



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Programme Review Report

Master of Business Administration

University of Bahrain

Kingdom of Bahrain

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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 of Bahrain

The programme review of the Master of Business Administration of the University of Bahrain 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 University of Bahrain, 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.

The University of Bahrain was notified by the HERU/QAAET in June 2010 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its Master of Business Administration with the site visit taking place in 2011. In preparation for the programme review, University of Bahrain submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with appendices on the agreed date in November 2010. With the site visit postponed to October 2011, an update was requested on 2 August 2011. The quality review site visit took place on the 9-10 of October 2011. It is expected that the University of Bahrain will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Master of Business Administration.

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme is offered by the College of Business Administration. The College also has Accounting, Banking and Finance,

Business Management, and Marketing undergraduate programmes. At the time of the visit, together with the newly admitted 22 students, the MBA programme has 108 students and 17 faculty members who are also teaching at the undergraduate programmes of College. All of the faculty members have at least Ph.D. degrees and the MBA programme does not employ any part-time lecturers.

The MBA programme was restructured in 2008. The MBA programme offers six core subjects and four optional courses in one of the concentration areas of Accounting, Finance, Management and Marketing. Furthermore the MBA programme offers six credits of an MBA project (Thesis) as an alternative to a course in Business Research Methodology and an MBA project of three credits. Entry standards have been reviewed and strengthened. The college has benchmarked this MBA programme against international and regional counterparts. As part of a university-wide programme, the College has commenced the process of seeking international accreditation for its Business programmes from AACSB as a further means of ensuring the quality of its teaching and learning.

2. Indicator 1: Curriculum

The programme complies with existing regulations in terms of the curriculum, the teaching and the assessment of students' achievements; the curriculum demonstrates fitness for purpose.

- 2.1 The MBA programme has a vision and mission. While these are generally aligned to the University and the College of Business vision and mission statements, they could be more clearly defined. As currently articulated the statements of the MBA programme do not do justice to the content, aims and outcomes of the courses presented. The Panel suggests that when the statements are being reviewed it would be beneficial if key issues articulated in the aims of the programme be included. It also suggests that the College consider giving more prominent display of the vision and mission of the programme within key venues as a reminder to faculty and students of the intentions and philosophical underpinning to their activities in teaching, learning and research.
- 2.2 The introduction of the revised MBA programme in 2008 has resulted in a series of changes to the programme in use operating between 1987 and 2006. The MBA programme introduced a series of optional courses allowing for a greater degree of specialisation within a range of key areas, namely, Accounting, Economics and Finance, Management and Marketing. The programme aims given in terms of programme educational objectives (PEOs) are clear and suitable for an MBA degree programme. Also important has been the adoption of writing a six credits thesis as an alternative to a three credits project and an additional course.
- 2.3 The MBA programme is well established with six core and four concentration areas – optional courses and a thesis or a project and a course. Course contents are clearly stated with their ILOs as well as their mappings with the programme ILOs. There is good evidence of documentation of the syllabus in terms of background, core and optional courses.
- 2.4 Both the programme ILOs and the course ILOs are well articulated. The mappings of ILOs of each course to programme ILOs are given in each course outline. Faculty reported that the course ILOs are explained to students in most of the courses, and that each may be assessed using different techniques of assessment. Assessment methods, particularly the use of formative assessment, needs to be adopted to encourage 'deep learning' and the development of specific intellectual and practical skills within the MBA students.
- 2.5 Faculty members are expected to be familiar with the implementation of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and have clarity in specifying particular outcomes in relation

to each disciplinary course. A clearer alignment between the assessment methods to be used and particular outcomes is needed. It is not necessary for every course to articulate every programme intended learning outcome, rather, that the programme intended learning outcomes are satisfied by the disciplinary courses as a whole. The current system of mapping suffers from a similar misunderstanding. Rather than seeking to specify every element of the programme ILOs to every course, a refinement should be sought to allocate key ILOs to particular courses. The current system of mapping is too generalised and requires more detailed focus with regard to the achievement of programme .

- 2.6 The nature of a MBA syllabus is such that it does not necessarily depend upon an intellectual progression in the levels offered over the duration of study. Nevertheless, evidence is presented in the suggested completion models of the MBA Student Handbook of a logical sequence in the courses offered over successive semesters. The continuation of the core courses from the previous MBA programme is legitimate and together they offer a sound foundation from which students are now allowed to specialise through the selection of a set of elective courses. The establishment of a Business Strategy course as a ‘capstone’ is highly desirable as it offers the students a good mechanism for a practical understanding and integration of their various disciplinary bases.
- 2.7 There is a college-wide teaching and learning policy for the MBA programme. The policy exists within the structure and formatting of the individual courses. As indicated above in 2.5 there remains room for improvement in the application of the policy.
- 2.8 In coming to its conclusion regarding the curriculum, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- the introduction of optional courses allowing for a greater degree of specialisation
 - the introduction of the six credit thesis option
 - the provision of good supervision appropriate to the degree level
 - ILOs of specific courses are well articulated in individual course outlines
 - the availability of a capstone course in Business Strategy
 - there is evidence of documentation of the syllabus in terms of background, core and optional courses.
- 2.9 In terms of improvement the Review Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- review the MBA programme's mission and vision
- develop a clearer alignment between the assessment methods and course ILOs to achieve particular outcomes
- revisit the mapping process of course ILOs against the programme ILOs.

2.10 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 The MBA programme was recommenced in 2008 and has had three intakes. 40 students each were enrolled in 2008 and 2009; and 23 in 2010/11. The admission policy requires work experience (at least one year's minimum) and a Bachelor's degree in any discipline. The minimum CGPA for qualification to the MBA programme is 2.67 in the Bachelor's degree, however the Panel was advised that most students had a CGPA of 3.0 or higher. English language requirements for the programme are IELTS of 6.0. These requirements have been consistently applied since the 2010-2011 intake. However, in some cases students were allowed to enrol with an IELTS lower than 6.0 on the basis that they would achieve the IELTS through further study as they progressed through the MBA programme. The programme team needs to review the IELTS entry standard since this revision will contribute to teaching and learning and thereby the success of the programme
- 3.2 Prospective students are required to undertake an aptitude test and to attend an interview with the programme coordinator. The College has adopted high standards in terms of entry into the MBA and has adopted a policy of quality rather than quantity in recruiting students. The total number of students recruited is 103 over three years, 24 students who completed 30 credits to date have since deferred while they are preparing their theses or projects, and ten students are on probation as a result of poor achievements. Consequently the total number of students currently enrolled is around 70.
- 3.3 Students entering without a business degree are required to undertake three of four background courses. These courses prepare students well, however the Panel, advised by the current students and grade performance, is of the view that the programme team should review the levels of the courses ACC 500 Financial Accounting and ACC 610 Advanced Financial Accounting, as the comparatively high failure rate in ACC 610 could indicate that students were not well prepared to study ACC 610. The College should ensure that where text books are required for subjects that the texts are indeed used by the staff.
- 3.4 The MBA programme has 17 full-time academic staff. All of these staff are required to teach on the bachelor programmes as well. The College advises that the average number of students per lecturer in the MBA programme is 13 (though with deferrals of students this number is probably lower). A small number of practitioners give guest lectures though it is reported that such practitioners are increasingly difficult to source.

- 3.5 When undergraduate teaching hours are combined with MBA programme's teaching hours, staff teaching loads in 2011 vary between 21 and 27 hours per week. This is very high. This is a result of the staff shortages. The average weekly teaching load based on the first semester 2010-2011 ranged between 12 and 21 hours. The College should review its staff teaching loads with a view to reducing these.
- 3.6 The qualifications of the staff are appropriate. The Panel noted that many of the staff are reaching the end of their career and that the College should prepare for staff renewal. The research profile for staff is limited with few publications in quality journals. However, the strong contribution of a small number of staff publishing in quality publications is acknowledged. Improving the quality and quantity of staff research output may increase the numbers of students electing to pursue the research thesis option.
- 3.7 The Panel reviewed a number of computer laboratories, and teaching rooms of various sizes. These were considered appropriate and adequate for the number of students in the programme. IT facilities are appropriate and equipment was purchased comparatively recently.
- 3.8 The College has a dedicated library liaison person who is proactive in providing support to staff and students. The Library subscribes to an extensive and appropriate range of electronic databases and subscriptions to electronic book services appropriate to the needs of MBA students. Students are appropriately advised on correct referencing procedures and the need to avoid plagiarism. The range and quality of library services are well acknowledged by the Panel. The library liaison staff member provides an induction to the library services and research writing. The MBA students are satisfied with the teaching and learning resources and the Panel observed that the technology is efficient and appropriate.
- 3.9 Student support is provided at a satisfactory level. Academics are available for advice; non-academic services, such as a bookshop (open in some evenings for MBA students), library services (especially the on-line services) and a careers service.
- 3.10 Retention rates are acceptable, as being in excess of 80% (when those students who are deferred while undertaking their final six research credits are included).
- 3.11 In coming to its conclusion regarding the efficiency, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- the adoption of high entry standards into the MBA programme
 - the low staff/student ratio

- appropriate standard of computer laboratories, teaching rooms and IT facilities
- the range and quality of library services offered to MBA students and staff.

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

- reduce high teaching loads for individual faculty members
- recruit qualified academic staff to ensure appropriate staff renewal.

3.13 **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 The Panel observed and is well satisfied with the efforts of the programme team to benchmark the University of Bahrain MBA against regional and international MBA programmes, and the clear evidence presented of this benchmarking. This benchmarking has had a clear influence on the current structure of the revised MBA.
- 4.2 In line with university policy the College is in the process of seeking the Associate to Advanced Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation. As part of that process the College has sought and achieved membership and eligibility to proceed with accreditation of the AACSB. An important part of the process of accreditation is the appointment by AACSB of the two mentors, one in accounting and one in business, and this has been done.
- 4.3 A number of formative assessment methods are used in the programme. These include: quizzes, presentations, assignments and reports. This is evident from the course portfolios and the interviews carried out with the students and the faculty members.
- 4.4 The programme team is in the process of introducing direct methods to measure the ILOs. The College has some indirect methods to assess the attainment of the ILOs such as student, alumni and employer surveys. The College may like to consider using interviews and focus group applications to various groups that are related with the programme to strengthen this process.
- 4.5 While specific ILOs have not yet been assessed, work has been completed in preparation for such assessment to take place. A schedule for assessment was developed in 2011 and will be implemented in the latter part of the 2011-2012 academic year. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre (QAAC) in its publication clearly addresses the development of an assessment model and assessment methods.
- 4.6 Grading criteria are documented clearly and are transparent. There are various internal methods used to ensure consistency in marking, such as the provision of model answers and the review of assessed work in class. These methods check reliability and validity of the papers and their marking. Further methods of internal moderation of examination papers could be considered.
- 4.7 The College does not use an external examiner system for exit level course or project work. A sample of examination scripts was scrutinised and the level was found to be

satisfactory. Nevertheless, the Panel suggests that the College consider the introduction of external examination of final year assignment papers as another effective quality check and input into the attainment and maintenance of standards in a field where regular curriculum improvement and content updating is critical to the competitiveness of graduates.

- 4.8 The supervision of students is well catered for with one-to-one attention for the thesis students and groups of four to five students being allocated to a supervisor in terms of the project option. The close attention received by students taking the thesis route was clearly evident in the formative marking provided to them on their initial efforts.
- 4.9 There is a university-wide policy that theses are subject to external examination; at the time of the site visit no student had completed their thesis. The Panel endorses the need for external examination for the thesis option of completing the degree. This strengthens the benchmarking of the degree and ensures that the standard of the qualification is maintained against the market.
- 4.10 The Panel met with a group of employers and heard that employers in Bahrain are satisfied with the levels of MBA graduates from the previous programme. Particular note was made of the strength of accounting graduates from the MBA programme. Alumni of the previous programme spoke highly of the programme.
- 4.11 The Panel had the opportunity to examine the course portfolios and the projects of the students. The quality of the portfolios appeared to be good. However, on closer scrutiny the Panel came across materials that were copied from electronic or hard copy publications without any references being made. The Panel heard during interviews with staff that this was not unusual. The University has an Academic Integrity Policy (AIP) where it states that any material quoted or paraphrased must be explicitly stated. Faculty members are aware of the AIP and the Panel saw instances where plagiarism had been detected and dealt with firmly. The Panel encourages the University to develop a mechanism to ensure that the AIP is consistently implemented. A plagiarism detection software programme could serve both in preventing plagiarism as well as providing a learning tool for students in recognising examples of plagiarism. This could also enable student to develop their academic skills for writing quality research papers.
- 4.12 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standards, the Review Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- benchmarking activities internationally and regionally conducted
 - the range of assessment methods used

- the supervision support provided to students with their thesis
- the use of survey instruments as one type of assessment of attainment of ILOs
- the demonstrable employer satisfaction with MBA graduates.

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

- develop further the internal moderation of examinations
- consider introducing external examination for the final examinations
- consistently implement the Academic Integrity Policy.

4.14 **Judgement**

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on academic standards of the graduates.**

5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

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

- 5.1 Policies exist for the management of the MBA programme. The College has a range of policies applying to teaching and learning, the regulation of staff, the collection and verification of marks, operation of the examination system, all of which suggest an adequate level of quality management of the programme. The Panel found that there is awareness of the difficulty of balancing the need to meet compliance within the programme to policies and standards set with the fundamental developmental thrust to achieve the outcomes of excellent teaching and learning.
- 5.2 A systematic way of documenting teaching and learning requires maintenance of a course portfolio. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Center (QAAC) in its publication IDEAS has clearly identified the minimum course portfolio contents as it would be difficult to standardise it for each programme. The course portfolio contents advised (offered) by QAAC meet national and international standards. Every course taught in the MBA programme has a course file containing all the necessary documentation enabling the assessment of the course for the improvement of teaching and learning. The course file contained the course outline, copies of tests, quizzes, projects, homework and examination papers, samples of graded work an examination papers, grades, student evaluation of the course and the faculty.
- 5.3 The University of Bahrain has a policy for the regular review of all programmes on a five yearly basis, which is rigidly upheld. The College is complying with this policy and intends to review the MBA programme in two years' time.
- 5.4 From interviews conducted during the site visit, it is clear that the faculty members of the College are very conscious of the need for a continual review of the adoption and implementation of the Outcomes Based Education (OBE). The Panel observed the willingness displayed by the faculty of the MBA programme to engage with OBE for the improvement of its delivery.
- 5.5 A student satisfaction survey has been undertaken. The Panel reviewed this and the findings. The Panel is satisfied with the evidence that the College formally advises students of the results of the student satisfaction survey and the actions that have been taken as a result of the feedback.

- 5.6 Student evaluation of teaching takes place for each subject each semester. The results are collated and given to the staff members concerned, heads of department and the Dean. The Panel was informed that where student dissatisfaction is expressed, the Head of Department meets with the staff member and reviews a plan of action to improve the teaching.
- 5.7 The College has not to date undertaken a successful alumni survey – primarily as it has limited records of up-to-date alumni contact details. The College is currently reviewing its alumni records and is planning to undertake a survey of alumni satisfaction. The Panel is of the view that such a survey of alumni should proceed as soon as possible. Such a survey is expected to assist in recruiting new students and finding job placements for graduates besides offering very useful inputs for improving the curriculum of the MBA programme.
- 5.8 The College has not to date undertaken a formal survey of employers. However, the programme team is currently compiling a list of employers of alumni and when this is complete, employers will be formally surveyed as to the quality and their satisfaction of the graduates as employees. A system of inviting input into the MBA programme from stakeholders through the Advisory Board has been adopted. From meeting with this body it is clear to the Panel that a very valuable input can be derived from its members. Currently the number of advisers on the panel is limited. There is an opportunity for the College to enlarge the Advisory Board, to formalise its meetings and create a mechanism to provide feedback on the MBA programme.
- 5.9 The relationship between the College and its Council Advisors appears to be well established and balanced with the College weighing the merits of any suggestions offered by the Advisors prior to its adoption.
- 5.10 There is provision for the on-going professional development of faculty with a budget provided for the presentation of papers at conferences. Provision is also made for courses for faculty training. The College and the University of Bahrain require newly appointed staff to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) offered on campus by York St John University from the U.K. Furthermore the programme which was initially aimed at the newly qualified staff who had limited or no experience in teaching, is now open to all faculty members.
- 5.11 Staff promotion is reviewed on an annual basis at the University of Bahrain. The academic ranking of the 15 faculty members involved with the MBA programme, given in the SER, are equally distributed among full, associate and assistant professors. According to the by-laws, assistant professors can only teach with the recommendation of the Department Chair and the approval of the College Council. There are shortages of associate and full professors at the College. During interviews with the faculty members it emerged that only a few faculty members have been

promoted in recent years, as most of them have very high teaching loads that prevent them from conducting research which is the main input for academic promotion. The Panel suggests that the College monitor, support and guide its junior faculty members that will advance them in academic ranks and keep them current in their teaching subjects.

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

- consistence implementation of policies to manage the MBA programme
- the rigorous implementation of the university programme policy
- the development of a system to collect and provide feedback on students teaching and faculty surveys
- evidence of working relationship with the Council Advisors
- the provision of on-going professional development and staff training.

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

- expedite a survey of alumni
- enlarge the Advisory Board and have formal meetings and mechanism to provide feedback on programme
- monitor, support and guide its junior faculty members in their subject specialisations.

5.14 **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 confidence in the Master of Business Administration offered by the University of Bahrain.