

# **Directorate of Higher Education Reviews Programme Review Report**

**Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance  
Centre for Academic and Executive Studies  
(Hosted Programme - University of Strathclyde)  
Master of Business Administration  
Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Site Visit Date: 9–11 October 2023**

**HA098-C3-R098**

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## Acronyms

APM	Annual Programme Monitoring
BIBF	Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
CILO	Course Intended Learning Outcome
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
FAR	Faculty Annual Report
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HEC	Higher Education Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HR	Human Resources
KIP	Knowledge and Information Portal
MBA	Master of Business Administration
PILO	Programme Intended Learning Outcome
QA	Quality Assurance
QAAHE	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RES	Research Excellence Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SBS	Strathclyde Business School
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SEED	Strathclyde Executive Education and Development

## I. Introduction

In keeping with its mandate, the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), through the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR), carries out two types of reviews that are complementary. These are: Institutional Reviews, where the whole institution is assessed; and the Academic Programme Reviews (APRs), where the quality of teaching, learning and academic standards are assessed in academic programmes within various colleges according to specific standards and indicators as reflected in its Framework.

Following the revision of the APR Framework at the end of Cycle 1 in accordance with the BQA procedure, the revised APR Framework (Cycle 2) was endorsed as per the Council of Ministers' Resolution No.17 of 2019. Thereof, in the academic year (2019-2020), the DHR commenced its second cycle of programme reviews.

The Cycle 2 APR Review Framework is based on four main Standards and 21 Indicators, which forms the basis of the APR Reports of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The **four** standards that are used to determine whether or not a programme meets international standards are as follows:

*Standard 1: The Learning Programme*

*Standard 2: Efficiency of the Programme*

*Standard 3: Academic Standards of Students and Graduates*

*Standard 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance*

The Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as 'the Panel') decides whether each indicator, within a standard, is 'addressed', 'partially addressed' or 'not addressed'. From these judgements on the indicators, the Panel additionally determines whether each of the four standards is 'Satisfied' or 'Not Satisfied', thus leading to the programme's overall judgement, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Criteria for Judgements**

Criteria	Judgement
All four Standards are satisfied	Confidence
Two or three Standards are satisfied, including Standard 1	Limited Confidence
One or no Standard is satisfied	No Confidence
All cases where <b>Standard 1</b> is not satisfied	

The APR Review Report begins with providing the profile of the programme under review, followed by a brief outline of the judgement received for each indicator, standard, and the overall judgement.

The main section of the report is an analysis of the status of the programme, at the time of its actual review, in relation to the review standards, indicators and their underlying expectations.

The report ends with a Conclusion and a list of Appreciations and Recommendations.

## II. The Programme's Profile

Institution Name*	Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance
College/ Department*	Centre for Academic and Executive Studies (Hosted Programme - University of Strathclyde)
Programme/ Qualification Title*	Master of Business Administration
Qualification Approval Number	-
NQF Level	-
Validity Period on NQF	-
Number of Units*	12
NQF Credit	-
Programme Aims*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the skills required for progression to higher level policy-forming positions.</li> <li>• Enable students to make successful career transitions.</li> <li>• Facilitate the move from technical specialism to general management.</li> <li>• Polish the skills and enhance the abilities of people working for themselves or about to set up in business.</li> </ul>
Programme Intended Learning Outcomes*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To explain, demonstrate and critically assess core concepts and skills of management and strategic leadership learning.</li> <li>2. To explain, demonstrate and critically assess the languages, concepts, skills and application of specialist areas in business &amp; management from the perspective of the general manager.</li> <li>3. To explain and critically assesses core concepts in organisational management themes of sustainability and responsibility; entrepreneurship and innovation; adaptability and resilience; digitalisation and technology; globalisation and internationalisation.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. To explain, critically assess, apply and integrate a wide range of techniques, practices and theories pertinent both to day-to-day management and to strategic change in modern, complex organisations.</li> <li>5. To analyse, assess and synthesise key issues and approaches in business &amp; management in depth, from a generalist perspective or by focusing more on a student's particular area of interest.</li> </ol>
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\* Mandatory fields

### III. Judgement Summary

#### The Programme's Judgement: Confidence

Standard/ Indicator	Title	Judgement
<b>Standard 1</b>	<b>The Learning Programme</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>
Indicator 1.1	The Academic Planning Framework	Partially Addressed
Indicator 1.2	Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes	Addressed
Indicator 1.3	The Curriculum Content	Addressed
Indicator 1.4	Teaching and Learning	Addressed
Indicator 1.5	Assessment Arrangements	Addressed
<b>Standard 2</b>	<b>Efficiency of the Programme</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>
Indicator 2.1	Admitted Students	Addressed
Indicator 2.2	Academic Staff	Partially Addressed
Indicator 2.3	Physical and Material Resources	Addressed
Indicator 2.4	Management Information Systems	Addressed
Indicator 2.5	Student Support	Partially Addressed
<b>Standard 3</b>	<b>Academic Standards of Students and Graduates</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>
Indicator 3.1	Efficiency of the Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.2	Academic Integrity	Addressed
Indicator 3.3	Internal and External Moderation of Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.4	Work-based Learning	Not applicable



Indicator 3.5	Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component	Addressed
Indicator 3.6	Achievements of the Graduates	Partially Addressed
<b>Standard 4</b>	<b>Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>
Indicator 4.1	Quality Assurance Management	Addressed
Indicator 4.2	Programme Management and Leadership	Addressed
Indicator 4.3	Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme	Partially Addressed
Indicator 4.4	Benchmarking and Surveys	Partially Addressed
Indicator 4.5	Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs	Addressed

## IV. Standards and Indicators

### Standard 1

#### The Learning Programme

*The programme demonstrates fitness for purpose in terms of mission, relevance, curriculum, pedagogy, intended learning outcomes and assessment.*

#### Indicator 1.1: The Academic Planning Framework

*There is a clear academic planning framework for the programme, reflected in clear aims which relate to the mission and strategic goals of the institution and the college.*

##### Judgement: *Partially Addressed*

- The mission of the Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance (BIBF) includes statements related to career-linked professional development programmes, ensuring a stimulating learning environment, and contributing economically to Bahrain's position as a regional financial hub. The strategic goals or pillars of the BIBF include programme development, teaching delivery, and learning and quality improvement and the implementation of these academic initiatives is monitored at an institutional level. The Panel was informed in interviews that the Academic Centre Advisory Committee reviewed the portfolio of programme offerings of the BIBF. The Educational Standards Committee also regularly meets to review its portfolio of programmes.
- Strathclyde University is viewed as a partner for BIBF's suite of post-graduate offerings. The Strathclyde Master of Business Administration (MBA) is one of two MBA programmes the BIBF hosts. In the case of the Strathclyde Business School (SBS) MBA, the BIBF recognises the international standing of SBS and that its 'One MBA' approach offers an MBA that is differentiated from other offerings in Bahrain by its international character, enabling employees in the financial sector of Bahrain to obtain an international qualification, without the expense of international travel. Therefore, the Panel concluded that the SBS MBA programme contributes to the mission and strategy of the BIBF.
- There is a partnership agreement between the BIBF and SBS that was signed in 2021 to set out the roles and responsibilities of the two parties, and it is to be renewed and expanded in 2026. Within the partnership agreement, there are provisions made for risk mitigation and management, such as specifying the SBS services, the partner's obligations and facilities to be provided, data protection, managing information and reporting, right of

audit, the termination of the programme, dispute resolution, matters of confidentiality and intellectual property rights, and liability and indemnity. Furthermore, BIBF identifies, categorises and rates various risks as low, moderate or high and identifies control measures for each risk.

- The Strathclyde MBA was established in the UK in 1966 and first gained the Association of MBAs Accreditation AMBA accreditation in 1983, with reaccreditation due in 2024. According to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), a Master's Degree is at SCQF level 11. The MBA Regulations 2022-2023 document indicates that all the modules (courses) are at a Master's level or level 9 (the Bahrain equivalent to the SCQF Master's level 11). The information about the MBA is included in the International Handbook, and a Master class presentation is made to prospective students in Bahrain.
- Programme description documents and the university's website refer to the programme as 'The Strathclyde MBA' or 'Master of Business Administration'. Strathclyde offers three formats of MBA delivery. The 'Master of Business Administration (Executive) part-time only' is offered at international centres. The sample Certificate provided confirms the programme description as a 'Master of Business Administration', and this was confirmed in interviews. However, some of the BIBF documents refer to the programme as 'The University of Strathclyde MSc Degree in Business Administration'. The Panel recommends that BIBF should ensure that the title 'Master of Business Administration' is used consistently in all documentation.
- According to the partnership agreement, an annual review of the agreement occurs between SBS and the BIBF, and evidence was provided of the two parties meeting recently. Furthermore, the BIBF has a Policy on Institutional Effectiveness Monitoring, which provides an outline of the strategic performance management system and a framework to monitor the achievements of learners on all programmes, the performance of staff, as well as the effectiveness of its programmes in meeting stakeholders' needs. These meetings have occurred regularly.
- According to the SER and partnership agreement, the SBS is responsible for delivering all aspects related to teaching and assessment in the MBA programme, as well as student admission, support, and staffing and that their rules and policies will be applied in the delivery of the programme. The BIBF is only required to provide the facilities for the delivery of the programme and takes responsibility for some aspects of programme administration. According to the partnership agreement, the SBS appoints local counsellors to provide academic counselling and run tutorial sessions with the MBA students at the BIBF. The BIBF administers the pay of the counsellors. These counsellors are also responsible for helping students to integrate the material into their local work context.

- The partnership agreement also specifies that Strathclyde is solely responsible for the programme's Quality Assurance (QA). According to the agreement, annual reviews are to be jointly held between Strathclyde and the BIBF to review the previous 12 months and to plan for the next 12 months. While an annual meeting had recently taken place, from interviews held, the Panel learnt that few formal structures and procedures were available to oversee the academic programme, with great reliance placed on informal interactions instead. The Panel recommends that the partnership agreement be revised to create more formalized reporting structures and relationships between the BIBF and Strathclyde, particularly concerning reviewing and contextualizing the programme's academic content.

## **Indicator 1.2: Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes**

*Graduate attributes are clearly stated in terms of intended learning outcomes for the programme and for each course and these are appropriate for the level of the degree and meet the NQF requirements.*

### **Judgement: Addressed**

- While the Subject Benchmark Statement for Master's Degrees in Business and Management of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAAHE) are referenced as generic graduate attributes, Strathclyde-specific graduate attributes include 'graduates that are engaged, enquiring, enterprising, and ethically and globally aware'. The SBS business case for the MBA notes that the MBA programme 'aims to give a broad understanding of management issues at a senior level along with appropriate skills and techniques but, at the same time, the programme allows a degree of specialisation if required.' It further states that the MBA programme outcomes are built upon four pillars, namely, the Development of the Reflective Practitioner, Making the Business Work, Strategic Management for Sustainable Success, and the Project (i.e., applying knowledge to a business issue). In the revised MBA programme, the overarching theme is 'Entrepreneurship & Innovation', and the programme design is intended to ensure that students develop 'to be successful and responsible lifelong global citizens'.
- The MBA programme aims, objectives, and learning outcomes are clearly stated and aligned. The MBA Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) are appropriately written and meet the requirements of the SCQF. Benchmarking of the learning outcomes has been done against the QAAHE's Benchmark Statement for Master's Degrees in Business and Management and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).
- The Panel acknowledges that the MBA PILOs are appropriate for a Master's level programme and meet the requirements of the SCQF. The courses constituting the MBA

programme are mapped against the PILOs. Research-related intended learning outcomes of the programme are included in the Mapping Scorecard for the Research Project and are appropriate for a coursework master's degree.

### **Indicator 1.3: The Curriculum Content**

*The curriculum is organised to provide academic progression of learning complexity guided by the NQF levels and credits, and it illustrates a balance between knowledge and skills, as well as theory and practice, and meets the norms and standards of the particular academic discipline.*

#### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The International Handbook for 2021-2022 outlines the curriculum for the SBS MBA that is offered in its Gulf and Asia centres, which consists of 15 core courses, two electives and the Research Project. According to the MBA Regulations 2022-23, the new MBA programme consists of 10 compulsory courses of 10 credits each, and an additional eleventh course of 20 credits. Furthermore, the research component can contribute 40 or 60 credits to the programme. Students taking a 40-credit dissertation (or equivalent) option take an additional 20 credits of course work by choosing two courses from a list of 20 optional courses. The courses are evenly spread across the four semesters.
- The International Handbook for 2021-2022 indicates that there are two intakes of students, one in September and the other in April. The classes of these two cohorts of students are combined, meaning that students starting in September begin with the Semester 1 – October courses, followed by Semester 2 – April courses, while those commencing in April start with the Semester 2 courses followed by Semester 1. The Handbook also indicates no course prerequisites, creating flexibility for student progression. The Panel was informed in the interviews that if students failed a course, there would either be an opportunity to redo the assessment tasks, or they would reattend the course in the subsequent year.
- The mapping of SCQF characteristics and the MBA learning outcomes reflect a balance between theory and practice, and between knowledge and skills in the curriculum. The course syllabi are provided in the International Handbook and on MyPlace. The courses cover the breadth of functional areas typically associated with an MBA programme such as Marketing-, Financial-, Operations-, Technology- and People- Management. Furthermore, in the second year, emphasis is placed on Leadership, Strategy and Governance. Overall, the Panel appreciates how the MBA programme reflects an appropriate balance between theory and practice.
- SBS offers a wide range of electives, and each year two of these are delivered at the BIBF. BIBF students can either (1) attend these electives in Bahrain, (2) attend the Summer School in Strathclyde and enroll for two of the electives on offer there, (3) complete electives

online, or (4) attend the electives offered at another international centre. However, the Panel learnt from interviews that one implication of the various range of electives being offered at different times and formats was that some students may have a congested timetable in a semester. This was particularly the case when there was a transition to the revised MBA programme.

- The textbooks for the courses delivered at the BIBF are listed in the 2021-2022 International Handbook and are referred to on MyPlace. The textbook list provided mainly included books from 2016 to 2019. During interviews, the Panel learnt that all textbooks are now provided in electronic format through Kortex.
- Lectures, videos, and notes on MyPlace, an electronic textbook on research methods, and the appointment of a supervisor are put in place to support students in their Research Project. Regarding guidelines for ethics of their research, the MBA Project Guidelines document of May 2020 indicates that data collection may not take place until ethic approval has been granted, meaning that data collection can only start after the supervisor has endorsed the ethics documentation.
- No written evidence was provided of how the SBS MBA considers the cultural and linguistic sensitivity of Bahrain. The Panel was informed in the interviews that the lecturers contextualized the courses' content by selecting local or regional examples and cases and requiring assignments to be applied to the local context. Furthermore, the local counsellors assisted with the contextualization of the knowledge to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region or to Bahrain itself. However, these arrangements were made in an informal and *ad hoc* manner. The Panel recommends that a more formalized and systematic approach be introduced to contextualise the course content and ensure it is fit for purpose in Bahrain.

### **Indicator 1.4: Teaching and Learning**

*The principles and methods used for teaching in the programme support the attainment of programme aims and intended learning outcomes.*

#### **Judgement: Addressed**

- Strathclyde University has General Academic Regulations for taught Postgraduate Degrees such as the MBA. While the Panel received a range of policies related to teaching and learning, no teaching and learning policy was provided detailing the philosophy of teaching and learning and the teaching methods employed. Furthermore, in preparing a business case for a new programme, the 'Programme Specifications' section of the Policy and Procedure on Programme and Module Approval requires that all teaching and learning activities should be specified. However, it does not list the range of such activities,

provide examples of teaching methods, or offer guidelines on their mix. On the other hand, in reporting on practice, the SER notes that the MBA contains a mix of lectures, problem-based and action-oriented learning exercises, practice exercises, readings, company visits and guest speakers. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the BIBF in cooperation with Strathclyde University should develop a formal teaching and learning policy that articulates Strathclyde's teaching and learning philosophy and the related teaching methods.

- The course syllabi describe various teaching and learning methods in use. During the interviews, the Panel was informed of Strathclyde's commitment to useful learning, as well as the flipped classroom approach adopted in the new MBA programme and that the QA guidance for online learning had informed the design of the blended mode of delivery of the MBA. The Panel also learnt that the delivery of an MBA course typically involved an online introductory session by the lecturer (one to two hours), individual preparation for the intensive weekend lectures (16 hours) and four sessions with the local counsellors in the evening after the day-long lectures and in subsequent weeks (twelve hours in total). Local counsellors provide more detail on the course content, provide local contextualization of the course content, and elaborate on assessment tasks.
- In line with its 'One MBA' philosophy across all delivery modes and international centres, SBS has a centralized Moodle-based e-learning platform called MyPlace, for all its students to access. The structure of the courses on MyPlace clearly differentiates general resource materials from regional-specific content. With the introduction of the new MBA, MyPlace has been replaced with MyMBA.
- In the revised MBA programme, some courses are designed to build skills and competences promoting entrepreneurial behaviour, including creative thought, and to introduce students to the latest technological developments and digital transformation to enable them to think strategically about innovation in organisations. The Panel was informed in the interviews that for many courses, the assignments required students to research and apply the course content to a particular case, typically an organization in their local context. Research capabilities are also developed through the capstone or Research Project.
- The range of teaching and learning activities offered in the MBA encompasses formal lectures and informal industry visits and guest lectures. Informal and non-formal learning opportunities for BIBF students have been provided as Master Classes. The Strathclyde Careers Centre also made online resources, webinars and other forms of career support available to students.

### **Indicator 1.5: Assessment Arrangements**

*Suitable assessment arrangements, which include policies and procedures for assessing students' achievements, are in place and are known to all relevant stakeholders.*

**Judgement: Addressed**

- Several policies guide assessment. The Strathclyde Assessment and Feedback Policy includes principles such as (1) promoting effective student learning, (2) being appropriate, fair, and transparent, (3) clear communication, and (4) continuous review. It also provides guidelines for anonymous marking and the implementation of the Policy. The Policy on Moderation and Double Marking states that all summative assessments are to be moderated and identifies several moderation methods, including internal moderation, unseen internal double-marking, and external moderation by an external examiner. Finally, the General Academic Regulations provide a Board of Examiners that reviews students' performance against approved criteria and ratifies the awarding of degrees.
- According to the partnership agreement, SBS is responsible for marking and grading examination scripts and assignments. However, the Panel was informed that local counsellors are usually paid to mark the assessment tasks, which are subsequently moderated by the faculty members at the SBS, although some faculty members preferred to mark the assessments themselves. These arrangements are not contained in the partnership agreement. The Panel recommends that the BIBF should ensure that consistent marking arrangements are agreed to and that the roles and responsibilities of the various parties are itemized in a written agreement. Furthermore, if local counsellors are to remain involved in marking and grading, then the Panel recommends that the BIBF should ensure that the local counsellors receive regular and formal training in assessment practices.
- According to Strathclyde Policy on Moderation and Double Marking, the University expects feedback on coursework to be returned to students within 15 working days of an assessment submission. The Panel was informed in interviews that local counsellors first marked the course assignments and were given three weeks to do so. After that, the SBS faculty members moderated the marks. This moderation took between one and three weeks. Students would receive their assessment results only after they were internally moderated. The Panel, therefore, suggests reviewing the turnaround time for evaluating assessments to ensure that students receive feedback within 15 working days of an assessment submission, in line with the Policy.
- No written information was given on the formative functions of assessments. The Panel was informed in interviews that students were expected to complete various teaching and learning activities on MyPlace/MyMBA before the intensive weekend of lectures. However, students received no feedback on their responses to these activities before the intensive lecture weekend. The Panel suggests that the teaching and learning activities on



MyPlace/MyMBA that students complete before the intensive lecture sessions be reviewed for opportunities to give formative feedback.

- The MBA Project Guidelines contains criteria on reflective learning, knowledge of the subject area, data collection and analysis, structure and argument, learning, and implications for theory and practice. Ethics is not included in the checklist as an item to be assessed. However, under supervision guidelines, it is stated that students will not be awarded a pass for Project Methodology unless the ethics documents have been completed and the Ethics Application approved by the supervisor.
- According to the MBA Project Guidelines, the supervisor assumes responsibility for monitoring students' progress with their research. While the exact number of meetings between the supervisor and student is not prescribed, at least six meetings should be arranged. In addition, two formative feedback submissions of draft chapters are expected during the project supervision process for their review and comment, occurring approximately a third and two-thirds of the way through the project. During interviews, the Panel was informed that MyPlace was also used to monitor student engagement with teaching and learning activities related to the Research Project.
- There is a Student Guide on Good Academic Practice and the Avoidance of Plagiarism that explains what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, procedures for handling cases of plagiarism, examples of penalties that can be imposed, and the use of Turnitin. The Guide also includes information on the appeals processes. At their Induction sessions, students are made aware of the plagiarism policy, which is also set out in the Student Handbook and uploaded on MyPlace.

## Standard 2

### Efficiency of the Programme

*The programme is efficient in terms of the admitted students, the use of available resources - staffing, infrastructure and student support.*

#### Indicator 2.1: Admitted Students

*There are clear admission requirements, which are appropriate for the level and type of the programme, ensuring equal opportunities for both genders, and the profile of admitted students matches the programme aims and available resources.*

##### **Judgement: Addressed**

- There are policies for admission, attendance, and suspension. Strathclyde Admission Policy which is to be renewed every five years, clearly defines the admissions process and criteria and became effective in March 2019. The statistics for the MBA cohort at the BIBF show that since 2018, 130 male and 75 female students were admitted, which corresponds to 36% female participants.
- The admission requirements are comparable to international standards. They include degree requirements, work experience and interviews, which are conducted by the Director of Strathclyde GCC and the MBA team from SBS. Remedial courses are given to students who lack the necessary English proficiency. The Panel suggests offering remedial courses to BIBF students who have no business background.
- Strathclyde Admission Policy includes arrangements for access, progression, and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which are aligned with UK regulations. RPL refers to UK arrangements for students without traditional qualifications who can enter the programme through 'alternative pathways'. However, these arrangements are not applicable in Bahrain.
- The interviews revealed that Bahraini stakeholders have had no direct interaction (in form of feedback or consultations) with SBS regarding the admission requirements. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the BIBF should ensure that the admission criteria are regularly revised in light of student performance and feedback from relevant stakeholders.

#### Indicator 2.2: Academic Staff

*There are clear procedures for the recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion, and professional development of academic staff, which ensure that staff members are fit-for-purpose and that help in staff retention.*

**Judgement: *Partially Addressed***

- The recruitment of SBS academics is defined in Strathclyde's Human Resources (HR) policies. The recruitment of faculty members who will teach the MBA in Bahrain is at the discretion of the respective SBS Department, which will assign qualified faculty members for the programme and manage their workload. The Programme Manager in Strathclyde approaches the Head of Department at SBS and lets him/her know what is required in terms of qualifications and faculty members to deliver the MBA in Bahrain.
- The recruitment of local staff is defined in BIBF's HR Policy Manual. Local counselors, who play an important supporting role in assisting Strathclyde faculty members and supporting MBA students are selected by Strathclyde and then employed by BIBF. They are selected from a list of possible candidates supplied by the BIBF. At the beginning of each semester, BIBF presents SBS with their choice of potential local counsellors and Strathclyde does the final selection. This concerns only people who are newly hired. Local counsellors who have served in this position before, do not undergo this selection process.
- Induction of Strathclyde academics regarding their deployment in the MBA programme delivered in Bahrain is informal in nature. Notably, the Strathclyde Programme Manager in Glasgow provides information about the country and its culture. The HR Department of BIBF is responsible for the induction of Bahraini staff regarding subjects like the BIBF as an institution, employee responsibilities, and BIBF policies and procedures. In the beginning of every semester, local counsellors also meet online with their respective SBS faculty members and are introduced to the academic part of their work.
- Appraisal and promotion processes of SBS academic staff are defined in Strathclyde's HR policies and follow clear and transparent procedures. Appraisal and performance management of local staff (fulltime employees) is defined in BIBF's HR Policy Manual. However, appraisal and performance management of BIBF part-time-staff such as the local counselors is not formalized or documented (for example: minutes of meetings, evaluation rubrics, etc.). The Panel was informed in the interviews that the evaluation of the local counselor is firstly based on feedback from students, obtained through course evaluation surveys. Students can also raise any concerns regarding certain counselors with the BIBF Programme Manager directly. Secondly, local counselors were evaluated based on feedback from SBS faculty members who teach the course. The Panel recommends the BIBF should introduce formalized procedures for the induction, performance appraisal and management, of local counselors in the MBA programme.

- Strathclyde University defines research objectives and procedures in its Research Excellence Framework (RES) of 2021. It focuses on research led and practice relevant teaching, and evaluates research based on the quality of outputs, their impact beyond academia, and the environment that supports research. SBS faculty teaching on the MBA at the BIBF have a high quality of scientific research, which is aligned with the RES framework and its objectives. Academic staff in Bahrain, notably local counselors, are not required to produce research.
- For Strathclyde academics, Strathclyde university has a workload model, which foresees a workload allocation of 40% of their time for research & knowledge exchange, 40% for teaching, and 20% for citizenship or community engagements activities. The specific implementation of workload is decided in their Department. The SBS Head of Department decides about teaching assignments of faculty members in Bahrain. If teaching in the MBA programme delivered in Bahrain exceeds annual teaching loads, faculty members will be offered offload teaching payments. These have to be approved by the Strathclyde Faculty Resource Group before any SBS academic can commit to teach in Bahrain.
- The Panel recognises local counsellors as academic staff given their pivotal role for the student's learning experience. That is, they perform a pastoral care role for students, such as elaborating and supporting students with their homework assignments and projects; they clarify any material for students if it was not fully understood during the intensive seminar; they provide students with additional information related to their respective courses; and they contextualize learning for students. Local counsellors also perform important teaching tasks. In addition to attending the 16 hours of intensive seminars taught by SBS faculty members, local counselors teach 3-4 sessions, or a total of 12 hours per class. Local counsellors also grade students' work (i.e., first marking all submissions), which are later moderated by SBS faculty. The Panel, therefore, is of the view that local counsellors have a substantial high workload. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the BIBF should introduce formalized and appropriate workload definitions and allocations for local counsellors, aligned with their academic roles.
- Strathclyde academics are all PhD holders specialized in their areas of teaching. Local counselors need to have a Master's degree and they must have several years of professional experience in the region or in Bahrain. Local counselors are for the most part BIBF MBA alumni who have been shortlisted by the BIBF Programme Manager.
- Strathclyde University has a thorough portfolio of policies regarding professional development of staff. BIBF specifies policies and procedures regarding training and development in its HR Policy Manual. Training is taking place for BIBF staff as reflected in the 2022 training records. However, five of the local counselors, did not receive training from BIBF. Moreover, local counsellors have not received formal training regarding the tasks they perform (teaching and grading). The Panel was informed that it should be

possible for local counsellors to join the professional development programmes of the University of Strathclyde. The Panel recommends that the BIBF should develop a formalized and documented approach regarding continuous learning and professional training and development of BIBF academic staff to ensure high quality of teaching and maintenance of academic standards.

- The SER states that Strathclyde University aims at fostering a culture of empowerment for staff members. It is also committed to gender equality and diversity, and there are various policies and programmes in place to support staff's work-family balance, which has attracted a diverse and highly qualified body of faculty members. There are also special arrangements for BIBF female full-time staff. In addition, Strathclyde University has numerous measures in place that ensure and monitor staff retention, specified in the Academic Career Development Framework. BIBF specifies retention policies in its HR Manual.

### **Indicator 2.3: Physical and Material Resources**

*Physical and material resources are adequate in number, space, style and equipment; these include classrooms, teaching halls, laboratories and other study spaces; Information Technology facilities, library and learning resources.*

#### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The new BIBF headquarter in Bahrain Bay provides adequate learning space (in terms of number and size) for students including a 300-seat auditorium, 20 smart (technology) classrooms, a computer laboratory, trading simulation room, group study spaces, and a library. MBA students have access to all these venues and facilities, and they have a dedicated academic floor in the BIBF building. The BIBF building is equipped with state-of-the-art teaching and learning equipment. The Panel considers the physical space as suitable for MBA students and appreciates the state-of-the-art facilities at the BIBF premises.
- MBA students have access to the Knowledge and Information Portal (KIP) of Strathclyde University, which is an intranet system that can be used by students to access databases, virtual learning websites, course sites, and library sites, etc. Moreover, students use a Moodle based virtual learning environment, called MyPlace (for students who started before 2022) or MyMBA (for students who started in and after 2022). BIBF received the Excellence Award 2021 for best electronic service, information and government for its MyClass e-learning platform by Bahrain's Information and eGovernment Authority. The Panel considers the information technology facilities as suitable for MBA students.

- Students have access to the Strathclyde University online library, which provides an extensive choice of online resources, such as databases, e-books, e-journals, conference papers. Library resources are easy to access (24/7) and convenient for students working from their home office. The library provides diverse support services, (e.g., library induction sessions, webinars that improve student's information literacy, and personal assistance and reference services). Physical books in the Strathclyde library are not available through inter-library loans, but portions can be scanned and shared with Bahraini students *via* email. In addition, students can use the BIBF library, where they have access to librarians who assist students with specific research topics. The BIBF library offers a large number of physical resources as well as workspaces, and computer facilities.
- BIBF has formal mechanisms in place to ensure maintenance and control of its resources and to regularly measure their adequacy. A maintenance team daily checks electrical systems, general equipment, plumbing, heating, ventilation, and AC systems. The daily inspections are documented. Moreover, there are regular security audits aligned with Bahraini regulations, and BIBF does regular risk assessments to update and adjust health and safety arrangements where necessary. BIBF is also compliant with health and safety regulations and has designated staff responsible for health and safety.

## **Indicator 2.4: Management Information Systems**

*There are functioning management information and tracking systems that support the decision-making processes and evaluate the utilisation of laboratories, e-learning and e-resources, along with policies and procedures that ensure security of learners' records and accuracy of results.*

### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The KIP by Strathclyde University serves as an intranet system that can be used by faculty members and relevant staff to manage information and assure efficiency of SBS's teaching and office activities. KIP allows them to manage all administrative activities (e.g., tracking student progress), and store and retrieve student information. The KIP information system provides relevant stakeholders (e.g., faculty members, advisors, and registrar) with the necessary information to take informed decisions regarding students, resources and organization. Moreover, faculty members use MyPlace/MyMBA to interact with students about their respective courses; to share all relevant material with the students; to give access to assignments; and to provide personalized learning opportunities for students. Faculty members are equally able to track student submissions and learning.
- All self-services (e.g., students, staff, and applicant portals) as well as stored student records are located on Pegasus. The information on Pegasus can only be shared among Strathclyde staff and students. The Strathclyde MBA Programme Manager for international centers manages the entry of information in Pegasus, and access to it. The

Panel learnt in the interviews that BIBF staff, like the local Programme Manager, have no access to Pegasus. Strathclyde University has a Record Management Policy in place that ensures the security of student records and the accuracy of results. The Records Management Policy was introduced in 2014 and is reviewed on a three-years cycle, and whenever necessary.

- Strathclyde University applies a secure certification process with uniform degree certificates for all types of programmes provided. Students have fast access to digital certificates, which can be verified by them through the Student Verification Portal. In the interviews, BIBF MBA students reported accurate certificates and transcripts, which were delivered in a timely manner. Certificates and transcripts have been accurate, and students can receive digital transcripts either directly in Strathclyde or *via* the local MBA Programme Manager.

## **Indicator 2.5: Student Support**

*There is appropriate student support available in terms of guidance, and care for students including students with special needs, newly admitted and transferred students, and students at risk of academic failure.*

### **Judgement: Partially Addressed**

- The Strathclyde online library provides 24/ 7 access for students. The Strathclyde library team offers induction about library resources and various webinars regarding academic library skills. Moreover, online or face-to-face sessions with librarians are offered to address particular topics, including using journal databases. Librarians at Strathclyde University, as well as in Bahrain can support students regarding information and knowledge resources for their research for specific projects. The Strathclyde University library also has provisions for students with disabilities, for example visually impaired students. For example, they can receive books and articles in different text sizes with different fonts and backgrounds.
- The SER emphasizes the importance of physical and mental health of students. There are online support services and a variety of types of counselling services available to various types of students (e.g., beginners, international students or students with disabilities).
- The MBA programme includes career guidance services, which are provided at Strathclyde University's Resource Center, which offers access to global job platforms and a range of information, events and activities accessible anywhere in the world. All MBA students have access for life (once they have registered as alumni) *via* Strathclyde Connect on MySpace/ MyMBA.

- Induction of MBA students is very comprehensive and takes place in Bahrain. It is run by local counsellors and staff. New students receive an induction at the beginning of each semester, which consists of various sessions. Firstly, there is a formal induction, which covers subjects such as programme curriculum and requirements, study plan, expectations regarding student engagement and performance, and final MBA projects. Secondly, a library demo session informs students about library resources and how to access and use them. Thirdly, students receive a Myplace/ MyMBA demo session; and finally, there is a BIBF induction, which focuses on local logistics and BIBF rules. All sessions are provided on site at the BIBF with relevant Strathclyde staff joining *via* zoom. The Panel appreciates the comprehensive induction given to students and the access to resources and support.
- Academic advising is done by local staff, notably local counsellors. Other forms of advising (regarding BIBF arrangements) are done by the local Programme Manager. The Panel found that there is no formalized process defined regarding advising. Academic advising in the sense of holistic support that includes topic such as academic progress, career planning, and access to resources is typically performed by the BIBF Programme Manager or by the BIBF Business Development Manager for all MBA students. Both Managers are not academics and they do not teach in the programme or academically support the programme. To date there is no advising policy or formalized process in place at BIBF. Everything seems to be done *ad-hoc* and from a reactive and problem solving-perspective. There is no documentation either about a students' advising history and advising meetings or other. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the BIBF should develop a formalized and documented approach regarding advising MBA students at the BIBF.
- Strathclyde is committed to gender equality according to the MBA student Handbook 2021-22. The University has in place Equality Outcomes which meet the requirements of the UK Equality Act 2010. Equality outcomes can be found in the Equality Outcomes Report from 2022. Strathclyde University has 11 outcomes that are measure with staff and student data and *via* survey. However, the relevant equality and Diversity Policy is not currently applied in Bahrain but is part of BIBF's future agenda. In practice, BIBF has accommodated for the needs of female students (for example, one student got pregnant and needed to postpone her MBA project, which was organized accordingly).
- The KIP information system provides SBS faculty members teaching the MBA programme in Bahrain with all information regarding student progress. However, this information is not accessible for BIBF staff or local counsellors because of UK regulatory constraints that limit access to these data to SBS staff and faculty only. Thus, at the end of each semester, the local MBA team is informed about students' performance by the Strathclyde Programme Manager (who has access to KIP). However, during the semester there is no continuous monitoring taking place for Bahraini students. Underperforming students can



re-sit the class (i.e., the next time the course is offered), or they can attend the class at Strathclyde University in Dubai. The Panel recommends that the BIBF should introduce processes that allow for the continuous monitoring of Bahraini students' performance and enable early intervention for at-risk students.

- BIBF seeks feedback from students after every teaching course and through an exit survey, which provides the BIBF senior management with some level of feedback regarding the overall satisfaction with the programme and related services. In addition, Strathclyde collects data from all international centers that include student feedback. The resulting report is published in a consolidated form as an annual programme monitoring report. However, there are no specific data or reports available, regarding the quality of support services related to Bahrain. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the BIBF should ensure a regular formalized assessment of the effectiveness of student support services at BIBF.

## Standard 3

### Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

*The students and graduates of the programme meet academic standards that are compatible with equivalent programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally.*

#### Indicator 3.1: Efficiency of the Assessment

*The assessment is effective and aligned with learning outcomes, to ensure attainment of the graduate attributes and academic standards of the programme.*

##### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The International Handbook identifies various assessment tasks such as group reports, individual assignments, reflective assessments and research papers. The Panel examined the details of the assessment tasks, samples of assessed work, and the feedback provided to students, and it concluded that valid and sufficiently complex assessment methods were in use. The moderation procedure followed also enhanced the reliability of marking.
- The Panel was informed in interviews that in designing its new MBA programme, Strathclyde University first referred to the graduate attributes contained in the QAAHE Subject Benchmark Statement for Master's Degrees in Business and Management. These attributes and Strathclyde-specific attributes were embedded into the PILOs. After that, the MBA programme courses were mapped against the PILOs. As Departmental faculty teams developed the courses, mapping scorecards for courses and course outlines were written containing the PILOs, Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs) and appropriate assessment activities. This has ensured that assessments are aligned with graduate attributes and outcomes. This same structure is reflected in the 2021-2022 course outlines.
- Student progression year on year is monitored through Programme Exam Boards responsible for ensuring assessments across a programme are marked fairly, and ensuring that students meet the PILOs. The MBA Board of Examiners of the SBS meets three times each academic year to review External Examiner reports and the marks being approved. Minutes of meetings indicate that the marks are analysed for each student, external examiner reports are reviewed, and special issues such as rule changes may be considered.

#### Indicator 3.2: Academic Integrity

*Academic integrity is ensured through the consistent implementation of relevant policies and procedures that deter plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct (e.g. cheating, forging of results, and commissioning others to do the work).*

**Judgement: Addressed**

- The Guidance on Dealing with Instances of Possible Academic Dishonesty by Students document sets out the policy on academic dishonesty covering prevention, detection, and investigation of an allegation. It also includes a section on monitoring. Appendices provide examples of academic dishonesty, minor infringements and cases where formal disciplinary procedures may be initiated. The final appendix details penalties recently imposed by the Senate Discipline Committee.
- The Panel was provided with the Academic Dishonesty Form, which is a template for reporting misconduct cases. At their induction sessions, students are made aware of the plagiarism policy, set out in the Student Handbook and uploaded on MyPlace. From time to time, during the delivery of the programme, students are reminded of the policy, and assignments submitted on MyPlace/MyMBA have Turnitin embedded to provide both students and faculty members information about any matching text. Guidelines for ethics in research are contained in the MBA Project Guidelines document and are monitored by supervisors.
- Turnitin software embedded in the MyPlace submission portal is used to detect cases of plagiarism. The Panel was provided with copies of Turnitin reports of assessment tasks from several courses as evidence that this was a regular requirement and practice, and the setting-up of assignments on MyPlace confirmed this.
- A matching text score of up to 10% is regarded as acceptable. However, when this is exceeded, the relevant academic staff will review the submission, and advise the student on any areas of concern. An example of the letter addressing a case of misconduct in 2017 is included in the evidence. However, there is no indication that this incident is related to a BIBF student. In interviews, the Panel was informed of a recent case where someone else had done the work for a student. The policy was followed to deal with this case of misconduct.

**Indicator 3.3: Internal and External Moderation of Assessment**

*There are mechanisms in place to measure the effectiveness of the programme's internal and external moderation systems for setting assessment instruments and grading students' achievements.*

**Judgement: Addressed**

- The Policy on Moderation and Double Marking states that all summative assessments must be moderated internally, as well as by an external examiner. Internal moderation is to be carried out by a university staff member who is appointed by SBS and must be suitably qualified. The Policy on Moderation and Double Marking also sets out procedures to address any differences in marks awarded by the markers and moderators (or second markers).
- The Assessment and Feedback Policy sets out the responsibilities for implementation of the Policy, clearly differentiating the roles assumed by the University, Faculties, Heads of Department/School, Programme Exam Boards, Programme Leaders/Directors, Year Coordinators and/or Module/Course Coordinators, staff involved in assessing students' work, and students. According to this Policy, Heads of Department/School are responsible for ensuring faculty adhere to the Policy, while Programme Exam Boards must ensure that assessments across a programme are marked fairly and that there is compliance with university and faculty regulations.
- The Procedure and Guidelines for External Examiners of Taught Programmes stipulates that the Programme Director or the Head of Department/School is responsible for identifying external examiners. Selection criteria for their appointment include that they should be a senior member of academic staff in the appropriate discipline and in another higher education institution; or a recognised authority in the appropriate discipline; or a recognised and experienced practitioner within the industry or a professional or statutory body. The appointment is for two years and can usually be renewed once for a further two years.
- The Policy on Moderation and Double Marking stipulates that a Board of Examiners is responsible for ensuring that assessments are marked fairly, and for reviewing and responding to External Examiners' reports following external moderation. A Moderation Form, based on a 10% sample of the marked assessments, is completed by the external examiner. Furthermore, the Panel was provided with evidence that examiner reports are drafted, and the response from the faculty members concerned is also captured in these reports. External examiners must also attend the Board of Examiners meeting.

### **Indicator 3.4: Work-based Learning**

*Where assessed work-based learning takes place, there is a policy and procedures to manage the process and its assessment, to assure that the learning experience is appropriate in terms of content and level for meeting the intended learning outcomes.*

**Judgement:** *Not Applicable*

### **Indicator 3.5: Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component**

*Where there is a capstone project or thesis/dissertation component, there are clear policies and procedures for supervision and evaluation which state the responsibilities and duties of both the supervisor and students, and there is a mechanism to monitor the related implementations and improvements.*

**Judgement: Addressed**

- Information on the research component of the MBA programme is provided in the MBA Project Guidelines of May 2020. When mapping the Research Project against the new MBA PILOs, two of the five PILOs are identified: PILOs 4 and 5. The Mapping Scorecard for the Project demonstrates how these PILOs inform the CILOs of the Project.
- According to the MBA Project Guidelines, which are made available to students and their supervisors, the student is responsible for managing the interactions with their supervisor. The Guidelines also indicate that the supervisor acts as ‘a guide’ in the research process and helps students to plan their research and reflect on their learning. Furthermore, the student cannot pass the ‘Project Methodology’ course until the supervisor agrees to the project proposal and approves the Ethics Application.
- According to the MBA Project Guidelines, after completing the taught component of the MBA, students can proceed to their project, which must be submitted within one year. Students are to arrange at least six meetings with their supervisor and are expected to have two formative feedback submissions during the project supervision process. These take place about a third and two-thirds of the way through the project work. In interviews, the Panel was also informed that regular interaction occurred between the supervisor and student through email correspondence.
- The MBA Project Guidelines, include marking guidelines and provide detailed technical requirements of the Research Project, including its layout, structure, and length. Based on the samples of Research Projects it received, the Panel was satisfied with the standard of students’ work, as well as the level of marking, but the feedback in the overall comments section was brief.
- The Policy on Moderation and Double Marking applies to the Research Project. Projects are to be marked by the student’s supervisor and second marked at a Project Review Board with a sample of the Projects sent to an external examiner to moderate. The Panel was informed in interviews that with the Research Project of the new MBA, two internal markers independently mark the Research Project and then compare their marking to reach a consensus result. If significant discrepancies or an agreement could not be reached, a third internal moderator is appointed, and only in exceptional circumstances was the Research Project referred to an external examiner at another institution. The evidence of external examining/moderating indicated that the last external examiner report for the Research Project was 2020-2021. None of the external examiners interviewed had been

involved in examining the Research Projects, only the coursework. Upon further enquiry, the Panel was informed that the appointment of an external examiner or moderator for the Research Projects had been discontinued. The Panel advises the reinstating of the external moderation process for the Research Projects.

### **Indicator 3.6: Achievements of the Graduates**

*The achievements of the graduates are consonant with those achieved on equivalent programmes as expressed in their assessed work, rates of progression and first destinations.*

#### **Judgement: Partially Addressed**

- From the student work samples received, the Panel was satisfied with the student achievement level. The Executive MBA cohort at BIBF had 97 students enrolled in 2023. Statistical analysis indicates a dropout rate of 19%, with 5% attributed to students failing and 14% to withdrawals from the programme. Students graduate after 2.5 to 7 years of study. In addition, the 2021-2022 Annual Performance Report of the BIBF Academic Centre indicates a completion rate for the 2017-2018 intake of 77%, while the student achievement data for the Annual Performance Report of the 2021-2022 academic year shows that completion rates for different year cohorts vary from 77% to 33%. The Panel recommends that the BIBF should investigate of the reasons for the slow progression of students through the two-year MBA programme in order to initiate remedial measures.
- Strathclyde administers exit and alumni surveys, but these are not analysed at the level of the site of delivery of the programme. That is, they do not specifically collate and analyse information about the MBA student cohorts at the BIBF. The BIBF also engages with employers at an institutional level through an HR manager's meeting. In addition, employers participate in a market report. However, there is no information emanating from these engagements that is specific to the Strathclyde MBA programme. BIBF has only recently compiled a survey to collect information on BIBF MBA Graduate destinations. However, Strathclyde does not use this graduate destination information to monitor its programmes or students. The Panel recommends that the BIBF should adopt a formal and systematic approach in monitoring the career progression of MBA alumni and the satisfaction of their employers.

## Standard 4

### Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

*The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance and continuous improvement, contribute to giving confidence in the programme.*

#### Indicator 4.1: Quality Assurance Management

*There is a clear quality assurance management system, in relation to the programme that ensures the institution's policies, procedures and regulations are applied effectively and consistently.*

##### **Judgement: Addressed**

- Appropriate institutional policies and regulations are in place at Strathclyde University to support the management and delivery of the MBA programme. They are routinely reviewed and revised, and the Panel found a robust awareness of these policies and regulations among staff and students during interviews. The BIBF also has its own suite of policies and regulations, some of which are applicable to the MBA programme.
- Primary responsibility for QA and academic standards in the MBA programme lies with Strathclyde University. However, the BIBF also has its own Code of Quality Practice, which includes provisions for monitoring institutional effectiveness and the delivery of academic programmes. The Strathclyde University quality management system is based on the UK's Quality Code for Higher Education, which is subsumed within the University's institutional and programme regulations. The Panel found that a comprehensive QA system is in place at Strathclyde University supported by a multi-layer committee structure with full oversight by the Senate. The system is reviewed based on feedback from external reviewers and staff generally understand their role in QA. The Panel learnt, however, that some of the related policies and procedures are not consistently deployed in the MBA programme. This was evident in the unavailability of evidence requested by the Panel, confirmed in interviews with staff and noted as a recognized opportunity for improvement. Therefore, The Panel recommends that the BIBF should consistently implement Strathclyde University's QA management system and related policies and procedures in the MBA programme.
- As noted previously, BIBF has its own QA processes some of which are implemented in the MBA programme in order to monitor student performance and outcomes. The Centre for Academic Studies prepares an Annual Performance Report (formerly known as the Annual Monitoring Report) summarising the outcomes and key performance indicators of all of BIBF's academic programmes, including Strathclyde University's MBA. The

Educational Standards Committee is responsible for reviewing the Performance Reports, which also identify opportunities for improvement. The Panel found, however, that these Reports are not concerned with the quality and academic standards of the programme, and they are not shared with Strathclyde University since they pertain to multiple academic partners. It was evident to the Panel that Strathclyde University and BIBF do not communicate on matters related to QA, and there is limited alignment between both entities QA activities. The Panel suggests that Strathclyde University and the BIBF align their quality and programme monitoring activities to foster a systematic, integrated and collaborative approach to assuring quality and academic standards on the MBA programme offered in Bahrain.

#### **Indicator 4.2: Programme Management and Leadership**

*The programme is managed in a way that demonstrates effective and responsible leadership and there are clear lines of accountability.*

##### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The MBA is a cross-border programme delivered by Strathclyde University in Bahrain at the BIBF. Academic responsibility and custodianship of the academic standards of the programme rest with Strathclyde University, as discussed previously (see Indicators 1.5, 3.1, 3.3 and 4.1). At Strathclyde University, the MBA is housed within the SBS and is managed by an MBA Director who reports to the Director of Strathclyde Executive Education and Development (SEED). A dedicated Administrative Professional Services team is in place to support the programme and includes international programme administrators who liaise with staff in Bahrain and Strathclyde University's other international centres. Relevant committees exist at the institutional and faculty level at Strathclyde University, with the Faculty Academic Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee having a key role in the MBA programme.
- At the BIBF, the MBA programme operates from the Centre for Academic Studies, which hosts all of the BIBF's cross-border academic programmes. An MBA Programme Manager and a Business Development Manager at the BIBF represent the interests of Strathclyde University in Bahrain. Although both are BIBF employees, the Programme Manager reports to the Head of the Centre for Academic Studies, while the SEED Director is the Business Development Manager's line manager. At the operational level, Strathclyde faculty members who teach the MBA programme in Bahrain are faculty members from other academic units within the SBS. At the BIBF, local counsellors have a dual reporting relationship with the Strathclyde faculty members for academic matters related to the courses they support and the Head of the Centre for Academic Studies for any administrative or operational matters.



- The Panel requested a chart to show how these complex management and communication arrangements between Strathclyde and the BIBF are structured and organised, but none was available, although separate organizational charts for Strathclyde University and the BIBF were provided, along with job descriptions. It was evident in discussions with Strathclyde and BIBF staff members that there was a sound understanding of individual roles. These were consistently deployed because most of the staff involved in delivering the MBA in Bahrain were long-serving, experienced and had a well-established association with the programme. However, the arrangements, structures and processes for the MBA in Bahrain are not formally documented, and this poses a significant risk for both Strathclyde and the BIBF with respect to the turnover of staff associated with the programme. The Panel, therefore, recommends that Strathclyde University and the BIBF review the existing MBA management and communication arrangements to ensure they are formalised and documented to sustain effective programme leadership and delivery in the long term.
- The Panel confirmed that Strathclyde offers equivalent quality of education to students on the MBA programme in Bahrain. Both alumni and current students informed the Panel that they had full access to all of the online resources and materials through MyMBA, and these were demonstrated to the Panel during the visit. Further verification was available through direct access to the MyMBA, induction information and interviews with key staff members, including Strathclyde faculty members, local counsellors and librarians. The equivalent quality of education is also achieved by having Strathclyde faculty members teach students in Bahrain (see also Indicator 2.2).

### **Indicator 4.3: Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme**

*There are arrangements for annual internal evaluation and periodic reviews of the programme that incorporate both internal and external feedback and mechanisms are in place to implement recommendations for improvement.*

#### **Judgement: Partially Addressed**

- According to Strathclyde University's Annual Internal Review Framework Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) must be conducted by programme teams based on course and programme-level reports to enhance teaching and learning and contribute to maintaining academic standards. The Panel requested copies of course review reports and the APM reports for the MBA programme but none were available. This was confirmed in interviews with Strathclyde staff members who indicated that APM reports had not been consistently produced for the MBA programme. Instead, the programme relied on information reported in the SBS Faculty Annual Reports, which contain a summary of enhancements made to all of the faculty's programmes. An examination of the most recent Faculty Annual Reports showed that improvements and general changes made to the

MBA are discussed, but the information presented does not constitute a comprehensive review of the programme or the courses. As noted above (see Indicator 4.1), the BIBF conducts an annual performance review of the programme, while a separate operational review is undertaken every year by Strathclyde University. Neither of these constitutes a comprehensive programme review, and the latter does not involve any QA staff from Strathclyde or the BIBF.

- APM reports are intended to feed into periodic programme reviews which are termed Quinquennial Reviews at Strathclyde University. The Panel requested copies of the latest Quinquennial Review of the MBA but was informed that it was not available and that a comprehensive periodic review of the programme using the Quinquennial Review process had not yet been undertaken since periodic reviews were only recently implemented at Strathclyde. The most recent updates made to the MBA in September 2022 resulted from a standalone review involving practitioners and other internal and external stakeholders that aimed to modernise the programme. The Panel is concerned with the lack of formal annual and periodic programme reviews on the MBA and recommends that the BIBF should ensure that the existing framework for annual and quinquennial reviews at Strathclyde is implemented rigorously and consistently in the MBA programme.

#### **Indicator 4.4: Benchmarking and Surveys**

*Benchmarking studies and the structured comments collected from stakeholders' surveys are analysed and the outcomes are used to inform decisions on programmes and are made available to the stakeholders.*

##### **Judgement: Partially Addressed**

- Strathclyde University has benchmarked the programme against the QAAHE's Subject Benchmark Statements for Master's Degrees in Business and Management to ensure the MBA meets threshold academic standards in the UK. The University also makes provisions for external benchmarks and standards in its institutional review framework; however, no evidence of this external benchmarking was provided to the Panel. The Panel was informed in the interviews that benchmarking with other UK higher education institutions was conducted when the MBA programme was re-designed in 2021-2022. There was no benchmarking undertaken locally in Bahrain with other MBA programmes, except for a recent market study by the BIBF. The need for formal local benchmarking was identified by the BIBF as an area for improvement. The Panel is of the view that the comparability of academic standards on the MBA programme ought to be benchmarked with other similar programmes in Bahrain and internationally. The Panel advises the BIBF to address this issue.

- Some formal mechanisms are in place at Strathclyde and the BIBF to collect feedback from internal and external stakeholders (including surveys, focus groups and committees). However, a formal schedule of these was not available. All students complete an MBA Class Evaluation survey at the end of each MBA course, and comment on their overall learning experience, the learning environment and faculty members. A separate survey is also administered to rate the local counsellors. The Panel requested samples of filled-in surveys with disaggregated data for Bahrain but was informed that none were available. Furthermore, no information was provided in response to the Panel's request for improvements based on survey results. In addition to surveys, student feedback is sought through the Staff Student Liaison Committee, which involves meetings with students to collect their feedback and views on all of Strathclyde's programmes at the BIBF.
- There was evidence of alumni surveys being conducted by Strathclyde on its other programmes, but the alumni survey results for the MBA programme were not provided when requested. The BIBF recognised the need for more alumni engagement as an opportunity for improvement and launched its own local alumni survey in September 2023. Alumni representatives have also been added to the Academic Advisory Committee at the BIBF, creating an additional local channel for alumni engagement. The Panel noted that Strathclyde consulted alumni from different international centres at the time of re-designing the MBA programme. However, this was a standalone activity for the new programme development.
- At the time of the visit, no surveys of employers had been conducted by Strathclyde or the BIBF. The BIBF organises an annual meeting of HR managers, but this relates to all of its programmes and courses. Some employer input was sought when the local market study was conducted, but this was a general perspective once again. The Panel is of the view that feedback from employers in Bahrain is critical and must be gathered because most of the students enrolled on the MBA programme are sponsored by their employers. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the BIBF should ensure that appropriate mechanisms for systematically gathering feedback from internal and external stakeholders are developed, implemented and used to inform decision-making on the MBA programme in Bahrain.

#### **Indicator 4.5: Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs**

*The programme has a functioning advisory board and there is continuous scoping of the labour market and the national and societal needs, where appropriate for the programme type, to ensure the relevancy and currency of the programme.*

**Judgement: Addressed**

- Both Strathclyde and the BIBF have functioning advisory boards in place, which are composed of diverse external stakeholders and with appropriate terms of reference. The advisory board at Strathclyde is a faculty-level board for the SBS that provides input into all of the School's programmes at a high level. A dedicated advisory board for the MBA does not exist, although there is an intention to establish an Industry Advisory Board. The Panel requested evidence of changes made to the MBA programme in response to feedback from the advisory board, but it was unavailable. In lieu of feedback from employers and the advisory board, the MBA relies on input from a group of global practitioners to inform the programme.
- Similarly, at the BIBF, an advisory board for the Centre for Academic Studies exists and meets annually. The board's remit applies to all Centre's programmes, including Strathclyde's MBA. The Panel noted, however, from the meeting minutes and interviews with the members, that their feedback relates to the competitive positioning of the BIBF's programmes in the market and the need for new programmes rather than feedback about the standing and value of the programmes in the context of the Bahrain labour market. The Panel recommends that Strathclyde and BIBF ensure that their respective advisory boards provide relevant programme feedback, which is used systematically to inform decision-making on the MBA and ascertain that the programme meets Bahrain's labour market, national and societal needs.
- A recent market scoping study was undertaken by the BIBF to identify emerging needs and themes in Bahrain and gauge local demand for its programmes. Based on the findings of this study, the Centre for Academic Studies has developed actions for its current programmes and the development of new programmes to be incorporated into the institutional strategic plan.

## V. Conclusion

**Taking into account the institution's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the virtual site visit, the Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the DHR/BQA *Academic Programme Reviews (Cycle 2) Handbook, 2020*:**

**There is Confidence in the Master of Business Administration of Centre for Academic and Executive Studies (Hosted Programme – University of Strathclyde) offered by the Bahrain Institute for Banking and Finance.**

**In coming to its conclusion regarding the four Standards, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:**

1. The MBA programme reflects an appropriate balance between theory and practice.
2. The comprehensive induction given to students and the access to resources and support.
3. The state of the art the facilities at the BIBF premises.

**In terms of improvement, the Panel recommends that the Bahrain Institute for Banking and Finance should:**

1. Ensure that the title 'Master of Business Administration' is used consistently in all documentation.
2. Revise the partnership agreement to create more formalized reporting structures and relationships between the BIBF and Strathclyde, particularly concerning reviewing and contextualizing the programme's academic content.
3. Adopt a more formalized and systematic approach to contextualising the course content and ensuring it is fit for purpose in Bahrain.
4. Develop a formal teaching and learning policy that articulates Strathclyde's teaching and learning philosophy and the related teaching methods.
5. Ensure that consistent marking arrangements are agreed to and that the roles and responsibilities of the various parties are itemized in a written agreement.
6. Provide regular and formal training in assessment practices to local counsellors if they are to remain involved in marking and grading.
7. Ensure that the admission criteria are regularly revised in light of student performance and feedback from relevant stakeholders.
8. Introduce formalized procedures for the induction, performance appraisal and management, of local counselors in the MBA programme.

9. Introduce formalized and appropriate workload definitions and allocations for local counsellors, aligned with their academic roles.
10. Develop a formalize and documented approach regarding continuous learning and professional training and development of BIBF academic staff to ensure high quality of teaching and maintenance of academic standards.
11. Formalize and document the advising of MBA students at the BIBF.
12. Introduce processes that allow for the continuous monitoring of Bahraini students' performance and enable early intervention for at-risk students.
13. Ensure a regular, formalized assessment of the effectiveness of student support services at BIBF.
14. Investigate the reasons for the slow progression of students through the two-year MBA programme in order to initiate remedial measures.
15. Adopt a formal and systematic approach for monitoring the career progression of MBA alumni and the satisfaction of their employers.
16. Consistently implement Strathclyde University's quality assurance management system and related policies and procedures in the MBA programme.
17. Review the existing MBA management and communication arrangements between Strathclyde University and the BIBF to ensure they are formalised and documented to sustain effective programme leadership and delivery in the long term.
18. Ensure that the existing framework for annual and quinquennial reviews at Strathclyde is implemented rigorously and consistently in the MBA programme.
19. Ensure that appropriate mechanisms for systematically gathering feedback from internal and external stakeholders are developed, implemented and used to inform decision-making on the MBA programme in Bahrain.
20. Ensure that the respective advisory boards of Strathclyde University and BIBF provide relevant programme feedback, which is used systematically to inform decision-making on the MBA and ascertain that the programme meets Bahrain's labour market, national and societal needs.