



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Programme Review Report

**Master of Business Administration
Applied Science University
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 Applied Science University

The programme review of the Masters in Business Administration of the Applied Science University was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to review the quality of 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 Applied Science University, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

Applied Science University was notified by the HERU/QAAET in June 2010 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its Masters in Business Administration with the site visit taking place during February-April 2011. In preparation for the programme review, Applied Science University submitted an SER with appendices on the agreed date in November 2010, with the site visit postponed to October 2011, more evidence was submitted on 25 September 2011. It is expected that the Applied Science University will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Masters in Business Administration.

The Masters in Business Administration programme at Applied Science University admitted its first students in 2007. The programme offers an MBA in the Arabic language to students of all nationalities with at least 60% average in their undergraduate degree. Three preparatory business courses are required for students whose undergraduate degree is not in business administration. Applicants with significant work experience can request an exception to the 60% admission requirement.

The MBA programme consists of eight required courses, two elective courses and a thesis. A total of 36 credit hours are needed to graduate. Students must achieve an overall average of 70% to graduate. Students have six semesters to complete all programme requirements. MBA courses are offered on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays to cater to the needs of working students.

2. Indicator 1: Curriculum

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

- 2.1 The aims of the programme are clearly stated and aligned with the mission and vision of the Institution. The College has developed programme and course intended learning outcomes (ILOs). The programme ILOs are clearly stated in the course syllabi. While the course ILOs are mapped to the programme ILOs using a matrix, the logical connection between the course ILO statements and the programme ILO statements needs strengthening. The underlying problem is that even though the course ILOs are mapped to the programme ILOs, the individual pairings often did not make sense. Completing the course ILOs does not assure that the programme ILOs are achieved. This needs to be addressed by restating the course ILOs in terms that make their logical connection to the documented programme ILOs explicit.
- 2.2 The Panel noted from the documentation and the interview sessions that the programme structure and the frequency of courses taken are satisfactory, as well as the overall duration of the programme. However, the addition of 'Strategic Management' to the list of required courses and the removal of Managerial Economics to the list of electives will strengthen the curriculum. The eight core courses are relevant to the current international trends, and students can choose two courses from the eight elective courses.
- 2.3 Some evidence of practical aspects of the curriculum is presented in the course syllabi through case studies and reports. However, they do not provide adequate evidence that the assignments have sufficient practical merit, nor that they are connected to a theoretical framework at the master's level. Furthermore, they are not clearly related to the ILOs. The programme team needs to include a practical experience in the curriculum to ensure that every student has at least one significant opportunity to practice applying what they are learning to an actual business.
- 2.4 While the breadth of material coverage is evident, the depth of coverage is unclear because of the lack of detail. Further description is needed of the content covered in each scheduled class session and of the required assigned readings. The course syllabi would benefit significantly from additional detail on the topics covered and the assigned readings. The chapters of assigned textbooks actually covered need to be stated. The inclusion of sample lecture notes in the course portfolio would also help to document the level of material covered.
- 2.5 Experience applying the course materials to real world situations is primarily through in-class case studies. Students may, but are not required to, use companies

as the subjects of course research or project work. More systematic experience at using what has been learned in real-world situations needs to be built into the core course assignments. This will ensure that all students gain confidence and skill in applying what they have learned prior to graduation.

2.6 All courses follow the same assessment model (30% for mid-term examination, 30% for class activities, and 40% for the final examination). Clear grade calculation criteria are used for the assessment of the courses as indicated in the syllabi.

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

- there is evidence of documented ILOs at course and programme level.

2.8 In terms of improvement the Review Panel **recommends** that the MBA programme should:

- restate course ILOs in terms that make their logical connection to the documented programme ILOs explicit
- designate the required strategic management course as the capstone course
- expand the description of course material coverage as described in the syllabi
- explicitly identify the theoretical components of each course
- strengthen the practical aspects in the curriculum.

2.9 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy 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 admission policy is limited to the requirement of a bachelor's degree from a recognised institution. Interviews are conducted systematically. Remedial courses are required in the case those admitted hold a bachelor's degree in a field other than business administration. The students required to take pre-MBA courses will be allowed to enrol in MBA courses only after they complete all required remedial courses .
- 3.2 The MBA programme has seven faculty members assigned to teach its courses. They also draw faculty members from other university departments depending on the programme's needs. All faculty members hold terminal degrees from various universities, and some of them have extensive work experience in the industry. Faculty members should be at the rank of associate or full professor. Any exception is to be approved by the Dean of the college. The teaching load of full-time professors is nine credit hours. Faculty members with administrative positions have a course reduction. Also, faculty members supervising enrolled students in the thesis writing course will have one credit hour per student supervised, count towards their teaching load.
- 3.3 The Panel found that there is funding available for conference attendance and that faculty members are rewarded for journal publication. It was also noted that there is faculty member release time for research. Although funding and faculty member release time for research are available, research should be further encouraged and promoted. There is not a mechanism in place to accomplish the aforementioned.
- 3.4 The library, computer laboratories, cafeteria, registration office, finance office, a selection of classrooms, and faculty member offices were visited. Faculty members indicated they are able to schedule laboratory time as needed and students confirmed their availability. The library and laboratory hours are sufficient to support MBA students on the three days they most often use the programme, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. This is particularly important for working students who can only access the campus on weekends. Recent upgrades to internet connectivity have addressed prior issues of speed and continuity of access to the internet. Classrooms are equipped with projectors and faculty members are issued with laptop computers to use in the classroom. Weekly preventative maintenance checks of laboratory and classroom equipment are done by the IT department. Faculty members report immediate response to any IT problems encountered.

Faculty member offices are suitable and equipped with a desktop computer and a printer.

- 3.5 The library has a small business administration collection of monographs and periodicals in both Arabic and English. While the physical collection is small, faculty members and students report that it meets their needs. Subscriptions to on-line databases supplement the physical collection with a wide range of materials in Arabic and English. Additional materials needed to support a course can be requested by faculty members in the semester prior to the need. To date no restrictions have been placed on requests for additional materials.
- 3.6 Records are kept of student use of the library collection and databases. Faculty members require the use of reference materials beyond the assigned textbook in most courses. Bibliographies in the papers submitted as course assignments allow faculty members to assess whether students have made use of materials beyond the assigned textbook(s).
- 3.7 New students are required to attend induction workshops. Interviews with students in their first semester of study confirm they were required to attend an induction workshop a few weeks earlier and felt the material covered was useful. The workshop introduced the ILOs for the programme. A separate library orientation is made available to all students. Library staff report providing training on how to access the collection and how to use the databases as requested by students. Transferred students have access to the same workshops.
- 3.8 Student academic support is provided by faculty members. One faculty member specialises in advising all MBA students, but all faculty members make themselves available to students. The small size of the programme has allowed faculty members to know each student to a degree not possible in larger programmes. As the programme grows the currently informal, yet effective, approach will need to be formalised. Students praised the level of support they receive from the MBA programme. Students universally reported that faculty members are readily available in person, by telephone, and by email. Non-academic advice is available from faculty members and for serious issues counselling is available on campus from a trained student counsellor.
- 3.9 It is premature to consider summary statistics of programme performance given that only two had graduated at the time of review. It should be noted that all seven students from the first three admission cohorts dropped out of the programme. Two of six students from the fourth cohort are still active. All students from the 2009 and 2011 cohort remain active.

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

- appropriate facilities provided to MBA students
- new students are given an induction
- availability of research funding for faculty members
- faculty members are supportive and helpful to students
- student academic advising has been tailored to each individual student.

3.11 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel recommends that the Department should:

- increase efforts to encourage and enable faculty members to engage in research
- formalizing student advising processes.

3.12 **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 academic standards are clearly stated as well as the aims and the ILOs of the programme. Furthermore, initiatives have been taken by the university to educate the faculty members on strategic planning and assessment tools and methods. However, there is a learning curve for the faculty members to become more familiar with the assessment process and link the assessment of students to the ILOs.
- 4.2 Attempts have been made to compare ASU's MBA programme with similar programmes at other universities, in Bahrain, the region, Middle East and North Africa and the United States of America. The University is in the process of looking into more formal benchmarking exercises. The Panel has also seen that the University has signed a number of Memoranda of Understanding, and it is in the process of signing some more with other institutions. This is generally positive for the university and the MBA programme in particular, provided there is substantial activity taking place that will be mutually beneficial to the institutions involved.
- 4.3 Course ILOs are explicitly mapped to all graded work. Specific sections of each assignment or examination are identified as relating to one of the four course ILO areas. These are aggregated for each student and a summary matrix is prepared. This is a recent practice that is being done for most, but not all courses. Section eight of the course portfolio contains the faculty member's assessment of whether or not the learning outcomes were achieved in the course. At the end of the semester faculty members report meeting to review the ILOs for all courses. The Panel noted that not all course file reports had section eight completed.
- 4.4 There are external examination reviewers from Mutah University, Jordan. A memorandum of understanding between ASU and Mutah University governs this relationship. This has been applied in at least one instance in December 2010. However, the Panel observed that some of the reviewers avoided commenting on the content of the examination. In other instances, concern was voiced over the limited content being tested.
- 4.5 For the thesis assessment a committee of three members evaluates the completed thesis with clear rubrics. The Graduate Studies Committee nominates the external examiner; the Dean will approve associate or full professors with no conflict of interest. The student has to defend the thesis within the programme time limit of six semesters.

- 4.6 The Panel examined during the site visit samples of student work in assignments, mid-terms and final examinations from the course files of all required and some elective courses, and noted that the level of assessment observed is not appropriate for a master's level programme. Student knowledge, critical thinking and analytic skills were not evidenced at a master's degree level. Assessments emphasised the repeating of knowledge rather than its application to problem solving. The Panel is of the view that greater depth-of-knowledge, critical thinking, analysis and more testing of their application are needed. Assessment instruments need to be brought into line with masters level work expectations.
- 4.7 The MBA programme has two graduates with a third student about to defend the thesis. No feedback from employers on the quality of the graduates was available. The one alumnus interviewed was satisfied with the programme and would recommend it to others. In interviewing students the Panel found that all were satisfied with the programme and with the willingness of the faculty members to be available to assist them.
- 4.8 The items in examinations (finals and mid-terms), in some instances did not appear to match the course ILO to which they were mapped. The nature of the questions could not be used to assess a master's level of intellectual skills. Questions limited to definitions and terminology are an invitation for memorising with no analytic, critical skills or applied value. The work, in many instances, does not demonstrate the ILOs in respect of student achievement.
- 4.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standards, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
- there are some efforts to benchmark the MBA programme
 - the structure of the programme and course ILOs and assessment of learning outcomes is well designed.
- 4.10 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel recommends that the Department should:
- improve the level of assessments
 - align course ILOs
 - revise assessment instruments to bring them into line with masters level work expectations
 - increase the depth of material covered and the rigour of assessment used to the graduate level.

4.11 Judgement

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

5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

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

- 5.1 The bylaws of the university have clearly stated criteria that are used in assigning faculty in all programmes. For the MBA programme, faculty members should be at the rank of associate or full professor.
- 5.2 Reviews and external consultations have been completed for the purpose of improving the programme. In addition, there is a perceived commitment to continuing these reviews. However, these actions are not part of a clearly stated policy.
- 5.3 Engagement in systematic quality assurance is a recent initiative of the programme. Many initiatives have started which should contribute to quality improvement in the future. The development of the programme and ILOs, the mapping of outcomes, and the linking of assessments to outcomes is in its second version. The efficacy of the first version and related processes were assessed with the help of an external consultant. Based on this assessment the outcomes statements, the process for mapping assessment to course outcomes, and the process for summarising student performance on outcomes were improved and implemented.
- 5.4 The MBA programme team has developed alumni and employer surveys, however, they have not yet been implemented. The University needs to implement fully the alumni and employer surveys.
- 5.5 There is an Advisory Board for the College that also serves the MBA programme. The Board meets four times per year. During the site visit, the Panel met with three members of the external Advisory Board. The board members were knowledgeable about the MBA programme and cited several of their recommendations that had been implemented. They also showed a strong interest in the MBA programme and had clear opinions on the need for continuous improvement of the programme.
- 5.6 The needs for faculty member professional development are identified by the Dean during the annual review process and in response to the implementation needs for new initiatives. Requests for workshops are submitted to the Head of the Staff Development and Training Centre. Workshop delivery is outsourced when the subject matter expertise is not available in the Centre. Reports of attendance at university sponsored workshops are provided to the Dean by the Staff Development and Training Centre. Attendance at workshops is mandatory for faculty members.

- 5.7 The student course evaluation is performed periodically at the end of the semester at least once per year. Results are reviewed in programme meetings by faculty members, and by the Dean as part of the annual evaluation process. Due to the small size of the programme regular meetings are used to gather informal feedback from students. The results are communicated to faculty members at the beginning of the following semester.
- 5.8 In coming to its conclusion regarding the effectiveness of quality management and assurance, the Review Panel notes, with appreciation, the following:
- there is evidence of external programme reviews
 - there is evidence of systematic quality assurance initiatives
 - the efforts to establish a formal survey of employers
 - the establishment of a college Advisory Board
 - the efforts to establish staff development and training.
- 5.9 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel recommends that the Department should:
- develop a system to gather and analyse all feedback from all stakeholders.

5.10 **Judgement**

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

6. Conclusion

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

There is limited confidence in the Masters in Business Administration offered by the Applied Science University.