



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Programme Review Report

**Bachelor of Arts Honours in Business Administration
University College of Bahrain
Kingdom of Bahrain**

Date Reviewed: 14 - 15 October 2009

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1. The Programme Review Process

1.1 The Programme Review Framework

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

Conclusions reached are in terms of minimum standards, and 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 the University College of Bahrain

The programme review of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) Honours in Business Administration of the University College of Bahrain (UCB) 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 UCB, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

UCB was notified by the HERU/QAAET in March 2009 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its BA Honours in Business Administration with the site visit taking place in October 2009. In preparation for the programme review, UCB conducted its institutional self-evaluation and submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with appendices on the agreed date in August 2009. It is expected that the UCB will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its BA Honours in Business Administration programme.

The University College of Bahrain (UCB) was founded in 2001. It is a private, not-for-profit organisation recognised by the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain as a provider of higher education. UCB offers undergraduate programmes in three areas: Business Administration, Information Technology, and Media and Communications. It also offers postgraduate programmes in Business.

At the commencement of the academic year 2008-2009, UCB had 469 undergraduate students registered, of whom 269 were studying Business Administration. There is a broad balance between male and female students. The majority of students are from Bahrain: about 30% of students are from outside of Bahrain, mostly from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

UCB aims to provide a 'western-style' educational experience and teaches the Business Administration programme entirely in English. The Business Administration faculty comprises eighteen full-time and four part-time staff.

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 Business Administration Programme has an appropriate set of aims which are to provide students with fundamental business knowledge complemented by a liberal arts education. The University aims to develop students that are not only able to pursue successful careers but also to participate responsibly in society. In order to do this the programme addresses both the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the development of relevant skills.
- 2.2 The BA Honours in Business Administration requires a minimum of 120 credits. The programme is designed to be completed in four years. Students are required to complete 21 credits in background studies – English, Mathematics, Computing and Culture – and nine credits from courses in the humanities and liberal arts. The remainder of a student's credits are made up from a compulsory business core, a major with both compulsory and elective courses, and a small number of free electives. Students choose from six majors: Management, Accounting, Finance, Marketing, Engineering Management, or Islamic Finance.
- 2.3 UCB's Business Administration Programme was developed initially with the assistance of McMaster University in Canada. Subsequently UCB has been supported by the American University of Beirut (AUB) which provided the material for the development of course outlines. The content of the programme aligns with similar programmes both in Bahrain and internationally.
- 2.4 At the programme level there is a set of formal learning outcomes arranged according to programme specification. These provide an overview of what a student should achieve on the programme. These could be improved by clearer differentiation between outcomes relating to the knowledge and understanding that a student will acquire on the programme, and the business-related skills that a student will acquire; that is the specific things that a graduate of the programme will be able to do. Consideration should also be given to specifying the learning outcomes that pertain to the different majors separately from the learning outcomes relating to the programme as a whole.
- 2.5 The Review Panel was provided with a set of course descriptions for all courses available on the Business Administration Programme. The Panel noted that the learning outcomes presented were highly generalised in the sense that multiple courses in different areas and at different levels had the same intended learning outcomes (ILOs). The learning outcomes in the course descriptions did not match the information in the curriculum skills map which was provided. Furthermore, there were significant differences between the learning outcomes given in the course

descriptions and those written in course outlines. Course outlines are not standardised and some provide limited information about the course content and delivery. The Panel considered that the Business Administration Programme would benefit from a more consistent approach to the specification of learning outcomes at the course level which differentiated courses in different subjects and at different levels.

- 2.6 Courses have pre-requisites and the programme is structured so that students progress from broad foundation studies to greater focus on business and specialisation over the course of their studies. Workloads appear to be appropriately managed. The normal loading is 12 – 15 credits per semester: those with high GPAs may take additional credits; those with low GPAs are required to take a lighter load.
- 2.7 Students are exposed to practice as well as theory through the use of case studies and research assignments. In addition, many lecturers are able to draw upon personal business and management experience to illustrate the concepts they are teaching. Students are required to master a range of skills including analysis, computing, written and oral communications, as well as acquiring knowledge and understanding of Business and Management. Students have the opportunity to undertake an internship as part of their studies. This is currently voluntary but consideration is being given to making it a compulsory part of the programme. There is no major or senior project. The final year strategy course, which is compulsory for all, except those majoring in Engineering Management, is considered to fulfil the role of a capstone course. While the Review Panel appreciates the presence of the capstone course as a compulsory subject in the last year of the programme it is not persuaded that this course is sufficient to replace the senior project or compulsory internships.
- 2.8 UCB has an embryonic teaching and learning strategy which acknowledges the importance of teaching within the institution. Students appreciate the small class sizes which facilitate interaction, discussion and individual attention. Students rate the quality of the teaching they receive as good. Much of the teaching is closely focused on set texts but the Panel also noted the use of cases relating to local and international business practice, and learning through exercises and projects. Students are required to take responsibility for fulfilling course requirements. There are limited opportunities for students to engage in independent learning within the programme structure.
- 2.9 UCB has a universal framework for assessment which requires that course grades are composed of two examinations held during the semester each of which is worth 25%; attendance which is worth 10%; 20 – 40% for a final examination; and up to 20% for homework, assignments or projects. This structure applies to all courses except practical courses such as the internship, which have a separate structure. The

assessment is heavily weighted towards tests and examinations, often involving multiple choice questions.

- 2.10 The University defines grades in both letter and number terms. These are translated into one word descriptors of level of performance, such as 'good' or 'unsatisfactory'. However, the lack of any explicit generic marking criteria or more detailed descriptors results in uncertainty about the comparability of grades awarded on different courses at the same level, and the extent to which the level of course is reflected in the assessment of student performance. The lack of appropriately framed learning outcomes at course level discussed above inevitably makes the task of assuring fair and rigorous assessment more difficult.
- 2.11 Students are not provided with clear assessment criteria in a systematic way. In some cases students have the opportunity to submit drafts of written assignments to get advice on how to improve their work before final submission. Individual assessments are returned to students but may not always be accompanied by a grade or written feedback, a grade only being assigned for the course as a whole in some cases. The Review Panel saw few examples of written feedback but students indicated that staff were available and willing to give them advice on their work. There is a formal appeal system against grading decisions but in the experience of those students who met the Review Panel, this seem to be a lengthy process.
- 2.12 In coming to its conclusion regarding the curriculum, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
- The overall structure of the programme which combines business studies with liberal arts and provides an opportunity to specialise in a specific area
 - The use of international experience to develop the curriculum
 - The balance between theory and practice and the acquisition of knowledge and skills across the programme
 - The opportunity for students to receive formative feedback on many courses.
- 2.13 In terms of improvement the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:
- Develop further its strategy for teaching, learning and assessment
 - Re-visit its programme learning outcomes to ensure that knowledge and understanding, and skills, are appropriately differentiated and the learning outcomes of the different pathways appropriately reflected
 - Review the learning outcomes of all courses to ensure that they accurately reflect the nature and level of the courses concerned
 - Re-visit the curriculum skills map to ensure that the learning outcomes at course level are appropriately linked to those at programme level

- Consider further the merits of making the internship course compulsory
- Review the appropriateness of MGT490 as a capstone course and review the status of this course on the Engineering Management major
- Consider ways of reducing the reliance on text book based teaching and of developing further opportunities for independent study
- Develop a set of grade descriptors matched to levels to inform marking
- Standardise the information given to students on course outlines
- Ensure that assessment criteria for all assessments are made available to students in a timely way
- Increase the amount of written feedback given to students on marked work.

2.14 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 Students are admitted to the programme on the basis of a senior secondary school diploma or equivalent and an English language score or test result. No minimum grade for secondary school diploma performance is set: a few entrants have scored below 60% but the majority attains high scores. The great majority of students come from English medium secondary schools. Those that do not pass the English test are required to take additional English classes prior to commencing their programme. The University offers a significant number of scholarships to students based on both merit and need. The University admits transfer students on the basis of their student record.
- 3.2 The majority of the teaching on the business administration programme is delivered by full-time staff. In appointing staff the University looks for teaching experience and qualifications of at least masters level. The proportion of staff with doctoral level qualifications is relatively low but a significant number of staff are studying for doctoral studies. The University currently has twenty three academic staff. The ratio of academic staff to students across the University is 1:15 which is within the range of acceptable staffing in the region. The Review Panel was told that the actual ratio on the Business Administration Programme was lower than this. Staff workloads are acceptable and generally fall between fifteen and eighteen credit hours per semester with additional teaching in the summer term. Staff are qualified in a wide range of subjects reflecting the broad nature of the curriculum. Staff turnover is relatively high. While in some senses this is a problem, turnover also presents the opportunity to hire staff that can support the areas of specialisation within the programme.
- 3.3 UCB positions itself as a teaching institution. It has a fledgling research policy which indicates that staff are not expected to engage in research but those that do undertake research will be given consideration in terms of their teaching loads. Some staff undertake discipline-based research, often contributing their own time. The University supports staff in attending conferences. The University could benefit from developing its research policy further to encompass the development of pedagogical research to complement its teaching focus, and to ensure that staff systematically engage in activity that keeps them abreast of both current thinking and research and appropriate practice.
- 3.4 UCB has invested in good quality teaching space with well-equipped classrooms. A new development will include informal group learning spaces. The University has good computing provision provided through computer laboratories and Wi-Fi access across the campus. Students have access to a Blackboard Virtual Learning

Environment (VLE) which is used by many teaching staff for posting course materials. Students noted favourably the use of PowerPoint by lecturers and the provision of class notes.

- 3.5 The library is in the process of being re-located to more spacious accommodation. However the library resources are limited in relation to the requirements of the programme. The chosen e-journal database has a very limited range of journals available. There is access to some e-books but the paper book collection is small and in some cases dated. There is no access to standard business databases and few business-related newspapers and magazines. Given the limited stock, investment in systems such as OPAC is of limited value. Students appear to make limited use of the library to research their work and rely extensively on the Internet.
- 3.6 Students enjoy access to a number of social spaces such as a coffee shop, cafe and a women's lounge. Other facilities include: a book store, medical centre, prayer rooms and good quality space for administration and academic staff offices. There are no sports facilities but sports events are organised off-campus. Students who met the Panel noted that the lack of such facilities contributed to a lack of a university identity and culture which some felt characterised UCB. The Review Panel heard that the University was considering re-establishing a student council which could play a role in developing UCB's identity and culture.
- 3.7 New students receive a short induction to the University. A student handbook which summarises key policies and student information is available in hard copy and on the web. However, the web edition is two years old and students who met the Review Panel were uncertain whether they had received a copy of the handbook. All students are assigned an academic advisor who actively monitors their progress. There are systems in place to identify weak students and a system of probation for those whose GPA is below standard. Staff are seen as accessible and helpful.
- 3.8 Students generally complete the course within four years. Wastage rates are low.
- 3.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the efficiency, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
- The high quality and well-equipped teaching and learning spaces
 - The good quality IT facilities and access to a VLE
 - Support for staff conference attendance and doctoral studies
 - Attracting good admissions standards
 - Extensive scholarship programme based on both merit and need
 - An effective academic advisory system and action to help weak students
 - Satisfactory progression and completion rates.

3.10 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:

- Review the book stock, journal access and database provision in the library in order to support greater student use of such learning resources
- Ensure that all students have access to an up-to-date copy of a comprehensive student handbook
- Develop UCB's research policy to ensure that it actively supports the University's Mission to be a leading provider of business education
- Consider ways in which the culture of the University can be strengthened from the point of view of the overall student experience.

3.11 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 As noted above, while ILOs have been developed at both programme and course level, these need substantial refinement in order to reflect content and level accurately. The expectations of student performance that are in place at course level are implicit in the choice of course content, required texts and testing of student knowledge and skills. However, the programme would benefit from the development of explicit and coherent statements of academic standards through well-designed programme and course level ILOs.
- 4.2 Furthermore, as noted above UCB has yet to develop detailed generic grading criteria which would assist in ensuring consistency of academic standards across the Business Administration Programme. There is no formal internal moderation of assessment, but all proposed assignments and examinations are submitted to the departmental head for checking. The head of department also monitors the profile of course marks and takes action where courses grades are collectively very high or very low. Where courses are taught in multiple sections a co-ordinator should be appointed to prepare the syllabus and examinations.
- 4.3 Although, as discussed in relation to Indicator 1, the programme needs to be more accurately documented in terms of learning outcomes and grade criteria, other indicators confirm that the programme meets acceptable standards in comparison with other local and international institutions. These indicators include the level of performance of students on assessments designed externally which test knowledge acquired through key texts; favourable comparisons made by both graduates and employers; and UCB's use of external benchmarks in designing and developing its programmes.
- 4.4 UCB has engaged internationally with higher education institutions in order to ensure that its structures and programmes are appropriate in content and standards. McMaster University in Canada was involved in the original establishment of UCB. More recently the Islamic University Malaysia assisted in the development of the Islamic Finance Programme at UCB which has influenced the Islamic Finance option on the Business Administration Programme. UCB has an ongoing relationship with AUB, through the latter's Regional External Programmes Unit. AUB assisted the University to set up its Business Administration Programme. AUB initially provided UCB with the course descriptors for the programme and continues to provide support through regular meetings, workshops and consulting projects. Academic staff who met the Review Panel also stated that they benchmarked their courses

against information available on the Internet from other universities and through publishers' materials available to support key texts. UCB also responds to the requirements of the HEC of the Bahrain Ministry of Education: for example, at the Ministry's request the core general course in Culture and Society in Bahrain and the Gulf was added.

- 4.5 The University has an Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) which serves as a curriculum committee and approves new courses. AAC has a general responsibility for the oversight of academic programmes including their quality and relevance. At present there is no formal substructure of programme oversight and development within the Business Administration area, for example for particular pathways. The Review Panel was told that these structures were under development.
- 4.6 UCB has been graduating students for over five years and has so far graduated just over 500 students from all programmes. About 120 business students graduate each year. The graduates who met the Review Panel spoke positively about their studies and the ways in which they had been equipped to move into the world of work. For their part the group of employers who met the Review Panel were equally positive about the students that they had employed from UCB. In particular they commented on the graduates' awareness of current issues and ability to join teams. They noted that UCB graduates had continued to develop their careers, and in some cases moved into senior positions, within their organisations.
- 4.7 The University does not gather information systematically about student first destinations. As yet the University does not have an active alumni association. Graduates who met the Review Panel would welcome further involvement in their University. There are no formal channels through which employers are involved in the programme, although some attend recruitment fairs and informal contact is maintained through the internship programme. Employers who met the Review Panel commented that other institutions provided greater opportunity for their involvement which they welcome and which could be of benefit to UCB.
- 4.8 Assessment on the Business Administration Programme is heavily weighted towards tests and examinations. Many assessments rely on questions drawn from question banks associated with required reading. The Review Panel was unable to judge the standards of student coursework from the very small sample available. The grade profile of student performance is appropriate. There is a normal distribution of grades skewed to the right with nearly 40% of grades falling between 2.30 and 3.29, labelled 'good'. Around 11% of grades are unsatisfactory. The number of grades above 3.7 is greater than expected. This may be an artefact of the assessment system or reflective of a number of very able students in the class, a feature noted by the students who met the Review Panel.
- 4.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standards, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:

- The use of external advice and benchmarking to ensure that standards are comparable to those of similar programmes in the region and elsewhere
- The positive comments of both graduates and employers regarding the way in which the programme equips students for work and career progression

4.10 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:

- Take steps to develop a greater understanding amongst faculty of the purpose and significance of appropriate ILOs in defining academic standards
- Take steps to develop more detailed generic grading descriptors in order to define more explicitly the standards students are expected to reach
- Investigate ways of increasing the amount of written coursework in the assessment diet in order to allow students to demonstrate skills in research and writing
- Develop systems for gathering first destination data
- Consider ways in which employers can be more formally involved in the development of the Business Administration Programme
- Continue to develop university processes for moderation, curriculum oversight and programme management in ways that provide further assurance of academic standards.

4.11 **Judgement**

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies 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 University policies and procedures are documented and set out in a number of places including the Faculty Guide Book issued in 2006/7, the By-Laws for the award of degrees and examinations rules, and in the student handbook. The University does not have a dedicated quality assurance function. UCB draws upon the expertise of AUB in quality assurance, for example in preparing its Self-Evaluation Review document.
- 5.2 The University is managed by an External Advisory Board (EAB) chaired by the University's founder who, as president, is also its chief executive. The EAB discharges most of its responsibilities through an Executive Committee. There is also an Academic Affairs Committee (AAC), referred to above, and a Planning Committee. Executive authority is exercised through the Office of the President, Vice-Presidents and Deans or programme heads. In discussion with staff, the Review Panel learned that further management changes were envisaged by the University to address the need for formal decentralisation of decision-making and to replace *ad hoc* responsibilities with more formalised structures as the institution grows.
- 5.3 AAC is responsible for approving new courses and formal withdrawal of courses to be discontinued across the University. As previously noted, this committee maintains general oversight of all programmes. There is no equivalent of a curriculum committee at subject level, but the Review Panel was told that such an innovation was under consideration. There is no formal system of annual or periodic review but the Business Administration Programme is discussed at faculty meetings which are held twice a year, once a semester. The lack of a committee was highlighted in the SER by the College. The Review Panel considered that further development of these structures and processes would strengthen the University's quality assurance systems and be of benefit to the development of the Business Administration Programme.
- 5.4 Students complete evaluation forms at the end of each module. These are currently sent to AUB for analysis. AUB provides a report to the President and this together with internal reports on staff performance prepared by heads of department is used to inform staffing decisions. Students are unaware of what happens to their feedback. The Panel concluded that the course evaluation process could be of greater benefit to the University if those providing the feedback were made aware of its use and importance, and if teaching staff were encouraged to make greater use of the

feedback in self-development. As noted above, there is no formal gathering of feedback from other stakeholders.

- 5.5 UCB previously had a student council that was disbanded because of suspected financial irregularities. The Office of Student Affairs focuses on promoting extra-curricula activities. There is no formal system of student representation. The students who met the Review Panel would welcome greater opportunity to be represented in decision-making. The Panel concluded that the development of a formal system of student representation would both strengthen the University culture and provide valuable input to programmes and wider initiatives.
- 5.6 UCB recently conducted a strategic review in conjunction with AUB which resulted in a revised strategic plan. The Review Panel was informed that the new plan, when implemented, would result in strengthening the management and enhancing the development of programmes, including the Business Administration Programme.
- 5.7 The Faculty Guidebook defines a set of expectations regarding teaching, research, service and student advisory activities. It also outlines a process of annual performance review that involves the provision of a written report on performance by line managers to each of the academic staff they manage and a development discussion between faculty member and manager to agree enhancement targets. The Review Panel heard that in practice the system operated more informally with the exception of analysing student feedback.
- 5.8 The University has human resource policies including criteria for appointment, promotion and duties. There is no formal staff development policy. In discussions the Review Panel learned that UCB found it difficult to release significant resources for staff development. The University was able to offer some support for conference attendance. UCB also faces problems with high staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting appropriate staff from both local and ex-patriate communities. The Review Panel recognised both the limited resources available and the problems of recruiting staff for a teaching-focused institution in the existing labour market. However, the Panel also considered that the University would benefit from involving staff more in identifying their own development needs and exploring low cost development activities, such as pedagogical projects which are commensurate with the University's Mission.
- 5.9 The University maintains a system of course documents which are available to staff taking over courses. The University has an effective computerised student record system which provides students with electronic access to their record and which is able to produce a range of reports on student enrolment and performance.
- 5.10 In coming to its conclusion regarding the effectiveness of quality management and assurance, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
 - The University's engagement with improvement planning

- The effective registry and student records system.

5.11 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:

- Make more explicit where formal responsibility for quality assurance lies within the University's structures
- Implement proposed changes to management structures and responsibilities
- Put in place formal systems of regular and periodic reporting and review for programmes
- Develop the course evaluation process to close loops with students and increase the use of the feedback for self-development
- Consider eliciting formal feedback from other stakeholders including graduates and employers
- Develop a formal system of student representation and involvement in university affairs
- Improve staff development policies and procedures in particular in relation to assisting staff to identify appropriate support for their career development.

5.12 **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 conclusion in accordance with the *HERU/QAAET Program Review Handbook, 2009*:

There is limited confidence in the BA Honours in Business Administration Programme offered by the University College of Bahrain.