



Directorate of Higher Education Reviews

Programmes-within-College Reviews Report

**Diploma in Accounting and Finance leading to
BSc in Accounting and Finance
Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance
Kingdom of Bahrain**

Date Reviewed: 12-16 February 2017
HC095-C2-R095

Table of Contents

Acronyms.....	2
The Programmes-within-College Review Process.....	4
1. Indicator 1: The Learning Programme	9
2. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme.....	16
3. Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates.....	25
4. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance.....	32
5. Conclusion.....	39

.

Acronyms

ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
APL	Accreditation for Prior Learning Process
BIBF	Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
BSAF	Bachelor of Science in Accounting and Finance
BSc	Bachelor of Science
CFA	Chartered Financial Analyst
CILO	Course Intended Learning Outcome
CIMA	Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
DipAF	Diploma in Accounting and Finance
EPSG	External Partnership Scrutiny Group
ESC	Educational Standards Committee
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
HEC	Higher Education Council
HR	Human Resources
IFP	International Foundation Programme
IFRS	International Financial Reporting Standards
ILO	Intended Learning Outcome
MIS	Management Information System

PILOs	Programme Intended Learning Outcomes
QA	Quality Assurance
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SIS	Student Information System

The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process

A. The Programmes-within-College Reviews Framework

To meet the need for a robust external quality assurance system in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR) of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA) has developed and is implementing two external quality review processes, namely: Institutional Reviews and Programmes-within-College Reviews which together will give confidence in Bahrain's higher education system nationally, regionally and internationally.

Programmes-within-College Reviews have three main objectives:

- to provide decision-makers (in the higher education institutions, the BQA, the Higher Education Council (HEC), students and their families, prospective employers of graduates and other stakeholders) with evidence-based judgements on the quality of learning programmes
- to support the development of internal quality assurance processes with information on emerging good practices and challenges, evaluative comments and continuing improvement
- to enhance the reputation of Bahrain's higher education regionally and internationally.

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

Indicator 1: The Learning Programme

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

Indicator 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 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates

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

Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

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

The Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Panel’) states in the Review Report whether the programme satisfies each Indicator. If the programme satisfies all four Indicators, the concluding statement will state that there is ‘confidence’ in the programme.

If two or three Indicators are satisfied, including Indicator 1, the programme will receive a ‘limited confidence’ judgement. If one or no Indicator is satisfied, or Indicator 1 is not satisfied, the judgement will be ‘no confidence’, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Criteria for Judgements

Criteria	Judgement
All four Indicators satisfied	Confidence
Two or three Indicators satisfied, including Indicator 1	Limited Confidence
One or no Indicator satisfied	No Confidence
All cases where Indicator 1 is not satisfied	

B. The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process at the Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance

A Programmes-within-College review of Bangor’s University business academic programmes offered by Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance (BIBF) was conducted by the DHR of the BQA in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. The site visit was divided into two phases. The first one was conducted by a representative from the panel, during the period 25-27 January 2017 at Bangor University, Wales in UK, whose qualifications are offered and delivered by the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies (the Centre) at BIBF in Bahrain; whereas the second site visit was conducted at BIBF’s premises during the period 12-16. February 2017 by all panel members. This arrangement was made due to the nature and type of programmes offered by BIBF and their delivery and internal quality assurance arrangements between the two institutions. The programmes reviewed during these site visits are the Diploma in Accounting and Finance that leads to BSc in Accounting and Finance, Diploma in Banking and Finance that leads to BSc in Banking and Finance or BSc in Business Administration and Finance and Diploma in Islamic Finance that leads to BSc in Banking and Finance. Currently, the three diplomas’ graduates have direct access to the third year of the relevant BSc programme at Bangor University.

BIBF was notified by the DHR/BQA in April 2016 that it would be subject to a Programmes-within-College review of the above-mentioned programmes. In preparation for the review, BIBF conducted its self-evaluation of these programmes and submitted the Self-Evaluation Reports (SERs) with appendices on 16 October 2016.

The DHR constituted a panel consisting of experts in the academic fields of Accounting, Finance, Banking, Business Studies and Islamic Finance and in higher education who have experience of external programme quality reviews. The Panel comprised four reviewers.

This Report provides an account of the review process and the findings of the panel for the Diploma in Accounting and Finance that leads to BSc in Accounting and Finance offered at Bangor University based on:

- (i) analysis of the SER and supporting materials submitted by the institution prior to the external peer-review visit
- (ii) analysis derived from discussions with various stakeholders (faculty members, students, graduates and employers)
- (iii) analysis based on additional documentation requested and presented to the Panel during the site visit.

It is expected that the BIBF in collaboration with Bangor University will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Diploma in Accounting and Finance that leads to a BSc in Accounting and Finance. The DHR recognizes that quality assurance is the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. Hence, it is the right of BIBF to decide how it will address the recommendations contained in the Review Report. Nevertheless, three months after the publication of this Report, BIBF is required to submit to the DHR an improvement plan in response to the recommendations.

The DHR would like to extend its thanks to Bangor University and BIBF for the co-operative manner that both institutions showed during Programmes-within-College review process. It also wishes to express its appreciation for the open discussions held in the course of the review and the professional conduct of the faculty and administrative staff at Bangor University as well as BIBF's staff.

C. Overview of the Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance

BIBF was established in 1981 to provide education and training in support of Bahrain's banking and finance sectors. The Institution offers a wide range of programmes including short courses, customised programmes, professional programmes and undergraduate and postgraduate academic programmes. The vision of the BIBF is to

be 'the institute of choice for the development of business professionals' and its mission is 'to contribute to establishing Bahrain as a regional financial hub, by providing 'quality, thought leadership and value' and through establishing BIBF as a centre of excellence'. Structurally, BIBF consists of six centres, including the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies which is responsible for the offerings of the three Bangor's University diplomas that are quality assured and validated by Bangor's University and lead to BSc degrees from Bangor University. This in turn means that graduates of the Diploma in Accounting and Finance can progress directly to the third year of the BSc degree in Accounting and Finance at Bangor University. It is worth noting that as per the validation arrangement between Bangor's University and BIBF which goes back to 2004, the former's procedures and regulations govern the operation of the latter as per validated provision, and Bangor University remains fully responsible for the academic standards and the quality of learning in the three diplomas offered at the BIBF in Bahrain.

At the time of the site visit there were 13 academic staff across Centre for Academic and Executive Studies (five full-time and eight part-time) and eight administrative staff all of whom are full-time. The total number of students at the Centre who are enrolled on the three Diplomas under review was 168.

D. Overview of the Diploma in Accounting and Finance leading to BSc in Accounting and Finance

The Diploma in Accounting and Finance was first offered by the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies of the BIBF in the academic year 2004-2005 as a full-time programme, through a collaborative partnership with University of Wales of which Bangor University was a constituent institution. This collaboration led to a progression agreement to get the final year of the BSc degree at Bangor University in the academic year 2010-2011. In other words, students enrolled in this programme get two certificates; Diploma in Accounting and Finance and a BSc in Accounting and Finance both from Bangor University. At the time of the site visit, there were three full-time and four part-time faculty members contributing to the delivery of the programme. The first graduating batch of the Diploma in Accounting and Finance comprised 25 whereas the first BSc graduates in Accounting and Finance comprised 27. According to the statistics provided by the Institution during the site visit, there were 75 students registered in the Diploma programme in the academic year 2016-2017.

E. Summary of Review Judgements

Table 2: Summary of Review Judgements for the Diploma in Accounting and Finance leading to a BSc in Accounting and Finance

Indicator	Judgement
1: The Learning Programme	Satisfies
2: Efficiency of the Programme	Satisfies
3: Academic Standards of the Graduates	Satisfies
4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance	Satisfies
Overall Judgement	Confidence

1. Indicator 1: The Learning Programme

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

- 1.1 The BIBF has clear mission and vision statements that are available to students and staff on its website and the Faculty Handbook. The institution's vision states that BIBF aspires to be 'the Institute of choice for the development of business professionals'; and this will be achieved through its mission statement '...by providing quality, thought leadership, and value through: 'offering a career-linked, comprehensive range of professional development programmes that have a life-long professional impact, leveraging best-in-class global alliances strategic partnerships, ...stimulating learning environment through high calibre faculty, practioners and staff innovative delivery... inspiring the trust of our stakeholders... maximize our contribution in strengthening our nation's position as a regional financial hub'. Moreover, the Panel studied the Diploma in Accounting and Finance (DipAF) and the BSc in Accounting and Finance (BSAF) programmes' aims and objectives and noted that they are suitable for the type and level of each degree. The aims and objectives of both degrees are well-articulated and consistent with the institution's vision and mission statements. Furthermore, there is also a clear academic planning framework within BIBF that facilitates the offering of the third year of the BSc programme at BIBF, thereby providing an alternative route for students who do not wish to continue their studies at Bangor due to work related issues or family commitment. The decision to house the third year at BIBF was made by the institution's Governing Council as a result of requests made by parents and potential students. From interviews with faculty and review of submitted evidence, the Panel confirms that the DipAF programme aims are appropriate to the type and level of programme offered by the institution. Hence, the Panel appreciates that the programme aims and objectives contribute to the achievement of the BIBF's mission and vision.
- 1.2 The curriculum of the programme is structured to enable students to get their Diploma in Accounting and Finance in two academic years at BIBF and progress to the third year to get a BSc in Accounting and Finance at Bangor University. The two years diploma plus third year bachelor degree consist of 25 modules divided into eight compulsory modules in the first academic year, followed by 10 modules (nine compulsory and one elective module) in the second academic year and seven modules (six compulsory and one elective module in the third year). The Panel examined the study plan of the DipAF programme and notes that it is a standalone programme that provides students with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies needed for a diploma degree; and this was confirmed during student and alumni interview sessions conducted both at BIBF and Bangor University. However, according to the alumni, there was one concern, which is the limitation of the elective modules during

their first two years at BIBF, unlike Bangor University, which offers many choices when it comes to elective modules. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should expand the range of elective modules offered to students during their first two years of study at the BIBF. The Panel studied the structure of the BSAF curriculum and noted that it clarifies the pre-requisites of individual modules such as having Accounting Information Systems 1 (ACC1106) as a pre-requisite for Accounting Information Systems 2 (ACC2111). Moreover, the study plan indicates how modules contribute to each other to have logical progression that leads to provide a suitable balance between theory and practice. Furthermore, there are certain modules which qualify students to be exempted from Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) modules. From interviews with staff and students, the Panel learnt that there are three compulsory modules namely Arabic, Human Rights and History of Bahrain that are required by the HEC. From interview sessions, the Panel confirmed that the above three modules are offered during year one and year two. However, the Panel noted that these modules are not included in the DipAF programme specification document. Hence, the Panel recommends that the Centre should revise the DipAF programme specification document to explicitly state the three compulsory general studies modules required by the HEC. During interview sessions, the Panel was informed that the above three modules are offered during year one and year two comprising the diploma degree raising the actual load of students during these years of study to be between 16 and 18 hours of lectures per week, which the Panel views as reasonable. Moreover, the Panel examined the provided module files and found that students' workload is suitable with appropriate balance between knowledge and skills. In addition, interviewed students indicated that generally they were satisfied with the balance between the theoretical and practical components of the modules. The Panel appreciates that the curriculum provides the required range of modules with a suitable balance between theory and practice to prepare students for the field of accounting and finance. However, some of the interviewed students highlighted that there is one module: International Financial Accounting and Reporting (ACC2107) which is loaded with too many challenging topics related to basic International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) statements to be covered in one semester; and the Panel notes also that students' performance was lower than other modules. Interviewed staff clarified that they are in agreement with the students and that currently they are working on resolving the issue. The Panel recommends that the programme team should move basic International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) statements from ACC2107 module to the Introductory Financial Accounting (ACC1101) module to divide the syllabus appropriately. From the study plan, the Panel notes that work-based learning is not included in the programme. The SER clarifies that there is a proposal 'to introduce a 'placements' through the Centre of Academic and Executive Studies during 2017.' In interviews with senior management, it was confirmed that a member of staff had been assigned to set up a

credit-bearing internship programme to be offered during summer. Interviewed employers expressed the strong need for an internship programme and their willingness to provide meaningful internship opportunities once it is introduced in the programme. The Panel encourages the programme team to continue with its plans to introduce an element of work-based component into programme.

- 1.3 The syllabus of the programme is organized to reflect current developments in the accounting and finance field in order to link knowledge with professional practice. All the modules in general have good depth and breadth that are comparable to similar programmes regionally and internationally. All module specifications follow a unified template consisting of modules code, modules title, number of credits, contact hours, module organizer, prerequisites, aims, Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), outline of topics, teaching materials (textbook, supplementary) and assessment methods. The Panel notes that the modules include current recognized textbooks and most are used internationally for the accounting and finance fields. Interviewed staff clarified that all the modules were last validated by Bangor University in 2016. The Panel studied samples of module outlines and found them to be updated with current research findings, with appropriate depth and breadth to suit the level and type of programme. There is also a strong emphasis on preparing students with both in-depth knowledge and skills in applying the key concepts within the accounting and finance context as well as acquiring general soft skills which are suitable for the exit levels. Moreover, the syllabus of Business and Commercial Law (LW2201) tackles the United Kingdom law in a comprehensive manner in order to prepare those students who will pursue their study at Bangor University. From interviews, the Panel learnt that most academics contributing to the programme hold professional certificates / qualifications in order to be up-to-date with current trends and ensure the currency of the material. Interviewed students studying the first two years at the BIBF clarified that currently all module outlines are distributed to them during the first lecture but in the near future the materials of the modules will be uploaded on the e-learning platform in order to be similar to students studying at Bangor's University for their BSc degree. The Panel appreciates that the DipAF syllabus is well-documented with sufficient breadth and depth to support and enhance the delivery of the programme. Notwithstanding the above, academic staff interviewed during Bangor's University visit, indicated the need to expand and enhance the content of the Quantitative Methods (QM1101) module to strengthen the quantitative concepts, numerical skill and statistics of the DipAF graduates, which will assist them when they take Financial Econometrics (ASB3317) module in their transition into the third year at Bangor University. It is worth noting that this was also an issue of concern to BIBF students interviewed during Bangor's site visit as they explained that there is a need to improve their numerical and statistical skills, which are of great importance to succeed in this module. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the Centre should revise the content of the Quantitative Methods (QM1101) module to ensure that students are

provided with sufficient quantitative concepts and numerical and statistical skills needed for the Financial Econometrics module offered at the third year of the BSc degree.

- 1.4 The DipAF has a set of Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) that are grouped into four main categories; namely, knowledge and understanding, subject specific-skills, cognitive (thinking) skills and key skills as described in the programme specification document. Similarly, there is a set of PILOs for the BSc programme. The Panel examined the provided evidence and notes that both sets are suitable to the level of each degree and are aligned to the programme aims and objectives. In addition, the PILOs in both specifications are mapped to the teaching and learning strategies and methods, and to assessment methods. Moreover, during Bangor's University visit, the Panel was provided with evidence of a mapping system that stipulates how the DipAF PILOs contribute to the achievement of the BSc PILOs. Interviewed academic staff members showed a clear understanding of the PILOs and their alignment to support programme aims, objectives and its delivery. The Panel acknowledges that PILOs of the DipAF and BSAF degrees are aligned with the programme's aims and objectives and facilitate students' progression. Nonetheless, the Panel notes that these ILOs are written more like aims and do not include measurable action verbs that support their assessments. Hence, the Panel recommends that the Centre should revise the ILOs to ensure that these include measurable action verbs.
- 1.5 The module specifications clearly illustrate the ILOs relevant to each module. The Panel studied the samples provided and notes that each module has a set of specific ILOs that are directly related to the module content, in addition to generic ILOs which are a sub set of the PILOs. From evidence provided and interviews with faculty members, the Panel confirms that both ILO sets are suitable for the level and content of the modules. Nonetheless, as stated in paragraph 1.4, these are written more like an objective rather than a learning outcome. In addition, the Panel notes that there is no direct mapping between the module specific ILOs and the selected PILOs for the module, which needs to be addressed, especially with the assessment tools (examinations, quizzes, assignments) being mapped to the corresponding PILO categories rather than the module ILOs or even the PILOs themselves (see recommendation under paragraph 3.4). Hence, the Panel advises the Centre to develop a clear mapping between the modules' specific ILOs and the PILOs.
- 1.6 The delivery of the DipAF programme is guided by 'BIBF Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy', which has recently been approved by the Educational Standards Committee. The strategy documents the range of teaching principles and methods that suit the delivery of the programme. These methods include active learning, independent / self-directed learning, seminars and group discussion / work. The Panel studied a sample of module files and their associated teaching plans and notes that a

variety of teaching methods are being utilized with suitable assessment tasks. During interview sessions, senior staff highlighted that to disseminate best teaching and learning practices, the Centre introduced a system of peer observation, which the staff found to be very useful to exchange good practices. The Panel studied a selection of peer review reports and is satisfied that these reports contained detailed remarks in relation to the conduct of the lecturers. Interviewed students expressed their satisfaction with the teaching and learning methods employed by programme team. The Panel appreciates the implementation of the BIBF's 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' to ensure the variety of the learning methods to prepare students for their study in the final BSc year at Bangor University. Furthermore, the Panel notes that although independent learning does occur in some of the modules; yet it needs to be more encouraged in the DipAF programme. Moreover, examples of research underpinning teaching and learning is evident in some modules such as Accounting and Auditing. However, the Panel is of the view that academic staff could do more in this regard. Consequently, the Panel advises the programme team to enhance the aspect of independent learning and research into more modules of the DipAF programme.

- 1.7 BIBF does not have a platform for e-learning, and as a result the e-learning component occurs based on staff and student's initiatives, whenever students are asked to identify companies and banks from the internet and to access the on-line book repository in the library. This, the Panel was informed by students interviewed during the site visit, that this limits their access to information and study material and does not facilitate developing their skills in the use of e-learning properly, which is needed during their third year of study at Bangor University. Hence, the Panel urges the Centre to invest in acquiring a platform that facilitates a proper integration of e-learning into the teaching and learning experience of the students (see recommendation under paragraph 2.8). Furthermore, the Panel also notes that the PowerPoint presentations for all modules were provided by the publishers of the textbooks, which means that sometimes there is not sufficient contextualisation to suit the demand of the local market in Bahrain. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should incorporate the local aspects / flavour in the modules and slides utilized from international resources where applicable.
- 1.8 The DipAF programme follows 'BIBF Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy', which documents the types of assessment to be used to achieve the programme's aims and objectives. This strategy is disseminated to key stakeholders such as students, academic staff, moderators and external examiners. Moreover, students are provided with the schedule of assessment due dates and timetable of quizzes and examinations in each module specification document distributed at the commencement of each semester. During interviews, the Panel was informed that assessment tasks at BIBF are internally checked and double-marking occurs for at least 10% of scripts within each

grade band' in addition to 'those within + or – 5% of the pass mark' as stated in the provided document; whereas external moderation is done by a team of external examiners appointed by Bangor University as per examination regulations. Moreover, during interviews with staff members, the Panel was informed that BIBF has a plagiarism procedure and (Turnitin) is used to detect plagiarism. During the site visit, students clarified that they use it to check their work for evidence of similarities before submitting their projects/assignments. From interviews and documents provided, the Panel learnt that students have the right to appeal if they have concerns on a given mark on their assessed work; and complaints related to grades are dealt with through the programme manager. Staff interviewed indicated that there is a transparent mechanism for grading students' work; and students are provided with model answers for all quizzes and a generic rubric for assessing the projects. The Panel notes that the feedback process is facilitated by a unified written template and guidelines to the academic staff for completion, dissemination and return to students; and interviewed students confirmed that this process is systematically implemented. Interviewed students highlighted that feedback is always provided one week after the submission of the assignment and they confirmed that the feedback helps them to improve their academic performance. The Panel appreciates that there are clear procedures for students' assessment along with detailed feedback which lead to improve students' academic performance. Notwithstanding the above, Bangor's University Validation Manual states that 'assessment criteria must clearly define what students have to do / demonstrate to achieve different levels of performance (threshold / pass, good, excellent) and must be written so that they can be easily understood by students'. However, the Panel notes that the assessment of students' projects along with their presentations do not explain how students were assessed in details and do not provide a detailed rubric for how the grades are distributed on various elements of the work such as introduction, discussion, conclusion, language, grammar, punctuation and referencing. Hence, the Panel recommends that the Centre should develop a detailed marking rubric for both the projects and the presentations, indicating what is expected at each grade level, along with detailed distribution of marks.

1.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding The Learning Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- The programme aims and objectives contribute to the achievement of BIBF's mission and vision.
- The curriculum provides the required range of modules with a suitable balance between theory and practice to prepare students for the field of accounting and finance.
- The syllabus of the programme is well-documented with sufficient breadth and depth to support and enhance its delivery.

- The Institution has an implemented 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' to ensure the variety of the learning methods to prepare students for their study in the final BSc year at Bangor University.
- Clear procedures for students' assessment are in place along with detailed feedback which lead to improve students' academic performance.

1.10 In terms of improvement the Panel **recommends** that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should:

- expand the range of elective modules offered to students during their first two years of study at the BIBF; and revise the programme specification document to explicitly state the three compulsory general studies modules required by the HEC
- revise the content of the Quantitative Methods (QM1101) module to ensure that students are provided with sufficient quantitative concepts and numerical and statistical skills needed for the Financial Econometrics module offered at the third year of the BSc degree; and move basic International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) statements from ACC2107 module to the Introductory Financial Accounting (ACC1101) module to divide the syllabus appropriately
- revise the intended learning outcomes to include measurable action verbs
- incorporate the local aspects / flavour in the modules and slides utilized from international resources where applicable
- develop a detailed marking rubric for both the projects and the presentations, indicating what is expected at each grade level, along with detailed distribution of marks.

1.11 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **The Learning Programme**

Indicator 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.

- 2.1 The SER states that students admitted to the DipAF programme delivered at BIBF are considered Bangor University's students, hence BIBF follows Bangor's University standard admission practice for the undergraduate programmes; which has been utilized since the programme's inception. Once students finish the requirements of the second year they receive their diploma degree and are granted direct access to the third year of the BSAF programme at Bangor University. To be admitted into the diploma, applicants should attain a high school certificate with a minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 75% or International Baccalaureate Diploma with at least 24 points, or 3 GCSE 3 A levels with a minimum 260 tariff points score. During interview sessions, the Panel was informed that there is a procedure in place for transfer students as well as procedures for its implementation. Information regarding admission requirement, registration, attendance and punctuality and fee structure is available in the Bangor Student Handbook (2016-2017). The admission policy places a minimum level for English language proficiency test (IELTS of 6) or equivalent score in an approved test of English proficiency. If the required English score is not achieved, BIBF offers a mandatory preparatory / foundation programme that students have to be enrolled in to achieve the required English score for admission. During interview sessions, both students and faculty members showed clear understanding of the admission policy and some students indicated that they benefited a lot from the foundation programme as it enhanced their English proficiency and improved their communicative skills. The Panel appreciates that there is a suitable admission policy that is well known to students and staff and is effectively implemented.
- 2.2 BIBF maintains details of the admitted students profile which include information related to students' gender and whether they were direct entry or from International Foundation Programme (IFP) which consists of English, mathematics, critical thinking and academic studies. It also specifies their IELTS score and whether they are coming from government or private schools. The Panel notes that the cohort of the admitted students is diverse with different nationalities. Statistics provided state that the CGPA of students' direct entry into the programme for the academic years 2013-2017 is 84%, 91%, 84% and 85% respectively, which is perceived by the Panel to be appropriate. The number of direct entry students applying to the programme each year has fluctuated between five and 12, from 2014 to present. The Panel also notes that there is a general trend for male students to exceed the number of female as per the provided data, which is expected for this type of programme and in line with international trends. During interviews, the Panel was informed that a number of students are applying to

undertake the ACCA and FCCA certificates, which is an indication that they are well prepared academically. Furthermore, according to the provided statistics, the Panel notes that since the programme inception 90 students progressed to the BSc in accounting and Finance at Bangor University and all of them completed their diploma in two years plus one more year to get the BSc degree which makes the total three years. Interviewed students informed the Panel that the diploma exit point provides them opportunities to work in case they did not want to proceed to Bangor for personal preference or financial reasons. From interviews conducted with academic staff and senior management at the BIBF and Bangor University, the Panel learnt that students who achieve the DipAF and progressed to the Bangor BSc programme perform well in relation to other Bangor students. The Panel appreciates that the profile of admitted students meets the programme's aims and objectives.

- 2.3 The DipAF programme is directly managed by the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies. At the management level, the Head of the Centre reports to the Deputy Director on all aspects related to the delivery of the academic programmes including the DipAF. He / she is supported by a number of administrative staff and the Undergraduate Programme Manager who is responsible for day-to-day issues related to all the undergraduate programmes offered at the Centre and acts as a point of contact between BIBF and Bangor University. Interviewed staff and students were well aware of the line of accountability and the programme day-to-day responsibilities. Nonetheless, the Panel is concerned that the programme does not have a specialized leadership (see recommendation under paragraph 4.2). As per Bangor's University Validation Manual, Bangor University has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that academic standards and the quality of students' learning experiences are achieved. This is achieved through Board of Studies meetings, Examination Boards and External Partnership Scrutiny Group (EPSG) meetings. From interviews and evidence provided, the Panel confirmed that the Board of Studies is appropriately constituted, with representatives from Bangor University as well as BIBF's academic and administrative staff and student representatives' from the three diploma programmes leading to the BSc programmes at Bangor University, including this programme. The Board ensures that Bangor's University regulations and standards relating to assessment, progression and awards are followed and implemented. It was evident from the minutes of the Board and EPSG meetings and site visit interviews with representatives from Bangor University and BIBF that there is regular and effective communication between both parties; and actions are appropriately carried out. The Panel appreciates that effective management structures are in place between BIBF and Bangor University to ensure that the programme is well-managed and delivered as per the validation agreement.
- 2.4 There are seven academic staff members (one with a PhD degree, five with Master's degree and one with BSc degree) contributing to teaching the major requirement

modules of the programme along with other staff members from other centres at the BIBF. Out of the seven teaching staff, three are employed on full-time basis and the remaining staff work as part-timers. The Panel is of the view that the students-to-staff ratio is suitable for the delivery of the programme. During the site visit, the Panel reviewed the CVs of the faculty members and noted that some of the staff members are either certified in accounting or expert practitioners who are able to bring valuable up-to-date professional experience to the classroom. From interviews, the Panel notes that both full-time and part-time staff are of a high calibre, technically competent, student centred and enthusiastic. Notwithstanding the above, the Panel recommends that the Centre should recruit additional full-time staff who are PhD holders especially as the institution is planning to offer the third year of the BSAF in Bahrain. This is also stated as an area of improvement in the SER and addressing it will enhance research output and ensure programme's stability and continuity. The Panel was informed during interview sessions that academic staff are encouraged to gain professional certificates and are required to attend professional development seminars or workshops. Interviewed staff members clarified that they found these activities informative, related to their duties and well organized. The Panel appreciates the high calibre of the academic staff teaching on the programme and their efforts in getting professional certificates related to their field. During interviews, the Panel was informed that there is a workload system in the BIBF's Human Resources Manual, which is applied to full-time staff based on a minimum of 600 hours of teaching per year (approximately 20 hours per week). Evidence provided during the site visit indicates that some of the part-time staff also teach 20 hours per week or more. This indicates that faculty members contributing to teaching major modules in the programme do not have time allocated for academic research and this was evident in staff's CV as they focus more on getting professional certificates rather than conducting research. When senior management was inquired about research output, it was highlighted that due to the nature of the institution research output was not a priority and was not marked as an area of improvement. However, the Panel is of the view that this needs to be changed especially with BIBF planning to expand its higher education capacity and offer the third year of the programme at BIBF. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Centre should develop a strategy for conducting research relevant to faculty's specializations and the nature of BIBF.

- 2.5 BIBF has clear and well-documented policies for staff recruitment, promotion and appraisal. During interview sessions, the Panel was informed that the Human Resource (HR) Department prepares a one-year plan for the institution's manpower needs after receiving the needs of each individual department. From interviews, the Panel learnt that the recruitment process starts by placing an advertisement on the institution's website and if no suitable candidate was found, the HR approaches a recruitment agency. All staff must attend the induction programme when they join the Institution and interviewed staff members were aware that they stay on a probation

status for 90 calendar days as per BIBF's HR Manual. However, during interview sessions, the Panel was informed that the induction for part-time staff is rather informal and *ad hoc*. Consequently, the Panel advises that the Centre to provide a formal induction programme for all part-time staff. From interviews, the Panel learnt that there is a mentorship procedure for newly appointed staff to be mentored by either the Undergraduate Programme Manager or module leaders during the first few months to facilitate their integration into the Centre. Furthermore, both full and part-time staff who are inexperienced in teaching have to undertake a 'train the trainer' programme to expose them to the teaching environment. BIBF also has a promotion procedure, which stipulates that candidates must submit a portfolio in order to be promoted to a Senior / Principal Lecturer and interviewed staff had clear understanding of the promotion processes. Data provided indicates that only one faculty member was recruited by the Centre at the beginning of the academic year. Nonetheless, the Panel notes that the Centre maintains a good staff retention rate. To ensure consistency across the Institution, the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies follows BIBF's annual appraisal procedure which is conducted for both teaching and administrative full-time staff by their direct manager; whereas, part-time staff members' appraisal is done through the Quality Assurance Unit. The Panel notes that the appraisal process is rigorous and diligently implemented and monitored by the HR Department and the senior management. The Panel appreciates that in general there are clear HR policies and procedures that are consistently implemented by the Institution and that staff members are fully acquainted with.

- 2.6 BIBF has a Management Information System (MIS) which is used as an administrative tool to record student application, admission, enrolment and assessment data as well as allocation of classrooms, timetabling and maintain student attendance records. The system produces a number of reports related to tracking applications, registration, student attendance and progression, class timetabling and the use of physical resources. The Panel was given a demonstration of the system during the site visit as well as copies of the generated reports. Administrative staff interviewed during the site visit showed clear understanding of the system and its benefits and shortcomings, which is leading the Institution to migrate to a new Student Information System (SIS) that is expected to be installed soon. Interviewed senior management highlighted that the new system will allow for the integration of the various individual reports generated by different bodies to be collated in one place to facilitate decision making. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the Centre in collaboration with the Institution should expedite the implementation of the new SIS to improve functionality and enhance decision making by management.
- 2.7 BIBF has a clear procedure for the security of students' records that stipulates the steps taken to safeguard these records. These steps include a backup system that is kept in secure locations on- and off-campus. There is also a disaster recovery procedure to

protect and retrieve essential data in case of external or even internal hacking attacks. Students' information and results are also transmitted to and held by Bangor University and this offers an additional layer of independent checking and off-site security of learner records. Moreover, access to the student record system is strictly controlled by a series of individual passwords for staff at appropriate levels, including the Senior Administrative Assistant, the Undergraduate Programme Manager and the Head of the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies. Students' results are subject to rigorous checking before being transmitted to Bangor University and finalized in the student record system. In addition, only authorized personal can make amendments to student results. Notwithstanding the above, the Panel noted during the site visit tour to the Registration Department that student's information and results captured on one system are re-captured manually to another system rather than being processed only once on an integrated database. For example, student information is captured on an excel spreadsheet at admission and then re-captured by the Registration Department on their database. Moreover, the Undergraduate Programme Manager captures the results for each module on an excel spreadsheet, the results are checked and the overall result are then manually entered in the Crystal Management Information System (MIS) by the administrative staff in the Registration Department. The Panel is of the view that data entry of the same information by multiple people increases the risk of error and reduces the security of data as more people have access to the information. This, the Panel was informed by the interviewed senior management will be resolved once the new SIS implemented. Therefore, the Panel urges the Centre to expedite the introduction of the SIS as stated earlier in paragraph in 2.6.

- 2.8 During the site visit, the Panel toured staff offices, classrooms, the library, computer laboratories, the Registration Department, student support, administrative offices, the café and the student lounge. The Panel noted that full-time lecturers have adequate personal offices while part-time ones share a room. Moreover, the number of classrooms, which are equipped with data projectors, smart boards and comfortable seating, is adequate for the current number of students and there is a functioning Wi-Fi coverage throughout the campus. Furthermore, BIBF has a full fledged 'Dealing Room' simulator that is utilized for teaching some of the programme's modules, in order to enable the students to experience practical real world activities directly related to their programme. The Panel appreciates BIBF's effort in having the 'Dealing Room' simulator to provide good learning and teaching experiences, which is utilised in delivering relevant programme's modules. Moreover, interviewed students clarified that BIBF provides them with opportunities to make suggestions and responds to them; a good example is the increase in the car parking space. Nonetheless, the Panel notes that the library has inadequate resources for academic degree programmes. There are few physical resources in the library and the book collection includes mainly three to four copies of the prescribed textbooks, which students could

borrow. Moreover, the library has limited opening hours and study space, does not subscribe to any academic journals or databases and the periodicals it subscribes to are of a professional rather than an academic nature. From students' interviews and the general tracking of the library resources, it is evident that students do not make much use of the library. In addition, the Panel is concerned that although students studying on the DipAF programme are considered as Bangor's University students, they are not provided access to Bangor e-learning resources while studying in BIBF. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Centre should expand the academic resources provided by the library and provide additional study space on campus; in addition to ensuring that DipAF students are provided with access to the Bangor e-learning resources.

- 2.9 During the site visit tour, the Panel confirmed that BIBF does not have a student e-learning platform despite the fact that students' feedback and successive annual monitoring action plans have made reference to the need to introduce and utilize an e-learning platform. Currently, students use (Turnitin) to submit their assignments and an online database of previous examination papers is available to students but does not contain all the papers for each module. In addition, they have access to Pearson (MyLabs), which is an online platform that helps students to learn more about their modules and do their assignments. Moreover, the SER states that BIBF is committed to introducing (Moodle) as an e-learning platform during the academic year 2016-2017, which was confirmed by the IT team and the senior management during site visit interview sessions. This will provide the opportunity to track student engagement as well as improve the access to learning resources and enhance the students overall learning experience. Nonetheless, until the time of the site visit, no evidence was provided to the Panel on formal actions taken to introduce (Moodle). Hence, the Panel recommends that the Centre should expedite the introduction and utilization of a comprehensive e-learning platform to ensure both faculty and students enjoy an efficient e-learning experience.
- 2.10 Currently, BIBF does not adopt any tracking system that informs the Institution on the utilization of its resources. Instead, available resources are managed manually and in a segregated manner that does not support holistic and informed decision making. Interviewed senior staff were well aware of this shortcoming which was also highlighted in the SER as an area of improvement. However, the Panel was not provided with evidence of formal steps taken to address this issue. Hence the Panel recommends that the Centre should adopt a holistic tracking system of all its resources that supports its strategic decision making.
- 2.11 The SER states that BIBF's students are provided with appropriate support in all areas of the physical facilities such as the library induction, computer laboratories and Dealing Room, in addition to academic and career advising. The Academic Office deals with day-to-day matters while the subject-specific ones are handled by the

module lecturers. It was evident from the panel's tour that the Registration Department's personal, librarian and IT support team are also very involved in students' support, which was confirmed by interviewed students and alumni. Furthermore, BIBF has a scholarship scheme for its outstanding students. Moreover, academic staff members are aware that there is a procedure for students with special needs, which states that they are accepted as long as the Institution has the required facility or is able to handle the case in order to provide an equivalent learning experience to them. Interviewed academic staff also demonstrated a high level of commitment and care for the students both individually and as a group; and interviewed alumni highly appreciated that they were part of a 'family' at BIBF. Interviewed students praised the programme team for their ongoing help and support and the students interviewed during the panel's visit to Bangor University highlighted that they are provided with support from BIBF, specifically those related to immigration office and accommodation when they first travel to Bangor. Moreover, Bangor University also provides sufficient support through the international students' office at Bangor University. The Panel appreciates that appropriate support is provided to students by both academic and administrative staff involved in the programme.

- 2.12 BIBF has a two-day induction programme which is conducted at the beginning of each academic year for its newly enrolled and transferred students. The Centre for Academic and Executive Studies arranges the induction programme which consists of a presentation and an introduction to the Student Support team, facilities and key information related to their study followed by a workshop 'Injaz' on the second day of the induction programme. All students joining the programme receive a copy of Bangor Student Handbook. The Handbook provides general information about BIBF and Bangor University and a listing of key staff and their contact details. It also contains information showing the programme structure and curriculum details. The Handbook also sets out student guidelines and regulations in relation to assessment and progression as well as health and safety information. Students currently studying at BIBF commented favourably on the induction processes, whether they had entered directly into the programme or progressed from the IFP. Nonetheless, it was unclear to the Panel if the induction programme offered by BIBF has been recently evaluated or improved; or if there are formal arrangements for those who missed it. Moreover, students interviewed during the site visit at Bangor University highlighted the difference between Bangor's University induction programme and that of BIBF, as Bangor's University programme is longer and provides more activities and interaction, which in the panel's view is understandable given the international status of Bangor University compared to the local flavour of BIBF. In addition, while students confirmed that BIBF supports them with logistics needed (i.e. visa, accommodation) for their transit to Bangor for their third year of study, they expressed the need to have a proper induction about studying at Bangor University and the life there before

leaving Bahrain. Therefore, the Panel advises the Centre to look into the arrangements needed to address students' requests. Notwithstanding the above, the Panel is satisfied with the induction programme conducted at BIBF and Bangor University.

- 2.13 BIBF has recently produced a 'Statement of Practice: Students at Risk' which summarises its approach to identifying and supporting students at risk of academic failure. The Statement covers students' performance and attendance monitoring as well as support for students with special needs. However, interviewed students and staff did not have a shared understanding about how 'at-risk' students are identified and supported. Moreover, the provided evidence is limited to a set of students' emails asking for the lecturer's explanation and help in certain topics in the modules. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should convert the new 'Statement of Practice: Students at Risk' document into a formal policy and procedure, make it available to students, staff and relevant stakeholders, monitor its implementation and assess its effectiveness.
- 2.14 BIBF offers its students an opportunity to study in a supportive learning environment. Students also benefit from a professional environment with high quality 'Dealing Room' training facility and exposure to practitioners in accounting and finance fields. The current campus / building, however, has limited social space for undergraduate students, which resulted in students engaging in few traditional extra-curricular activities such as sports and societies as stated by students and alumni. Students do, however, have opportunities to participate in various career related events. Interviewed students and alumni clarified that there is a Student Council, which has a remit to review requests to support activities of their interest. Nonetheless, the Panel was not provided with any minutes of meetings of the Student Council. From interview sessions conducted with staff, students and senior management, it was highlighted that given the current facilities and location, it is challenging to provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities for the students studying in the programme. The Panel recommends that the Centre should explore ways for enhancing students' informal learning experience considering the current status of the campus.
- 2.15 In coming to its *conclusion* regarding the Efficiency of the Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- There is a suitable admission policy that is well known to students and staff and is effectively implemented.
 - The profile of admitted students meets the programme's aims and objectives.
 - Effective management structures are in place between BIBF and Bangor's University to ensure that the programme is well-managed and delivered as per the validation agreement.
 - The academic staff teaching on the programme are of high calibre and are motivated to gain professional certificates related to their field.

- There are clear Human Resources policies and procedures that are consistently implemented by the Institution and staff members are fully acquainted with them.
- The 'Dealing Room' simulator provides good learning and teaching experiences in delivering relevant programme's modules.
- An appropriate support is provided to students by both academic and administrative staff involved in the programme.

2.16 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should:

- recruit additional full-time staff who are PhD holders specialized in Accounting and Finance to ensure programme's stability and continuity; and develop a strategy for conducting research relevant to faculty's specializations and the nature of BIBF
- expedite the implementation of the new Student Information System to improve functionality and enhance decision making by management
- expand the academic resources provided by the library and provide additional study space on campus; in addition to ensuring that DipAF students are provided with access to the Bangor's University e-learning resources
- expedite the introduction and utilization of a comprehensive e-learning platform to ensure both faculty and students enjoy an efficient e-learning experience
- adopt a holistic tracking system of all the centre's resources to support its strategic decision making
- convert the new 'Statement of Practice: Students at Risk' document into a formal policy and procedure and ensure its availability to students, staff and relevant stakeholders; and monitor its implementation and assess its effectiveness
- explore ways for enhancing students' informal learning experience considering the current status of the campus.

2.17 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **Efficiency of the Programme**.

3. Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates

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

- 3.1 Attributes of the graduates of the programme are embedded in the educational aims of the programme which in turn are embedded in the PILOs. These are composed with a strong emphasis on graduating knowledgeable and skilful accountants who would 'conduct their work with minimal supervision' as stated in the programme specification document. The Panel examined all module files and found that the main educational aims are clearly linked with the purpose / aims and the generic intended learning outcomes of each module and that the assessment tools are properly aligned with the relevant PILOs. The Panel is satisfied that graduate attributes are embedded in the programme's main educational aims and the PILOs; and their achievement is ensured by using assessment tasks that are valid and reliable as it was evident from students assessed work (more details in paragraph 3.7). Nonetheless, the Panel noted that although interviewed academic staff had a clear understanding of what they expect the graduate of the programme to achieve and what qualities they would have, the academic staff were not familiar with the term 'graduate attributes'. Hence, the Panel advises the Centre to arrange workshops on this issue to ensure that all academic staff members are familiar with the term.
- 3.2 BIBF does not have a formal policy on benchmarking and the programme has not been subjected to any formal benchmarking, which the Panel confirmed during the site visit. Interviewed staff members clarified that indirect benchmarking occurs firstly through the scrutiny of external examiners who are selected from other universities in UK or Europe and are appointed by Bangor University; secondly the progression of students from the BIBF Diplomas to the Bangor BSc offerings provides an external reference point for comparing the standards of BIBF graduates. Furthermore, both the Examination Board and Board of Studies' meetings play a vital role in scrutinizing assessment procedures and incorporate any suggested changes as required. In addition, from interview sessions, the Panel was informed that the programme team is engaged in informal benchmarking against professional standards by virtue of their personal professional registration and affiliation with Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and Fellow Chartered Certified Accountant (FCCA). Furthermore, the SER states that 'the content of the programme is aligned with six out of the 14 examination modules required to get the ACCA professional certificate and this allows BIBF's students to be exempted from those six modules. Interviewed students confirmed their exemptions from these modules and highlighted that they are well-prepared to get other certificates in Accounting and pursue their study at Bangor University. The Panel appreciates the efforts of the academic staff in aligning the content of the modules and outcomes to the ACCA professional certificate which led

to students' exemptions from several modules in the ACCA; and recommends that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should develop a formal benchmarking policy to benchmark all aspects of the programme with local, regional and international institutions.

- 3.3 BIBF has an Examination Policy and Invigilator Guidelines document that deals with the conduct of examinations and related matters. Moreover, BIBF follows to the Bangor University Validation Manual that stipulates the assessment policy and procedure followed in the programme. From interviews, the Panel learnt that Bangor University verifies BIBF's adherence to these policies and procedures through three main mechanisms. Firstly, the contentious communication between the Programme Moderator assigned by Bangor University and the BIBF's programme manager; secondly, Board of Studies meeting, thirdly, the provision of a systematic process of internal and external moderation. Interviewed senior management from both BIBF and Bangor University clarified that, based on the outcomes of discussions at the Examination Board and Board of Studies meetings, updates on the assessment procedures are incorporated where needed. Students also have a say in revising / updating the assessment policy and examples were provided to the Panel on improvement introduced based on students' suggestions, such as the reduction of the number of quizzes from three to two effective from 2016-2017. Interviewed students confirmed that they are consulted when changes are proposed to assessments and confirmed that information related to assessment is contained in the Student Handbook, which they receive during their induction. The Panel studied the Student Handbook and noted that it includes information on how the modules will be assessed, the pass mark, the grade classification framework, the procedure for submitting assignments, the procedure for returning marked work, feedback, moderation, external examining, and various administrative arrangements, including procedures for appeals. Interviewed academic staff reported that all forms of assessment are carefully written and internally and externally moderated prior to the start of the semester. The Panel appreciates that assessment policies and procedures are consistently implemented, monitored and subject to regular review; and are made available to students.
- 3.4 The Panel studied DipAF programme specification document and it was noted that assessment methods are mapped, on a programme level, to the PILOs directly. Moreover, each module specification has general ILOs which is a subset of the PILOs and there is a table showing the alignment of assessment with the selected set of PILOs. Each module specification has a table showing the alignment of assessment with the selected set of PILOs. To ensure the alignment of assessment with outcomes, the Panel was informed that at the end of the delivery of a module, each academic staff member is required to write a reflective report. This report is sent to the Undergraduate Programme Manager to check the alignment of assessment with PILOs. During the

site visit, interviewed staff members gave ample examples on how they select proper assessment tools to assess different learning outcomes based on their types and categories such as knowledge, critical thinking, and general transferrable skills. From interviews and evidence provided, the Panel notes that there are mechanisms in the internal and external moderation process to confirm that assessment tasks are properly aligned to the relevant PILOs. Furthermore, the Panel was informed that the importance of aligning assessment to the learning outcomes has recently been part of staff development workshops to ensure faculty's full awareness of this aspect. Therefore, the Panel appreciates that there are implemented mechanisms that ensure that assessment tasks are well aligned with the PILOs. Nonetheless, the Panel notes that there is a need for mechanism to assess the course specific ILOs as discussed in paragraph 1.5, and that there is no mechanism to assess the level of achievement of the PILOs once students sit for the examination and / or submit an assessment task. Hence the Panel recommends that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should develop and implement a mechanism to assess students' level of achievement of the PILOs upon semester completion.

- 3.5 The BIBF follows Bangor's University Validation Manual, which shows comprehensive documented guidelines for the internal moderation process. All assessment tools are subject to pre-assessment internal moderation conducted before teaching the modules. Faculty members who taught the module before or subject experts are invited to participate as internal moderators. Interviewed internal moderators clarified that they are provided with the programme specification, module specification, lesson plans and model answers. The process includes checking the structure of the question paper and its alignment to the selected PILO(s), the marking guide / rubric to ensure that it is accurate and valid and the currency of assessment tasks. From interviews, the Panel learnt that any recommended changes are documented and sent back to the module lecturer to make the changes. Furthermore, second marking occurs after assessment tasks is marked, during which a second marker checks the accuracy of the marking. Interviewed moderators clarified that the process takes an average of one month and is overseen by the senior management of the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies; and stressed that they are not allowed to use any assessment task without being internally and externally moderated. The Panel examined module files and samples of students' assessed work and confirmed the utilization of internal moderation and double marking. The Panel appreciates that there are good mechanisms in place for the internal moderation of all assessment tools, which leads to fairness and rigor in evaluating students' achievement.
- 3.6 The programme team follows Bangor's University Validation Manual with respect to external moderation process. The external moderation process starts with a two-day site visit from Bangor University to the BIBF at the end of each academic year. As mentioned earlier, external examiners are not Bangor's University staff but they are

selected from other UK universities or European universities as long as they are eligible to work at UK. External examiners have to be at senior status or above, specialized in the field and are appointed as per Bangor University Validation Manual for an initial period of three years which can be extended to five years upon Bangor's approval. During interviews, the Panel was informed that the external examiners review the module files and samples of student work in the first day; and present their oral feedback at the Examinations Board meeting that is held on the second day, followed by the submission of a written report. The Panel studied samples of the external examiners reports and notes that the external moderation was done on DipAF modules and that the comments are discussed and implemented by the programme team in the upcoming offering of the module. The Panel appreciates that external moderation is well-implemented to ensure that the academic standards of DipAF programme are similar to students studying in other universities; and actions taken improve and enhance the delivery of the programme modules. Notwithstanding the above, the Panel notes that some of the external examiners' reports are not detailed enough specifically if these comments are related to giving advice on possible changes to the structure of the programme and / or sequence of the modules. Consequently, the Panel advises the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies to ensure that all external examiners provide detailed comments when writing their reports.

- 3.7 During the site visit, the Panel closely examined samples of students' assessed work that covers a wide range of assessment tools (quizzes, presentations, final examinations, projects). The Panel notes that there is clear evidence of depth and breadth in the range of assessment instruments applied in the modules within the DipAF curriculum. The Panel notes that the depth of knowledge and skills is assessed across the quizzes and final examinations, and in the latter there is strong evidence that students are able to analyse accounting concepts. The Panel studied the samples provided and notes that the graded coursework reveals an acceptable level of achievement, and is similar to programmes offered regionally and internationally. The Panel is satisfied that the assessment tasks are at an appropriate level of complexity across the different modules, meet programme's aims and grades awarded are fair and reflect the level of students' work. Moreover, the level of achievement of students in various assessment tasks and their ability in comprehending the accounting concepts and skills are appropriate; and this was also confirmed from the external examiner reports and interviews conducted with employers. In interviews conducted during Bangor's University site visit, the Panel was informed that the performance of BIBF's students in English language and critical thinking is far better than other students coming from international partners of Bangor University. The Panel appreciates that the level of students' assessed work is appropriate to the type of the programme.
- 3.8 BIBF conducts data analyses of its accounting and finance cohorts, which show that the enrolment continues to increase since the programme inception in the academic

year 2010-2011. Moreover, statistics provided in the SER indicate that the average marks attained by DipAF and BSAF are high and that most students complete the programme in the specified duration. Data provided shows that the BIBF students pursuing the third year of the BSAF programme at Bangor University score the highest passing rates amongst students coming from other international partners with Bangor University. However, and as stated in paragraph 1.3, they need to further develop their quantitative skills. Moreover, BIBF's students need to develop their scientific referencing skills, especially when submitting a research assignment where they lack the skills of properly refer to the references they used. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Centre should ensure that students are provided with the required skills to reference their work accurately and in the required scientific format. As per the provided evidence, 24 students out of 29 progressed to the Bangor BSc in Accounting and Finance in the academic year 2011-2012 while in the academic year 2012-2013 17 students out of 23 graduated with BSc in Accounting and Finance. In 2013-2014, the number of BSc degree decreases to 13 out of 17 students and one student failed the BSc degree. Nonetheless, 100% of students in 2013-2014 and 2012-2013 proceeded to the BSc whereas in 2014-2015 the percentage deceased to 89% and the total number of dropout students from 2011-2014 is 13 out of 70 and is mostly related to shifting to other programmes. From the above mentioned statistics, the Panel notes that those students who obtained DipAF at BIBF are well prepared academically and are the same as those who progressed to the BSc degree at Bangor University. According to the statistics provided in the SER, 87.5%, 93.8% and 100% of graduates proceeded to relevant employment during 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015 respectively. Whereas 75%, 37.5%, 54% opted to undertake professional certificates during the same academic years mentioned earlier. From interviews and the provided statistics, the Panel learnt that the majority of students work in private organizations, audit firms and insurance companies, while a small number of graduates join the government sector, indicating a demand for these graduates in the local market. The Panel appreciates that the level of graduates' achievement at DipAF and BSc degrees meets the requirements of both degrees.

- 3.9 BIBF along with Bangor University monitor the year-on-year progression of the students. Statistics provided by the BIBF indicate clearly that all students who completed the programme requirements graduated in three years as they spend two years at BIBF in Bahrain where they receive a diploma award and one year at Bangor University to accomplish their bachelor degree. The withdrawal rate is low as 13 students only dropped from the programme to date. From interviews, the Panel was informed that there is no evidence of a comparison with equivalent programmes in Bahrain or the region, but a comparison of BIBF students with other international partners of Bangor University provides evidence that their performance is far better than others in English language and critical thinking. The Panel studied the summarized cohort analysis of the number of graduates from DipAF from 2013-2015

and notes that the number decreases 25, 20, 13 respectively; the same applies to BSc graduates as it fluctuated from 27, 24, 17 respectively in the same academic years mentioned earlier. Consequently, the Panel encourages the Centre to investigate the reason behind the declining number of accounting and finance graduates.

- 3.10 According to the SER, there is no programme advisory board but instead BIBF has a Governing Council which is chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank of Bahrain after the Institution was placed under the umbrella of the Central Bank, as per the Royal decree number 21 of 2016. The Governing Council is composed of senior representatives from the business sector along with senior staff members from the BIBF. From interviews conducted during the site visit, the Panel was informed that the Governing Council meets regularly to discuss issues related to the status of the business sector in Bahrain. Nonetheless the Panel is concerned that the Governing Council responsibilities are at a high level not at a programme level, which was confirmed from interviews conducted with BIBF's senior management and evidence provided. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the BIBF constitute a programme advisory board with external discipline experts, employers and alumni to discuss and consult on matters related to the development and the currency of the programme.
- 3.11 During the site visit, the Panel conducted interviews with both employers' representatives and graduates of the BSAF programme. Interviewed employers' representatives stated that the accounting and finance graduates are noted for their technical competency, confidence, good work ethics and career orientation. They were of the view that the graduates benefited a lot from the international experience and exposure at Bangor University and confirmed that it matured them. From alumni's interviews, the Panel was informed that a good number of them are studying to obtain the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) certificate to facilitate their promotion process at work. They also stressed that BIBF prepared them well for the workplace, whereas Bangor University focused on academic aspects and this in turn helped them to merge theory with practice. However, according to the alumni, there was one concern, which is the limitation of the elective modules during their first two years at BIBF, unlike Bangor University, which offers many choices when it comes to elective modules (see recommendation under paragraph 1.2). Overall, the Panel appreciates that graduates and employers are highly satisfied with the programme and its delivery. Nevertheless, the Panel urges the Institution to develop and conduct employer and alumni surveys that formally gauges their satisfaction. (see recommendation under paragraph 4.8)
- 3.12 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Academic Standards of the Graduates, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- The efforts of the academic staff in aligning the content of the modules and outcomes to the ACCA professional certificate which led to students' exemptions from several modules in the ACCA.

- Assessment policies and procedures are consistently implemented, monitored and subject to regular review; and are made available to students.
- Formal mechanisms are in place to ensure that assessment tasks are well aligned with the programme intended learning outcomes.
- Mechanisms are in place to ensure the programme's internal moderation, which leads to fairness and rigor in evaluating students' achievement.
- External moderation process is well-implemented to ensure that the academic standards of students on the programme are similar to students studying in other universities; and actions taken improve and enhance the delivery of the programme modules.
- The level of students' assessed work is appropriate to the type of the programme.
- The level of graduates' achievement at DipAF and BSc degrees meets the requirements of both degrees.
- Graduates and employers are highly satisfied with the programme and its delivery.

3.13 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should:

- develop and implement a formal benchmarking policy to benchmark all aspects of the programme including its outcomes with local, regional and international institutions
- develop and implement a mechanism to assess students' level of achievement of the programme intended learning outcomes upon semester completion
- ensure that students are provided with the required skills to reference their work accurately and in the required scientific format
- constitute a Programme Advisory Board with external discipline experts, employers and alumni to discuss and consult on matters related to the development and the currency of the programme.

3.14 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **Academic Standards of the Graduates**.

Indicator 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.

- 4.1 BIBF has its own policies, procedures and regulations, which are applied across the whole institution. These policies cover HR, finance and procurements and management of programmes on offer. There is a BIBF Quality Framework, which applies to all the provision covering professional staff development, and short courses as well as all the academic programmes run in collaboration with overseas institutions. Moreover, the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies at the BIBF is the custodian of all quality assurance procedures related to the whole institution through producing a comprehensive set of policies, strategies, guidelines, handbooks and academic templates. The Panel examined the provided documents and confirms that they are clearly written and well-organized. The DipAF programme under review is primarily governed by both Bangor University and BIBF's policies and processes; and the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies at the BIBF is responsible to ensure that the programme satisfies both institutions' requirements. Academic and administrative staff members interviewed during the site visit at both BIBF and Bangor University were fully aware of the policies, procedures and guidelines related to their work, and reported that they are inducted about these policies and procedures when they are appointed. The Panel appreciates the existence of a comprehensive set of policies and procedures that govern the delivery of the programme; and that there is a monitoring system which ensures that the programme satisfies both Bangor University and BIBF's regulations.
- 4.2 The Panel was provided with BIBF's organizational chart that outlines the structure of the Institution. The management structure revealed that the Head of the Centre also manages the Quality Assurance Unit. From interviews, the Panel was informed that the Head of the Centre is responsible for the overall management of the undergraduate programmes validated by Bangor's University; and is supported by the Undergraduate Programme Manager who is responsible for carrying out the day-to-day activities along with the assistance of both administrative and academic staff. Nonetheless, the Panel notes that the organizational chart of the Centre does not provide the programme with a specialised leadership that formally guide the programme in academic issues related to the curriculum, syllabus and specialization. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Centre should enhance the academic leadership of the programme by incorporating a provision in its organization chart to appoint a specialized academic leader for the programme.
- 4.3 The SER states that the ultimate responsibility for maintain academic standards and the quality of students' learning experience rests with Bangor University as stated in

the BIBF-Bangor University Validation Agreement document. As per this agreement, the Board of Studies is responsible to ensure that all proposed modifications to the programme such as content, delivery and assessment or staffing are well handled and enhance the quality of the learning experience provided to students. In its constitution, the Board of Studies is chaired by the Head of the Centre or a person nominated by the Board and includes the Undergraduate Programme Manager, all academic and administrative staff members contributing to the DipAF programme, internal moderators, external examiners, at least three student representatives, a Moderator appointed by Bangor University, Bangor's Quality Assurance (QA) Officer and co-opted consultative members. Evidence provided indicates that the Board meets regularly and provides useful feedback on all the Bangor's University diploma programmes offered at BIBF. The Board of Studies' meeting is held in Bahrain and reports to Bangor's Teaching and Learning Committee. From minutes of meetings the Panel confirmed that the Board provides useful feedback on all the three Bangor's University diploma programmes offered at BIBF. Furthermore, from interviews conducted during the site visit, the Panel learnt that there is a joint ongoing cooperation between Bangor's University Moderator and QA staff at BIBF; and it was evident that both parties play an important role in communicating and advising on the application of the Bangor's University policies and regulations. Furthermore, there are Internal and External Examination Boards meetings which are held to review module assessment results and ensure their adherence to the validation agreement. The Internal Board consists of the Head of the Centre, Undergraduate Programme Manager, academic teaching staff, administrative coordinators, QA Officer, and Examinations Centre Officer, while the External Board consists of Bangor's University Moderator, Bangor QA Officer, Head of Centre, Undergraduate Programme Manager, academic staff members contributing to the programme, internal moderators, external examiners along with BIBF QA Officer. It is worth noting that the two Boards share the same responsibility apart from being local and international to ensure the academic standards of the graduates from both DipAF programme and BSAF programme. The findings of the meetings of the above two Boards are discussed at the meeting of the External Partnerships Scrutiny Group (EPSG), which is held on periodical basis to identify and manage risks or threats to quality standards. Overall, the Panel is satisfied that the quality of the BIBF's delivery is ensured by several parties; in addition to having several joint committees to ensure the effectiveness of the quality assurance system. Therefore, the Panel appreciates that there is a clear quality assurance management system in place in relation to the programme, which is consistently implemented, monitored and evaluated.

- 4.4 During the site visits at both Bangor University and BIBF, it was apparent from interviews with both academic and administrative staff that there is a comprehensive understanding of the internal quality assurance system and the role staff members play in ensuring the implementation of the quality assurance policies related to their

duties. Interviewed staff confirmed to the Panel that academic staff attend the Board of Studies and Examination Board's meetings held at the BIBF in conjunction with Bangor's University representatives, to ensure their full awareness of and engagement in all procedures related to quality assurance. Furthermore, interviewed academic and administrative staff clarified that capacity building workshops are conducted periodically or when new processes or policies are introduced or updated; and these activities are organized by the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies to disseminate good practice amongst all staff members. Furthermore, staff are briefed about quality assurance processes during the induction programme and through key documents such as the BIBF Faculty Handbook and HR Handbook. Furthermore, staff interviewed during Bangor's University site visit were clear about their role in quality assuring the delivery of the DipAF programme at BIBF and in ensuring the quality of the students' learning experience as they proceed to the third year of the BSAF programme at Bangor University. The Panel appreciates that staff members show a high level of understanding and compliance with all internal quality assurance procedures and practices related to the delivery of the programme.

- 4.5 Currently, BIBF does not offer its own academic programmes. All academic programmes offered by the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies are programmes hosted / delivered by BIBF and designed, quality assured by international higher education institutions. As for Bangor' University programmes offered at BIBF, the SER states that the development of new programmes is governed by Bangor's University Validation Manual and several bodies are involved in scrutinising the process such as Bangor's University External Partnerships Scrutiny Group (EPSG) and a formal validation panel constituted for this purpose only. The Panel examined Bangor's University Validation Manual and notes that it is aligned to the UK Quality Code and represents appropriate international quality standards for the development of new programmes. The last programme designed using this Manual was the Diploma in Islamic Finance programme. From interviews, the Panel was informed that currently there are no plans to introduce new programmes as BIBF is focusing on offering the third year of the BSAF programme in Bahrain after students obtain the DipAF rather than being involved in introducing new programmes. The Panel is satisfied that the BIBF consults and caters for the business sector needs when introducing new programmes.
- 4.6 As described in paragraph 4.3, there are several arrangements in place for monitoring the quality assurance of the programme and its delivery. One of these is the module review reports prepared by module leaders at the end of each semester reflecting on the delivery of the module content, the student attendance and engagement, assessment performance and student feedback. These reports were included in the module files, which were made available to the Panel at the site visit. The reports are collated by the Head of the Centre who develops an annual report and submits it to

the BIBF Educational Standards Committee (ESC). The annual report is prepared for the three Bangor University diploma programmes offered at BIBF (including the DipAF) and is drawn from the activities of the Board of Studies and Programme Examination Board. It provides a critical evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching on the academic programmes, including an analysis of student enrolments and performance, staff and student feedback, identification of good practices, and an action plan to address any issues identified or initiatives to enhance each programme. The Panel reviewed the annual report for 2015 and noted that there is evidence of a number of actions which were implemented as a result of this report during the current year, including piloting the new peer review scheme and the introduction of new student evaluation forms for the modules during the mid-term, in addition to the one distributed at the end of the semester. It was also noted that some items on the action plan remained outstanding such as the introduction of (Moodle) and this was confirmed during interviews conducted with staff and senior management who concurred with the Panel's view and stressed their support to urge the concerned body to speed the implementation process. Overall, the Panel appreciates that the annual internal review of the programme is effectively implemented and the produced reports are evaluative, reflective and indicate actions to be pursued through the Board of Studies' meetings.

- 4.7 BIBF follows Bangor's University Validation Manual which sets out clear and comprehensive procedures for the revalidation of academic programmes, which is required every five years. The procedure of the revalidation stipulates that the Bangor's University External Partnerships Scrutiny Group (EPSG) and a formal validation panel constituted for this purpose only must be provided with a proposal to revalidate the programme along with several documents to be submitted to them by the secretary of the programme at least 14 days before they meet. The documents submitted include the programme specification, copies of recent annual monitoring forms, copy of the most recent internal quality audit applicable to the programme, copies of course handbooks, copies of all module specifications associated with the programme, reports from external bodies (if available), internal moderator's reports and external examiner's reports. From the provided evidence, it was noted that revalidation of any programme is left to the EPSG members and the validation panel discretion during which both parties should decide whether to continue the validation, continue with minor modification, continue once recommendations are addressed or withdrawal. From interviews conducted with senior management at BIBF and Bangor University, the Panel was informed that the next revalidation for the DipAF programme is scheduled for 2018. The Panel was informed that the validation process was expedited by one year to also include the provision of offering the third year of the BSAF at BIBF as an option for the students in response to BIBF's stakeholders feedback. The Panel is satisfied that there are appropriate arrangements in place once the periodic review takes place.

- 4.8 The SER states that students' feedback is sought for each module at the end of each semester. Interviews with senior management and staff clarified that there is a standardized student evaluation form, which was recently revised to clearly differentiate between comments on the lecturer, the module, the facilities and administration issues. The evaluation forms are distributed and collected by administrative staff and analysed before being sent to the lecturers for review and comments. The evaluation outcomes along with the lecturer feedback are reviewed by the Undergraduate Programme Manager and the Head of the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies. Interviewed staff informed the Panel that issues concerning individual staff performance are followed up by the Head of the Centre while other issues are raised at the Board of Studies' meetings and are incorporated in the annual report as appropriate. The Panel was provided with a sample of filled student evaluation forms and noted that senior management responded positively to students' concerns. From interviews with students and staff, the Panel was pleased to note that a recent additional mid-semester module evaluation form was introduced to enable an early intervention to students' feedback to improve their learning experience. The Panel appreciates that BIBF collects student's feedback for each of the modules twice a semester and that the outcome is used to improve the programme and its delivery. Despite the above mentioned efforts exerted by the Centre to get students' feedback, there is no formal mechanism to gather alumni and employers' feedback on the programme and its graduates. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Centre should design and administrate appropriate survey instruments to obtain feedback from alumni and employers' on the programme and its outcomes.
- 4.9 BIBF has a formal mechanism to identify the professional development needs of its staff through the annual appraisal process. From interviews with senior management, the Panel was informed that in addition to the annual appraisal process, BIBF conducts workshops to cater to staff's professional needs. Interviewed staff members clarified that they find these activities informative, related to their duties and well organized. Furthermore, they clarified that the annual appraisal includes a section entitled (Development Plan), which is discussed and agreed on between the academic / administrative staff member and his / her manager. The SER states that it is the responsibility of all managers to assist their staff to identify their needs in order to enhance their performance and professional careers. Furthermore, the HR Department reviews the development needs from the appraisals and formulates a training plan which is budgeted and submitted to the Remuneration Committee for agreement. The Panel appreciates that BIBF links the professional development plan with the appraisal system to enhance the staff's academic and personal skills. BIBF also has an Education Sponsorship Scheme for its staff members to pursue further study that benefits both the individual and BIBF and evidence on its implementation was provided by the Institution. Furthermore, from interviews conducted with representatives from Bangor University, the Panel was informed that there are teaching and learning

meetings / activities that are held at Bangor's University, which BIBF staff can participating in *via* video conferencing. However, the Panel found no evidence of such participation, or any sort of communication between both parties in this regard. In addition, no evidence was provided on conducting other academic activities such as joint research, even though the collaboration between the two institutions goes back to 2004. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the BIBF should establish a proper channel of academic collaboration between its staff and those of Bangor University.

- 4.10 The SER states that BIBF plays a vital role in providing the business sector with its needs of calibre employees in different disciplines such as accounting, finance, insurance, and Islamic studies. According to interviews conducted during the site visit, the Panel was informed that BIBF's close contact with the business sector enables it to forecast the needs of the local market. Furthermore, the establishment of the Dealing Room and injecting simulation sessions in the DipAF programme is well received by the business sector. Moreover, interviewed senior staff informed the Panel that BIBF arranges annual meetings with HR and Training managers from the business sector to outline its current offerings and receive feedback and comments on its modules. Whilst the Panel acknowledges the close relationship between the business sector and BIBF and recognises that these meetings are beneficial to the development of BIBF and its relationship with the sector, they are not specifically focused on the programme. The Panel also notes that a number of BIBF's Governing Council members have senior positions in the business sector who during their meeting provide information about the general trend in the market. Nevertheless, this in the Panel's view does not replace the need to conduct a formal scoping of the local and regional labour market needs. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the Centre should conduct a formal study to identify the short- and long-term local and regional market needs and ensure that the programme is current and meets these needs.
- 4.11 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- A comprehensive set of policies and procedures governs the delivery of the programme; and there is a monitoring system which ensures that the programme satisfies both Bangor University and BIBF's regulations.
 - There is a clear quality assurance management system in place in relation to the programme, which is consistently implemented, monitored and evaluated.
 - Academic staff members show a high level of understanding and compliance with all internal quality assurance procedures and practices related to the delivery of the programme.
 - The annual internal review of the programme is effectively implemented and the produced reports are evaluative, reflective and indicate actions to be pursued through the Board of Studies meetings.

- Student's feedback is collected for each of the modules twice a semester and the outcome is used to improve the programme and its delivery.
- The Institution links the professional development plan with the appraisal system to enhance staff's academic and personal skills.

4.12 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the Centre for Academic and Executive Studies should:

- enhance the academic leadership of the programme by incorporating a provision in the institution's organization chart to appoint a specialized academic leader for the programme
- design and administrate appropriate survey instruments to obtain feedback from alumni and employers and on the programme and its outcomes
- establish a proper channel of academic collaboration between the BIBF's staff members and those of Bangor University
- conduct a formal study to identify the short- and long-term local and regional market needs and ensure that the programme is current and meets these needs.

4.13 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance**.

5 Conclusion

Taking into account the institute's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the site visit, the Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the DHR/BQA Programmes-within-College Reviews Handbook, 2014:

There is confidence in the Diploma in Accounting and Finance, leading to BSc in Accounting and Finance, offered by the Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance.