



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

# **Higher Education Review Unit**

## **Programme Review Report**

**Master of Business Administration  
University College of Bahrain  
Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Date Reviewed: 9-10 October 2011**

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# 1. The Programme Review Process

## 1.1 The Programme Review Framework

The *four* indicators used to measure whether or not a programme meets minimum standards are as follows:

***Indicator 1: Curriculum***

***Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme***

***Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates***

***Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance***

Conclusions reached are in terms of minimum standards, and the summative judgment falls into one of three categories:

- (i) *The programme satisfies all four indicators and gives confidence, or*
- (ii) *There is limited confidence because up to two indicators are not satisfied, or*
- (iii) *There is no confidence in the programme because more than two indicators are not satisfied.*

## 1.2 The programme review process at the University College of Bahrain

The programme review of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) of the University College of Bahrain (UCB) was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. This Report provides an account of the HERU programme review process and the findings of the Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by UCB, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit, which was conducted on 9-10 October 2011.

UCB was notified by the HERU/QAAET in June 2010 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its MBA with the site visit taking place during February-April 2011. In preparation for the programme review, UCB submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with appendices in November 2010. With site visit postponed to October 2011, a revised SER was prepared and submitted to HERU/QAAET in August 2011. It is expected that the UCB will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its MBA.

The MBA programme is offered as one of a number of business programmes at the UCB. The UCB was founded in 2002 and prides itself in offering 'western-style'

university level education. English is the language of instruction and the focus of the institution's provision is business and management disciplines, information and communication computer technology (ICT), and multi-media and graphic design. The MBA has been offered at the UCB since 2007. The mode of delivery is part-time, usually evening or weekend. The current student enrolment on the MBA has a variety of nationalities as well as Bahrainis, e.g. Saudi Arabians, Kuwaitis, European and American. The majority of students are in employment and carry out their studies part-time. The current gender breakdown of students is 45% male and 55% female. Student numbers on the programme were: 2007-8 (92 enrolled students); 2008-09 (174 enrolled students); 2009-10 (103 enrolled students); and in 2010-11 (42 enrolled students).

The structure of the MBA programme is: 6 core courses (18 credits) plus concentration courses (12 credits) and a 6 credit dissertation (thesis). There are 5 concentration subject areas from which students can choose; namely, Management; Marketing; Management Information Systems; Banking and Finance; and Islamic Finance and Banking; the latter, being by far the most popular concentration of the students. The MBA programme operates on the basis of a maximum class size of 15 students.

## 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 UCB's mission statement specifies that it is 'a business management university' and is 'dedicated to quality education benchmarked against international standards and tuned to the needs of the region it serves.' There is clear evidence of the institution addressing its mission through the MBA programme, for example by conducting regular international benchmarking exercises and in deciding to specialise in Islamic Finance, which is a critical area in the Bahraini economic context.
- 2.2 The MBA programme goals are primarily related to preparing students for the world of work within the Kingdom of Bahrain, recognising the regional and international contexts as well, and focusing outside the traditional oil and gas economy. These goals are appropriate and seem to be catering for specific and critical educational needs of the country and region.
- 2.3 Programme and course specific intended learning outcomes (ILOs) have been determined and are in keeping with what is expected on an MBA programme. However the linkage, alignment and coverage of these various levels of ILOs is not always clear. A more detailed mapping exercise and document is required.
- 2.4 The MBA credit load has recently been revised from 42 to 36 credit hours. This constitutes 30 credit hours of course work, plus an additional six credit hours dedicated to the dissertation. The programme structure consists of core courses plus concentrations and then the dissertation component. A total of six core courses [18 credit hours] precede the set of four concentration courses [12 credit hours]. Students first complete the set of core courses before confirming their choice of one of five sets of concentrations. In keeping with the international character of an MBA, this structure strikes a good balance between exposing students to general business management principles and concepts, while simultaneously allowing them to achieve a degree of specialisation. The five areas of specialisation that are offered are Management, Marketing, Banking and Finance, Management Information Systems and Islamic Banking and Finance. All of these areas of specialisation are related to the UCB mission; are appropriate for a MBA programme; and are relevant to the local and regional context. However, there was concern that possibly too many areas of specialisation were being offered given the staffing of the programme, the size of the student intake, and resulting size of classes.

- 2.5 The introduction of a compulsory research dissertation component by the HEC is a recent development. The institution has responded positively to this requirement. The research course module lays a solid foundation for the dissertation that tends to be quantitative in nature. Furthermore, the policy and procedure for conducting the dissertation is well documented, and a supportive supervision arrangement has been created. Related requirements and procedures [e.g. the research proposal, examination process] are rigorous, systematic and supportive.
- 2.6 Course outlines are available for all of the courses of the MBA programme and are set out in a standard format. However information related to course pre-requisites, journal article readings and case studies was not incorporated into these outlines. Furthermore, the alignment of assessment tasks with ILOs is not always explicitly presented.
- 2.7 Appropriate for a professionally orientated degree such as the MBA, the curriculum achieves a balance between theory and practice, making use of a wide range of teaching methods and materials to support this. In particular, the use of case studies and applied projects is commendable. Furthermore, the small size of classes promotes flexibility and shared responsibility for learning.
- 2.8 While there does not appear to be a comprehensive, formal teaching and learning policy, interviews and various documents [including the handbook dated August 2011] indicate that lecturers are encouraged to make use of a variety of teaching and learning approaches and material, and achieve an appropriate balance of theory and application. There is clear evidence of academic staff regularly updating their course material, prescribed texts and case studies, in order to ensure that the content of courses remains current and relevant. The use of 'real world' or work-based assignments for assessment purposes, as well as the small class size, which encourages greater levels of interaction in the classroom, helps students to relate course content to their day-to-day working experiences. The revised weekly course breakdown [as reflected in the August 2011 handbook] also suggests that in future a more standardised approach will be taken to teaching methods as well as the types of assessment tasks to be adopted.
- 2.9 While documented policy and procedures were not always clearly evident, structures and procedures are in place to set and review assessment tasks, and to monitor and approve examination and final course results. The grading criteria are transparent and communicated to students, with appropriate breakdown of marks for attendance/participation, reports, etc. In spite of these arrangements, some of the examples of examination questions set were poorly phrased, or were ambiguous. On the other hand, the low staff to student ratio has promoted more detailed and personalised feedback on assessment tasks and discussion thereof.

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

- There is a good balance between the core courses that give a broad knowledge base in the field of Business Administration and the number of courses making up the concentrations.
- The dissertation requirements, guidelines and process are sound.
- There is a good balance of theory and practice/application in the ILOs, teaching and learning activities and teaching materials.
- A wide variety of teaching and learning approaches are used to support the delivery of the curriculum.
- Marking criteria are clear and transparent.

2.11 In terms of improvement the Review Panel **recommends** that the Department should address the following issues:

- Course outlines that specify course entry requirements [prerequisites], course readings [i.e. journal articles] and case studies to be used.
- The linkage of programme and course specific intended learning outcomes needs to be better mapped and integrated to ensure alignment and coverage.
- Consider reducing the number of concentrations being offered.

## 2.12 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **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 Based on the submitted documentation, the profile of the students admitted to the MBA programme matches the programme aims and objectives. Furthermore, the interviewed students and alumni reflect positively on the quality of the admitted students. However, the admission process and criteria require further clarification and proper dissemination as there seems to be confusion among faculty members in this regard. Once clarified, these criteria should be consistently applied. Some faculty members spoke of waiving the English proficiency requirements in certain cases, but could not point to any regulation defining the conditions for such waivers.
- 3.2 The profile of the faculty members contributing to the MBA programme at UCB is appropriate, as judged from the CVs and from the feedback of the students and alumni. The qualifications and experience of the teaching staff are all appropriate. Also, there is sufficient support for professional development as indicated by the allocated budget and the feedback from the faculty members. However, there are still some important improvements to make. There is a need for more faculty for the Islamic Banking and Finance concentration which seems to be quite popular. The Institution has recognised this need and intends to recruit a new full-time member of faculty soon. Also the teaching loads should be reduced. It was noticed that some faculty members taught up to 21 hours per week which can negatively impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- 3.3 The MBA students enjoy dedicated classrooms and IT laboratories designed with care. The effort expended by the institution to provide adequate facilities is commendable.
- 3.4 The library collection seems limited and the library space is small. The online resources, however, are adequate. Since the MBA classes are scheduled in the evening, extending the current library hours would be beneficial.
- 3.5 There is little evidence of the student usage of teaching and learning resources. There is a need for a better monitoring of the usage and appropriateness of such resources. The department needs to keep better documentation of the students' usage of teaching and learning material specified in the syllabi with associated analyses and action plans. It is also expected that the Institution collects and analyses the feedback of students on the IT and library resources in order to take actions for enhancing the effective usage of these resources. Such analyses and related action plans should be formally documented.



- 3.6 Although there is an orientation programme for the MBA students, the interviewed students and alumni did not recall attending such a programme. More effort is needed for ensuring a more effective induction of new and transferred students. A formal documentation of the induction programme and its assessment would be beneficial.
- 3.7 The academic and non-academic support provided to MBA students is appropriate. The students are particularly satisfied with the accessibility of their lecturers.
- 3.8 The provided statistics indicate a good progression rate of the MBA students. The programme may benefit from benchmarking its minimum rate of progress policy and from reviewing its current practice of considering students with a GPA of 2.0 in good standing.
- 3.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the efficiency, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- The profile of the students admitted to the MBA programme matches the programme aims and objectives.
  - The profile of the faculty members contributing to the MBA programme is appropriate.
  - The facilities provided to the MBA students are adequate.
  - The availability of adequate online library resources.
  - Appropriate academic and non-academic support is provided to MBA students.
- 3.10 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel **recommends** the following issues should be addressed
- The admission process and criteria require further clarification, proper dissemination and more consistent application.
  - A review of faculty workloads, especially for those with heavy administrative responsibilities, needs to be undertaken.
  - Better monitoring of the usage and appropriateness of teaching and learning resources.
  - Ensure a more effective induction of new students.

### 3.11 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on efficiency of the programme.**

#### **4. Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates**

*The graduates of the programme meet acceptable academic standards in comparison with equivalent programmes in Bahrain and worldwide.*

- 4.1 As stated earlier, there has been some attempt to implement the ILOs across the programme. However, although the Self-Evaluation Report indicates that there is a policy to have between four and ten ILOs for each course, this was not always in evidence in the documentation submitted to the Review Panel. In general, therefore, there was insufficient evidence that the ILOs had been appropriately mapped at the individual course level; or that sufficient attention had been paid to ensure that assessment tools reflected the ILO's.
- 4.2 The programme team has expended considerable effort in seeking to benchmark their MBA programme against a number of similar programmes in universities across the world. These include McMaster and Dalhousie University in Canada, the American University of Beirut and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Latterly, the International Islamic University of Malaysia had been consulted on the introduction of the very popular Islamic Banking and Finance concentration. Aspects considered in this benchmarking process include: number of credit hours expected of an MBA programme, GPA requirements both at the admission stage and for progression on the programme, and the structure of the MBA programme adopted at the UCB; for example, the opportunity for students to undertake specific concentrations such as Islamic Banking and Finance. It is also worthy of note that the institution appears to continuously use these benchmarks.
- 4.3 Assessment on the MBA programme, though containing a variety of instruments such as mid-term examinations, quizzes, final examination, and student presentations did not, in the view of the Review Panel, provide sufficient evidence that higher order cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis and critical evaluation were being examined. Of concern was the misalignment of the assessment requirements with what would typically be expected at a Masters level. Course ILOs were typically set in terms of lower level cognitive tasks [e.g. describe, explain, illustrate, give examples, calculate, apply] and examination questions assessed at this level through the use of multiple choice questions or quizzes, and short answer responses. At a Masters level, it would be expected that the emphasis would be placed on higher order cognitive functioning [e.g. analyse, synthesise and critically evaluate], and that essay format responses to examination questions would be more appropriate. In an MBA programme it is also very typical and appropriate to incorporate case study analysis into the examination; this is not done.

- 4.4 The students' assessed work (including final examinations, mid-term examinations and quizzes) which the Review Panel read during their site visit did not always reflect the required ILOs of the programme and tended to display lower order skills and knowledge than that expected of a Masters level qualification. Marking appeared to be on the generous side. However, there were some good examples of high calibre dissertations seen by the Review Panel during the site visit, some of which were directly applicable to the business context in Bahrain and beyond.
- 4.5 Class attendance and participation are monitored and the students who were interviewed by the Review Panel expressed satisfaction that at the end of the MBA programme their overall knowledge and skills had been enhanced greatly, e.g. in communication skills. Cohort analysis suggests that students had achieved the programme aims. The final results of students on the programme reflected appropriate grade distribution, though few if any students achieved the High Distinction GPA of 3.50-4.00.
- 4.6 As indicated earlier, the grading criteria have appropriate breakdown of marks for attendance, participation, reports, etc. The minimum GPA is a B- (i.e. 2.70) and students are allowed to retake any courses that fall below that threshold. Student work is moderated through a practice of second marking on a sample of examinations. At present the MBA programme has an external examiner for the dissertation component of the programme only. The criteria for appointing the external examiner (who is currently from another university in Bahrain) was not clear. The Panel suggests that the programme team develop clear policies for internal and external moderation.
- 4.7 Course feedback evaluations are completed by students and there is also an emerging alumni network. However, course evaluation questionnaires did not have open-ended questions designed to solicit qualitative responses from current students on the programme (e.g. on programme structure) and concentrations.
- 4.8 The Review Panel interviewed a small sample of employers of MBA graduates as well as several alumni of the programme. These were from both the government sector and the commercial sector (e.g. banks, telecoms). Feedback from all of these stakeholders was in general positive about the programme, especially the quality of the teaching staff. Employers indicated the value-added element that the MBA programme had brought to their employees, some of whom had been sponsored to undertake their MBA at the UCB. However, a more formal External Advisory Board for the MBA programme is at an embryonic stage.
- 4.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standards, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- The programme is benchmarked against a range of other MBA programmes.
- There is evidence of internal moderation of student performance for some courses.
- An external examiner has been appointed to assess the thesis component of the programme.
- Sample dissertations viewed during the site visit are of good standard.
- Employers and alumni are satisfied with the programme.

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

- Ensure that Programme level ILOs are appropriately mapped with individual course level ILO's and that this is reflected in the assessment tools adopted on the programme.
- Develop more appropriate assessment tasks to address higher order cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, and critical evaluation.
- Incorporate complex case study analysis into the examinations.
- Develop clear policies for internal and external moderation.
- Consider appointing an external examiner in addition to the dissertation external examiner
- Activate the External Advisory Board.

#### **4.11 Judgement**

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

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

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

- 5.1 At institutional, faculty and programme levels there is clear evidence of considerable investment of resources to improve the effectiveness of quality management and assurance. Despite the fact that the current Head of Quality Assurance Directorate has only been in post for a very short period of time (the previous Head recently left the institution), there are a number of examples of good practice, e.g. in the range of workshops on quality assurance (including those on Intended Learning Outcomes) and the level of faculty participation in these; and the number of formal committees that now exist such as: the Curriculum Development Committee, Student Affairs Committee, and an Academic Research Development. A considerable effort has been made by the institution to cascade quality assurance over the last year.
- 5.2 There are some examples of good practice in the conducting of reviews of the MBA programme as evidenced by the introduction of the Islamic Banking and Finance concentration which arose from international benchmarking. This is also evident from on-going discussions about Intended Learning Outcomes, case study materials, and the number of concentrations offered. There was clear evidence during the site visit that discussions on quality assurance take place quite frequently and that the results of these discussions are appropriately reported and recorded. Examples of continuous improvement include: enhanced provision for faculty in thesis supervision; case study developments; course and programme review procedures; and textbook developments.
- 5.3 There is evidence of the programme team carrying out feedback of current students and alumni and there is an emerging External Advisory Board for the MBA programme (seven potential members from local businesses have been identified). An example of action taken on student feedback is the need to indicate clearly to students what the required thresholds are for moving on to the dissertation stage of the programme. The embryonic Alumni network has also been instrumental in organising activities for graduates of the MBA programme. Employer feedback is, however, less formal and needs to be formalized. The Panel notes the establishment of the External Advisory Board and encourages its early activation.
- 5.4 The institution has invested (both in time and in financial resources) to continuing professional development (CPD) of its faculty (as well as administrative staff). This is evidenced in the number of conferences faculty members have been attending in recent years within their own subject areas; the growing number of research papers

published by faculty; and the number of internal and external workshops attended on quality assurance aspects.

- 5.5 In conjunction with its Human Resources Department the institution has developed a clearly documented Training Needs Analysis (TNA) approach to staff development. Examples include: support to complete doctoral degrees for those faculty who do not currently hold that degree; and a recent international conference on Knowledge Based Industry Education held in Bahrain in January 2011 at which faculty and university management helped to organise and made contributions. There is also an emerging relationship between participation in CPD and staff promotion policies as evidenced by HR policies in the Institution. As stated earlier, high faculty workloads are an on-going issue for the Institution, which leaves little time during the normal working week for faculty to carry out scholarly research activities. During the site visit however, a number of faculty members displayed strong interest in carrying out research for peer-reviewed publications and a number had published recently as well as having on-going publications. This is commendable.
- 5.6 The College keeps its records up to date. This is being done *via* an Oracle based system as well as manual systems e.g. in the area of tracking student progress on the programme.
- 5.7 In coming to its conclusion regarding the effectiveness of quality management and assurance, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
- There is evidence of a systematic approach to quality assurance and management within the MBA programme.
  - The MBA programme has benefited from reviews including international benchmarking.
  - The programme team responding to student feedback as well as that from alumni.
  - A programme of Continuous Professional Development has been developed for faculty based on Training Needs Analysis.
  - Faculty members keep abreast of their scholarly interests .
- 5.8 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should address the following issues:
- Establish the External Advisory Board without delay.
  - Faculty research should be supported in a more systematic fashion.

## 5.9 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on effectiveness of quality management and assurance.**



## 6. Conclusion

Taking into account the institution's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the site visit, the Review Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the HERU/QAAET *Programme Review Handbook, 2009*;

**There is limited confidence in the Master of Business Management programme offered by the University College of Bahrain.**