



هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب
Education & Training Quality Authority
Kingdom of Bahrain - مملكة البحرين

Directorate of Higher Education Reviews

Programme Review Report

**Ahlia University
College of Business and Finance
Master's Degree in Business Administration
Kingdom of Bahrain**

Site Visit Date: 21-24 November 2021

HA046-C3-R046

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Acronyms

ACID	Ahlia Centre for Information and Documentation
ADREG	Admission and Registration Information System
AQAC	Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee
AU	Ahlia University
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
CAQA	Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CILO	Course Intended Learning Outcome
CME	Centre for Measurement and Evaluation
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
HEC	Higher Education Council
HR	Human Resource
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ILO	Intended Learning Outcome
IT	Information Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
MIS	Management Information System
NQF	National Qualification Framework
OP	Operational Plan
PILO	Programme Intended Learning Outcome
SER	Self-evaluation Report
TLAC	Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee

I. Introduction

In keeping with its mandate, the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), through the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR), carries out two types of reviews that are complementary. These are: Institutional Reviews, where the whole institution is assessed; and the Academic Programme Reviews (APRs), where the quality of teaching, learning and academic standards are assessed in academic programmes within various colleges according to specific standards and indicators as reflected in its Framework.

Following the revision of the APR Framework at the end of Cycle 1 in accordance with the BQA procedure, the revised APR Framework (Cycle 2) was endorsed as per the Council of Ministers' Resolution No.17 of 2019. Thereof, in the academic year (2019-2020), the DHR commenced its second cycle of programme reviews.

The Cycle 2 APR Review Framework is based on four main Standards and 21 Indicators, which forms the basis of the APR Reports of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The **four** standards that are used to determine whether or not a programme meets international standards are as follows:

Standard 1: The Learning Programme

Standard 2: Efficiency of the Programme

Standard 3: Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

Standard 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

The Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as 'the Panel') decides whether each indicator, within a standard, is 'addressed', 'partially addressed' or 'not addressed'. From these judgments on the indicators, the Panel additionally determines whether each of the four standards is 'Satisfied' or 'Not Satisfied', thus leading to the Programme's overall judgment, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Criteria for Judgements

Criteria	Judgement
All four Standards are satisfied	Confidence
Two or three Standards are satisfied, including Standard 1	Limited Confidence
One or no Standard is satisfied	No Confidence
All cases where Standard 1 is not satisfied	

The APR Review Report begins with providing the profile of the Programme under review, followed by a brief outline of the judgment received for each indicator, standard, and the overall judgement.

The main section of the report is an analysis of the status of the programme, at the time of its actual review, in relation to the review standards, indicators and their underlying expectations.

The report ends with a Conclusion and a list of Appreciations and Recommendations.

II. The Programme's Profile

Institution Name*	Ahlia University
College/ Department*	College of Business and Finance
Programme/ Qualification Title*	Master's Degree in Business Administration
Qualification Approval Number	Cabinet Decision No. (1626-03) of 2001
NQF Level	9
Validity Period on NQF	5 years from Validation Date
Number of Units*	8 courses + a dissertation
NQF Credit	144
Programme Aims*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To equip students with opportunity to develop analytical skills and technical expertise in business administration management in real-world setting. 2. To provide students with competence in applying a range of tools, skills, approaches techniques of relevance to a wide variety of operational setting. 3. To develop student's leadership potential through a variety of soft skills such as effective communication, teamwork, global and sustainable thinking as well as change management. 4. To provide students with opportunity to develop lifelong learning skills, autonomy and professional leadership, including research and sensitivity to ethical issues and social responsibility to contribute to businesses and society at large. 5. To develop student's management acumen and foster a genuinely entrepreneurial approach to management.
Programme Intended Learning Outcomes*	<p>A. Knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>A1. Concepts and Theories: Demonstrate critical knowledge and understanding of concepts and specialist theories related to functional areas of business such as management, marketing, finance, accounting, economics and management information systems and display a detailed and integrative view of various management functions in a business organization.</p>

	<p>A2. Contemporary Trends, problems and Research: Demonstrate an extensive detailed knowledge and awareness of major current business issues and latest trends and research findings in the field, including identification of best practices and utilization of specialized research methods and techniques.</p> <p>A3. Professional Responsibility: Demonstrate extensive detailed knowledge and understanding of the professional and legal responsibilities related to day-to-day vocational practices and operations of a specialist in a given business field in various industries.</p> <p>B. Subject-Specific Skills</p> <p>B1. Problem Solving Use professional and specialized range of quantitative and qualitative methods and tools to analyze and solve functional-area-business problem situations.</p> <p>B2. Modeling and Design Apply a range of standard and specialized research models and methods (e.g. sensitivity analysis, simulation) to capture real-world complexities in business.</p> <p>B3. Application of Methods and Tool Use a range of specialized software to analyze quantitative problems in business to probe into a business problem using specialized methods/ techniques and interpret the obtained results</p> <p>C. Critical-Thinking Skills</p> <p>C1. Analytic skills: Critically analyze and evaluate extended knowledge and data related to real-world business cases and prioritize problems in order to identify possible solutions and make decisions in different business situation.</p> <p>C2. Synthetic Skills: Utilize data and information from a variety of sources (e.g. critical analysis) to conceptualize, define and formulate new business strategies and solutions to deal with complex business situations.</p> <p>C3. Creative Skills: Demonstrate creativity and originality both in the application of knowledge and in the development of solution to complex business problems and issues.</p> <p>D. General and Transferable Skills (other skills relevant to employability and personal development)</p>
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	<p>D1. Communication Skills: Communicate effectively at professional level complex ideas and information in the functional areas of business to well-informed audiences and specialists using oral and written formats.</p> <p>D2. Teamwork and Leadership: Operate at professional level effectively as a team member or leader in order to complete project according to deadlines.</p> <p>D3. Organizational and Developmental skills: Operate at a professional level in variable and complex business contexts and employ reflective practice skills for self-development as part of a wider program for continuing professional development.</p> <p>D4. Ethics and Social Responsibility: Demonstrate ability to respond to ethical challenges and conduct business transactions according to ethical and social norms.</p>
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* Mandatory fields

III. Judgment Summary

The Programme's Judgment: Confidence

Standard/ Indicator	Title	Judgement
Standard 1	The Learning Programme	Satisfied
Indicator 1.1	The Academic Planning Framework	Addressed
Indicator 1.2	Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes	Addressed
Indicator 1.3	The Curriculum Content	Partially Addressed
Indicator 1.4	Teaching and Learning	Addressed
Indicator 1.5	Assessment Arrangements	Addressed
Standard 2	Efficiency of the Programme	Satisfied
Indicator 2.1	Admitted Students	Addressed
Indicator 2.2	Academic Staff	Addressed
Indicator 2.3	Physical and Material Resources	Addressed
Indicator 2.4	Management Information Systems	Addressed
Indicator 2.5	Student Support	Addressed
Standard 3	Academic Standards of Students and Graduates	Satisfied
Indicator 3.1	Efficiency of the Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.2	Academic Integrity	Addressed
Indicator 3.3	Internal and External Moderation of Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.4	Work-based Learning	Not Applicable

Indicator 3.5	Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component	Addressed
Indicator 3.6	Achievements of the Graduates	Addressed
Standard 4	Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance	Satisfied
Indicator 4.1	Quality Assurance Management	Addressed
Indicator 4.2	Programme Management and Leadership	Addressed
Indicator 4.3	Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme	Addressed
Indicator 4.4	Benchmarking and Surveys	Addressed
Indicator 4.5	Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs	Addressed

IV. Standards and Indicators

Standard 1

The Learning Programme

The programme demonstrates fitness for purpose in terms of mission, relevance, curriculum, pedagogy, intended learning outcomes and assessment.

Indicator 1.1: The Academic Planning Framework

There is a clear academic planning framework for the programme, reflected in clear aims which relate to the mission and strategic goals of the institution and the college.

Judgment: Addressed

- As explained in interviews, the Self-evaluation Report (SER) and supporting documentation, the University Vision and Mission statements direct the formulation of a University-wide five-year strategic plan, which is translated into annual operational plans. Within this University-wide framework, a College Vision and Mission and Goals have been developed. A Teaching and Learning Excellence Plan sets Key Performance Indicators, Measures and Annual Targets, some of which are relevant to the College of Business and Finance. The University Operational Plan (OP) identifies specific projects, activities and tasks for the year that are aimed at attaining annual targets, and this incorporates the College's OP as well, including MBA specific actions. College Council minutes provide evidence of reviewing and approving operational plans. The MBA programme has been designed to be aligned with the plans of Ahlia University (AU) and the College of Business and Finance, as reflected in the MBA Programme Specification and AU Graduate Attributes.
- The Panel was informed that risk is managed at a university, college and programme level as clarified during interviews. Firstly, a university standing committee chaired by the Vice President for Administration and Finance oversees risk management at the university level. The Risk Committee convenes meetings, and a risk register is maintained. Secondly, the MBA committee responsible for the delivery of the MBA programme identifies and raises the risks with the College Council. The Panel notes that various decisions were taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic to enable online course delivery and assessment.

- The MBA has been evaluated twice as part of the BQA academic programme review cycle and was placed on the NQF on Level 9 in 2019. The aims of the MBA programme have been mapped against the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs).
- The programme title ‘Master’s Degree in Business Administration’ is concise and indicative of the qualification type and content. This is also reflected in the sample MBA Certificate and Transcript. The programme description and documentation can be accessed via the website.
- The five programme aims set out in the SER are clear and appropriate for an MBA degree. These aims have been revised as part of the BQA programme review process. Evidence is provided of changes that were made to the MBA programme, including revising the Research Course and introducing an Entrepreneurship and Family Business Management course. In addition, a College External Advisory Board has been constituted to assess the programme. This advisory board has been consulted and has met to confirm that programme changes have been made according to their recommendations.
- The five programme aims intend to develop various technical and soft skills, tools and techniques, leadership qualities, lifelong learning, and an entrepreneurial approach to business. These aims clearly overlap with the strategic intent of the University. Furthermore, one of the aims explicitly addresses research-related objectives appropriate for a research-oriented, post-graduate degree such as the MBA. The Panel appreciates the integrated planning framework that has been devised from a strategic level to a programme level.

Indicator 1.2: Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes

Graduate attributes are clearly stated in terms of intended learning outcomes for the programme and for each course and these are appropriate for the level of the degree and meet the NQF requirements.

Judgment: Addressed

- A list of 10 graduate attributes for AU graduates have been identified and each has been mapped against one or more of the MBA PILOs. From the documentation provided and in interviews, the Panel learned about a range of activities (e.g. guest speakers, company tours, MBA summer school of the University of Bradford) that are intended to develop these graduate attributes. From interviews and various documents, the Panel learned that lifelong learning as a graduate attribute was actively promoted through research activities such as conference attendance and joint research publications, with the intention of encouraging students to pursue doctoral studies.

- MBA PILOs are clearly set out in the Programme Specification and have been mapped against programme aims. An examination of a sample of course files indicates that Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs) are included in the course syllabi specification and are set out in a standard template. Moreover, CILOs have been mapped to the PILOs as shown in the curricular map. This mapping illustrates that the CILOs for the MBA programme, cover a range of areas of knowledge and understanding, subject-specific skills, critical thinking skills, and general and transferable skills. The Panel is satisfied that there are clear lines of mapping between CILOs, PILOs and graduate attributes.
- The PILOs set out in the Programme Specification are appropriately written. According to the SER, PILOs are mapped to NQF level 9. AU Assessment Manual V.5 makes explicit reference to the NQF and its requirements and provides guidelines to ensure that there is an appropriate ILO-Assessment linkage. According to the Assessment Manual, the Chairperson/ Programme Coordinator is tasked with completing a 'PILOs assessment matrix' based on all course assessment work and has to ensure that they meet a 60% mark-threshold. If not, after discussing the results, an improvement plan is developed by the Department. While no formal benchmarking exercise has been carried out, the provided evidence includes desktop research/analysis that had been conducted to compare the programme to others locally, regionally and internationally, as well as to that of professional bodies.
- In the second semester of the second year of the MBA programme, students undertake the MBA Dissertation (DMBA 499). In preparation for, and as a prerequisite for starting the Dissertation, students must have completed 21 course credits, including a Research Methodology course (MAGT 558). As a collective, these courses are aligned to the programme aim 'To provide students with opportunity to develop lifelong learning skills, autonomy and professional leadership, including research and sensitivity to ethical issues and social responsibility to contribute to businesses and society at large.'

Indicator 1.3: The Curriculum Content

The curriculum is organised to provide academic progression of learning complexity guided by the NQF levels and credits, and it illustrates a balance between knowledge and skills, as well as theory and practice, and meets the norms and standards of the particular academic discipline.

Judgment: *Partially Addressed*

- The 36 credits of the MBA programme are structured to be completed within four semesters, or two years. Academic progression is evident in the MBA study plan. Firstly, three prerequisite courses are specified, namely Financial Accounting (ACCT 510), Managerial Finance (FINC 510), and Business Statistics (STAT 510). Any student who does not have Business, Management or related undergraduate majors is required to first

complete these pre-MBA courses. Secondly, the Research Methodology course in the second semester of year one can only be undertaken if all 9 credits of the first semester have been successfully completed. Thirdly, the second semester of the second year is dedicated to the MBA dissertation, which by its nature is the most complex component of the programme. The credit load of 18 credits per year provides a suitable student workload.

- According to the SER, the MBA curriculum is closely aligned to that of Brunel University, UK, who validated the programme at its inception. According to the Benchmarking Report for the MBA programme a comparative benchmarking exercise took place, comparing the MBA programme to that of local, regional and international universities. The content of the report focused upon Admission requirements, as well as Programme Content and Structure, suggesting that the benchmarking was limited to a desktop survey exercise. A Programme Evaluation Report was also conducted of the MBA by an external programme evaluator.
- According to the SER the exercise of mapping PILOs and CILOs ensures that there is a fair distribution of the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) related theory versus practice, and knowledge versus skills. This is reflected in the MBA Programme Specification - Curriculum Skill map. Furthermore, the sample courses provided serve as examples of this. From the SER and interviews, the Panel learned that there is an internal verification process conducted every semester to verify the course syllabus specification.
- In terms of depth, the Strategic Management course (MAGT 561) is scheduled for the second semester of year one. This would suggest that it has been positioned as a foundational course. However, in interviews, the Panel learned that there were integrative elements included in the course, such as integrative case studies. Typically, Strategic Management is positioned as a capstone course in MBA programmes, so that it is dealt with in more depth, and serves to integrate insights from other courses and management functions. Human Resource Management (MAGT 560) and Operations & Quality Management (MAGT 551) are elective courses. Usually, these would be regarded as core courses for an MBA programme along with Finance and Marketing Management. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should restructure the curriculum by placing the Strategy Course (MAGT 561) as the second course offered in Semester 1 of the second year. The Panel further recommends that the College should include the Human Resources (MAGT 560) as a core course, not as an elective one. Given the current level of enrolment and the resulting small class sizes, to enhance the teaching and learning experience of students and optimise the use of resources, the Panel also suggests that the MBA team consider reducing the number of elective courses offered each year.
- Course files were provided for three of the courses. The dates of the textbooks ranged from 2013 to 2017. In some instances, additional readings were provided. While this material

was relevant, the most recent of these was dated 2016. In the Strategy course, students were required to source recent and relevant articles and bring them to class to discuss trends and issues. The Panel recommends that the College should ensure that textbooks and references for all MBA courses are reviewed and updated as and when required.

- According to the SER, the Research Methodology course (MAGT 558) requires students to conduct a Literature Review, which assists in drafting their initial dissertation proposal. Workshops were also arranged to support MBA students with their research. Over and above dealing with the research policies and procedures, topics included: use of the statistical analysis software such as EViews and SPSS, Research Ethics, Presentation Skills, Writing a Research Paper, Data Collection and Analysis. Furthermore, a set of Guidelines for Supervision of Master's Degree Dissertation is currently in its fifth version, with additional guidelines provided for the oral defence. These guidelines clearly set out how the research related outcomes will be achieved and measured.
- Students are expected to complete their dissertations within the Dissertation/supervision semester. They are required to meet at least twice a month with their supervisors until submission of the dissertation, and a record of the meeting is kept on ADREG. However, in interviews the Panel was informed that students would often meet more regularly with their supervisors than was required. The Guidelines for the Supervision of Master's Degree Dissertations sets out the procedures and rules for the registration, supervision, and examination of the Dissertation, including an oral defence. Timelines are also provided for various research related activities. The appendices provide guidelines on the content and presentation of the Dissertation, as well as various report forms and marking rubrics.

Indicator 1.4: Teaching and Learning

The principles and methods used for teaching in the programme support the attainment of programme aims and intended learning outcomes.

Judgment: Addressed

- AU does not have a formal teaching and learning policy but has formulated a Teaching and Learning Excellence Plan (2021-2025) that addresses policy issues. Initiative 2 of the plan is 'To promote and Support Excellence through outcome based Impactful Teaching and Learning. Performance Indicators include Innovative Teaching Methods, Virtual Teaching and Learning, and Adaptation of smart teaching tools'. During interviews, the Panel was informed about teaching innovations such as promoting self-directed group learning, holding debates and using case studies and using MS Teams and smartboards as a learning platform during Covid-19. The implementation of this plan is monitored by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC) in coordination with the

Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA). The plan was revised in line with the university strategy for 2021-2025, and supports Strategic Objective 5, which aims to 'create an exceptional learning environment...'. Furthermore, as part of its annual review, the Department is required to assess the appropriateness of teaching and learning methods and report on workshops and related events.

- The MBA Programme Specification identifies a range of Teaching and Learning Methods, including lectures, group work, group discussions, Course projects, Literature review, assignments, case studies, Research project/dissertation, Guided self-study; which are all appropriate for the MBA. Although the Panel is satisfied with the wide use of case studies and journal articles; yet it is suggested that the MBA team consider introducing simulation to enhance teaching and learning.
- E-Learning is a part of the teaching and learning activities and takes place through the use of MS Teams and the Moodle platform. The Panel was informed in interviews that the Moodle platform is used as a repository of course material and to submit assignments through Turnitin, which helps to maintain academic integrity. The Panel was informed that MS Teams has been used extensively for online teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as to host guest lectures online, thereby helping to achieve intended learning outcomes.
- Lifelong learning is incorporated into the goals of the College. Furthermore, the MBA programme aims to provide students with the opportunity to develop lifelong learning skills. In the Teaching and Learning Excellence Plan (2021-2025), Initiative 3 aims 'To develop a Range of Teaching and Learning Strategies that provide students with opportunities to enhance their employability and foster research and life-long learning'. This is to be achieved through appropriate teaching and learning strategies, and promoting skills for an entrepreneurial mindset and research. A range of research related activities are identified including a research forum, research symposiums, international seminars and research capacity building workshops. Also, external executives are invited as guest speakers. The research capabilities of students are primarily developed through the MBA dissertation and its supporting activities. The Panel learned that creativity and innovation are being promoted through guest speakers, industry visits, participation in the MBA summer school at the University of Bradford and through the introduction of the Entrepreneurship and Family Business Management (MAGT 567) elective course.

Indicator 1.5: Assessment Arrangements

Suitable assessment arrangements, which include policies and procedures for assessing students' achievements, are in place and are known to all relevant stakeholders.

Judgment: Addressed

- The AU Assessment Manual sets out a wide range of policies and procedures related to the assessment of courses. It has been revised recently and is in its fifth version. Some of the most recent revisions were made to ensure that adopted standards were adhered to including those of the HEC, BQA and NQF requirements. The manual covers policies and procedures related to the university's assessment design, transparency and security of assessment. It also includes regulations for the marking of assessments and their internal and external verification and moderation and approval. Finally, it covers feedback on the student assessments, student challenge of grade, appeals processes, and academic misconduct. Every semester, the Department is required to report to the College Council and TLAC on the implementation of the assessment policy and procedures.
- The Assessment Manual is made available to academic staff and students through the website and Ahlia SharePoint. A workshop was conducted to all academic staff highlighting the revisions made to the Manual, which is sent to external assessor's/examiners once they have been appointed as clarified during virtual interviews. It is also summarised in the Student Handbook and drawn to students' attention during their induction day. Given the teaching and assessment adjustments that were made as a result of Covid-19, survey results suggest that students are satisfied with the current online practices and procedures. The Panel concludes that suitable assessment arrangements are in place for assessing students' achievements, and that these are known to all relevant stakeholders.
- Regarding formative assessments the Panel notes that 'Course assessments must include formative methods mapped to the ILOs so that students receive guidance on how to approach an assessed task and also feedback on their learning to aid further learning within a course...'. In the course files examined, within the Course Syllabus/ Specification document, the description and weighting of assessment tasks, as well as their relevant outcomes are provided in a table format, alongside each method of assessment. According to the feedback policy contained within the Assessment Manual, students are to receive prompt and detailed feedback. During interviews, students expressed their satisfaction with the promptness and quality of feedback received. They also noted that this feedback was often discussed in lectures in preparation for final assessment tasks.
- AU has a research ethics framework, which sets out a review for research ethical approval and a policy and procedure on plagiarism. This includes a compliance procedure that is followed with all research projects. This procedure incorporates checking that supporting documents such as the informed consent are attached and using these documents to classify the research as Exempted, Expedited, or subject to a Full Review. The documents that are completed include checklists related to a range of ethical issues. The Panel notes that the assessment rubric of the Dissertation does not explicitly assess research ethics and suggests that ethics could be added as an assessment criterion.

- Students are expected to complete their dissertations within the Dissertation/supervision semester. Students are required to meet at least twice a month with their supervisor, and a progress report is submitted on ADREG. The Guidelines for the Supervision of Master's Degree Dissertations sets out the procedures and rules for the registration, supervision, and examination of the Dissertation, including an oral defence. Timelines are also provided for various research related activities.
- The weighting of assessments is described in the course syllabus with clear criteria and expectations. Furthermore, internal and external moderation procedures are set out in the Assessment Manual. An internal moderation committee consisting of the instructor, a course verifier who must have the requisite expertise in the course, and the Chairperson of the Department monitors the assessment process both prior to the delivery of the course and after the final examinations as clarified during interviews.
- Academic misconduct and plagiarism policies and procedures are included in the Assessment Manual. During their orientation and at the beginning of each course, students are informed about issues of academic misconduct and plagiarism as confirmed during students' interviews. In the event of a case of misconduct, a Discipline Committee is convened to assess and carry out disciplinary procedures and impose any penalties in line with the policy. No evidence was provided of any disciplinary committee having been convened, and the Panel learned that there had not been any occurrence of serious cases of misconduct that would have required a disciplinary hearing. Should such a hearing be held, the Assessment Manual does make provision for a Student Assessment Appeals policy and procedure to be followed.

Standard 2

Efficiency of the Programme

The programme is efficient in terms of the admitted students, the use of available resources - staffing, infrastructure and student support.

Indicator 2.1: Admitted Students

There are clear admission requirements, which are appropriate for the level and type of the programme, ensuring equal opportunities for both genders, and the profile of admitted students matches the programme aims and available resources.

Judgment: Addressed

- The revised admissions policy was approved in July 2021 and includes a clause on inclusiveness and diversity. According to the SER, the application process ensures that applicants meet the requirements for the MBA programme and ensure equal opportunity for all applicants. The general and MBA specific admission requirements are made available on the website, on brochures and in the Student Handbook. From interviews, the Panel observed that the stakeholders, especially students, were aware and informed about the admission policy.
- There are MBA specific admission requirements set out in an admission requirements document, on the university website, and in the MBA brochure. These criteria include a bachelor's degree in any business and management related discipline (with the option to be accepted with a BA in other disciplines after passing an interview and Foundation Courses), and a minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 2.5 of their bachelor's degree results. However, applicants who have a CGPA above 2, may also be accepted after a selection interview process. Furthermore, a 'satisfactory level' of English proficiency is required and experience is regarded as an additional advantage rather than being a minimum selection requirement. The Panel seconds the MBA report, when it states the need to specify the 'satisfactory level' of English and the specific interview requirements and criteria. Therefore, the Panel advises the College to specify and document these requirements. Transferring students from recognised institutions are accepted onto the programme; and in compliance with HEC regulations. Overall, the admission criteria for the programme are consistent with local and international standards.

- While most applicants have a business-related undergraduate qualification, approximately 30% do not. These admitted students are therefore required to attend foundational courses in financial accounting, managerial finance, and business statistics. The Panel is satisfied with the existence of foundation courses to prepare students who do not have business background.
- The Student Admission Committee is responsible for regularly reviewing the entry requirements to the degree with the latest revision having been adopted in 2021. AU compares its admission policy against the requirements of other universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain and beyond.

Indicator 2.2: Academic Staff

There are clear procedures for the recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion, and professional development of academic staff, which ensure that staff members are fit-for-purpose and that help in staff retention.

Judgment: Addressed

- The academic staff bylaws includes chapters on the appointment, promotion, and performance evaluation of faculty. In addition to the academic staff bylaws a second set of bylaws deals with the promotion policy, procedures and criteria. According to the SER appointments are initiated by the Department and ends with the University Council for final approval. Minutes have been made available as evidence of this process being followed. The Human Resource Directorate at AU's assumes responsibility for the induction of new faculty members, introducing them to the institution, its rules and operations. Deans and department chairpersons are responsible for providing initial information and support to new members in regard to the department's functions, and serve as a mentor for the first semester as per AU's mentoring procedure. An Annual Performance Appraisal Procedure is followed and linked to professional development, including furthering their postgraduate studies and professional certification. Evidence is provided of several promotions over the past few years.
- Several policies promote and govern the conducting of research in a safe and ethical way by both students and faculty. Furthermore, AU has a research plan for the years 2021 to 2025. Several awards and incentives are made available to encourage research activities, presentations, and publications. The listed article and book publications, as well as the conference presentations demonstrate active research faculty with a high-quality output, as it is also reflected in the Scimago ranking. The Panel appreciates AU's support for the research activities of its academic staff.

- AU regulations are approved by its Council and compliant with the HEC requirements for the allocation of faculty teaching load, specifying the maximum number of courses and student dissertations for each rank. In the interviews, a clear understanding and appreciation of the workload allocation was articulated. In regard of the additional extra-curricular activities, the Panel suggests that AU reconsider the workload allocation by allotting extra hours for community engagement and extra activities.
- According to the SER 'There is a set of HR policies and procedure that considers all employee needs including women needs in line with Bahraini law and regulatory requirements.' A recent amendment in 2021 was approved by the University Council to further support women needs. This includes extensions for paternity leave or reducing the workload for pregnant employees. AU is organizing an annual Equal Opportunity conference in partnership with Brunel University.
- AU has appointed 40 faculty members in the College of Business and Finance, consisting of 6 Professors, 5 Associate Professor, 15 Assistant Professors, 11 lecturers, 3 Research Fellows and 2 Support staff. The overview of qualification and prior experience before joining AU presents an appropriately experienced and qualified faculty set to teach on the MBA programme.
- AU has a Professional Development Committee which is responsible for the identification of staff's development needs that are incorporated into a professional development plan for the University. Feedback on professional development activities is also used to plan for the following year. The College is sponsoring faculty for Master's (5 faculty members in the last 5 years) and PhD's (14 faculty members in the last 5 years), as documented.
- As part of the collaboration agreement of the College of Business and Finance with Brunel University, all faculty members who hold a PhD, are trained in research supervision. This is embedded in the general faculty professional development plan, which is developed on an annual basis for detailing the specific training requirements. This also includes an acknowledgment of including research supervision as a specific topic [e.g., 'Good practice of supervision' session as shown in the provided evidence.
- According to the SER, staff retention rates over the past two years has exceeded 90%. Incentives, motivation and retention include salary increments and research grants.

Indicator 2.3: Physical and Material Resources

Physical and material resources are adequate in number, space, style and equipment; these include classrooms, teaching halls, laboratories and other study spaces; Information Technology facilities, library and learning resources.

Judgment: Addressed

- The University has well maintained 24 classrooms, several lecture halls, a theatre, library and 12 computer laboratories. Teaching venues are equipped with data projectors, whiteboards, and smart boards, while the computers in computer laboratories have programme specific software installed including SPSS. In the interviews, it was made clear how the resources are allocated and the Panel notes that the resources are appropriate for the MBA programme.
- The library has a reading room and several study areas for group study/work. Some computer laboratories are equipped with Bloomberg terminals and SPSS for data analysis. Using their logging on credentials, MBA students have access to both the physical library on the AU campus and the virtual library, which provides access to a wide range of electronic journals and e-books. In the interviews with students, it became clear that there is a continuous Information Technology (IT) support also during the online teaching period during Covid-19.
- Requesting departments to order new books/references every semester serves as a mechanism to maintain the library resources and ensure their adequacy. There is a wide variety of library material made available as per the provided evidence; in addition to, a monitoring of the library usage. The SER clarifies that library, Information Communication Technology (ICT) resources and any other requirements (programme-specific software) are subjected to periodic upgrades and replacement as and when needed by the ICT Centre as it is the responsible entity to keep ICT resources well-maintained.
- Access to the campus is controlled by security guards and requires the presentation of an ID card. Students with special needs can access facilities using ramps and elevators and have access to the underground basement parking from where they have special access to the elevators. According to the SER, fire extinguishers and hoses and first aid kits are positioned at various points on the campus; there is a university emergency team to assist in the event of an emergency; and there is a Health Clinic available with a full-time medical professional. As per the SER, students are provided with the contact numbers of the Director of Student Counselling and the Head of Safety and Security as well as the contact numbers of the first aiders, which are available at various points throughout AU campus. The virtual tour confirmed the appropriateness of the resources and procedures.

Indicator 2.4: Management Information Systems

There are functioning management information and tracking systems that support the decision-making processes and evaluate the utilisation of laboratories, e-learning and e-resources, along with policies and procedures that ensure security of learners' records and accuracy of results.

Judgment: Addressed

- The Management Information System (MIS) used is known as ADREG and has various functionalities and reports and has assisted in decision making at the college and department levels. It can analyse and report on data related to faculty load, resource planning and allocation, strategic and financial planning, and student performance. This system is comprehensive and delivers an adequate support for managing the MBA programme. According to the SER, ADREG can furthermore be used to generate reports related to the booking and utilization of venues. The Learning Management System (LMS) in use is Moodle, which is synchronized to the ADREG system to manage course enrolments. The utilization of Moodle generates information that informs the decision-making processes.
- The Authentication of Certification Procedure is a guide to the approval, verification, and authentication of certification. According to the SER all certificates printed originate from the ADREG database, which is tracked by the ADREG graduation module. Its security features include authorized access rights to selected users and embossing of certificates with a unique serial number, a history of all prints, and an online approval of graduation from all parties concerned as clarified during interviews and shown in the samples of students' certificates. The accuracy of transcripts and certificates are ensured through the use of the ADREG system as described above. In interviews, students expressed their appreciation for the transparent and expeditious process in issuing the transcripts and certificates.

Indicator 2.5: Student Support

There is appropriate student support available in terms of guidance, and care for students including students with special needs, newly admitted and transferred students, and students at risk of academic failure.

Judgment: Addressed

- The Deanship of Student Affairs is primarily responsible for student support, through a range of activities and services including admission and registration; counselling; sports, cultural and social activities; complaints handling; accommodating students with special needs; and dissemination of information. The organogram of the Deanship documents the primary linkages between the Dean of Student Affairs and other entities including the Students Activities and Service Directorate, the Admission and Registration Systems Support Unit, the Student Counselling Directorate, as well as the Professional Relations Directorate. This system of interlinkages allows an integrated student support. In the interview with students, the Panel noted the positive appreciation and evaluation of a continuous student support by AU.

- The MBA programme fact sheets that are made available on the university's website identify several examples of careers related to the MBA degree. The Directorate of Admissions and Registration provides individual appointments with prospective students who seek advice on choosing their programme. In the interviews, MBA alumni were reporting about a continuous support in their career development by AU that they appreciated.
- An orientation day is held each semester for new students, covering topics such as the student support services available, academic rules and regulations, information related to library and how to access its services and resources off campus, and pastoral care, and all these activities took place virtually during Covid-19. This general induction is followed by a specific programme induction that focusses on the MBA programme; and a Student Handbook is also made available.
- As set out in the academic advising policy and procedure, each student is allocated an academic adviser, who they are expected to meet with, at least once a semester to discuss their academic progress, but more frequent meetings are held with students on probation or at risk of academic failure. During the meetings, students discuss their study plan, grades, and progress to ensure that ILOs are met and graduate attributes are achieved. A documentation of such meetings is registered in the ADREG system. The interviews with students made clear that they appreciated the current support system.
- The Student Counselling Directorate is responsible for following up on students with special needs. AU has a special policy for admitting and supporting students with special needs. After disclosing the special need on the admission application form, the special need student will be interviewed by a Special Needs Admission Committee to assure the special need is recognized and the required support system in terms of facilities, learning and examination needs and activities participation is available. The equal opportunity approach by AU is reflected in the listing on the United Nations Platform for SDG5 related to Gender Equality, and the 3rd place that AU won in 2021 with Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ebrahim Al Khalifa Award for the Advancement of Bahraini Women. In the interviews, the active engagement of AU in equal opportunities was articulated by both internal and external stakeholders. The Panel appreciates AU's arrangements to cater for women's needs which led to being awarded by several entities.
- There is a Policy for Identifying and Supporting 'At Risk' Students. Students at risk are identified through the ADREG system, which notifies the academic adviser, requiring more regular meetings and monitoring of the student. At-risk students could also receive additional support such as extra teaching and learning sessions or counselling for non-academic problems. From interviews, the Panel learned that there was no at-risk student identified in the last three years.

- Surveys are conducted by The Centre for Measurement and Evaluation (CME) on a regular basis in regard of students, employees and external stakeholders. In the interviews, students as well as external stakeholders talked about their participation in the surveys, the awareness of being heard and the notification about subsequent actions based on the surveys. The Panel is satisfied with AU's support to its students.

Standard 3

Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

The students and graduates of the programme meet academic standards that are compatible with equivalent programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally.

Indicator 3.1: Efficiency of the Assessment

The assessment is effective and aligned with learning outcomes, to ensure attainment of the graduate attributes and academic standards of the programme.

Judgment: Addressed

- The AU Assessment Manual provides a framework for assessing the MBA programme setting out policy, procedure and guidelines for good practice. Included in the Manual is an approach to ensure appropriate ILO-assessment linkages. The samples of assessments made available to the Panel indicate varying levels of complexity according to the level of courses examples include Strategic Management (MAGT561) and Research Methodology (MAGT558). The weighting of assessment items (e.g., quizzes, projects, and final examinations) are precise and provided to students. In conclusion, the Panel finds that the assessment methods in the programme are appropriate in terms of their validity, reliability, level of complexity, and standards.
- The AU Assessment Manual sets out the assessment policy and procedure. Internal and external verification and moderation processes are intended to ensure appropriate alignment of the assessment with the learning outcomes and graduate attributes. The course syllabus/specification is to be verified before the commencement of the course. An Internal Verification Form is used to map the NQF level for the course syllabus and includes a verification of the assessment's level of complexity. This form is used in an internal verification process conducted every semester. There is evidence of this process being applied. It was confirmed during the interviews that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure the alignment of assessments with both learning outcomes and graduate attributes.
- AU has mechanisms in place to monitor and improve the assessment process. The minutes of the MBA Committee and examples provided illustrate that both internal and external moderation are taking place. In discussion with the faculty and external moderators, the Panel established that the policies are adhered to, and the external moderators have provided feedback to AU's faculty on the courses they examine. The Assessment Manual

is now in its fifth version, and an Online Delivered Courses Assessment Manual has been introduced. The Panel is satisfied with the assessments arrangements which are in place.

Indicator 3.2: Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is ensured through the consistent implementation of relevant policies and procedures that deter plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct (e.g. cheating, forging of results, and commissioning others to do the work).

Judgment: Addressed

- Matters of academic misconduct and plagiarism policies and procedures are included in the AU Assessment Manual. According to the SER, academic misconduct and plagiarism issues are raised at student induction. Students are informed of what these constitute, how to avoid them, and the penalties where transgressions occur. According to the Assessment Manual, the University is focused on preventing six types of misconduct: plagiarism; data falsification; use of third parties (tacit personation) or cheat-ware sites; free-riding collusion; recycling collusion; and active personation. The Academic Research and Intellectual Contribution Committee is responsible for adherence to the core principles and related specifications. The Panel observed in the interviews that faculty and students are fully aware of the procedures of detecting and dealing with academic misconduct.
- The Assessment Manual sets out the academic misconduct and plagiarism policies and procedures. Concerning assignments, plagiarism checks are conducted on two levels at AU: (i) assessments submitted by students as a component of the course grade, and (ii) final project and dissertation manuscripts. Regarding the latter, the Guidelines for Supervision of Dissertations contain a requirement for supervisors to assess the similarity index through the use of Turnitin within the context of a zero-tolerance for plagiarism. Evidence of Turnitin usage is provided. During the interviews, faculty explained that they meet with their students every two weeks when working on projects and these meetings help them to identify whether students outsource their work, plagiarize, or use spinning tools.
- Transgressions at AU are dealt with per the academic misconduct and plagiarism policies and procedures as stated within AU Assessment Manual. No evidence of misconduct was provided. In the interviews, the Panel has learned that there have been no severe cases for any academic misconduct by the MBA students. The Panel concludes that academic integrity is ensured by implementing relevant policies and procedures that deter significant plagiarism incidents and other forms of academic misconduct but that minor incidents could be better monitored. The Panel, therefore, recommends that AU should introduce a register of minor incidents of students' academic misconduct.

Indicator 3.3: Internal and External Moderation of Assessment

There are mechanisms in place to measure the effectiveness of the programme's internal and external moderation systems for setting assessment instruments and grading students' achievements.

Judgment: Addressed

- AU has formal and appropriate procedures for internal moderation of assessment. It was explained to the Panel that verification of assessments weighted 20% or above occurs at the pre-assessment stage. A Verification/Moderation Committee is formed, including the instructor, course verifier, and Chairperson of the Department. Explicit criteria for selecting the moderation committee are published and set out in the Assessment Manual. Samples of internal verification/ moderation are provided. The process for the post-internal moderation is carried out by the Department Council, which make decisions about fairness in the grades. The Chairperson of the Department Council monitors the moderation process, together with CAQA and TLAC. Three samples of assignments with high, average, low grades are reviewed to verify the ILO alignments, the appropriateness of the tasks, and the fairness and accuracy in the grading. During the interviews, the Dean clarified the role and effectiveness of the internal Verification/Moderation Committee.
- The AU Assessment Manual includes an external moderation policy. Evidence of external moderation is shown in the external examiner's report. Furthermore, there is evidence that the external examiners' reports are discussed and documented. Clear criteria are set for the selection and appointment of external assessors; and evidence was provided of these being applied effectively. The Dean and the CAQA with TLAC are responsible for appropriately managing the internal and external moderation of assessments and selecting the external moderators. The Dean evaluates the effectiveness of moderation, and improvements are made to the MBA courses, as required.
- According to the SER and confirmed in interviews, the CAQA, in coordination with TLAC chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, monitors the moderation processes. There is evidence of reflection and an effective moderation system, with the reports being sent to the TLAC for decision making and record-keeping. The Panel concluded that there are appropriate mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of the programme's internal and external moderation systems for setting assessment instruments and grading students' achievements. The Panel appreciates the overall process of the moderation of assessment.

Indicator 3.4: Work-based Learning

Where assessed work-based learning takes place, there is a policy and procedures to manage the process and its assessment, to assure that the learning experience is appropriate in terms of content and level for meeting the intended learning outcomes.

Judgment: Not Applicable

Indicator 3.5: Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component

Where there is a capstone project or thesis/dissertation component, there are clear policies and procedures for supervision and evaluation which state the responsibilities and duties of both the supervisor and students, and there is a mechanism to monitor the related implementations and improvements.

Judgment: Addressed

- AU has well-articulated Guidelines for the Supervision of Master's Degree Dissertations. The Dissertation (DMBA 599) is a core course that must be attained to exit the MBA programme. The dissertation aims to provide students with an opportunity (a) to obtain practical experience in research and analysis; (b) to demonstrate independence, academic originality, critical thinking and problem-solving, practical and written skills, as well as organization and time-management skills; and (c) where appropriate to develop skills in community service. Finally, it is seen as an instrument for differentiating between students' abilities. The College maintains a database that lists the topics/ dissertation titles to be supervised by each faculty member after getting the list approved by the MBA Committee. This ensures alignment between courses ILOs and the programme PILOs. The primary roles of the supervisor and student are clearly articulated on the AU website and the Guidelines document; and the MBA Director monitors the process of supervision.
- An overview of processes related to Master's degree Dissertations is set out in the Guidelines document, including a guide of deadlines. Supervisors monitor and review students' progress and are required to document and minute student progress in ADREG. The MBA Director is responsible for monitoring the supervision process by reviewing the records on ADREG. The sample of ADREG supervision records is detailed and functions well as a monitoring tool.
- According to the Dissertations Guidelines document, there is an oral defense committee that the MBA Committee approves its members. When the student submits the dissertation for evaluation, an Examination Committee consisting of the supervisor, an internal examiner (a faculty member of AU), and an external examiner with relevant background are appointed. In accordance with the postgraduate guidelines, when considering appointments, the Department, College, and University Councils consider factors such as the area of specialisation of the internal and external examiners. The Examination Committee ensures that the defense is conducted fairly and transparently. This assessment process and the make up of the examination committee ensures that the dissertation is of a similar level to equivalent programmes, thereby ensuring that the academic standard of AU is maintained. The MBA Director approves all required

assessment forms and the final dissertations, and thereafter, these are forwarded to the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Research. In interviews, the external examiners noted that they did not receive a copy of the Turnitin report of the dissertation being examined. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AU should adopt a standard procedure of providing external examiners with a copy of the Turnitin report for the dissertation. Despite the above mentioned, the Panel appreciates the satisfaction of external examiners of dissertations with respect to the quality of the students' work.

Indicator 3.6: Achievements of the Graduates

The achievements of the graduates are consonant with those achieved on equivalent programmes as expressed in their assessed work, rates of progression and first destinations.

Judgment: Addressed

- AU adopted the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) set out by the BQA. This ensures that students' academic achievements are appropriate and comparable with other equivalent programmes. Furthermore, each PILO is assessed every semester, and where the PILO is not attained, the MBA Committee determines an improvement plan. The graduate attributes are considered achieved when all the ILOs are achieved within the programme. The Panel confirms that students' achievements are appropriate and comparable to equivalent programmes. This is based on reviewing the students' assessed work, including course assignments and projects. This was corroborated in interviews with the students, faculty, and stakeholders (such as external examiners, external advisory board members), as well as by the employee satisfaction survey. Furthermore, it was confirmed during the interviews that five MBA graduates are currently pursuing their PhD degrees, and several students had published their work in journals, book chapters, and at conferences.
- A notable increase in admitted students and the retention of students are shown in the provided evidence. Graduated students also appear to show a steady growth. On a spreadsheet called the MBA Graduate Destination List, it is clear that AU's tracks the employment of its graduates. This was confirmed during the interviews where the students reported that AU survey's them regularly and calls them in person if they do not respond. The list shows that 95.5% of graduates are employed (with 91% with appropriate employment and 4.5% as entrepreneurs or other employment). A further 4.5% are unemployed and looking for work. The MBA graduates interviewed by the Panel were satisfied with the programme, and there is evidence of both employee satisfaction and advisory board satisfaction. During the interviews, several students also expressed their appreciation for the College and emphasized how the MBA programme has helped in equipping them for their current careers. The Panel is satisfied with the progression of the students in the programme.

Standard 4

Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance and continuous improvement, contribute to giving confidence in the programme.

Indicator 4.1: Quality Assurance Management

There is a clear quality assurance management system, in relation to the programme that ensures the institution's policies, procedures and regulations are applied effectively and consistently.

Judgment: Addressed

- Quality assurance is viewed as a strategic priority and is included as one of the strategic objectives of AU as clarified during interviews and stated in the provided evidence A Quality Assurance Manual, currently in its fourth version, sets out the university's policy and procedures related to quality assurance management. Furthermore, it incorporates the regulations and requirements for accreditation. The latest version of the manual included revisions and additions to the external reviewer feedback process, NQF related information, the procedure for remapping and the revalidation of qualifications, a framework for cross-border programmes and guidelines for research oversight. This latest draft of this manual was introduced to both administrative and academic staff through a series of workshops and is made available on SharePoint. Furthermore, new staff members are provided with a Staff Handbook, which contains information on quality management. Similarly, in their orientation, students receive the Student Handbook which also addresses quality management topics. The Ahlia Centre for Information and Documentation (ACID) is responsible for the storage and distribution of all documentation related to quality management. In interviews, the Panel confirmed that administrative and academic staff were aware of the latest version of the Manual, quality management system requirements and how their work was influenced by quality management considerations.
- The CAQA in collaboration with the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC) and TLAC are primarily responsible for developing and implementing quality management systems for the University and all hold meetings on a regular basis. In interviews, the Panel was informed that the CAQA was responsible for updating policies and procedures related to accreditation, ensuring that the policies and procedures were applied consistently, training staff and faculty on these policies and procedures, and reporting on quality assurance related activities. The CAQA plans for internal reviews and submits reports emanating from these reviews to the TLAC to address academic matters,

and the AQAC to address any administrative matters related to quality management. Department Councils are responsible for implementing quality management within academic departments and are required to prepare a report each semester on the application and status of quality assurance standards within the Department. The Panel was provided with evidence of the Department Council holding meetings to review the reports and make necessary adjustments or improvements to programmes, such as introducing new textbook.

- According to the SER, all the department reports are ultimately submitted to the University Council for their consideration. The quality assurance process flow can be summarized as follows. The Departmental Council submits a report to the College Council for consideration, after which it goes to the CAQA. Thereafter, the report is considered by the TLAC, as well as the AQAC before being tabled at a University Council meeting. The Panel observed that quality assurance policies and procedures are consistently implemented at departmental and college level.
- The Panel was informed in interviews that to communicate the objectives of quality assurance, policy documents are published on the website or stored on SharePoint, where they can be accessed by all staff. In addition, workshops are held for faculty, and events are held to give feedback to other stakeholders. Part-time and newly appointed staff members receive an induction by the Chairperson of the Department and are trained in the CAQA policy and procedures. Furthermore, the Panel learned that all staff members are responsible for quality assurance, and that a wide range of people were involved in preparing the self-evaluation reports for the BQA reviews. From the interviews conducted with academic and support staff, the Panel was satisfied that they had a good understanding of the quality assurance requirements and the role that they were to play in the quality assurance process. The Panel acknowledges the integrated quality assurance system and staff's full awareness of the requirements.
- AU Quality Management System (QMS) itself is monitored by CAQA in coordination with the AQAC and TLAC. In interviews, the Panel was informed that the CME was responsible for conducting a range of surveys amongst various stakeholder groups (including current students, alumni, and employers), analysing the data and compiling the report. The design of the surveys was informed by contributions from the Departmental Council, who also reviewed the report. Several improvements have been noted such as aligning the QMS to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 pertaining to Quality Education.

Indicator 4.2: Programme Management and Leadership

The programme is managed in a way that demonstrates effective and responsible leadership and there are clear lines of accountability.

Judgment: Addressed

- The organizational chart of the College of Business and Finance is designed according to the subject disciplines and programmes offered within the College. During interviews the Panel confirmed that academic staff are not solely dedicated to a single department/directorate or programme, but lecture across programmes and levels, currently dedicating between 5% and 35% of their time to the MBA programme as clarified in the SER.
- The MBA Director convenes the MBA Committee which consists of the Chairperson of the Department and reviews the programme's day-to-day activities and receive information from number of sources, and especially the Department Council to aid in decision making related to the MBA. The MBA Committee makes recommendations and reports to the College Council of Business and Finance for decision making. Furthermore, the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Research assists with research related matters to support the MBA programme, including coordinating with the HEC for dissertation topics approval and scheduling. Article (17) of the University bylaws sets out the terms of reference for the College Council. These terms of reference clearly set out the responsibilities for academic matters pertaining to the College. The Dean is, therefore, responsible to oversee the implementation of the rules and regulations of the University within the College, and as and when needed, refers relevant issues to standing committees such as the Curriculum Committee, who would review and approve any proposed changes to the programme structure, with final approval resting with the University Council. Similarly, Article 21 sets out the responsibilities of Department Councils. The TLAC, is chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and monitors and oversees academic matters in the University, while the AQAC, is chaired by the President and has oversight of administrative operations. The Panel is satisfied with the clear roles of responsibilities and reporting lines.
- Article (14) of the bylaws lists the University Council's responsibilities. Articles 14, 17 and 21 clearly differentiate responsibilities between University Council which is the responsibility for the institution as a whole, while Colleges assume responsibility for College-wide matters and Departments for departmental-level matters. The MBA Director is, therefore, responsible for academic matters pertaining to the MBA programme, in coordination with Department Councils and other university units such as CAQA, CME and Student Affairs, and standing committees.
- The roles of College Dean and department chairpersons are stipulated in the University bylaws. 'The Dean is responsible for managing all affairs of his/her College in accordance with regulations...', while 'The Chairperson of an Academic Department is responsible for managing all the academic, administrative and student's affairs that falls within the ambit of his/her department.'. According to the bylaws, the Department Council must

meet at least monthly, as should the College Councils. Sample minutes of the College and Department suggest that these meetings have, and still do, take place regularly. The Panel appreciates the institution's leadership efforts in instilling a culture that encourages the maintaining of academic standards of the programme.

Indicator 4.3: Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme

There are arrangements for annual internal evaluation and periodic reviews of the programme that incorporate both internal and external feedback and mechanisms are in place to implement recommendations for improvement.

Judgment: Addressed

- Three types of reviews take place in relation to programmes and courses, namely semester reviews, annual reviews, and periodic reviews as clarified in interviews. Firstly, twice a year, at the end of each semester, the programme undergoes a quality assurance review, and a report is prepared. This procedure is a recent development, implemented for the first time in the first semester of the 2020-2021 academic year and is primarily focused on the course level, resulting in minor changes such as revising the prescribed textbooks. Secondly, there is an annual review of the MBA programme conducted by the Department Council. The CAQA reviews the annual report and recommends actions to be taken by the Department and College Council for discussion through the TLAC. Moreover, internal verification of courses is carried out by the Department each semester. It is worth noting that the annual review deals with some changes at the course level, such as revising textbooks, course content, structure and assessment methods, and some changes made in light of the review could result in minor improvements to the programme, such as changes/updates to course content, provided they do not affect the programme structure as clarified in interviews.
- In accordance with the programme review framework and the Process for Developing, Reviewing and Closing Academic Programmes, periodic programme reviews are conducted every three years and could lead to major changes to programmes, including structural changes. Any major changes that are proposed are reviewed by the university's Standing Curriculum Committee and thereafter tabled at a University Council meeting for final approval as clarified in interviews. The most recent periodic review was conducted in 2018-2019 and led to changes in the programme structure. When conducting the periodic review, teams are formed from staff and faculty members within the Department Council. Data for the periodic review is obtained from internal and external sources, including the external programme assessors, the College External Advisory Board, students, alumni and employers of graduates. Recommendations for curriculum changes are developed into an action plan which ought to be approved by the Department Council and the College Council; and monitored by the CAQA. The Panel was informed

in interviews that an External Reviewer was also appointed to ensure that appropriate changes were made. In addition, given that quality assurance was built into the operational plan, this served as a further mechanism to monitor implementation as clarified during interviews.

Indicator 4.4: Benchmarking and Surveys

Benchmarking studies and the structured comments collected from stakeholders' surveys are analysed and the outcomes are used to inform decisions on programmes and are made available to the stakeholders.

Judgment: Addressed

- AU has a benchmarking policy covering three types of benchmarking, namely comparative benchmarking against peer institutions, good practice benchmarking against regulatory requirements and professional standards, and internal benchmarking. According to the policy, benchmarking usually takes the form of a desktop survey. However, the Panel is of the view that formal agreements with other institutions can facilitate the comparative benchmarking exercises. Therefore, the Panel suggests that AU consider this matter.
- Benchmarking findings and desktop surveys are used to review academic programmes and motivate for changes to the MBA as it was evident in the provided documents.
- The CME assumes responsibility for administering regular university and programme surveys amongst the university's internal and external stakeholders, analysing the data and collating the feedback. These surveys are administered amongst students, alumni, employers, and advisory board members.
- The various surveys are collected and analyzed by the CME and then forwarded to the Advisory Board, Department Council and College Council to review and for decision making purposes. The Panel was provided with an example, where in their satisfaction survey feedback students requested more practical content in the research methods courses, leading to the Research Methodology (MAGT558) course being revised to include the practical application of SPSS. The operational plan serves as the mechanism to implement the recommended improvements. Furthermore, the Advisory Board is updated about the revisions at their meetings as noted from interviews. The Professional Relations Department arranges for the outcomes of changes to be communicated with stakeholders through classroom announcements and discussions with students, and to alumni and employers at annual alumni gatherings. In addition, online events have recently been held to provide feedback to stakeholders.

- According to the SER, the College Advisory Board has reviewed the modifications made to the MBA programme and was satisfied. From interviews the Panel learned that members of the Advisory Board were contacted frequently by AU, often outside of formal Advisory Board meetings, to get their opinion on a range of topics, including curriculum changes, and to inform them when the changes recommended had been implemented. Interviewed students were also aware of the changes being made to the programme and were generally satisfied with these.

Indicator 4.5: Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs

The programme has a functioning advisory board and there is continuous scoping of the labour market and the national and societal needs, where appropriate for the programme type, to ensure the relevancy and currency of the programme.

Judgment: Addressed

- A College External Advisory Board has been constituted to provide guidance and support on issues related to the College and its programmes, including 'identifying academic programmes and promoting revision of current programmes'. Its 5 to 9 members are drawn from employers, industrial and professional experts in the field, and alumni.
- It is evident from the minutes of meetings that regular meetings of the Advisory Board are held and this provides the opportunity for them to comment on programme reviews including developing new academic programmes, improving or closing of existing ones as clarified during interviews. The Panel appreciates the active involvement of Advisory Board Members in enhancing the programme and ensuring its relevance to market needs.
- AU has a policy for Needs Assessment and Analysis. In accordance with this policy, a market needs assessment for the MBA programme has been conducted. This assessment relied on secondary research conducted by the Future of Jobs Survey, MBA Careers Research report, the Graduate Management Admission Council and the Bahraini HEC's National Education Strategy 2014-2024 to assess the market needs for its MBA. AU concluded that the market requires MBA graduates in the Gulf in particular, and MENA in general. The MBA Committee further recognized the need for a more practical approach in its programme, and greater emphasis on content areas such as digital marketing, leadership and entrepreneurship. From interviews, the Panel noted that the Department Council and College Council are responsible for ensuring that regular reviews are conducted and guide the development, review and closure of any academic programme as clarified in the SER.

V. Conclusion

Taking into account the institution's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the virtual interviews and documentation made available during the virtual review, the Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the DHR/BQA Academic Programme Reviews (Cycle 2) Handbook, 2020:

There is Confidence in the Master's Degree in Business Administration of the College of Business and Finance offered by Ahlia University (AU).

In coming to its conclusion regarding the four Standards, the Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:

1. The integrated planning framework that has been devised from a strategic level down to a programme level
2. AU's support for the research activities of its academic staff.
3. The arrangements to cater for women's needs which led to being awarded by several entities.
4. The overall process of the moderation of assessment.
5. The satisfaction of external examiners of dissertations with respect to the quality of students' work.
6. The institution's leadership has instilled a culture that encourages the maintaining of academic standards.
7. The active involvement of Advisory Board Members in enhancing the programme and ensuring its relevance to market needs.

In terms of improvement, the Panel recommends that Ahlia University and/ or the College of Business and Finance should:

1. Restructure the curriculum by placing the Strategy Course as the second course offered in Semester 1 of the second year.
2. Include the Human Resources course as a core course, not as an elective one.
3. Ensure that textbooks and references for all MBA courses are reviewed and updated as and when required.
4. Introduce a register of minor incidents of students' academic misconduct.
5. Adopt a standard procedure of providing external examiners with a copy of the Turnitin report for the dissertation.