



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

# Higher Education Review Unit

## Institutional Review Report

University College of Bahrain

Kingdom of Bahrain

Dates Reviewed: 14 - 17 February 2010

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## **1. The Institutional Review Process**

The review of University College of Bahrain (henceforth referred to as UCB 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 (APs) and supporting materials (SMs) submitted by UCB. The Report also takes into consideration the supplementary documentation requested from the institution, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

## **2. Overview of the University College of Bahrain**

The University College of Bahrain (UCB) was founded in 2001 as 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 1504 undergraduate students registered, of whom 368 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) nations.

## **3. Mission, Planning and Governance**

In June 2009 the UCB Mission statement was reviewed and revised with the assistance of the American University of Beirut (AUB) consulting team. The Mission statement is disseminated in appropriate UCB publications and on the UCB website, albeit with some slight word differences. The first point to note is that the statement is narrowly focused on delivering a “*business management*” curriculum, whereas there are already programmes in

place that would not normally be included within that category; for example, the Graphic Design major.

Secondly, the Mission makes strong claims that should guide the institution in its strategic planning and decision-making in the future. However, these claims are ambitious and raise questions as to whether they are realistically achievable given the resource availability to the institution. The Statement, thirdly, articulates the aim to *generate new knowledge* which suggests a research agenda, however, no research strategy was evident to the Panel, current research activity was found to be very limited, and PhD qualified faculty members were proving difficult to attract and retain at UCB. Isolated examples of research activity resulted from self-motivation on the part of the faculty members concerned rather than any institutional level research agenda or a developed research infrastructure.

Fourthly, the Mission claims that the *quality education is benchmarked against international standards*. The Panel did not find evidence of the benchmarking of quality and standards achieved by UCB students or any quantitative measures of achievement in its various operational and support units. The general interpretation of 'benchmarking' was found to be merely a descriptive comparison of curriculum content between institutions.

Lastly, the Mission states that UCB is *tuned to the region it serves*. Although the graduate employment data has been gathered in the Department of Graphic Design, and looks very positive, the other fields could only present anecdotal information on employment and further studies for their graduates. Although no formal and regular mechanisms were in place for consultation on the curriculum development at UCB, the interviews with employers indicated that the University graduates were gaining employment and meeting the skills requirements.

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) claims that the UCB Mission is reviewed periodically. The only review evidenced was in June 2009, 7 years after the inception of the institution. This review did not involve the UCB community or external stakeholders. The Panel encourages the institution to open discussions about its Mission to ensure that it is relevant in light of its present situation. UCB also needs to ensure that the intentions of the Mission are understood and supported by a wide range of stakeholders internally and externally to the University. This will assure UCB that the activities of the University are tightly focused and concentrated on achieving the Mission.

#### ***Recommendation - 1***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a process of regular review of its Mission statement that involves a wide section of the internal UCB community and which takes account of the views of external stakeholders.*

As part of the above mentioned review in June 2009 by the AUB consultancy team, a Revised Strategic Plan (RSP) (June 2009) was produced and submitted as material to inform the HERU Panel. The reason for the title indicating that the Plan was *Revised* was unclear to

the Panel. The Panel found the Plan to be more of an Advisory Improvement Plan rather than a true strategic plan. This is confirmed by the statement on page 4 of the Revised Strategic Plan' stating the UCB management would apply this, or portions of this report as deemed fit or appropriate. Indeed very few of the significant recommendations in the Revised Strategic Plan had been acted upon at the time of this Panel visit.

A UCB Strategy Map was an informative inclusion within the Revised Strategic Plan and this presented clearly identified objectives that the Panel recognized as important strategic issues; for example, the *Fluid Decentralized Organizational Structure*. In an associated narrative, this was interpreted as a delegation of authority to administrative and academic committees – a much needed development as the UCB grows and diversifies. However, this objective had no KPIs. No new committees were evident as fully constituted committees in the institution. It remains unclear to the Panel as to whether this recommendation and objective will be acted upon. The Panel encourages UCB to develop and implement its own Strategic Plan with objectives that it intends to pursue actively; and with each objective having realistic KPIs, targets and time-lines for achievement. This Plan should be developed with involvement of a broad section of the UCB community thus giving ownership, commitment and accountability to individuals and units to engage with the implementation.

***Recommendation - 2***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop a new strategy plan through an inclusive process with its community and ensure that the plan has clear objectives, Key Performance Indicators and time lines.*

It also remains unclear to the Panel what mechanism is used and the locus of responsibility for monitoring of achievement of objectives within the Strategic Plan. Further evaluation of progress is likely to be required by the newly established Board of Trustees, so, that this body can adequately discharge its responsibilities.

Several versions of organizational charts were presented to the Panel including quite different versions in the Revised Strategic Plan as compared with that in the Human Resources Policies and Procedures - HRPP document. Various titles appeared not to match with the reality of post-holder titles and committees/groups. The Panel urges the University to develop a clear and current organizational chart showing the proposed academic and administrative committee structure with reporting lines, with an indication of any unfilled or future positions.

***Recommendation - 3***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a clear organizational chart with the proposed academic and administrative committee structure including reporting lines.*

UCB has a collection of policies and procedures, many very recently introduced (provided to the Panel as Extra Evidence), that are not comprehensive but are relevant to some key

activities across the institution – Human Resources, Academic Regulations, Finance etc. The Panel heard with concern during a range of interviews with staff that they are generally unaware of the policies and when there is awareness, contradictory accounts of the central policy details were given. For example, termination of contract notice was unknown or contradictory; criteria and procedure for promotion between the ranks were unknown. Not surprisingly, in many cases the policy and procedures as described were not implemented; for example, the annual faculty members’ performance reviews were not operational. Other procedures do not appear to follow internationally best accepted practice; such as, the appointment of faculty members and senior academic positions is less than transparent and often does not involve senior or other faculty members in the selection and decision-making. There are no evident policies relating to faculty member responsibilities and expectations regarding teaching duties, or qualifications required to teach at different academic levels. These also need to be demonstrated to comply with HEC regulations.

***Recommendation - 4***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement its policies and procedures consistently across the institution and develop a strategy to ensure staff awareness and understanding.*

Other than the involvement of students in the Student Affairs Committee, there is no student representation on academic or academic support committees. Whilst at present there are few functional committees, as this committee structure is implemented as a result of the relevant objective in the ‘Revised Strategic Plan’, UCB should involve students in appropriate committees and working groups.

***Recommendation - 5***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain provide opportunities for student representatives to be included in appropriate committees and working groups as full members. These student members should be elected from an organized student association/council.*

The President has an advisory team, the University Council, to assist in decision-making. However, the meetings are irregular and informal. The Panel encourages UCB to introduce regularly scheduled, formal meetings not only for the University Council but at every management level of the institution as the current approach is very patchy in terms of coverage, regularity and reporting. Those meetings need to produce minutes that are appropriately distributed and used to track actions and progress on the business of the meeting. In order for management to function effectively, UCB needs a continuing process for the collection and distribution of data tracking.

The institution manages its budget and expenditure largely by placing all responsibility for expenditures in the hands of the President and the Head of Finance. Heads of academic and administrative departments do not have budget responsibility, nor do they receive monthly summaries of the funds that have been expended. This absence of a link between planning and budgeting that includes those responsible for the delivery of the academic programmes constitutes a risk for the quality of UCB's education provision and thus a reputational risk.

As an alternative, UCB could consider introducing a system of shared responsibility in which the heads of department, in particular, are given annual expense budgets which they can track, control and manage. The Panel encourages the University to give adequate delegated authority and control of the approved budget to those in charge of the delivery of programmes and services. This will ensure that programme offerings are appropriately resourced and so contribute to the quality of the learning programmes.

***Recommendation - 6***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain give adequate delegated authority and control of the budget to the unit heads so that they are empowered to lead and manage their departments effectively.*

#### **4. Academic Standards**

Programme structures seem to comply with HEC regulations in terms of the number of credits being commensurate with the yearly 2 semester structure, except for the weekend delivery of the MBA programme which will be commented upon separately. Programmes conform with international norms of structure and credits in the different disciplines and are based on the American liberal education model (rather than vocational). They were originally developed in collaboration with McMaster University, Canada.

No formal benchmarking of programmes has been undertaken so far. The Panel did not find persuasive evidence of appropriate benchmarks being used to set academic standards or to measure the institution's performance in its teaching and learning programmes. The interpretation of 'benchmarking' by a number of faculty members and staff interviewed by the Panel was clearly limited to comparisons of curriculum content and descriptive inputs rather than comparisons of performance outcomes and direct measures of resources. The University needs to identify similar institutions, both regionally and internationally, so that it can firstly, set benchmarks for itself and secondly, ensure that the findings of its benchmarking activities are used to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

***Recommendation - 7***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement formal benchmark mechanisms for its programme structure and performance, and undertake benchmarking exercises on a regular basis.*

The RSP refers to substantial duplication of core courses and even programmes and has recommended their merger. *There is very little linkage among the different elements for a degree programme to ensure that the graduates are indeed acquiring the knowledge they are meant to via the intended courses.* The same report also pinpoints the lack of brand identity and integration of the various University offerings denoting a lack of academic planning and poor quality assurance. Through interviews the Panel heard that some senior staff object to the recommended changes on pedagogical grounds holding the view that recommendations emanated from an efficiency of resources consideration. It was not clear to the Panel how changes are considered, decided upon and further implemented. The Panel concludes that there needs to be a formal review of programmes to eliminate duplication; then reviews of programmes to be offered need to be undertaken to ensure graduates are appropriately qualified for employment or further studies.

***Recommendation - 8***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain conduct a formal review of its programme offerings to eliminate duplication; then undertake reviews of programmes to be offered to ensure graduates are appropriately qualified.*

The weekend delivery of the MBA programme contradicts the HEC injunction not to hold a once monthly condensed period delivery for any Master-level programme. Moreover, it is delivered over a 3 day-period from 9:00 to 5:00 with coffee and lunch breaks, which limits the total delivery time to about 20 hours per module. This puts it considerably below the delivery time for the equivalent evening programme. Furthermore, from interviews with faculty members teaching on the weekend programme, the Panel was told that this format was not suitable for junior professionals and should be limited to top executives. There is no distinction between the modes of delivery of the two programmes (evening and weekend) in the final degree awarded. The Panel urges UCB to address the lack of equivalence in the offering of the MBA programme as well as the unacceptably long teaching hours per day associated with the delivery of the MBA programme. Failure to do so constitutes a serious threat to the quality of the MBA programme.

***Recommendation - 9***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain review the weekend MBA programme to ensure its compliance with HEC regulations and eventually adjusting its delivery format to fulfil set academic and regulatory requirements.*

There are clear admissions requirements stated on the UCB Website and in the Student Handbook. The required English language entry standards are also indicated clearly. However the RSP highlights serious problems with the admission process: (1) *a number of students admitted have limited ability to successfully carry college-level work;* (2) *not all students who apply to UCB are required to take the English Entrance Examination;* and (3) *some students lack*



*an official TOEFL score. Furthermore, the English faculty/group has control neither over student admissions, enrolment into appropriate English classes, nor over the English entrance examination. This raises serious doubts about the commitment of the University to uphold its own admission standards and highlights again the problem with academic governance and management.*

The provided organizational chart does not explicitly state the reporting line of the Admission and Registration Department. However, the Panel was informed through interviews that the Head of Admission and Registration Department reports directly to the University President. Management of the English entrance examination is also under the control of Admissions with no involvement of academics. With this allocation of responsibilities, there could be a conflict of interest resulting from pressures on the Admission and Registration Department to enrol an adequate number of students. The Panel found no evidence of any systematic and regular review of Admissions criteria or any evaluation of the services offered by the Admissions and Registration Department.

The optimal capacity for the University within its current campus premises has been estimated at 2000. The Panel urges the University to bring the English entrance examination under the control of the English Language Programme within set policy guidelines for admission into the core curriculum of UCB and different levels of its Foundation Programme.

In evaluating the Multimedia and Communications Programme, the RSP states that basic resources to recruit and retain students are inadequate. Moreover, no admissions committee exists to propose or review changes to admission policies and procedures. The Panel urges the University to create an Admission Committee with faculty member involvement to oversee the admissions process and introduce necessary changes as required.

***Recommendation - 10***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain establish an appropriate mechanism at institutional level for the systematic review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the admission criteria in all programmes.*

It became clear to the Panel through interviews with the staff that UCB has an open policy of admissions; namely, all students who fulfil the nominal requirements for admission are accepted. This is confirmed by the results of the English entrance examination which shows that all applicants who take the test are channelled through the different levels of the foundation programme. Though a small percentage of non-admitted students are included, the Panel is of the view that these relate to applicants who do not follow through with their applications rather than actual rejections. The University needs to have a considered view of the admissions criteria for each programme to ensure that students have the potential for successful programme completion in their chosen discipline.

***Recommendation - 11***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement minimal admission standards for each of its programmes.*

Learning outcomes (LOs) have been developed for purposes of this review exercise and reported in the Programme Review Report (PRR). The AUB consultancy team in 2009 worked with all UCB academic departments to ensure the development and integration of proper LOs at programme and course level. For undergraduate Business programmes, LOs have been provided across concentrations and a programme level LO matrix has also been developed. However, LOs seem to be the result of the AUB consulting exercise and not of a sustained process involving UCB faculty members. Moreover there is no mention of any staff development to write and maintain LOs. A formal review process is allegedly being established following the recent development of LOs.

It is not clear to the Panel whether AUB will evaluate the implementation of course and programme LOs as a continuation of the current consultancy contract which expires in the Autumn of 2010. However, the Panel would like to stress the importance for UCB to build its own capacity in undertaking and sustaining this crucial exercise. UCB has identified this requirement as an area for improvement in relation to this indicator.

***Recommendation - 12***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain take urgent steps to develop its internal capacity both at management and faculty levels in order to ensure sustainability of the institution.*

Despite the apparent commitment of the University at all levels to develop an outcome-based education, the Panel found little evidence of a consistent process of LO development and review and subsequent adjustment of curriculum to assure achievement of these defined outcomes. The Panel heard during interviews that Faculty members are left alone in their efforts to define proper learning outcomes. At best, they would consult with their Heads of Department before finalizing their LOs in the course syllabus. The PRR which compiles all LOs developed with the help of AUB consultants was not mentioned by any of the interviewees. This suggests to the Panel that there has been limited involvement of faculty members in developing the list of LOs provided as support material for the current review exercise. Moreover, students reported that LOs were merely mentioned in the syllabus and did not seem to be its central component.

***Recommendation - 13***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain, with the aid of appropriate expertise, develop and review learning outcomes for all courses and programmes provided.*

For the Internship course which carries 3 credit hours, *there is no formal internship documentation with specific requirements, guidelines, and goals* and no mentoring of students prior, to or during, the internship period. The report further states that *the internship with its*

current requirements and even with the recommended changes does not deserve a 3 credit hour academic load. The Panel was disconcerted to hear during interviews that there is no awareness of the recommendations pertaining to the Internship included in the RSP.

**Recommendation - 14**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain revise its Internship course to ascertain its effective contribution to the student academic training, and to justify the allocated credit.*

**Recommendation - 15**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement detailed guidelines and regulations pertaining to the management, supervision and assessment of the Internship.*

UCB does not employ an efficient system to measure the learning capacity of students. This contradicts the detailed approach for assessing achievement of LOs in different programmes as described in the PRR and the related assertion that *UCB has developed and rolled out a comprehensive assessment system for all of its educational programmes*. The Panel did not find any evidence of a comprehensive and routine review process in relation to achievement of programme outcomes. Assessment of student learning is rather conducted individually by faculty members within their own courses.

**Recommendation - 16**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a comprehensive outcomes assessment system for all of its educational programmes.*

Students interviewed by the Panel reported that it was not common practice for faculty members to provide written feedback on their examination papers. If a student needed any significant feedback on his/her performance, they would have to contact the faculty members personally. This was verified on the examination papers made available to the Panel which had little written feedback. Consistency of assessment across sections and courses is within the remit of the Examination Committee, which seems to be the only active committee in the University.

Despite many other constructive initiatives by faculty members, the processes of assessment seem to be largely contained within faculty members' initiatives and at best infused by informal brainstorming between faculty members and department heads. Furthermore, faculty members seemed to have a rather intuitive approach to learning assessment and did not perceive the need for professional development in measuring course and programme LOs.

Further, there is no external scrutiny of LO achievement, such as through grade moderation, external examination or any other form of grade normalization. During interviews with the Examination Committee, the Panel heard that it is partly playing this role by monitoring marking schemes and controlling grade inflation but this was not confirmed by the

Registrar. Any moderation processes appear to be informal. The Panel encourages the institution to give immediate consideration to these issues in order to ensure the quality of its academic provision.

***Recommendatio - 17***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement an external assessment moderation system to evaluate achievement of learning outcomes*

Programme heads report in interviews with the Panel that they used course portfolios to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. These were consequently requested in order to understand further the type of delivery and assessment in classes. The portfolios provided were very rudimentary and did not seem to conform to what one would expect from a course portfolio. They consisted of a course syllabus, the different examination components and samples of student work. They did not seem to be geared towards the continuous improvement of course delivery as such. The Panel urges the institution to develop and implement a standard format and content for course portfolios to evaluate the teaching and learning.

***Recommendation - 18***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a standard format for course portfolios geared to the evaluation of teaching and learning to include direct and indirect measures of student performance, graded assignments and examinations, faculty member reviews of the course, and improvement plans.*

UCB appears to have an embryonic Management Information System (MIS). However, there is no clear description of the MIS used, its outputs or its degree of support for academic decision-making. The institution states that *a Management Information System will be needed to record, track, analyze and report on KPIs and University performance*. The Panel found no sample management reports included in the documentation and the supporting material. A compendium of statistics produced by the Registrar included all basic statistics of admissions, registration, and other transactional data but the data were not targeted towards any remedial or management process of student performance improvement or maintenance of academic standards.

***Recommendation - 19***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain redesign its management information system to allow for tracking and improving student performance and maintaining academic standards, as well as to provide a sound platform for decision making.*

The Panel found from interviews with staff that the Learning Management System (Blackboard) is the most commonly deployed and usage statistics indicate that it is widely in use. The library management system also covers most library processes and provides a student interface through the University Intranet for requests of basic services like book borrowing. A new grade entry system is being implemented to replace the old manual

system. These systems do not seem to have an interface other than running on a common network platform. The University does not have any kind of IT plan to ensure such integration. Moreover, the absence of clear reporting and governance structures has an impact on information flows, or lack thereof, thereby limiting data generated for other than basic transactions. The Panel urges the University to develop an integrated architecture and infrastructure of its various information system applications to enable the holistic management of academic processes especially those targeting student needs.

***Recommendation - 20***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement an integrated architecture and infrastructure of its various information system applications to enable a holistic management of academic processes especially those targeting student needs.*

UCB has entered into a number of agreements with international institutions; only two of which appear to be consequential; the first with the Management Centre at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) enabling UCB to offer an MBA in Islamic Finance. UCB grants the MBA certificate upon completion of the programme and no appropriate process of quality assurance seems to be in place by IIUM. The programme is currently fully contained within UCB although three faculty members from IIUM teach in this programme.

The second agreement is with the American University of Beirut (AUB). UCB has a consultancy agreement with the Regional External Programmes (REP), the consultancy branch of the Olayan Business School at AUB, to help with a number of academic processes. While the recent agreement was signed on time for helping with the preparation of the current review, the collaboration with AUB has been in place since 2005 and consists primarily of supporting UCB on the academic side of its operations. The relationship with AUB cannot be considered as a form of academic alliance. This has been clearly stated in the consultancy contract wherein AUB clearly distances itself as an academic institution of repute from any academic association with UCB. AUB's role was nonetheless central to the preparation of the SER, the RSP, and other key documentation for the current exercise.

Other collaborations by UCB include the agreement with the *Institute for Manufacturing (IFM) at Cambridge University* to offer a programme on research and innovation as well as consultancy services to the region. This is not expected to have any direct relevance to UCB academic programmes and seems to be rather commercial in nature. However, during a meeting with students, a number of them were adamant that the University was now affiliated with *Cambridge University* which would entitle them to pursue their studies at Cambridge. Whilst there is nothing to suggest that the University has ill-communicated on the real scope of its agreement with *Cambridge University*, it is important to correct any such misperceptions.

UCB has explicit agreements with many institutions as documented in the support material for the SER. The Panel encourages the University to further expand its collaboration with

other institutions in specific areas that will contribute to achievement of the institutional Mission and Vision, and to evaluate periodically all of these collaborative arrangements.

*Affirmation - 1*

*HERU affirms University College of Bahrain's effort to form collaborations with international institutions and urges the University to develop proper implementation plans for some of these agreements, and discard those that are not implementable.*

## **5. Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

The lack of effective evaluation and review processes in academic and administrative units at UCB, has resulted in a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) that has a paucity of evidence to demonstrate many aspects of compliance with the criteria for the HERU Quality Indicators. Attention to the criteria associated with the Quality Indicators should have resulted in more self-reflection and action to generate direct and indirect measures of performance, and development of systems to sustain an environment of continuous improvement. This lack of supporting evidence applies to the management of quality assurance processes at UCB and demonstrates lack of attention to the HERU Quality Indicator 12 regarding quality assurance and enhancement.

Quality assurance systems at UCB are at a very early stage of development. The Panel heard of the President's commitment to providing a quality education for the students. However, the Panel did not find a clear, shared understanding from management or from other layers of personnel across the institution, about the meaning of 'quality education'. While the University has just established a Quality Assurance Committee, its terms of reference have still to be developed and there is no quality framework to guide the work of this committee. There is no designated unit or position at UCB with particular responsibility for quality assurance or institutional research.

The only evident feedback mechanism operating in UCB is the end of course survey instrument to gauge student feedback – mainly directed at the performance of the faculty member rather than the course itself. No other units evidently evaluated their own performance with any formal mechanisms. This lack of routine feedback and baseline data prevents any rational, informed improvements to be evaluated. UCB has no Quality Manual containing relevant policies and procedures, and lacks any process to monitor and demonstrate compliance with HEC licensing regulations.

From interviews with students and faculty members, it was evident that some improvements and response to services and programmes do result from representations made to the President. When the Panel questioned the existence of evaluative processes during interviews it heard from a range of staff that it was oral feedback. No documentary evidence of feedback, analysis or process leading to improvement was available. The Panel encourages the University to develop a quality framework from discussion and debate

involving the UCB community as a whole; document the quality assurance and enhancement framework; policies and procedures; and evaluation instruments; in an institutional Quality Assurance Manual with designated responsibility for its production dissemination and maintenance. The institution should also ensure that routine evaluations involving direct and indirect measures of performance are deployed across all programmes and services at UCB and that the information is analyzed and used in a process of continuous improvement.

***Recommendation - 21***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a systematic and robust approach to quality assurance which is centred on continuous quality improvement rather than compliance and correction, and which is integrated with all aspects of the University including governance, administration and the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.*

The Panel noted the comprehensive UCB institutional and programmatic review carried out by the American University of Beirut (AUB) and reported as part of the UCB 'Revised Strategic Plan' (June 2009). The Panel views the AUB consultancy as a strength and the recent review contained very specific recommendations and proposals for improvement. It was of concern to the Panel that those responsible for programmes and services that had been subject to review, had not seen the review documentation as submitted to the Panel and had not been asked to respond to the points raised or action any of what appeared to be constructive recommendations for quality enhancement. Given the time that has now elapsed the Panel is concerned that the recommendations from AUB are not taken seriously and/or treated with sufficient urgency to bring benefit to the institution and its current students and staff.

***Recommendation - 22***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain provide a timed action plan showing how the 'Revised Strategic Plan', including proposed changes to structures, programmes and services, will be implemented, who is responsible in each case, and how progress towards achieving objectives will be monitored.*

## **6. Quality of Teaching and Learning**

The PRR describes assessment methods used to review academic programmes and further states that "UCB has developed and implemented systematic processes to develop, monitor, evaluate and revise the substance and delivery of curricula on an ongoing basis for better alignment with UCB's Mission". However the report does not provide any sample of such assessment and the Panel did not find any evidence of it during the site visit. Further, the AUB programme review produced a set of recommendations for programme and curricular changes. At the time of the visit, the Panel noted that Programme Heads did not seem to be aware of such recommendations though these were made in June 2009; nor was there a

formal process to tackle recommended changes. The Executive Committee was tasked with implementing the Strategic Plan where curricular recommendations were issued. However, there was also mention of the establishment of a separate committee to oversee the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Further anomalies reported by the RSP pointed to pre-requisites not being always respected and both faculty members and students not always being clear about them. Course catalogue descriptions are not always respected during delivery and *instructors were left to their own devices to update course descriptions as they saw fit in their particular instance...some courses appeared not to include an actual syllabus*. Some course deliveries were also outdated and there appears to be no mechanism to review syllabi formally and on a periodic basis. The first priority recommendation of the RSP is to institute a formal curriculum review and quality assurance process to palliate the above. This was not verified during the visit as findings of the report were not communicated, and no process to act on the proposed changes seemed to be in place at the time of the visit. The Panel would expect that any such changes and follow-up on the recommendations of the RSP were to be taken up by a curriculum committee and relevant QA structures, it was indicated to the Panel during interviews that implementing such changes would be through the University President.

***Recommendation - 23***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain should institute a formal curriculum review process to integrate evidence-based changes and improvements to programmes and courses.*

In the absence of relevant academic committees, such as a Curriculum Committee, programme and curriculum development seems to be done in an *ad hoc* manner through the hierarchical academic chain of command. Faculty members requesting a change in their existing courses or proposing new courses, discuss their request with their Programme Director who discusses this with the Executive Committee. A Programme Head mentioned a 'Syllabus Committee' through which such changes are considered but the Panel did not find evidence of the existence of such a committee. The Executive Committee, which is made up of a majority of administrators (4 administrators and the 3 department heads), seems to be playing a key role in the review and approval of new courses and programmes which are subsequently forwarded to the Board of Trustees. The RSP also mentions that at times, the University President directly oversees changes in course content.

***Recommendation - 24***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a clear decision-making process for curricular changes; one that is primarily vested in academics and not in administrators.*

The RSP also mentions that course descriptions have been left untouched since programmes were started and faculty members were free to make changes to course syllabi without any



form of referral. The Panel also saw evidence of courses being outdated with one example given in the RSP. A problem of redundancy between different courses and even different programmes was pointed out in the RSP.

Other than the AUB consultancy, there was no external review of programmes reported, although undergraduate programmes were initially developed in collaboration with McMaster University as previously stated. UCB makes a claim to following guidelines by INQAAHE, and UK QAA amongst others but the Panel did not find evidence of any formal quality assurance procedure to ensure sound academic standards, nor did the University undergo any systematic quality assurance process hitherto. Faculty members interviewed by the Panel insisted that the quality of curriculum was a strength of the University but could not provide a tangible justification about how it is being evaluated.

The Panel heard during interviews with students and graduates, of their appreciation of faculty members' commitment and efforts to support them in their learning and personal development. However, this attention to the student educational experience is increasingly at risk due to pressures of high teaching loads and turnover of faculty members. Moreover, as UCB is primarily a teaching institution, most if not all of its teaching staff are primarily involved with teaching rather than scholarship. As a result there is little evidence that teaching is being informed by current scholarship. Other than claims made in the SER and PRR that there are mechanisms to ensure academic staff keep up to date in their disciplines, and that faculty members are encouraged to be innovative in the delivery of programmes, no evidence was found to support this claim. The course outlines and syllabi provided along with the SER do not emphasize any significant innovative delivery of teaching, nor is there a mention of any support or development opportunity for innovative teaching.

***Recommendation - 25***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain provide its staff with development opportunities to support innovative teaching methods as well as scholarship in disciplines.*

Interviews with faculty members and students suggest that the quality of teaching is variable across the institution. Some faculty members actively promote experiential learning in their courses and use evidence-based knowledge in their delivery. As many faculty members had previous work experience in industry, they endeavour to bring to class their practical knowledge and keep students abreast of latest developments in practice. A University official who is also a full-time faculty member talked passionately about graduating 'leaders' rather than operational people. This was echoed through the student, alumni and employer interviews; however no supporting documentation or processes existed to corroborate this; nor was this part of any unified and systematic pedagogical strategy or philosophy within the University, nor does the University seem to provide any type of instructional support for teaching and learning.

Blackboard is the Learning Management System (LMS) used to support blended e-learning in the University. But it was not made clear how the LMS was used for any innovative

teaching delivery; that is beyond its use as a repository of course resources and a vehicle of communication with students. Student interviews confirmed the basic use of Blackboard.

Although the University claims to conduct 'student evaluation of teaching' (SET) on a regular basis, the Panel found during interviews with students that the process is not systematic and takes place only occasionally. No SET is held for MBA students. The SET evaluation forms do not include a course and section name or a lecturer name. Students write it on the 'anonymous form' provided, which could constitute a threat to the integrity of the SET process. Moreover there does not seem to be any systematic process for collecting and processing SET feedback and there is no analysis or tabulation of SET results. Moreover SET are strictly used for retention decisions and feedback to faculty members or student is not provided. Faculty members are occasionally invited by department heads to discuss some of the student complaints but the process is informal.

***Recommendation - 26***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain conduct student evaluation of teaching systematically both for undergraduate and graduate courses and the resultant data is analyzed and used as a basis for improving the quality of teaching and learning.*

The University provides the Alumni with a link on the website to record their details and keep in touch but there is no mention of any other form of feedback provided by them. However, during interviews with alumni the Panel heard of a high level of satisfaction with the institution. They praised UCB for the quality of teaching, use of computer-based instruction, small-class sizes enhancing the learning experience, family atmosphere, practice-based teaching, the liberal education curriculum, and the close follow-up of students during internships. Employers interviewed by the Panel also expressed satisfaction with the graduates output. However, the Panel did not find any formal mechanisms to gauge stakeholders' satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the Institution.

***Recommendation 27***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain institute formal mechanisms to determine employers' and alumni satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the Institution.*

## **7. Student Support**

There is overwhelming evidence of a student-focused culture at UCB. All staff, both academic and administrative, demonstrated a commitment to student learning and well-being. During interviews with the students the Panel heard that staff, including the Heads of Department and the President, are readily accessible to students and responsive to their needs, and that all students, including international students are treated with equal respect and consideration.

**Commendation - 1**

*HERU commends University College of Bahrain for its culture of responsiveness to individual student needs.*

Scholarships are available to students with good grades. For the Spring Semester 2009-2010, a significant number of enrolled students were being supported with a 100% scholarship, although the majority are supported by external parties. However, the Panel could not find any policy pertaining to the implementation of the allocation of the scholarships. There is no documentation that explains how students may apply for scholarships and the process by which an application is evaluated.

**Recommendation - 28**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and document its own criteria and procedures for the allocation of scholarships.*

The University has not yet built a mechanism to monitor and identify students who are at risk of failure. Moreover, even if a student 'at risk' is identified, UCB does not have a formalised method for providing assistance. The Panel encourages the University to develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and support academically weak students.

**Recommendation - 29**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and support academically weak students.*

During the programmes of study, students have access to course structure, examination dates, final course grades, etc. with the right to appeal. However, the involvement of the academic department in the process is not documented, and the Panel received contradictory answers from faculty members interviewed.

The Panel notes that the University does not provide many of the student support services that are usual in a University. These include: counselling, career planning, and health services.

**Recommendation - 30**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain provide professional counselling, career planning and health services to students to contribute to their well-being and academic success.*

## **8. Human Resources**

The Panel is concerned about the high turnover of staff as well as the lack of transparency in the recruitment of staff. There is no strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of high quality staff. There is no systematic collection of data about staff turnover. Most faculty members are given the maximum teaching load (as indicated by the HEC) as a standard

expectation with no reduction in load for research productivity and/or management responsibilities.

All recruitment processes, including the advertising of posts, checking of references and interviewing of candidates must be as transparent as possible and include the input of the relevant sectors of the University. Appointments need to be transparent and the selection of academic staff needs to have the clear input of those involved in the teaching and learning. Moreover, the renewal of one or sometime two year contracts needs to take place as early as possible in the first or second year to ensure that the academic staff members are confident about their ongoing employment.

***Recommendation - 31***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a strategic human resources plan for the recruitment and retention of high quality academics.*

The Panel received a set of Human Resources Policies and Procedures dated 24 January 2010. The Panel notes the role of the President with all requests requiring presidential approval and being pre-eminently involved in the processes of selection and appointment. Equitable treatment is a fundamental dimension in academic communities. The Panel urges the University to apply these policies consistently and equitably.

***Recommendation - 32***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain apply the Human Resources policies and procedures consistently and equitably.*

There is no regular survey of staff satisfaction in place and no plan to improve the working and learning environment for staff on the basis of evidence. While staff members are positive about the physical facilities of the working environment, there is little evidence that senior management has actively supported the development of a community of scholars amongst the staff. It was reported to the Panel that an institution-wide staff performance appraisal process is being developed. The Panel urges the University to take the opportunity to base developmental planning on individual dialogues and to use that information to inform staff development plans at all levels of the organization.

***Recommendation - 33***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a regular survey for staff satisfaction and use the result to improve the working and learning environment.*

UCB has a set of grievance policies. However, the Panel found during interviews that staff members are not aware of these policies; and did not find any evidence of implementation. The Panel encourages the institution to ensure that it disseminates these policies across the institution.

**Recommendation - 34**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop mechanisms to ensure that grievance policies are implemented and that staff members are aware of these policies.*

The Panel was provided with evidence of a staff orientation process, which occurred through a tour of the campus and the use of a staff induction pack with information relevant to their future work area. They are also invited to a social gathering soon after commencement of employment. As the institution grows the orientation process will need to be developed further and formalized.

UCB supports faculty members to attend conferences and training activities. Between July and December 2009 nine individuals benefited from these policies. Two attended a workshop at the University of Bahrain and two members of administrative staff attended a Tamkeen Progression Programme. The non-Bahrain based events related to English language teaching and to Women in Leadership. A small number of these items were research related, as most could be classed as training/development. It was not apparent to the Panel how these activities arose from a comprehensive survey of needs and developmental priorities.

**Recommendation - 35**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain articulate a coherent professional development plan updated annually from information generated by individual reviews and reports of programme/department needs.*

The Panel did not see evidence that UCB has formal promotion or reward procedures. If that is so, it could be a factor affecting retention and motivation. The Panel encourages the University to develop and implement transparent and motivating reward and recognition policies and procedures.

**Recommendation - 36**

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain put in place transparent policies and procedures for recognising and rewarding faculty performance and high levels of motivation.*

## **9. Infrastructure, Physical and Other Resources**

The Panel had a tour of the infrastructure of UCB. The campus consists of three buildings, each with three levels. Classrooms, faculty member offices and computer laboratories are well furnished and equipped with television sets, computers, LCDs and wireless intra- and internet access as well as white-boards. The campus also includes two cafeterias, a bookshop, a small room to accommodate a nurse and a limited parking lot. The buildings

are supplied with carbon dioxide powder fire extinguishers and fire alarm bells; however no fire water hoses were seen inside the buildings. Safe emergency exits are not evident; which is a major concern. Although ramps are in place for persons in wheelchairs to enter the ground floor of each building, there is no access to upper levels in the absence of any elevators. The Panel heard during interviews with staff that there are no effective policies or procedures in place to assist the learning of students with, for example, visual or hearing impairments. The University should survey the academic faculty, staff and students to ascertain their needs and suggestions and take the findings into consideration in the improvement of the campus.

The library is relatively small with a maximum capacity of around 30 users at any time (about 5% of the total number of UCB students). It is equipped with 8 computers and supervised by two staff members. The book collection is less than 15,000 items, but the number of different titles could not be ascertained, besides the fact that many items are old issues and many books were held with multiple copies. There are no subscriptions to E-journals; however the library provides on-line access to Emerald Insight. Though it was claimed that the librarian can buy new items on request, the procurement is not systemized and has to go through the University President to be approved, since no annual budget is planned or allocated for this purpose. The library is open from 8.00 to 16.00 and only during working days (Sunday – Thursday). This means that graduate students, both evening and weekend programmes, cannot access the library when visiting the University for Classes.

There are as yet no formal mechanisms in place for assessing user satisfaction. The Panel concludes that the Library is under-resourced and the library collections are small and lacking in currency.

***Recommendation - 37***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain continue to improve its resources, including the library collection, services and opening hours to cater for the current and projected growth in student numbers.*

The management of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is supervised by the IT Officer. Although the SER indicated that the University has an ICT system that supports both the academic and administrative constituents of the University to carry out technical and pedagogical services, the Panel found that the system in use is very constrained. This makes it inappropriate for carrying out even basic transactional reports necessary for admission, registration and library.

The present management information system limits the extent to which reliable data can be used for institutional planning at UCB. Furthermore, meaningful information, which could be used in identifying and providing support for at-risk students and for tracking success rates across the teaching and learning programmes, is not readily available. While some form of evaluation using data takes place, the absence of a reliable database for the purpose

of the consistent monitoring of performance across the programmes and as a tool for making informed academic decisions, is an area of concern which needs to be addressed.

The Panel was concerned to note that back-up data is stored in the same room as the system servers. Although regular back-up procedures are in place and the systems incorporate a measure of redundancy that provides some protection, the Panel was unable to establish whether or not UCB has an ICT disaster management and recovery plan. This constitutes a serious risk for the institution. As a matter of urgency UCB needs to develop and implement an ICT disaster recovery plan which includes the storage of back-up data in a separate location, preferably off-campus in order to ensure business continuity. The Panel also noted that only one person is responsible for all IT related tasks, which also constitutes a business risk.

***Recommendation - 38***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement an ICT disaster recovery plan that includes the storage of back-up data in an off-site location and ensure that there is sufficient staffing of the IT department.*

## **10. Research**

In the SER, UCB observed that the focus was upon teaching and service with faculty members not having the resources to contribute towards a major research agenda. The Panel heard that the institution is trying to recruit an increased proportion of PhD holders. It also heard that some existing faculty members are studying for PhDs. However, high staff turnover confounds these endeavours as doubtless did a temporary halt on admission which meant that offers of employment to six faculty members were withdrawn.

***Affirmation - 2***

*HERU affirms the intention of University College of Bahrain to increase the proportion of PhD holders among the faculty membership.*

At present the small numbers of active researchers operate separately. The Panel heard no information which would suggest either the first signs of emergence of a research culture or of any academic strategy to cultivate one.

***Recommendation - 39***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and document a clear and detailed research strategy, with specific KPIs and provide appropriate resources to support this function.*

The Panel heard of provision for faculty members' attendance at conferences and at least one example of a member of faculty receiving financial assistance toward the cost of study for a PhD. However it also heard of other cases where such assistance has not occurred. The Panel

did not find evidence of policies and procedures to support the research endeavours of academics.

***Recommendation - 40***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement equitable and transparent formal policies and procedures to support the research ambitions of the institution.*

## **11. Community Engagement**

The University contributes to community engagement through offering scholarships both as a means of securing top students and a means of community engagement through the inclusions of local students whose finances may otherwise preclude their access to higher education. While the efforts of the University are appreciated by the Panel, the institution needs to consider formalising these activities and expanding the scope of its community activities. There are important opportunities for UCB to expand its work considerably to mutual benefit in this regard. The Panel did not find a shared understanding of the potential scope for community engagement that could bring mutual benefit to external organisations and the University and noted that the University is not active in its outreach to the local communities; apart from the scholarships it provides. However, the University is applauded for provision of scholarships for local students in need. UCB awards 23 scholarships a year to Saar and Janabiya village residents, the two adjoining villages to UCB campus. Countrywide, UCB gives 30 to 35 scholarships a year and in its short history, it has graduated between 130 and 140 students with full-scholarships with a further number on partial scholarships ranging from 10 to 50%. As a result, the University has succeeded in attracting a number of meritorious students.

***Commendation - 2***

*HERU commends University College of Bahrain for its provision of scholarships to meritorious applicants and for local students in need.*

There are few community events at UCB and there have been some exhibitions and sport activities. The Panel found during interviews with academic staff and students that there is a lack of understanding of the central function of community engagement in the University. There needs to be a shared understanding of who comprises the UCB community and what form of engagement with this community should take place. In particular, UCB needs to consider the curriculum implications of its community engagement approaches. The Panel would like to encourage UCB to develop this third core activity by developing a plan through which the institution: (i) conceptualizes its own understanding of community engagement; (ii) integrates these activities into the other core functions; (iii) ensures that there is allocation of appropriate resources, and (iv) develops and implements quality assurance mechanisms for community engagement.



***Recommendation - 41***

*HERU recommends that University College of Bahrain develop and implement a conceptual framework, coordinating structures, policies and resource allocation for community engagement so that individual efforts become part of an institutional plan, that is implemented, monitored and reviewed.*

## **12. Conclusion**

With the stated Mission and Vision of UCB, and the growth that has taken place and planned for the future, the institution now needs to undertake a transition to equip itself to operate with good governance and sound practices for quality management in all its programmes and activities. This requires new organizational structures, policies and procedures that are implemented swiftly and rigorously to bring about the essential changes. It also needs to develop and implement a management and committee structure through which the quality of the core functions can be managed. These changes are important to align the institution with international good practice and to comply with the regulating requirements of the Higher Education Council.

To achieve the necessary changes UCB needs to (i) develop a robust and documented quality management system; (ii) develop indicators to measure progress towards achieving outcomes; (iii) implement formal review processes informed by direct and indirect measures of performance; and (iv) implement the necessary improvements and provide feedback to all stakeholders.

UCB also needs to develop and articulate its approach to teaching and learning in a comprehensive academic plan, which will stem from its mission and will enable consistent and robust teaching underpinned by research across the faculties and support the academic success of students. This together with the need for an allocation of time for research and scholarly activities will have implications for the workload of academic staff.

Failure to give urgent attention to these matters constitutes a major risk to the viability, status, and reputation of UCB.