Education & Training Quality Authority
Kingdom of Bahrain - مملكة البحرين

هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب

Directorate of Higher Education Reviews

Institutional Review Report

Applied Science University
Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 20-24 October 2019

HI008-C2-R007

Table of Content

Acronyms

ASDU	Academic Staff Development Unit
ASU	Applied Science University
BoD	Board of Directors
BoT	Board of Trustees
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme
CE	community engagement
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CILOs	Course Intended Learning Outcomes
CMU	Cardiff Metropolitan University
DAF	Admin and Finance
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
DSS	Decision Support System
GAs	Graduate Attributes
HEC	Higher Education Council
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HoDs	Heads of Departments
HR	Human Resources
ICT & KM	Information Communications Technology and Knowledge Management Directorate
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LLRC	Library and Learning Resources Committee
LMS	Learning Management System
LSBU	London South Bank University
LTAS	Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

MEU	Measurement & Evaluation Unit
MIS	Management Information System
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoC	Memorandum of Cooperation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
QAA	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre
QMS	Quality Management System
RIREC	Research Ethics Committee
SIS	Student Information System.
SOS	Student On-line Services
SP	Strategic Plan
SPRMC	Strategic Planning & Risk Management Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
UC	University Council
VP	Vice President

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 Programme Reviews where the quality of learning and academic standards is judged in specific programmes. The DHR completed the first cycle of institutional reviews in 2013, and the second cycle is scheduled for 2018-2019, in accordance with the Institutional Quality Reviews Framework (Cycle 2) approved by the Cabinet (Resolution No. 38 of 2015). The main objectives of the institutional reviews are:

1. To enhance the quality of higher education in the Kingdom of Bahrain by conducting reviews to assess the performance of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operating in the Kingdom, against a predefined set of Indicators and provide a summative judgment while identifying areas of strength and areas in need of improvement.
2. To ensure that there is public accountability of higher education providers through the provision of an objective assessment of the quality of each provider, which produces published reports and summative judgements for the use of parents, students, and the Higher Education Council (HEC), and other relevant bodies.
3. To identify good practice where it exists and disseminate it throughout the Bahraini higher education sector.

The institutional review process will assess the effectiveness of an institution's quality assurance arrangements against a pre-defined set of standards and indicators, and identify areas of strength and areas of improvement. Each Indicator will have a judgement; i.e. 'addressed' or 'not addressed', which collectively will lead to a Standard's judgement. A Standard will be given a judgement of 'addressed', 'partially addressed' or 'not addressed' depending on the number of indicators 'addressed' within a Standard, as detailed in the Institutional Quality Reviews Framework (Cycle 2). The aggregate of Standards' judgements will lead to an overarching judgement – 'meets quality assurance requirements', 'emerging quality assurance requirements', 'does not meet quality assurance requirements', as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Overall Judgements

Judgement	Description
Meets quality assurance requirements	The institution must address all eight Standards
Emerging quality assurance requirements	The institution must address a minimum of five Standards including Standards 1, 4 and 6 with the remaining Standards being at least partially satisfied.
Does not meet quality assurance requirements	The institution does not address any of the above two overall judgements

II.   The Institution Profile

tution Name	Applied Science University
Year of Establishment	2004
Location	Building 166 Road 23, Block 623 East Al-Ekir PO Box 5055 Kingdom of Bahrain
Number of Colleges	4
Names of Colleges	1. College of Administrative Sciences 2. College of Arts and Science 3. College of Engineering 4. College of Law
Number of Qualifications	18
Number of Programmes	18
Number of Enrolled Current Students	2941
Number of Graduates	4484
Number of Academic Staff Members	115 (full-time)
Number of Administrative Staff Members	88 (full-time)

III.   Judgment Summary

Standard/ Indicator	Title	Judgement
Standard 1	**Mission, Governance and Management**	**Addressed**
Indicator 1	Mission	Addressed
Indicator 2	Governance and Management	Addressed
Indicator 3	Strategic Plan	Addressed
Indicator 4	Organizational Structure	Addressed
Indicator 5	Management of Academic Standards:	Addressed
Indicator 6	Partnerships, Memoranda and Cross Border Education	Addressed
Standard 2	**Quality Assurance and Enhancement**	**Addressed**
Indicator 7	Quality Assurance	Addressed
Indicator 8	Benchmarking and Surveys	Addressed
Indicator 9	Security of Learner Records and Certification	Addressed
Standard 3	**Learning Resources, ICT and Infrastructure**	**Addressed**
Indicator 10	Learning Resources	Addressed
Indicator 11	ICT	Addressed
Indicator 12	Infrastructure	Addressed
Standard 4	**The Quality of Teaching and Learning**	**Addressed**
Indicator 13	Management of Teaching and Learning Programmes	Addressed
Indicator 14	Admissions	Addressed

Indicator 15	Introduction and Review of Programmes	Addressed
Indicator 16	Student Assessment and Moderation	Addressed
Indicator 17	The Learning Outcomes	Addressed
Indicator 18	Recognition of Prior Learning	Addressed
Indicator 19	Short courses	Addressed
Standard 5	**Student Support Services**	**Addressed**
Indicator 20	Student Support	Addressed
Standard 6	**Human Resources Management**	**Addressed**
Indicator 21	Human Resources	Addressed
Indicator 22	Staff Development	Addressed
Standard 7	**Research**	**Addressed**
Indicator 23	Research	Addressed
Indicator 24	Higher degrees with research	Addressed
Standard 8	**Community Engagement**	**Addressed**
Indicator 25	Community Engagement	Addressed

IV.   Standards and Indicators

Standard 1

Mission, Governance and Management

The institution has an appropriate mission statement that is translated into strategic and operational plans and has a well-established, effective governance and management system that enables structures to carry out their different responsibilities to achieve the mission.

Indicator 1: Mission

The institution has a clearly stated mission that reflects the three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement of a higher education institution that is appropriate for the institutional type and the programmes qualifications offered.

Judgement: Addressed

The Applied Science University (ASU) developed its recent version of the vision and mission statements in 2015, following a change in the senior management. As per the SER, ASU's vision is 'to be one of the leading private universities supporting practical learning and scientific research in Bahrain and the Gulf'. Its mission is well-aligned with this vision, stating that 'ASU is committed to offering an education that is accessible to academically competent students of Bahrain, the Gulf and beyond, and to deliver academic programmes of quality that graduate students equipped with knowledge and skills relevant locally and regionally. ASU is further dedicated to the promotion of a culture of learning and scientific research for its students, staff and faculty regionally and globally to engage meaningfully with the community at large.

The Panel notes that ASU's mission is appropriately phrased and reflects the core functions of the University. It reflects the main three functions required of a higher education institution, namely teaching and learning, research and community engagement. In developing its mission, the Panel noted that ASU has involved both internal stakeholders including the Board of Trustees (BoT), Deans, Heads of Department (HoDs), faculty, staff and students; and relevant external stakeholders such as the programmes' advisory boards whose members include both national and international representatives. Furthermore, the process of developing ASU's vision, mission and core values took into consideration the Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 and the Higher Education Council's (HEC) strategy for higher education, HEC strategy for research and the UNESCO 2030 Framework for Education and the Higher Education Academy of the UK.

It was evident from interviews the Panel had with various stakeholders during the site visit, that the vision and mission are widely disseminated and communicated to internal and external stakeholders and that there is a general understanding of their essence. The Panel also confirmed that the vision and

mission statements are informed to newly recruited staff and students during their induction and orientation activities and are clearly displayed throughout the campus.

There is evidence that the already approved 2015-2020 mission statement has been discussed and reviewed during the period between the five-year planning cycles, and that such discussions involved the Deans, programme advisory boards, academic staff, the Student Council, and representatives of employers. It was noted during the various on-site visit's interviews that ASU has already embarked on reviewing its current mission statement in preparation for developing the new Strategic Plan for 2020-2025. Moreover, it was also confirmed by senior management and faculty during interviews that they have been involved in the process of the new Strategic Plan (SP) development which started with environmental scanning and SWOT analysis workshops. Hence the Panel is satisfied convinced that the requirements for this Indicator are addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- None

Indicator 2: Governance and Management

The institution exhibits sound governance and management practices and financial management is linked with institutional planning in respect of its operations and the three core functions.

Judgement: Addressed

The ASU's BoT has a clear remit and Terms of Reference (ToR). Its roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in the university's basic bylaws. The Panel examined the roles of BoT and found that they follow sound principles of governance as a higher education institution. Moreover, the BoT evaluates its own performance every two years, though this was changed from once a year, along with the production of an annual end of year report.

The ASU's Bylaws provides clear separation of responsibilities between the Board of Directors (BoD) and BoT on one hand and the top management of ASU (University Council, and University Management Committee) on the other hand. The BoD role focuses on giving the final approval on ASU's budget, and making sure that the University is adequately funded. Similarly, the role of BoT is well-defined, and it carries the responsibility of ensuring appropriate environment for the University to achieve its mission, and ensuring compliance with national regulations, monitoring the institution's performance, and guiding the ASU's strategic directions. The University Management Committee assists the ASU's President in overseeing all its functions and operations, while the University Council (UC) governs the academic standards of the University.

The BoT's Policy defines the selection criteria of its members, and new members are ratified by the HEC. The BoT holds two meetings annually and keeps official records of its minutes. The Panel acknowledges

the fit-for-purpose structure of ASU's BoT as well as the knowledge and experience of the BoT's members.

As stated in the SER and confirmed in the site visit interviews, the strategic planning process starts with developing the Strategic Plan, which is approved by the BoT and is translated into a set of annual operational plans for each functional area. The link between strategic planning and financial allocation is attained through a joint committee, between the BoT and UC, titled the Strategic Planning & Risk Management Committee (SPRMC) which also monitors the implementation of the operational plans. This link ensures that the overall budget is in line with the identified strategic goals of the University. The annual operational plans are reviewed by the BoT as one of its responsibilities is to ensure sufficient budget for the implementation of the operational plans. As evident from the ASU's Bylaws and Financial Bylaws, financial spending authority is centralized in the hands of the Vice President (VP) for Administration, Finance and Community Engagement and the Director of Admin and Finance (DAF). Deans and Unit Directors contribute to budget preparation, using standardized formats. Though they are responsible for the implementation of their approved budget, they need DAF approval for all transactions up to a certain amount. During interviews, the Deans confirmed that they have flexibility in using their approved budget, although they do not have final spending signatory. Deans and unit heads receive monthly reports on the status of their budget and the budgetary system allows them to request a transfer of allocations from one item to another within their approved budget.

ASU has appropriate policy and processes to prevent and detect fraud. The University has an automated system that requires more than one signature for approving spending, and an internal auditing system that minimizes opportunities for fraud. The computerized monthly reporting system provides additional measure to detect financial fraud, if any. Financial risks are also included in the risk register. The Panel finds that overall, the ASU satisfies all of the requirements of this Indicator.

Recommendation(s)
• None

Indicator 3: Strategic Plan

There is a strategic plan, showing how the mission will be pursued, which is translated into operational plans that include key performance indicators and annual targets with respect to the three core functions with evidence that the plan is implemented and monitored.

Judgement: Addressed

As stated in the SER and confirmed in the interviews, an initial Strategic Plan was established in 2013 for the period of 2013-2018, but was reviewed and further developed in 2015 following a change in the senior management, to serve as the current Strategic Plan for the period of 2015-2020. Relevant

stakeholders, both internal and external, were identified and invited to participate in the process, which involved environmental scanning, consultative workshops, SWOT analysis and risk register.

ASU strategic planning activities are directed by the Strategic Planning & Risk Management Committee, a standing advisory committee for both the BoT and University Council, which is responsible for developing the Strategic Plan based on the Strategic Management Policy that was set to guide the strategic planning process. The Strategic Plan sets seven pillars and objectives for the strategy. The first three pillars relate to the main core functions of ASU (teaching and learning, research and community engagement), whereas the other four objectives address areas that support the University's core functions (student support, internationalization and partnership, quality assurance and sustainable growth). ASU developed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the various Strategic Plan Objectives. The targeted levels of the KPIs are set annually, while the bases for their determination are set as part of the benchmarking activities which ASU conducts, as was revealed in interviews with senior management.

ASU has policies to monitor the progress made in implementing both the Strategic Plan and annual operational plans by the BoT and various levels of senior management, as stipulated in the University's Bylaws. These Bylaws define clearly the roles and responsibilities of the BoT, University Council, the University President, the VP for Academic Affairs & Development, and VP for Administration, Finance & Community Engagement. The University has also established a Governance Strategic and Planning Unit to coordinate the planning and monitoring of the Strategic Plan. The 'Dashboard', an application developed by the University, is used by the Unit for the periodic monitoring of the Strategic Plan. Regular semester-based and annual reports are also produced by the Governance Strategic and Planning Unit which are forwarded to top management levels.

As mentioned in the SER and confirmed in the site visit interviews, ASU has a clear and well documented cycle for its planning process, starting from strategic plan development and approval, the development of annual operational plans and targets for its KPIs, the periodic monitoring of the operational plans' implementation, to the regular reporting. The Governance Strategic and Planning Unit plays a vital role in the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the planning activities. The Panel notes the extensive usage of the annual operational plans by various units of the University, both academic and administrative, as well as the use of KPIs that have been put for those plans, as basis for periodic monitoring of implementation.

During the site visit, ASU gave a presentation of its 'Dashboard' system to the Panel. This system allows close monitoring of progress made in meeting the set targeted levels of KPIs for various functions and activities, and allows identification of areas that require corrective actions. It is also used to generate different kinds of reports which are submitted to the Strategic Planning and Risk Management Committee and to the BoT. The Panel notes with appreciation the in-house development of ASU

Dashboard system, which reflects the University's aspiration for continuous development and enhancement. The Panel finds that overall, the ASU satisfies all of the requirements of this Indicator.

Recommendation(s)
• None

Indicator 4: Organizational Structure

The institution has a clear organizational and management structure and there is student participation in decision-making where appropriate.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU has an appropriate organizational structure, with clear reporting and communication lines among different parties, including the BoD, BoT, UC, President, VP for Academic Affairs & Development, VP for Administration, Finance & Community Engagement, Deans and HoDs, staff and student. The University also has a committee structure which provides a framework for decision making and communication with various members of the University's community and external stakeholders. In some areas, there is a council as well as a committee, centre or unit, where the council's role is seen as advisory and supervisory while implementation is carried out by the committee, unit or centre. The University realizes the necessity of having these multiple layers of management at the current stage of its development, while acknowledging the need for reviewing its committee structure in the future in terms of number, composition and ToRs. The Panel concurs with the University's approach in this regard.

The organizational structure is publicized and is available on ASU's website. It is also reviewed regularly, and adjustments are made accordingly. The most recent change was made in the academic year 2018-2019 where the former Deanship of Admissions & Registration was merged with the Deanship of Student Affairs. Roles and responsibilities of various offices and committees are also set, while the job descriptions and roles and responsibilities of staff members are collated in the Job Description Handbook. Chains of command in the University are well defined and staff are made aware of their roles through faculty handbook and staff induction as was confirmed during interviews.

As mentioned in the SER both internal and external stakeholders contribute to ASU's decision making, including students, alumni and employers whose opinion is sought. Staff contribute to decision making through staff meetings, department and college councils and through staff satisfaction surveys. Interviews with students, including president and members of the Students Council showed that students' input is provided formally through membership of the Students' Council's President in the University Council, as well as through the student satisfaction surveys. Employer surveys and the

Annual meeting which the University holds with the employers' representatives provide avenue for their contribution in the decision-making process of ASU.

The ToRs of various committees are set. The committee structure provides appropriate platform for discussions on academic quality and provides reporting lines to senior management, UC and BoT. The Committee ToR Booklet provides an appropriate official guide for committees' functions and minutes of all committees' meetings are well kept. It was confirmed to the Panel during the on-site visit that the effectiveness of various committees is evaluated through ASU's internal audit and quality audit processes. Based on these reviews, actions were taken to enhance the committees' effectiveness through an on-line document repository, a brief self-evaluation questionnaire, as well as through mandating annual reports on committees' work, which was used recently as basis for the annual review of committees under the aegis of the University Council. From the evidence provided, the Panel is satisfied that the requirements for this Indicator are satisfied.

Recommendation(s)

- None

Indicator 5: Management of Academic Standards

The institution demonstrates a strong concern for the maintenance of academic standards and emphasizes academic integrity throughout its teaching and research activities.

Judgement: Addressed

The academic governance of ASU is well articulated and supported with policies that allow for maintenance of academic standards. It starts with the programme team, department councils, college quality assurance units, college councils to the Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) Centre and its coordinating group, then to the overall University at the University Council and BoT levels. The way ASU has developed its academic governance allows results of monitoring of academic standards implementation to be reported to ASU's upper management ending up with the BoT. Added to this is the regular reporting to BoT conferral statistics, graduate attributes and performance, and employers' satisfaction with graduates. Annual reports of ASU are also submitted to the HEC.

As mentioned in the SER, ASU has a sound policy and process to address issues related to academic misconduct such as the Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism and Examination Rules and Regulations Students' Misconduct Bylaws and Code of Ethics and the Professional Conduct Bylaws that deal with misconduct by students and staff, respectively. Adding to this are the policies on Plagiarism and Examination Rules and Regulations, and Research Ethics Policy. During interviews with staff and students the Panel was able to confirm that they are aware of the various policies for academic integrity through staff and student Handbooks and that 'Turnitin' software is made available to staff and

students. Interviewed students also confirmed the extensive use of Turnitin in all written assignments submitted by them.

ASU communicates rules and regulations to students through the Student Handbook. The University has established a clear mechanism for dealing with various appeals and complaints which lie with the Deanship for Student Affairs and is communicated by students through the Student On-line Services (SOS). However, ASU does not have a policy for dealing with student grievances, while procedures for submitting and dealing with grievances exist. It became clear to the Panel that ASU mixes students' appeals with grievances. Hence the Panel is of the view that the ASU needs to develop a separate policy to govern student grievances (see the recommendation Indicator 5). However, the Panel is satisfied that the requirements for this Indicator are satisfied based on the conducted interviews during the site visit and the provided evidence.

Recommendation(s)

- None

Indicator 6: Partnerships, Memoranda and Cross Border Education (where applicable)

The relationship between the institution operating in Bahrain and other higher education institutions is formalized and explained clearly, so that there is no possibility of students or other stakeholders being misled.

Judgement: Addressed

Currently ASU has cooperation with Cardiff Metropolitan University (CMU) and London South Bank University (LSBU). The processes for establishing this cooperation ending with a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) for CMU and a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) for LSBU were generally sound, covering two programmes from each partner institution. The SER describes the mechanism for implementing the MoC and MoA, making sure that the learning experience gained by students enrolled in these programmes is equivalent to that of students studying at the partner's home campus. Roles and responsibilities of ASU and its UK University partners are clearly detailed in the MoA with CMU and the MoC with LSBU. As confirmed in interviews, these responsibilities include teaching commitments and involvement of the partner University in the quality assurance of its programme, including the setting up of examination boards at the end of each semester or year as per the university partner's regulations and the implementation of external examiner system, similar to that of the home campus. Furthermore, the SER referred to the cooperation between ASU and the partner institutions in some research activities. However, apart from holding two joint conferences, the Panel found no evidence of assistance provided to ASU staff to enhance their academic and research capabilities. The Panel was informed, during the site visit about the decision to discontinue the offering of CMU programmes. This was also confirmed during the skype conference meeting that the Panel held with the CMU representatives. The Panel was assured that both ASU and CMU are committed to ensure that students

who are currently pursuing their CMU degrees shall continue to be provided with the learning experiences as was originally planned in their programmes.

As mentioned in the SER detailed information on the programmes offered by the CMU and LSBU are available through various means, and are conveyed to students through the Student Handbook and the ASU website, in addition to the relevant College Handbook, and the Programme's brochures. During the site visit interviews, the Panel learnt that CMU students were informed by the University about the decision not to enrol new students into CMU programmes. The Panel also found that ASU's senior management comply with the HEC regulations to ensure that at least 25% of the teaching staff on the CMU and LSBU programmes are from the parent institutions, as the number of staff members employed to teach in these programmes reflect adherence of ASU with these regulations.

During the site visit, it was made clear to the Panel that the four programmes offered through this partnership are defined as LSBU or CMU-validated programmes. Admission requirements to these four programmes are similar to those applied at the parent institution's home campus. Furthermore, these programmes are subjected to the quality assurance processes of ASU as well as to those of the partner institutions.

Regarding monitoring the implementation of the partnership agreements, there are appointed personnel assigned to monitor the implementation of the MoA with CMU and the MoC with LSBU. The ASU President has been identified as the designated person from ASU, while the Pro -Vice Chancellor of each of the UK partner University is the Partner's designated person. The Manager of the International Partnership Office serves as the contact person at ASU who is responsible for dealing with day-to-day management related issues. The Panel considers that, in general, the University has clear and appropriate arrangements for the delivery of its cross-border education programmes. The Panel is also of the view that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- None

Judgement: The Institution **addresses** Standard 1: Mission, Governance and Management

Standard 2

Quality Assurance and Enhancement

There is a robust quality assurance system that ensures the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements of the institution as well as the integrity of the institution in all aspects of its academic and administrative operations.

Indicator 7: Quality Assurance

The institution has defined its approach to quality assurance and effectiveness thereof and has quality assurance arrangements in place for managing the quality of all aspects of education provision and administration across the institution.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU has a detailed and well-articulated Quality Management System (QMS). This system is translated into a three-layer organizational structure which comprises three hierarchical entities, namely: the QAA Council chaired by the University President, reporting directly to the University Council and includes a number of key academic and administrative personnel; the QAA Centre, chaired by the QAA Centre Director, reporting directly to the President; and the College QAA Units headed by the Vice Deans who directly report to the Director of QAA Centre with regards to all matters related to quality assurance in their colleges and Programme Leaders in each college are members in these units. Each of these entities has clear ToRs, responsibilities and membership descriptions. The Panel was informed during interviews that having the University President as the Chair of the QAA Council is meant to reflect the University's strategic perspective towards quality assurance. However, the Panel believes that this area could benefit more if the role of the Chair of the QAA Council were assigned to another senior personality, in order to maintain the impartial and supervisory role of the President on the overall University performance and operation.

In order to facilitate coordination and collaboration between various level and entities across ASU, a QAA Coordinating Group comprising a QAA Centre staff, QAA Unit Heads and the Admin QAA Coordinator, was created. It is responsible for coordinating QAA-related activities and ensuring that processes are implemented, maintained and reviewed. For administrative quality issues, this role is performed by the Admin QAA Coordinator. During interviews, the Panel learnt that one main rationale behind the establishment of this group is to ensure linkage and collaboration between the higher strategic level of guidance and supervision as represented by QAA Council on one hand, and the operational and executive level, on the other hand, as represented by the QAA Centre and Units respectively. During interviews and following examination of the provided evidence, the Panel confirmed that this arrangement works satisfactorily at present, though it believes that the ASU may benefit from a review of the effectiveness of this mechanism of linking and coordinating the operation of various entities concerned with quality assurance issues.

The Panel notes with appreciation the persistent efforts of ASU to instil a culture of quality within its core functions and operations and among its staff and students, which have proved effective in addressing quality issues. The Panel, however, would like to make the following two observations in this regard. Firstly, and as stated during interviews, quality assurance and management arrangements in place exhibit more focus on academic affairs and operations compared to administrative affairs. Although the Panel found evidence that internal quality audits are conducted on some administrative entities in the University by the QAA Centre, it notes that several entities are designated to look after the quality of academic affairs in the University while all administrative affairs are represented merely by the Administrative QAA Coordinator, whose role is described by the QMS as 'to operationalize quality assurance at the administrative office level within the framework of the University's quality management system.' In the Panel's view, this limited representation of administrative entities within the multiple QAA structures affects the comprehensiveness of the QMS at ASU and minimizes the opportunities for these entities to be actively involved in implementing the system. This conclusion was confirmed during interviews as well. Hence, ASU is advised to consider more engagement of its various administrative entities in implementing its QMS by introducing appropriate mechanisms similar to those available for academic affairs.

Secondly, during interviews the Panel learned with some concerns that the Head of Internal Audit & Compliance Unit conducts independent internal quality audits to any academic or administrative ASU units, including the QAA Centre itself. Results of these audits are reported to the President, being the immediate reporting line of this post. In the Panel's opinion, this situation constitutes a source of confusion and an overlap with the roles of other entities such as the QAA Centre and QAA Units, which are specifically founded for this purpose. The Panel recommends that ASU should take the necessary actions to ensure that quality assurance activities, including, internal quality audits are coordinated and conducted by specialised entities in order to avoid any potential overlap and confusion with other entities in the University.

ASU Quality Assurance Manual is a comprehensive document that contains all policies and regulations and shows the responsibilities of the individuals and bodies that have a responsibility for quality assurance matters. Moreover, ASU has a well-articulated and neatly documented large set of policies, procedures and regulations covering various aspects of its academic and administrative operations and activities. Furthermore, ASU has a detailed policy for developing, reviewing and disseminating policies. In addition, these reports are subject to periodic reviews when deemed necessary and the Panel found several evidences of these reviews.

ASU conducts two types of internal audits, annual and per semester. There are also some monitoring processes in place associated with improvement action plans. These are: academic programme review reports, internal quality audits data collection and analysis (KPIs dashboard). There is evidence that these monitoring mechanisms result in identifying areas for improvements that can be addressed. There are also examples of implemented improvements based on these reviews. The Panel also found evidence on periodic reviews of many of these policies and procedures supplemented by improvement

plans. In addition to all these arrangements in place, the QAA Council 'meet regularly to oversee matters related to institutional and programme reviews (internal and external) and accreditation and to advise the University Council on effectiveness of quality assurance and enhancement processes and ensure their compatibility with key external reference points'. Furthermore, ASU utilizes external quality reviews, BQA's and HEC reviews to identify areas for improvement in various aspects of its operations. The Panel found evidence on the University's compliance with these requirements and stipulations.

The Panel notes that ASU has recently enhanced its processes to monitor compliance by expanding its internal audit's remit to encompass compliance. ASU takes a University-wide overview of ensuring that all activities comply with the requirements of HEC and other regulatory bodies. During interviews, the Panel was informed that ASU evaluates its QMS also through the results/outcomes of the QA reviews. Recently, QAAC designed a survey as a self-evaluation tool to take the opinions of ASU staff about the QA procedures and practices in place. It was also mentioned that the SER preparation helped ASU in discovering further areas that still need improvement in the institution. One significant finding of this practice, the Panel was told in interviews with staff, was the need to move from just focusing on compliance to trying to find and share best practices and identifying areas of improvement.

While the Panel acknowledges the existence of formal review and monitoring mechanisms that are systematically implemented, it notes that these reviews have not included the overall QMS which was developed nearly five years ago. In other words, these mechanisms address individual components of this system instead of the system as a whole. This observation was confirmed during interviews, but the Panel also learnt that the University intends to conduct a comprehensive review of its QMS following the completion of the Institutional review. The Panel was also informed during interviews that an external auditing firm audited the University in 2015-2016 and that the ASU believes its time now to have another external audit carried out. The Panel concurs with this intention and believes that the system will benefit a lot from such a comprehensive review.

The University portal is one of the main channels whereby QAA polices are made available for and accessible by ASU stakeholders. Key points from the ASU policies have been integrated in either the Staff Handbook or the Student Handbook. In addition, the Panel established that all ASU key documents, policies, and regulations documents are disseminated *via* different means of communication such as social media, emails, ASU website, the President's News Digest and induction programmes. Awareness workshops on key policies and regulations such as workshops on the Quality Assurance Manual; Annual Programme Review and Benchmarking were organised to discuss those policies that require detailed explanations or have undergone a significant change. This was further confirmed during interviews with different stakeholders who were found to be aware of the policies and procedures relevant to them. Overall, the Panel is satisfied that the requirements for this Indicator are met. .

Recommendation(s)

- Take necessary actions to ensure that quality assurance activities, including, internal quality audits are coordinated and conducted by specialized entities in order to avoid any potential overlap and confusion with other entities in the University.

Indicator 8: Benchmarking and Surveys

Benchmarking and surveys take place on a regular basis; the results of which inform planning, decision-making and enhancement.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU has a detailed Benchmarking Policy in place that was reviewed and updated in 2018-2019. Moreover, workshops are conducted to train staff on how to conduct benchmarking as part of their professional development activities. The Panel found evidence on comprehensive formal benchmarking activities that have been conducted with two local institutions, namely AMA International University-Bahrain and the University of Bahrain; a number of regional Universities such as Philadelphia University(Jordan), Al-Ahliyyah Amman University (Jordan), Al-Yarmouk University (Jordan) and, Al-Zaytuna University (Jordan), Al-Zarqaa (Jordan), Sharjah University (UAE), Al-Ain University for Science and Technology University (UAE) and Gulf University for Science (GUST) (Kuwait); and one international University, namely LSBU.

Moreover, the majority of these activities have been made based on formal agreements with these institutions for the purpose of conducting benchmarking activities and they took place in two cycles: on annual basis and on periodic basis (5-year). Nevertheless, the Panel notes, with the exception of benchmarking with GUST, addressing library issues and services, and with LSBU, addressing few institutional aspects and some academic affairs, all these activities are exclusively academic in nature, (i.e. academic programme benchmarking activities). In fact, section 7 of ASU's Benchmarking Policy itself clearly states 'this section applies for academic benchmarking activities only'. No refence is made for benchmarking other aspects of the University's work throughout this Policy. Hence, the Panel recommends that ASU should expand its current scope of benchmarking activity by including other aspects of the institution's operations such as administrative affairs, research activity and community service and engagement as core functions of the University.

The SER states that these benchmarking activities have contributed to programme development and enhancement during their annual and periodic reviews. The programme benchmarking cover specific aspects selected by the programme team. The outputs of this process are reflected in Benchmarking Report, which are then reflected in either the Academic Programme Review Reports or the Programme Reflective Analysis Report. During interviews with HoDs and staff, they confirmed that benchmarking helped them in developing the study plans and research methods courses. The Panel also found evidence from the documents provided and during interviews that benchmarking results are discussed by the concerned entities such as college councils, programme coordinators and faculty members to implement the necessary changes.

According to the SER, the Measurement & Evaluation Unit (MEU) is 'responsible for gathering feedback from stakeholders' by means of focus group discussions and surveys, assisted by the Information Communications Technology and Knowledge Management (ICT & KM) Directorate. ASU uses several tools for collecting data related to different aspects of its operation and feedback from different target stakeholders. The New Student Experience Questionnaire in both languages, Arabic and English, for example collects feedback from new and transfer students regarding their first semester experience in the University, in terms of their overall satisfaction with the learning environment. Course Evaluation Survey elicits student feedback and perceptions of teaching, assessment and feedback, as well as organization and management of the course. The Panel learnt during interviews with students that this survey is an online compulsory tool conducted at the end of each semester and represents an appropriate opportunity for students to provide feedback on various aspects of course teaching. The same applies to Student Satisfaction Survey, which elicits feedback on students' satisfaction with various aspects including facilities and resources, approachability of staff, as well as other extracurricular activities of the University. Another tool, i.e. Exit Survey for Graduating Students, seeks students' perception of various aspects of University life, e.g. advising, admission & registration, curriculum & instruction, facilities & learning resources and their overall programme experience. A similar survey, namely Alumni Satisfaction Survey, measures alumni's satisfaction with the delivery of the programme, in relation to their current work preparation. Moreover, Employers' Evaluation of ASU Graduates is another tool which ASU uses for measuring its graduates' standard, preparedness for labour market and their performance on the job as well as the employers' confidence in these alumni. Master students' feedback on teaching, assessment, feedback and support, as well as organization and management of the thesis course, on the other hand, is collected through a specific survey called the Thesis Course Evaluation Survey. And finally, ASU staff's opinion about the various aspects of their institutional life is explored through a comprehensive survey called Staff Satisfaction Survey while satisfaction with regards to the services provided by QAA Centre is elicited through the Staff Satisfaction Survey with its Services, which was specifically designed for this purpose. According to the SER, and as confirmed during the site visit interviews, all student-related surveys are made available through the Student Information System (SIS).

The Measurement & Evaluation Unit is the main entity in charge of analysing surveys and sending their results to the concerned departments, which in turn, are expected to 'evaluate the feedback, respond accordingly and where necessary formulate an action plan and monitor implementation'. All these surveys are available on ASU's ICT system, which is a comprehensive platform for various functions and electronic services. From the documents provided and during interviews, the Panel established that these surveys are analysed thoroughly, and their results are conveyed to the relevant entities for further consideration and consequent actions. Students during interviews confirmed to the Panel that their feedback is well-attended to by the University. Establishing the Student Clubs' Room, establishing an on-campus shop, changing the catering service provider, and replacing one of the course instructors

were among the examples of changes that the Panel heard during interviews, in response to these surveys. Overall, the Panel is satisfied that the requirements for this Indicator are satisfied.

Recommendation(s)

- Expand the current scope of benchmarking activity by including other aspects of the institution's operations such as administrative affairs, research activity and community service and engagement as core functions of the University.

Indicator 9: Security of Learner Records and Certification

Formalized arrangements are in place to ensure the integrity of learner records and certification which are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU uses the SIS system for managing its students' records. The system is owned by the Admission and Registration and is part of a comprehensive electronic ICT system to which 'new functions have been introduced over the years', as confirmed in the SER. The SIS is guided by a set of processes and procedures introduced in one comprehensive document, namely Admission and Registration Manual. Moreover, there is a procedure in place to verify the results of students who successfully complete the requirements of their programmes. This procedure involves programme, department and college councils and thereafter the students' name list with the supporting evidence, are presented to the University Council to review and officially confer the degrees. Certificates of eligible students are signed by the designated member of Admissions and Registration, the relevant Dean and the University President. These arrangements have been verified and confirmed during the Panel's interviews with relevant administrative staff as well as interviews with students during the site visit. The Panel also confirmed during interviews and the campus tour what the SER states about the SIS being supportive to 'enquiry and reporting requirements of ASU management (for planning and oversight), academic staff (for academic monitoring and interventions) and students (for self-service) and it now links with ASU's accounting system for fees payment.'

During the campus tour and interviews, the Panel was informed that examination papers prepared by course instructors are put in sealed envelopes, handed over to the examination committees in their colleges to be kept in a special designated room called the Examination Committee Room, few days before the examination date, to be collected by the invigilators on the examination day. During its visit to a sample of these rooms, however, the Panel found out that these rooms are just like any other staff offices with some empty file cabinets and cupboards inside. On the other hand, and following the official announcement of examination results, these envelops, along with all marked students' answer sheets, are kept either in the instructors' or in the HoDs' office as a final destination. The Panel also heard repeated confirmation of this arrangement during different interviews with academic staff. In the Panel's view, these current arrangements in handling examination papers and their answer sheets after

examinations are vulnerable and may pose potential risks to examination security and to student's answer sheets should a need arises afterwards to access them, as for example for a grade appeal. Hence, the Panel recommends that ASU should take necessary actions, to ensure the security of all its examination papers and proper access to students' marked work.

Access to the SIS is secured with data verification/validation processes and different levels of security. Data and records management are controlled by the set of procedures provided in the Admission and Registration Manual. On examining these procedures, the Panel was satisfied that they ensure secured and strict safeguard to students records and data. Furthermore, staff confirmed during interviews that access to the SIS is controlled by username and passwords with different levels of privileges and authorization. During the campus tour to the venues where the physical students' records are kept, the Panel observed the neat and secured way with which these records are handled and stored. There is a key-code system and a fingerprint recognition system to further ensure the safety and security of these venues. State of-art file cabinets are used to keep these records neatly arranged and with clear classification labels and codes. All these measures are supplemented by a robust mechanism for issuing and scrutinizing various physical students' records. Even the certificate paper was replaced by one which is marked with invisible ultraviolet ink as a further security measure. In addition, the Panel notes that there is a functional procedure in place for daily, weekly and monthly back up operations for all electronic student records by ICT & KM, where all these backups are stored in a remote off-campus server as a Data Recovery site. There is also a detailed recovery plan in place. These security measures of the electronic student data were also confirmed during the ICT demonstration presented to the Panel during the site visit. The Panel also established, during interviews and from reviewing the evidence, that the ASU academic staff receive a detailed induction on the utilization of the various functions of this system during their orientation programme when joining the University.

Similar to all ASU operations, the two entities responsible for handling and keeping students' records at ASU, i.e. ICT & KM Directorate and Admission and Registration are subject to regular internal audits by QAA Centre and Internal Audit Unit. The QAA Center audit report of ICT & KM 2018-2019 included a set of recommendations and improvement actions with certain KPIs and timeframe for implementation. The on-site ICT demonstration session the Panel was provided with during the site visit revealed the measures in place and intended enhancements to this system in general as well as to functions related to students records and data security in particular. Furthermore, ICT has a comprehensive survey through which it measures users' satisfaction with the services provided. The results of this survey are analyzed and then incorporated in a detailed action plans to address these findings According to the SER, an audit was conducted in the academic year 2017-2018 and consequently, the Registration Office developed an action plan that included some areas for improvement. One of these improvements was developing a portal for accessing, on a read-only basis records of ASU students in UK partner programmes. The replacement of certificate paper mentioned above and the use of an invisible ultraviolet ink as a further security measure is another example of improvements inspired by these reviews. The Panel also learned during interviews that ASU plans to

include reviewing procedures for entering incomplete examination grades and changes resulting from appeals on its current SIS system. Overall, the Panel is satisfied that the requirements for this Indicator are satisfied.

Recommendation(s)
• Take necessary actions to ensure the security of all its examination papers and proper access to students' marked work.

Judgement:	The Institution **addresses** Standard 2: Quality Assurance

Standard 3

Learning Resources, ICT and Infrastructure

The institution has appropriate and sufficient learning resources, ICT and physical infrastructure to function effectively as a HEI, and which support the academic and administrative operations of the institution.

Indicator 10: Learning Resources

The institution provides sustained access to sufficient information and learning resources to achieve its mission and fully support all of its academic programmes.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU has a library that operates under the University bylaws and is guided by a policy that was last revised in May 2019. These bylaws and policy detail all aspects related to the library operations. In addition, there is a committee with clear terms of reference that is responsible for directing and monitoring the library operations. This committee is called the Library and Learning Resources Committee (LLRC) and includes as members the Director of Library and Information Services as well as representatives from the different colleges. This committee directly reports to the University Management Committee. Examination of the library committee meetings' minutes as well as interviews with staff confirmed the active role played by this committee with respect to ensuring smooth and appropriate operation of the library.

A tour of the library facility during the site visit indicated that it is well-equipped in terms of furniture and technology hardware and software, in a way that suits users' learning needs. It also includes spaces for individual and group study. There are, in addition, library specialists who, according to the interviewed students and staff, are available and helpful in addressing their queries and attending to their learning and research requests. The library is open every day of the week from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm except for Fridays when it is open from 2:00 pm to 8:00 pm. It holds 30,000 books and 63 printed journals and has annual subscriptions to e-books and electronic databases including Avery Index, Ebrary, Arado, Emerald, EBSCOhost. These databases can be accessed on and off campus, as was confirmed by student and staff interviews. Nonetheless, the Panel noticed that there was a considerable number of outdated books in the library (e.g. in the MIS specialty) and thus it recommends that ASU should review its Library textbook collection to ensure their currency, especially in the rapidly changing areas of disciplines. The library also adheres to the university's inclusion policy by having in place arrangements for students with mobility issues, visual impairments, and other special needs. These physical arrangements were double-checked during the Panel's site visit tour and were found to be appropriate for meeting the needs of this group of students.

With respect to ensuring that there are adequate library resources that meet the needs and the learning requirements of ASU's programmes, the New Programme Development Policy stipulates that in the

proposal for any new programme, information should be included on the library resources required to meet the proposed programme's needs. This proposal with the library resources specified in it must be endorsed first by the relevant college Dean before being sent to the University Curriculum Committee and then to the University Council for approvals. Compliance with this process was confirmed through interviews with the library administrative and academic staff. In addition, as per this policy and the SER, the LLRC is one of the several committees that must endorse this proposal after ensuring that its resource implications are considered well in advance. Interviews with staff and a review of minutes of the LLRC meetings indicated ASU's efforts in ensuring that the library resources meet the needs and requirements of the programmes and course offerings. They also confirmed, as stated in the SER, that ad hoc requests for library resources by individual faculty members or departments are submitted through a specific form, that must first be approved by the relevant Programme Leader and the College Dean before being assessed by the library Director for budget requirements.

To further ensure that the library resources adequately meet the programmes' requirements, ASU has recently implemented, in 2018-2019, two comprehensive reviews of its library collections and subscriptions. One of these reviews involved mapping of the library holdings to programme and course specifications; whereas, the second involved an assessment of the library learning resources in light of the needs of the university's six research themes. The first review resulted in a comprehensive Excel workbook comprised of sheets demonstrating the mapping of library resources to courses of each programme on offer. As for the second review, it resulted in a list of resources relevant to the institutional research themes, which was provided to the Deanship of Research and Graduate Studies. When asked about these reviews in the site visit interviews, the staff confirmed that these were conducted by the QAA Centre.

The SER mentions that the ASU library has been formally benchmarked against that of GUST in Kuwait in 2016. The Panel was able to view, as evidence, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two universities as well as the benchmarking report, and concluded that the scope of the benchmarking exercise had been comprehensive, as can also be deduced from the list of recommendations that had resulted from the benchmarking. The scope of the benchmarking covered among other things: library collections, acquisitions, cataloguing, reference and information literacy, automation, and marketing and outreach.

ASU conducts a mandatory semester-based orientation for new students, which includes an introduction to the library. In addition, the library organizes induction sessions for new staff members in general. This was confirmed through interviews with students and staff, who clarified that these induction sessions are considered general ones in comparison to other more specialized induction sessions that the University organizes for students and academic staff. Specifically, students attend library induction sessions on a semester basis, in which they are provided with hands-on training on how to utilize the library services and to access different types of resources, whether printed or online. As for the academic staff, there is a dedicated induction day, which includes practical training on

searching the library collection and electronic databases and on the use of the plagiarism detection software Turnitin. Both staff and students confirmed during interviews that they were provided with a survey form at the end of the induction for the purpose of evaluating its effectiveness. The evaluation report of the library induction day indicates a high satisfaction rate with the information and activities provided.

As mentioned in the SER, ASU collects feedback on the library services and resources through a variety of ways. Among them is the Library Survey for students and staff, which is regularly reviewed by the LLRC; the Student Satisfaction Survey and the Graduating Students' Exit Survey, which are distributed annually and include items on library provision; the SOS system, through which students can submit queries, complaints, and feedback about any university service including those of the library; and finally *via* the fora provided through the Student Experience Committee and the LLRC, where comments and feedback on the library are shared and discussed. An examination of the meetings' minutes of these committees confirmed to the Panel that students' and staff feedback on the library and its services is sufficiently covered in their discussions and that improvement actions are planned out accordingly. In addition, a thorough presentation on the information systems available at the University confirmed to the Panel the effectiveness of the SOS system in receiving, and conveying through the right channels, students' feedback on all institutional facilities and services, including the library.

The SER claims that every semester progress updates are provided by the library and used to feed information into the Institution's Strategy Implementation Reports, which include information about the progress made in the different operations of the University. Interviews with staff confirmed that, in the preparation of these progress updates, the library takes into consideration feedback collected from the different surveys and committees. Likewise, the same point applies to the Operational Plan prepared by the library every year, as mentioned in the SER and confirmed through interviews.

The SER gives one example of a students' feedback that was acted upon and this relates to how well the library staff respond to students' questions and enquiries. Since this particular indicator on the Library Survey had received a relatively low score (3.5 out of 5), some improvements were introduced by ASU such as: training the library staff in communication and customer services skills, provision of a help desk in the library, holding regular student workshops on library services, and posting instructions and announcements on the library electronic screen. These improvements were also mentioned by staff and students during the tour of the library. Hence, the Panel is satisfied that the requirements of this Indicator are addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- Review the University's library textbook collection to ensure their currency, especially in the rapidly changing areas of disciplines.

Indicator 11: ICT

The institution provides coordinated ICT resources for the effective support of student learning.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU ICT & KM Directorate is guided by the ICT & KM bylaw and reports directly to the VP for Administration, Finance & Community Engagement. The ICT & KM bylaw sets out the objectives and the services of the Directorate. Whereas, the ICT & KM policy, which was last revised in January 2017, describes in more detail the responsibilities of the Directorate, as well as the procedures, rules, and regulations related to its main areas of provision, which are: KM, application development, and technical support. As mentioned in the SER and confirmed during interviews with staff, the monitoring of the Directorate's operations is carried out by the LLRC, as this committee is responsible for reviewing all planning, implementation, and budget allocation related to ICT and learning resources. The Director of the ICT & KM is a member of the LLRC and thus can directly communicate to this committee all the necessary information it needs about the services provided by his/her Directorate. As for how the Directorate communicates its role, responsibilities, and services to students and staff, this is carried out through having dedicated pages for the Directorate on the ASU website. Moreover, the induction sessions for all newcomers, whether students or staff, include an introduction to the Directorate's resources, services, and staff members, as was mentioned in the SER and the induction documents, and confirmed at the interviews with staff and students. As in the case of the library, there are evaluation surveys administered on a yearly basis to evaluate students' and staff's satisfaction with the services provided by the ICT & KM Directorate. As concluded from staff interviews, these surveys are conducted and analysed by the QAA Centre at ASU and then their results are utilized by the Directorate for improvements. One example of feedback from members of staff that was acted upon by the ICT & KM Directorate relates to the development of an in-house oracle-based system in which all the operational plans in the University are integrated. This system was developed at the beginning of the academic year 2018-2019 and once it was developed, the concerned staff units and departments were trained on its use.

ASU has an annual ICT Operational Plan, which is set at the beginning of every academic year. This plan is mapped to the University's strategic objectives and KPIs and includes information, such as: the ICT objectives with related KPIs, timeframe for their fulfilment, the responsible parties, and the budget needed. As confirmed in staff interviews, the Operational Plan helps ensure that ICT resources are planned for in advance, especially for the provision of new learning programmes/courses. In addition, the ICT & KM Directorate has a disaster recovery plan, according to which data is backed up daily, weekly, and monthly and is stored on servers in different locations on-and-off campus. Moreover, as mentioned in the disaster recovery plan and explained in interviews, ASU is in its initial steps to implement a cloud disaster recovery system through an outsourced local computer services company.

Finally, the ICT & KM also oversees the planning and implementation of the security of the SIS as well as all other available systems at ASU, as confirmed through the detailed ICT systems' presentation provided to the Panel during the site visit.

The ICT & KM Directorate is also in charge of planning for ICT physical resources and for their maintenance and/or replacement. In accordance with the ICT & KM policy, the Directorate's staff carry out regular 'health checks' on the University's hardware and software and, then, develop a maintenance/replacement schedule based on priority and on purchase or renewal dates. Interviews with ICT staff indicated this as well as what was stated in the SER, with regards to facilitating the purchase of new computers and other peripheral devices through the Directorate's Annual Operational Plan and its financial resources requirements.

As explained in the SER and confirmed in interviews, at the end of every semester, the ICT & KM Directorate prepares updates on the progress of its operations, which feed information into the University's Strategy Implementation Reports. The Panel reviewed the Strategy Implementation Report of 2017-2018 and found evidence of the ICT & KM Directorate's progress updates' contribution to the strategic objectives of the University. Finally, periodic quality audits are conducted on the Directorate's operations, where each audit usually results in a report followed with an action plan for addressing areas of improvement as needed. The Panel had a chance to examine a sample of these action plans and found them fit for purpose.

The ICT & KM Directorate has up-to-date registers, which include information on all software installed across ASU as well as lists of all hardware and peripheral devices (e.g. computers, data show projectors, printers, copiers, cameras). Currently, the University has in possession 545 desktop computers that are all networked wirelessly, and there are interactive data show projectors in all classrooms. The Panel confirmed the availability of these hardware devices during its tour of the ASU facilities and had the opportunity to also examine and inquire about the available software. In result, the Panel noticed that ASU has a range of programmes/applications varied between some that are for administrative use and others for students' and staff academic use. These include Office 365, SharePoint, OneDrive, Skype for Business, Microsoft Outlook, E-Library System, Moodle Learning Management System (LMS), Turnitin, and other specialist software, such as: SPSS, MATLAB, Computer Aided Design, and 3D printing and scanning software. This is in addition to anti-virus applications with appropriate firewalls and anti-hacking software, as stated in the SER. The University additionally has subscriptions to regional and international electronic databases, such as Emerald and EBSCOhost, with some Arabic databases as well, that aid students and staff in accessing a plethora of resources for their academic and research purposes. During the Library tour, the Panel noticed that these databases are organized based on the programme offerings at the University, to facilitate the search of the e-resources.

As claimed in the SER, the planning of ICT facilities and resources at ASU takes into consideration the provision of adequate access to all users including those with mobility difficulties and/or visual impairments. The Panel observed such provision during the site visit tour and noticed that special

attention is given to how the ICT facilities are set up and to how the computers are customized with special features to accommodate the visually impaired. The Panel therefore acknowledges ASU's inclusive approach in planning and setting up its ICT facilities.

As stated in the SER and confirmed during the site tour and interviews with staff and students, staff members of the Technical Support Unit of the ICT & KM Directorate are regularly available to assist technology users as needed. Their unit is also responsible for keeping the technical infrastructure of the University up-to-date and fit for purpose, through the regular provision of technical support, maintenance, and protection of the ICT network, hardware and software and other related systems across the University. In addition, a helpdesk service is also available to receive and respond to troubleshooting requests of users.

As mentioned in the SER, ASU collects feedback on the ICT services and resources in several ways. Among them is the ICT & KM survey for students and staff, which is distributed at the end of each semester to inform short-term action plans and improvements. In addition, the New Students' Experience Survey, which includes a section on ICT provision, is utilized to elicit students' feedback on their first year of study. There is also the Student Satisfaction Survey and the Graduating Students' Exit Survey; the SOS system, through which students can submit queries, complaints, and feedback about any university services including those related to ICT & KM; and finally the fora provided through the Student Experience Committee and the Library and Learning Resources Committee where comments and feedback on the ICT & KM services are shared and discussed. The Panel had the opportunity to examine the minutes of meetings of these committees as well as a sample of survey analysis reports and was able to confirm that feedback on ICT collected from users is being utilized in the development of relevant action plans. Moreover, as concluded from staff and student interviews, the Panel notes that users can also provide feedback through a variety of ASU's social media channels.

ASU has a Management Information System (MIS), which was developed and designed in-house and which went live in 2017-2018. As mentioned earlier in this Report, the Panel was provided with a thorough presentation on the different ASU electronic systems in place, among them the MIS, which comprises two parts: The Institutional KPIs Dashboard and the Decision Support System (DSS). Data from different sources (databases, the SIS, the LMS, the HR system, stakeholders' surveys, progress updates from committees and different Directorates on operational plans) is utilized by these two MIS parts. As explained in the presentation, the KPIs Dashboard collates data on progress made in relation to the institution's strategic KPIs, to assist ASU management in planning and interventions accordingly. Whereas the DSS provides an overview of a wide range of data, that supports managerial and academic decision-making and interventions. Both parts of the MIS generate reports for ASU management, to help relevant parties in monitoring progress and related decision-making processes. Access to the MIS is restricted to specific personnel only and such protected access is ensured through some security features set up by the Technical Support Unit of the ICT & KM Directorate, that mainly include user category access arrangements and multi-level authorizations and permissions, as explained in both the

presentation and the SER. The Panel notes with appreciation the different electronic systems in place at ASU and finds them effective in supporting the management of the core functions, operations, and decision-making processes across the Institution. Hence, the Panel is of the view that the requirements of this Indicators are addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- None

Indicator 12: Infrastructure

The institution provides physical infrastructure that is safe and demonstrably adequate for the conduct of its academic programmes.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU has a Procurement and Logistic Services Department that is a part of the Directorate of Administration & Finance and is responsible for ensuring that all the ASU premises and physical infrastructure are well-maintained. The financial requirements for the provision and maintenance of the infrastructure are included in the Annual Operational Plan of the Directorate of Administration & Finance. The responsibilities of the Procurement and Logistics Department, as explained during interviews with administrative staff, include maintaining a register of all physical infrastructure and equipment with their descriptions and quantities, brands, and locations within the ASU campus. This register covers equipment and resources available in classrooms, computer and engineering laboratories, and art and design studios. The Department also maintains a schedule for the maintenance and upgrading of all University's assets. The work of the Procurement and Logistic Services Department is supported by the Facilities Management Committee, which meets biannually and includes as members the Director of Administration and Finance, the Head of Procurement, the Maintenance Supervisor, and the Health and Safety Supervisor. The main task of this committee, as explained in the SER and in interviews, is to oversee all matters related to ASU premises, infrastructure, and facilities. Every semester, progress updates on procurement, logistics, and maintenance of the University equipment and infrastructure are provided by the Directorate of Administration and Finance and used to feedback information into the institution's Strategy Implementation Reports

The present campus, to which the ASU has moved in 2013, is fully owned by the University. The facilities it encompasses, as it became clear to the Panel during the tour, are all well-equipped with necessary furniture, equipment, and technology. In addition to classrooms, it includes the following: student study spaces; a student lounge; a students' activity centre; snack outlets; staff offices; a staff room; meeting rooms; design workshops and studios; computer, language, engineering, and specialized science laboratories; a mock trial room; a library; and a state-of-the-art lecture theatre.

All of the available facilities and spaces at ASU are fully compliant with the HEC requirements for buildings and facilities of HEIs, and their physical capacities are mapped to current and projected student numbers. This was confirmed during interviews and the submitted evidence.

So far, for all the University activities, excluding non-academic sports activities, ASU has not found it necessary to utilize any additional premises. In the case of sports activities, however, ASU has made agreements with external local clubs to allow its students to utilize their courts and fields. At the same time, ASU is currently in the process of building on its campus a large and all-encompassing complex of sporting and recreational facilities. The plan to construct this sports complex was confirmed to the Panel during interviews with various ASU key stakeholders.

ASU has a clear Health and Safety Policy which was last revised in January 2017. As confirmed in interviews, the implementation of this policy is overseen by the Department of Administrative Affairs. In addition to being responsible for the campus environment, in general, this department is responsible for providing health and first aid services through two qualified university nurses (one full-time and one part-time) and for campus security through a subcontracted security service provider. The security and safety procedures of the University ensure controlled access to its campus through the monitored entrance gates and access to the academic building through turnstile/digital control, which the Panel had the opportunity to view during the site visit tour.

As confirmed through interviews with staff, the department's Health and Safety Supervisor plays a major role in communicating information and guidelines on health and safety to all stakeholders, mainly through the staff induction and student orientation sessions and through displays of health and safety rules around campus, particularly in the laboratories. Safety training is also provided for staff and registers of hazardous substances are stored with the laboratory supervisors as was observed in the site visit tour. There are also regular safety drills conducted on campus and training sessions about how to handle emergencies and hazards through safe practices. Additionally, a 'health day' is organized annually to raise awareness about health and safety procedures.

As mentioned in the SER and explained during interviews, ASU collects, through the Procurement and Logistics Department, feedback related to staff and student satisfaction with its infrastructure in several ways. Among them is the New Students' Experience Survey, which includes questions on the physical environment. There is also the Student Satisfaction Survey and the Graduating Students' Exit Survey; the SOS system; social media channels; and finally, the fora provided through the Student Experience Committee and the Facilities Management Committee, where comments and feedback on the facilities and matters related to the infrastructure are shared and discussed. By examining the analysis reports of these surveys and the minutes of these committees' meetings, the Panel confirmed that feedback of students and staff is being appropriately taken into consideration and responded to. One example that was mentioned in interviews with students and staff, of an action made as a result of feedback collected from the different stakeholders, was in relation to changing the cafeteria catering company at the end

of the academic year 2017-2018. Hence, the Panel is of the view that the requirements of this Indicator are addressed.

Recommendation(s)
• None

Standard Judgement:	The Institution **addresses** Standard 3: Learning Resources, ICT and Infrastructure

The institution has a comprehensive academic planning system with a clear management structure and processes in place to ensure the quality of the teaching and learning programmes and their delivery.

Indicator 13: Management of Teaching and Learning Programmes

There are effective mechanisms to ensure the quality of teaching and learning provision across the institution.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU's academic plan is included in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS). This is based on the University's Strategic Plan in which one of the three central strategic objectives is Teaching and Learning. The Strategic Plan outlines four key priorities of: Management of Programmes and Curricula; Faculty Development; Enhancement of Programmes; and Technology Enhanced Learning. The academic plan shows how relevant aspects of the Strategic Plan Objective are reflected in the LTAS and also how they relate to the other two Strategic Plan Objectives of Research and Community Engagement.

The LTAS contains the aim to 'enable all students to have an excellent learning experience and to improve continually the quality of that experience in the light of changes in student needs. It …recognises the crucial role of teaching staff and learning support staff in the implementation of the strategy, and the importance of supporting and recognising teaching excellence'. There is also a LTAS goal :'To educate our students in their chosen discipline to become confident, critical, creative, adaptable, articulate and aspiring graduates'. Together these statements represent a philosophy of teaching and learning which is appropriate for the University's size and mission. Furthermore, the Panel acknowledges that the philosophy is a holistic one, that takes into account not only student learning and teaching, but also student support and the learning environment, and how these relate to other University Strategic Plan Objectives.

The LTAS gives seven guiding principles for how it is to be applied. Again, these are holistic and integrated in nature, and characterise the teaching and learning experience as a partnership between staff and students, demanding commitment from both parties. The LTAS also provides a clear description of the student learning experience and sees this as a framework within which all provision is to be designed and delivered. It identifies seven strategic priorities which are mapped back to the University's Strategic Plan Key Priorities in the key objective areas of Teaching and Learning or Student Support.

The LTAS contains an implementation plan which links the seven priority areas to the Strategic Plan, and lists the University's initiatives which Colleges will be involved in. The implementation plan is overseen by the VP for Academic Affairs & Development who chairs the University Learning and Teaching Committee. Priority areas are taken forward by working groups, some of which are expected to have

student representation. College Councils are expected to be closely involved in the implementation and monitoring of the LTAS. The Panel saw evidence showing the progress made in the Priority Areas, and the evidence that the University uses to demonstrate this. Staff whom the Panel met in interviews were familiar with the LTAS and its initiatives. The University's Learning and Teaching Committee oversees implementation of the LTAS and Minutes of that Committee which the Panel saw recorded discussions of this. The current strategy was approved by the BoT in 2015, and this was the first LTAS designed to integrate with the University's Strategic Plan. It also underwent revision in 2017. The Panel concludes that the University has an academic plan which is implemented, monitored and reviewed.

Roles and responsibilities of those involved in the management of academic programmes are set out in the University's Bylaws. All of these roles are defined either in the Job Descriptions Handbook or the Quality Assurance Manual. Programme Teams, led by the Programme leader, play a crucial role in making sure that the programme is delivered according to the Programme Specification and to the requirements of outside bodies.

The SER notes that academic management structures were found to be appropriate in the external scrutiny provided by HEC Accreditation (2019) and National Qualification Framework (NQF) listing (2016). It also notes that a QAA Coordinating Group is responsible for overseeing arrangements at College level. The Panel learned in interviews that this Group is organised by the QAA Centre, meets monthly and includes all the QAA Centre staff plus QAA representatives from the Colleges. In addition, the SER states that there are specific management arrangements for the University's collaborative programmes, which include the Foundation Director, programme leaders, ASU International Partnerships Office Manager, and the partner University link tutors. The Panel verified these arrangements in the relevant staff interviews.

The University's LTAS embodies its Learning and Teaching Policy. The aims and guiding principles of the LTAS were described above, along with the University's mechanisms for its implementation, monitoring and review. These form an over-arching policy base which is supported by numerous other policies related to learning and teaching such as: The Academic Advising Policy; Students at Risk Policy; Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism Policy; Student Internship Policy; External Examiner Policy; Monitoring and Review of Programmes Policy; New Programme Development Policy; Benchmarking Policy; and Programme Advisory Board Policy. This comprehensive suite of policies covers all aspects of programme design and review, as well as student support and guidance, and assessment. The policies are clearly written, dated and version controlled. The Panel notes with appreciation that the LTAS and accompanying policies reflect a holistic understanding of quality assurance and an institution which is making progress towards establishing a quality culture.

Students in all programmes must take an internship course. The SER states that the internship is a prerequisite for graduation, and that students only start the internship when certain conditions – such as having achieved 90 hours credit and completing all core courses – have been met. Students already employed may, with appropriate approvals, carry out their internship in their employment situation. The

management of internships is guided by the University's Student Internship Policy. The version provided was approved by the BoT in 2015. According to the University's normal expectations, which is for policies to be reviewed every two years, it should have been reviewed in 2017 and the Panel recommends the University to update the policy as soon as possible.

Internships are arranged at the College level by the College Internship Unit, and there are Academic Internship Supervisors in each College. The Internship Policy sets out the key responsibilities of those involved, guidelines for the student while in the internship, how employers are identified, guidelines for writing the student final report, how the internship will be assessed, and so on. The Academic Training Supervisor is responsible for visiting the student on internship. In interviews with various participants, the Panel learned that although these are indeed the arrangements included in the Policy, nevertheless there was some inconsistency in the way they were applied across all internships. For example, the Panel learned that not all employers were contacted before the placement started, and that some employers draw up the Internship work programme, rather than the College Internship unit. The Panel recommends that the University should ensure that the Internship Policy is reviewed and updated as soon as possible and applied consistently and effectively across all internships. The Panel recognises that the QAA Centre quality audit of the Internship, carried out in 2017-2018, together with the recommendations and good practice identified, will be a valuable input in addressing this recommendation.

Regular mechanisms for improvement of the internship experience include a student evaluation form and an employer feedback form, which is a checklist covering the student's fitness to the job, leadership skills, team skills, communication and language skills. The employer feedback form, however, does not ask for comments on the effectiveness of the internship itself and hence the Panel encourages the University to review the form to ensure that it supports improvement of the internship programme. ASU also provide Programme Advisory Boards with opportunities to comment on internships and industrial experience, and this was confirmed in the Panel's interviews with various participants.

The University has several processes in place which contribute to its evaluation and improvement of teaching and learning. These processes include the annual course evaluation, course portfolios, annual programme reviews, periodic programme reviews, external examiners, student surveys, and peer observation of teaching. Processes for evaluating teaching and learning are overseen by the University's QAA Council, which the President chairs. The QAA Centre plays a central role in managing the University's QMS and guides colleges in the conduct of annual internal programme evaluation and enhancement. The Centre produces an annual Operational Plan and end of semester progress updates. Various activities are included: audit of quality assurance processes, annual and periodic programme reviews, compliance with external requirements, and arrangements for accreditation.

In its interviews with staff the Panel heard examples of the QAA Centre's activities in auditing the University's academic activities, such as the audit of course portfolios, and the audit of Registration and Admissions. Furthermore, the University provides various professional development activities for staff

that relate to evaluation of teaching and learning such as an awareness session on the Quality Assurance Manual, Course Portfolio workshop, Annual Programme Review, and Benchmarking workshop.

Where changes to a programme are required there are detailed processes for minor and major changes to courses. The SER states that where significant changes to a programme are identified, it may need to go through the University's New Programme Development process. In interviews with students, the Panel learned that their voice was heard and that suggestions such as the need for more skills courses had been taken up by the University. In its interviews with external examiners the Panel also learned that suggestions for improvements (such as updating the curriculum and additional software needs) had been made by the examiner and acted upon by the University. The SER also states that there are several mechanisms for the sharing of good practice to enable continuous improvement of teaching and learning. These include opportunities to become 'Advance HE' (formerly known as Higher Education Academy) Fellows, in-house conferences, and staff development sessions.

Overall, the Panel acknowledges that the University has a thorough set of processes for evaluating learning and teaching, backed up by clear documentation and reflecting an integrated, holistic approach to quality assurance. Hence, the Panel is stratified that the requirements of this Indicators are addressed.

Recommendation(s)
• Ensure that the Internship Policy is reviewed and updated as soon as possible and applied consistently and effectively across all internships.

Indicator 14: Admissions

The institution has appropriate and rigorously enforced admission criteria for all its programmes.

Judgement: Addressed

The University produces a range of useful and accessible information relating to academic programmes on its website. Documents available on the website include information about credit transfer, language of programmes, and admissions requirements. The one-click 'Apply Now' button takes enquirers directly to a Student Applications Guide, Student handbook, fee information, and online applications forms, amongst other items. The Student Application Guide states the University's policy of encouraging students with special needs to apply to the University and directs them to the Deanship of Student Affairs.

The SER states that the University Bylaws make clear provision for credit transfer. The University's Credit Transfer policy dates from 2019. It states that the overarching principle of the process is to 'verify whether the student's experience at the other institution is appropriately commensurate with the experience of students in similar programmes offered by ASU'. The process is managed by Admissions and Registration and a description of the process is also included in the Admissions and Registration Manual. A College Credit Transfer Committee assesses transfer requests and after approval by the Dean they are also checked

by Admissions and Registration. A QAA Centre's audit of Admissions and Registration that was carried out in 2018 found the Deanship compliant with University Bylaws, procedures and good practice concerning credit transfer processes. In interviews the Panel met students who had applied to the University through credit transfer and learned that the process operated as intended.

Admission of students is the responsibility of the Directorate of Admissions and Registration whose first responsibility is 'To welcome prospective students, help them fill out the application forms for joining the University, and to screen applications for admissions purpose.' The processes are rigorously enforced by the Directorate of Admissions and Registration. Admission Criteria and expected knowledge competencies are set out in the University's Admissions and Registration Manual.

The SER states that the University's admission processes completely align with HEC guidance and are consistent with those of other HEIs in Bahrain. The NQF Listing report found that the University met Standard 1 for Access, Transfer and Progression. The University undertook an extensive institutional benchmarking exercise, including admission criteria, in 2018-2019. The report concluded that compared to those of regional universities the admissions criteria of ASU were better elaborated and more explicit.

The language of each programme is stated clearly on the University's website. Entry requirements, including those for language skills, are set out in the Student Application Guide and in the University's Admissions and Registration Manual. All applicants must take an English placement test to determine which English course they should take in the University. The Panel heard in interviews that three remedial (not for credit) English courses are offered (ENG097, ENG098 for students taking programmes delivered in English; ENG099 for students taking programmes delivered in Arabic). In addition to this all students must take one of the credit-bearing courses, English 101 (for programmes in Arabic) or English 111 (for programmes in English). Language requirements for the collaborative programmes are set by the UK partner.

The SER states that the University does not offer formal foundation studies but offers a number of remedial courses once students have been admitted. These are in remedial English (described above), remedial Mathematics (Introduction to Mathematics and Statistics, Introduction to Computer Mathematics, and Mathematics for Information Systems), and for Master's students there may be some subject-specific remedial courses. The SER also states that remedial courses are subject to the same scrutiny and review processes as other university courses. The evidence provided includes the course specification for Introduction to Computer Mathematics which follows the normal course specification template.

Review of admission policy, and particular admissions criteria, contained in the University's Admissions and Registration Manual, is the responsibility of the University Council and must be undertaken every 4 years, although in practice this happens every two years in line with the University's expectation that policies are reviewed every two years. The evidence provided confirms that University Council reviewed

admission requirements for the Bachelor's in law degree in 2013-2014 and confirms that College Management Committees also follow-up on changes to admission criteria.

Annual programme review considers recruitment and admission of students and may lead to revision of admission criteria. Programme leaders analyse student performance in relation to their entry requirements and this may lead programme leaders to consider revising entry requirements, which would require approval of the University Council. Periodic Programme Review also considers admission policy. Overall, the Panel concludes that the University has appropriate admissions criteria for its programmes, which are implemented and reviewed and hence this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- None

Indicator 15: Introduction and Review of Programmes

The institution has rigorous systems and processes for the development and approval of new programmes - that includes appropriate infrastructure - and for the review of existing programmes to ensure sound academic standards are met. These requirements are applied consistently, regularly monitored and reviewed.

Judgement: Addressed

The University sets out in a variety of policy documents its expectations that programmes are up-to-date, relevant to the labour market and societal needs, reflect current research and are consistent with the University's mission and strategy.

The Bylaws govern the establishment of programmes, including programme structure and progression routes. The University's LTAS links its strategy for learning and teaching with overall University Mission and strategic priorities. It notes in various places the importance of research-informed teaching and lists as one of its guiding principles: 'Staff will underpin a high-quality student learning experience with discipline specific pedagogical approaches that are informed by research, (subject and pedagogic).' It also characterizes the student learning experience as one that provides '…exciting, creative, innovative, research-informed learning opportunities which maximise learner participation'.

As noted above, research-informed teaching is one of the priority development areas for the LTAS. In interviews with various participants, the Panel concluded that development of research-informed teaching is still at an early stage in the University. When asked how this was being taken forward, the Panel was given examples such as student projects or other assignments having a research component, rather than the incorporation of a teacher's own research experience or knowledge into the teaching of a course. The University is encouraged to continue its efforts to make research-informed teaching a priority.

The University's Annual Monitoring and Review of Programmes Policy sets out procedures for annual and periodic monitoring of programmes, and the aim of the latter in particular is to: ensure programmes are still relevant and meeting their aims, ensure programme content is up to date and relevant, confirm that the programmes continue to comply with the requirements of University Bylaws and external agencies such as HEC and BQA, and review and comment on future plans for the programme. Programme Advisory Boards (PABs) also play a part in ensuring that programmes are fit for purpose, one of their purposes being to assist Faculty in the ongoing review of the curriculum, to ensure its relevance to industry and the profession. The minutes of the PABs' meetings show that topics such as employability skills, and internships are discussed. In its interviews with members of PABs, the Panel heard of examples where the University had considered suggestions made by the Boards. However, PAB participants repeatedly noted that there was a need for more course offerings in English. In interviews with University staff the Panel heard that teaching in Arabic meet a societal need and that currently there were no plans to change this, although various support for improving the English language skills was provided by the University. However, the Panel also heard that the University had aspirations to produce graduates who were global citizens, to increase the number of UK partnership programmes, to gain international accreditation for its courses, and to increase the number of international students, all of which would demand graduates with skills in a second language, probably English. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the University should develop and implement appropriate mechanisms to provide more opportunities for students to acquire better English language skills within the programme.

The SER states that the University's Bylaws cover various aspects of programme structure which underpin a mechanism to ensure that its qualifications are consistent with expectations relating to fields of study and credit hours. The Bylaws cover credit hours, study loads, grades and pass rates, amongst other items. As mentioned earlier in this Report, ASU was accredited by the HEC in 2019 and achieved NQF Institutional listing in 2016 and following on from this established Mapping Panels and Confirmation Panels for its programmes to ensure that ASU qualifications are aligned with the NQF. Four programmes have so far been placed on the NQF and others have been submitted. A detailed account of the mapping process is provided in the New Programme Development Policy and Procedure.

The QAA Centre oversees compliance with the requirements of HEC and NQF for academic matters, However, NQF level and credits are not currently included on qualification certificates. It is the University's intention to include this when all of its programmes have been placed on the NQF. The Panel encourages ASU to expedite this process.

The programmes awarded by its UK partner institutions are placed on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) for UK qualifications; credits of those programmes are determined using the UK Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS). FHEQ level and CATS credits are shown on the transcripts of awards from the partner institutions.

The University's requirements for the design and delivery of a new programme are contained in its New Programme Development Policy and Procedure. This policy applies to new programmes and existing programmes where substantial changes have been approved. A validation process is required for programme approval, which includes external assessment at various stages. Discussion of a new programme starts at the Departmental and College Curriculum Committee. This gives the opportunity for general debate amongst those who will be concerned with designing the programme. A Programme Development Team is then set up to take the proposal forward. This will include consultation with staff and carrying out market research and acquiring evidence of demand. The University Curriculum Committee considers whether the proposed programme is consistent with the University Strategic Plan and considers its resource implications. If the University Curriculum Committee is satisfied the proposal goes to University Council for approval, and University Council instructs the QAA Centre to liaise with the Programme Development team to map the qualification to the NQF.

As mentioned earlier in this Report, the University's policy and procedures for review of programmes – both annual and periodic – are in place, together with other mechanisms that the University uses to evaluate teaching and learning. There is an emphasis in these processes on ensuring currency and relevance of courses and programmes. Externality is introduced into these processes by the consideration of external examiners' reports, external moderation reports and reports from external bodies such as BQA and HEC during Annual Review and Periodic Review. The University has a clear policy which guides the appointment and activities of external examiners.

Both external examiners' reports and Panel interviews with external examiners and moderators confirm that external personnel do make suggestions for changes to courses and programmes, and that these suggestions are taken seriously and acted upon where feasible by the University. An example of changes to a programme initiated by an external examiner was given in the submitted evidence. Furthermore, in its interviews the Panel heard of changes recommended by external examiners which included better alignment of a programme to future labour marker needs.

As described above, following on from achieving Institutional Listing, the University established Mapping Panels and Confirmation Panels, in accordance with the NQF Manual, in order to apply for its programmes to be placed on the NQF. Training on the NQF is provided for academic staff members of Mapping and Confirmation Panels. The useful presentation given in the evidence includes NQF background information, guidance on the work of Mapping and Confirmation Panels, and information on Institutional Listing.

Overall, the Panel finds that the University has an appropriate and thorough suite of policies and procedures to oversee the fitness of/for purpose of its programmes. It also has appropriate systems for the development, approval and review of programmes, which (where they have been used) are applied consistently and monitored and reviewed. Hence, the Panel is of the view that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)
• Develop and implement appropriate mechanisms to provide more opportunities for students to acquire better English language skills within the programme.

Indicator 16: Student Assessment and Moderation
There are implemented transparent assessment policies and procedures including moderation. Assessment of student learning is appropriate and accurately reflects the learning outcomes and academic standards achieved by students.

Judgement: Addressed

The University's Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy underpins the University's assessment activities. Various mechanisms help to ensure that the Policy is implemented systematically across the Institution. As set out in the External Examiner Policy, external examiners have the role of ensuring 'that the assessments themselves and the assessment process is equitable and is fairly operated in the marking, grading and classification of student performance, and that decisions are made in accordance with University regulations.'

Other procedures relating to assessment are given in the Admissions and Registration Policy and in the Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism Policy and Examination Rules and Regulations. The University also provides guidance for supporting students prior to and during examinations so that they are not unfairly disadvantaged during the assessment process: the Academic Advising policy, Student at Risk Policy and Policy for Students with Special Needs are all discussed elsewhere in this report.

The University disseminates information about assessment *via* the University intranet, in the Student Handbook, Programme Handbook, Moodle and SIS. The University monitors implementation of its assessment policies through external examiner reports, annual and periodic programme review processes, course review and course portfolios and course portfolio audits by QAA Centre.

The University has an annual academic staff development programme which includes various workshops dealing with measuring CILOs and PILOs. For example, in the 2018-2019 workshops on 'Methods of assessment' and 'Assessment and feedback in higher education' were offered. In addition, the University provides a training pack on writing ILOs, which includes a useful booklet on designing and assessing ILOs.

The University's Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy covers moderation, both of assessment instruments before assessment, and of verification of marks after assessment. Pre-assessment moderation involves an Internal and an External Moderator. The responsibilities of those involved in the process are set out in the policy. There are also guidelines for appointing the External Moderator, and for reporting.

The University appoints two types of external assessors: course External Moderators and Programme External Examiners.

In interviews with staff the Panel confirmed that the External Moderator does not carry out post-assessment moderation of courses. This is purely the job of the Programme External Examiner when he/she reviews the programme, which was also confirmed in the interview with external examiners. Post-assessment moderation is carried out by the Internal Moderator. The Panel recommends that ASU should consider involving External Moderators in the post-assessment moderation of courses, to ensure that the assessment has been rigorous, fair and the standards achieved are comparable to international norms. While the Panel notes that post-assessment moderation is carried out at programme level, this activity will be carried out too late to benefit the students who sat the courses and may have launched grade appeals.

Moderation forms, which consist of a checklist to verify various aspects of the assessment instrument must be included in course portfolios, giving a further opportunity to monitor the consistency of the moderation process. Heads of College QAA Units are responsible for ensuring that moderation is carried out according to the policy. They audit course portfolios and write a report each semester which goes to the Dean and QAA Centre, as evidenced by the submitted evidence, which includes a report from the College of Engineering. This indicates that a variety of issues is picked up for action, including those in relation to moderation.

As noted earlier, the University appoints Programme External Examiners, who have the role of ensuring that assessments themselves and the assessment process are equitable and fairly conducted as per the External Examiner Policy. Programme External Examiners provide a comprehensive report on all aspects of the assessment process which is sent to the VP for Academic Affairs & Development and to the QAA Centre and forwarded to the College for consideration by the programme team. A brief report and an action plan are then prepared.

The University's Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy contains a section on dealing with student appeals. The appeal process is set out in this policy and in the Student Handbook. The latter is given to students at induction and is on the University website. A fee is payable which is returned if the grade is changed to the student's benefit. The Appeal is a two-stage process. A committee set up by the Dean, consisting of Faculty other than the Course Coordinator or anyone involved in original marking or moderation, checks that no errors have been made in the marking. Once this has been done the student has the right to appeal the grade. The appeal is carried out by a committee set up by the HoD. If a change is agreed it must be approved by the HoD and Dean. It is then communicated to the Directorate of Admissions and Registration, who inform the student. The policy expects the appeal to be carried out in a timely manner: the student must appeal within 10 days of the grade announcement, and once the appeal committee is set up it must report to the HoD within one week. Students whom the Panel met in interviews confirmed the grade appeal process operated as set out in the policy.

The Student Misconduct Bylaws lists the sanctions that can be applied if a student is guilty of academic misconduct. The University's Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism Policy and Examination Rules and Regulation Policy states that it covers academic misconduct by students on taught courses and it also includes postgraduate students, and Master's dissertations and reports. Staff academic misconduct is dealt with under a separate policy.

Appendix 2 of the University's Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism Policy gives a useful table which lists: type of misconduct, examples, level at which it is to be dealt with, and recommended penalties. Plagiarism by students is seen as a form of academic misconduct. Appendix 1 of this Policy sets out the University's advice on plagiarism detection, emphasising that students should have access to plagiarism detection software at an early stage in their university career so that they can become educated in what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. Colleges must also provide at least one course where students can use Turnitin, or another plagiarism detection package. The students and alumni whom the Panel interviewed were all aware of plagiarism and the Turnitin software. They indicated that Turnitin was not explained during induction but was embedded in all courses. However, the SER indicates that a review of practice took place in 2018-2019 and as a result certain changes were made. These included: mandatory mention of the Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism Policy in Moodle areas and course specifications (this was confirmed by the Panel in the provided evidence); and relevant workshops to be scheduled frequently in the Academic Staff Development Programme. The Academic Members Training Calendar shows two related courses included for the year 2018-2019.

In general, the University has comprehensive policies and procedures for assessment which are disseminated to all relevant users, along with processes for monitoring implementation. the Panel finds that the University has transparent policies and procedures which are carried out fairly and effectively on the whole. Hence, the Panel is of the view that this indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- Consider involving External Moderators in post-assessment moderation of courses, to ensure that the assessment has been rigorous, fair and the standards achieved are comparable to international norms.

Indicator 17: The Learning Outcomes

The institution ensures that all programmes and courses have clearly formulated learning outcomes and there are effective mechanisms to ensure that graduates achieve the learning outcomes of the programmes.

Judgement: Addressed

Both the University's LTAS and its New Programmes Development Policy require all courses and programmes to have clear ILOs. As indicated under Indicator 15, Section 6 of the Programme

Specification Proforma requires articulation of PILOs and of CILOs, together with their mapping to PILOs. This proforma forms part of the documentation seen by the University Curriculum Committee and University Council, as part of the approval process for a new programme. PILOs and CILOs are reviewed as part of the University's Monitoring and Review of Programmes Policy, and Programme External Examiners may also comment on them in their reports. This is borne out in the evidence provided. The examples of annual and periodic review reports provided show that ILOs are included in the matters for report. The External Examiner's report for the Bachelor's in Computer Science degree also discusses PILOs and CILOs.

The University's Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy states that one of the purposes of assessment is to assess the extent to which learners have achieved the ILOs. While the need for appropriateness of assessment to measure achievement of ILOs is a theme throughout the document, Graduate Attributes are not mentioned. The SER states the University's position in this regard, that since CILOs are mapped to PILOs if a student demonstrates that he/she has achieved all the CILOs, this also demonstrates that all the PILOs have also been achieved. The SER states that appropriateness of ILOs is first tested during new programme review. Subsequently pre-assessment moderation will also check that the assessment instruments are appropriate to measure students' achievement of ILOs. Post assessment, the Course Evaluation Report contains an analysis of achievement of CILOs. The Panel verified that this was the case with various Course Evaluation Reports in the range of course portfolios made available.

The achievement of PILOs for each student is managed by the production of two excel spreadsheets which for each student maps the CILOs achieved to the related PILOs, and this was confirmed by University staff in its interviews with the Panel. Interviewed staff also ascertained that the mark required in an assessment for a student to have achieved a particular CILO was 60% (although there was some uncertainty or confusion about this: some participants suggested 50% was the grade required). The pass mark was the same for all CILOs, and there was no weighting given to reflect CILOs which were deemed more important or essential for successful graduation. The Panel encourages the University to review whether weightings should be attached to CILOs which are deemed to be essential for achieving the PILOs.

The University has developed a set of Graduate Attributes (GAs) which the SER says can be considered as the product of the cumulative achievement of PILOs and their overall learning experience at ASU. In interviews with staff the Panel explored whether all GAs (as given in the Student Handbook) were measurable and whether a formal mapping of PILOs and GAs had been undertaken. The Panel heard that no formal mapping had been undertaken and that whereas GAs such as 'Committed to lifelong learning' might not be directly measurable, success in activities like teamwork might indicate that a graduate had the propensity to carry on learning through life. The Panel was not convinced that the University had presented convincing evidence for this argument and recommends that the University ensures that all GAs are measurable and that there are formal mappings of GAs to PILOs, so that the University can be sure that all students achieve the University's GAs.

The University does not offer exit awards but has arrangements which facilitate transfer between programmes: programmes are defined clearly at a level on the NQF; courses are designed to provide a clear indication of whether the student has achieved the CILOs at the relevant level and so completed it; provision of a transcript for students who are leaving. As part of its student support system (Academic Advising and Students at Risk procedures) the University may provide students with information about alternative programmes that might suit their interest or abilities better.

The SER describes a robust set of procedures for handling learners' data and results to ensure that the outcomes of assessment are in line with its regulations. These procedures are guided by the University's Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy and its Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism Policy and Examination Rules and Regulations.

Access to the SIS is by personal login which determines the level of access a user can have. Periodic SIS data audits are carried out. Access to the Admissions and Registrations Offices is controlled by a key-code and fingerprint security system. The Deanship of Admission and Registration was audited in 2017 by the University's Internal Audit Unit. This found the Deanship largely compliant with various key indicators and made some recommendations for follow-up, such as carrying out a simulation of back-up failure of the SIS, greater use of the statistics on student attendance by staff, and tighter control of course registration for students at risk. In 2018 A QAA Centre audit of Admissions and Registration processes was also carried out in 2018. This also found the Deanship compliant with University Bylaws, procedures and good practice concerning security of documentation.

Student progression is tracked in various ways. At the individual level, the Students at Risk Policy sets out procedures for identifying students at risk by monitoring students' GPA. Students who fall below GPA 62 would be flagged on the SIS, and informed of help and support available. At the course level progression is tracked in the Course Evaluation Reports which feed into annual and periodic monitoring of programmes.

The academic programme review reports give detailed progression rates, in terms of amount of credit completed, for the programme for the last 5 years. These reports also call for comment on whether the progression rates meet the expected targets. The University therefore monitors a detailed set of data at the programme level to be able to judge whether academic standards are met. Furthermore, course instructors, programme leaders and external examiners are asked to consider progression statistics and make recommendations for improvements if there are causes for concern. Annual programme review reports include a section where the programme must report on the actions accomplished in response to the recommendations of the previous year's report.

The University's Career Development and Alumni Affairs Office collects and maintains statistics on graduate employment. The SER states that the statistics are analysed to provide information on employability of graduates which is one of the Office's KPIs. The Employers' Survey Report is a source of information at programme level on whether employers consider the University's graduates fit for their

job and meeting expectations in the world of work. On the whole, the employers who responded in 2017-2018 were satisfied or very satisfied. Employers whom the Panel interviewed were satisfied with the skills of the University's students and mentioned the competitiveness of the University's graduates, and their passion for their specialty.

As mentioned earlier in this Report, benchmarking is carried out as part of new programme development. Introduction of new programmes is guided by the University's New Programme Development Policy .The Benchmarking Policy indicates that PILOs, CILOs and their mapping are areas of interest for benchmarking. The provided Benchmarking Reports include detailed course by course comparisons. The Computer Science benchmarking exercise provides evidence of a detailed comparison of ASU ILOs with those of regional and international universities. Other external reference points include external examiners who report on courses and programmes. It was noted above that external examiners' reports show that they discuss issues concerning ILOs. In addition, some of the University's programmes have been benchmarked against professional body requirements. The evidence provided includes a review of the Bachelor in Accounting and Finance by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) in 2019. The Panel finds that, in general, the University has a through system for formulating learning outcomes and effective mechanisms to ensure that graduates achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes. Hence the Panel is of the view that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- Ensure that all Graduate Attributes are measurable and that there are formal mappings of Graduates Attributes to Programme Intended Learning Outcomes, so that the University can be sure that all students achieve the University's Graduates Attributes.

Indicator 18: Recognition of Prior Learning (where applicable and legislation permits)

The institution has a recognition of prior learning policy, and effective procedures for recognizing prior learning and assessing current competencies.

Judgement: Addressed

Learners are allowed to transfer internally from one programme to another within ASU once they fulfil the Institution's transfer rules and requirements, as evident in the 'Admissions and Registrations Manual'. Moreover, the Institution allows external transfer from HEC approved Institutions. The Panel was provided with samples of internal and external transfer cases. The Panel was unable to identify any policy or procedures to support recognition of competence drawn from any aspect of the applicant's professional or personal accomplishments. However, recognition of informal and non-formal prior learning is not currently supported by national regulations. Hence, the Panel agrees that the Institution satisfies this Indicator.

Recommendation(s)
• None

Indicator 19: Short courses
The institution has effective systems in place for the management of its short courses (where applicable).
Judgement: Addressed

The University offers short courses to its students, alumni and staff. These are mainly professional courses which are deemed to be required based on information gathered from the training needs analysis for staff, and by canvassing students and other stakeholders to determine which skills courses are in demand. In so far as these short courses are designed to fill identified gaps in training or professional needs, they are aligned with the University's Mission and academic programmes. Examples of programmes to be delivered in 2019-20 are Preparing for IELTS, Adobe Photoshop, and Legal English. The University does not deliver short courses to the wider community and none of the courses delivered to students is credit-bearing. A form for the approval of a short course must be completed in order to ensure alignment with the University's Mission. ASU short courses sessions are delivered by both internal and external trainers.

The plan of courses to be organised is drawn up and managed by the Training, Development and Continuing Education Centre. A Training, Development and Continuing Education Policy was developed in May 2018-2019. This sets out the key responsibilities of the Centre which include, co-ordinating and monitoring all training delivered to students and alumni; preparing the annual training plan; evaluating training programmes for effectiveness. There is guidance in the policy about drawing up a training course and the main responsibilities of the key personnel (Director of the Training, Development and Continuing Education Centre and Head of Business Development). According to the SER the short course programme is overseen by the VP for Admin, Finance and Community Engagement who must approve the annual programme. However, it is not clear under which Operational Plan the short courses programme is included. The Training, Development and Continuing Education Centre does not have an operational plan of its own. The Panel suggests that the University might be better able to judge the effectiveness of its short courses if dedicated objectives and KPIs were set for the Centre's activities in an operational plan.

The Panel considers that on the whole, the University's short courses align with its mission and are evaluated for effectiveness, and hence, this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)
• None

Standard 5

Student Support Services

The institution has an efficient and effective student administration and academic support services.

Indicator 20: Student Support

The institution provides efficient and effective student administration and academic support services, and encourages the personal development of students.

Judgement: Addressed

As per ASU's Student Affairs Bylaw, the Deanship of Student Affairs is the provider of all student support services. The Deanship is comprised of a Dean and a team of qualified staff and operates through three main offices, which are the Student Services Office, the Counselling Office, and the Career Development and Alumni Affairs Office, as explained in the SER and heard in the site visit interviews. In addition to these three main offices, a decision was made by the University in the academic year 2018-2019 to include the Directorate of Admissions and Registration under the Deanship of Student Affairs. The Deanship has an Assistant Dean of Student Affairs for Admissions and Registration to supervise the Directorate of Admissions and Registration. The Panel's tour of the University campus confirmed the availability of these offices and services under the Deanship of Student Affairs. Whereas, interviews with students and staff indicated that newly enrolled students are made aware of the services provided by the Deanship of Student Affairs at orientation as well as through the online Student Handbook. Nevertheless, the Panel came to know through site visit interviews with the administrative staff that currently, ASU employs a counsellor who does not hold a certificate or degree in counselling, though she happens to have many years of experience in the field. The Panel is of the view that for the current number of enrolled students, one employee serving as a counsellor may not be enough, especially when he/she lacks official certification in this field. Hence, the Panel recommends that the ASU ensure the recruitment of a certified counsellor to guide and support the existing counselling provision at the University.

The ASU Policy for Students with Special Needs and the Student Application Guide explicitly state that any student who fulfils the University's admission criteria and can reasonably be accommodated will be admitted to ASU, whether they have a special need or not. This is in line with the institution's mission to provide education to all applicants who are academically qualified, a**s** was further confirmed to the Panel during interviews with multiple stakeholders. When applying to the University, students with a disability are required to declare their special need/s on their application form, after which they are interviewed by a committee chaired by the Dean of Student Affairs and comprised of members from Admission & Registration, Student Services, and Counselling. As explained in the SER, a faculty member with some background in psychology, therapy, or any related field also serves on this committee. Once admitted, students are again asked during the orientation programme to declare through a questionnaire their special needs and are then sent an email reminding them of the assistance and support available to them

through the Deanship of Student Affairs. As concluded from the site visit tour and from interviews with students and staff, this support is varied and includes counselling and guidance; physical, academic, and examination provision; and financial support. In terms of physical support, wheelchair access to all buildings is provided and facilitated by ramps, lifts, and special gates. In addition, computers with special features and screens are also available in the library for the visually impaired. The Panel had the opportunity to view all these physical arrangements during its tour of the ASU premises.

As claimed in the SER, the support services provided to students with special needs are evaluated indirectly through ASU's Student Council and directly through meetings with individual students. One improvement that was made based on students' feedback was the addition of a feature in the SOS system that allows students to declare a special need. This new feature was highlighted among other features during the presentation on ASU's electronic systems that was provided for the Panel by the ICT & KM Directorate. At the time of writing the SER, ASU was working on developing a new 'Students with Special Needs' survey to assist in evaluating support provided to this group of students. The Panel had the opportunity to examine this survey during the site visit and confirmed that it has already been put into effect.

As mentioned in the SER, ASU supports its students from the onset of their studies and it does so through the orientation programme, which all incoming students are obliged to attend. This orientation programme is guided by a document including a set of guidelines, which cover key responsibilities, procedures, and considerations related to the programme. As concluded from the supporting evidence and site visit interviews, students are introduced in the orientation to a number of important aspects linked to the University's operations, facilities, activities, rules and regulations, policies, services, resources, administrative matters, and health and safety. Most importantly, students are introduced to what is expected of them during their study duration. All of this is covered through a series of sessions conducted by members of staff from different colleges, deanships, and directorates. During orientation also, students are provided with the chance to access registration information and to validate their university email accounts. They, therefore, learn early on how to use the SIS to register their courses, access their progress records, and request additional support when they need it, as is mentioned in the SER and explained in interviews and the electronic systems' presentation.

In addition to this orientation programme, site visit interviews with students and staff members confirmed that ASU organizes programme-specific induction sessions, in which students receive specific information about their colleges and programmes of study. They, therefore, learn about what is expected of them in terms of attendance, punctuality, and participation and receive information about related penalties and warnings in case they fail to live up to these expectations. They are also directed to the Bachelor Degree Bylaw/ Graduate Studies Bylaw and to the Student Handbook, which clearly state all of these expectations and penalties. The students are also informed during orientation and induction sessions that all warnings' notifications will be available for them to access through the SIS. This is in

addition to all other necessary information related to their programmes of study, status of enrolment, and grades, as was also confirmed during the electronic systems' presentation.

The Student Affairs Office of the Deanship of Student Affairs at ASU organizes a social programme of events, as well as a wide range of extracurricular activities for students, to help promote their personal development, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. This was confirmed to the Panel during interviews with members of staff and students, who mentioned, in particular, a special annual event, titled the 'Educational Cultural Exhibition', which focuses on co-existence among different cultural, religious and ethnic groups. Other events and activities, organized in collaboration with the Community Engagement Office at the University, provide opportunities for students to serve the local community, such as visits to elderly care centres, orphanages, and institutes for the blind. In addition, there are other activities organized by the students themselves through the Student Council, which the Panel had the opportunity to interview a few of its members during the site visit. Results of this interview showed that ASU's Student Council play an effective role in enhancing student life, as well as in representing the students' voice within the University community.

ASU's extracurricular activities and events are -announced through a number of channels, such as: printed posters, e-platforms (e.g. social media, university display screens, emails, and SMS), and ASU website. In addition to extracurricular activities, students at ASU can participate in several clubs that operate directly under the leadership of the Student Council. Currently, as mentioned in the SER the six student clubs operating at the University are the Cultural Club, Media Club, Sports Club, Volunteering Club, Women's Club, and the Talents' Club. The Panel was able to find out, during interviews with students including members of the Student Council, that there was a general sense of satisfaction towards these clubs and ASU's extracurricular activities.

As mentioned in the SER, ASU collects feedback on the effectiveness of student affairs and services in several ways. Among them is the New Students' Experience Survey, which is distributed to newly enrolled students at the end of their first academic year, to elicit their feedback on their first year of study, and this includes questions related to student affairs. There is also the Student Satisfaction Survey and the Graduating Students' Exit Survey; the SOS system; and, finally, the fora provided through the Student Experience Committee and the University Council where students' comments and feedback on student affairs are shared and discussed. With respect to the University Council, in particular, the President of the Student Council attends most of its meetings where he reports to the University Council the students' feedback, and likewise conveys information from the University Council to the student body. This was confirmed through interviews with students, staff, and members of the Student Council, where examples were provided of actions taken by ASU to improve services based on students' feedback, such as: increasing parking spaces for students; providing a sports hall for female students and one for the males; and increasing the number of sections of some courses to accommodate working students. In result, the Panel appreciates ASU's efforts in taking the students' voice into consideration in its decision-making processes.

ASU has a Students at Risk Policy, which provides guidance on how to monitor and support students' progress, in order to introduce early interventions when necessary. The Panel inquired about the implementation of this policy during the site visit and found that its execution is supported by several automatic processes within the SIS, as well as through the operations of the Advising and Direction Unit at ASU and the faculty members serving as academic advisors.

ASU identify students at risk of academic failure and those on academic probation, based on their cumulative percentage, specifically 'between 60 and 62' for the at-risk students and 'below 60' for those in probation. When the student's academic performance falls within any of the above-mentioned numbers, they automatically receive through the SIS a warning. Their academic advisor also receives a notification about this warning. In addition, at the end of the semester, students receive *via* email a report from the Advising and Direction Unit informing them of their academic standing and status and requesting from them to either meet with their academic advisor for academic matters or with the Deanship of Student Affairs for personal matters. Copies of this report are also forwarded to the student's college and to the Deanship of Student Affairs. These steps in the process were confirmed through interviews with staff and also through the electronic systems' presentation provided to the Panel during the site visit, in which it became clear that the SIS is set up in such a way that prevents the students from registering for any new courses without first meeting with their advisor and obtaining their approval. During the meeting with the academic advisor, an action plan is drafted, which would help the student improve his/her cumulative percentage. This plan could, for example, include alternative study strategies or increased study time or a reduction in the number of courses the student is taking per semester. The Panel's interviews with students indicated their satisfaction with the system in place to support students at risk of academic failure. In addition, students confirmed that they have the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of this system through the different satisfaction surveys they are subjected to and also through the committees they sit on.

ASU has an Academic Advising Policy, which provides guidance on how to support student progress through the allocation of an academic advisor for each registered student. The role of the academic advisor, as stipulated in this policy, is to assist the student in successfully fulfilling their programme requirements, by regularly providing them with the necessary mentoring, coaching, and guidance they may need throughout their journey of studies. As mentioned in the SER and confirmed in interviews with academic staff, this guidance is generally related to academic matters and could be related to the University policies, rules and regulations, assessment criteria, and academic standards, especially those relevant to the student's programme of study. Nevertheless, the Panel noticed that there is no specific number of meetings mandated by the Academic Advising Policy and this was also mentioned in the SER, where it is claimed that the quality and frequency of meetings between the students and their academic advisors are monitored by the College Advisory Committee. However, upon examining a sample of minutes of this committee's meetings, the Panel realized that the monitoring role of this committee is limited only to those students who are about to graduate to ensure that they are receiving advice

concerning meeting their study plan's requirements on time. The Panel, therefore, finds that ASU could benefit from revising its Academic Advising Policy, to include a clear clause on the minimum number of meetings required per semester between advisors and their students, so as to ensure some consistency in the frequency of face-to-face advisory services being received by all students across the University.

Finally, to enhance the academic advising process, ASU has recently developed an online system, which facilitates the advisor's viewing of the student's attendance records, assessment grades, and academic progress and for the student, the viewing of the advisor's recommendations and discussion notes. This was confirmed to the Panel through interviews with students and academic staff as well as through the electronic systems' presentation provided during the site visit. As per interviews, this system has improved the two-way communication process between the advisor and advisee and has kept Deans and HoDs informed about the advisors' performance through online summary reports that are accessible to them through an online link. The Panel finds that on the whole, the University satisfies the requirements of this indicator.

Recommendation(s)

- Ensure the recruitment of a certified counsellor to guide and support the existing counseling provision at the University.

| **Judgement:** | The Institution **addresses** Standard 5: Student Support |

Standard 6

Human Resources Management

The institution has appropriate human resource policies and procedures including staff development in place that demonstrably support and enhance the various operational activities of the institution.

Indicator 21: Human Resources

The institution employs human resources that are sufficient in number and appropriately qualified to achieve the mission and to provide good quality higher education.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU has a Human Resource (HR) Strategy that was developed to supplement its Strategic Plan 2015-2020 and strategic goals. The strategy targets three main areas, namely (a) attracting and retaining excellent and diverse staff with appropriate qualifications; (b) providing staff development and empowerment opportunities for existing staff; and (c) ensuring compliance with regulatory bodies .It also provides an organisational framework and sets out specific goals related to these areas that are used to support the achievement of relevant ASU's strategic goals and monitoring them. ASU has an Overall Strategic Focus (2017 - 2020) with regard to HR with specific sub-areas or progressive themes and the Panel believes that this reflects a well-articulated direction in this area. Furthermore, this framework is supported by a comprehensive set of policies and procedures that are provided in the Staff Handbook and are available online *via* the staff portal. These cover various issues related to staff affairs including, Recruitment and Settlement Policy; Retention Policy; Leave, Attendance and Overtime Policy; Health & Safety Policy; Payroll Policy; Equality and Diversity Policy); Harassment and Anti-Bullying Policy); Academic Promotion Policy; Staff Development Policies for academic staff and administrative staff. Moreover, for each of the aforementioned three main HR areas, ASU has a detailed Recruitment and Settlement Policy, which includes a clear procedure for implementing the University Annual Manpower Plan, with specific timelines and allocation of responsibilities and reporting lines. This plan is developed before the annual budgeting process which takes place in January of every year. From the documents provided and interviews with concerned entities during the site visit, the Panel confirmed that Directors and HoDs play a role in the development and implementation of this plan by reporting their annual staffing needs to the HR Department and later on by interviewing the short-listed candidates.

There is an HR committee at each college to help with the process of interviewing and recruiting qualified staff. The same process is carried out for recruiting administrative staff. During interviews, the Panel heard that one of the challenges the University faces in appointing academic staff is the lengthy processes for gaining HEC approval for the staff appointments. This also explains the Panel's observation that many of the academic positions at the time of this review were occupied by staff on

acting capacity while awaiting the necessary HEC approvals. Hence, the University resorts to employ up to 25% of its academic staff on part time basis as an alternative solution within the HEC's regulations. The Panel also learned that there is a process of internal recruitment where some vacancies are advertised through the University intranet and eligible internal ASU candidates will get priority, if they can leave their current position. On examining the current administrative and academic staff profile, the Panel noted the diversity of these staff coming from different countries and with a variety of international academic background.

As for hiring faculty members to teach in the academic programmes offered in collaboration with the British partners, LSBU and CMU, the Panel heard during interviews that their recruitment is fully handled by ASU. Hence, they are recruited as ASU full-time staff, while UK partners take part in the selection of these staff and their interview. These staff are expected to spend 25% of their teaching time in these programmes. At the time of this review, there were four staff in this category.

The HR Department is the entity responsible for keeping full time and part-time staff records. According to the SER and as revealed during the campus tour, the staff's physical documents are kept in appropriate places and are secured in a controlled access place that uses fingerprint recognition software and can only be accessed by the HR staff or with appropriate authorization by senior management and the consent of the member of staff. Furthermore, the Panel was satisfied to see that electronic copies of all of these documents are stored in electronic files on the staff portal with clearly identified access privileges.

ASU has a detailed and comprehensive staff induction programmes for academic as well as administrative staff that cover various aspects of their institutional life and career, with relevant entities (Deans/ managers) beside HR taking part in this programme. According to the SER, these induction programmes of newly appointed staff include a welcome presentation by senior management and information about ASU policies, procedures, rights, obligations and available services. Moreover, staff are introduced to ASU's history, Vision and Mission, its programme and students' profile as well as its culture and ethos, organisational hierarchy and communication channels. The induction also includes information about key departments, use of Moodle, NQF, preparation of course portfolios as well as a briefing on health and safety, while a full version of Health and Safety Handbook is available online.

In addition to the University-level induction, newly appointed academic staff (both full time and part-time) are provided with a college-level induction where they meet their HoDs and get introduced to college or department- specific rules and regulations within the scope of their job description. Following these induction activities, full-time academic staff members are assigned a mentor who guides them throughout their first year of service and provides them with any professional advice and assistance they need. The Panel heard very positive statements about the impact of this mentorship during interviews with full-time academic staff. Part-time academic staff, on the other hand spoke positively about the role of the programme leader in this regard. Both groups of staff confirmed that they are kept updated

about the University /college news and any changes or new policies, regulations, or decisions through the email system, News Digest, social media, etc.

Following the general orientation programme, HR seeks inductees' opinion about the programme by asking them to respond to 'a feedback questionnaire after attending the Induction Day'. Moreover, the Staff Satisfaction Survey includes one question about induction. The HR Department also uses an Induction Checklist which includes a specific section to be filled by line managers, another one to be filled in by HR and a third section where the employee's job description of is provided. During interviews with both full time and part-time academic and administrative staff, the Panel established that all these arrangements are in place, and that staff are quite satisfied with the way these comprehensive induction programmes are being implemented and with the positive impacts they make on their work at the University.

Article 14 of Academic Staff Bylaws of the ASU Bylaws stipulates a 45 hrs per week workload for academic staff, distributed over almost the same tasks and responsibilities found in their job descriptions. Moreover, the workload of academic staff is assigned based on their academic rank/ title. This work allocation model reflects good practice in distributing time across core functions, providing time for teaching, research and for community engagement activities. According to Staff Handbook the teaching load for academic staff may vary depending on the rank of the faculty, and the administrative and secondary responsibilities the faculty may do. For example, the workload of the Vice Dean, Director, and HoD is reduced by three credit hours. Interviews with academic staff confirmed this conclusion.

The SER sates that the 'University has clear complaints and appeals procedures, which are made available through inclusion in the Staff Handbook'. The ASU Quality Assurance Manual, on the other hand, stipulates that 'there must be a published policy on complaints which includes a system for recording and monitoring complaints and the associated responses'. However, and on examining these documents, it was found they only include detailed information on steps to be taken for investigation and resolution of staff grievances, together with information on appeals procedures and resolutions. There is no information on what a staff member should do to initiate a complaint against an issue he/she is annoyed by rather than against an action or a decision that was already taken against him/ her. The only reference this document makes to 'complaints' is in item 6.17.4.2.2, as follows: 'Upon receiving a written complaint, the Director/Dean shall clarify whether the procedure outlined in Step 6.17.4.1.1 for informal resolution of the grievance was properly completed by the administrative/academic staff. If not, then the employee may be asked to go back and complete the procedure'. This may reflect a misunderstanding of the two concepts, i. e. grievances *vs* complaints. This conclusion was further confirmed during different interviews with both academic and administrative staff who confirmed that a complaint procedure is explained in the Staff Handbook rather than a clearly defined grievance policy. Hence, the Panel recommends that ASU should develop a stand-alone grievance policy to address this issue and eliminates this confusion.

The HR Department, in collaboration with QAA Centre, conducts Staff Satisfaction Survey. On examining this document, it was found that it covers various issues about the institution's functions and services. However, and despite the SER assertion that this survey is conducted on annual basis, the Panel was not provided, during the site visit, with evidence on filled-in survey forms, analysis of their results or actions taken based on these results. Moreover, and although the SER states that 'in 2018/19 the Staff Retention Policy was revised to refer specifically to the Survey', it is not clear how this revision was made and what triggered it. The HR Department conducts exit interviews, and analyses Exit questionnaire. However, no evidence is available on this analysis or actions taken based on it. Only one completed Exit Interview form was found. This procedure was improved in 2018-2019 by making these forms anonymous. ASU has an Employee Retention Policy which identifies procedures followed for staff retention. From interviews, the Panel learnt that staff retention rate is considerably high (with 9-10% and 10% staff turnover for the last two years respectively) reflecting a high level of staff satisfaction. This was further confirmed during interviews with different staff who spoke positively about their work conditions at the University and the level of support they receive in various aspects of their work. The Panel considers that on the whole, the University has appropriate HR policies and procedures which are implemented effectively. Hence, the Panel is of the view that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- Develop a stand-alone grievance policy to eliminate the confusion found between grievances and complaints.

Indicator 22: Staff Development

The institution has a systematic approach to staff development and provides opportunities for all staff to remain up-to-date in their areas of teaching, research and administration.

Judgement: Addressed

ASU has two staff development policies, one for academic staff and another one for administrative staff. According to the SER staff development needs are identified by their line mangers and linked to an annual appraisal system and an Employee Evaluation Policy. Staff performance is monitored by these mangers as well as reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis, using a staff portal which allows both parties to follow up on the whole process. Identified professional development needs are addressed by two University level entities, namely the Academic Staff Development Unit (ASDU) and the Training, Development and Continuing Education Centre. Both entities spearhead the implementation of ASU's professional development policies by conducting staff development needs analyses, organising the programme of professional development/ training activities, monitoring the activities and collecting feedback on their implementation.

ASU has a detailed Employee Evaluation Policy. The policy stipulates that the results of staff performance evaluation is linked to annual increments, training needs analysis, contribution rewards and recognition in terms of promotion, incentives and other financial and/or non-financial rewards. There is also an online evaluation form that uses tasks listed in each employee's job description as a KPI for evaluation. A distinct final rating system exist for both academic and administrative staff with an appeal process.

For academic staff, there is an Academic Promotion Policy in place which is also available online. At the end of each academic year, faculty discuss their achievements with their HoDs and then with the Deans. An online evaluation process for academic staff also exists but with a broader range of data reflecting the multi-functional role of staff. Academic staff performance evaluation incorporates input from student evaluation (through course evaluation survey), peer evaluation, goal evaluation, goal setting, and line manager evaluation. The Panel was informed during interviews that if a staff member is not happy about his/her appraisal score, he/she can reject it online and it will go to the counter signatory for further review and discussion and then a re-appraisal is done. If the issue is not resolved, then the staff member can opt for an official appeal as per the procedure described in ASU Staff Handbook

As mentioned in the SER, these arrangements are reviewed annually, and enhancements are made whenever they are identified. Examples of these enhancements include transferring the process online, linking it more closely to job descriptions of administrative staff, and organising a workshop for line managers (especially newly appointed managers) on the staff appraisal system. This was confirmed during the ICT demonstration presented to the Panel during the site visit.

According to the SER, the development needs of academic staff are identified by means of annual Training Needs Analysis. The ASDU, which operates under the Assistant VP for Academic Affairs and Development, is the dedicated unit for all academic staff development in the broad areas of teaching and learning, including assistance with teaching, mentoring, teaching observations and instructional technology. The provided evidence indicates that ASU provides training opportunity on NQF for its employees. The ASDU also collaborates with HR and performs a training needs analysis and develops an operational plan based on needs identified at staff appraisal. Line managers may also recommend some needs based on their own observations. They may also use reports of peer observations and any special requirements put forward by HoDs and Deans for the purpose of developing a master training plan. This plan is then translated into an Academic Members Training Calendar. The Panel was also informed that there is a budget allocated for implementing these activities. On the other hand, the Panel knew from interviews, that ASU Training, Development and Continuing Education Centre, which operates within the scope of its own well-articulated policy and organizes training for ASU students and the community, also provides sometimes professional development opportunities for both academic and non-academic ASU staff. These are designed and implemented in collaboration with, external expertise who conduct a large number of short courses, workshops and training programmes.

Administrative staff development activities are overseen by the HR Department in collaboration with the Training, Development and Continuing Education Centre. They are also informed by the Training Needs Analysis, which in turn is informed by staff annual appraisal and their line managers' feedback. The Centre develops a calendar of training events for the coming academic year. Both calendars of academic and non-academic training and professional development activities are made available *via* the online staff portal.

ASU makes use of several initiatives to enhance its staff development activities. These includes: the Fellowship Scheme offered by Advance HE which recognises excellent practice in supporting the student learning experience, with 46 staff gaining this Fellowship; ASU's annual Good Teaching Conference; and ASU's annual 'Crossing the Bridge Together' workshop series. Moreover, the SER states that ASU 'has allocated 2% of its gross annual income to support academic staff development', in line with HEC requirements, and the Panel was provided with evidence to support this claim. Moreover, the Panel knew from interviews with staff members that sufficient financial support is provided by ASU for conference participation, publication, research activities and other aspects related to their professional development and capacity building.

All professional development activities are followed by a feedback collection activity to elicit trainees' feedback on various aspects of the trainer's performance as well as various aspect of the activity itself. Line managers for administrative staff are also given the opportunity to comment on the usefulness and impact of the training activity provided by filling a post-training performance monitoring sheet. Moreover, the SER refers to several other ways in which staff development activities are evaluated including giving presentations, echo sessions and monitoring sheets. These have been confirmed during different interview sessions. The SER also states that the analysis of feedback reports on these activities is discussed in a monthly meeting between the heads of ASDU and the administrative staff development unit. Nevertheless, and while the Panel acknowledges all these efforts that ASU is doing in conducting a large number of staff professional development activities, it notices the absence of QAA Centre's role from any stage of this process, such as identifying, planning, designing, conducting or evaluating the effectiveness of these activities. The Panel believes that these efforts will benefit from and be further enhanced by an active role of this entity in this crucial area. Hence, the Panel recommends that ASU develops and implement a mechanism to ensure an active role for the QAA Centre in the provision of the University's staff professional development activities.

Recommendation(s)
• Develop and implement a mechanism to ensure an active role for the QAA Centre in the provision of the University's staff professional development activities.

Judgement:	The Institution **addresses** Standard 6: Human Resources Management

<div style="border: 1px solid; padding: 10px; background-color: #e8ece0;">

Standard 7

Research

The institution has a strategic research plan appropriate for its mission that is translated into a well-resourced operational plan, which is implemented and monitored.

Indicator 23: Research

The institution has implemented a plan for the development of research (e.g. disciplinary specific, scholarship of teaching and learning) appropriate for its institutional type that includes monitoring its research output, together with policies and processes to ensure the ethical and effective conduct of research.

</div>

Judgement: Addressed

The SER explains that the University Bylaw dealing with Research states that 'scientific research at the University aims to enrich the quantitative and qualitative science and knowledge in various fields'. The Bylaw sets overarching principles for research and establishes the Deanship of Research & Graduate Studies to lead these activities. Within its Mission, the University sees itself as being dedicated to the promotion of a culture of learning and scientific research. The University Strategic Plan includes Research as one of its three core strategic pillars. Its strategic objective is to 'Develop a research culture and deliver high quality research outputs'. Key priorities under this objective are strategic investment in staff, establishing priority areas for growth, increasing research activity/culture, and enhancing the external profile. The Strategic Plan and its approach to research activities are aligned with priorities identified in the National Research Strategy 2014-2024 and the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030.

The Research Handbook: Principles and Structure sets out how the research strategy is to be implemented and monitored. It also gives guiding principles for carrying out the University's research agenda. It contains four research Strategic Priorities which mirror the four Key Priorities given in the University's Strategic Plan. In the Handbook, Strategic Objectives are given for each Strategic Priority and list of KPIs is given, for the planning period of 2016-2017 to 2020-2021.

The Research Handbook describes the structure of the Deanship of Research & Graduate Studies and shows the Colleges' position in that structure. It sets out procedures for funding of research and the process for proposing new projects in the University for funding. It includes chapters on research groups, in-house journals, and research ethics. There is also useful information about how the quality of research proposals will be judged. In principle, the Handbook is a thorough and useful document. However, there is no version control page for this document, and it is not dated. In interviews with staff, the Panel heard that the Handbook had been produced in 2015 and had not since been updated. The Handbook therefore does not reflect the latest revision of the University's Strategic Plan, and has not, as is common in the University, been updated within the last two years. The Bylaws (included in

the Handbook) expect that 'Annually, a research handbook will be edited, published and distributed widely to key government departments, organizations, decision makers and colleagues.' This does not seem to have been done with the Research Handbook, and its lack of currency may explain the discrepancies noted by the Panel. Hence, the Panel recommends that the University should update the Research Handbook without delay so that it reflects the organisational structure and current Strategic Plan of the University accurately.

An annual operational plan for the Deanship of Research & Graduate Studies is produced. Objectives and KPIs for the Deanship are clearly tied to the University Strategic Plan Objectives. However, it is difficult to link the KPIs in the Deanship's operational plan to the KPIs given in the five-year KPIs for Research given in section 2.5 of the Research Handbook: there seems to be little overlap between the two sets. The operational plans of Colleges include objectives and priorities for research based on the key priorities of the Strategic Plan, not the five-year plan for research. Again, this lack of coherence may reflect the fact that the Research Handbook has not been updated since 2015.

The SER states that Deanship and Colleges submit progress updates which feed into the University's Strategy Implementation Report. This latter document gives a report of whether KPIs have been achieved, but without detail of the activities involved. The SER also states that the Deanship produces a comprehensive annual report on its achievements against its operational plan. The annual report for 2018-2019 includes planning of the operational plan for 2019-2020. Again, the objectives of the plan are based on the University's Strategic Plan, not the five-year plan for research. The report contains College research budgets for 2019-2020, and an updated (2018) Research Policy. Hence, the Panel recommends that the University should ensure linkage between the KPIs given in the University Strategic Plan, the Research Handbook five-year plan, the Deanship Operational Plan and College Operational Plans so that it can better monitor progress towards its strategic objectives.

The SER states that implementation of objectives is overseen by the Research Innovation and Research Ethics Committee (RIREC) for operational KPIs and the Strategic Planning and Risk Management Committee for strategic KPIs, although it is not obvious from the 2018-2019 Minutes of RIREC that this is recorded. College Research Coordinators are members of RIREC and thus provide a link from the Colleges to institutional oversight. The SER also evidences the effectiveness of these processes by pointing to the steady rise in research outputs from 2013 – 2019, from approximately 10 publications in 2013-2014 to over 100 in 2017-2018, examples of which are published in international, peer-reviewed journals.

The Deanship of Research & Graduate Studies is responsible for overseeing the research budget. The Dean and the VP for Academic Affairs and Development monitor the budget and they receive monthly expenditure statements from Financial Affairs. Additional monitoring is undertaken by the University's Budget and Planning Committee.

A research budget is set each year. The example given in the provided evidence shows allocations across the four colleges and the Deanship for the year 2019-2020. In various interviews the Panel heard that the University spends 3% of its budget on research. In the last three years (from 2015-2017) ASU had complied with the HEC requirement to allocate 3% of net profit to research. However, in October 2017, HEC released new regulations which require the spending to be a percentage of gross revenue. The University took around three months to align its budget with the new HEC regulations, which took it almost halfway through the academic year and so the University did not meet the spending criteria in that academic year. For the year 2018-2019, the University is attempting to meet the 3% of the Gross Revenue allocation to research and since then has budgeted its spending to meet the 3%.

The SER states that operational planning and budget allocation ensure that sufficient funding is available to meet the needs of the University's research plan and various staff members confirmed this in interviews with the Panel. Currently the budget funds interdisciplinary research in the areas of Sustainable Development, Future ICT, Teaching & Learning, Coexistence, Tolerance & Peace, Women Leadership and Economic Growth. The Panel heard in interviews with staff that successful research proposals must be in these areas. The budget also funds research materials and equipment, ASU's in house conferences, participation in outside conferences, subscriptions to e-journals, databases, publication fees, research consultations, and membership fees.

The ethical and safe conduct of research is underpinned by various University Bylaws, including the Research Bylaw, the Bylaw on Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and the Students' Misconduct Bylaw. The University's Research Handbook contains a detailed chapter on research ethics, covering general rules of research ethics, intellectual property, plagiarism, and human research ethics. In addition, there is a Research Ethics Policy available *via* the University's website to staff, students and other stakeholders. Research proposals must include an ethics declaration form (contained in the policy) before being considered by the Deanship of Research & Graduate Studies, and then by the RIREC. The policy applies to any research proposals whether by staff, or for undergraduate or Master's projects. An ethics declaration form must be completed for every proposal, even if the investigator does not consider that a permission is necessary. The policy contains a specimen participants' consent form. Masters graduates that the Panel interviewed confirmed that this was the case. They confirmed that they knew about ethical implications before they started the research and mentioned that there was a signed declaration in the thesis, and it was clear that they understood the issue. One of RIREC's responsibilities is to review the policy on research ethics, which should be done every two years. The policy was approved by the RIREC in May 2019.

All full-time academic staff have a contractual obligation to carry out research, set out in the Academic Staff Bylaw and in their job descriptions. There is a weekly time allocation for research which is a minimum of five hours (about 11%)] although the average across the University is 6.5 hours (about 14%). Research output feeds into academic staff annual evaluation.

The Research Policy is a detailed document which applies to all faculty who conduct research, all University students who conduct any research activity, and employees concerned with carrying out the administrative procedures involved in conducting any research. It sets out the procedure for staff to apply for research funding and research development activities, including participation in conferences, workshops or seminars. There are also rewards for publication in journals and conference proceedings. Financial support is also available for publication fees and writing books. Clear instructions and application forms are provided in the policy document. The RIREC is responsible for approving funding proposals, and this activity is recorded in its minutes. This committee has both senior University and college members.

A Research Funding Application Form must be completed and then signed off by the HoD, Chair of the College Scientific Committee, Dean of College, Dean of the Research & Graduate studies, and Chair of RIREC. Proposals that are approved are funded from the University's research budget. The Research Bylaw stipulates that monetary incentives are provided for the various activities mentioned above and that these incentives are allocated from an additional budget since they are not activities mandated by HEC requirements SER. In interviews with staff, it was confirmed that various incentives were available for research. The SER states that the University offers a number of capacity-building activities which centre around research. Some form part of the University's Annual Staff Development Programme, such as Academic Writing for Successful Article Publishing, Encouraging a Research Culture, Formulation of Research Hypotheses, Master's Thesis Supervision, and Scientific Research in Academia. In addition, as mentioned above, the University holds an Annual Distinguished Seminar. The University also holds a Research Seminar Series. The College of Arts & Science's Research Committee Report 2017-2018 includes various activities within the College including various staff publications, citations, and three research seminars.

As per the SER, the University is committed to extending its network of international research contacts in order to support and enhance its own research culture. The University held an international conference on Sustainable Futures with its collaborative partner LSBU in 2017. Another conference, on Innovation, Technology, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship was planned for November 2019. The collaboration agreement with LSBU is currently being extended to include joint research and staff development initiatives. The Panel encourages the University also to explore further opportunities for collaborative research projects with industrial partners in order to enhance its research capacity.

The Panel considers that, on the whole, the University has implemented a plan for research which is appropriate for its mission and has policies and procedures which will help to ensure appropriate research output and ethical conduct of research. Hence, the Panel is of the view that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)

- Update the Research Handbook without delay so that it reflects the organisational structure and current Strategic Plan of the University accurately.

- Ensure linkage between the KPIs given in the University Strategic Plan, the Research Handbook five-year plan, the Deanship Operational Plan and College Operational Plans so that it can better monitor progress towards ASU strategic objectives.

Indicator 24: Higher degrees with research (where applicable)

Where the institution offers higher degrees that include a research component, it provides effective supervision and resources for research students and ensures that its research degrees are of an appropriate level for the programme.

Judgement: Addressed

The University offers five Master's courses, three in the College of Administrative Sciences and two in the College of Law. They are all delivered in Arabic. The study plans of all the Master's programmes include a compulsory thesis or applied project in the final year. The thesis is described in a Thesis course specification which is a clear and detailed document. The Graduate Studies Handbook states that each Master's programme has a study plan composed of 36 credit hours of compulsory and elective courses with a Master's thesis, or an applied project in the College of Administrative Sciences. The thesis/project is awarded 6 or 12 credits. The Graduate Studies Handbook also contains detailed instructions for assessing the thesis. An external member is included in the assessment committee. A Thesis evaluation form is provided by the Research & Graduate Studies Deanship which requires recording of marks across the various thesis elements, assuring accuracy of the final grade. The form asks for marking on such aspects as whether the thesis contributes to a specialised field of knowledge, and that the scientific level of the work is appropriate to a Master's degree.

The Graduate Studies Bylaw guides the conduct of graduate courses, and the Graduate Studies Handbook, which is currently being updated, deals with all aspects of graduate student support. It sets out responsibilities for Deans, HoDs, Programme Leaders, Master's Thesis supervisors, and graduate students. It includes information about applications, disciplinary procedures, and assessment of the thesis or project. It also contains very detailed chapters about how to produce a research thesis/practical project, including how to write acknowledgements and a dedication.

Every graduate student is assigned a supervisor as well as an academic advisor. In interviews with students and alumni the Panel heard that the students had received good support from their supervisors, and had also been able to approach other members of staff for more specialised advice. The College Graduate Studies Committee is responsible for monitoring students' progress and support. It also recommends appointments of supervisors, which are then approved by the Deanship of Research & Graduate Studies. The RIREC oversees quality assurance and enhancement of graduate studies

activities. Its Minutes record discussions of items such as a draft Master's Thesis Handbook, draft guidelines for Master's supervisors and examiners, and a new Research Ethics policy.

To help build research capacity, all undergraduate students must take a compulsory course in research methods, tailored to the needs of students in particular colleges. There is also a Student Research Conference, mentioned in the President's Newsletter of April 2019, at which undergraduate and postgraduate students presented their research. Three students from each track were awarded prizes, and the supervisors of those winning first prize also received an award. The University encourages supervisors of Master's theses to publish jointly with the students to help develop their research skills and entry into the world of research.

Students and alumni whom the Panel interviewed confirmed that no financial support or expenses were given to the students, but there were instances of students receiving scholarships as a result of excellent performance as undergraduates. The Panel encourages the University to review its policy on financial support of postgraduate students in order to attract more candidates and enhance its research capacity-building.

With regards to providing students with feedback, The SER states that, while the University's Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy relates primarily to classroom-based activities, nevertheless its principles also apply to thesis students, who are expected to receive effective and timely feedback. As noted above, the thesis supervisor is responsible for monitoring progress, giving feedback and providing support. The Supervisor is required to submit a follow up report to the Department each semester. This short proforma records tasks that the student has achieved, hours per week spent on thesis preparation, and assessment of the student's achievement on the thesis. Students have opportunities to discuss their feedback with academic staff during office hours. These activities allow the supervisor to intervene early should issues arise. The supervisor will provide support with research techniques, while the academic advisor will support with personal issues, referring to the student counsellor if appropriate. Students and alumni whom the Panel interviewed confirmed that they had been able to meet regularly with their supervisor and have received a variety of support: one student's supervisor provided references that the student could not obtain; all said that their supervisors read several drafts of their thesis and gave feedback. They also confirmed that feedback had been timely and helpful.

The SER notes that all students complete a Student Satisfaction Survey and an Exit Survey, although neither instrument asks specifically about their thesis experience. However, a dedicated Thesis Course Evaluation Survey was added in 2018-2019.

Various documents and policies underpin the University's provision of resources for students' research: Bylaws for the Library and for ICT and KM, Library Policy and ICT & KM Policy and Procedures. The library policy makes reference to ensuring resources for research as well as teaching and has some special provisions for postgraduate students e.g. postgraduate students may borrow more books for

longer; and there is a more generous renewal allowance. As noted earlier in this Report, in 2018-2019 library provision was assessed in the light of the University's research activities and a list of relevant resources was made available to the Deanship of Research &Graduate Studies. Colleges have input into planning of resources *via* membership of the LLRC, and identify resources needed through the annual operational planning process. The Assistant Dean of Research & Graduate Studies is also a member of the LLRC thus providing another channel for feedback on resources required. Students and alumni whom the Panel interviewed noted that e-resources were available from home and commented on the large library of books and e-resources.

The SER states that examination of Master's theses is conducted according to the Graduate Studies Bylaw, the Graduate Studies Handbook, and the Assessment, Moderation and Feedback Policy. The latter policy applies to all learners undertaking taught components of programmes, so it does not give advice on assessment of theses, but does include grade classifications for postgraduates, and a list of generic marking criteria for Master's level work. These procedures call for a committee of assessors, including an external member, to be formed to assess the student by a viva voce examination. Marks are recorded on a Thesis Evaluation Form.

As mentioned above, the Graduate Studies Handbook covers assessment in detail. College Graduate Studies Directors are responsible for identifying externals for thesis examinations, and these are approved by the Research & Graduate Studies Deanship. According to the Graduate Studies Handbook, the external examiner receives the thesis and first validates that the thesis is appropriate for discussion. Then a discussion panel (including external members) is set up. The student gives a presentation to this panel (and any other interested person) and is then questioned by the panel. The SER states that a process review was held in 2018-2019 and currently a process is being drawn up to further clarify the appointment and duties of examiners, with further guidance on the assessment process. Enhanced guidance for supervisors is also being produced as a result of this process review.

The SER states that the University provides supervisor training sessions. The provided evidence includes a presentation for the 'Crossing the Bridge Together Seminars' (May 2019), and a session on 'How to have a good viva' as examples of capacity building activities. No detail is provided but this session appears to be a role-play of a viva examination. The academic staff development programme for 2018-2019 does not offer any courses specifically geared to Master's supervision. The SER states that processes related to supervision – including supervisor training – are currently being reviewed. As noted above, in 2018-2019 a Thesis Course Evaluation form, which includes questions about supervision, was developed. It is intended that the results of this would be fed into designing more development opportunities for academic staff.

The Panel considers that, in general, the University provides effective supervision and resources for its Master's students. Hence, the Panel is of the view that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)

• None
Judgement: The Institution **addresses** Standard 7: Research

Standard 8

Community Engagement

The institution has a clear community engagement plan that is aligned with its mission and which is operational.

Indicator 25: Community Engagement

The institution has conceptualized and defined the ways in which it will serve and engage with local communities in order to discharge its social responsibilities.

Comment(s)

ASU has community engagement (CE) as an integral part of its functions. It is addressed in ASU's mission, Bylaws and in its Strategic plan, where it constitutes the third pillar of the Strategic Plan. Four main priorities have been identified, namely: consultancy and knowledge sharing, community support, open campus and public outreach. Community engagement activities are guided by a policy that defines the University's commitment towards serving the community, outlines the scope and nature of activities to be carried out as well as specifies the responsibilities of various parties involved.

ASU has a dedicated Community Engagement Office which is supervised by the VP for Administration, Finance & Community Engagement, in addition to a Community Engagement Committee which reports to the University Council and has representatives from various colleges and departments. Furthermore, ASU considers community engagement as part of its academic staff responsibilities which they are evaluated on. Although ASU views community engagement mostly as a community service that is -what the University can provide the society with, there is a clear evidence of active and formal representation of the society on ASU Programme Advisory Boards, as was confirmed in interviews.

The Community Engagement Office keeps a record of the conducted activities, which is together with the operational plan used as a checklist for monitoring purposes. Like all other departments, the Office prepares a progress update at the end of each semester, which feeds into the University's strategy implementation report. Upon examining the Annual Operational Plan 2018-2019, it was observed that it has KPIs for eight types of community engagement activities. It is not clear, however, how the target levels for these KPIs were set. For example, under item 3.2 (D), the number of staff to participate in community engagement activities is five. This would be questionable if all staff have community engagement as part of their contractual responsibilities, as the SER claims. The Panel believes that this area could benefit from a detailed review of the University's planning and performance in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the ASU engagement with its local community. Hence, the Panel recommends that the University should review the community engagement planning and evaluate the effectiveness of its engagement with local community.

Annual reports on community engagement activities are produced. However, the provided evidence has only reports for 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 academic years, with no report for 2017-2018. Each annual report is mainly a list of all events and activities that the University or its representatives were involved in. Neither the annual report on community engagement nor the SER itself, provides critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the ASU's CE activities, with identified areas for future improvement, if any. During the on-site visit, however, it was made clear to the Panel that each activity is evaluated by its attendees using an activity evaluation form. In the Panel's view the results of these evaluations should be considered as an integral part of the Community Engagement Annual Report. According to the SER, and as confirmed in the interviews with staff, feedback collected is used to identify and to plan future activities and events by incorporating it in the operational plan of the Community Engagement Office.

The Panel notes that the scope and nature of ASU community engagement activities are guided by a clear policy, which defines the University's commitment towards serving the community in line with its mission and strategic objectives. Hence, the Panel is of the view that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation(s)
• Review of the University's community engagement planning and evaluate the effectiveness of its engagement with local community.

Judgement:	The Institution **addresses** Standard 8: Community Engagement