an in-company supervisor.
- 3.2 The University provides an exit award in the form of the Associate Diploma which is gained after successful completion of 75 credits. This indicates a flexible approach to study which also reflects the working background of a large number of the students. Also reflecting such a flexible approach is the afternoon-evening mode of delivery from 15.30 hours to 21.30 hours which is highly convenient for many of the students on the programme who work in the mornings. There is also a well-structured system of pre-requisite subjects which guides students effectively in their choice of degree programme.
- 3.3 The programme team have made efforts to document Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) at the programme level and they have also developed pilots for mapping ILOs at individual course level. The many course files that the Review Panel viewed during the two day site visit were of a high standard. These are detailed, consistent across different courses, and reflected the range of skills expected of students following the programme. They represent good practice, though there is some inconsistency in how much information from the course files is given to students in the form of course outlines, which in some cases tended to be of a summary nature.
- 3.4 The curriculum is well informed by a range of internal and external stakeholders including an Industrial Advisory Committee, employers, alumni, external examiners and other universities. Moreover, there is some evidence of these stakeholders having an impact on the curriculum as evidenced by the number of modifications carried out over the preceding two years and the introduction of two new courses being added to the curriculum; namely; Supply Chain Management and Total



Quality Management. However, a more formal reporting mechanism, to gain benefit from the input of the programme's external examiners needs to be strengthened.

- 3.5 The Industrial Training Module referred to in 3.1 is an example of good practice, especially as it reflects the fact that 70 per cent of the students on the programme are completing their studies whilst in employment, thereby representing a practical and relevant component of their studies. The College has also commenced a process of external workshops which can benefit students. An example of one such workshop held during 2009-2010 was the Enterprise Development and Investment Promotion workshop held with significant external support (e.g., from the UNIDO).
- 3.6 In the area of teaching, learning and assessment, it is clear that the programme team have developed a clear philosophy and strategy. There is a wide range of assessment methodologies adopted by the programme team including: class assignments; quizzes; mid-term examinations; final examinations and student presentations. The latter is used especially in relation to the Graduation Project and the written report from the Industrial Training Module. The fact that class sizes are small (usually a maximum of 30 students) means that students receive good contact and support from their lecturers. This was confirmed by the large number of students and alumni (more than 20) who were consulted over the two day site visit. A strong emphasis within the programme is that of self-learning, which again was evidenced among the students consulted during the site visit. The College's grading system tests a wide range of skills on the part of students and the marking strategy is clearly stated and understood by students on the programme. The programme team have also introduced a clear and systematic process of moderation in assessments.
- 3.7 The establishment of the Curriculum Review Committee in 2009 has made a clear and positive contribution to the operation of the programme. Minutes from the Committee viewed during the site visit indicated a clear commitment on the part of faculty members to a willingness to review the curriculum and change it where necessary. In addition, the aims and objectives of the programme were clearly articulated to students.
- 3.8 In coming to its conclusions regarding the curriculum, the External Review Panel noted, *with appreciation*, the following:
- mapping programme ILOs to course ILOs
  - the curriculum is informed by a range of internal and external stakeholders
  - the availability of Industrial Training Module
  - the use of a wide range of assessment methodologies.

3.9 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- ensure that continued progress is made in the mapping of programme and course ILOs
- develop and implement a formal mechanism for reporting the views of programme external examiners
- strengthen the input from external examiners.

### 3.10 **Judgement**

On balance the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on curriculum.**

## 4. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

*The programme is efficient in terms of the use of available resources, the admitted students and the ratio of admitted students to successful graduates.*

- 4.1 The programme matches the profile of admitted students, approximately 70 per cent of whom are working whilst studying. The entrance examinations in English and Mathematics prepare students for their studies. The flexible nature of the provision, whereby students can take longer than the customary three years to complete, also reflects an attempt to match the programme with the needs and backgrounds of the students. Students, some of whom transfer from other universities, can receive exemptions from some courses, and in interviews with the students, this was confirmed.
- 4.2 During the site visit it was clear that effective arrangements are in place for orienting new students and that guidance is given to students as they progress through the programme. A detailed Student Handbook is provided which covers the normal range of academic related issues e.g.; examinations, attendance and student behaviour.
- 4.3 In terms of student progression rates, the SER indicates that these are high namely 92 per cent overall; and 86 per cent in terms of year on year progression. It appears that very few students drop out from the programme, especially given the high proportion of working students (many of them in full-time employment). However, the Review Panel would like to see a more detailed analysis of the progression and retention rates for the programme, ideally in the form of a proper cohort analysis. The programme team were not able to produce this during the site visit and this is an area where further effort is required by the University.
- 4.4 The academic faculty members were found to be qualified, highly experienced and from diverse backgrounds many of whom are originally from outside Bahrain. The Panel received confirmation from students and alumni that this enriches their learning experience. The number of faculty members employed to resource the programme is inadequate. This is partly due to the small number of faculty members, all of whom either teach 21 hours or 24 hours, depending on whether they are PhD holders. It is also due partly to the policy of maximum class sizes of approximately 30 students. Such high teaching loads, which even the Dean of the College bore, along with the hours set aside for student support and guidance place a heavy burden on faculty members. Indeed for some faculty members it is possible that they will teach on seven separate courses within the programme in any given semester, though due to the small class sizes and the need to repeat classes, most faculty members may end up only teaching on three or four different courses.

However, even if that is the case, it was clear to the Review Panel that it is unrealistic for faculty members to potentially teach across a diverse range of business subjects and courses and at the same time deliver a quality programme. That said, it must also be noted that the Review Panel found the faculty members to be a highly motivated and engaged group of staff who display a strong level of professionalism.

- 4.5 It is clear that additional faculty member appointments are required to support the programme, especially in relation to the need to cover the different electives and options within it and the Review Panel would recommend this be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- 4.6 Given 4.4 and 4.5, the most obvious opportunity cost to the faculty members of such high teaching loads is the limited amount of research being carried out by faculty members. Though there is an emerging research culture within the University and at College level, which has recently been strengthened by the establishment of a Research Committee and a substantially enlarged research budget, the faculty member is encouraged to develop ways of facilitating research in the form of sabbaticals and part-time teaching relief. This will assist existing researchers and also help emerging researchers to publish their research.
- 4.7 In terms of the physical infrastructure within the University which includes the library, IT facilities and social space for students, this was found to be inadequate. The library particularly was very limited in terms of books, academic journals and study space, although the University has recently invested in an e-Library, which the Review Panel had the opportunity to view during the site visit. The University is aware of the infrastructural weaknesses of its facilities and advised the Review Panel of its intention to re-locate to a new and larger campus during the end of 2011. When this happens the Review Panel would strongly recommend that high priority should be given to expanding the library facilities. This is essential, not only to foster a more academic and scholarly environment for students, but is also vital to support the students especially in the area of independent learning e.g.; in the Graduation Project and in other forms of group work. Investment in a suitable Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) might be considered appropriate within the new campus.
- 4.8 The University might give attention to developing social meeting areas (and adequate catering facilities) in order to enhance greater social interaction between students on campus. The lack of such facilities is an issue raised by a number of students during the site visit.
- 4.9 In coming to its conclusions regarding the efficiency of the programme, the External Review Panel noted, *with appreciation*, the following:
- effective arrangements are in place for orienting new students

- there is evidence of guidance given to students as they progress through the programme
- qualified and experienced faculty members
- there is an emerging research culture within the University and at College level.

4.10 In terms of improvement the Review Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- recruit additional faculty members to cover the full range of courses being offered
- review teaching load policy
- support faculty member research objectives in a more structured way
- enhance the quality of statistical information on student progression and retention on the programme
- improve the physical infrastructure available to students
- enhance the library facilities, especially the e-Library.

#### 4.11 **Judgement**

On balance the Review Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy the indicator on efficiency of the programme.**

## 5. Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the graduates

*The graduates of the programme meet acceptable standards in comparison with equivalent programmes in Bahrain and worldwide.*

- 5.1 There is good evidence within the programme documentation that ILOs, study plans and course descriptors clearly articulate with the academic standards expected of graduates. This was especially in evidence in terms of academic progression through the different levels of the programme and the emphasis on the higher order skills such as power of analysis and communication.
- 5.2 The Department and University have invested heavily in the cultivation of external benchmarks with universities in a number of countries (e.g. Malaysia, Jordan and Egypt), particularly with the Al Ahliya Amman University in Jordan. Evidence was presented during the site visit that such benchmarking has had positive effects on the operation of the programme. At the same time, due recognition has been given to the needs of the Bahraini educational system and the economy of Bahrain. In terms of the wide experience of faculty members and as a result of this benchmarking process, there was evidence presented that the programme meets equivalent academic standards consistent with its learning objectives.
- 5.3 In terms of the actual academic standards achieved by students on the programme, the SER indicated that, on average, 30 per cent of students achieved the highest 'excellent' grades in the examinations and assessments; with 30 per cent achieving the next highest level, i.e. 'very good'. The Review Panel was in general satisfied that such grades were an accurate reflection of the actual standards reached by students. The basis for this conclusion was; partly the large sample of student work that the Panel viewed during the site visit, but also the recent introduction of a strong and effective system of 'free tutorial teaching groups' to assist students who are having difficulty with their studies. The latter allows students to seek out remedial support from faculty members, if needed. Again consultation with students confirmed that such a system is utilized by them.
- 5.4 The system in place for the grading of students' work in terms of the allocation of marks across the different items of assessments also encourages students to reach their potential. The department has developed a system of allocating no more than 40 per cent from the final examination to the total grade obtained, which is consistent with current good educational practice in other educational systems. Considerable thought and effort has been expended by faculty members to ensure that this system is effective in maintaining standards. This is also reinforced by a recently introduced structured moderation process for assessments which involves not only the lecturer involved in the course, but others who double mark a sample of students' work, as well as the Dean of College.

- 5.5 The College is using external scrutiny of its academic standards by external examiners from such countries as Malaysia, Jordan and Egypt. During the site visit the Review Panel also met two of the three current locally based external examiners who were of the view that they are having a positive impact on the delivery of the programme, to ensure consistent and fair academic standards.
- 5.6 In relation to the standards reached in the Graduation Project, there is some evidence of inconsistency in relation to single authored Projects and double authored Projects in terms of how the grades are allocated. The Industrial Training Module is marked by an internal supervisor and an in-company supervisor with the former allocating 70 per cent of the final mark and the latter 30 per cent. Further clarity is needed in terms of the level of interaction between these two supervisors and their respective roles in allocating the final grade. The Review Panel read the guidelines for both the Graduation Project and the Industrial Training Module which indicated a good system was in place. However, during interviews with students they could not confirm the level of contact between the two supervisors.
- 5.7 The Review Panel read a large number of Graduation Projects during the site visit. Many were of a good standard. However, the Panel also detected some Projects that had been significantly plagiarized. A strong culture of deterring and detecting plagiarism should be instituted across the whole University.
- 5.8 In coming to its conclusions regarding the academic standards of the graduates, the External Review Panel noted, *with appreciation*, the following:
- there is evidence of academic progression through the different levels of the programme
  - there is evidence of benchmarking activities
  - there is evidence that the programme meets equivalent academic standards consistent with its learning objectives
  - there is evidence of using structured moderation process for assessments.
- 5.9 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel **recommends** that the College should:
- distinguish its marking criteria for single authored Graduation Projects and double authored Graduation Projects
  - clarify and strengthen the respective roles of academic supervisors and in-company supervisors of the Industrial Training Module
  - develop and implement a system to detect and reduce plagiarism.

#### 5.10 Judgement

On balance the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on academic standards of the graduates.**



## **6. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance.**

*The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance give confidence in the programme.*

- 6.1 There is clear evidence at University and College levels that policies, procedures, and regulations are in place to enhance quality management and assurance. A Quality Assurance Centre (QAC) and committee structure have been established and this arrangement has already impacted positively on the programme. Minutes from meetings of the committee were viewed by the Review Panel and these indicated a strong commitment to enhancing the quality of the programme. A number of sub-committees have also been established at College level and these meet bi-weekly. The staff resource to operate the QAC, which is a central university resource, will need to be enhanced as it currently relies on a very small number of dedicated individuals, who also carry out teaching responsibilities.
- 6.2 There is clear evidence that faculty members have been responsive to the views and feedback of various stakeholders. These include: the Student Council; the Industrial Advisory Committee and the system of Student Evaluation Questionnaires and Senior Exit Surveys. These are examples of good practice. For example, the Student Evaluation Questionnaire and the Senior Exit Survey contain very useful information. The former is very well structured and the latter contains good quality information on the jobs that graduates are following. The Industrial Advisory Committee has also met on a number of occasions and given advice to faculty members which has contributed in some way to changes in the curriculum.
- 6.3 The Review Panel also viewed the College's improvement plan during the site visit. This indicates a clear attempt to embed a quality ethos amongst faculty members. One aspect of this is the University's commitment to continuous staff development. This is manifested in a series of training programmes that staff have undertaken; e.g. in the new quality assurance systems; and the creation of a Faculty Kit which sets out the University's policy on staff development, promotion, as well as aspects such as health and safety. Some focus could also be placed on pedagogical staff development (e.g. use of a virtual learning environment) which might allow faculty members to use their available time more optimally.
- 6.4 Staff development has also been enhanced by more formal systems of academic staff performance and rewards which is commendable. In the area of research and other scholarly activities, the University has established a Research Committee. This is in its infancy, though there has been a substantial increase in the budget allocated to

research activities. The Review Panel suggests that the University fully implement its research strategy.

There is a clear commitment to develop a research ethos among faculty members, though this will require to be resourced effectively. Given the high teaching loads of faculty members, this will be a challenge for the College and University, though it is encouraging to note that additional faculty members appointments have been approved by the University which will help, once the new staff are in place.

6.5 In coming to its conclusions regarding the quality management and assurance, the External Review Panel noted, *with appreciation*, the following:

- there are written policies, procedures, and regulations in place to enhance quality management and assurance
- there is evidence of faculty members being responsive to the views and feedback of various stakeholders
- there is evidence of enhanced formal systems of academic and staff performance and rewards
- there is evidence of conducting Student Evaluation Questionnaires and Senior Exit Surveys.

6.6 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- increase the staffing resource in the University's Quality Assurance Centre
- enhance the expertise of faculty members in the area of pedagogy
- implement policies to allow faculty members to develop their research potential.

## 6.7 **Judgement**

On balance the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on quality management and assurance.**

## 7. Conclusion

Taking account of the institution's own Self Evaluation Report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the site visit, the Review Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the *HERU/QAAET Programme Review Handbook, January 2009*:

**There is limited confidence in the Bachelor of Science in Business Management programme offered at the Kingdom University.**