Higher Education Review Unit

Programme Review Report

Bachelor of Science in Business Management

University of Bahrain

Kingdom of Bahrain

Dates Reviewed: 27-28 May 2009

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1. Programme Reviews

1.1 The Programme Review Framework

F*our* indicators that are 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**

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 of Bahrain

The programme review of the Bachelor of Science in Business Management of University of Bahrain (UOB) 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 UOB, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

UOB was notified by the HERU/QAAET in February 2009 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its Bachelor programme in Business Management with the site visit taking place in May 2009. In preparation for the programme review, UOB conducted its institutional self-evaluation and submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with appendices on the agreed date in March 2009.

The quality review site visit took place on 27th and 28th May 2009. This Report records the evidence-based conclusions reached by the Review Panel. It is expected that the College of Business Administration at UOB will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Business Management programme.

The University of Bahrain (UOB) was established in 1986. UOB is organized into eight colleges, namely: College of Applied Studies; College of Arts; College of Business Administration; College of Engineering; College of Information Technology; College of Law; College of Science; Bahrain Teachers College.

The programme under review, the Bachelor of Science in Business Management, is located within the Department of Management and Marketing, one of three departments in the College of Business Administration. At the time of the visit there were some 770 undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Business Management. The Department of Management and Marketing is comprised of 33 full-time academics. They are classified into three specifications: Management, Marketing and Quantitative Methods. The Management specialists number 14, 12 hold PhDs and 2 hold Masters degree. The holders of Masters qualification are currently completing PhDs in British and Australian Universities. Other Departments within the College, and from elsewhere in the University, also contribute to the teaching. The Department does not employ part-time lecturers.

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 curriculum content has clear aims and relate well to college and university mission. It is also well designed and organized to accomplish the knowledge and skill set represented by the B.Sc. degree. Course offerings represent a wide range of content for such a degree. Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO) are articulated very well in the programme and course specifications. The study plan guides students through an appropriate mix of course and elective courses in the Major. Management courses are sequenced from Basic to Advanced and include skill-specific courses as well as courses requiring cross-cutting critical thinking, analysis, and organizational skills. The range of courses offered provides good foundational knowledge of management theory, concepts, and components. Courses are numbered and sequenced to build expertise appropriate to the B.Sc. level. The overall curricular map demonstrates both sequencing and an expanding scope leading to the body of knowledge and skills required to earn the degree.

2.2   The B.Sc. in Business Management comprises four levels. A total of 126 credits hours are required for successful completion. Students take 42 three-credit courses of which 38 are compulsory (3 are university requirements, 24 college requirements and 11 are from major departments), 4 are electives (1 college, 1 management and 2 business). Course structure is an area for improvement. Presently the course appears to be rather unbalanced, and does not offer students sufficient choice. The range of elective courses is limited. The Panel suggests an increase in the number of specialized management courses at third year level.

2.3   Course syllabi state course objectives and provide a list of subject-specific skills. Syllabi also include a list of the ILOs in each domain (knowledge and understanding, intellectual/cognitive/analytical skills, transferable skills) addressed by the course, and there is good evidence that these are aligned with the programme level ILOs. A standard format for course outlines is developed and used.

2.4   Objectives 1-4 in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) stress the importance of the practical/applied nature of the programme. Over the four levels, students are exposed to the knowledge, and subject-specific and generic transferable skills, appropriate to such a programme. The Department intends to make a final year project compulsory as a means of ensuring that all students have an opportunity to develop and demonstrate analytical and communication skills at the highest undergraduate level.

2.5   As a general requirement for graduation, there are some opportunities for students to engage in work placement consultancy roles with companies. Student participation is

compulsory but it does not give any academic credit towards the degree. A concomitant of this would be the need to employ more innovative assessment tools to measure students' attainment of these skills. The Panel heard that students would welcome more work placements as these also provide opportunities to impress potential employers.

2.6 Teaching, learning methods and materials vary by course, with faculty members selecting materials and utilizing the methods that are most appropriate for the course content, lesson purpose, and level of students. The syllabus for each course specifies course methods and materials, as well as providing evidence that individual course objectives directly contribute to programme–level ILOs. Course syllabi and the SER state that many of the courses are delivered through the lecture format. However, it appears that 'lecture' may include a wide variety of teacher–student and student–student interactions.

2.7 Regarding assessment, syllabi specify assessment and evaluation practices in each course, and in general the content of assessment instruments within courses appears to be relatively well matched to the course objectives. For example, written examination questions may call for short answers or essay responses to questions with objective, conceptual or analytical knowledge.

2.8 The teaching, learning and assessment strategy takes cognisance of University regulations, the nature of existing physical resources, and the growing number of students on the programme. A central tenet is the use of English as the medium of instruction and assessment. Teaching and learning schemes and the associated assessments are drawn up to address the intended learning outcomes for each course and these are communicated effectively to students.

2.9 A variety of teaching methods is currently employed, but lectures are the most common form of delivery. However, there are group activities and student presentations towards the end of the programme.

2.10 The programme follows the American credit-hour system which was originally adopted from the American University of Beirut in the Fall of 1982, along with the introduction, in 2009, of a set of Intended Learning Outcomes which are a blend of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK (QAA) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) standards. However, the development and updating of the contents and structure of the programme are influenced by the academic staff members, the academic councils (Department Council, College Council, University Council and the Board of Trustees). The ILOs are also influenced by the changing needs of the local market, the latest advances in the field, and continuous comparison with what is taking place in international universities around the world.

2.11 The assessment policy, examination dates and procedures for assessment are communicated to students through course outlines. The assessment methods vary in length and in the areas they measure, and this variation is intended to provide a wide range of feedback for evaluating the work of the student and measuring learning outcomes. The dates and procedures for each course follows university regulations and includes two in-course tests plus an end of course final examination. Students were clear about the nature of the assessments and what was required of them. Assessment procedures are carried out effectively and efficiently, in accordance with university guidelines. The assessment instruments are well-suited to measuring academic performance, although the assessment of student competencies in terms of practical, business–related skills, could be developed further. A review of the assessment regime could usefully be undertaken in conjunction with, and be informed by, a review of the skills within the curriculum.

2.12 Marking of student work is to some extent undertaken promptly and tutors provide helpful and detailed individual and group feedback. Students valued the constructive feedback they received. There is a well-documented and closely monitored appeals system.

2.13 The Department does not have a clear policy of prompt feedback and review to students of all assessed work, with the exception of the final examination. In general, the instructors do not give students detailed written comments on submitted work. However, students are encouraged to discuss their marked work with their lecturer. Each lecturer also displays outside his/her office, a timetable of office hours for contact with students. In addition, the Department does not have a policy of having external examiners.

2.14 The assessment framework is constructed so that grades reflect attainment of course objectives. To ensure that this linkage continues in place, the department applies several good practices. Assessment is coordinated across sections of the same course. The Curriculum Committee and /or Department Chair reviews advance copies of all course mid-term and finals assessments to compare them to ILOs course objectives, and other tests for the course across time. The Departmental Improvement Plan has identified the need for more transparent and varied methods for testing and assessment.

2.15 In coming to its conclusion regarding the curriculum, the Review Panel notes with appreciation the following:

- The curriculum content has clear aims and relate well to college and university mission
- Course syllabi state course objectives and provide a list of subject-specific skills
- Assessment procedures are carried out effectively and efficiently in accordance with university guidelines. The assessment instruments are well-suited to measuring academic performance

- The good use of external reference points to maintain curriculum currency and relevance
- An appropriate mix of knowledge and generic skills which offers a sound basis for employment or further study
- Appropriate assessment procedures.

2.16   In terms of improvement the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:
- Increase the number of specialized management courses at third year level
- Employ more innovative assessment tools to measure students' attainment of these skills
- Review of the assessment regime could usefully be undertaken in conjunction with, and be informed by, a review of the skills within the curriculum
- Have a clear policy of prompt feedback and review to students of all assessed work
- Have more systematic and formal arrangements to encourage greater engagement with the external business community in Bahrain
- Make more use made of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs such as Blackboard or Web-CT)
- Use the Department's student advisory process more effectively
- Ensure greater curriculum provision for students to allow more exposure to practical work-related features
- Consider a greater use of external input (e.g. including external examiners)
- Model answers on written assignments could be more detailed.

2.17   Judgment

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the program **satisfies 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 Most students are Bahraini, but there are some other Arab and international students. Around 90% of students are admitted on a competitive basis. These students have scores in excess of 80% in the nationally-recognized secondary school examination 'Tawjihiah'. To gain admission to the Department, all must have scored at least 80%. The result is a highly qualified student intake.

3.2 The faculty of the Department of Management and Marketing is comprised of 33 full-time academics. They are classified into three specifications: Management, Marketing and Quantitative Methods. The Management specialists consist of 14, 12 of whom hold PhDs and 2 hold Masters. The holders of Masters qualification are currently finishing their PhDs in British and Australian Universities. All have or are building extensive records in research, public community service and service to their field, as well as teaching (including advising responsibilities). The range of specialties is appropriate to the curriculum which is offered. The programme does not employ part-time faculty. Academic and non-academic staff are highly motivated, enthusiastic and well-qualified. Although estimates of Student-Staff Ratios (SSRs) and FTEs were provided in the SER and during the site visit (e.g. SSR was approximately 30:1), it was difficult for the Panel to obtain an accurate measure of the workload level of academic staff apart from numbers of hours of teaching (varied between 6 hours weekly to 12 hours depending on administrative responsibilities). As an area of improvement the department could consider utilizing more innovative ways of optimising existing staff resources *via* a more formal system of Workload Allocation in order to achieve a balance between teaching and learning, research and professional activities. The Department appears to require more academic staff (full-time or part-time equivalent).

3.3 Comprehensive pre-application information is available on the university website and informative and well-presented hard copy information packs are also available for students. Indeed at university, college and departmental levels there is an excellent and well-structured system of induction and orientation. The admission arrangements work well and there is a one-day orientation programme for new students which involves input from existing students. Not all students avail themselves of this opportunity. Many are content to accept the advice and guidance that is readily available from existing students. Staff use the application and enrolment forms to identify students who may need extra learning support, including those with disabilities. Some staff have developed their own websites as a means of communicating with students, which is commendable as well as being highly efficient.

3.4 Physical and material resources to support the programme are sound, especially library and IT facilities. There is also an excellent student support service in such areas as employability and career planning. Students appear to make good use of these facilities. The Department recognizes that there is scope for providing advice on a more formal basis at College and Department level. Careers fairs/ open days, where potential employers are invited to the University, have proved to be successful.

3.5 Student support services are well-documented in a university handbook issued to all students at induction though take-up of this facility appears to be patchy.

3.6 The college handbook, written in English and Arabic is clear and offers comprehensive information on the courses available. It is an excellent feature and offers further scope for development.

3.7 Overall, the arrangements for student support and guidance at both programme and university level are very effective and support achievement of the aims and objectives of the provision. It is clear that the department places a high priority on providing students with a supportive environment to facilitate their studies.

3.8 In IT provision, the facilities provide an airy and effective working environment for students and are supported by a high level of technician support. As well as running appropriate networked business software, many are internet-linked. Equipment is largely Pentium 4S and there is a rolling replacement programme. Technical support in the College is provided by four highly-qualified laboratory supervisors, one of whom works with academic staff to develop material for the web. Students expressed a moderate level of satisfaction with the IT provision.

3.9 The Department does not operate a formal personal tutor system but relies instead upon course tutors to offer the necessary academic support and guidance. Students were well aware of this facility and used the office hours to meet and seek advice from tutors. The office hours system involves staff displaying and informing students when they are available for consultation. Some students reported that on occasions there were queues to see certain members of staff. During the site visit the Panel was pleased to hear of the level of pastoral care that many faculty members provided to their students, especially to those with personal and/or health problems. Current and former students reported favourably on this high level of pastoral support and guidance, which is often provided informally by the course team. This is an example of good practice in the Department.

3.10 A major area for improvement is that of student progression and retention. From the figures provided in the SER this appears to be a serious issue to address. For example, in academic year 2007-08 only 36% of the first year entrants progressed to second year. If the second semester intake is omitted from the calculation, the figure is 49%. It was difficult for the Panel to calculate overall progression rates in the form of a cohort analysis since the data provided did not facilitate this over a discrete cohort of students

(i.e. across the duration of their programme). However, as a rough estimate, if progression rates between years 2, 3, and 4 follow those for 2007-08 (Summary of the Programme and Data set, p14) just 17% of the initial intake will graduate. It is strongly recommended that the Department, College and University together address the issue of retention and progression as a matter of urgency. There is also a need to improve the quality of student progression and retention statistics. The Panel is of the view that this is as much a resource allocation issue (which staff recognized during the site visit), as it is an issue of standards and management information systems. Information on why students leave their programme should also be gathered in order to inform the teaching and learning environment and to assist with resource planning.

3.11 The Department aims to produce highly qualified and able graduates. It would be better placed to assure itself that its high standards are being met, if it collected, collated and analyzed more comprehensive statistics on student progression and the first destinations of its graduates. This, in turn, would provide useful feedback on the appropriateness of its provision and serve to inform curricular and other developments. The University, College and Department are aware of the desirability of this. The Panels encourages the Department to complete their deliberations and implement appropriate measures at the earliest opportunity.

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

- Academic and non-academic staff are highly motivated, enthusiastic and well-qualified
- There is an excellent and well structured system of induction and orientation at University, College and Departmental levels
- Some staff have developed their own websites as a means of communicating with students
- Physical and material resources to support the programme are sound, especially library and IT facilities
- There is also an excellent student support service in such areas as employability and career planning
- The college handbook is an excellent feature and offers further scope for development
- During the site visit the reviewers were pleased to hear of the level of pastoral care that many faculty members provided to their students, especially to those with personal and/or health problems
- High admission standards matched by high levels of final achievement
- A strong record of achievement in employment and further study following completion
- Excellent pre-admission and induction support and guidance, including well-written, helpful material provided for students

- A comprehensive range of support and guidance services at University and Departmental level by accessible and supportive staff
- College Careers Fairs/Open Days which facilitate students' access to employment opportunities
- Library facilities are comprehensive and well-used
- IT provision is extensive at University and College level and is ably supported by well- qualified technicians.

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

- Utilize more innovative ways of optimising existing staff resources *via* a more formal system of Workload Allocation in order to achieve balance between teaching and learning, research and professional activities
- Moderate the level of students' satisfaction with the IT provision
- More academic staff are required in order to allow staff to conduct research and other professional activities
- Address the issue of weak student retention and progression as a matter of urgency.

3.14 **Judgment**

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the program **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 Academic standards are clearly articulated in programme and course specifications. The Department is pro-active in ensuring that standards are consistent between courses and between faculty members (e.g. *via* moderation). Teaching quality is regularly evaluated through faculty performance appraisals and course evaluations. The Department also provides orientation and mentoring for new faculty members. In the SER 'Plan for Improvement' for this aspect, the Department displays a strong commitment to further utilize peer observations, student evaluations, as well as professional development and training programmes in order to monitor and further enhance the quality of teaching and learning. All of these intended actions can only serve to strengthen the already good quality of teaching displayed in the programme.

4.2 Student achievements in their assessments are rigorously determined and monitored, partly through the different assessment elements (e.g. quizzes, case studies and final examinations); but also through a well-developed moderation system. Moreover, students and graduates confirmed that the programme meets their expectations and satisfies the needs of the Bahraini economy. Grade distributions were appropriate at least for the cohorts that were examined by the reviewers. There is a robust internal moderation system which ensures consistency and fairness in assessment procedures. Following discussion and agreement between the lecturer(s) and the subject coordinator, the Head of Department is informed. This affords the Dean and Head of Department an overview of the assessment process and student assessment diet.

4.3 Benchmarks for the quality of the curriculum include staff experience and knowledge of curriculum developments in the Middle East (American University of Beirut (AUB)), USA, and UK, including the QAA subject benchmark statements for business and management. Although university regulations are quite prescriptive, the Department and College have continued to develop new courses to reflect changing business and management needs. Existing courses are kept up to date and there is clear evidence of staff research and other professional activities informing curricular developments. There are strong links with governmental agencies and these too are used to inform the curriculum. In addition, the reviewers were impressed with the knowledge of, and level of engagement with the wider international academic community exhibited by academic staff.

4.4 Students reported moderate levels of satisfaction with the standard of teaching. Academic staff are highly qualified, and texts and other learning materials are current and used effectively to underpin student learning.

4.5 Employers were confident that students were being provided with the knowledge and transferable skills necessary to pursue a successful business career. They highlighted student understanding of, and facility in English as a crucial feature.

4.6 The Panel found clear evidence of students benefiting from extensive added value. Students valued a degree from the University because of its reputation, and the employment opportunities it offered. Employers valued graduates from the Department and made extensive use of students' Grade Point Averages (GPAs) as an aid to selection.

4.7 Comprehensive first destination statistics were not available, but there was sufficient evidence of graduates obtaining appropriate, high level positions in the private and public sectors. Similarly, those progressing to postgraduate study, in Bahrain and abroad, have been highly successful. Of the current students interviewed a very high percentage intended to progress on to Masters courses. The Department is keen to improve contacts with graduates and businesses, and measures are being introduced to track graduate progress more systematically in order to produce more accurate and comprehensive destination data. The Panel supports this development.

4.8 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standards, the Review Panel notes with appreciation the following:

- Academic standards are clearly articulated in programme and course specifications
- Student achievements in their assessments are rigorously determined and monitored
- There is clear evidence of students benefiting from extensive added value.

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

- Evaluate levels of satisfaction with the standard of teaching and implement improvements.

4.10 **Judgment**

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the program **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 There is a strong commitment at university, faculty and departmental level, to maintaining and enhancing quality. This is achieved through rigorous, robust and structured procedures. There is scope, however, for greater clarity and transparency in the way in which these are actioned.

5.2 There is a strong ethos of effective and regular review of programme provision and discussions are clearly documented in, for example, Departmental Council minutes.

5.3 There are well–established and widely–understood procedures for programme monitoring and enhancement at departmental and college level. For example, best practice is disseminated through the recently established college-based Academic Development Centre. Student evaluations are central to this process. Validation of new programmes involves detailed consideration of demand for the proposed programme and the resource implications. It is an inclusive process, which instills a sense of ownership among staff through a widespread consultative process. The whole process is informed through a high level of international awareness exhibited by staff.

5.4 Student views are canvassed widely and taken seriously. There is evidence of prompt changes being made in response to students' evaluations and comment. All lecturers are evaluated by students for the quality of their teaching and learning support though end-of course questionnaires. These are considered at Vice-President level and comments forwarded to the Faculty. The outcomes are considered by the Head of Department and the Dean, but unfortunately are not discussed with the lecturer concerned even in cases where there may be scope for improvement. The Dean prepares an overview report of staff performance and comparisons are made with previous years. In addition, students have opportunities to report informally and formally though a number of channels, including student representatives on the University Board. Current and past students felt empowered by these arrangements.

5.5 There is considerable staff development activity. There is evidence of staff contributions to conferences and other professional activities, nationally, regionally and internationally. There is a small but significant and growing, level of liaison with local businesses offering a two-way flow of information and mutual benefits. New staff are required to undergo an induction and training programme and an informal mentoring scheme operates. The Department may wish to formalise this. A formal system of peer observation has yet to be introduced although it is clear that there is a considerable exchange of ideas between staff informally. Staff promotion is based on three criteria; teaching and learning, as evidenced particularly by student evaluation questionnaires; research, evidenced by the quality and number of publications; and community service-

broadly defined. The result is an open and suitably rounded process which is well-understood and accepted, by staff.

5.6 The Self-Evaluation Report was extremely well written and clear. It assisted the Panel greatly in their task, albeit with the caveats already mentioned above. It was also honest and reflective. It conveyed accurately the high level of internal debate on quality issues. The Department and College benefit from a core of committed staff with a wide range of experience and breadth of vision to identify important areas of concern and to take appropriate concerted action. Many of the action points identified in this report have already been highlighted in the impressive Improvement Plan. During the visit, the reviewers also appreciated the degree of openness and honesty shown by faculty members, especially in relation to areas where improvement is required. This strengthens the enhancement aspect of the QAA process for all concerned.

5.7 One final area for improvement is: consideration should be given to more structured and formal input to the programme from external stakeholders, e.g. the business community who expressed a desire to be involved in aspects of programme planning and scheduled inputs to classes.

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

- There is a strong commitment at university, faculty and departmental level, to maintaining and enhancing quality
- There is a strong ethos of effective and regular review of programme provision and discussions are clearly documented in, for example, departmental Council minutes
- Best practice is disseminated through the recently established college-based Academic Development Centre
- New staff are required to undergo an induction and training programme and an informal mentoring scheme operates
- The department and college benefit from a core of committed staff with a wide range of experience and breadth of vision to identify important areas of concern and to take appropriate concerted action
- There is a strong commitment to quality throughout the institution with clear evidence of internal debate and an openness to external comment
- Student views are canvassed widely and acted upon promptly, to the students' satisfaction
- There is a significant professional development ethos; this is reflected in the take–up of staff development and other professional activates, within and outside the University.

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

- Have greater clarity and transparency in the way in which the procedures of enhancing quality are actioned
- Have an improved management information system at departmental, college and university levels in relation to student progression and first destination statistics
- Consider more structured and formal input to the programme from external stakeholders, (for example, the establishment of a Program Advisory Board).

5.10 **Judgment**

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the program **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 Program Review Handbook, 2009*:

There is confidence in the Bachelor of Science in Business Management program offered by the University of Bahrain.