



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

# Higher Education Review Unit Institutional Review Report

**AMA International University - Bahrain**

**Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Dates Reviewed: 15 - 18 November 2010**

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## **1. The Institutional Review Process**

The review of AMA International University-Bahrain (henceforth referred to as 'AMAIUB' or 'the University') was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in accordance with its mandate to 'review the quality of the performance of education and training institutions in light of the guiding indicators developed by the Authority' (Royal Decree No 32 of May 2008, amended by Royal decree No.6 of 2009) and the procedures set up in the Higher Education Review Manual published by HERU.

This Report provides an account of the HERU institutional review process and the findings of the Expert Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), appendices and supporting materials submitted by AMAIUB, the supplementary documentation requested from the institution, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

## **2. Overview of AMA International University-Bahrain**

AMA International University (AMAIUB) – Bahrain is a member of the AMA Education System (AMAES) based in the Philippines. AMAIUB was established in 2002 as an independent private institution of higher learning and licensed by the Higher Education Council (HEC) in Bahrain on 22 October 2002. The University is located in a 57,450 square metre campus in Salmabad, Kingdom of Bahrain. AMAIUB is organised into 4 Colleges that offer a number of programmes, consisting of 6 Bachelor's, and 2 Master's. Each of these programmes has students enrolled in the current (2008-2009) academic year.

AMAIUB has a headcount enrolment of 3945 students who come from Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Qatar, Yemen, Egypt, Oman, Libya, and Iran. Just over 75% of students are registered in Business programmes with most being at the Bachelor's level. The Colleges of Engineering and Medicine only offer programmes at Bachelor level. The latter has a student enrolment of just over 1% of the undergraduate body. With regard to enrolments at the postgraduate level, the vast majority (over 75%) are in the College of Administrative and Financial Sciences.

## **3. Mission, Planning and Governance**

AMAIUB's vision and mission are the same as the parent University in the Philippines. AMAIUB clearly defines itself as an institution of higher learning that offers IT-based education, which is holistic, relevant, of quality, and globally recognised. These are the hallmarks of its programme offerings. The first point to note is that although the

Chairperson of the Board of Trustees (BOT) confirmed during an interview (*Interview on 02/11/2009*) that AMAIUB is '*oriented to technology*', the Panel could not find evidence that technology is infused in all the programmes over and above what is found in many other universities that do not claim to have a technological orientation.

Secondly, the mission statement is ambiguous when it says that it offers programmes at '*all levels and all disciplines*'. If this means that all programmes which a university can offer, will be offered by AMAIUB, this is unrealistic and is indeed beyond the capacity of most, if not all, universities. On the other hand, if it is the more limited claim that within its present programme qualification mix it will offer programmes at all levels, this is clearly not the case; for instance Engineering and Medicine are offered at only the bachelor level. The institution does not offer doctoral studies in any of its programmes and is in no position to do so in terms of academic capacity, facilities, and the other types of infrastructural and academic support that is necessary to offer studies at this level. Furthermore, a '*leading University*' claiming to be '*responsive to the needs of Science*' should have research and scholarship as an integral element of its mission, which is not the case in the current mission statement. The Panel was unable to determine in interviews with staff what the phrase '*responsive to the needs of Science*' means within the context of AMAIUB.

Thirdly, it is unclear to the Panel what measures and benchmarks the University has in place to ensure '*holistic, relevant, quality and globally recognised education*'. While the mission statement is displayed consistently through various publications and on campus, the Panel did not find during interviews with staff that there was a general awareness or understanding of the mission and how it should be applied in their sphere of work. As will be seen later in this Report there is no clear institutional understanding of '*quality*'.

Fourthly, while the Panel acknowledges that AMAIUB is a member of AMA Education System (AMAES), it is concerned that AMAIUB has not developed an institutional identity of its own that is appropriate to its own uniqueness in the education sphere in the Kingdom of Bahrain, e.g. '*relevance*' does not refer to globally recognised education only, but should also address the local circumstances, content and requirements. The Panel was informed during interviews with senior staff that the power to change the vision and mission falls outside the remit of AMAIUB and is currently done at AMAES, the parent institution in the Philippines. In addition, the Panel found that staff and students from AMAIUB did not participate in the review process of the mission. Furthermore, it is not clear if the University Director of AMAIUB has any involvement in the committee which reviews the vision and mission statement of the parent University.

### ***Recommendation - 1***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain review its Mission in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and that the new Mission is aligned to the*

*mission of the parent institution. The University needs also to conduct an institution-wide debate before its new mission is formally approved to ensure stakeholder buy-in at all levels.*

Fifthly, although the University has stated that *'it serves as a key player in the development and enhancement of education in the Kingdom of Bahrain through its innovative curricular programmes that takes (sic) into heart the dynamics of culture in the region and that these programmes aim to respond to meet the industry needs of Bahrain'*, it is unclear to the Panel how the University ensures the accommodation of the needs of business and industry in Bahrain in terms of specific curricula content. While the Chairperson of the BOT confirmed that *'AMAIUB made a difference to the Kingdom of Bahrain and will continue to'*, (interview 02/11/2009), the Panel found little evidence that the University meets the needs of business and industry in Bahrain in terms of specific curricula content, except for a recent example of Islamic Banking. The University does not have policies, procedures and structures (e.g. Programme Advisory Committees) in place for ensuring regular contact and feedback from employers on the performance of graduates, changes in the market, and possible changes to the curricula. The Panel urges the University to address this weakness.

#### ***Recommendation - 2***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement policies, procedures and structures which provide regular feedback and guidance from business and industry in Bahrain on its programme offerings.*

The University has a detailed five-year Strategic Plan in place that was drafted in 2007 and is running until 2012. However, the Panel could not identify a clear relationship between the Strategic Plan and the University's mission statement. Furthermore, with a few exceptions, such as student enrolment, the Panel found that the University had not specified appropriate benchmarks, annual target levels and key performance indicators (KPIs). The Panel did not find any evidence that the Strategic Plan was based on critical analysis, e.g. SWOT Analysis. It was stated in the Self-Evaluation Report and during interviews with senior management that staff and students were involved in the process of finalising the Strategic Plan. However, the Panel found limited involvement of staff and no involvement of students in developing and finalising the Strategic Plan.

The University does have a Teaching and Learning Plan and a Research Plan, but not an Enrolment Plan. There is no plan in place to manage or regulate future growth. The Panel was informed during interviews with members of the Board of Advisors (BoA) and staff members that an Admissions Plan needs to be put in place in order to align the infrastructure with the growth in student numbers. Further, the Panel noted from a presentation made by a Senior Official from AMAES that the emphasis is on the rapid growth in student numbers and increase in financial income of the University. The Panel

was deeply concerned with the focus on the growth of student numbers without due consideration for the effect such growth might have on academic standards.

***Recommendation - 3***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain refrain from further expansion of its programmes and enrolments until such times that the academic endeavour of the institution is placed firmly at the forefront of all decision-making rather than as a business enterprise.*

***Recommendation - 4***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement an Enrolment Plan aligned with its new Mission and which takes into account the need to ensure the embedding of quality in teaching and learning, research and community engagement given its existing infrastructure and other resources.*

The Panel found that a shared understanding and ownership by staff and students of AMAIUB's Strategic Plan is lacking and is concerned that the strategic planning process is a top-down approach only. The Panel encourages AMAIUB to develop a more inclusive approach to planning. This should not only include staff participation but also students and the views of relevant external stakeholders.

***Recommendation - 5***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop its strategic plan complete with key performance indicators and annual target levels as bases for measuring effectiveness of its various functions, and in meeting stated goals and objectives and that this should be an inclusive process.*

The Panel noted from the SER and interviews with staff that the Functional Plans for each section in the University are agreed upon and contain key result areas and operational objectives linked to the Strategic Plan. The Functional Plans do not show a critical analysis of strengths and weaknesses, and how much of what had been planned has been achieved. In addition, the Accomplishment Reports are used for annual monitoring and reporting. The detailed plans lack quantitative measures (target levels) to be assessed and the lack of reflection in the reports on annual plans shows a lack of effective quality assurance within the University. The annual plans lack consistency in various areas, particularly in research output and research funding. In addition, the Strategic Plan and its associated annual plans do not reflect the University's policy on research. On the other hand, the AMAIUB Research Agenda provides a very ambitious Research Plan that covers a large array of research topics.

The roles, responsibilities, and procedures for the AMAES Board of Trustees (BOT) and for the AMAIUB Board of Advisers (BOA) are documented and in place. The University has stated that the BOA meets once a year. However, the Panel was informed that the BOA met for the first time one week before the Panel's visit to AMAIUB in the seven years of its existence. Furthermore, according to the organisational structure, it appears that the BOA advises the BOT, and not the School Director. The Panel urges the institution to ensure that the BOA meets regularly in order to fulfil their responsibilities.

#### ***Recommendation - 6***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain ensure that the Board of Advisers meets regularly in order to fulfil their responsibilities towards the institution.*

While the Panel was informed during an interview with the Chairperson of the BOT, that the BOT reviews the mission, vision and systems (*Interview-02/11/2009*) it could not find evidence of the process used to review the effectiveness of governance. The University has stated that there are delegations of authority for financial and management decisions and that the University operates independently as in the case of the other member universities. However, the Panel is concerned that the degree of independence is limited.

The Panel found confirmation through interviews that financial and accounting systems that include processes to prevent and detect fraud are in place. However, the Panel did not find evidence of transparency in the budgeting process nor any indication of how the budget is linked to strategic planning. Furthermore, no details were provided on risk management. The Panel found that appropriate mechanisms which are linked to planning, resourcing, implementing and monitoring of the academic programmes and delivery as well as tracking of student progress, are not in place. In addition, there is not an adequate management information system to support institutional decision-making so that the quality of the provision in the three core functions is improved.

#### ***Recommendation - 7***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop a system for planning and resource allocation, which is aligned with the mission and strategic plan of the institution and supported by a properly designed management information system.*

The University has a clear organisational and management structure. It has developed job descriptions for all employees, which are also discussed with all new employees. During interviews with the Panel, staff indicated that the weekly Operations Meeting ensures the effective coordination of activities and that AMAIUB's top management provides effective leadership for the academic and administration sections. Although a number of mechanisms are listed to ensure effective communication throughout the University, the Panel was

informed during interviews with staff and students that the communication mechanisms are inadequate. The Panel suggests that the institution reconsiders its communication strategy. Once this strategy has been revised the institution needs to ensure its effective implementation and to put in place an evaluation mechanism.

***Recommendation - 8***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain revise its communication strategy to ensure a two-way flow of information and to monitor regularly the effectiveness of this strategy.*

It is evident that a Student Council is in place. The SER states that AMAIUB promotes student empowerment and recognises students' participation in decision-making and that the governing culture of the University actively encourages students to participate in all curricular and co-curricular initiatives. However, the Panel could not find any evidence of student representation on other decision-making bodies; e.g. the Academic Council. There is no student representation on the University Council. The Panel encourages AMAIUB to appoint a student representative to serve on this body. The institution should also consider strengthening student participation on key committees within the University. This would ensure that the needs of students are taken into account in formal decision-making processes.

***Recommendation - 9***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain put systems in place to ensure student participation on key committees, such as the University Council.*

While the Panel found that the University has a number of policies and procedures, it could not find evidence through interviews or otherwise of mechanisms to ensure staff and student awareness of these or their accessibility. Furthermore, these do not seem to be consistently applied across the University. Clear guidelines regarding the authority of the BOT, the School Director, the BOA, and other important structures like the AMAIUB's Operations Committee, on the development and approval of policies and procedures could not be identified.

The University stated that new major policies are developed and approved by the Head Office in the Philippines. This was confirmed during an interview with the Chairperson of the BOT. The Panel is concerned that the approval of new policies could be a cumbersome process impacting negatively on the day-to-day operations of AMAIUB. Procedures for Policy Review and Implementation are available. Although the Chairperson of the BOT confirmed during an interview that the policies are self-assessed, the Panel could not find evidence of a regular review of policies including review dates on policies and examples of revised policies based on feedback and benchmarking. The Panel urges the institution to



ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure staff awareness of policies and procedures and that their implementation is consistent across the University.

***Recommendation - 10***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain ensure (i) staff involvement in the development of policies and procedures; (ii) upon approval of new policies and procedures develop mechanisms to ensure staff awareness and understanding across all levels of the institution; (iii) develop and implement mechanisms to ensure that the policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated.*

The University has stated that academic freedom is respected to the fullest extent. This approach ensures that academics and students are empowered in the teaching and learning process. The Panel did not find evidence to support the above claims. It is not clear how the University culture contributes to achieving this said goal. In terms of the maintenance of a high standard of academic achievement, it is unclear how measures are utilised to ensure high standards. The Panel could not find any evidence that shows AMAIUB has the freedom to establish its own identity in terms of its context as a higher education institution operating in Bahrain. The Panel was informed, during interviews with senior staff that the University is in the process of considering possible benchmarking practices. The Panel urges the University to use benchmarking and external moderation to set academic standards and to measure the University's performance, which will improve the quality of teaching and learning.

***Recommendation - 11***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain use benchmarking and external moderation to set academic standards and to measure the University's performance in its academic programmes.*

## **4. Academic Standards**

AMAIUB follows international good practice in using learning outcomes as a means to the identification and maintenance of academic standards. However, the poor quality of the majority of the learning outcomes developed at all levels in all programmes at AMAIUB means academic standards are compromised in serious ways. Curriculum documentation in the form of course outlines made available to the Panel showed that AMAIUB defines 'course objectives', competencies and values. Internationally, objectives are generally understood to be related to the programme, course or module itself in that they define what the *programme, course or module* aims to do. Competencies then refer to what *students* should be able to do by the time that they complete the programme, course or module. In most of the documentation made available to the Panel, it was clear that the academic staff members

who had developed the courses concerned were confused about the distinctions between objectives and competencies. Often, '*objectives*' describe competencies and '*competencies*' then refer to content knowledge or some other phenomenon.

In order to ensure coherence across a curriculum, course or module learning outcomes cannot be developed in isolation from each other and attention needs to be paid to ensuring that they contribute to overarching '*exit level*' outcomes for the programme. The Panel found no evidence of such coherence in the outcomes developed by AMAIUB for the courses.

### ***Recommendation - 12***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement learning outcomes for its programmes, which are consistent with the programme aims and reflect an appropriate level of knowledge competencies and skills.*

Assessment criteria associated with competencies have not been identified in any of the documentation made available to the Panel. Details regarding assessment were limited to the weighting allocated to different forms of assessment. The Panel did find some evidence that efforts have been made to use what appeared to be Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives to categorise the kinds of learning expected of students in the various courses. In most of the documentation examined by the Panel, learning at the higher levels of the taxonomy has been identified as necessary for assessment purposes. Perusal of the examination papers and scripts made available to the Panel, however, showed a disjuncture between the kind of learning necessary to pass the course and what was actually rewarded in the assessment process. The Panel found that there are serious slippages between curriculum documentation and actual practice. As a result the maintenance of academic standards at AMAIUB is not evident.

In addition, the failure of the University to ensure that learning outcomes have been properly formulated at programme, course and module level and the assessment criteria associated with those outcomes have been developed, means that the University has no principled process in place to ensure that assessment is valid, reliable and fair. Furthermore, the overall coherence of the programme is further compromised as the outcomes at the lower levels of the curriculum need to articulate with those higher up and *vice versa*. The lack of appropriate outcomes and assessment criteria also impacts on the validity of rules for progression since no overall principle is used to describe and measure learning. The Panel is concerned that progression is therefore dependent on principles which are not necessarily coherent across the entire programme and by extension across the institution.

Moreover, academic staff members are assessing students' work using norms developed by the AMAES, which then have to be adjusted to the local context. Given the '*under preparedness*' of many of the students enrolled at the University, the Panel heard that staff

members were frequently required to 'mark for key words' and ignore other elements of students' learning. This means that generic competencies (such as the ability to communicate clearly in English appropriate to the field of study) are not assessed and, also, that assessors cannot be completely sure of the extent of students' learning. Since the University has no system of external examination; there is no means of moderating the validity and reliability of assessors' judgements. Hence, AMAIUB is using a norm system of assessment (i.e. a system which relies on implicit standards shared within the institution without any reference to outside criteria) rather than the criterion referenced system identified as international good practice. This negatively impacts on the quality of the institution's graduates.

### ***Recommendation - 13***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement associated assessment criteria for learning outcomes.*

In terms of AMAIUB's programme structure and credit hours, its qualifications are based on recognised fields of study in higher education; the extent to which they represent a coherent body of knowledge (and the extent, then, to which students can be deemed to be knowledgeable within that field) is highly questionable. In interviews and in documentation, AMAIUB acknowledged issues pertaining to the shift in credit hours from 120 to 180 in its programmes – a shift which has led to the use of the terms 'old' and 'new' curriculum. The Panel was repeatedly informed during interviews with a range of academic staff that the curriculum used at AMAIUB had originated in AMAES in Philippines.

The system in the Philippines allows a degree to be awarded on the basis of the completion of 120 credits of learning. Bahrain, however, requires 180 credits to be completed. Although AMAIUB has moved to a 180 credit system, this move has clearly caused confusion amongst students. The Panel did not find any evidence that attention has been paid to the overall coherence of the curriculum after the adoption of the 180 credit system. This matter needs to be addressed.

### ***Recommendation - 14***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain as a matter of urgency (i) ensure the coherence of the curriculum within the 180 credit system; and (ii) develop and implement mechanisms to ensure that staff and students are fully apprised of the credit system.*

AMAIUB allows students who gain admission to the University to transfer credits earned at other institutions of higher education. In interviews with a range of staff, the Panel was unable to ascertain clearly the maximum number of credits the University allowed students

to transfer, although a figure of 66% was mentioned. If the figure of 66% is correct, this is high by international standards. The Panel could find no clear policy on credit transfer or other forms by which credits may be given, such as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). The failure of members of staff to be able to identify the number of credits which could be transferred into an AMAIUB qualification suggests that clear and accurate advice would not be available to students.

***Recommendation - 15***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop a policy on the recognition of prior learning as well as having clear rules for the transfer of credits into its programmes, which are consistently implemented.*

AMAIUB does not have a policy on student clinical training. The Panel is concerned about the complete lack of coordination between pre-clinical education delivered by AMAIUB and the clinical training conducted by clinical staff at Salmaniya Medical Centre. Clinical staff at the hospital informed the Panel that there has never been any coordinated meeting to discuss student pre-clinical preparation or the way clinical training is conducted. The Panel also noted that no evaluation was conducted for teaching and learning at the College of Medicine.

***Recommendation - 16***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement a policy that ensures effective coordination between pre-clinical and clinical training in the College of Medicine.*

***Recommendation - 17***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain conduct a regular assessment of the teaching and learning of both pre-clinical and clinical education of the medical programme.*

The impact of AMAIUB's failure to ensure that learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria have been formulated at programme, course and module levels was described at the beginning of this section. Another problem associated with this lack, relates to the failure to distinguish between generic skills and knowledge (or 'graduate attributes') and specific skills. Although AMAIUB does appear to have developed what elsewhere might be termed 'purpose statements' for all of its programmes (and these were available on the walls of the room in which the Review took place), the Panel could find no evidence of a policy or description of the generic skills and knowledge which graduates should possess

and, even more significantly, could not find during interviews with academics evidence of an awareness of the need to develop generic skills and knowledge in curriculum documentation. This is an issue which needs to be addressed through programme review.

With regard to admissions, AMAIUB publishes information regarding its programmes, admission criteria and other academic requirements on its website and in hard copy. In relation to admissions criteria, the AMAIUB website states that admission is dependent on the score in an entrance examination and an interview with a Dean. In interviews with staff, however, the Panel learned that the University had an 'open admissions' policy and that students were admitted to programmes of study regardless of their score on the entrance examination. The Panel also heard of concerns that students admitted to the University were under-prepared for tertiary level study and that remedial courses were not always successful in bridging the gap between the knowledge and skills normally expected of a new undergraduate and the reality of the student's actual level of preparedness. The Panel urges the institution to address this matter.

***Recommendation - 18***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement effective measures to ensure that its protocols and requirements for admission are stringently enforced.*

The Panel found little, if no, evidence, of the use of data tracking student performance to identify problems at course or module level or of the identification of areas of study which presented difficulties to more than individual students as a result of this process. Given the levels of under-preparedness for higher education studies amongst students, which appears to be prevalent at the University, the use of data analysis to initiate curriculum review and redesign would constitute a considerable step towards the enhancement of quality.

***Recommendation - 19***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain further develop its capacity to collect and use data in order to initiate curriculum review and redesign.*

## **5. Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

AMAIUB instituted a Quality Assurance Committee in 2006 and in 2008 established a Quality Assurance Unit. A Quality Assurance Guide is also available (albeit as soft copy only). However, during interviews with staff, the Panel found that there is no common understanding of quality assurance. Indeed, the AMA University System is not even known to many of the Quality Assurance committee members. The Panel strongly encourages the

institution to develop a culture of quality at all levels of the University, ensuring that it is pervasive throughout the whole institution, its programmes, functions, and units.

***Recommendation - 20***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement a programme for its entire faculty and non-faculty staff to promote a quality culture, and ensure awareness and understanding of its quality assurance system.*

The Panel found the Self-Evaluation Report did not cover a wide enough scope for this review and provides a clear example of weak quality assurance across the institution, since it has not included in the SER a critical analysis of its present situation that would lead to defining areas of improvement. Further, the Panel is of the view that the SER was not written in a way that reflected the current status of AMAIUB nor did it provide evidence of self-critique and identification of improvement opportunities. The Panel encourages AMAIUB to take the process for self-review for both internal and external purposes seriously in the future. This will assist the institution in its endeavour to enhance the quality of its education provision.

Interviews with various staff at AMAIUB indicate that the current, limited implementation of quality assurance is understood as a developmental process. This understanding should continue as quality assurance grows and becomes more systematic so that it allows for, and encourages, a critical reflection on the teaching, learning and assessment processes and does not become an inspectorial process tied to punitive measures. Quality assurance needs to be understood as a mechanism for strengthening the academic endeavour through the development of a quality culture.

AMAIUB perceived itself in many aspects to meet international standards or states its aim to meet such standards in the future. However, without a systematic quality assurance process of all core activities, AMAIUB could not provide support for such claims or monitor progress towards such aims. The system of documentation of its practices needs a more sophisticated process and consideration should be given about which policies and procedures are required and for what quality processes.

***Recommendation - 21***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement a holistic approach to quality assurance, which is centred on continuous quality improvement rather than compliance and correction and ensure that the system is implemented consistently across the institution.*

In terms of benchmarking and surveys, the University's plans do not have clear annual target levels of benchmarking for most of its activities that can be used as a basis for monitoring, assessing, and evaluating the effectiveness of its operation. Current activities have been limited to conducting surveys, which include the assessment of courses and lecturers' performance. These are conducted each trimester. A satisfaction survey was carried out once, as a pilot study, and involved a very small number of students. Furthermore, in most cases, the results of surveys were not reflected upon to identify areas of concerns and, consequently, there is no clear evidence of mechanisms being in place to ensure that identified areas of improvement are addressed in a manner that leads to the development of an action plan with timelines and allocated resources for implementation of the plan. This situation is aggravated by the fact that AMAIUB does not have a degree of independence and that it has to rely in almost all of its decisions on its Board of Trustees. The Panel urges the institution to rectify this situation as a matter of urgency.

#### ***Recommendation - 22***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement mechanisms to ensure that the results of user surveys and benchmarking are acted upon to improve the quality of provision at the institution.*

## **6. Quality of Teaching and Learning**

AMAIUB has prepared a Teaching & Learning Plan for the years 2007-2011. Given that the Plan has been in place since 2007, the Panel could find little evidence that it is being implemented. Goal 5, for example, is listed as '*to ensure superiority in teaching and learning*'. The first strategy (strategy a) which is to be used as a means of attaining this goal identifies the provision of '*required classroom amenities that would contribute to effective teaching learning-atmosphere*'. A Panel tour of teaching facilities at the University at the start of the site visit revealed a complete lack of audio visual and other teaching aids in many classrooms. This observation would suggest that no implementation of this particular goal has taken place in the two years since the Plan was developed. In a similar vein, another strategy identified as a means of achieving the same goal (strategy d) is listed as to '*maintain classroom discipline that would initiate analytical judgment, scholarly effort, social awareness and involvement, cultural, moral and spiritual values*'. In interviews with students, however, the Panel learned of a failure to maintain discipline in classroom situations, which extended to students actually taking calls on their cell phones whilst the lecturer was talking and to others arriving only five minutes before the end of the class solely to get a mark for attendance. Goal 6 of the Plan is listed as '*to provide appropriate and extensive student services*'. Strategies identified as a means of achieving this goal include the '*provision of adequate budget, physical facilities, equipment and materials to support student activities*' (strategy b), '*adequate financial aid to deserving students*' (strategy e), '*active health programmes*' (strategy f) and '*affordable Foods (sic) services*' (strategy g). During the site visit, however, the Panel heard complaints from

students regarding the lack of support for their out-of-class activities and the quality of the cafeteria. Furthermore, it saw no evidence of financial aid to needy students.

Moreover, contrary to what would normally be expected of a Teaching and Learning Plan, the AMAIUB Plan does not provide details of the *pedagogical* strategies identified as necessary for the University to achieve its Vision and Mission. Apart from the use of problem based learning in the College of Medicine, AMAIUB appears to rely on fairly traditional methods of teaching. In a university focused on technology education, the absence of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in teaching and learning in a Teaching and Learning Plan is remarkable. The Panel was also surprised to see no mention of the ways teaching needs to be adapted to drive the attainment of learning outcomes in the Teaching and Learning Plan. In conclusion, although AMAIUB has developed a Teaching and Learning Plan, the Panel is gravely concerned about its scope and its implementation. As a result the Panel urges the University to take immediate steps to address this by reviewing and revising its Teaching and Learning Plan and ensure that the new Plan is implemented across all Colleges in the University.

***Recommendation - 23***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain review its Teaching and Learning Plan and that this review should include the identification of pedagogical strategies necessary for it to achieve its Mission and Vision.*

The Panel heard with deep concern in interviews with staff of academics teaching outside their area of expertise. In interviews with students, the Panel heard that Faculty members qualified and experienced in one area were frequently called upon to teach in others. Examples of this practice cited by students include a psychologist being called upon to teach corporate governance and business management teachers being called upon to teach information systems. The Panel urges the University to ensure that academic staff members are appropriately qualified for the programmes they teach and considers this as a serious breach of quality that must be addressed immediately. Failure to do so constitutes a major academic and reputational risk to the institution.

***Recommendation - 24***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain ensure that academic staff members are appropriately qualified for the programmes they teach.*

The Panel was encouraged to hear of the openness of members of academic staff to questions posed by students and of their willingness to promote discussion in their classes, apart from the use of problem-based learning in the medical curriculum. However, the Panel



found no evidence of the rigorous consideration of the way *teaching approaches* can be varied and used to support students as they strive to attain specific learning outcomes. The Panel's concerns regarding laboratory and library resources are expressed in Section 9 in this Report. These concerns clearly negatively impact on the possibility of a variety of teaching methods and approaches being used at AMAIUB even if the introduction of a variety of teaching approaches were to be considered.

With regard to the development of new programmes, the University's *Operations Manual* details the processes and procedures involved in their development. The *Operations Manual* directs readers to the *AMA Procedure Manual*. Following a request for the *Procedure Manual*, the Panel was directed to the *Administrative Handbook* and the *Faculty Handbook*. Neither of these texts provides details of the processes and procedures used by AMA to develop new programmes. The SER does, however, go on to note that '*for new programmes, there is a pool of experts who prepare the curriculum which involves stakeholders such as students and industry practitioners. The drafted curriculum is then reviewed by the Dean of the College concerned and the Deputy Director for Academics, particularly on content and compliance with existing guidelines and/or policies. Final review is done by the Vice President for Academics before a copy of the curriculum is forwarded to the President/Chairman for approval*'.

In the absence of any documentation or other evidence detailing that these processes are followed when new programmes are developed and approved, the Panel can only accept the version of programme approval processes detailed in the SER and affirmed by staff members in interviews. The Panel could, however, find little evidence of stakeholder consultation in other areas of quality related activity and would have welcomed evidence of wider consultation in programme development processes. In addition, the Panel was concerned that staffing considerations, including the availability of qualified and experienced staff, are not mentioned as forming part of the considerations in the introduction of new programmes, particularly given concerns regarding staff teaching outside their areas of expertise (as already discussed in this section of the Report). Also not mentioned as part of programme approval processes are considerations regarding resources. In short, the Panel was concerned about the poor understanding of what constitutes programme approval processes at AMAIUB.

#### ***Recommendation - 25***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement rigorous procedures for programme development which are formalized in a policy and that arrangements are made to document these processes when they occur.*

AMAIUB recently conducted a review of all its existing programmes in order to bring them into compliance with the regulation requiring all three year bachelor programmes to consist of 180 rather than 120 credits. Documentation related to this review provided to the Panel suggests that the review processes fell far short of international standards. Although

external experts do appear to have been members of the curriculum review teams, the Panel could find no evidence of the involvement of other stakeholders, such as alumni or employers, in the review processes. In addition, students' perspectives on the curriculum do not appear to have been included and reports of the Review Committees do not indicate any consideration of other indicators of quality, such as student tracking data, or of curriculum elements such as pedagogical approach, learning materials and other forms of support made available to students. In short, then, the evidence suggests that reviews are focused on an extremely narrow view of curriculum focusing on the content of courses and their sequencing.

In interviews with the Panel, staff members confirmed that curriculum reviews take place at College level at the end of each academic year. These annual reviews appear to involve members of the College convening as a committee to discuss curriculum matters and do not appear to incorporate the systematic and principled collection and consideration of evidence. The Panel was informed that no other processes for more comprehensive in-depth reviews (which would take place at longer time intervals of, perhaps, five years) exist.

Given that AMAIUB is a technologically focused university which aims to produce high quality graduates for industry and other professional areas in fast developing fields, the Panel was concerned to hear during interviews with external stakeholders' reports of gaps between the curriculum at AMAIUB and current practice outside the University. These reports affirm the need for formal curriculum reviews, which take into account the experiences and perspectives of external stakeholders. Without such processes, the AMAIUB curricula run the risk of becoming 'stale' and of failing to contribute to the production of graduates who can work at the cutting edge of their chosen fields.

#### ***Recommendation - 26***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement formal policies and procedures for rigorous and regular curriculum review.*

The review process initiated to allow AMAIUB to comply with the regulation that bachelors' programmes in Bahrain should consist of 180 credits rather than the 120 credits associated with such programmes in the AMAES has already been noted in this section of the Report. The need to incorporate 60 additional credits in degree curricula was addressed by inserting a number of additional courses. The way additional learning was incorporated into the programmes is of concern to the Panel. In the first place, the nature of some of the additional courses hardly befits higher education. Two 'Euthenics' courses (EUTHE1-A and EUTHE2-A) each carrying a single credit, deal with the policies and programmes of the University and with its disciplinary code. In order to complete the courses, students are required to study the *Student Handbook* (or the *Euthenics kit*, which is largely the same as the handbook). Regardless of attempts which may be made to use the courses as an attempt to instil values

in students (and thus to treat the content with which they deal from a 'philosophical' position), it is hard to see how courses of this nature could be considered worthy of bearing credit in an institution of higher education. In interviews with a range of academics, the Panel learned that credit had been allocated to the Euthenics courses because, if this had not been done, students would not have attended the course. Internationally, credits are awarded to indicate *learning* and not attendance. The practice of awarding credit to force attendance is unacceptable. The Panel was also disappointed that AMAIUB had not considered the fact that students' reluctance to attend the courses could be an indicator of the perceived lack of quality and relevance of the courses themselves.

Secondly, in the review process, little consideration appears to have been given to determining the needs of students as additional courses were inserted into the programmes. For example, in the Bachelor of Science, Business Informatics (BSBI) programme, a three credit course on Speech and Oral Communication (DBI305) has been inserted in the third trimester of the first year. The Panel could find no evidence, however, of any formal assessment of students' speech and oral communication for the purposes of the review to see whether or not such a course was really necessary or whether, for example, a course in Speech and Oral Communication was more of an imperative than a course in Written Communication.

The issue of curriculum coherence arises in relation to the addition of courses such as Arabic Studies (ARABC01-A), History of Bahrain (HIST01), and World History (HIST02) in several AMAIUB programmes. While the Panel is aware of the requirement for courses such as these to be included in curricula in AMAIUB and is also aware of trends towards including what might be termed '*liberal arts*' courses in many specialized curricula at universities across the world, the insertion of such courses needs to be achieved within the context of wider considerations regarding the nature of the graduates these universities hope to produce. The addition of these '*liberal arts*' courses is usually associated with a revision of purpose statements at programme level, with the re-development of exit level learning outcomes or competencies and even with the re-development of the mission and vision statement of the institution. This does not appear to have been the case at AMAIUB with the result that the Panel concludes that the additional courses have been inserted as a matter of expediency in order to comply with regulatory requirements.

#### ***Recommendation - 27***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain review all curricula for coherence in the light of insertion of additional courses and their contribution to the programme outcomes.*

AMAIUB elicits students' perceptions of lecturers on a regular basis as part of its performance appraisal system. The Panel was pleased to hear that students' perceptions are

triangulated with perceptions of peers in order to contribute to the validity of any judgments made regarding staff members' performance, especially given the nature of the short-term contracts on which academic staff members are employed.

Although AMAIUB claims to conduct surveys of student satisfaction on programmes and courses, the Panel could find no evidence of this. The University cites a research study on Students' Satisfaction on the performance of AMAIUB faculty members, SY 2008-2009 in relation to the QAAET guideline asking for surveys of student satisfaction at programme and course level. This piece of research is focused on *teachers*, however, and not on programmes or courses. Surveys focusing on programmes or courses would look much wider than the individual teacher and would incorporate curriculum design (including assessment and feedback on assessment) and resources. The lack of student satisfaction surveys at programme and course level is arguably indicative of an understanding of the teaching and learning endeavour as encompassing only the act of teaching. This is a very narrow understanding of teaching and learning in higher education in contemporary terms. In the context of the institution-wide student satisfaction survey, which was conducted the Panel is also concerned with the quality of the research. Only 25 respondents were included in the survey and the research report contains no adequate explication of the constructs being tested in the survey and of the way these constructs constitute good teaching. A rigorous student satisfaction survey would require a larger sample and more conceptual clarity regarding what was being tested.

#### ***Recommendation - 28***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement rigorous and well theorized and conceptualized procedures for monitoring on a regular basis the satisfaction of students with its programmes and courses.*

In interviews with students, the Panel heard frustration voiced regarding AMAIUB's response to issues they had raised. Since AMAIUB evaluates only its teachers and not its programmes and courses, there is effectively no means for students to provide feedback at this level other than through their representatives or by making individual complaints. The lack of response by the University to issues that are raised is a matter of as much concern as is the lack of procedures to elicit feedback at this level. The issue of communication between the University and its students has been raised elsewhere in this Report.

The Panel was pleased to note that AMAIUB has conducted one tracer survey of its graduates, which included investigation of the extent to which they had succeeded in finding employment since this is an important indicator of the efficacy of its programmes and of the quality of the graduates it produces. AMAIUB is encouraged to develop a means

whereby tracer studies are conducted on a regular basis so that these can feed into programme reviews.

## 7. Student Support

The Panel found that student support services including student guidance and advising, and procedures for dealing with students with low academic performance, are established at AMAIUB. The Panel was informed during interviews with staff that the Academic Counsellor Programme has been implemented whereby all staff members have a consultation period of 6 hours per week to support students academically. This includes an English language support course and a Special Mathematics Remedial Programme for under-prepared students. The Panel read in the SER and heard in interviews with staff of the use of data to track student progress and that students whose progress was less than satisfactory were issued with warnings and eventually excluded from the University. The Panel was pleased to learn from academics that students who are potentially '*at risk in terms of their academic performance*' are identified and that steps are taken to provide additional support to these students before any warnings were issued. The Panel found the willingness of members of the academic staff to work with students identified as '*at risk*' in work schedules, which are already onerous, to be noteworthy, especially given the context of punitive action identified as appropriate in the SER. However, there is no critical analysis of the results of implementing such procedures, e.g. the percentage of students under academic probation, based on cohort analysis and their changes over years. Such an analysis would provide an indication of quality at programme and course level. Although the institution stated in the SER that support for at-risk students is available, this appears largely to be limited to the support provided by members of the academic staff in consultation hours. The Panel could not find sufficient evidence that the institution provides structured resources to identify and assist students at risk of failure. In addition, the Panel is concerned that the Student Guidance Office does not have a dedicated full-time Head.

### ***Recommendation - 29***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain follow a more holistic approach to student academic support, which includes qualified counsellors and dedicated resources to the academic support functions at the institution.*

While there is a Student Council, this is primarily a group which organises social and charitable events. The Panel noted during interviews with members of the Student Council that there is no allocated budget to support its activities. This compromises the student learning experience as non-curricular campus activities can be an important opportunity for student development and so contribute to the quality of the student learning experience. The

Panel encourages AMAIUB to consider allocating a budget to the Student Council so that it can provide a range of activities for students.

***Recommendation - 30***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain allocate a budget to support the activities of the Student Council.*

The institution has identified the special needs of students with disabilities and provides support for such students, although not all special needs are catered for. The Panel noted that a University Clinic and a full-time Campus Nurse have been established at AMAIUB. The Panel is concerned that no dedicated budget is allocated annually to the Student Affairs Department in order to ensure a quality student support service to students.

## **8. Human Resources**

The University states very clearly that it has sufficient human resources with regard to both teaching and non-teaching staff to fulfil its Mission. The faculty in general have appropriate qualifications; however, the University is seeking to increase the proportion of faculty members who hold PhDs and has been successful in this area. It is clear to the Panel that virtually all appointees did have substantial and relevant teaching experience before joining the University although questions have been raised earlier in this report regarding the extent to which this experience means that academic staff members are up-to-date with the latest developments in curriculum design and approaches to teaching.

However and as already noted earlier in this Report, the Panel was concerned to be told by students that faculty were often required to teach in areas outside their areas of expertise and indeed expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation. While the students who met with the Panel reported positively on many faculty members, they did say that some were difficult to understand. Another area of complaint was the rapid turnover of faculty; other students said that in one term one course had four different teachers. A number of other concerns were raised relating to a minority of faculty members. These related to such issues as failure to supply students with copies of the syllabus, poor teaching notes and the absence of text books and the use of out-of-date text books. Students also complained that teachers on occasion recommended text books that were not available in the University.

One of the more stringent conditions of employment is the requirement that staff should, by using a machine that reads fingerprints, prove times of arrival and departure from the building. At present there is only one such machine which means that at certain times of the day there are long queues of staff waiting to use the machine. This results in a significant waste of staff time but it also contributes to the lack of respect that some students accord to

the teaching staff. This requirement for academic staff to clock in and out is goes against international good practice in universities. Such institutions are traditionally seen as a community of scholars and as such the relationships, even in this day of managerialism, are generally collegial and respectful. The Panel urges the University to discontinue this practice.

***Recommendation - 31***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain discontinue the practice of academic staff clocking in and out.*

In respect of academic staff, the teaching load policy is 21 hours per week, in addition to six hours office or counselling hours, which is extremely high by international standards. In respect of non-teaching staff many departments are, again in relation to international standards, very poorly staffed, for example the Head of Library Services has only two staff members, who are both working students, while there are only two members of the Information Technology (IT) department. In addition, the problems of the teaching overload are compounded by the fact that many of the teaching staff carry responsibilities, which in many other universities would be discharged by senior members of the administrative staff.

The consequences of such a heavy teaching load not only negatively impact on the quality of teaching and the amount of time that faculty can devote to the needs of individual students but also severely restricts the time available for faculty members to devote to research and scholarship. Those members of the faculty who chair committees or are involved in management activities are particularly adversely affected because it does not appear that sufficient relief from teaching duties is given for such activities. The Panel encourages the institution to review and monitor current staff loads with due consideration being given to adjusting time allocation in the three core functions of teaching, research and community service.

***Recommendation - 32***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain review its current academic staff workload practices and introduce a carefully monitored workload policy that gives due consideration to time allocations for the three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.*

The University does not have a promotional structure; thus there is a basic salary which is supplemented in respect of the faculty member's qualifications, length of service and other responsibilities. The Panel was informed during interviews with staff that the basic salary has not been increased for at least four years. Another extremely unusual feature is that all staff, both teaching and non-teaching staff, are appointed on one year contracts and the vast majority of staff are foreign nationals, in most cases from one nationality. In general, it

appears that the University maintains comprehensive staff records including their CVs, evidence of qualifications and records of teaching loads. It also has policies on maximum class sizes and grievances.

All applicants for teaching positions, including those associated with AMA institutions in the Philippines, apply through the internet. In line with the University's procedures the Director of Human Resources prepares the shortlist and it is only at a later stage that members of the academic staff are involved, a process which the University might wish to reconsider. There appears to be a rigorous procedure for interviewing staff, which includes a demonstration teaching session.

The University has a system for reviewing the performance of teaching and non-teaching staff. For example, teaching staff are reviewed at the end of each trimester. The absence of a promotion structure means that staff members are not provided with a positive incentive to improve their performance. Rather the incentive is a negative one – the fear that the faculty members' contracts will not be renewed. The Panel is of the view that having all the academic staff of the institution on an annual renewable contract constitutes a major academic and quality risk to the sustainability of the core functions of the institution. This might also hinder academic freedom and any long-term research commitments of an individual faculty member. The Panel urges the University to lengthen the contracts of academic staff to ensure sustainability and viability of the institution. Failure to do so constitutes a major threat to any expansion plans the institution may have.

***Recommendation - 33***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement a systematic performance management and promotion programme for all staff.*

***Recommendation - 34***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain review its policy of appointing staff on one year contracts.*

According to the SER and also to statements made in interviews, staff development at AMAIUB is the province of the Human Resources Department. The Panel heard repeatedly in different interviews with staff how staff development needs are identified and communicated to the Department so that training activities can be planned and implemented. The fact that AMAIUB had not developed curriculum documentation incorporating properly formulated learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria in advance of an important process such as the Institutional Review suggests an overall lack of awareness of the need for training in this area and, concomitantly, an indication of the limitations of the system the University uses for identifying training needs. Given that training is the province of the Human Resources Department, the Panel is gravely concerned that a group of human resource practitioners are expected to provide the



level of training which, in other institutions, is usually offered by academics who are highly trained and qualified in the field of higher education. The Panel suggests that the institution give serious consideration to the professional development needs of academic staff.

The University organizes five or six staff development workshops for faculty per year, although the Panel was not given information about the level of participation in these events. The University has an apparently generous policy in supporting faculty to engage in international staff development activities but the Panel was disappointed to note that in 2008/09 only four faculty members took advantage of the *Faculty Development Programme Overseas*. The University might wish to consider how to encourage more faculty members to participate in these programmes or otherwise engage in other forms of staff development related to both learning and teaching and research. No specific provision is made for the development of part-time staff members who if they wish to participate in staff development activities, have to do so in their own time without remuneration.

While the Panel met a good number of teaching staff who had been at the University for some time, typically three or four years, it seems very unlikely given the teaching staff and the nature of their contracts, that the University will be able to create a core community of scholars who, through continuing involvement, will help it grow and mature as an established institution. The net income figures disclosed in the audited financial statements for the last four years indicate that there is sufficient financial flexibility to achieve the above.

Full-time faculty members are not permitted to engage in consultancy or undertake other part-time work. While from the point of view of ensuring staff commitment to the University, it does have a disadvantage in the case of some disciplines that staff do not keep in touch with external developments in their professions; a problem that is reinforced by the absence of a Programme Advisory Group or similar committees.

The shortage of non-teaching staff impacts on a number of areas – the effect on the library is discussed later in this report - while it is probably also the cause of a number of other complaints which were forcefully expressed by students including the point that very often telephone calls made by students to obtain help or information are not answered and that students are not informed of changes in regulations or of upcoming deadlines. Students also pointed to the difficulties consequent on there being only one student advisor.

While the Panel did not see any data relating to the rate of turnover of non-teaching staff it did note that a number of staff holding important positions in the University whom it met had only been in post for only a number of months.

### ***Recommendation - 35***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement a strategic human resources plan for the recruitment and retention of high quality staff and that includes a professional development plan.*

## **9. Infrastructure, Physical and Other Resources**

The Panel undertook a tour of the campus facilities at AMAIUB. The Panel noted and heard during interviews with staff that there is a shortage of teaching rooms – a problem which it is understood will be dealt with in the next development stage. The Panel also noted the lack of visual aids in a number of rooms (an issue that was also raised by a number of students) but it is understood that steps are in hand to rectify this problem. The Panel encourages the institution to do so as soon as possible.

In relation to the next building development, the Panel suggests that the institution might like to consider that rather than building rooms all of the same size, thought be given to the design so that it offers more flexibility in terms of the size of rooms. This would enable the provision of larger lectures as well as small group teaching, which would enhance the quality of the learning environment. This is an issue which needs to be discussed in the revision of the Teaching and Learning Plan recommended earlier in this Report.

Another significant issue is the lack of any space, other than the entrance hall, for the students to congregate and socialize. This point was made by a number of students and staff to whom the Panel spoke, including those who attended the open sessions. It is important that the University seeks to overcome this short-coming in particular to encourage the growth of extra-curricular activities on the campus.

### ***Recommendation - 36***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain find ways of making space available to students that can be used for social and recreational purposes in order to provide a quality learning environment for its students.*

The Panel observed that the rooms used by faculty are extremely crowded and members of staff are afforded very little personal space and are not provided with computers. Staff members also have to conduct their office hours in a communal room allocated to each faculty. This adversely affects the quality of the interaction between staff and students. In addition, the Panel heard during interviews with students of the lack of facilities available on campus on Saturdays – a day on which many students attend classes.

### ***Recommendation - 37***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain ensure (i) academic staff members have appropriate working space and computers and other equipment needed to provide a quality learning experience for students; (ii) staff and students have the space for private interaction and (iii) that the facilities available to students on Saturdays are comparable with those available for the other days of the week.*

In terms of student and staff safety, the Panel observed that there are safety notices in the laboratories but they are often placed in parts of the room where they can be easily missed. In no rooms are there fire notices of the conventional type giving details such as assembly points in the case of fire; instead the rooms simply have maps of the building pinned to the notice boards.

### ***Recommendation - 38***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain review its policy with regard to safety notices in laboratories and similar facilities and its general policy regarding safety.*

The Panel observed that the building is accessible to students with disabilities, including those who rely on wheelchairs. However, the Panel learned in interviews with staff that there are no effective policies or procedures in place to assist the learning of students with, for example, visual or hearing impairments. The Panel encourages the institution to develop and implement a suite of policies and procedures to ensure that students with special needs are adequately supported.

### ***Recommendation - 39***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement a suite of policies and procedures to ensure that students with special needs are adequately supported.*

The Panel conducted a tour of the library. One of the more serious issues that the Panel identified in relation to infrastructure and learning support is the library about which a very high proportion of students with whom the Panel spoke complained. There are a good number of grounds for complaint of which the most significant is the poor attitudes of some of the library staff to students; the bureaucratic style of operation; and the opening hours especially during examination periods. Concern was also expressed that the library was closed on Saturdays despite the large number of students who attend the campus on that day. Students also complained about the size of the holdings and the age of the books in a number of, but not in all, areas. This is in sharp contrast to the largely positive conclusions of a report on the students' views on library provision included in *Results of Surveys on Student Satisfaction SY 08-09*. It should be noted that although the library survey is included in that

folder it is, unlike the other two surveys in that folder, not dated and so it might have been undertaken some time ago as the findings of the survey and the discussions with students are contradictory.

While the University claims that it is constantly conducting benchmarking exercises the Panel did not see any reports on such activities. Neither did any of the results of the student surveys that were made available to the Panel deal adequately with the library. The Panel noted that AMAIUB has not yet developed formal mechanisms for assessing user satisfaction. Finally, the Panel concludes that the Library is under-resourced and its collections are small and very old and thereby insufficient to provide an adequate quality learning support for students.

***Recommendation - 40***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain improve its resources; including the library resources, services and opening hours to provide a supportive learning environment.*

The management of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is supervised by the IT and Data Centre Officer. The Panel was surprised to observe that computer screens indicated that the software in use is not authorized. In subsequent discussions it emerged that the University's software licenses had expired but had not yet been renewed since the University was considering a proposal to upgrade its software. The Panel urges the institution to rectify this situation immediately in order for it to be operating in good standing within a legal framework.

***Recommendation - 41***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain ensure as a matter of urgency that it is in possession of the necessary software licenses.*

The Panel was concerned to note from discussions with staff that back-up data is not only stored in the same area as the system servers but in the same room. Although regular back-up procedures are in place and the systems incorporate a measure of redundancy that provides some protection, the Panel was unable to establish that AMAIUB has an ICT disaster management and recovery plan. This constitutes a serious risk for the institution. As a matter of urgency AMAIUB needs to develop and implement an ICT disaster plan which includes the storage of back-up data in a separate location, preferably off-campus in order to ensure business continuity.

***Recommendation - 42***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop and implement an ICT disaster plan that includes the storage of back-up in a separate location.*

## **10. Research**

AMAIUB has a Research Development Manual-2008 which serves as a guide for the planning, approval, implementation, funding, and monitoring of research projects. AMAIUB has also developed a Research Agenda-2008, which includes a comprehensive list of potential research areas for almost all of its academic departments. This agenda is unrealistic, considering the various constraints facing research activities as discussed later in this section. Almost all suggested research projects are planned to start in 2009/2010. There is no evidence that the development of this ambitious Research Agenda has involved the academic departments, or that it has resulted from interaction with local industries, although it is claimed that the Research Agenda was developed in line with the Vision of 2030 of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

***Recommendation - 43***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain review its Research Agenda, involving relevant stakeholders, to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of the local community and its faculty, and that the Agenda is realistically implementable in the light of the affordable human, physical and fiscal resources.*

The research management plan does not have KPIs and target levels. There are no quantitative target levels or benchmarks to monitor progress in research output across the institution. The annual plans lack consistency in various areas, particularly in research output, and research funding. For example, to say that in year 2011/ 2012 AMAIUB will continue to increase its budget on research provides a misleading impression that research funding was planned for in the previous years, which is not the case. The Panel suggests that the institution revise its research management plan and ensure that annual plans are aligned with it.

The Research & Development Office responsible for the management of research activities maintains records on research proposals submitted by the AMAIUB faculty. It seems however, that research conducted so far, is limited to 'Institutional Research' and student research. It appears that what is meant by research and scholarly activities is not fully understood by many members of AMAIUB community, including some members of the

Research & Development Unit. The Panel encourages the institution to ensure that all academic staff members have a shared understanding of the research ambitions of AMAIUB.

***Recommendation - 44***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain (i) revise its research management plan and ensure that annual plans are in alignment; (ii) ensure that there is a shared understanding across the institution of the research plan.*

The AMAIUB Research & Development Manual includes policies for ethical and safe conduct of research, as well as a policy on intellectual property, along with various forms for submission, review, and monitoring progress of research projects. The University's policy on individual research grants provides insufficient and rather negligible financial support per project. In its SER, AMAIUB stated that it allocated 3% of the institution's budget for research undertaking. The Panel reviewed the audited budget and found that this does not support such a claim. Furthermore, the stated percentage does not match the research agenda developed by AMAIUB.

The SER refers to leave for academic staff to conduct research; however the supporting document indicated that this was limited to five faculty members who travelled to the Philippines for oral defence of their thesis. While the Panel appreciates this support for staff members, this does not constitute support for the research agenda of an institution of higher learning.

***Recommendation - 45***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain review its current policy on funding of individual research projects so that appropriately adequate funding is available to support research and scholarly activities.*

With regard to postgraduate education, AMAIUB has developed policies and procedures on the supervision of theses, and for the monitoring of student research projects. It lacks, however, a policy on minimum resources for student research projects apart from assigning supervisors. AMAIUB has not reflected on the effectiveness of the existing policies and procedures of its research activities and whether there is effective and sufficient library and IT support for postgraduate studies. The Panel suggests that the institution consider doing so.

In conclusion, the development and implementation of an effective research programme requires: a clear research plan with priorities identified in collaboration with the community and its major industries; faculty or researchers who can afford adequate time for research; research facilities and equipment; adequate library and information resources; adequate

financial resources committed to the research plan; and policies and procedures for management of research activities. Based on the SER, the supporting documents, and other information gathered during the on-site visit, AMAIUB has weaknesses in most of these essential elements. The current excessively high teaching load coupled with administrative functions constitutes major constraints for faculty to be engaged in active research. The severe shortage in library resources and the lack of any research laboratory equipment and facilities for medical and engineering fields constitute a major barrier for implementing research activities. Finally, but most importantly, appropriate levels of funding for research need to be made available for the ambitious proposed research agenda to be realized.

***Recommendation - 46***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain evaluate the effectiveness of the present policies and procedures of its research activities and enhance the support the University provides to its postgraduate students in order to assure the quality of the programme outcomes in term of research training, adequate supervision, and access to journals, other materials and research laboratories.*

## **11. Community Engagement**

AMAIUB does not have a framework or any documentation in place to address the core function of community engagement. The Panel noted that there have been some *ad hoc* community events, such as exhibitions and sport activities. However, the Panel did not find through discussions with academic staff an understanding of community engagement. There is, then, a need to develop an institutional understanding of community engagement and clarity on the extent to which AMAIUB wants to focus on this aspect of its work. In particular, AMAIUB will need to consider the curriculum and research implications of its community engagement approaches so that there is an integration of these three core functions.

The Panel encourages the University to recognize that community engagement is the third core function of a higher education institution. AMAIUB needs to develop this function by developing a plan through which the institution: (i) conceptualizes its own understanding of community engagement; (ii) integrates its identified activities into the other core functions; (iii) ensures that there is allocation of appropriate resources, and (iv) develops and implements quality assurance mechanisms for community engagement.

***Recommendation - 47***

*HERU recommends that AMA International University-Bahrain develop a conceptual framework, coordinating structures, policies and resource allocation for community*

*engagement and integrate its community engagement activities into the curriculum and research as appropriate.*

## **12. Conclusion**

AMAIUB has been operating in Bahrain for eight years yet it still has not managed to develop for itself an institutional identity that is appropriate for its local context and which is aligned to that of its parent institution. As a consequence its Mission is that of the parent university and is not relevant in terms of the breadth and levels of AMAIUB's programme offerings, academic as well as physical infrastructure. These issues need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

AMAIUB needs to put the academic enterprise at the forefront of its planning and financial decisions and not that of it as a business endeavour. Furthermore, the institution's governance and management structures, as well as not meeting internationally recognised standards of good corporate or university governance, operate haphazardly; all of which have a negative impact on the quality of the academic activities and in particular teaching and learning at the institution.

In addition, AMAIUB faces a number of other serious challenges these include: (i) the excessively high teaching load coupled with the high administrative load on faculty who are involved in many committees or other administrative positions; (ii) the poor contractual conditions of faculty particularly the length of contract period and the low salary scale; (iii) the inadequate and inappropriate faculty office space, which does not permit effective faculty office hours and proper academic advising; (iv) the inadequate and in many cases outdated library collections; (v) the inadequate laboratory facilities and equipment, particularly for engineering and medical programmes; (vi) the limited faculty professional development activities; (vii) the almost complete absence of research or scholarly activities.

All of these have had a deleterious effect on the quality of teaching and learning at the institution. AMAIUB has to take serious and urgent steps to address all of the existing shortcomings in order to make a start in becoming an institution providing quality higher education and before any further expansion takes place.