Education & Training Quality Authority
Kingdom of Bahrain

Directorate of
Higher Education Reviews
Institutional Review Report

Ahlia University
Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 17 – 21 March 2019
HI012-C2-R004

Table of Contents

Acronyms

ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
ACID	Ahlia Centre for Information and Documentation
ADREG	Admission & Registration Information System
AU	Ahlia University
BoT	Board of Trustees
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
CAQA	Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Points Average
CILOs	Course Intended Learning Outcomes
CME	Centre for Measurement & Evaluation
COC	Committee of Committees
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
FPBC	Financial Planning and Budgeting Committee
GWU	George Washington University
HEC	Higher Education Council
HRD	Human Resources Directorate
IAQAC	Institutional Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee
ICTC	Information Communication Technology Centre
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSEM	Master of Science in Engineering Management
NQF	National Qualification Framework
PD	Professional Development
PILOs	Programme Intended Learning Outcomes
PPDC	Programme Planning and Delivery Committee
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

SEN	Special Educational Needs
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis
TLAC	Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee
TLC	Teaching and Learning Committee
ToR	Terms of References
TTT	Train the Trainer
USPC	University Strategic Plan Committee
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 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

Institution Name	Ahlia University
Year of Establishment	Cabinet Decision No. 1626-03 -2001
Location	Building No. 41, Road No. 18, Block 319, Manama Hoora, Kingdom of Bahrain
Number of Colleges	5
Names of Colleges	1. College of Arts and Science 2. College of Business and Finance 3. College of Engineering 4. College of Information Technology 5. College of Medical and Health Sciences
Number of Qualifications	18
Number of Programmes	12 Bachelor Degrees 4 Master Degrees 2 PhD Degrees
Number of Enrolled Current Students	No. of students registered in the First Semester 2018/2019: 1442
Number of Graduates	No. of Ahlia University graduates since inception until summer 2017/2018: 4388
Number of Academic Staff Members	103
Number of Administrative Staff Members	117

III. Judgment Summary

> **The Institution's Judgement: Meets QA requirements**

Standard/ Indicator	Title	Judgment
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	Not Applicable
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

Ahlia University (AU) has a clearly articulated mission statement which defines the institution's purpose with respect to the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. The AU Mission is presented in appropriate institutional publications along with a vision statement expressing the long-term aspirations of the University, and is accompanied with a set of 10 core values, with an emphasis on the ethical values guiding all activities across the Institution. The core values are further elaborated within the AU Strategic Plan (2016-2020).

The Panel considers that although there has been little change in the published mission statement since the inception of the University, the AU mission statement remains appropriate to guide the future direction of the University and is well-suited for the level of education, as well as for its research activities, which contribute to the economic developments in Bahrain.

The mission statement is published on the AU's website and is disseminated through various AU handbooks and on notice boards across the campus. It was evident from interviews conducted by the Panel that there is a high level of awareness of the current strategic plan across the AU community, and that it serves to inform the operational plans for all units across the University. The SER states that the Mission was last reviewed in 2015 as part of the development process of the Strategic Plan (2016 – 2020). This process involved a range of appropriate internal and external stakeholders as per the SER. However, other than a set of slides produced to inform a SWOT analysis conducted in November 2015, little documentary evidence is provided to substantiate this consultative process with stakeholders. Nonetheless, from interviews with senior management, the Panel was informed of the participation of various internal and external stakeholder groups at appropriate stages in this development process.

The SER clarifies that the mission statement is reviewed to remain in line with national priorities and strategies. The review of the Mission is conducted as part of the revision and development of successive four-year Strategic Plan but no supporting evidence was provided of discussions pertaining to fitness for purpose or fitness of purpose specifically related to the mission statement. Hence, the Panel recommends that AU should implement a structured and formal process for periodic review of the mission statement and development of the five-year Strategic

Plan, to ensure that the input from appropriate stakeholders is recorded and the approval steps prior to publication are documented. The University Strategic Plan Committee (USPC) has a clear mandate to monitor and review the Strategic Plan and, accordingly, conducts an annual review of it and recommends any necessary updates to the University Council. The USPC also reports the implementation of the Strategic Plan on a periodic basis.

The Panel is satisfied that the Mission of AU has been developed through an inclusive process and that the strategic derived operational plans provide a sound directional steer for the future development and operation of the University.

Recommendation

- Implement a structured and formal process for periodic review of the mission statement and development of the five-year Strategic Plan, to ensure that the input from appropriate stakeholders is recorded and the approval steps prior to publication are documented.

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 SER emphasises the efforts of AU in ensuring that the governance arrangements for the University demonstrate a clear separation of ownership and responsibility for financial matters from decision making related to academic matters. The SER makes it clear that the Board of Trustees (BoT) does not get involved in the day-to-day management and operations of the core functions of the Institution and this was confirmed during interviews and from meeting minutes demonstrating the areas of business conducted by the Board. The BoT is responsible for ensuring effective governance and oversight of all activities across the University.

The SER supporting materials included an undated list of the eight Board members and evidence of approval of the BoT membership by the Higher Education Council (HEC) in July 2016. The AU website has a list of the HEC approved members but no further information or 'brief' on the BoT is provided on the website, as is claimed in the SER. The current BoT membership was confirmed during the site visit and it comprises appropriate high-level delegates across a range of disciplines and experiences. There have been no recent changes or additions to the membership of the BoT but it was explained to the Panel during interviews that any new Board members would be inducted by the Chair of the Board and briefed on their roles and responsibilities, which are documented in the Ahlia University By-Laws. The AU By-Laws document of 2018 includes the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the BoT, Board of Directors, University Council, College Councils and Department Councils; it also includes the responsibilities of senior administrative positions.

To ensure that the financial resources available to AU are used effectively to support the strategic plans and all programmes offered, the University has established the Financial Planning and Budgeting Committee (FPBC), which has appropriate ToR to conduct its business of financial

planning. The ToR of the FPBC makes it clear that the Committee has a responsibility to ensure that the departmental budgets are aligned with the operational plans of colleges and the university's strategic plan. The FPBC reports directly to the President.

In relation to financial decision-making, the President and vice presidents have financial and academic responsibilities. Their roles and obligations with respect to financial duties are clearly set out in the 'Responsibilities' section of their Job Descriptions. The deans and chairpersons also have job descriptions which set out their authorities in making financial and academic-related decisions. A documented request from the AU President for deans and chairpersons to submit their proposals for budgetary allocations in 2018 demonstrates the inclusion of these managers in the budgetary planning process of academic year 2017/2018. This delegation of financial authority to those staff directly involved in programme management and delivery is stated in the SER as the university's strategy for ensuring that programme objectives are met and high academic standards are achieved.

The methodology for budget preparation is described in the example of the institutional budget for 2019 provided to the Panel and this shows the consideration of planned student enrolments and faculty positions and associated salaries. The budget documentation includes slides giving guidance on budget preparation and this provides further evidence that the budget planning process is suitably inclusive at the planning stage.

AU's finances are managed in compliance with the 'Commercial Company Regulations' requirements of Bahrain's Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism. The Annual General Meeting of AU shareholders receives the company's financial reports and appoints the external auditors for the year ahead. This procedure and practice ensures that the appointment of auditors is independent of the AU Board of Directors, the AU BoT, and internal AU management.

The SER refers to the engagement of the FPBC reporting to the University Council on financial issues and the linkage of budgetary provision to the current strategic and operational plans. The consolidated annual budget is prepared by the Directorate of Financial Affairs on the basis of the annual estimated expenditure forms completed and submitted by the deans/directors, which are based on past, current and anticipated trends, as well as the requirements of strategic objectives expressed in Operational Plans. The inclusive process of budget development is supported by evidence in the meeting minutes of the Budget Planning Committee, in which it is reported that budget forms ought to be distributed in July 2018 for completion by departments, colleges, administrative directorates and centres, along with guidelines for completion of detailed proposals. The most recent external and independent audit demonstrates full compliance with international financial reporting standards. The financial regulations, which include processes to prevent and detect fraud, and external auditing, are included in the cited Manual of Financial Affairs Policies & Procedures. The revised Financial By-Laws of 2018 were provided to the Panel during the site visit and these provide the detailed guidance required for effective financial management.

The Panel is satisfied that AU conducts its financial affairs and management thereof within a sound system of designated responsibilities across the staff and committee structure of AU, and that the allocation of resources is appropriately aligned to the Strategic and Operational Plans of the University, which addresses the requirement of this Indicator

Recommendation

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

The AU Strategic Plan (2016-2020) was developed taking into consideration the university's strengths and priorities, the HEC National Strategy for Higher Education in the Kingdom, Tamkeen Skills Gap Study, and the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030. This environmental scan informs the planning process and ensures that the University develops its educational provision to support the needs of society, and the Kingdom's economic development and growth strategy.

The approved Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 was developed in conjunction with relevant internal and external stakeholders and the range of consultations include meetings held with those involved in implementing the previous Strategic Plan. The status of achievements related to the previous Plan was circulated within AU prior to meetings with stakeholders such as the Chairperson of the BoT, the President and other senior managers, chairpersons and directors of centres and departments. Student opinions are sought through consultation with members of the Student Council and other key committees; and surveys conducted by the Centre for Measurement & Evaluation (CME) such as student satisfaction, employer satisfaction, alumni satisfaction, and staff satisfaction. Furthermore, two SWOT analysis workshops were held; one for staff and students, and a second for external stakeholders including alumni and employers. Based on interviews, faculty and staff input was gathered through their membership of the University Council and other key committees including Programme Advisory Board meetings. The Panel concludes that the development of the Strategic Plan (2016 – 2020) was the product of an appropriately consultative exercise and was inclusive and transparent.

In January 2017, the USPC considered and reported on necessary changes for developing Operational Plans and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as derived from the Strategic Plan for AU. The Strategic Plan (2016-2020) has KPIs and annual targets related to the three core functions as prescribed by the Standards and there is evidence of alignment of the KPIs with the strategic objectives. The KPIs are grouped under each of the eight themes. The Strategic Objectives which correspond to the sub-KPIs are shown along with the related themes. Although, many KPIs and targets are suitably quantitative and appropriate, some of the quantitative targets stipulated in the Plan are not. For example, the effectiveness of various committees is set at 80% but the Panel was unclear as to how this is determined; in addition, the usage of counselling and guidance services is set with a target of 80% but this does not necessarily reflect the effectiveness and value of this service to students.

The SER reports appropriate engagement of the University Council in monitoring achievements and targets within the Strategic Plan, and the President reports progress at intervals to the BoT. The President is the Chair of the USPC and evidently reports to the University Council and

onwards to the Board. Based on a review of the Strategic Plan KPIs, the Directorate of Strategic Planning produces an annual report that details the extent of achievement of strategic objectives and targets. This report is reviewed by the USPC prior to submission to the University Council, to facilitate decision-making and then subsequently used for informing the BoT. Hence, the Panel is of the opinion that annual monitoring of the Strategic Plan and constituent objectives is clear and evident in the SER and supporting documents.

The Annual Operational Plans are derived from the Strategic Plan and are monitored regularly through focused meetings with colleges, departments and directorates, as a responsibility of the Director of Strategic Planning. During interviews, the Panel was informed that the USPC conducts formal reviews of progress on a quarterly basis. The progress on achievement of strategic objectives is reported briefly in the 'Annual Report of the Directorate of Strategic Planning', which is forwarded to the University Council and BoT. Upon scrutinizing this evidence, the Panel noted that the detailed unit and departmental Operational Plans need to be more clearly defined in terms of documentation and review.

The Panel is satisfied that the Strategic Plan is developed and monitored through a sound process. The derived Operational Plans at the level of departments and operational units need to be reviewed regularly, and reported and documented through the committee structure, in order to facilitate effective decision-making. Hence, the Panel recommends that Operational Plans for all administrative and academic units should systematically reviewed for achievement of KPIs and defined targets, and results of reviews are being reported through the committee structure, in order to inform senior management and the Board of Trustees. Overall the Panel is of the view that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation

- Ensure that Operational Plans for all administrative and academic units are systematically reviewed for achievement of KPIs and defined targets, and results of reviews are being reported through the committee structure, in order to inform senior management and the Board of Trustees.

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

AU has a clearly defined organizational and management structure that is described in a summary of assigned roles and responsibilities in the SER. The Institution comprises colleges, directorates, and centres, and the respective duties and responsibility of each are well-defined and documented. The organizational structure is depicted in a chart showing reporting lines. The positions indicated on the chart are conventional international titles, and descriptive of the designated responsibilities. The Panel confirmed during interviews that there was a clear understanding of functional roles and responsibilities across the AU staff and managers.

Decision-making process at AU is demonstrated to be inclusive of a wide range of faculty, administrative staff and students. This process is implemented through a clearly-defined

committees and board structure. The AU President and team of senior managers are appropriately involved in the key committees. The Panel concludes that the organizational structure provides the necessary leadership in the key activities across the University.

The Organizational Chart is accessible to all stakeholders and across the Institution *via* AU's website. The Chart is also available in the Staff Handbook and on SharePoint for all staff. The Panel is satisfied that the Organizational Chart accurately indicates the hierarchy and 'chain of command'. Job Descriptions with assigned responsibilities are clearly defined in the provided evidence. From interviews, the Panel confirmed that staff members are provided with access to the Staff Handbook, which has all the necessary policies, procedures and regulations pertaining to staff in general.

The organizational structure is stated in the SER and is subject to a regular review and revised where appropriate. For example, a revised committee structure was recommended by the University Council to the BoT, which was subject to a further review before it was finally approved by the BoT.

The AU standing committees and councils have a broad representation of senior managers, support staff, faculty and student representatives on selected groups. The President of the Student Council is a member of the University Council and additional student representatives may be invited to relevant meetings of their respective College Councils. From Panel interviews with different committees' members, minutes of meetings and ToRs of all committees, it is evident that there is comprehensive involvement of stakeholders in decision-making at AU.

The Panel appreciates that the overall committee structure, defined reporting lines, and records/minutes available to the Panel indicate a system that functions effectively to guide the operations and planning across all AU activities. The Panel was provided with a sample of a 'Committee Evaluation Report', which shows proper procedure and practice of performance evaluation. AU has established a 'Committee of Committees' (COC), to take responsibility for, and report to the University Council on, the effectiveness of all standing committees. The Panel concludes that the functional responsibilities of AU's standing committees, reporting lines and the monitoring of performance of these committees by the COC is effective in the management and operation of activities across the university. Therefore, this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation

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 BoT has the ultimate and explicit responsibility for the oversight of academic standards at AU and the University Council ensures that the operational systems meet the requirements for maintenance of high academic standards in all programmes of study. This operational responsibility cascades downwards from the University Council to the College and Departmental Councils. The Panel recognizes from interviews and provided evidence that there

is a comprehensive faculty representation across these councils to ensure full ownership of academic integrity at the level of programme and course delivery.

The BoT receives and considers routine reports on the academic achievement of student cohorts. The responsibility for academic leadership falls on the Vice President (VP) for Academic Affairs who monitors the operational effectiveness at the college and department levels and reports to the President. The Student Handbook contains the academic rules and regulations for undergraduate and graduate students. This handbook is available to staff and students in hard copy and is accessible on the AU's website, and there is a comprehensive Assessment Manual to guide all aspects of assessment in AU's programmes.

Students are made aware of the academic rules and regulations, and code of conduct, at the Student Orientation event. The students also have access to regulations through the AU website and they all receive the Student Handbook with clear statements and warnings against academic offences. A specific section in the Assessment Manual deals with academic misconduct and with particular emphasis on the deterrence of plagiarism. Evidence and interviews with staff and students showed that the similarity detection software 'Turnitin' is used regularly by staff in relation to submission of all substantial assignments through Moodle. From interviews with staff, it can be concluded that the use of this software is an effective deterrent against plagiarism in student assignments. The process for violations of academic regulations are clearly disseminated to students at various critical stages in their study programmes. However, the Panel noted from the provided evidence that although it was stressed that cases where academic dishonesty has been detected are referred to the University Disciplinary Committee and penalties should be imposed if the allegations are upheld, no specification for those penalties were mentioned. The Panel learned during interviews that a detailed procedure for academic misconduct's penalties is underway. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AU should expedite the process for developing a comprehensive procedure for penalties on academic misconduct, for better and effective deterrence.

AU has a systematic process and related policies for dealing with complaints and grievances of students. The Panel learned from students that academic-related complaints on grades, should be directed to the Department Chair; however, in some cases, the Dean of the College or the Dean of Student Affairs may become involved. During interviews, the students reported that grade appeals are dealt with in a fair and transparent manner. The Panel examined the provided evidence and found that the numbers of grade appeals are relatively low. For non-academic complaints, the Head of Student Support is the first point of contact but the Dean of Student Affairs may be involved. All cases are recorded from initiation to the final outcome. The Panel concludes from reviewing the policies and procedures and the observed implementation practice at AU that there is a transparent and fair process for the investigation of complaints, appeals and grievances by students, and these are applied consistently across the Institution. Hence, the Panel is of the view that AU has established a range of mechanisms to ensure academic standards are upheld and academic integrity is maintained in teaching and research activities; therefore, this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation

- Expedite the process for developing a comprehensive procedure for penalties on academic misconduct, for better and effective deterrence.

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

AU has a dedicated Academic Partnerships Policy and Procedures to guide the selection and operation of external affiliations. From interviews with representatives of the two main affiliated universities, i.e. George Washington University (GWU) in the US and Brunel University in the UK, and from documentation regarding the mechanisms and procedures for interaction between AU and these two affiliates, it is demonstrated that due diligence has been done in establishing the formal details of these two arrangements. Furthermore, the SER makes reference to evidence on the duties of the Legal Affairs and Compliance Unit that ensures that there is compliance of Agreements, including affiliation arrangements, with Bahraini law and HEC regulations.

The formal Agreements between AU and the two main affiliates i.e. Brunel University and GWU, include details of all aspects of the arrangement, including responsibilities for assessment, teaching & learning resources, and quality assurance. Although, the SER refers to the responsibility of the Joint Boards to ensure that all aspects of programme implementation, including compliance with HEC requirements and considering the suitability of assessment in the Bahraini context, there is no detail provided on the formal review policy or procedure, and no records of such practice are listed in the Supporting Materials. However, Section 6 in the Brunel Agreement details the annual review process involving both parties. The Panel recommends that AU should establish formal review procedures for the joint programmes (Brunel and GWU) and record the outcomes of reviews together with actions taken for any changes/ improvements.

From interviews, the Panel learned that joint boards meet regularly to monitor the programme performance and to ensure the academic integrity of the partnership. However, they do not evidently include any aspects of staff training or Professional Development (PD). As Ahlia University provides second supervisors for the graduate students and so the requirement for PD and criteria for appointment of second supervisors would be necessary. The Panel recommends that AU should take advantage of the experience of the affiliates in delivering its graduate level programmes.

The Master of Science in Engineering Management (MSEM) programme, operated in conjunction with GWU, is managed through a joint board (MSEM-OCP). Two senior managers are responsible to ensure effective planning, programme and course level coordination, monitoring of performance, and all aspects of programme delivery. The detailed day-to-day operations are managed through the Programme Chair at AU and the deliberations of the MSEM Programme Committee. The MSEM Handbook has clear statements on the responsibilities of the Board, student rights and responsibilities, and the rules and regulations that apply to students in relation to the two institutions. There is less clarity in the Handbook regarding the detailed assessment of students and parity of qualifications although there is a statement that 'students

admitted to the GWU M.S Degree in EM offered at Ahlia University take the same curriculum as offered at the main GWU campus and receive the same certificate of MS Degree'. However, the Handbook does include clear information on the authentication and endorsement of earned certificates by the Bahraini Embassy in the US and ultimately by the HEC in Bahrain. The SER and supporting material also demonstrates that the equivalence of the MSEM programme has been considered and determined as appropriate to Level 9 in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Bahrain. The status of the qualifications and details of the affiliations are clearly articulated in the Student Handbook and International Student Handbook.

Regarding the Brunel/Ahlia PhD without residence, there is rather less detail in the relevant Handbook regarding the standing of the earned qualification with the Bahraini authorities. The mode of study is a traditional UK structure of a research thesis. There are no taught elements to the programme and therefore the assessment is based solely on the submission and examination of the dissertation. However, the Panel found clear details on the mode of study, assessment and completion requirements in the relevant Handbook.

The AU International Directorate is responsible for the implementation of strategies and any agreements with institutions and other organizations nationally, regionally or internationally. This Unit has the responsibility to ensure the maintenance of good relations with affiliates and provide periodic reports to AU's management, and relevant committees, on operationalization of academic partnerships, collaborations, and outcomes. It is evident from the SER, interviews with representatives of all parties, and publications related to the joint programmes, that there is a positive and comprehensive relationship between AU and its affiliates, which is bringing additional benefits and opportunities for AU students to learn from this international experience.

The Panel concludes that the collaborative arrangements with affiliates have been established with due diligence and have operated effectively to bring real benefit to students engaged in the study programmes and the partnered institutions as a whole. There is scope for further interaction between the organizations but the Indicator is satisfactorily addressed.

Recommendation

- Establish formal review procedures for the joint programmes (Brunel and GWU) and record the outcomes of reviews together with actions taken for any changes/ improvements.
- Implement professional development activity for AU faculty that draws benefit from the experience of the affiliates in supervising graduate level research and implementing graduate level assessment.

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

AU has a Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA), which is responsible for accreditations, reviews and quality management systems. Structures are in place to monitor implementation of quality assurance across the University, as well as to monitor and review how the quality assurance processes are implemented. Several structures and committees are responsible for quality assurance including, the CAQA, Institutional Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee (IAQAC), the Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC), and legal affairs compliance.

The scope of work of the CAQA is set out in a policy and operational plan. In addition, the CAQA reports to the IAQAC and TLAC; and obtains legal advice from legal affairs, in terms of compliance with HEC and other requirements as confirmed to the Panel during interviews. The term 'Champions' is referred to in various documents, but the definition, appointment and role of these champions are not clearly set out. During interviews, it was clarified that a champion had been appointed for each of the eight standards included in the institutional review framework, and was related to the role/responsibilities of the post that the champion occupied. Furthermore, interviews with senior management confirmed to the Panel that these champions were already functioning in positions at a senior level in the organisation and championed these standards on an ongoing basis, not only for review purposes. A Quality Manual has been produced and distributed to inform all staff of the quality requirements. The Panel acknowledges that in its design, the quality assurance management system is appropriate.

All Colleges and Departments of the University are represented on, and involved in the quality-related structures and committees, which the Panel found to be operational. During interviews, the Panel learned that one of the duties of the Departmental Chairs was to assume responsibility for quality assurance of those courses delivered by the Department. Interviews with staff members from different colleges showed that staff attend workshops related to quality assurance of teaching and learning, and it is included as a topic in the induction programmes for new staff, who also received a manual of policies and procedures. The Panel appreciates the attention that has been given to the implementation of the quality assurance policy and procedures in relation to teaching and learning and of the various attempts to keep staff informed of these policies and procedures.

The CAQA is involved with monitoring and reviewing various policies and procedures, and makes recommendations based on the findings of these reviews. As a result of the measures taken to assure quality, the University has received 'full confidence' for a number of its programmes that were subjected to programme reviews, and has ten programmes placed on the NQF framework. The Panel appreciates the role of champions and other committed leaders in driving the process of implementing quality assurance measures, monitoring and reviewing them.

The CAQA has its own operational plan covering activities related to accreditation and enhancing quality assurance practices. During interviews, the Panel learned that one of the key responsibilities of the Policies and Procedures Committee was to review policies regularly. Each policy had a different review cycle time, depending on the nature of the policy. The policy in relation to the CAQA had last been updated in academic year 2009/2010. The ToRs of the IAQAC Committee is now in its second edition, having been updated in 2018, as is that of the TLAC. A third version of the Quality Manual was produced in 2016. Where there are amendments made to policies and procedures or new policies were introduced, the CAQA is also responsible for providing quality assurance training to staff. These workshops are evaluated through surveys. The Panel appreciates the systems and procedures in place to monitor the implementation of quality assurance and to ensure that all staff are familiar with the requirements.

However, the Panel noticed that CAQA is not directly involved in this quality assurance process, other than for programme reviews. For example, less attention has been given by the CAQA to the quality assurance of research, although, the Graduates Studies and Research Council interacts with the TLAC regarding all academic quality-related aspects relevant to the review of Master's programmes, as well as dealing with quality aspects of research. Similarly, quality assurance of community engagement is largely outside the ambit of the CAQA. The Panel identified this as an area for improvement. The Panel recommends that AU should expand the scope of the quality assurance policy and procedure to include research and community engagement.

Furthermore, the Panel noted that not all policy documents stipulated when they should be reviewed. In addition, some of the policy documents that have been revised or introduced, build upon previous policies and procedures, without the earlier policies being repealed. This has resulted in the generation of a number of policies becoming fragmented. The Panel recommends that the review date of policies be explicitly included in the policy and that a system of repealing old policies be introduced, to ensure that they remain current.

The Panel notes that policies, procedures and regulations are in place in relation to the three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. However, policies, procedures and regulations pertaining to doctoral level programmes were not evident. During interviews, it was clarified that doctoral programmes were only hosted by AU, and that students were bound by the policies, procedures and regulations of the international partner university responsible for programme delivery, i.e. Brunel University.

The Panel acknowledges that in relation to teaching and learning, policies, procedures and regulations are well developed. During interviews, the Panel learned that Programme Chairs were the Programme Review Coordinators in their Departments and were responsible for a three-year cycle of programme reviews. This review process included consultations with stakeholders as well as input from external reviewers. As clarified during interviews, the results

of this review were deliberated at a departmental level, before being escalated to a college and then university council level, *via* the TLAC. The Panel also learned that there was ongoing informal feedback on programmes and that changes were also introduced within the three-year timeframe. The Panel appreciates the attention given to the quality assurance of programmes at the Departmental level.

The Panel notes that a five-year process is set in place to monitor compliance with respect to the HEC requirements and BQA cycle frameworks. In addition to this, there are at least two review processes per year that take place (known as loop closure and enhancement). The Panel also learned from interviews that the Policies and Procedures Committee is responsible for overseeing all policies, to ensure that they are aligned with HEC requirements and bylaws, up-to-date, accurate, consistent, and put into practice.

The Panel notes that university policies and procedures are maintained by the Ahlia Centre for Information and Documentation (ACID) for easy access by staff and students in electronic or hard copy. Some of the policies are included in Staff or Student Handbooks, which are made available to new staff as part of their induction programme, and handed out to students during their orientation.

According to the SER, a repository of policies is available on the AU's website and SharePoint. A snap shot of the SharePoint site is included as evidence. Only five people have permission to modify this site. During interviews, it was confirmed that all staff had access to this information on SharePoint but could not modify it. In addition to online repositories and the distribution of hard copies of handbooks, quality assurance policies are disseminated by email to all staff. However, it is not clear how the University would check that all staff have in fact read and understood this information. It is the Panel's opinion that the University is encouraged to develop a procedure to ensure that all staff read emails and communicate/exchange information about critical policy changes. The Panel learned during the site visit that regular workshops are held to explain these new policies and procedures to staff. Where such workshops are not arranged, the Panel suggests that a procedure be put in place to check that all staff have read critical policy changes. The Panel appreciates the procedures and efforts undertaken to ensure that both staff and students are kept abreast of the latest developments in quality assurance.

The Panel concludes that through a variety of committee structures and mechanisms, AU has established a comprehensive system to ensure quality of its programmes, administrative and support services, and this system evidently serves a process of continuous quality improvement. The Indicator is therefore addressed.

Recommendation

- Specify/record the review date of each policy document and develop a procedure for repealing previous policies when revised policies are introduced.
- Expand the scope of the quality assurance policy and procedure to include research and community engagement.

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

AU conducts numerous informal benchmarking activities, and these are guided by a Programmatic Benchmarking Policy and Procedure that sets out the policy and procedure for benchmarking activities. According to this policy, 'The focus of benchmarking should be at least on the learning programme structure and curriculum, number of credits, work-based learning, professional and practical components, delivery modes, learning outcomes and graduate attributes'. A notable omission in the scope of programme benchmarking is at the level of assessment. The Panel observed from the report of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) that the reason for not accrediting many of the course modules for exemption, was related to assessment.

According to the documented procedure, benchmarking of programmes should take place on a regular basis, and in line with the programme review process, which involves a three-year cycle. Also, based on the benchmarking procedure, each benchmarking exercise should be done against at least three other selected institutions: one local, one regional and one international. As stated in the benchmarking manual, colleges/departments should be responsible for the identification of benchmarking institutions. This process was confirmed to the Panel during interviews.

When implementing these policies and procedures, typically benchmarking has been done for external review purposes and at the end of a programme review cycle within colleges. The Panel learned from interviews that programme benchmarking occurred regularly as part of a three-year programme review cycle, and that it was carried out to ensure appropriate programme content. A list of programme benchmarking that had recently been conducted by Colleges, listed 13 benchmarking activities. In each case, international, regional and local universities were listed. During the interviews, it was clarified that the nature of this benchmarking was largely a comparison with information available on the Internet.

AU also uses external assessors for the purpose of benchmarking assessment activities. External assessors were interviewed by the Panel, who confirmed that they were generally satisfied with the quality of assessments and standard of work of the students. During interviews, the Panel was informed that the University was increasingly aligning its programmes to professional body requirements, with a view to ultimately seeking accreditation from these professional bodies for relevant programmes. This, therefore, constituted another form of informal benchmarking. Interviewees highlighted the difficulties of formalising benchmarking, and obtaining information beyond that which was publicly available. The Panel is of the view that the international partnerships with GWU and Brunel University could be further developed for benchmarking purposes by agreeing to formal benchmarking arrangements. The Panel appreciates the level of activity of informal benchmarking, particularly of teaching and learning activities, and encourages AU to continue the process of aligning all programmes to the accreditation requirements of relevant professional bodies.

The Panel learned during interviews that informal benchmarking of research outputs had recently been implemented. Interviewed staff members stated that tracking of the research outputs listed on SCOUPS was cited as a source for benchmarking of faculty research, and in

addition to SCOUPS, comparative data was obtained through local and regional research rankings.

There is no evidence of benchmarking for community engagement activities or the administrative and support areas at AU. During interviews, the Panel learned that there had been a benchmarking activity with two other libraries, one local and one regional. They had compared textbook collections, online resources and their websites [refer to indicator 10]. In addition, the administrative support area had the opportunity to be informally benchmarked at a regional conference. Hence, the Panel recommends that AU should improve the benchmarking policy and procedure to cover all three core areas of activity, i.e. teaching and learning, research and community engagement, as well as assessment, administrative and support functions, and establish formal benchmarking agreements accordingly.

The Panel learned from interviews that market needs for programmes were established primarily through regular surveys and meetings with alumni and employers. Furthermore, both employers and alumni are represented on College Advisory Boards. These boards have been established in each College, which the staff appreciates as providing a platform to discuss employer surveys and ideas for new courses or changes to programmes.

Through interviews, the Panel was given several examples of changes made to programmes as a result of formal programme reviews. These included the introduction of QuickBooks in IT, a focus on furniture and kitchens in interior design, and making mass communications more practical by including TV production. The Panel appreciates the responsiveness of AU to the feedback received from various stakeholders.

The Panel notes that, facilitated by the CAQA, and according to the Programmatic Benchmarking Policy and Procedure, the benchmarking report, along with further input collected from stakeholders and market studies, are used to develop action plans. The findings from benchmarking of programmes are tabled in the form of a report submitted to various groups within the University, including the University Council. The minutes of these meetings suggest that discussion of the reports, and ultimately improvement action plans, are developed and form part of college operational plans. During interviews, the Panel learned that the University has obtained five-star ratings in three areas of the QS ranking; HEC accreditation; and 10 programmes have been placed on the Bahrain NQF.

The Panel notes that the University has a dedicated unit 'CME', to assist in conducting surveys. The CME Policies and Procedures Manual lists 24 different surveys, each with specification of the frequency of which surveys are to be conducted, and identifying the purpose and owner of each survey. These 24 different surveys target several stakeholder groups of the Institution including faculty, students, alumni and employers, and cover a range of topics including facilities, services, systems, teaching and learning, and staff. A list of 21 surveys conducted during 2018 was provided. The Panel also noted that information used for this institutional review included online admissions data, employability data, and survey results; most of which was obtained from the CME.

Based on feedback from various stakeholders, the University updated its programmes to ensure that they offer courses that are needed by the industry. The Panel learned during interviews that in response to information from student surveys, changes have been made to textbooks, and the practical components of courses have been increased. The Panel appreciates the wide range of

surveys that are administered across a range of stakeholders on a regular basis, and that they are used for enhancing the quality of the University and its offerings.

The Panel concludes that a suitable range of stakeholder surveys takes place at AU; some benchmarking is conducted, although this process could be developed further, and the results of these inputs are used to inform decision-making, planning and quality enhancement. The Indicator is therefore addressed.

Recommendation

- Improve the benchmarking policy and procedure to cover all three core areas of activity, i.e. teaching and learning, research and community engagement, as well as assessment, administrative and support functions, and establish formal benchmarking agreements accordingly.

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

The SER describes the 'Admission & Registration Information System' (ADREG), which is an integrated online system used for capturing, extracting, analysing and securing student learner records and conducting related administrative tasks. The ADREG system has 22 major modules, covering a wide spectrum of activities related to student record keeping, administration and reporting. During interviews, the Panel learned that staff members have access only to those modules that are relevant to their duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, a policy and procedure for Security of Assessment Documents and Records is contained within the AU Assessment Manual. The Panel acknowledges that ADREG is a sound student administration and academic record system, and that appropriate measures have been designed to secure records.

The ADREG system has several levels of authorisation. The job title of an employee defines the role and authority required to work on the ADREG system. There is a system in place to monitor applications for initiating or changing authorisation access and two levels of approval are required for any changes to be made. Furthermore, access to the system is monitored, and all activities on the ADREG system are logged. The Panel learned from interviews that an internal auditor and external auditors review the security, access and use of the system on an annual basis, and that there has been no breach in security over the last ten years.

During the site visit, the Panel observed that there is a fireproof room within the Admission and Registration Office, where current student records are kept, which is secure at all times. The Panel was informed that all documents pertaining to a student were scanned and stored electronically on ADREG, prior to being placed in the student's file. The Panel was also shown a separate room where the student records of graduates were archived and stored. The Panel appreciates that the measures that have been adopted ensure the security of student records.

The Panel notes that the Authentication of Certification-Policy and Procedure sets out a detailed and rigorous procedure for the approval, verification and authentication of certificates. It includes multiple checks by several parties to safeguard the issuing of certificates. What is more, this process is enabled and supported by the online ADREG system, as confirmed from interviews. The graduation module on the ADREG system can only be accessed by a few authorised users, who are able to print certificates following an approval process. Certificates are further secured and protected from duplication or forgery by being embossed with a serial number, and by a unique 29-digit security key being generated for each certificate. A log is kept of all activity on ADREG related to certificates. The Panel appreciates the measures that are in place to safeguard and maintain the integrity of certificates and their issuance.

The Panel notes that in addition to the Authentication of Certification-Policy and Procedure referred to above, the Assessment Manual sets out the policy and procedures for the design, marking, review, internal and external verification, moderation, and approval of assessments, as well as matters pertaining to their transparency, security, handling misconduct and providing feedback to students and appeals.

The Panel is satisfied that with respect to the integrity of student records and certification, the Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation
None

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

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

According to the SER, the regulations of the library are documented in the 'Library Policy' and the 'Library Booklet'. Both documents include well-defined provisions on lending policy, opening hours, database searches, etc. All library rules and regulations are available to staff and students on the university's website. In addition, AU conducts an induction day for new students, in which they are introduced to the facilities and services available at AU, and the 'library booklet' is disseminated to students.

During the site visit, the Panel toured the library, and noted that although the library is small in space, it is considered to be suitable with regard to the number of current students. The Panel also noted a number of spaces for independent student study, group work, and study halls which are all supported by WIFI and internet and fitted with computers where the students can carry out online research. The library is managed by the librarian, supported by qualified administrative staff for managing the conventional collection and electronic holdings services. The library includes 29000 books, 82 Journals and 11,000 electronic books and periodicals that cover fields of knowledge relevant to the AU portfolio of programmes and research activities. In addition, the library provides access to 2,500,000 e-journals and 11,000 e-books through subscription to online databases from various publishers such as EBSCO, Proquest, Lexis Nexis, Al Manhal, etc. All students gain access to the library and borrow books with a library card issued by the AU library. There are also mechanisms in place for academics to request additional resources in the library. The library is supported by an allocated budget to enrich its collections of books, periodicals and electronic materials in all knowledge fields, and to facilitate the adoption of modern information technology.

Faculty members are responsible for mapping learning resources to the learning requirements of different programmes. The Panel observed from a sample of course files that it is stated in each course specification, the books, journals and databases that are required in each course. The SER mentions that colleges are encouraged to recommend supplementary material for their learning programmes and submit their lists to the Textbooks & Library Committee (TLC).

AU benchmarked its library services against one local University, while interviews revealed one more benchmark with one regional University. The benchmarking covered many areas such as: vision & mission, resources, facilities, services, management etc. However, the study did not identify any areas for improvement as a result. Hence, the Panel recommends that AU should expand the benchmarking study of the library resources and facilities to include more local,

regional, and international universities, and utilize the results of these benchmarks in improving the library holdings and services.

AU has implemented a mechanism for overseeing and monitoring the operations of the library through the TLC, which gathers input each year from colleges to ensure the relevance of the resources every semester. The TLC comprises representatives from each academic department. Feedback on the library from students and staff are also collected through surveys, which are analysed and forwarded to the committee for review and decision-making. The Panel was provided with a survey report that shows a high satisfaction rate among staff members toward the library resources, facilities, and services. The minutes show that updates are discussed every semester, and actions are taken for improvements. There is also evidence on presenting proposals by the departments to renew electronic resources.

The Panel is of the view that the Institution addressed this Indicator in relation to the AU library collection and services.

Recommendation

- Expand the benchmarking study of the library resources and facilities to include more local, regional, and international universities, and utilize the results of these benchmarks in improving the library holdings and services.

Indicator 11: ICT

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

Judgement: Addressed

AU has an Information Communication Technology Centre (ICTC), which plays a pivotal role in providing IT-related services across the University to all users. The Centre reports to the ICTC Council, which oversees the operations of the Centre. The roles and responsibilities of ICTC are clearly defined, and include: managing and maintaining ICT solution and services for the AU community, providing ICT training for staff and students, and keeping all AU community informed of relevant updates. Interviewed staff and students during the site visit showed a good understanding of the ICT management and processes, and confirmed to the Panel that proper communication of IT information is in place. They further added that training workshops and programmes in various IT systems (i.e. Moodle, ADREG, or any new software) are also conducted by the Centre. The Panel appreciates that the ICTC offers comprehensive and effective services to the AU community of users.

The ICTC develops an annual operational plan, which is designed to cover related KPIs in the AU Strategic Plan for 2016-2020. In addition, AU has a procedure for 'Server Back-up and Restore', which was developed and recently updated by the ICTC. Interviews with administrative staff during the site visit revealed that AU secures its IT system through a firewall, antivirus/malware detection software, and a physical backup of the data. The Panel also learned that there is a data recovery plan for the data on the ADREG system. Furthermore, data is backed up off-site at two venues. A daily backup is made, with a tape being taken to an outside venue to be stored. The data is also backed up in the cloud. As confirmed to the Panel from interviews,

a six-month test is conducted to confirm that the data which is backed up, can be recovered. The Panel views this as an example of good practice.

The SER states that maintenance of all hardware and software in laboratories and IT infrastructure is conducted each semester. Proactive maintenance is also done when inventorying assets. AU has also implemented a plan for enhancing ICT services for the academic year 2018 -2019. In addition, the SER reported that there is a dedicated budget for addressing any maintenance requirements. Although the Panel acknowledges the procedures and planned maintenance of ICT resources, the Panel recommends that AU should regularly update the registers of all ICT services provided by AU, and develop an action plan for the staged replacement cycle of ICT resources.

As reported in the SER, AU keeps up-to-date registers of the provision of ICT services and showing a list of software installed and description of the hardware available in each laboratory. Based on interviews with different stakeholders, the Panel acknowledges that sufficient hardware and software licenses are available. There are also four technicians from the ICTC support team available throughout the teaching hours to assist in any troubleshooting. However, the register lacks important information such as: the date of the inventory, validity date of software, or the condition of hardware.

Feedback on ICT services is collected from staff through service evaluation forms and from students through satisfaction surveys. The results of these surveys and forms are collected and analysed into one report by the Programme Planning and Delivery Committee. This Report is issued by the Committee every semester and communicated to departments and colleges for decision-making. The latest Report shows a high satisfaction rate among students and faculty with ICT services. Interviews revealed that data collected about satisfaction levels are discussed in departments and any shortages are addressed accordingly through a formal request presented to the Committee.

The Panel notes the high satisfaction toward ICT resources and services, and the effective utilization of the satisfaction surveys in decision-making and improvements, and concludes that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation

- Regularly update the registers of all ICT services provided by AU, and develop an action plan for the staged replacement cycle of ICT resources.

Indicator 12: Infrastructure

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

Judgement: Addressed

The Programme Planning and Delivery Committee (PPDC) is responsible for ensuring the availability and the appropriateness of infrastructure resources. The Committee reports directly to the University Council for decision-making on any significant proposals. The Panel notes that PPDC's ToRs have been recently reviewed and the new ToRs were approved in May 2018. The

SER clarifies that PPDC maintains an inventory of physical infrastructure; the PPDC also receives reports every semester from various channels such as ICT, Library, and Human Resources on the status of physical infrastructure and equipment as well as other learning resources in laboratories, studio, and classrooms. The Committee collates all these detailed reports and circulates them to the concerned departments and colleges for decision-making. Interviewed faculty and administrative staff confirmed the existence of allocated budget for maintenance of different resources. The Panel examined the Committee's meeting minutes, and confirmed that regular meetings are conducted by this committee each semester. In addition, the meeting agenda shows that reports from various channels are discussed, and decisions on the improvement of programmes delivery are taken accordingly. Hence, the Panel is satisfied that a proper scheduled maintenance and upgrades for all physical resources is in place.

AU has a 'Procedure for Reviewing Resources Towards Planning for Programme delivery', approved in April 2018, to ensure that a regular review of the available resources and facilities is conducted. The Procedure is in place for inventorying the facilities and learning resources. However, the Panel noted that there is no Register as prescribed by this Indicator. This Register should provide information on all physical infrastructure and equipment showing scheduled maintenance and upgrades. Also, the Register should identify and evaluate the adequacy of all classrooms, tutorial space, library resources, studios and laboratories. Hence, the Panel recommends that AU should develop a comprehensive Register of AU's infrastructure that includes a schedule for maintenance and upgrades of equipment and accommodation, together with an evaluation of the status of all teaching and learning spaces.

The Panel toured the AU campus and noted various facilities that cater for the special requirements for each programme. These specialised facilities include equipped Studio for TV production and Audio activities, Art Studio, and Engineering Practical Labs. In addition, the Panel toured the common facilities that cater for all offered programmes, such as lecture halls, seminar rooms, conference hall, and laboratories. The Panel was also provided with evidence regarding the capacity of the Campus and future plans for expansion. Interviews with senior management revealed the University's plan to move to a new spacious campus in Salman Town. The Panel was shown a model of the new campus design during the tour.

Given that the current student population is 1442, and the future planning for expansion in a new permanent campus is underway, the Panel is of the view that the physical resources, teaching space and learning support facilities are generally suitable for the current programmes. However, to meet the future aspirations of the University and to provide a complete university experience for students, including recreational activities, the Panel recommends that the University should expedite moving to the new campus.

According to the SER, all teaching and learning spaces are WIFI enabled and laboratories and studios are maintained on a daily basis. Practical laboratories are also regularly checked for IT resources. The students have access to a clinic for medical treatment. Moreover, AU has established a 'Health and Safety Committee' to ensure that all health and safety policies and procedures are implemented in line with relevant laws and regulations set by government authorities, the HEC, and the Ministry of Labor and Civil Defense. Information on health and safety are available on the university's website, and as a leaflet disseminated to students and staff during induction days.

The interviewed students and staff expressed a general satisfaction with the University's infrastructure; they further appreciated the friendly support from the administration regarding

suggestions to improve the Institution. The interviewees also mentioned the suggestion boxes as another tool for communicating concerns and proposals for improvement. In addition, the list of surveys conducted in 2018 includes faculty, students and alumni satisfaction surveys. The Panel also notes that the ICT survey template includes one general question on the periodic maintenance of the infrastructure. Overall, the Panel concludes that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation

- Develop a comprehensive Register of AU's infrastructure that includes a schedule for maintenance and upgrades of equipment and accommodation, together with an evaluation of the status of all teaching and learning spaces.
- Expedite moving to the new campus, in order to meet the future aspirations of the University and to provide a complete university experience for students, including recreational activities.

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

Standard 4

The Quality of Teaching and Learning

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

As per the SER, AU has a teaching and learning plan which is appropriate for its type and mission. There is a five-year 'Teaching and Learning Plan 2016-2020', which serves as a link between the university-wide strategic and operational plans. The document includes a statement of the philosophy of teaching and learning, which is appropriate for the qualifications offered by the University and is aligned with its mission. The document also incorporates six broad strategic objectives, which are listed in the institution's Strategic Plan and provides a planning framework/timeline through which the specified teaching and learning goals and objectives can be achieved. The implementation and monitoring of the plan is the responsibility of the VP for Academic Affairs who is also the Chairperson of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC) and who makes regular verbal and written reports to the University Council.

In relation to the quality of teaching and learning, AU has clear and appropriate roles and responsibilities for the VP for Academic Affairs, Deans, Chairpersons, and faculty. The TLAC develops and implements university-wide academic related policies and procedures for the creation and maintenance of an optimal learning environment, and for the delivery of teaching and assessment of learning. The Committee also monitors closely, and in conjunction with CAQA, the extent of implementation of academic-related policies and procedures and validates the accuracy of information.

AU, as part of the teaching and learning plan, is implementing clear procedures to improve teaching and learning, which include: peer review evaluation, newly appointed faculty mentoring system, Train the Trainer programme (TTT), internal and external moderation, online course and instructor evaluation by students and establishment and operation of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee. These initiatives and actions were confirmed to the Panel during interviews with senior management, faculty and students. The Panel learned also during interviews that a PD plan is set to improve any weaknesses in the teaching performance of faculty members.

The Panel found many committees, departments, and staff who are involved in the enhancement of teaching and learning as follows: TLAC, which develops academic-related policies and monitors their implementation, in addition to reviewing AU Assessment Manual to assure the effectiveness of teaching and learning policies, VP for Academic Affairs, Deans, Chairpersons, and faculty members, who are all involved in the assessment process, the Professional Staff Development Committee, which is responsible for reporting the training

needs of staff, and the Human Resources Directorate, which organizes PD activities for faculty. Many of the PD activities in the 2018 programme are relevant to enhancement of teaching and learning, including the use of technologies.

It was evident to the Panel from the supporting documnets and interviews, that AU has a compulsory internship course on the lists of courses offered in all undergraduate qualifications, and the Director of Professional Relations is responsible for the placement of students, liaising with the industry, and maintaining students' records. AU has established undergraduate internship programme guidelines, which explain the policies and procedures related to the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, procedures, evaluation of students, and grading of the internship experience. Interviewed students explained that they can either seek placement in a host organization independently or with the assistance of the University. To ensure the suitability of the host organization, the University has a list of approved organizations that are licensed and registered by the government, and students cannot be hosted in an organization which is not formally approved and listed.

Faculty and employers who supervise the internship students explained to the Panel that the student spends 240 hours of placement during an average time of two months and is required to submit a monthly and final report. Students are evaluated by a site supervisor who completes mid and final reports, and by an AU academic supervisor who also reports on the student's performance. The academic supervisor is required to make at least two visits to the internee during the placement. The Panel finds that the arrangements for assignment of internship placements and the management of students during the internship experience are satisfactory.

AU has a consistent and transparent system to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across its programmes, which consists of: peer-review evaluation, online course and instructor evaluation by students, faculty self-evaluation, and faculty evaluation by chairpersons and CAQA. It was confirmed to the Panel during interviews that this system is applied to all courses and faculty members across the University. Therefore, the Panel appreciates that AU has a suitable and consistently applied system to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, and improvements are made through provision of the faculty PD programme, and other mechanisms including the innovative Train-The-Trainer initiative (TTT). Overall, the Panel is of the view that the Institution addresses this Indicator.

Recommendation

None

Indicator 14: Admissions

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

Judgement: Addressed

AU publishes clear information about its admission criteria for entry to all academic programmes, including credit transfer arrangements. The expectations on admission, including attendance requirements and expected standards of academic integrity, are made available to students, prospective students and other stakeholders through a number of

platforms such as the 'Student Handbook' and the website. The Panel found that the 'Undergraduate Prospectus Catalogue' published on the University's website and the hard copy provided by the University do not have up-to-date information on Internship credits (still mention six credits not three). The Panel recommends that AU should consistently update all information included in its publications and particularly the online platforms.

The Panel notes that AU clearly states the regulations regarding the transfer of credits from one programme to another or from another institution to AU as per HEC regulations. Information about credit transfer is detailed in the 'Student Handbook' and on the website.

The admission requirements for the MSEM programme and the PhD programmes follow the requirements of the GWU and Brunel University respectively. Admission criteria and measurement of knowledge competencies related to other programmes are aligned with local academic norms for most disciplines. However, the Panel found that the only varied criterion among undergraduate disciplines is the overall high school average score where the Colleges of 'Arts & Sciences' and 'Business & Finance' accept unconditionally the same score of 60% whereas the Colleges of 'Information Technology' and 'Engineering' accept unconditionally scores of 65% and 70% respectively. There is no difference in the English and Mathematics proficiency skills requirements for all undergraduate majors. The Panel is of the view that different majors may require different language and mathematics proficiencies and hence, recommends that AU should review the general and specific admissions criteria and entry standards to ensure that they are appropriate, and that students have the relevant proficiency, prior knowledge and skills to succeed in their study.

The languages of teaching and learning in the programmes are clearly stated and admission criteria include minimum language standards that must be met. AU has an English Language Foundation Course as a remedial measure for applicants who fail the English language examination. Interviewed faculty members and students confirmed that if the applicant achieved the scores required in both English and Mathematics in their secondary school certificate, he/she will be admitted directly to the academic programme; however, if the applicant did not achieve the requirements, he/she will take placement tests and based on his/her score; he/she will be placed in a foundation course.

As reported in the SER, the admission policy is reviewed regularly based on statistical reports developed by the Directorate of Admission and Registration. The Panel was provided with statistical reports of admitted students in each programme and the informal benchmarking report which is used to inform any revisions of the Admission criteria.

Overall, the Panel acknowledges that the admission requirements are in line with HEC requirements and are rigorously and consistently applied. Thus, the Panel concludes that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation

- Regularly update all information included in University publications and online platforms.
- Review general and specific admissions criteria and entry standards to ensure that they are appropriate, and that students have the relevant proficiency, prior knowledge and skills to succeed in their study.

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

AU has a policy on 'Needs Assessment and Analysis' to evaluate demand for new programmes, which has been approved in 2018 and is updated every 3 years. The purpose of this policy is to maintain awareness of market and societal needs, stakeholders' demands and the future employment opportunities for graduates. The policy is supported by procedures describing the sequence of activities for implementation. In addition, AU has a Quality Manual approved by the University Council in November 2016 and a procedure for the mapping and confirmation of its qualifications, as per the NQF placement and alignment requirements. The Panel notes that AU includes NQF qualification levels and credits in the student transcript. The Panel also notes that AU has a re-mapping and re-validation procedure which describes criteria for changes made to the course or overall qualification that requires a re-mapping or re-confirmation procedure to be conducted.

In order to develop, review or close an academic programme, market and societal needs and stakeholders' demands are identified *via* tools such as surveys, interviews, focus and working groups, consultations with external experts, and evaluation of available market studies published by government or professional institutions and organizations. This was confirmed to the Panel during interviews with senior management. An example of the effectiveness of the policy with respect to external consultations was demonstrated by the College of Business and Finance where some elective courses had been added based on the recommendation of the College Advisory Board. Another example is in the College of Arts and Sciences where major changes had been added to the Mass Communication and Public Relations programme to give more emphasis to the practical skills.

AU has a clear policy and procedures for the design of new academic programmes, describing the principles and criteria for designing programmes to ensure their compliance with the university regulations, local and international quality guidelines and academic standards. A new programme proposal includes, among other items: the academic plan, the requirements of the programme in terms of facilities, faculty members, and learning resources. During interviews with senior management, the Panel learned that there are eight new programmes waiting for HEC approval, and these programmes have been introduced as a result of changes in the labour market and the associated need for particular knowledge and skills. All new

programmes are subjected to approval by the BoT. The Panel acknowledges that AU has effective policies and procedures for the development of new programmes.

AU has implemented effective mechanisms for programme construction and subsequent approval which include the description of learning outcomes with Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs) mapped to the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs). Interviews with senior management clarified that the mapping of CILOs is done by experienced faculty members after programme learning outcomes have been approved by the relevant Department, College Council, University Curriculum Committee, and University Council. The CILOs must be approved by the Department's Curriculum Committee, which receives all survey results and other related information and then the outcome is forwarded to the Department Council. The process of developing both CILOs and PILOs integrates multiple inputs such as the informal benchmarking with local, regional and international universities, and surveys of students, alumni, and employers to determine the market needs. The Panel appreciates that AU has effective mechanisms for programme construction and approval which includes the description of learning outcomes and mapping exercises.

AU policy and procedures for the periodic review of study programmes are clear and applied consistently across the Institution. The programme reviews are conducted on a three-year cycle. During interviews, the Panel was informed that external stakeholders' feedback, which includes employers and alumni, is gathered every two years and provided by the CME to all academic departments to be prepared for the three-year review cycle. In addition to the conducted benchmarking and market studies, AU has a regular external review of its programmes to ensure currency and relevance of the curriculum. The external reviewer is selected based on written criteria.

Overall, the Panel is of the view that AU has robust policies and procedures for the development and review of its programmes that are applied consistently across the institution. Therefore, the Panel agrees that AU has addressed this Indicator.

Recommendation
None

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

AU has an Assessment Manual introduced in 2016, which provides information on assessment methodologies, marking criteria and guidelines for assessment, to be used to evaluate the achievement of learning outcomes. The assessment policies and procedures are publicly available through the university's website. Instructors are required to specify the assessment tools deployed in their courses and document the assessment in the course specifications. Course specification forms distributed to students at the beginning of each semester include: assessment tools without the percentages allocated to those tools, the CILOs tested by each instrument, and the mapping of the assessment to the CILOs. The Panel notes that AU utilizes

variety of assessment tools to measure students' achievement of learning outcomes. These tools include quizzes, written examinations, case studies, reports and presentations.

AU ensures the effectiveness and systematic implementation of the assessment policies and procedures across the University through multiple checking points. Firstly, faculty members ensure that the assessment is designed to test the achievement of CILOs which are included in the course syllabus. Secondly, each course includes formative and summative assessment methods, and the final examination is worth at least 40%. Thirdly, there is an Internal Moderation Committee, which carries out the internal verification of assessment, in addition to the external moderation. During interviews with senior management, the Panel noticed that other checks and balance points are also in place such as the College Council to consider the grade distributions, workshops on assessment for faculty members, course files with all assessment instruments and samples of graded student work, the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee. These working groups and associated procedures are deployed across all courses and the systems are monitored and updated for improvement by the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Quality Assurance Committee, and the VP for Academic Affairs. The Panel appreciates that AU has effective assessment policies and procedures, which are published and accessible, and they are systematically implemented across the Institution.

AU has effective policies and procedures that govern the internal and external moderation of assessment. The Assessment Manual states the roles, responsibilities, and the mechanism of appointing the internal and external examiners. For every examination with a total mark of 20% or above, an internal verifier is assigned to review it before it is taken by the students and an external moderator to review it after being taken by the students. This was also confirmed during interviews with external examiners. During interviews, the Panel learned that moderators receive adequate information and guidance on their responsibilities and tasks to be completed in a set time frame. The Panel acknowledges that AU has effective policies and procedures that govern the internal and external moderation of assessment and clearly state the roles and responsibilities of the external examiner/reviewer and the terms and conditions of their appointment.

As stated in the SER, there is an approved and implemented policy and procedure for students to appeal against marks awarded for assignments and the final examination. As confirmed by different interviewees, this is done through the 'Challenge of Grade' procedure, where students can request a re-evaluation of their grade to be conducted by an Ad hoc committee, which is formed by the Department Chairperson. Interviewed students explained that they are given information during their induction programme about the appeal process and the timelines in which appeals can be raised. Information on appeals is also provided in the Student Handbook.

The interviewed students reported that they consider the assessment to be fair and transparent, and that they may approach the instructor directly at any point during the semester to enquire about their grades. The grade appeals' records are kept by the Deanship of Student Affairs and this record demonstrates that the number of 'Challenges of Grades' in the last two semesters is 63 appeals which represents 5.5% of the total number of grades issued. Hence, the Panel appreciates that AU has a clear and transparent grade appeals process that

is effectively communicated to students, and is consistently applied across the Institution and conducted in a timely manner.

The Panel is of the view that AU assessment policies and procedures are transparent and are regularly implemented and monitored. Therefore, the Panel concludes that the Institution addresses this Indicator.

Recommendations

None

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

All programmes and courses have clearly formulated learning outcomes. The relevant department is responsible for developing the PILOs through their Curriculum Committee within the Department. The Committee uses a variety of sources of information, which include: Benchmarking reports, surveys of students and alumni, College Advisory Boards' recommendations, the market needs' assessment, and employability of the graduates. The PILOs go through several approval levels before being finalized, which start with the Department, College Council, University Curriculum Committee and the University Council sequentially. Interviewed senior management clarified that PILOs must be in compliance with HEC requirements and in line with the mission and vision of the University. Furthermore, interviewed academic staff added that the course level learning outcomes are developed by an experienced instructor and are then approved by the department and college councils.

The Panel observes that programmes have clearly stated learning outcomes which are mapped with courses included in each study plan. The course syllabus clearly states the learning outcomes with teaching and assessment methods mapped to every subgroup of CILOs. However, the course syllabus does not include the mapping of the CILOs against the PILOs, as noted from the sampled course files that were provided to the Panel during the site visit. The Panel advises AU to include the mapping of the CILOs to the PILOs in the course syllabus/specifications to show students how the course outcomes contribute to the programme as a whole.

Although AU has an action plan for enhancing student employability, a clear statement on graduate attributes, and clear CILOs for 300 and 400 level courses, there is no clear demonstration of the extent to which these attributes and outcomes have been achieved. The interviewed faculty explained that the CILOs are assessed every semester, and if any outcomes have achieved below 60%, the Chairperson will hold discussions with the course instructor to identify the reasons and ways to improve this. The Panel is of the view that AU can further benefit from the exit survey, alumni survey, and employers' survey results as well as advisory boards' recommendations to assess the achievement of graduate attributes and programme learning outcomes.

AU tracks student progression through the ADREG system to ensure academic standards related to the completion of required credit hours and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) required for graduation. ADREG is utilized to maintain and update student data files and generate reports of grades at the end of each semester, which are used by academic departments to monitor the academic standards. During interviews, the Panel was informed that the graduation officer checks the completion of the required credit hours and achievement of the minimum required CGPA for prospected graduates, then the students are informed and asked to fill in the required documents and take the exit survey in order to proceed with the certificate issuance and HEC endorsement process. The Panel acknowledges that AU follows clear procedures for submitting data and results for certification.

The Directorate of Professional Relations has an Alumni Office responsible for the alumni database. As confirmed from interviews, the alumni office organizes workshops for alumni who are still seeking employment. The SER states that student and graduate data are gathered by the Alumni Office and compiled into a report which is received and considered by the Admission and Exemption Committee with a view to improvements.

Benchmarking of learning outcomes by each department is done informally at the undergraduate level against local, regional and international universities through the information available online. It is conducted regularly as part of a three-year programme review cycle to ensure the appropriateness of the programme content. From interviews with academic administrators, the Panel learned of a range of appropriately selected universities that are used for informal benchmarking of AU's programme outcomes. AU is also aligning its programmes to professional body requirements, with a view to ultimately seeking accreditation from these professional bodies for relevant programmes. As mentioned earlier in this report, the Panel is of the view that AU could further benefit from conducting formal benchmarking with other universities and advises AU to continue the process of aligning all programmes to the accreditation requirements of relevant professional bodies.

Overall, AU programmes have clearly articulated learning outcomes and the Institution addresses the requirements of this Indicator.

Recommendation

None

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

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in this specific case is limited to the credit transfer between AU's programmes or from other official HEIs. In this context, AU has mechanisms designed for RPL and these are implemented in accordance with the AU's policies and through a fair and transparent assessment.

Students can get information and guidance on the process of RPL from the Directorate of Admission and Registration, the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectus and student handbook. The Departments concerned must approve the internal transfer and equate the student's completed courses according to their new programme study plans. Staff explained to the Panel that AU has formal arrangements for internal and external transfer; students can withdraw and obtain an official transcript with the awarded courses and number of credits attained throughout their learning at AU.

Furthermore, AU has a clear policy to support access and RPL measures and accords with the NQF and the HEC on RPL. The policy has effective procedures which include the identification of formal learning, documentation, assessment, evaluation and transcription of prior learning either internally or externally. AU's policies and procedures, in this regard, comply with HEC credit exemption rules and regulations. The policy defines the maximum number of allowable credits to be transferred and the required documents. This information is available to the students through online and hard copy resources .

AU has an up-to-date register of RPL assessments and admissions. The courses exempted are recorded in the student academic transcript and electronically documented by the Admission and Registration Department on ADREG.

The Panel is of the view that AU addresses this Indicator through deployment of suitable policies and practices related to the RPL.

Recommendation

None

Indicator 19: Short courses

The institution has effective systems in place for the management of its short courses (where applicable).

Not Applicable

Judgement: The Institution **addresses** Standard 4: The Quality of Teaching and Learning

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

AU provides the students with a set of varied services to support them to succeed academically, socially, and financially. These support services cover different areas such as: counselling, academic advising, admissions, professional relations for internship, sport activities, social and cultural events, etc. All these services are provided to students under the supervision of five Directorates and the Student Council within the Deanship of Students Affairs.

During the site visit, the Panel found that students have access to contracted recreational centres and sports clubs across Bahrain, due to lack of sports facilities within the campus. The Panel also found that the University maintains close relationships with private and public organisations, both locally and internationally, through which they link students with employers with a view to internships; workplace field trips; and programmes of career-related workshops and events (e.g. Career Day). The Panel appreciates AU's efforts in providing students with a number of programmes to support their internship, and the annual Career Day to open doors for job placement.

AU has clear Special Educational Needs (SEN) policies and procedures for students with physical disabilities and learning difficulties or even those with some chronic diseases such as Sickle Cell Anaemia. The SEN policies and procedures are dated 2012 and were reviewed and modified in 2017/2018; they are available in both languages- Arabic and English- for easy access. A record is maintained of students with SEN and the type of services provided to them during their study. AU also showed that the SEN students are supported academically and financially starting from the admission process through to graduation and job placement. During the site visit, the Panel met some SEN students and had an ad hoc meeting with them, where SEN students assured the Panel that they are supported and encouraged to participate in all university activities, and participate in publication of articles in the university's monthly magazine. The Panel received samples of progress meeting minutes and records of SEN students. When the Panel met with the internship supervisors and employers, they received positive feedback regarding the participation and the skills that the SEN students brought into their organisations and the progress they made.

There is a clear mechanism for the selection process and decision-making related to recruitment of SEN students to the University and for their identification in the class attendance list, to maintain the same level of quality service and care provided to them throughout their programme. AU's SEN ToRs declare developing Survey/Questionnaire to evaluate the needs of SEN students which should lead to incorporate their remarks and suggestions to further develop

the services provided. According to the latest report generated by the CME, the percentage of satisfaction of the SEN students is 86.61%. The Panel appreciates all AU's efforts to integrate students with SEN within the university's study programmes and activities.

The University provides multi-level administrative platforms for students and alumni related to their admission, enrolment, and grades, such as: the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Prospectus, academic calendars, Assessment Manual and feedback on assessment policy, induction programme, and through electronic platforms of ADREG and the university's main website and hotline. AU's students are provided with the needed support for admission and enrolment through a dedicated Hotline to staff members, Helpdesk and at Orientation Day. During the site visit, the students also emphasized the value of AU's open-door policy whereby they can approach any staff for academic and administrative support .

AU is providing its students with plenty of internal and external opportunities to excel and show their talents and leadership in different extra-curricular activities, where all events and leisure activities are effectively communicated electronically and physically across the campus and through social media. Most of these social, recreational and community activities are led and coordinated by the Student Council. The Panel found that AU is embracing an effective approach and mechanism to motivate students to participate in different social, recreational, community, and cultural activities where students are awarded 'A' Activity Credit. This is considered officially in the ADREG system whereby every 30 activity approved hours are recorded in the students' logbook. During the site visit, the students informed the Panel of a special recognition annually in a formal event for the best participants and highest achievement recognized by the President's and Dean's Honour.

AU uses different mechanisms, including surveys, to evaluate its services and events. During the site visit, the Panel found that the Student Council plays a role in motivating the completion of different surveys and evaluations. Furthermore, the students and graduates can contact the University for different issues through various formal channels and through user-friendly means of communication such as WhatsApp and a Suggestion Box.

The CME has a clear policies and procedures manual describing the collection of data on students' satisfaction with respect to administrative and support services. The Deanship of Student Affairs, the ICTC and the CAQA play a vital role in this data collection, dissemination, analysis of data, and annual report writing, to inform senior management and the USPC for decision-making and further quality improvement. The results then are shared with the University Council.

The University runs an effective counselling and support policy and mechanism for students at risk of academic failure, where services of preventative and remedial nature are provided in an ethical manner. For the academic areas, the AU uses the ADREG system to communicate, monitor and identify at-risk students for all relevant staff such as academic advisors, counsellors and support from the specialised professionals. AU has developed -at different academic levels and across all programmes- a clear set of criteria to determine students who fall into the category of 'At Risk'. During the site visit, the latest record of at-risk students was provided, which showed that during the academic year 2017/2018 there were 15.4% of students at risk while this has been reduced to 13.7% in 2018/2019. The progression samples of academic transcripts provided also show improvement across different semesters. Samples of reports on how to provide remedial support to students at risk showcase this area as a strength.

The University has a mechanism in place for supporting all its students in their academic studies. The Academic Advising Team consists of faculty members, Chairperson of each Programme or Department and the College Dean. The Advisor provides a study plan, follows and vigilantly implements the Academic Advising and Probation policy with respect to advisees under probation, ensures that their advisees meet with them at least once per semester, and follows up advisees until they complete their graduation requirements. During the site visit, the students informed the Panel that their advisors contact them through phones and emails in cases when they miss any of the student-advisor meetings. The University provides regular tutorials for students to support their learning, some of which are electronic tutorials, which encourages self-directed learning. Interviews with the students also revealed that there is an informal peer tutoring system in place conducted by senior students, which is going to be developed into a formal programme in the University soon. This system allows the students to submit a request whereby a senior student could respond and provide the needed help and support.

Through a range of policies and procedures directed at the provision of support services, and particularly for the support of SEN students, the University demonstrates that it fully addresses this Indicator.

Recommendation
None

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

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

AU has a set of policies and procedures that inform its Human Resources management. The recruitment procedure considers the Bahraini Governmental Bylaws and Regulations with commitments towards the Bahrainisation Policy. The selection of candidates for different vacancies, either academic or administrative, is based on their qualifications, experience, and merit. During the site visit, the full-time and part-time staff informed the Panel that they applied for positions through different means, such as the AU's HR system or website, or direct application in person.

AU has a systematic approach to recruitment and promotion of its faculty which is monitored by the Appointments and Promotions Committee following receipt of proposals from departments and colleges. During the site visit, the members of the PD and the Appointment and Promotion Committees informed the Panel that AU follows a clear strategy for the recruitment of its staff. This strategy aims to recruit 50% Bahraini permanent, 25% non-Bahraini permanent, and 25% fresh sabbatical staff. The University has well-developed and detailed bylaws for both academic and administrative staff. These documents elaborate on promotions, leaves, performance management, transfer, allocated roles and responsibilities, disciplinary processes, and contracts. In addition, all staff performance is evaluated rigorously on multiple levels during staff members' work contracts. During the site visit, it was demonstrated to the Panel that staff shared a high level of awareness and understanding of their terms and conditions of employment. Based on the latest HR generated records in October 2018, the AU staff and faculty retention rate was 89.9% for the academic year 2017. The University relates this to having a clear HR system for renewal of its annual contracts which leads to security of employment. Also, staff reported to the Panel that they receive good incentives and recognition of achievements and that the University supports their development on different levels, including their research.

The University uses a platform called Alamthal System, which is an Enterprise Resource Planning system. This System has a number of modules or sections within its functionalities: Accounts Payable, General Ledger, Accounts Receivable, HR Management System & Payroll, Utilities & Setup, Inventory, and Fixed Assets. The listed functionalities include Financial Management, Procurement & Supply Chain, Fixed Assets, Time & Attendance, Wholesale & Retail, Services & Contracting, and Customer Relationship Management. The University manages and generates its data through this system to publish reports, audit logs, requests,

documents, etc. The Alamthal System also provides a clear description on the functionality of each module and the features built under each category. This system is used internally with a high level of security for the protection of the university's financial and HR-related records. It uses OPTIMUM security features that require user-definable access, central locking, audit trail, data stamping, etc. In addition, AU has a regular process of data backup, storage and recovery, which is granted to primary users only. During the site visit, the Panel was informed by HR representatives that the Alamthal system is undergoing a major development and upgrade, whereby staff will have a function to update their records related to qualifications, PD and experiences.

AU has a staff induction system in place as described briefly in the Staff Handbook. It is stated in the SER that the induction for newly appointed staff is run twice a year at the beginning of each semester. However, senior management assured the Panel that the induction process is conducted at any point when new staff arrive. The Panel also learned that the University does not run a specific evaluation after each induction; however, they do have a specific section in the employee satisfaction survey related to induction. Furthermore, the mentoring policies and procedures detail the mechanism to familiarise new faculty with the university's academic and administrative policies and procedures and to monitor their career development.

AU's faculty workload model is in compliance with the HEC rules and regulations and is supportive to faculty development in different areas such as research, teaching, community outreach, and academic administrative responsibilities. AU outlines the teaching workload, considering academic ranking and suitable number of credit hours per course, and faculty's commitment to teaching and research supervision. When the Panel members met with academic staff and the College Deans, it was confirmed that AU's system of academic workload allocation for teaching, supervision, and advising was clear to all staff. The Panel acknowledges that the University has a level of flexibility for academic staff who are engaged in major tasks or PD.

AU, through its HR management system, is implementing a structured step-by-step approach for handling complaints and appeals. This process is described for all staff members in the Staff Handbook, and communicated to staff through the university website and SharePoint. It is also referenced and introduced in the Induction Day for all staff. Samples of the few documented cases were provided to the Panel and the Panel notes that the stages from submission of the case to investigation and disciplinary action, is conducted in a timely manner. During the site visit, staff demonstrated full awareness of the process and that they were unable to recall any major complaints; as, most cases are usually resolved in a friendly and informal manner.

The CEM plays a key role in designing, conducting/collecting, and analysing surveys, and producing reports for the purpose of informing key decision-makers and stakeholders at AU on both the university and programme levels. AU provided the Panel with samples of satisfaction surveys conducted, along with related reports and quality improvement or actions plans. The Human Resources Department, in collaboration with the CME, collects data in relation to staff satisfaction and exit feedback at the end of service. During the site visit, the Panel was informed that an HR representative conducts an end-of-service or exit interview and the Panel was provided with a 2019 record of exit interviews as evidence.

Overall, the Panel finds that the Institution has appropriate human resource policies and procedures, which include recruitment, retention, promotion and performance management. Thus, the Panel concludes that the requirements of this Indicator are addressed.

Recommendations
None

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

AU's Strategic Plan has a clear objective: 'Attract and retain a motivated, highly qualified and experienced faculty and administrative staff who are committed to achieving the mission of the university', which led to developing KPIs with focus on PD of its academic and administrative staff. The PD committee ensures that all staff are equipped with the necessary administrative, teaching skills and academic competencies required to deliver a quality experience to students. During the site visit, the Panel was informed that the University allocates 2% of its operational budget for PD activities. Also, it was confirmed to the Panel that AU develops its PD plan based on multiple dynamic resources and needs analysis. All staff interviewed by the Panel during the site visit emphasized the effectiveness and clarity of the process towards creating a career development plan.

The University has a PD plan that consists of different stages: identification of the PD needs for all the staff, planning for PD activities based on staff evaluation and needs' analysis, and coordination with the Human Resources Directorate (HRD) and various departments for the nomination of staff for PD. The Directorate of Financial Affairs also works closely with the HRD to plan and budget for the training programmes.

AU has strategically and operationally developed its PD activities based on training needs' analysis. This is reflected in the University's annual PD plan that lists the PD activities for the academic years 2016/2017 and 2018/2019. It is clear to the Panel that AU is using its internal expertise to deliver these PD activities. The University runs a series of PD for its faculty with a focus on teaching and learning, which the Panel recognizes as an area of good practice. The interviews with full-time and part-time faculty members revealed the PD formal training and support provided to them are based on results of the peer-review or performance evaluation. Some of these training programmes follow different models such as the Higher Education Academy and TTT.

The University has a transparent and clear staff appraisal system and performance evaluation mechanism. It is well-structured, rigorous and well-documented reflecting the multi-level assessment for each staff member for both academic and administrative roles. Also, details of the evaluation criteria and description of the calculation for each evaluative score is provided in the CME Manual. Feedback on staff evaluation is shared at different levels with a focus on areas of strength and areas for development through PD. This mechanism is also used for developing a plan for staff promotion. The Panel acknowledges that the University runs an effective multi-level evaluation for its faculty, the end-product of this evaluation is a summary report for individual faculty members, which is shared with the President. Although this is a rigorous and

a time-consuming mechanism and process, it reflects the transparent and collective approach to decision-making at AU, as confirmed by staff interviewed during the site visit.

The University developed its PD Framework to focus on areas such as: teaching and learning, teaching aids and computer skills, research, administrative skills, knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing, interpersonal skills, and university-wide skills requirement. From submitted evidence, it is clear that AU invests heavily in providing PD programmes for academic and administrative staff alike. The Panel noted that staff are provided equal opportunities for PD and they are all informed of these. Furthermore, the University has external collaboration partners to deliver training in research supervision skills, Women Leadership programmes and extensive internal programmes such as Mentoring and TTT. AU also proved that it is in compliance with national bodies and regulations from relevant authorities such as the HEC by meeting its standards and providing plans for capacity building. For example, there is a specific provision of training related to the NQF mapping exercise, as per the NQF requirements. All AU PD activities are also recorded and monitored.

As per the SER, there is a process for evaluating each PD activity conducted. All activities are evaluated immediately and reports are generated by the CEM department and shared with all staff where the data is used for further development and improvement of the AU's PD services. During the site visit, the staff assured the Panel that three external training and conference participation opportunities are provided for each staff annually. The Panel appreciates that there is a high level of staff satisfaction with provided opportunities for PD, and concludes that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation

None

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

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.

Judgement: Addressed

AU has a four-year 'Research Plan', which was approved by University Council in April 2016. As described in the Introduction of the Plan, it was developed in line with various core documents such as: AU's Strategic Plan (2016-2020), AU Research Plan for 2010, Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030, Bahrain National Strategy for Research, Standards for Accreditation published by the Higher Education Council of 2015, and BQA's 2nd Cycle of Higher Education Institutional Reviews Framework of 2015. The Plan consists of eight goals with nine clear KPIs, each mapped to the Strategic Objectives of the University. Upon scrutinizing the research plan, the Panel is of the view that it is comprehensive and appropriate for the institution type and mission of providing 'the facilities and support for its staff to pursue innovative research'.

The research plan has an accompanying 'Implementation Plan', developed in April 2016, which includes proposed actions and their respective responsible individuals. While the tasks within the research plan are allocated to specific individuals, each within their respective competences, the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research oversees the implementation of the research plan as a whole. These mechanisms aim to ensure the safe and sound ethical practices within the research activities conducted by the University. During interviews, the Panel learned that the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Research, in association with the Council for Graduate Studies, monitors the implementation of the institution's Research Plan.

AU has a comprehensive policy and procedure for funding research, which was approved in May 2018. As stated during interviews, the BoT approves the proposed research budgets. The research budget of 2019 shows approximately 3% of total revenue allocated for research, which is in line with HEC requirements. During interviews, the Panel was informed that funding is provided for publishing research findings, and the amounts of funds are based on the quality and rank of journals. Furthermore, the faculty confirmed that their requests for conference attendance were generally accepted and funded.

AU has a recent and current 'Research Rules and Regulations' document, which was approved by the BoT in July 2018. It also clearly stipulates the university's obligation to fund research (Article 5), given that the research is a 'right' for academics and one of the main components of the formal Appraisal (Article 4). It also includes provisions for preserving intellectual property rights, and an assertion that AU is committed to keep ethical and safe conduct of research. During interviews with staff and senior management, the Panel was assured that this document

is effectively communicated to all faculty and is implemented. The Panel is satisfied that the Institution implements a variety of mechanisms and checks to encourage faculty to engage and report their research activities.

According to the PD plan of 2018, there is a number of research capacity building activities for staff that were conducted, such as: writing a research article in Latex, the role of innovation research, creativity and critical thinking, research symposia, guest lectures, research seminars, etc. In addition, AU hosted a number of research-related events, such as: the annual PhD research symposium in conjunction with Brunel University, and the annual research forum in which AU faculty and graduate students debate their recent researches. During interviews, the senior management mentioned that encouraging scientific research is a general policy embraced by AU, and was a key reason to be ranked 35 among Arab Countries in QS ranking of 2018.

Based on an examination of the list of staff publications, the Panel notes with appreciation that AU implement effective research policies and procedures that led to a notable increase of the international publications of faculty. Therefore, the Panel agrees that the institution addresses the requirements of this Indicator.

Recommendation

None

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.

AU offers four master programmes and two PhD programmes. The Panel examined the ILOs of sample programmes, which all have research components, and found from the sampled dissertations, evidence of aligning these components to their respective PILOs. The assessment of the research components are implemented through internal verification, internal moderation, and through external assessment as confirmed by the Panel.

The University has a 'Guidelines for the Supervision of Master's Degree Dissertations' document, published in 2018, which outlines criteria for the appointment of external examiners as well as the examination process. With this guidance AU provides a template for evaluating dissertations, furthermore, all dissertations must be submitted through Turnitin to assist in identifying cases of plagiarism. In addition to the University's 'Revised Postgraduate Bylaws, and 'Bylaws for Academic Promotion', there are also rules for appointing appropriately qualified research supervisors for guiding the students and monitoring and reviewing their research progress. The stated regulations and guidelines reassure the Panel that the monitoring of progress and assessment systems are appropriate for the level of these qualifications.

During the site visit tour of AU's facilities, the Panel viewed the space and facilities available for postgraduate students, i.e. classrooms, seminar and conference rooms, computer laboratories etc. The Panel noted the specific spaces dedicated for PhD research scholars to access the internet facility for online research activities. The library is equipped with appropriate electronic databases that are accessible remotely. According to the SER, PhD students on the Brunel programme are also provided with access to the complete e-collections of Brunel University. As

previously indicated in Indicator 12, the Panel is of the view that the current infrastructure of the Institution is sufficient to meet the requirements of research-based programmes, given the small numbers of the offered postgraduate programmes and students enrolled in them.

During interviews with students, the Panel learned that AU conducts various capacity building activities, which the students are highly satisfied with. In the area of research capacity building, the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Research conducts regular workshops on the research process. The evidence provided to the Panel lists different workshops' titles that have been held by the Deanship during the last three years, which include for example: Towards Successful Defense Exam, Paving the Way for Successful Defense Exams, and Creating your Google Scholar profile. In addition, the SER reports that the Statistical Centre also has a role in research capacity building through its provision of support to postgraduates in using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and other statistical software.

Data on research students' satisfaction is collected every semester by the CME as described in the CME Manual. The CME analyses these surveys and conveys results to the concerned colleges for actions to be taken. In addition, 'Graduate Exit Surveys' are also used to assess student satisfaction with both the courses offered and teaching methods. The analysis of survey results indicates a high satisfaction level amongst postgraduate students with their programme, learning experience, faculty and physical facilities.

Overall, the Panel is of the view that the University addresses this Indicator through its provision of sound supervision and quality assurance mechanisms that are appropriate to ensure the consistency of high level of academic rigour demanded at postgraduate programme level.

Recommendation
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.

Judgement: Addressed

According to the SER, the 'EMPOWER' Plan 2016-2020 has given prominence to community engagement as the third core function of the University and supports one of the university's core values, namely 'Social Responsibility'. This is supported by its inclusion in several planning documents. According to these documents, community engagement includes volunteerism, leadership and civic action. Furthermore, it is expected that staff, faculty and students would all be involved in community engagement. The EMPOWER Plan 2016-2020 also identifies three strategic themes related to community engagement, these are (1) entrepreneurship, mentoring, partnerships; (2) outreach and widening access to lifelong learning; and (3) sharing expertise through research.

There is a Community Engagement Committee that supports and promotes community engagement in the University through developing a strategy for community engagement that is aligned to the EMPOWER Plan, and supports related activities and projects. The Panel further noted that at the college level, operational plans for community engagement have been developed, wherein objectives and project activities and tasks have been scheduled to give effect to the University's Strategic Objective on community engagement. These plans include activities to cultivate relationships and collaborations with local industries and professional associations, the promotion of practical learning, developing internship programmes, hosting of community-based events, arranging guest lectures, and organising field trips, workshops, and competitions.

The Panel notes the inclusion and integration of community engagement in several policies, planning documents and processes. The Panel also notes that the most prominent of the community engagement themes- in terms of the activities described in the SER and supporting documents - focuses on the first theme of entrepreneurship. The other two themes are realised through activities such as guest lectures, conferences, courses, internships and scholarships. The Panel notes that the Director of the Entrepreneurship Centre is responsible for coordinating all entrepreneurial activity within the University and supporting entrepreneurship. These activities include: training, mentoring of students, liaising with faculty, maintaining partnerships with external stakeholders and arranging guest speakers. The Panel learned from interviews that a workshop was conducted for faculty entitled 'embedding entrepreneurship into teaching'. The Panel acknowledges the focus on entrepreneurship as a relevant area of community engagement across AU.

Community engagement programmes that students have been involved in include the Injustice Programme, fundraising for breast cancer, as well as projects initiated by the Student Council, such as visits to the elderly, blood donations, and cancer awareness programmes. Furthermore, there are college-specific initiatives that students are involved in such as the arrangement of an art exhibition for local artists and a conference on empowerment of women. In some cases, these community engagement activities were included as a part of some coursework. For example, a Facebook marketing campaign was initiated on behalf of the community. In other cases, students registered for 'French 101' received extra grades for attending the French Day, which was a community-based activity. The list of achievements from 2014 to 2018 includes prizes for debate competitions, INJAZ, Bahrain Universities Model United Nations, Trade Quest competition, Pearl Initiative case study competition, and Huawei's ICT skill competition.

It was evident during interviews that community service and volunteering activities are prominent amongst AU staff and students. The Panel learned from interviews that AU sees itself as part of Bahraini society and therefore wants to contribute both to the country at large and to the local community. The activities are therefore aligned with various government initiatives, such as Bahrain Vision 2030, in their rendering of community service. Some student research projects are also orientated towards community needs. Furthermore, interviews reflected a recognition that community service is something that is 'in the hearts' of both staff and students, and that addressing the needs of special needs students is an important area for the University. The Panel also learned that the community-related opportunities taken by students, faculty and staff promote active citizenship, a work ethic, and an awareness of the needs of the country.

From interviews the Panel confirmed that there are no service-learning programmes in place. The Panel was not presented with any evidence of credit-bearing service-learning courses that have been incorporated into existing degree programmes. The Panel encourages AU to introduce service-learning courses for each College, to consolidate various community service and volunteering activities, and to further strengthen community engagement.

Even though community engagement is listed as one of the responsibilities of academic staff in the Staff Handbook, and is reported to be taken into account in the allocation of workloads, it is not clear if all academic staff are actually required to contribute to community engagement. It may not be specifically assessed as part of the performance requirements of academic staff, as it is combined with other university service responsibilities (such as research) when assessing promotion applications. It is not explicitly specified as part of the teaching load and therefore seems to be occurring on an ad hoc and discretionary basis. While the recently established Entrepreneurship Centre is headed by a dedicated faculty member, and several faculty members are involved in giving lectures, they do not seem to have been specifically assigned this responsibility. The Panel acknowledges the extent to which staff have engaged voluntarily in community engagement activities and recommends that AU should further clarify what is expected of faculty in terms of their involvement in community engagement, and distinct from their teaching and research responsibilities.

The Head of Community Engagement, and the Community Engagement Committee, are responsible for compiling a community engagement progress report, which contributes to an annual report on achievement of related KPI's. This report sets out the activities of community engagement, which are aligned to the Strategic Objectives of the University. Targets for each KPI have been set and actual community engagement activities are reported against these targets. The above committee is also used as a forum to consult on new activities related to community

engagement. The Panel recommends that AU should collect and utilize stakeholders' feedback on Community Engagement activities in measuring the outcomes and the impacts of these activities and plan improvement accordingly.

While there is no direct reference to a database of community engagement activities, the reports produced would suggest that such a database could easily be established. The reports provide a mechanism to monitor the level of community engagement activity. Given that these KPIs focus on activity rather than outcomes or impact, it seems that the effectiveness of these activities is not known. The Panel learned during interviews that AU has a good reputation for community service, and events are regularly featured in the local newspapers. These newspaper articles have reported on- among other things- student participation in the Smile Initiative, as well as the advancement of equal opportunity training and activities, including speaking out about the gender pay gap.

Overall, the Panel concludes that, community service is an important activity within AU, and there is a wide range of different types of service activity are encouraged. Thus, the Panel agrees that this Indicator is addressed.

Recommendation

- Further clarify what is expected of faculty in terms of their involvement in community engagement, and distinct from their teaching and research responsibilities in the related policies and procedures.
- Collect and utilize stakeholders' feedback on Community Engagement activities in measuring the outcomes and the impacts of these activities and plan improvement accordingly.

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