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

Higher Education Review Unit

Institutional Review Report

Applied Science University

Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 8-11 November 2009

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1. The Institutional Review Process

The review of Applied Science University (hereinafter referred to as 'ASU' or 'the University') 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 the performance of education and training institutions in light of the guiding indicators developed by the Authority" (Royal Decree No 32 of May 2008 amended by Royal Decree No. 6 of 2009).

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

2. Overview of Applied Science University

ASU is owned by the 'Gulf Education Project W.L.L. Company', which is a limited liability company registered in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The University is registered as a higher educational institution under the Ministry of Education Licence Number WD 140/2004 dated 5 July 2004 and operates under the commercial name 'Applied Science University'.

ASU began its academic activities in the academic year 2005-2006 with 229 undergraduate students (152 Bahraini and 77 non-Bahraini) and 27 postgraduate students (26 Bahraini and 1 non-Bahraini). In 2009, the total number of registered student has increased to 1105 undergraduate students (488 Bahraini and 617 non-Bahraini) and 123 postgraduate students (74 Bahrainis and 49 non-Bahrainis). The University comprises three Faculties (Colleges), and 11 Departments offering a total of 11 undergraduate and 7 postgraduate programmes.

The academic staff members has increased from 18 faculty members in 2005 to 57 faculty members in 2009 most of whom are PhD holders. More than 90% of the current faculty members are non-Bahraini. 49 of the current faculty members are full-time while eight are part-time. The University has 77 administrative staff members, 31 of whom are full-time.

3. Mission, Planning and Governance

ASU has new Vision and Mission statements which has recently been adapted. The Vision and Mission statements recognise higher education as the University's primary purpose. The Mission statement was revised recently with the intention to make it more realistic and was approved by the University Senate on 1st June 2009 and the Board of Directors on 8th June 2009. However, five months later it was not evident to the Panel the extent to which there is awareness of the new Mission, for example the students' handbook still included the old University Mission.

The Panel suggests that ASU conducts an institutional-wide debate that involves its various stakeholders; i.e. management, deans, academics, administrative staff and students, to ensure a shared understanding of the Vision and Mission across the Institution as these form the basis for strategic planning, which in turn leads to the development and implementation of the operational plan.

Recommendation-1

HERU recommends that Applied Science University conduct an institutional-wide debate that involves its various stakeholders, to ensure a shared understanding of its new Mission and Vision across the Institution.

The Mission statement refers to the graduate attributes which students will acquire during their studies. These are essentially concerned with knowledge transfer and skills acquisition. While the Mission includes the University's aspirations of being 'an applied science university', ASU does not show how this would translate into specific graduate attributes associated with such an institutional type.

ASU operated until May 2009 without a clear strategic plan. In the Senate meeting dated 1st June 2009 an *ad hoc* committee of five staff members was formed to develop a strategic plan for the University. As a result, a five year Strategic Plan has been developed which begins to detail how the University will move towards its Vision and Mission. The SER indicates that the Strategic Plan was approved by the University Senate, the University Board of Directors and Board of Trustees. The dates of the approvals are 18th July, 22nd July and 28th July 2009 respectively. The Panel noted that the Plan was developed and approved over a very short period without a thorough SWOT analysis, needs assessment or involvement of different internal or external stakeholders. No data and facts were used to support the development of the Strategic Plan. The Panel suggests that the University review the process through which it developed its Strategic Plan.

Recommendation-2

HERU recommends that Applied Science University review the mechanism through which it develops it Strategic Plan so that its planning is informed by facts and data and that the process is more inclusive.

The Strategic Plan comprises a number of areas for improvement, each with associated objectives that provide some detail as to how ASU intends to move towards the destination set in its Vision. However, this plan remains at the level of broad goals without defined targets, timelines, or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Consequently, it does not provide enough information about what the University will try to achieve specifically in each individual year; the extent and nature of its expansion in programmes or buildings and infrastructural facilities; the arrangements for programme reviews; or benchmarking of courses and programmes. The Plan does not provide clarity as to what actions ASU will take to achieve its strategic goals or how ASU will measure its successes in this regard. The Strategic Plan thus needs to be accompanied by an operational plan of specific implementation activities including timeframes, KPIs and annual targets. Adequate resources will need to be allocated to ensure that the Strategic Plan set by the University is implemented.

The SER states that Faculty Deans submit annual reports to the University President evaluating their Faculty's progress and performance. However these reports are not connected to the University's strategic goals. (More details on monitoring are given in section 5 of this Report.)

Recommendation-3

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a detailed operational plan with timeframes, Key Performance Indicators, annual targets and allocated resources, to achieve its Strategic Plan. This should be done in the light of the revised vision and mission statements.

ASU is committed to providing high quality education that enhances the knowledge and skills of students, using a range of pedagogical and teaching approaches and the provision of the necessary resources and facilities. The University has gone through some evaluation activities conducted by affiliated institutions, such as the University of Mutah in Jordan, De-Monfort University in UK, and Helwan University in Egypt. However, almost all these activities provide broad validation of the University's programmes rather than detailed

benchmarking of its academic programmes. The resulting reports are very brief and do not add significant evaluative information on the academic standards of the programmes taught. ASU is evidently aware of the importance of external benchmarking and acknowledges the need for more work in this area both at institutional and programme levels. The Panel is of the view that the University needs to develop a sustainable approach to this vital aspect of assuring and enhancing its academic standards.

Recommendation-4

HERU recommends that Applied Science University undertake more robust and independent benchmarking activities that include an in-depth evaluation of the quality of its academic provision.

The University has a defined policy for academic misconduct which has been drafted and approved by the Board of Directors on August 2009. Hence, the effectiveness of the policy cannot be evaluated yet. However, the policy does not include plagiarism explicitly; neither does the student guide refer to plagiarism. Whilst the SER states that there is a need for the development of such policy, through interviews the Panel could not determine a shared understanding among faculty members about what constitutes plagiarism or the urgent need of developing a policy on plagiarism. Where plagiarism has been detected, the structures and procedures for investigating and dealing with such infringements seem to be *ad hoc* and left to individual judgement. This especially applies to the wide use of information and documentation from the internet by both staff and students. The Panel urges the University to develop and implement clear procedures in relation to plagiarism, and to keep detailed records of such cases. Attempting to cheat in examinations and tests, on the other hand, are dealt with more swiftly. The University keeps detailed records of such incidents with their outcomes.

Recommendation-5

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a policy on plagiarism; to monitor regularly its implementation and effectiveness; and to keep a detailed record of its execution.

The Panel notes that because ASU is a relatively young institution, it is in the process of developing a suite of policies. It is essential that these policies are developed within the

framework of the Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan so that they form an integrated suite of documents that provides a coherent approach to all ASU activities.

Moreover, the Panel is concerned that the suite of new policies has been primarily developed by an individual or a committee with limited input from different stakeholders. The Panel encourages the University to establish a systematic process for policy development that allows for input from all University stakeholders, including students. Such policy documents need to be kept in a repository (which could be electronic or physical) where they are easily accessible to all staff in the languages used as mediums of instruction by the University. Moreover, the process whereby such institutional plans and policies are approved and reviewed needs to be made systematic and transparent.

Recommendation-6

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a systematic policy development process that is informed by inputs from all stakeholders, including students, with arrangements for disseminating the new developed policies to all relevant stakeholders.

The University has developed an organisational chart. However, the organisation and management structure and roles of all members of management are not explicitly stated and available to all stakeholders. There is evidence of a lack of clarity regarding the responsibilities and lines of reporting at the various level of management. As the University grows, it is important that all staff members understand the roles and responsibilities of administrative staff, faculty members and the function of all committees. This is necessary for institutionalising decision-making as a transparent and effective process.

In a small and new university, it is not surprising to find staff members having various managerial roles alongside their teaching. However, at ASU almost all faculty members who hold management responsibilities - often involving multiple administrative activities - simultaneously carry the maximum teaching load permissible by the Higher Education Council (HEC). This undermines both their ability to provide leadership and maintain academic standards and so constitutes a quality and reputational risk to the Institution. (This will be discussed in more detail in section 8 of this Report.)

The University's main income is student tuition. It appears to have financial stability, producing annual net profit exceeding its capital since its inception. However, minimal amount of this profit has been re-inserted to the University's annual budget. There is evidence that the financial and accounting systems include processes to prevent and detect fraud, including the use of accredited external financial auditors. However, the development and distribution of the budget is not transparent and is separated from the academic activities.

The Panel encourages the University to develop a mechanism so that there is involvement of the colleges in the budgeting process. This is necessary to ensure that there is sufficient and appropriate resource allocation for the programme offerings. This in turn will assist the University to achieve its strategic goals and to provide a quality teaching and learning experience for its students.

Recommendation-7

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a transparent budgeting process which includes input from senior academic managers, Faculty Deans and Department Chairs and ensure the alignment of resource allocation to its Strategic Plan and core functions.

ASU was established in 2004 and is governed by a Board of Directors (BoD) consisting of five members who are the University shareholders with the President of the Board being the member with the highest number of shares. The BoD is the ultimate authority for governing the University, setting its direction and approving all decisions. However, the minutes of the Board of Directors indicate that these meetings focus mainly on approving of policies and procedures put forward by the University Senate. No monitoring and evaluation plan or process is in place to monitor the Board's effectiveness. The Panel urges the University to address this shortcoming.

Recommendation-8

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a formal process for the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of its Board of Directors.

The University Senate consists of the President, his assistants and the Deans, and is chaired by the President. The University bylaws state that the Senate is the highest academic authority in the Institution. Whilst the Panel saw evidence that the Senate is playing the primary role in handling the University's academic affairs, interviews and documentation suggest that the authority of the President dominates the Senate's decisions. In the University bylaws, for example, there is a separate list of authorities defined for the President, which include among other things: budget preparation and implementation; preparation of the University's annual development plan for discussion by the Board of Trustees and the BoD; granting partial or full research leaves to individual faculty members; and appointing all Deans and President's assistants. As the Senate is the custodian of the academic integrity of the Institution and the

highest academic decision-making body, the granting of research awards and academic planning should reside within the Senate.

The Board of Trustees (BoT) was first established in 2008, in response to the regulations of the HEC. It comprises the Board of Directors and three external academic members who are appointed by the BoD from outside the Kingdom and who have not attended most of the BoT meetings. The BoT is an advisory board and as such all its decisions are non-binding. The Panel encourages ASU to provide the BoT with a statuary role in assuring quality at ASU. Moreover, the BoT would benefit if it is expanded to include more independent representation. The separation of ownership, governance and management is essential to avoid potential risks of conflict of interest and ensure good corporate governance.

Recommendation-9

HERU recommends that Applied Science University strengthen its Board of Trustees by expanding it to include qualified and independent external stakeholders while ensuring that the Board is independent of the Board of Directors and that its members' obligations to meet regularly are realized.

The Panel suggests that the University develop rigorous and transparent criteria for the appointment of the BoT's members. The University also needs to develop clear terms of reference that outline the full roles and responsibilities of the BoT and its relationship to the BoD as a separate body. New members of the BoT should undergo some form of induction to ensure that they understand the significance of their task in relation to quality development and assurance at ASU. Records of attendance and decisions at meetings need to be kept. The BoT would then be in a position to advise and guide the University as the latter grows in strength and size. One of the tasks of such a body would be to monitor and assess the performance of the leadership of the University, including the President. Similarly, there needs to be a process whereby the effectiveness of the BoT can be monitored.

The SER indicates that a policy regarding Conflict of Interest is under development. This could also assist in safeguarding group decision-making processes and allow for the kinds of academic autonomy associated with traditional and quality universities.

Recommendation-10

HERU recommends that Applied Science University, in accordance with generally accepted good governance practice, separate the powers and duties between ownership, governance and management and institute a process whereby the role and function of the Board of Trustees is fully defined and implemented.

4. Academic Standards

All ASU's programmes follow the credit hour system as required by the HEC and practised by the two affiliated universities, namely: Mutah and the Private University of Applied Science in Jordan. This includes the total numbers of required credit units, categories of requirements (major, faculty and university) as well as pre-requisite, progression and graduation requirements.

The offered undergraduate and postgraduate subjects of study are all internationally recognised. Postgraduate programmes are mainly offered in fields that are also offered at the undergraduate level.

Specific information on the study requirements for each degree awarding programme, is made available to students on admission and subsequent semester registrations, in the form of a one sheet "Study Plan" for each programme. This, as well as information on other relevant aspects, such as examinations, grades, appeals and fees are available in the Student Guide and the University Prospectus, and on the web. The Panel is also satisfied that all students have access to individual academic advisors who follow their progress and provide them with guidance on a regular basis. This was also confirmed by different groups of students interviewed during the site visit.

It is noted that the Study Plan sheets do not include any basic introductory information on the nature of study and the kind of learning experiences the student should expect in the course of his/her study or on the differences between neighbouring programmes of study that share significant numbers of common courses. Such information which can be extracted from the programme's Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) can be useful in explaining the University offerings and the choices that are open to students.

It is also noted that in general the number of electives is quite limited. The Panel was informed during meetings with students and staff that even in the case of university electives, where students are required to choose two courses out of a list of nine course titles, in practice the same two courses are offered each semester. The Panel advises the University to guarantee the offering of a wide range of elective courses.

Information on course outlines and criteria of admission to various programmes is included in the University guide and is also available on the University website and other documents. Where English is heavily used alongside Arabic, students may be required, on assessment of their language proficiency to take remedial courses as a pre-requisite to admission. This is in addition to English language courses, which are required in all programmes.

Credit transfer and recognition of credentials from other universities is handled, on a case by case basis, by a special committee in each Faculty. Although the student handbook states that there is a time limit of seven years on the transfer of credits previously acquired by the student from other institutions, the Panel heard during interviews of transfer being allowed outside this limit.

It is noted that there are no threshold grade criteria for admission to undergraduate programmes other than certified completion of secondary school study *Tawjihiah*. Students can choose their major field of study regardless of whether it is aligned with the branch of their studies at the secondary school (Science or Art) or not. However, information, provided through secondary school transcripts, is used in advising students on the choice of their field of study and recommended plans of study. These would often include, for example, remedial courses that need to be taken whenever a student chooses to continue his/her higher education studies in a different field than that followed at the secondary school. Similarly, there are no threshold requirements on admission to postgraduate programmes other than holding a bachelor's degree. Students with BA degrees in an Art subject, for example, can be admitted to a Science or Law programme provided they pass a number (usually five) of remedial courses as a pre-requisite.

The University's approach to admission to both undergraduate and postgraduate studies seems to be predicated on the assumption that any weakness in the qualifications of student applicants can be compensated if a number of remedial courses are passed. Admission requirements are in essence flat and similar for all fields of study. The Panel suggests that the Institution consider differential admission requirements as one mechanism to enable student success.

The Panel noted, from the gathered evidence that decisions regarding approval for a student's fields of study, remedial courses or transfer of credits are taken in an *ad hoc* manner without written terms of reference and clearly defined levels of responsibility and oversight. This is a feature of the current managerial arrangements that needs to be addressed, especially as the University's numbers of students and programmes grow.

The University does not keep a record of the applications it receives as it makes its acceptance/rejection decisions at the time of the application. Hence, no acceptance to rejection ratios are available. However, there is evidence that the University has an open door admission policy. This policy, especially in relation to postgraduate programmes, carries the potential risk that the standards of teaching and learning and of student assessment and

achievement being involuntarily lowered to match the abilities of student intake. No convincing evidence was provided to demonstrate that passing the remedial courses makes up adequately for identified weaknesses in a student's qualification. The Panel noted that the average grades of undergraduate and graduate students are significantly higher than their secondary school grades. This makes it important for the University to employ independent and robust benchmarking methods to demonstrate that its student assessment and achievement standards are comparable with those recognised elsewhere.

Recommendation-11

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a process of independent external evaluation and benchmarking to which all programmes are subjected.

Recommendation-12

HERU recommends that Applied Science University revise its admission policies for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes so that a rigorous and robust admission policy, complete with selective and subject-specific criteria be developed and implemented.

The Student Guide and other University documents provide clear information about the examination procedures, schedules, grade distribution and rules for re-examination, appeals, cheating, and other related aspects. The University has defined the equivalence between categories of student grades (A, B, C, etc) and percentage marks. There are no written policies on marking criteria. There is evidence that curve normalisation is used in setting final grades in some courses while in other courses final grades are derived using the equivalence table without resorting to normalisation. The Panel encourages the University to develop and implement consistent criteria for grading and assessment.

Scrutiny by the Panel of a cross-section sample of examination papers showed a good proportion of questions that rely on memorization with little opportunity to demonstrate critical understanding by the student of the underlying concepts or his/her ability to apply knowledge to different real situations. Interviews with students indicated that this memorization-based approach dominated the teaching of a significant proportion of courses. The students expressed great appreciation for the teaching and assessment of other courses, which are centred on case studies or problem solving applications.

The Panel was informed during interviews with academics of internal moderation or marking review by other faculty members being practised but saw little evidence on actual

examination papers. Evidence of written formative feedback on assessment was also found to be rare and uneven.

Given that student admission to both undergraduate and postgraduate studies has effectively no grade or quality threshold, the University needs to demonstrate, through the use of external examiners and benchmarking of its assessment methods that its students are achieving appropriate levels of knowledge and skills at the various levels of their progression and graduation. This applies to all subjects and Faculties, and particularly to postgraduate studies. There is a need to demonstrate that postgraduate courses are delivered and assessed at an appropriately advanced level. In addition, the minimum qualitative attributes to be met by all Masters Dissertations as well as the criteria for the selection and appointment of the dissertation external examiner need to be clearly stated. This needs to be applied across all disciplines and Faculties.

Recommendation-13

HERU recommends that Applied Science University evaluate its assessment policy through systematic benchmarking and the use of independent external examiners for its courses, particularly at exit levels, and to ensure that postgraduate courses are delivered and assessed at appropriate advanced levels.

The Panel noted with satisfaction the University's preliminary attempts to benchmark its programmes with a number of institutions for which ASU has signed memoranda of understanding. (More details are given in section 6 of this Report.) The Panel was also informed by senior management of the intent to extend benchmarking to other international universities. The Panel strongly supports this approach, with emphasis on the use of independent peers or institutions, as a necessary and effective mechanism for raising academic standards to recognised competitive levels.

Affirmation-1

HERU affirms Applied Science University's decision to expand further its benchmarking activities with relevant higher education institutions.

The Panel saw evidence of numerous reports generated by the Admission and Registration Information System (ARIS) at the Registration Office where detailed updated data on individual students and aggregated data on groups of students are generated. Depending on

the intended use of the reports, the data is filtered or analysed by gender, subject of study, risk category or other parameters. The Panel notes, however, that although statistically analysed data on student performance can be readily generated by the ARIS staff, there is little evidence of it being requested or used for academic planning. For example, no study has been carried out to correlate the students' performance at the University with their secondary school qualifications, or with their age or gender.

Recommendation-14

HERU recommends that Applied Science University utilize its Admission and Registration Information System capacity to generate data and reports to be used by its academic, management and governing bodies for informed decision-making.

The University initially had a collaboration agreement with the Applied Science University in Jordan which involved supervision by that University of the setting up of the entire technical, educational, academic and financial aspects of the then new ASU as well as supervising the development of curricula and assessing the performance of the ASU faculty members in achieving the required standards. This was shortly replaced by an agreement with Mutah University in Jordan whereby the named University would assist ASU in upgrading the standards of its programmes and in a wide range of areas that include: registration, admission, e-learning, and new specialisations. The two universities signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that provided for one annual weeklong visit by a senior academic team from Mutah to ASU to evaluate and examine all main systems including registration, admission, curricula, teaching and learning and student assessment. The University has also signed an MoU with University of Helwan in Egypt and is in the process of signing other MoUs with other higher education institutions.

The Panel verified during the site visit that all the University's agreements are of an advisory nature and that ASU is authorised by the HEC to offer all its degree awarding programmes on its own. It also noted that the University is transparent about all its partnership agreements with full information being made available on the website and in submitted documents. The Panel recognizes the experimental evolving nature of these collaborations and acknowledges that the University is benefiting from the advice and technical assistance it is receiving from such collaborations. The Panel is of the view that it is important that the University develops in due course a clear strategic approach towards such partnerships with a view to aligning the areas and modalities of collaboration with the needs of its overall strategy. It is also important to note that while partner institutions can be a valuable source of support they cannot be simultaneously considered as independent or neutral in relation to evaluation or benchmarking.

5. Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The University has shown initiative to develop a quality system through the recent establishment of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), the appointment of the President's assistant to chair the QAC, and circulating information about quality to staff. The commitment of the President and the Board of Directors to quality in ASU was also noted. This was expressed in a number of ways and in a variety of interviews.

However a documented quality policy was not present. The University needs to develop a comprehensive quality policy that encompasses quality assurance and enhancement and is implemented throughout the Institution. Moreover, there is no evidence of the University publicizing its internal systems and processes that contribute to effective quality assurance and enhancement. There is no quality assurance handbook, nor was the Panel provided with a document specifying or describing the system and processes. The Panel urges the University to develop a policy document that articulates its quality systems and processes which address planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement as well as the allocation of responsibilities for accountability purposes. Such a system should show how the quality framework is to be given effect in the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, as well as in administrative support services. It is important to note that a quality system is more than a reactive measure to external regulatory requirements. It should enable the achievement of the University's Mission and strategic priorities, and take into account the specific institutional context, including its quality strengths, risks and areas for improvement.

Recommendation-15

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a comprehensive University-wide quality framework, policy and procedures centred on continuous quality improvement rather than compliance to external regulatory requirements.

At the time of the site visit, the QAU consisted of a single faculty member who teaches two extra courses, in addition to the full teaching load of five courses as well as being a member of a number of other committees. The responsibility of the QAU was stated in its inception remit and through the Unit's Mission, Vision and stated goals. However, these responsibilities are quite broad and go beyond assuring, maintaining and enhancing quality, as they also include setting policies and conducting research concerning future introduction of new programmes. The diversity of assigned responsibilities, which is not supported by

adequate staffing or expertise, jeopardizes the ability of the Unit to perform its core tasks. The Panel encourages the University to review the responsibilities of the QAU and consider expanding human resources (academic and administrative) for Quality Assurance (QA) purposes in particular.

Recommendation-16

HERU recommends that Applied Science University review the responsibilities assigned to the Quality Assurance Unit so that they are more realistic and to expand its human resource capacity so that the Unit can discharge effectively its responsibility.

The faculty member chairing the QAC is also chairing the library, academic and strategic planning committees in addition to his post as the President's assistant and a teaching load of 5 + 2 course in three different programmes. This raises questions about work load limits, adequacy of staff for administrative and academic requirements of the University as well as the objectivity of the criteria used to select leaderships. (More details on workload are given in section 8 of this Report.)

One of the University's tools for monitoring the quality of its provision is the annual reports that are required to be presented to the President from all Deans, Heads of Departments and Directors of Administrative Units. However, the reports presented to the Panel as samples of Faculty's annual reports consist of two pages listing the number of graduates, main activities of the Faculty, and list of papers/books published by faculty members through the academic year. Reporting is not connected to the University's strategic goals and does not reflect the monitoring of progress towards any pre-set targets. Furthermore, according to the SER the President is supposed to receive all these reports (down to the department level- bypassing the Faculty to which these departments belong). This is an irregular and impractical arrangement as it undermines the work and responsibilities of the Faculty and gives one person the responsibility of reading and analysing all such reports. Moreover, the University presented no evidence of any subsequent decision or action based on these reports.

Recommendation-17

HERU recommends that Applied Science University ensure that there are clear lines of reporting with both monitoring and development responsibilities and that outcomes of annual reporting systems are used as inputs for planning.

6. Quality of Teaching and Learning

Since its establishment, the University has experienced a rapid increase in its student numbers and programme offerings in the absence of a thorough and comprehensive strategic plan. ASU stated in its SER that the primary responsibility in establishing and maintaining educational programmes and their content lies with the University Senate. The Panel found evidence that changes in the curriculum and other matters pertaining to the courses are initiated by the Department Council and final decisions are reached by the University Senate. However most of these reviews are on an *ad hoc* basis to solve a pressing problem. There is no evidence of processes being in place for systematic reviews of programmes. The quality assurance framework (referred to in section 5 of the Report) needs to include periodical reviews which use multiple sources of data to ensure the continuous improvement of ASU's offerings. Such reviews, when undertaken with a developmental approach where critical reflection is valued, can provide an excellent forum for quality enhancement at programme level. While there was evidence of review of student grades and other data taking place at the end of each semester, these were not undertaken within the context of engagement by a range of stakeholders with various forms of data.

Input from industry is at the level of informal meetings. There is no evidence that any of the currently offered programmes were chosen on the basis of a clear market survey or need assessment. Furthermore, the programmes do not have any formal structure as external advisory groups. The Panel suggests that given the 'applied' nature of the University, it could consider strengthening its ties with business and calling on their input in programme reviews and curriculum development. This should be done on a formal basis, through the development and implementation of Programme Advisory Board that have clear terms of reference.

Recommendation-18

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop rigorous internal policies and processes for periodical review of all its programmes that involves relevant internal and external stakeholders in the form of Programme Advisory Board, to achieve sound academic standards.

Throughout its operation, the University has gone through exercises conducted by affiliated institutions to evaluate its programme offerings. These activities have increased in intensity in the last academic year. For example Mutah University in Jordan has conducted, as part of its agreement with ASU, an initial visit in 2008 followed by a more comprehensive visit in the summer of 2009. The report on the former visit confirmed general alignment with Mutah's expectations, presumably based on Mutah's own systems, and made some useful suggestions on various reviewed aspects. A review of assessment was also carried out by the Mutah team but their report's comments on the subject were very brief and superficial with no critical analyses of the strengths or weakness of ASU's assessment system. A report was also provided by another potential partner, De Montfort University in the UK, on ASU's graphic design curriculum. The report, which was based on a desk-top examination of some relevant documents, very briefly confirmed the general alignment of the distribution of credits with recognised standards but without any in-depth assessment of the curriculum.

Whilst the Panel notes such activities, it encourages the University to undertake more informative benchmarking activities which include an in-depth evaluation of the quality of its academic programmes and outline how it can improve its teaching and learning activities. ASU should determine the kinds of benchmarking it needs to assist it in developing quality programmes and request this from such affiliated institutions so that the process moves from one of validation to one of critical review and development.

ASU has gone through a substantial process of developing course and programme Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) recently. The SER shows an encouraging level of understanding of the ILO concept and an acknowledgment that the University is still at an early stage of development in this area. The Panel noted that the experience varies between different Faculties, with each drawing on its own resources of experienced academics and its background history in dealing with course syllabi, objectives and portfolios. In some cases, the stated course ILOs are little more than a reorganised list of the course syllabi or the chapter titles of relevant textbooks. In almost all cases there are no clear statements of programme ILOs. The University indicates in the SER its intention to develop further course and programme ILOs for all its offerings.

Affirmation-2

HERU affirms the Applied Science University's decision to develop Intended Learning Outcomes for all courses taught in the University.

There is a need for developing a coherent University framework and policy for developing and implementing the outcomes-based approach with a view to making programme ILOs the basis for the design, management, monitoring and periodical self-evaluation of all University curricula and courses. For the ILOs to be effective they need to reflect the unique aims of the programme on the one hand and the acknowledged international subject benchmarks on the other. They also need to be transparent and measurable to enable their use as the main reference guide for designing curricula and courses as well as student assessment and methods of teaching and learning. This would almost certainly require a significant measure of coordinated training and capacity building that involves the ASU academic leadership and senior management across the University. Full development of course and programme ILOs could be among the top priorities of the University's quality assurance unit and committees.

Recommendation-19

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop Programme Intended Learning Outcomes; map the course Intended learning Outcomes to programme Intended Learning Outcomes; and use these Learning Outcomes to guide the design of its curricula, courses, student assessment and teaching and learning methods.

There is some evidence of the piloting of alternative teaching approaches, such as the use of online teaching *via* Moodle and of a large number of teaching classes having multi-media equipment. There is also some evidence of a variety of methods and approaches being used, such as group work. The Panel was unable, however, to ascertain either the extent of the use of the equipment by faculty members, or the extent of the integration of technology in the educational interactions with students, as the University does not keep any record of such activities. The Panel suggests the University disseminate and monitor the active usage of the available multi-media and alternative teaching facilities in the teaching and learning process. Given the necessary support and development, staff members seem to be willing to use new approaches relevant to their discipline and aligned to the ILOs.

There is evidence that a practical training course, to be carried out with industry or other employers, is required in most programmes offered by the University. There are however no credits attached to such activities. Moreover, the requirements to fulfil this course are minimal and the assessment is very basic with no feedback provided to the students. Work-based learning needs to be better developed and integrated into the programme particularly given the 'applied' nature of education promised by ASU. Such courses need to be formally curriculated and assessed. The course work is assessed by the relevant industry representative and a coordinator assigned in each Faculty. While assessment of students undertaking work-based learning may be a joint endeavour between ASU faculty members

and the relevant industry representatives, the responsibility for developing and monitoring the assessment methods and the quality of the course needs to rest with ASU faculty members. Moreover, the coordinator is responsible for the evaluation of all students within the Faculty who are attending such industrial training courses, in addition to his/her full basic and extra teaching load. This does not allow the assessment to be thorough and detailed.

Recommendation-20

HERU recommends that Applied Science University review; better develop and integrate the practical training courses required to complete its academic programmes so that the course is formally curriculated and assessed in order that the University fulfil its role as an 'applied' university.

The Panel notes with appreciation the commitment, loyalty and dedication of the academic staff members in general, in providing a quality learning experience for their students, despite their heavy teaching loads. There was evidence from interviews with staff at all levels, with students and with alumni that the staff members of ASU are accessible and concerned with their students' wellbeing. The Panel acknowledges the high number of PhD holders amongst the faculty members.

Commendation-1

HERU commends Applied Science University for its faculty members' commitment and dedication towards providing a quality learning experience for their students.

The Panel is, however, of the view that in order to fully benefit from such dedicated faculty members; the University needs to develop and implement a coherent approach to staff development, which is missing at ASU. (See section 8 of this Report.)

The Panel was provided with evidence that evaluation by students is undertaken regularly in undergraduate programmes in order to determine student satisfaction. However, Master students indicated that, in general, they are not required to provide any formal feedback. Given the special needs of postgraduate students both in terms of complexity of courses and the need for adequate supervision, the Panel encourages ASU to ensure that postgraduate evaluation be carried out regularly and that the findings of such user surveys are implemented.

The SER states that student satisfaction surveys are used by the University as a tool for its internal quality assurance system. However, it was not clear how this data is analysed, triangulated with other data forms and sources, and used to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at ASU. During interviews, students indicated that they are not informed about changes or improvements that are carried out in response to student surveys. Moreover, there are no indications that the results of these surveys are discussed at Department Council meetings. Data, such as student evaluations, can be combined with the use of more intensive, in-depth benchmarking of particular courses to contribute to the programme review process, along with other data such as peer and self-evaluations, by staff members and the department, of teaching materials and texts and assessments. Other data, such as student pass rates and inputs from employers, could also contribute to reviews which could provide ASU with a holistic approach to programme improvement.

Scrutinizing of student satisfaction surveys reveal that they are mostly concentrated on performance of faculty members rather than the content of the course, the availability of facilities or resources. Gathering student feedback is a credible quality measure undertaken by the University. However the validity of the used questionnaire for the purpose of course evaluation could be revised to provide more information.

According to the SER, comprehensive (encompassing library services, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), student support, etc..,) student satisfaction questionnaires have been designed and distributed for the first time last semester. The analysis of the results was scheduled to occur with the beginning of this academic year. However, until the time of the site visit the results of the survey had not been analysed. The Panel urges the University to use feedback results to enhance performance and address weaknesses before the start of each academic year.

Recommendation-21

HERU recommends that Applied Science University further develop its student feedback surveys and conduct them for both its postgraduate and undergraduate students, as well as use the results of these surveys to enhance the teaching and learning experience within the University and in decision-making processes.

The alumni reported a feeling of pride in their Institution and seem to have maintained close contact with the ASU. This was achieved by the Institution through email and SMS communication. The Panel also noted that a more systematic approach to networking with the alumni and employers was adopted recently by the University Public Relation Office and the provision of an alumni feedback template and an employer feedback template on its website. The Panel is of the view that the University would greatly benefit from the

systematic tracking of data on its alumni's destinations and where possible on their feedback (as well as that of their employers) on the effectiveness of their studies at ASU.

Affirmation-3

HERU affirms Applied Science University's decision to formalise its relationship with its alumni and their employers, and the initiatives taken by its Public Relation Office in this regard, and encourages the University to use data collected in further developing its programmes and staff capabilities.

7. Student Support

ASU has a Student Guide Handbook with details on admission and registration requirements, fees and regulations governing students' behaviour and misconduct. Each programme is defined in terms of a one sheet study plan. (See section 3 of this Report). There is no information about the content of each course nor are pre-requisite courses defined for various course sequences. The Panel was informed during interviews with staff and students that the latter feature is explained to students on the day of registration by academic advisors. However there is evidence of a number of occasions where students did not register for courses needed as prerequisites in consecutive semesters and where these cases caused problems leading to delays in students' graduating. This, the Panel was informed, is due to faculty members rather than the student advisor signing the registration forms without having enough information about the programme requirements. The Panel encourages the University to make prerequisite and programme requirements information more available to faculty members and students so that they can make informative decisions during registration. Moreover, the Student Handbook is not updated on a yearly basis which might lead to students missing important information. The Panel suggests that the University updates its Students Handbook annually.

The University has recently developed and published a postgraduate handbook. The handbook is not widely used as it has not yet been disseminated among all postgraduate students. The Panel urges the University to disseminate the handbook among all its postgraduate students.

The Panel heard during interviews with students that academic advising is available in the University. Advice given appears to have been sound and helped them in elevating their GPA and choosing more appropriate courses.

Commendation-2

HERU commends Applied Science University for having an effective academic advisory system.

The Panel received confirmation that students are in general informed about the new rules and regulations governing their studies through different media, such as SMS, electronic and regular display boards, the University website or through faculty members. In general, students indicated their satisfaction with the information they receive.

Whilst ASU states in its SER that it admits students who *are not eligible for entry at another university*, the average *Tawjihiah* score for its admitted students is on the lower level and its minimum requirements for registration in Master programmes is a bachelor degree without any consideration of the grade average or clear restriction on the discipline of the undergraduate degrees (see section 4). Furthermore, the University has not developed mechanisms to monitor and identify students who are at-risk of failure. Even when an at-risk student is identified, this happens when the student starts failing and gets a warning, ASU does not have formal mechanisms for providing him/her with the necessary support for success. Rather, it depends on the individual academic advisor's initiatives and judgements. The Panel encourages the University to develop policies and procedures to identify and support academically weak students. Moreover, the University needs to collect and analyse data on these students to identify the areas of needed support and the effectiveness of the support mechanisms it provides.

Recommendation-22

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a mechanism to identify and support at-risk students and to evaluate periodically the effectiveness of the mechanism used.

The Panel notes that the University does not provide many of the student support services that are expected from an institution of higher education. These include: counselling, career planning, health services, and internship placement.

Recommendation-23

HERU recommends that Applied Science University provide professional counselling services to students, with the aim of contributing to their academic as well as life-long success and their well-being.

Most recently, the University has established a Deanship for Student Affairs, the assigned Dean has just been appointed to his post and it is premature to evaluate the effectiveness of this position. However, the Panel is concerned that the Dean of Students Affairs is also the Chair of Student Disciplinary Committee, which might cause some conflict between the two roles. Moreover, he is also a faculty member who has a full teaching load of five courses plus two extra courses. This heavy teaching load and additional administration responsibilities will hinder the Dean's ability to fully serve as a Dean of Student Affairs or carry out his teaching responsibilities adequately. The Panel urges the University to review its workload policies and practice. (See section 8 for more details.)

The Panel noted the financial support the University provides to its Student Council. However, this amount still does not cover many activities conducted by the Student Council. Moreover, the lack of appropriate infrastructure within the University premises has hindered the execution of some major student activities, such as sport activities. (See section 9 for more details.) The Panel encourages the University to develop innovative mechanisms to support student activities whilst the current premises are in use.

8. Human Resources

The Panel noted that the academic recruitment process is driven by the President. The SER claims that the Recruitment Policy aims to attract the best candidates and that the *diversification of staff qualification and experiences provides a strong basis for achieving its mission.* However, this is contradicted by the fact that the SER states that priority is given *for candidates who are recommended by ASU's academic staff.* This was confirmed to the Panel as most of the academic staff interviewed indicated that they were approached to submit their CVs, rather than responding to an open advert. The Panel encourages ASU to follow international good practice so that an appropriate set of selection and recruitment criteria are consistently applied in the appointment of academic staff from a pool of shortlisted applicants to ensure that the best candidate is chosen.

The Human Resources (HR) Department is not involved in the selection process, its role comes at a later stage of recruitment, once the candidate has been selected and preliminary agreement has been reached. Though the SER states that the Head of Department is

involved in the interviews of candidates, the Panel was informed through interviews that academic staff selection is mainly conducted by the President, and the Faculty Dean only. The Panel encourages the University to formalise its recruitment policies and procedures and to involve the Head of Department and the Human Resource Department at earlier stages of staff selection.

Recommendation-24

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a formal recruitment policy and procedures that involve all relevant parties at different stages of the selection process.

A Performance Management Plan and a promotion plan have only recently been put in place. At the time of the site visit, student evaluations of academic staff were the main source of evidence for the evaluation of performance. Students interviewed intimated that their concerns, once voiced to the Dean about staff members, are usually quickly addressed. Insufficient evidence was provided about the role of the affected academic staff member and the Departmental Chair in this process. The Panel is concerned that the heavy reliance on student's formal and informal feedback as the primary indicator of performance is a practice that may be open to abuse and unfair to staff members. The Panel urges ASU to ensure that the recently developed suite of Human Resources policies is applied expeditiously to mitigate the risk to the quality of academic provision through high staff turnover.

Affirmation-4

HERU affirms Applied Science University's decision to develop and implement a Performance Management System that can be used for fair and effective evaluation of all staff members.

The 57 faculty members teach in 18 different programmes. A good number of courses taught in these programmes are run on a morning basis, an evening basis and a weekend basis. This has led to extremely high workloads for academic staff; ASU applies the HEC rules and regulations with regard to teaching loads. The 5 +2 rule (where 5 courses are the basic courses to teach and the +2 is considered as overtime for which a faculty member should receive an overtime allowance) is the maximum legal load for any individual academic and not, by any means, the requirement for all academics. Moreover, there is an expectation of significant additional administrative duties from the academic staff members, especially as the provided

administration support is minimal. Individual senior staff members hold several key portfolios and teach the maximum load of 5 + 2 per semester. As a result their capacity to provide academic leadership in their Faculties and the committees they chair is limited. The Panel strongly urges ASU to reconsider its teaching load practices. Failure to do so constitutes a major academic and reputational risk to the institution.

Recommendation-25

HERU recommends that Applied Science University review its teaching load practice with a view to reducing its faculty member's academic load in line with international good practice, and develop a strategic workload plan to determine staffing needs for the future.

Non-Bahraini staff members, who constitute more than 90% of the full-time faculty members, are hired on a renewable contract. From a range of interviews with academics the Panel observed that the average duration of a contract is two years and that these are renewable based upon performance. All part-time teaching staff members are contracted on a course teaching basis. Through interviews with senior management, the Panel was informed that staff retention is a concern to the University and that competition from other private universities is a key risk. The Panel is of the view that having more than 90% of the University's core academic staff on a short-term renewable contract together with the high turnover rate the University management highlighted during the site visit, represents a major risk factor to the sustainability of the core functions of the University. This might also hinder academic freedom and any long-term research commitments of individual faculty members. The Panel encourages the University to strengthen and broaden the incentives for its full-time academic staff members and review its contract arrangements to ensure medium- and long-term stability and progressive evolution of its programmes.

The Panel noted that there is no clear organizational structure with appropriately delegated duties, in particular with regard to the multiple duties of academic managers and their relationship with their administrative counterparts. Moreover, and as mentioned earlier in this Report (see section 3), the Panel is concerned with the heavy administrative load of the academic staff. The Panel suggests that ASU expands its administrative staff so that administrative tasks are executed effectively. Further, the leadership of ASU needs to define the administrative roles of its management with greater clarity to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of its management system.

The Panel could not find any evidence to corroborate the claim in the SER that a formal process of staff development has been established. The Panel acknowledges efforts by ASU to offer the ICDL for all teaching staff and urges the ASU to expedite the commencement of

the planned Teaching Methods course. However, a systematic and coherent plan is needed for the evaluation and development of its entire staff (both academic and administrative) and to link the staff development plan to the evaluation process. This will ensure the development of appropriate teaching and assessment methods and the administrative skills needed.

Recommendation-26

HERU recommends that Applied Science University, in developing and implementing a University-wide staff performance management system, include processes for performance evaluation of, and feedback to, individual staff members which is linked with a detailed staff development plan.

9. Infrastructure, Physical and other Resources

The Panel toured the present facilities at the current campus and recognized the limited current physical infrastructure. All interviewed students and staff members expressed their dissatisfaction with the current campus, the lack of appropriate infrastructure, and the lack of sufficient space to conduct extra-curricular activities.

The Strategic Plan recognises the need to move to a new campus and outlines some plans for this move, which was further explained to the Panel in a number of interviews with senior management. The University presented to the Panel some elements of a plan for the proposed new campus. Land has been purchased and some initial drawings of the new campus have been drawn up. However, in the view of the preliminary nature of such information, this plan cannot be accepted as evidence of the adequacy of the future infrastructure as it is premature.

Affirmation-5

HERU affirms Applied Science University's intention to move to a purpose built campus.

Recommendation-27

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop a detailed and clearly written plan on the objectives, projected capacities and functionalities of the new campus with a clear time line to commence with the finalisation of the plans and building of the new campus.

The SER suggests that the present campus is sufficient to the current needs of the University. It claims there are a number of features available in the University. The Panel could not verify these claims during the site visit. For example, there are no records showing scheduled maintenance and upgrades of physical infrastructure. Moreover, there are no documents showing that the provision of classrooms, tutorial space, library resources, laboratories security services and amenities are sufficient for the programmes being offered. Although the SER indicates that there is academic provision for students with special needs care, the present campus does not provide any physical provision for these students.

The SER states that the library is resourced to *support the educational and research process of faculty members, students, employers of the University and local community.* The library has a limited stock of books, a number of which are duplicate copies. Students are allowed to borrow these books for one week. Students reported that they bring photocopies of whole books to lectures. The Panel stresses that greater monitoring of the photocopying of textbooks is necessary, as the lack of a University copyright policy and copyright disciplinary procedures places both the University and the individual student at risk. The University is urged to give immediate attention to this matter.

> *Recommendation-28*
>
> *HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a copyright policy that enables students to make use of photocopying facilities while safeguarding the copyright of textbooks used within its campus.*

There is a study area in the library that can accommodate around 15 students in addition to internet facilities for another 12 students. A couple of computers are also available in the cafeteria. The University does not subscribe to electronic databases in its own right and the sustainability of relying on other universities is questionable. Periodicals and journals provided by the University are minimal and inadequate to support the teaching and learning of undergraduate courses, not to mention research and postgraduate activities. The Panel saw evidence that the University is inquiring about subscribing to new databases to ensure sustainability and to increase access by students and staff to research and teaching and learning resources. However, these subscriptions are not finalized. The Panel suggests that the University benchmark the adequacy of the library and information resources against equivalent facilities at other well-functioning institutions.

Affirmation-6

HERU affirms applied Science University's decision to expand its databases to assure sustainability and increased access by students and staff to research and teaching and learning resources.

Recommendation-29

HERU recommends that Applied Science University benchmark the adequacy of its library resources with other institutions of similar size and type.

The Library has only two administrative staff, one of whom is a qualified librarian and was appointed one week prior to the site visit. In addition to their administrative duties the library staff members are expected to provide guidance and training to faculty members and students on the use of databases and other library resources. However, the University did not provide any evidence that such activities have been conducted formally. These staff members serve also as sales people since the bookshop is housed in the library. The Panel urges the University to make a clear separation between the functions services and staff of the library and the bookshop to eliminate potential for abuse and conflict of interest in the delivery of its library services. It also encourages the University to appoint an adequate number of personnel to assume various responsibilities associated with an academic library in a manner that would increase the effectiveness of the library as a learning resource.

The formal Library working hours are from 7:00am to 7:00pm. However students indicated to the Panel that there are times, especially in evenings and weekends, when access to the library is not available for this whole period. This causes problems specially as a large number of ASU's students are working and need access to the Library at late hours of the day. The Panel urges that ASU address this matter urgently.

Recommendation-30

HERU recommends that Applied Science University ensure the availability of access to the Library during the full announced working hours of the Library so that it is adequate for all its students including evening and weekend students.

The University has recently expanded its computer laboratories. The Panel, in its tour of the facilities, noted that the infrastructure in terms of computers is adequate for the needs of the number of student users and the types of programmes conducted. However, students indicated that the computer laboratories are not always available for students free use. Moreover, most of the computers are not equipped with printers. The Panel suggests that the University address these matters.

The IT department which has the responsibility for the installation and maintenance of IT facilities, as well as training of staff and students on ICDL, and employees on IMS, consists of 4 administrative staff, two of whom are part-time. The Panel appreciates the University's effort to improve the ICT literacy of its students and staff through the offering of ICT training to all students on ICDL as part of Computer 1 and 2 courses which are pre-requisite in all programmes, and through providing ICDL training to all its faculty members.

Roles and responsibilities for ICT management within the institution are clearly stated and the IT committee and ICT unit appear to have clear objectives, defined processes and adequate tools. There is an ICT strategic plan, including periodical backups and disaster recovery plans. Testing of the plan is recommended. The University has a process for the maintenance and replacement of physical ICT resources. This appears to be currently adequate. However, as with many of the University's activities and functions, there is no benchmarking of IT facilities against external references.

The University identified in its SER a need to replace its servers and update its PCs. The Panel is of the view that replacement and updating should be based on a needs analysis and supported by an allocated budget.

The University recently monitored staff and student satisfaction with IT services and information systems support through a satisfaction survey questionnaire distributed at the end of the past academic year. However analysis of the results was postponed until the start of the new academic year. This delay does not support the use of student feedback results as a tool for enhancing performance and addressing weaknesses before the start of the new academic year. Through the interviews held with staff and students the Panel found a good degree of satisfaction with the provision of ICT services.

10. Research

The SER claims that the ASU 'allocates an annual budget to support research activities'. The Panel noted from interviews and from the Annual External Audit Report that the process adopted by ASU constitutes a retrospective summation of actual expenses rather than a

forecasted planned budget for research activities. The main item of expenses consists of honoraria for books that have already been authored by staff members using their own time and resources. Another item corresponds to consultancy fees paid to a few staff members for their help with the preparation of needed documents.

The Panel concludes that these expenses were allocated or directed to activities that do not ordinarily constitute research output. The scholarly output of authored books is acknowledged. However the evidence provided indicates that there are no criteria for defining the minimum required standards for the publication of books. Furthermore, no specific criteria are used for the selection of referees. Indeed a number of these text books were not refereed. The Panel urges the ASU to develop a set of rigorous criteria based on international good practice to ensure the quality of these scholarly works is not compromised.

Recommendation-31

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement a set of rigorous criteria based on international good practice to assure the quality of the text books published by the University.

Although ASU has managed to attract a significant number of staff with PhDs (including Professors and Associate Professors) there is little evidence of substantial research output. Research is severely inhibited by the maximum teaching load and the additional administrative duties, which are undertaken by all staff. The Panel observed that the potential to develop niche areas and concomitant postgraduate programmes is available. However in the absence of an institution driven Research Plan to support, enable and promote the research activities of individual staff with the support of clearly budgeted capital and human resources, ASU is unlikely to achieve its research goals in the near future.

Recommendation-32

HERU recommends that Applied Science University develop and implement an overarching and realistic approach to research and its development.

The Panel noted that the selection of supervisors for Masters theses complies with the minimum requirements of the HEC. However, no additional requirements have been put in place by ASU for the purposes of enhancing the quality of the supervision provided to its

students. Moreover, there are no clearly agreed upon standards as to what constitutes a thesis or how external and internal examiners are identified and approved.

The Panel noted that graduate students interviewed are satisfied with the availability of their supervisors as an academic advisor. The claims made in the SER regarding their induction and the monitoring of their progress was validated. (See section 7.) However the Panel is of the view that a Master supervisor needs to provide more guidance than what is currently provided. On examining of a sample of theses discrepancies, the Panel is concerned about significant discrepancies in the quality of scholarship and written presentation of approved theses. ASU is urged to develop appropriate benchmarks and standards for its postgraduate studies (especially the presentation of theses) to ensure that its Masters degrees are of acceptable academic standards.

Recommendation-33

HERU recommend that Applied Science University develop and implement a set of criteria and standards to be used for the selection and roles of supervisors, external and internal examiners of theses, and to benchmark appropriately the standards of theses works and written presentations.

11. Community Engagement

As noted in the SER, there is no policy, plan or institutional structure to deal with community engagement or inform the quality assurance of its function and activities. Through the SER and interviews, the University provided some examples of community engagement, such as providing bursaries, and fee discounts to some students as well as financial donations to societies that help the poor within Bahrain. The University indicated that the community is also served through the offering of short courses, seminars and the writing of articles in the local news papers. However, while the Panel appreciate these activities, it did not find a shared understanding of community engagement or service as being the third core function of the institution.

The Panel encourages ASU to develop its community engagement functions through a plan in which the University conceptualises its understanding of community engagement; integrate the community engagement activities into the other core functions including reporting to the various governance structures and to its staff and students; ensure that there is allocation of appropriate resources (including an accountable person) as well as the development and implementation of a monitoring mechanism to evaluate ASU achievements in this regard.

Recommendation-34

HERU recommends that Applied Science University define the community it intends to serve, then develop and implement a community engagement policy in relation to its commitment towards Bahraini society pursuant to the University's Mission.

The Panel through interviews with employers and staff could not determine strong and formal links with the labour market whether locally or regionally, and graduate employers. The Panel urges ASU to strengthen this area of outreach. Moreover, the University did not provide evidence of student involvement in the University's community engagement activities.

The University has taken a number of steps toward increasing its community engagement. This, the Panel was informed through interviews, was achieved through a number of meetings conducted between faculty members and representatives of government ministries and from other companies operating in Bahrain. Whilst the Panel appreciates such meetings, it encourages the University to develop these meeting into more regular, formal meetings that will result in practical activities and to align these activities with its to-be-developed community engagement policy.

Affirmation-7

HERU affirms Applied Science University's plan to consult with government bodies and industrial and professional advisory groups in order to strengthen its commitment to the community.

12. Conclusion

ASU is a young institution that is still attempting to find its niche in the Bahraini higher education sector as well as embedding the academic function within the Institution. There is evidence of various activities regarding attempts for incorporating quality assurance at different levels of the University. However, these are all undertaken on a fairly *ad hoc* manner and mainly in response to requirements of external authorities or in response to issues that arise. ASU has reached a stage in its history and growth where it cannot continue

to rely on goodwill and informal mechanisms for such activities. Systems and clear policies and processes are thus needed. Without such systems the University is at risk of running programmes and producing graduates of undefined standards.

Five years after establishing itself, ASU still needs to develop its key quality processes. Developing such processes has financial and time implications but is essential for ASU to be assured of the quality of its provision, to establish and safeguard its academic standards, and thereby establish itself as an institution of choice in Bahrain and the region. The small size and newness of the University has meant that reporting and feedback mechanisms have functioned effectively on a collegial, informal basis. However, ASU now needs more systematic and formal processes to be put in place. These would include, *inter alia*, programme design and review processes, staff development processes, a quality framework, research plans and policy development and review processes. These would all need to be guided by a detailed strategic and operational plan and the expansion of its academic and administrative staff capacity to the extent that allows it to perform its different functions optimally. At the same time, the University will need to use caution in developing such processes to guard against a profusion of committees and policy documents which can distract from, rather than advance, the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Moreover, ASU needs to develop and implement a transparent budgeting system that is linked to the University's Strategic planning and its academic activities. Senior academic managers, Faculty Deans and Department Chairs need to be involved in the process. The University needs also to review its governing policy in order to ensure a clear separation between governance, management and ownership.

The above notwithstanding, if ASU develops for itself a growth trajectory that is consistent with its identity as a university of applied science and within the Economic Vision 2030, ASU will be in a position to make a positive contribution to the future prosperity of the Kingdom of Bahrain.