



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Programme Review Report

Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics

AMA International University

Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 28 -29 September 2009

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1. The Programme Review Process

1.1 The programme review framework

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

Indicator 1: Curriculum

Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

The summative judgment falls into one of three categories:

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

1.2 The programme review process at AMA International University-Bahrain

The programme review of the Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics (BSBI) of AMA International University-Bahrain (AMAIUB) was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. This Report provides an account of the HERU programme review process and the findings of the Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by AMAIUB and its College of Administrative and Financial Sciences (CAFS), the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

AMAIUB was notified by HERU/QAAET in November 2008 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics with the site visit taking place in September 2009. In preparation for the programme review, AMAIUB conducted its programme self-evaluation and submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with appendices on the agreed date in June 2009.

The quality review site visit took place on 28th and 29th September 2009. This Report records the evidence-based conclusions reached by the Review Panel. It is expected that the College of Administrative and Financial Sciences, at AMAIUB will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics programme.

AMAIUB began offering the Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics in 2002. Located within the AMAIUB's College of Administrative and Financial Sciences (CAFS),

the Bachelor of Science degree in Business Informatics is one of seven degree programmes currently offered by CAFS. The six other programmes include the undergraduate Bachelor of Science in International Studies (BSIS) (formerly the Bachelor of Arts in International Studies); the Bachelor of Science in Mechatronics Engineering (BSME); the Bachelor of Science in Engineering Informatics (BSEI); the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science (BSCS) and postgraduate degrees including the Master of Science in Computer Science (MSCS); the Master of Business Administration (MBA).

In June 2009 there were 1,162 full-time and 1,458 part-time students registered on the Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics degree. The total number of students registered on the programme has grown significantly since 2002. From a student enrolment of 81 in 2002, the BSBI programme had grown to a total of some 2620 registered students in June 2009, making it the largest programme in AMAIUB.

There are 49 full-time and 28 part-time staff teaching on the Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics degree. As well as staff from CAFS contributing to programme delivery, 52 academic staff from other faculties within AMAIUB participate in delivering the programme (35 staff are from the Centre for General Education and 17 based in the College of Computer Studies).

The BSBI programme content has since its launch in 2002, been revised. Programme regulations, regarding the minimum number of units taken across the trimesters and aspects of compulsory course content, have been amended, during the academic year 2007-2008 in line with the HEC policy.

The BSBI programme is structured around a 'ladder' framework which provides students with the option of exiting with awards at Diploma, Associate Degree, Bachelor Degree levels.

2. Indicator 1: Curriculum

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

- 2.1 The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) provides a clear Vision and Mission of the overall institution and of the host department. The overview of the programme aims and ILOs provide some indication of the broad academic orientation of the programme and has highlighted the importance of developing the students with an academic underpinning for the development and application of technical and problem solving skills on a vocational basis. However, these ILOs primarily focus on developing knowledge comprehension, understanding and capacity for application. There would appear to be comparatively little emphasis on higher level learning in relation to the capacity to critique, evaluate and undertake synthesis in academic domains.
- 2.2 There is some evidence contained within the SER that an attempt has been made to strike a balance between the development of knowledge and skills in the overall approach to curriculum development and delivery.
- 2.3 The courses/subjects contained in the programme are broadly typical of those expected in a Business Informatics degree. Some limited course choice is offered within the programme structure.
- 2.4 The citation in the SER of a revised curriculum during 2007-2008 resulting in the provision of new academic content including new courses in areas such as 'History of Bahrain' and the 'Islamic Banking and Finance' are indicators of a willingness to undertake some contextualisation of the programme's core curriculum to local cultural, and business conditions.
- 2.5 Although recent course innovations demonstrate some capacity to reflect and improve the broad programme curriculum, the Review Panel found no evidence of formal mechanisms for incorporating the views of existing students or key external stakeholders into new curriculum developments. However, current students are able to provide feedback *via* student surveys related to existing individual courses.
- 2.6 The attempt to respond to the requirements of new student induction *via* the development of a 'Euthenics' element within the curriculum facilitates students understanding of 'life at university' and is an example of the adoption of good practice.
- 2.7 Given the range of experience, backgrounds and prior learning of part-time and full-time student intake, and the range of English language competences, the attempt at augmentation of the core programme *via* the additional provision of remedial Mathematics and modular English, and Islamic Education are, in principle, to be commended.

- 2.8 There is no indication in the SER of an overarching framework guiding the teaching and learning strategy employed across the degree programme and how the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are delineated between the rungs of the ladder framework.
- 2.9 It is not clear from the SER how the business and management and IT streams within the programme are assimilated. As with all 'hybrid' academic programmes, there is the possibility that the two streams are not fully integrated either in relation to the curriculum design and delivery or as perceived by the students. The 'Practicum' component may be one such means of achieving this. The Review Panel anticipates that this issue of IT/Business integration across and within course content in relation to syllabus outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment strategies should be developed more fully. The embedding of action learning within the curriculum *via* the 'Practicum' course demonstrates good practice in this instance.
- 2.10 There appears to be an increased awareness on the part of the faculty of the need for programme review and enhancement. There is evidence of reflective practice in some areas; for example stemming from the curriculum review; course design and implementation, and inclusion of the 'Practicum' course.
- 2.11 The inclusion of additional compulsory courses for incorporation of extra credit now puts the programme in line with the Kingdom of Bahrain's Ministry of Education's minimum credit requirements for degree programmes delivered over three trimesters.
- 2.12 There is some evidence of prompt feedback on student performance in relation to both formative and summative components.
- 2.13 In coming to its conclusion regarding the curriculum, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
- There is some evidence of an attempt to provide knowledge enhancement and to facilitate student familiarity with programme policies and regulations *via* the introduction of the 'Euthenics 1 & 2' courses
 - There are some clear attempts at contextualization *via* the adoption of the 'Islamic Banking and Finance' and similar courses
 - The embedding of action learning within the curriculum *via* the 'Practicum' course demonstrates good practice in this instance
 - There appears to be an increased awareness on the part of the faculty of the need for programme review and enhancement
 - The inclusion of additional compulsory courses for incorporation of extra credit now puts the programme in line with the Kingdom of Bahrain's Ministry of Education minimum credit requirements for degree programmes delivered over three trimesters
 - There is evidence of reflective practice in some areas; for example stemming from the curriculum review; course design and implementation, and inclusion of the 'Practicum' course

- There is some evidence of prompt feedback on student performance in relation to both formative and summative components.

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

- Address the imbalance in curriculum in relation to course objectives focused on knowledge and understanding. Specifically, that the programme team should incorporate in the programme a greater emphasis on developing students' deep understanding, and furthering their capacity for critical appraisal of theory; as well as offer more opportunities for applied problem solving across all levels of the programme
- Adequately respond to the perceived need to integrate conceptually and practically the separate 'informatics' and 'business' course streams between courses and across all levels of study. In addition, to indicate how the teaching and learning strategies employed facilitate such an integration process
- Address the need for the programme to evidence appropriate delineation (between levels) of vertical deepening of knowledge and understanding from level 1 through to level 3. The lack of sufficient supporting data in these areas leads the Review Panel to conclude that, in terms of level delineation of aggregate intended learning outcomes, the necessary deepening of knowledge, capacity to critique, apply theory to practice, and construct knowledge from understanding at higher cognitive levels, are not adequately evidenced. It is the view of the Review Panel that this is a material omission in terms of the communication of programme curricula design, content and programme philosophy
- In terms of the curriculum fit between levels and across courses, the Review Panel has noted that there is evidence of instances where some compulsory courses have an almost identical syllabus to other compulsory courses and that the academic content is drawn from the same body of knowledge (for example for the 'Information Resource Management' and 'Information System Management' courses which used different versions of the same textbook). It is the view of the Review Panel that such curriculum duplication should be identified and removed across the programme on a holistic basis and that all possible future sources of duplication should be identified and addressed. Further, the Review Panel strongly recommends that a formal academic mechanism be devised, at the programme level, for identifying and addressing such curricula overlap and duplication and that it should be applied across the programme in a universal, rigorous and systematic manner, in order, to prevent a reoccurrence of this duplication of academic content
- Provide a clear academic rationale and underpinning course philosophy for the overall programme design, curriculum content, balance of intended learning

outcomes and for the overall teaching and learning strategy adopted within and across the programme

- In relation to curriculum mapping, there would appear, from the evidence presented to the Review Panel, to be a lack of sufficient differentiation between skills level attainment across and between courses; i.e. almost all the ILO skills attainment boxes were ticked in the programme curriculum map. An adequate explanation or narrative of skills development within and across course and between levels was not evidenced during the site visit, despite repeated opportunities being given to the internal panel to do so
- There would appear, to the Review Panel, to be a bias (70% standard - 30% Bahrain contextualised) towards standardized academic content rather than contextualized content. This balance was not adequately supported by sufficient justification; i.e. in relation to the quality of the teaching and learning materials, the adoption of leading edge technologies, teaching and learning strategies etc. Indeed part of the localisation would appear to be the result of local Ministry of Education requirements rather than any independent academic judgement on the part of the programme team
- Based on evidence supplied by students currently on the programme, *via* oral feedback to the Review Panel, there would appear to be the perception on the part of some students of sub-optimal communication from faculty of the rationale for, and the implications of, the change in credit balance of the programme as a result of Kingdom of Bahrain, Ministry of Education requirements. This communication gap should be addressed
- It was evident to the Review Panel that there was a lack of adequate in-depth understanding and detailed appreciation on the part of teaching staff about how the student experience on the BSBI programme was different from other AMA programmes or to other programmes elsewhere. This gap in faculty understanding and detailed appreciation should be addressed by CAFS
- The reasoning behind the balance between informatics, generic management and hybrid curriculum content was not adequately evidenced to the Review Panel, either at the pre-site visit phase or during the two-day site presence. This omission should be addressed by the programme team/Faculty
- In terms of on-going programme management, there would appear to be an overemphasis on administrative procedure rather than academic processes in relation to programme review, course development, curricula design innovations and in relation to development in teaching and learning strategies. The balance between academic and administrative processes should be addressed by the programme team

- From Review Panel discussions with programme representatives, it would appear that key teaching staff do not adequately understand how the individual courses fit together to provide a unified academic whole, and so an integrated academic experience for students on the programme. This gap in faculty understanding and detailed appreciation should be addressed by the faculty
- From the evidence supplied to the Review Panel, there would appear to be a paucity of clear academic rationale and lack of an underpinning course philosophy for the overall programme design, curriculum content, the balance of intended learning outcomes and for the overall teaching and learning strategy adopted within and across the programme. When questioned, programme team members repeatedly focused on the individual courses that they were responsible for, and appeared unable to explain the extent to which an overarching framework or academic architecture provided the basis for programme design and delivery. This lack of apparent in-depth understanding on the part of the programme team of the (academically derived) rationale for the programme and apparent lack of awareness of the main academic and vocational underpinnings for the programme design was a cause for serious concern on the part of the Review Panel members
- Evidence supported reasoning behind the balance between informatics, generic management and hybrid curriculum needs to be provided. Content was not adequately evidenced to the Review Panel, either at the pre-site visit phase or during the two-day site presence. This omission should be addressed by the programme team.

2.15 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy the indicator on curriculum.**

3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme

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

- 3.1 The requirement for programme applicants to take a compulsory entrance examination in Business Informatics and the English Language in order to determine prior learning and core business and IT practices is to be commended, as is the subsequent placement of 'weaker' students in remedial courses in core subjects.
- 3.2 As two thirds of admitted students come directly from secondary school and the remaining third have either intermediate education or professional experience, AMAIUB claimed its capacity to tailor programme content in early stages across a range of skill sets. However, little evidence was provided either in the SER or during the site visit, about the extent to which this aspiration was realized. The Review Panel found little evidence of any relevant policy or significant practice being implemented in this regard.
- 3.3 The 2620 students enrolled at AMAIUB-CAFS are taught by 129 full-time and part-time faculty including staff from the Centre of General Education and the College of Computer Studies. Therefore the University seems to satisfy the general requirements of the Higher Education Council. Moreover, faculty are required to devote a minimum of 3 hours of research time per week and 6 hours of student advising (consultation hours). Whilst there was ample proof of the faculty dedication and availability to advising students, there is no evidence of any significant research output by faculty.
- 3.4 The number of faculty members and others who contribute to the programme appear generally to be adequate in quantity. However all faculty, across all ranks, had a teaching workload of 21 hours, augmented with 6 consultation hours and 3 research hours accounting for a minimum of 30 working hours. While this is within the upper limit defined by the HEC, this load is considered excessive as it is applied continuously throughout the semesters. Furthermore, the academic qualifications and professional experience that core staff possess, as evidenced by the résumés made available during the site visit, suggest modest academic achievements of faculty, with relatively little research output or significant previous academic experience for many. There is comparatively little international diversity in the faculty body with the majority of staff coming from a single country.
- 3.5 The University holds a periodical exercise, the TNA (Training Needs Assessment) to identify development needs of its faculty. But the list of seminars and other training that was held as a result of this TNA relates to basic skills that university academics ought to have before entering the job (e.g. time & stress management, classroom management, etc). At any rate, faculty development generally covers more advanced

areas of learning that relate to new pedagogical practices in the classroom, new subject expertise, research support, conference attendance, etc. No evidence of such support was provided.

- 3.6 BSBI faculty currently appear to produce almost no research output and their teaching is predominantly skill-based and sub-optimally informed by theory. Moreover, the details provided to the Review Panel concerning research outputs by staff were not expressly evidenced to neither support the attainment of programme aims nor inform curricula content. Whilst a sizeable budget was presented as evidence of the change in direction for AMAIUB, the Review Panel expresses its concerns about the feasibility of the implementation of the research strategy (if any) in relation to adding value to the BSBI programme. Although large amounts of expenditure appear to be allocated to cover the capital and operational cost of research, it is not clear how such monies will trickle down to staff workload allocation and related academic activity, such as conference attendance, research training, etc. In addition, the objective of publishing a number of in-house journals reflects an attempt to comply nominally with the new research requirements of HEC. However, the Review Panel, would expect that a more practical research strategy should be adopted that fosters the creation of a 'research culture' in order to facilitate the emergence of an appropriate climate for staff to produce high quality research outputs that are published in peer-reviewed venues, both journals and conferences.
- 3.7 AMAIUB is housed in a modern campus in Salmabad which was purposefully designed to host programmes like the BSBI. The computer laboratories were well equipped and manned by qualified personnel. Timetables indicating course schedules in each laboratory showed a high occupancy level. The Review Panel was concerned that given the computer intensive nature of the BSBI programme, there may not be enough 'slack' time for student independent laboratory based work outside of formal class time. Laboratory timetables were provided and seemed to afford the necessary time for student extra-class work.
- 3.8 The library did not appear to contain an adequate volume of academic journals or texts in the collection viewed by the Review Panel. Most of the books in the library shelves appeared to be multiple copies of generic early-editions textbooks with the collection containing relatively few reference texts. Similarly, there appeared to be no academic journal collection apart from a few local publications and one issue of an academic journal published by AMAIUB. Physically, the library appeared to have limited space. Given the student numbers, there was comparatively limited seating formally designated for students. However, there were dedicated workstations for library and database search. Library staff asserted that a number of on-line resources were available through the on-line portal of AMAIUB including access from outside the AMAIUB intranet on campus. However, during the AMAIUB visit the members

of the Review Panel were unable to verify this claim, as they could not access these resources, on site, *via* the specified AMAIUB library URL.

- 3.9 The Review Panel was concerned by the lack of evidence of significant e-learning infrastructure for either full- or part-time students. This lack of virtual learning and supported e-learning was particularly surprising for a business informatics programme. Similarly, there are no 'smart' classrooms with projectors requiring staff to carry equipment back and forth denoting outmoded delivery standards and cumbersome logistics. The SER does, however, acknowledge this area as being in need of improvement. The Panel heard confirmation during the visit that the University was moving towards implementing smart classrooms.
- 3.10 New students are inducted on academic matters upon admission. A two course sequence 'Euthenics' 1 and 2 has been incorporated into the curriculum to orient students on all aspects of their university life. Students confirmed during a meeting with the Panel that they benefitted from the courses. They were generally happy with the level of orientation they received upon joining the University and the subsequent and continuous support they received from the University and the BSBI faculty.
- 3.11 Cohort analysis shows a retention rate above 90% and a graduation rate above 70%. A breakdown of marks by GPA category seems to indicate signs of grade inflation as roughly 50% of the current student population are in the 'very good' to 'excellent' categories. Moreover, scores from the placement test show rather modest performances of student intake with a prevalence of 'average' to 'poor' mark for a large number of students. Tawjeehia (passing score at the end of secondary school) scores were not provided despite the request of the Panel. It is not clear how long students spend in the remedial programmes before being allowed into the BSBI programme. Based on the average student tenure of 3.5 years until graduation, the Review Panel concludes that students spend on average just one semester in remedial classes which is rather short for a general intake with modest abilities.
- 3.12 A 'tracer study' for BSBI graduates of 2008 details the student whereabouts beyond graduation in terms of where they are employed but does not provide any other useful information from either graduates or employers. Although the University does not provide any placement service for its BSBI graduates, they seem to do quite well as most are either employed or pursuing further graduate education. It would have been useful to seek student feedback on the quality of the BSBI programme and further the degree of satisfaction of employers with the quality of training provided by AMAIUB to its graduates.
- 3.13 In general, it was difficult for the Review Panel to obtain detailed, accurate and comprehensive data about students and related academic matters. This could denote the absence of an existing efficient and effective management information system

that enables proper tracking of important operational data in relation to the BSBI programme.

3.14 In coming to its conclusion regarding the efficiency, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:

- Overall, there would appear to be adequate provision of physical and material resources for the current cohort of students
- The adoption of competence evaluation and student induction training would appear to be adequate
- In relation to staffing, there is some evidence of on the job training, and the use of seminars to enhance staff competencies
- Recent initiatives in relation to research planning and allocation of resources are encouraging
- The use of formal administrative structures and the establishment of committees related to new research collaborations is a positive component
- There is some evidence of initiatives to improve HR policy in order to recruit staff with higher qualifications and in the area of new staff induction.

3.15 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should develop the following:

- The programme requires enhanced staff and student access to core academic materials, such as online data bases, journals, and enhanced e-learning opportunities
- There should be an enhancement in staff academic profiles in order to be more compliant with external expectations of teaching faculty competencies. This should include a continuation of the trend towards the recruitment of more staff with doctorates, an increase in the volume of staff possessing prior experience of employment in higher education, and new staff recruited from across a number of geographical regions in order to foster greater academic and cultural diversity in the programme's faculty
- The programme will benefit from better research trained faculty. AMAIUB should endeavour to provide programme faculty with more ample opportunities to conduct research including by lowering teaching load and hiring faculty with proven research degrees. A system of reward and promotion giving due credit to relevant research would help foster a culture of research that is currently lacking. A genuine research strategy should be based on creating the appropriate conditions for staff to publish in peer-reviewed venues, both journals and conferences. Programme faculty should avail themselves of genuine opportunities to train in the leading edge technologies and applications in their fields of specialty as well as receive training in the latest pedagogical practices in business informatics

- Programme planning should ensure the availability of enough laboratory time for student independent practice. AMAIUB should closely monitor laboratory occupancy and take appropriate measures to avoid an overuse of lab resources
- The library should invest in the proportionate acquisition, regarding the size and academic breadth of the programme, of new reference and academic texts and build a sizeable journal collection to reflect the stated research plan
- As the quality of programme intake depends in a large part on the output of remedial programmes AMAIUB should closely monitor its remedial programmes to ensure that only qualified students progress into the BSBI programme. Specifically, the causes of over marking leading to excessive grade inflation should be more precisely identified and monitored by the programme faculty and a strategy put in place to minimise the likelihood of such exposure to over marking occurring.

3.16 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on efficiency of the programme.**

4. Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

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

- 4.1 There is cooperation with AMA Philippines regarding curriculum content and standard setting. In addition, the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain regulates AMAIUB as well as other local institutions. Based on the evidence provided to the Review Panel, these regulations would appear to be complied with and incorporated into programme design and staffing policies.
- 4.2 There would appear to be a general commitment, in principle, by the institution and programme management team to external benchmarking in both academic and practitioner areas. There is some evidence of the provision of value added components in relation to academic retention and the academic progression of students.
- 4.3 There are high student retention and progression rates across courses in the region of 70-80%. The introduction of new academic structures such as the 'Academic Affairs Committee', and 'Research Committee' are evidence of an attempt by faculty to adopt a more systematic and procedural approach to academic policy and implementation in practice.
- 4.4 There is no formal evidence of the current adoption and implementation of effective and efficient procedures for the use of external academic benchmarks (outside the AMA organisation) in the programme. Specifically, in terms of programme academic progression requirements and overall academic and graduate standards such metrics, are not 'externally referenced'. Such an absence of evidence in relation to the adoption of a current formal policy of external examining is, in the view of the Review Panel, an important limitation in relation to external academic credibility, and the maintenance and application of academic standards. Consequently, it is the view of the Review Panel, that there is a clear and present need for the programme management team to benchmark externally student and graduate attainment levels, as a means of comparing, maintaining and enhancing academic standards in relation to the expectations of key external stakeholders (academic, government, and practitioner) and against other local equivalent institutions and programmes.
- 4.5 There is, as yet, no evidence of the intention to use external examiners or similar in the next academic year; i.e. 2009 to 2010. The programme team appeared to be uncertain about how the programme will effectively benchmark academic standards. Similarly, the faculty appeared not entirely clear whether the target for external benchmarking was to be achieved by 2011 or 2013. The Review Panel found that

there was a lack of sufficient evidence of any substantial formal processes for formal benchmarking internal moderation, other than *via* a student complaints procedure.

- 4.6 There is inadequate evidence of the current adoption of a universal mechanism within the programme to monitor, control and maintain academic standards in order to minimise exposure to grade inflation or over marking. There is a clear need in the view of the Review Panel for the development and implementation of a system for formal internal (AMAIUB) moderation (and anonymous marking) of student works; other than on a reactive basis as the result of student academic appeals.
- 4.7 There is inadequate evidence of direct, pro-active, systematic mechanisms to facilitate ongoing consultations and formal input from key external stakeholders including employers, and the Ministry of Labour, in relation to curricula content design, determination of the level of academic standards, desired employability skills and generic industry and graduate level professional competences. This lack of an outward facing stance is, in the view of the Review Panel, a key limitation.
- 4.8 In relation to academic staff research output, and in order to provide an adequate basis for underpinning programme specific academic content and practice, there would appear to the Review Panel to be insufficient research output in external; peer reviewed journals, academic (not practitioner) conference attendance and participation.
- 4.9 It would appear that no current use is made of formal external examinerships in regard to the undergraduate degree, nor were there any apparent (specific) plans about how this issue would be addressed.
- 4.10 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standards of the graduates, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
- There would appear to be a broad commitment to external benchmarking in both academic and practitioner areas
 - There is some evidence of the provision of value added components in relation to academic retention of students.
- 4.11 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the College should:
- Address as a matter of urgency the absence of an external examiner policy as it is a limitation in relation to external academic credibility and maintenance of standards
 - Demonstrate that a clear strategy, action plan and timescale together, with the appropriate prioritization of resources have been developed in order to address the Review Panel's concerns stemming from the lack of internal and external benchmarking of academic standards for the programme. A statement of

'aspirations' or desire to accomplish the above, will not, in the Review Panel's, view be sufficient

- Develop and explicitly document an internal system for formal internal moderation of student work
- Develop and explicitly document a formal system for generating input from key external stakeholders, including employers and the Ministry of Labour in relation to academic standards, course design, mode of assessment, determination of skills and overall graduate standards
- Develop a system for the allocation and monitoring of academic workloads in order to facilitate other scholarly activity, including research outputs and academic conference participation
- The programme team should implement a feedback system in order to facilitate the determination of how programme alumni and other stakeholders perceive the quality and relevance of the BSBI programme and to gauge the degree of satisfaction of employers with the programme graduates
- The programme team should implement a more efficient and effective management information system that will enable it to better track important operational data relating to students, courses, facilities, alumni and employers.

4.12 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy the indicator on academic standards of the graduates.**

5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

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

- 5.1 There is some evidence of good practice in the University and College under this category. For example, there is a clear attempt to embed a quality culture and corresponding systems as evidenced in the weekly 'Operations Meeting' as well as the Academic Council of the University. A 'Curriculum Review Committee' has also been established to consider changes and updates to the curriculum. There are also other examples of good practice; e.g. the weekly Euthenics class and orientation programme for new students at the start of the academic year. The SER refers to a Student Handbook, Faculty Handbook for professors and an Administrative Handbook for non-academic staff. Student discipline is monitored through the Office of Student Affairs and academic matters are dealt with by the Deans.
- 5.2 Student Satisfaction Surveys as well as Teaching Improvement Plans have recently been introduced which indicates an intention to implement continuous improvement within the programme. Faculty meetings are conducted monthly to review the operation of the BSBI programme with more urgent matters referred to the Dean and other senior members of staff. The SER was somewhat vague on how this operates. During the site visit the Review Panel had opportunity to read the minutes of these meetings and whilst there is some evidence of an attempt to enhance academic quality and review procedures this, appears to have been quite recent. In this regard, the minutes and policy statements provided for the review process tended to be somewhat perfunctory rather than strategic and forward- thinking - indeed re-active rather than pro-active. This statement is made in the full knowledge of the relatively short period of time that the programme has been operating at the Bahrain Branch of AMA International University.
- 5.3 There is some evidence of an attempt to standardise quality procedures and processes; e.g. in the manner in which student feedback is gathered and responded. This is an improvement on the somewhat informal processes used previously. It is encouraging that the College (CAFS) has identified this as an area for further enhancement and improvement. However, there was little if any evidence provided during the site visit that such feedback has informed decisions regarding the suitability of the curriculum, although such views have appeared in the most recent edition of the University's newsletter, *The Pioneer*. Similarly, although external stakeholders such as potential employers spoke highly of the graduates they had employed, there was little evidence of them being involved in any on-going basis in an advisory capacity for the programme team. Examples of good practice did exist in the form of the in-company projects based on short internships facilitated by the

University and College, though it was not clear what assistance the College gave to students to obtain such intern positions. There is an intention to launch a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with local industries and businesses, which is to be encouraged.

- 5.4 There appears to be a structured programme at College and University levels for Corporate Planning including Capital Expenditure Planning and Operation Expenditure and this is strongly influenced by an Annual Functional Plan and an Annual Accomplishment Report.
- 5.5 In the area of Staff Development, the SER refers to Training Needs Assessments (TNA) conducted by the Human Resources Department which appears to be good practice, though the SER document is vague on how these are carried out (i.e. content and objectives). The SER also refers to on-going seminars and workshops attended by staff, international study tours and exchange professorships. However, during the site visit there was insufficient evidence provided of examples of staff who had participated in such activities, especially in relation to Research and Scholarly Activity. Certainly the College and University has instituted an Annual Faculty/Staff Development Plan through its Improvement Plan for the period 2008-13 and a Research and Development Department with an enhanced budget has been established, all of which are encouraging developments. Though this is very embryonic, it is anticipated that this will lead to adjustments in staff workloads to facilitate staff research activities, including articles for peer-reviewed journals and international conference attendance. The University has also launched this year a new in-house academic journal which is inter-disciplinary.
- 5.6 In the area of Programme Improvement, the SER refers to there being adequate records of curriculum enhancement from within the Office of Deputy Director for Academics. Improvement Plans and subsequent editions of the BSBI curriculum have been produced which is commendable.
- 5.7 In coming to its conclusion regarding the effectiveness of quality management and assurance, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
 - There are indications of attempts to develop staff *via* the use of Training Needs Assessments
 - The research plan development is an indication of aspiration to good practice
 - Some evidence of an attempt to enhance the academic quality and review procedures in recent times. This is evidenced *via* the attempt by faculty to embed a quality procedure and emerging curriculum development guidelines (the introduction of a 'Curriculum Development Committee', which holds weekly meetings to address quality issues)

- There would appear to be an attempt, in broad terms, by the institution to initiate steps for the achievement of research activity enhancement; specifically, *via* initiatives such as the development of a 'Research Plan'
- There is evidence of some attempt by the institution to develop academic staff *via* the use of visiting speakers, workshops and IT software training sessions. The use of Teaching Need Analysis is supporting evidence of this practice
- There is some evidence of attempts at obtaining feedback from students on the programme for example *via* the 'Student Satisfaction Survey'.

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

- Construct a formal policy for staff development and continuous professional enhancement
- Provide documented evidence of a strategy and implementation policy for formal on-going external stakeholder consultation and involvement in relation to programme management, monitoring and evaluation
- Construct, document and embed a formal staff development and promotions policy for continuing professional development and planning and implementation
- Revise current workload models of the academic staff which would (routinely) allow sufficient (strategic) opportunity for continuous professional development, including discipline orientated (e.g. IT, Management, HRM, Marketing, Finance), academic research and related scholarly activity
- Revise the planning cycle for programme quality review and enhancement. It would appear to the Review Panel, that the time horizon for strategic planning is predominantly 'for the next year', rather than two or three years hence
- In relation to programme management, provide increased opportunities for greater participation, by teaching staff and student representative and key external stakeholders. There would appear to the Review Panel to be a concentration of authority with the Dean(s) and Head(s) of Department, rather than the front line academic, related staff, and students. For example, there would appear to be no formal Programme Committee, incorporating the above staff, with representation of external stakeholders
- Develop a comprehensive system for formal feedback on programme quality to inform future programme and course design, to inform teaching and learning strategies, and to inform professional practice as the basis for continuous quality enhancement and programme improvement

- Re-orientate programme quality appraisal and evaluation functions away from an emphasis on administrative processes towards academically centred policies, procedure and practice
- Formally incorporate continuous review and appraisal processes in order to enhance the quality of academic standards, staff performance and competence so that the programme's academic processes and functions are 'fit for purpose'
- Provide a platform by which programme faculty can take 'ownership' of quality processes and enhancement of management processes and functions. Ensure that programme and institutional stakeholders perceive quality enhancement monitoring and evaluation, procedure and functions as something that is undertaken by internal academic staff, not done to them by external agencies
- Formally incorporate enhanced academic standards, continuous review of processes and procedures for enhancing quality systems in the programme
- Quality assurance should be driven by an on- going review of academic practice, reinforced by external (including international) benchmarks and standards. The College and University should enhance and benchmark systems for appraising academic standards.

5.9 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy the indicator on effectiveness of quality management and assurance.**

6. Conclusion

Taking into account the institution's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the site visit, the Review Panel draws the following, unanimous, conclusion, in accordance with the *HERU/QAAET Programme Review Handbook, April 2009*:

There is no confidence in the Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics Programme offered by AMA International University-Bahrain.