



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

# Higher Education Review Unit

## Programme Review Report

**Master of Business Administration**

**AMA International University-Bahrain**

**Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Date Reviewed: 26-27 October 2011**

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# 1. The Programme Review Process

## 1.1 The Programme Review Framework

The *four* indicators used to measure whether or not a programme meets minimum standards 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 AMA International University-Bahrain (AMAIUB)

The programme review of the MBA of the AMAIUB was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. This Report provides an account of the HERU programme review process and the findings of the Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by AMAIUB, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit, which was conducted on 26-27 October 2011.

AMAIUB was notified by the HERU/QAAET in June 2010 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its Master of Business Administration with the site visit taking place during February-April 2011. In preparation for the programme review, AMAIUB conducted its institutional self-evaluation and submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with appendices on the agreed date November 2010. With the site visit postponed to October 2011, a revised SER was submitted on 12 September 2011. It is expected that the AMAIUB will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its MBA programme.

AMAIUB started offering the Master of Business Administration (MBA) in the year 2002 together with six other curricular programmes; namely Bachelor of Science in Business Informatics, Master of Science in Computer Science, Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, Bachelor of Arts in International Studies later renamed to Bachelor of Science in International Studies (BSIS), Bachelor of Science in Mechatronics Engineering, and Bachelor of Science in Engineering Informatics.

## 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 Panel examined the aims of the programme, as stated in the SER, and found them to be in alignment with the mission and vision of the Institution.
- 2.2 The programme ILOs (Intended Learning Outcomes) are clearly stated in the programme specification document. Course ILOs are clearly stated in course syllabi. They are clearly mapped to the programme ILOs using a matrix, and there is a logical connection between the course and the programme ILO.
- 2.3 The MBA programme is appropriate. The four Foundation /Pre-MBA courses, the six core courses, the selection of four courses from the eight specialisations and then the thesis writing at the end, provide a framework through which students gain an adequate educational experience.
- 2.4 Syllabi are standardised and are informative. Some of the courses in the specialisation areas have not been offered in the last two years. Moreover, the Panel found discrepancies between the information available in the syllabus, from the course file, and the aggregated information provided.
- 2.5 The evidence of practical aspects of the curriculum as presented in the course syllabi through case studies and reports, is not sufficient. Furthermore, they do not provide adequate evidence that the assignments have sufficient practical merit and that they are connected to a theoretical framework at the master's level. In addition they are not clearly related to the ILOs. Some of the assessments are not related to the learning outcomes nor do they reflect the level of the course/programme. The programme team needs to develop the practical application of course content.
- 2.6 Whilst the course syllabi contain different teaching and learning methods per skills and assessment, there is no formal teaching policy. The Panel is of the view that a teaching policy needs to be developed to facilitate independent learning and improve the teaching and learning.
- 2.7 All courses follow the same assessment model. Clear criteria are used for the assessment of the courses as indicated in the syllabi. In the courses requiring cases, though the rubrics used for the evaluation are clear and measurable, the evaluated work lacked originality and had large portions copied from existing sources without attribution. During the month of the site visit the University acquired anti-plagiarism software.

- 2.8 There is evidence of internal scrutinising of the examinations. However, these are administrative checks to meet a requirement rather than academic for the purpose of evaluating the content of the tests. Assessment should focus on the content rather than being limited to the completion of an administrative task.
- 2.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the curriculum, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- programme ILOs are aligned with the university mission
  - course ILOs are mapped to programme ILOs
- 2.10 In terms of improvement the Review Panel **recommends** that the College should:
- ensure assessments are related to learning outcomes
  - develop syllabi for all course
  - develop a teaching and learning policy
  - develop the practical application of course content.

## 2.11 **Judgement**

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

### **3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme**

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

- 3.1 The admission policy is limited to the requirement of a bachelor's degree from a recognised institution. Admitted MBA students without a business education background are required to take four Foundation/Pre-MBA courses.
- 3.2 Application interviews are conducted systematically. Remedial courses are required for those admitted who hold a bachelor's degree in a field other than business administration. Students required to take pre-MBA courses are only allowed to enrol in MBA courses after they complete all required remedial courses. The College needs to review the admissions standards by introducing an English language proficiency test, such as TOEFL or IELTS, and also a test, such as GMAT, which is tailored for MBA admission programmes.
- 3.3 Faculty members are shared between the undergraduate and graduate business programmes. The MBA programme has 31 faculty members delivering MBA courses in the fall 2011-2012 trimester. The number of faculty members is adequate to offer the MBA programme. All 31 faculty members teaching in the MBA programme are PhD holders. An examination of the faculty members' resumé and courses being taught shows they are teaching in areas appropriate to their education and professional experience, however, the limited research output of most faculty members raises the question of how they are staying current in their fields. Most faculty members have not published in a refereed context in the last four years.
- 3.4 Seven of 31 MBA faculty members attended external academic conferences during the 2010-2011 academic year. The workload hours assigned to research was raised from six hours per week to nine beginning in the fall 2011-12 trimester. Faculty members are being encouraged by the administration to engage in joint research activities to increase their research output. An internal research funding application process has been implemented and faculty members are in the process of applying for these funds. The 'Guidelines for Faculty Research' published in September of 2011 make the application process and product expectations transparent.
- 3.5 The admissions office, registration office, library, computer laboratories, cafeteria, some administrators' offices, the finance office, a selection of classrooms, and faculty member offices were visited. The computer laboratories are adequate to accommodate the MBA students' and faculty members' needs. Classrooms are equipped with projectors. However, faculty members' offices are not adequate and they are not appropriate to accommodate the faculty members and the students

visiting them. Faculty members do not have any privacy to carry out any consultation with their students. The offices are shared with a group of faculty members and there are a limited number of desktop computers. Laptop computers may be signed out on a daily basis. Faculty also use the laboratories designated for student use to access computing resources for preparing and uploading teaching materials. The University needs to provide the faculty members with appropriate offices and computers.

- 3.6 The library hours are sufficient to support MBA students on Wednesdays and Saturdays when they attend classes. The library's collection is small to meet the needs of MBA students and faculty. The number of available books and periodicals is not sufficient enough to provide the necessary support for students' further readings and the faculty members' research needs. However, there are some databases that somewhat meet the aforementioned needs.
- 3.7 New students are required to go through an orientation. Interviews with students confirmed they were required to attend an orientation where they were introduced to the university facilities, how to use the computer laboratories and how to register for courses.
- 3.8 Student academic support is provided by faculty members who are assigned a number of students as advisees. There is counselling available for students if they have personal problems. There is also a career placement office. Through the interviews with faculty members as well as admissions staff, the Panel noted that approximately 10% of the students' intake on average drop out of the MBA programme. This is attributed, according to the interviewees, to the difficulty that students have in balancing their professional, personal and academic lives.
- 3.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the efficiency, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- suitable arrangements are in place for orientation of students
  - adequate support provided to students.
- 3.10 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel **recommends** that the College should:
- review the admissions standards
  - encourage and provide research support to faculty members teaching in the MBA programme
  - provide appropriate offices and computers to the faculty members
  - enhance the library facilities.



### 3.11 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy 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 The aims and intended learning outcomes for the MBA programme, and for each course are clearly and appropriately stated. The ILOs are well documented as stated earlier. The documentation provided by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Office indicated a well-organised process. The programme is in the early stages of accumulating the data necessary for conducting a cohort analysis.
- 4.2 Benchmarking has been done on the academic structure of the MBA programme but not on the academic standards of the graduates. Comparisons of admission criteria, curriculum plans, programme requirements, assessment criteria, research requirements and ILO statements currently being done are appropriate but need to be augmented with benchmarking of results. Examples of relevant results might include quality of registered students, student satisfaction with the programme, student completion rates, time to degree, placement of graduates, graduate performance on intended learning outcomes, and employer feedback on the performance of graduates. This type of benchmarking will require the establishment of information sharing agreements with the chosen benchmark institutions to access the data needed to make comparisons. The basis for choosing benchmarking comparison institutions was not articulated. These need to be made explicit and reviewed for their fitness for the intended purpose.
- 4.3 A comprehensive examination is given after the students complete all course work and before the admission to the thesis stage. This examination is moderated by external reviewers. The criteria used in grading the examination are clearly stated. Moreover, four different faculty members grade the examination to ensure fairness and consistency. The questions are limited to four core courses and cover general topics. The Panel is of the view that this system is burdensome and does not add value to the programme. In many instances, the Panel observed that grades were assigned with no clear link to the actual work. There is a process to have the examinations internally reviewed and approved at the college level. This would be a guarantee of quality if implemented properly.
- 4.4 Assessment on the MBA programme contained a variety of different instruments such as mid-term examinations, quizzes, final examinations and student projects. During the site visit, the Panel noted that the level of student responses on these assignments is not at the master's level. Student work does not demonstrate the depth of knowledge or the critical analytic skills to be expected of an MBA student.

- 4.5 During the site visit, the Panel noted that there were some inconsistencies in the grading of student work. Assessment methods were below the quality standards of an MBA programme. Overall, the work as included in the course portfolios does not meet the criteria set for grading. In several instances, full marks were given to portions of rubrics that were missing in the actual work of the students. Several samples of student work on assignments presented in course portfolios as being exemplary were found to have been plagiarised from documents on the internet. The very high quality of English, and unusual but technically correct phrasing in the student assignments, made the plagiarism evident. Internet searches for key phrases found in the assignments quickly revealed the source documents. Further effort is needed within the MBA programme to detect plagiarism in student work. A strong culture of deterring and detecting plagiarism should be instituted across the whole University.
- 4.6 In relation to the system in place for the grading of students' work, the Panel noted that the students' scores are being adjusted upwards in the recording of grades. The conversion formula used to convert raw student scores into recorded grades has the effect of shifting all student grades upwards significantly. For example, a student earning 0% on a graded item would have 50% recorded as the grade. Earning 50% before conversion would result in 75% being recorded as the grade. This process is applied to all graded work in all MBA courses. It has the net effect of inflating grades in the programme. Students achieving a programme passing standard of 75% will have earned only 50% in their pre-conversion work. There needs to be a comprehensive review of the allocation of grades.
- 4.7 The Review Panel examined a range of course projects during the site visit, and found in some courses that some ILOs are not covered in assessment. The mid-terms, and final examination in many instances did not reflect an assessment of the ILOs. The nature of the questions does not assess a higher level of intellectual skills. The work does not demonstrate the ILOs in respect of student achievement. The reviewed work also indicated an easy grading process. There were no failures in the sections reviewed confirming the grade inflation observed. Many upper level courses were not offered in the last two years. Thus assessment at this level was not possible.
- 4.8 The Panel interviewed during the site visit a group of alumni who indicated satisfaction with the programme. Some suggested the need for improving the standards of the faculty teaching the courses at the MBA level. The Panel met one employer, who indicated satisfaction with the programme.
- 4.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standards, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- there is evidence of benchmarking activities against other universities
- alumni satisfaction with the programme.

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

- increase the depth of materials covered and the rigour of assessments appropriate for MBA level
- review the allocation and criteria of grades
- improve the alignment between specific assessment questions and the course learning outcomes
- review the comprehensive examination
- provide more comprehensive benchmarking which goes beyond reporting on academic structure of the academic programme
- develop and implement a system to detect and reduce plagiarism.

#### 4.11 Judgement

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

## 5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

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

- 5.1 The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Office has two full-time staff members. The Office recently developed an appropriate rubric for different types of assessment, and they are using the ISO 9001 standard for documentation. An approach was adopted to measure the specific ILOs. To get the faculty members involved in the process of quality they were required to attend three workshops and seminars in the last four months. A formal structure is being implemented.
- 5.2 The Panel, after studying various documents and based on interviews with faculty members and other administrators, reached the conclusion that there is evidence of continuous improvement in certain areas, such as curriculum, allocation of nine hours for research, support from management for conference attendance, and the promotion process that has been put in place.
- 5.3 Feedback is collected through a variety of course evaluation, teaching evaluation, student satisfaction, alumni satisfaction, employer evaluation, and employee satisfaction questionnaires. The results are collated and presented to various management committees. For example, the course evaluation results are compiled by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Office and presented to the departmental and programme committees for review. The Planning Office receives and incorporates all such results into the institutional and programme planning processes. Faculty gave examples of how past reviews led to specific improvements in current practice.
- 5.4 There is an alumni survey which is distributed to the alumni once a year by the Alumni Affairs Office. This is a good instrument in receiving feedback from the Alumni. However, there is no mechanism in place to analyse trends from this survey. There is an employer survey which is distributed to the employers once a year by the Placement and Linkages Office. Again, there is no mechanism in analysing trends from this survey.
- 5.5 There is an Academic Advisory Board with three external members. During the site visit, the Panel met with the members and found that there is a lack of understanding of the role of the Advisory Board beyond helping the institution.
- 5.6 The faculty members are aware of the importance of their professional development. However, there is a blurred conceptualisation of what needs to be done. There is a

beginning interest in research focused on the local market, especially small and medium sized enterprises. However, it was not obvious which journals or conferences would serve as an outlet for the research once completed. A University Research Journal was suggested as a plausible alternative but if this is the case it would limit the exposure of the faculty to research and to have a credible quality journal would be difficult to attain.

5.7 The faculty members interviewed were aware of the promotion criteria and shared in detail the process with the Panel.

5.8 In coming to its conclusion regarding the effectiveness of quality management and assurance, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- the establishment of a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Office
- the establishment of a College Advisory Board
- there is evidence of alumni and employer surveys
- there is a process in place for reviewing the curriculum at the end of each trimester
- there are processes in place for evaluating the faculty members' performance
- there is a procedure in place for performance appraisal of faculty members.

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

- analysing trends from alumni and employer surveys.

#### 5.10 **Judgement**

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies 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 Programme Review Handbook, 2009*:

**There is no confidence in the Master of Business Administration offered by the AMA International University-Bahrain.**