



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Program Review Report

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration

Gulf University

Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 13-14 January 2009

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1. The Programme Review Process

1.1 The Programme Review Framework

Four indicators that are used to measure whether or not a programme meets minimum standards are as follows:

Indicator 1: Curriculum

Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

The summative judgment falls into one of three categories:

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

1.2 The programme review process at Gulf University

The programme review of the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration of Gulf University (hereinafter referred to as 'GU') was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. This Report provides an account of the HERU programme review process and the findings of the Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by GU, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, interviews and observations made during the review site visit. The quality review site visit took place on 13th and 14th January 2009. This Report records the evidence-based conclusions reached by the Review Panel. It is expected that the Department of Administrative Sciences of GU will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Business Administration programme.

The Gulf University is organized into 5 colleges and two centers, one of the college is the College of Business, Management and Finance which is responsible for the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Business Administration programme.

The programme started in the Fall Semester of 2005-2006. Only 3 students were admitted. At the time of the Panel site visit there were 36 students on the programme. Of these, 7 are from the Kingdom of Bahrain, 28 are from other Gulf States and one student comes from outside the Gulf region. 27 are male and 9 female. Of the students admitted to the degree, 8 come straight from school, 21 from intermediate education and 7 are post-experience students.

2. Indicator 1: Curriculum

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

- 2.1 Programme aims are clearly articulated and reflect the mission of the University. These aims find concrete expression in the content and management of the curriculum. However, the Panel considered that these programme aims would have benefited from a more explicit link to the mission/aims of the College and more particularly to the Department within which the programme is located.
- 2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are expressed at both Programme and Course Level. The Panel notes the efforts of the Programme Team to develop a programme specification which recognizes the importance of subject knowledge/skills, thinking skills, and employability/personal development skills. The mapping of individual courses against Programme Learning Outcomes is also acknowledged. However, the Panel suggests that the introduction of over-arching programme outcomes which both integrate and set the framework for individual course outcomes could also be introduced. It is the view of the Panel that a number of the specified ILOs are more related to individual courses than that of the Programme as a whole.
- 2.3 The Panel recognizes the considerable effort evident in the preparation of comprehensive course specifications. These specifications and the associated syllabi which are distributed to students include:
 - Aims/Learning Outcomes
 - Teaching/Learning Methods
 - Assessment
 - Course Structure
 - Reading/References.

- 2.4 A review of a sample of course descriptors suggests clear attempts to differentiate ILOs between different courses within the same subject area. This was confirmed by members of the Programme Team and progression in depth of study was in part acknowledged by students on the programme. The Panel understands that the revised course specifications have been recently prepared and were only distributed this term. It was not possible, therefore, to establish the extent to which these new descriptors informed the student experience.
- 2.5 The SER recognizes the need to adopt a more effective mechanism in reviewing and revising aims and learning outcomes and verifying their validity. The Panel acknowledges this reflection and notes some areas of good practice with regard to the development of ILOs within course specifications although some inconsistencies in presentation and content remain. The possibility of staff development initiatives to assist in the structure, development and differentiation of learning outcomes may usefully inform practice.
- 2.6 Courses included in the programme are consistent with those expected of a Business Administration degree. Although not yet formalized, the Panel was able to ascertain that modification to the curriculum is informed by contributions and recommendations from various stakeholders. The breadth of study is evident.
- 2.7 The degree is credit based (152) and reflects a combination of Department (63), University (27) and College (23) credits. In addition, 39 credit hours are devoted to one of three Elective Tracks: Business Administration, Human Resource Management/Public Relations and Marketing. All students undertake 15 hours of English which can include Study Skills, Academic and Technical Writing, and Reading and Research. The Panel considers the explicit inclusion of these study-related skills as an example of good practice. Student take-up of the latter courses is in part determined by the number of credits of core English study required. This could be up to 12 hours depending on English competence at enrollment. This would restrict the number of additional hours of study available within the block. The Panel recommends that the University considers the means by which all students on the degree could access the more generic study-skills courses which it believes provide an excellent underpinning to the subject-specific content of the degree.
- 2.8 The Business Administration degree is a relatively flexible programme offering student choice within a structured framework. Minimum and maximum workloads are set out

within the University Regulations on Registration. A formal Academic Adviser System is in operation and it is the responsibility of the Adviser to guide students in subject choice ensuring consistent and appropriate academic progression. Many courses have pre-requisite requirements and these are clearly defined and communicated. Students confirm the proactive role of Advisers in supporting the planning of their studies. This is also complemented by the distribution of a course guide. The Panel endorses the view expressed in the SER that guidelines should be updated and that a “handbook for advisers and students” should be developed. The Panel recognizes the benefits of flexibility and also notes the challenge of ensuring that individual students exercise choice in a manner which supports their educational ambitions whilst facilitating progression and their academic development. Efforts are undertaken to ensure a balance between knowledge, skills, theory and practice in the learning programme.

- 2.9 Teaching, learning and assessment processes are subject to University guidelines. A Teaching Manual is distributed to all staff. The SER indicates that students are required to participate in class discussions, to submit homework and reports/term papers, to take quizzes (these are reflected in the grading structure), as well as the mid-term and final examinations. This is also reflected in various individual course specifications. Teaching and learning methods include: use of seminar presentations, case studies, and group discussions. Faculty members, however, acknowledged that the balance is tilted towards the more traditional lecture.
- 2.10 Students confirm some exposure to a variety of teaching methods dependent on subject type and topic covered. The need to broaden and diversify the teaching and learning approaches is acknowledged. Projectors, white boards, videos, and power point handouts are all used to enhance the learning experience. Information is also available *via* the personal websites of some professors and lecturers although it was not clear that this has been integrated into a formalized University strategy.
- 2.11 The SER confirms that University guidelines for the construction of examinations are followed. It is further recognized that the department seeks to use a variety and balance of assessment instruments. Assessment involves a combination of essays, reports, projects and examinations but the balance is weighted heavily toward traditional examinations. These comprise mid-term examination (30%) and final examination (40%). Attendance and student participation is also assessed and allocated a weighting of 10%. A further 20% is allocated to a combination of quizzes and assignments.

- 2.12 To ensure smooth conduct, coordination, and maintain integrity and fairness, mid-term and final examinations are supervised and arranged by a central committee in the University. Assessments are reviewed in terms of marks distribution and feedback is consistent with University regulations. Students have the right to appeal and request reassessment of their examination papers. Grading systems are consistent with University regulations. There is less explicit evidence of clear assessment and grading criteria although a review of subject and course grading profiles confirms a range of performance consistent with a programme of this type.
- 2.13 At course level individual lecturers have responsibility for the development of assessment instruments as informed by University policies. Potential examinations are reviewed by the Dean and changes incorporated when necessary. The Panel commends the practice of developing two examination papers for each course – one of which is ultimately undertaken by students. A perusal of course content and examination question papers confirmed that attempts are made to ensure a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application. However, there is no evidence of any form of external examination, moderation or review. The Panel urges the department to consider developing and implementing such a system as soon as possible.
- 2.14 In coming to its conclusion regarding the curriculum the Panel notes with appreciation the following:
- The development of programme aims which are consistent with the mission of the University
 - The development of a syllabus which is broadly consistent with the content of similar degree programmes within the business field and the incorporation of study and related skills within the programme structure
 - A credit accumulation system which facilitates student choice within a structured framework including a commitment to a range of teaching and learning methods
 - Production of a programme specification which maps courses against programme learning outcomes
 - Guidance on the structure and content of examination papers including a process of internal review.
- 2.15 In terms of improvement the Panel *recommends* that the department should:
- Through the introduction of the formal review process suggested in the SER, reflect on programme aims/learning outcomes and consider the development of over-arching programme ILOs. Review individual course ILOs to ensure

consistency of practice and presentation across subject areas to support the quality and delivery of provision

- Consider the consolidation of a more explicit teaching, learning and assessment policy which could meet the expressed need to promote variation in teaching learning approaches, fully document current assessment practice in the area and assist the move towards the application of explicit grading criteria and the external review of assessment instruments
- Produce a document for students and advisers providing clear information on the structure of the programme, option choices, progression and the key learning, teaching and assessment policies which underpin delivery
- Develop and implement an external moderation system.

2.16 Judgment

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

3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

The programme is efficient in terms of the use of available resources, the admitted students and the ratio of admitted students to successful graduates.

- 3.1 Students enrolling onto the programme are required to satisfy the minimum entry requirements of the University which is a high school diploma or its equivalent, with no minimum score. The current entry profile is consistent with the University's mission to recruit students from diverse backgrounds. Of the 36 students starting the programme in 2007/08, 28 are from other Gulf States, 29 have entered from other institutions (e.g. colleges) and 7 are post-experience students. The provision for students from Gulf States who study in the weekend programme is considered in paragraph 6.9.
- 3.2 The programme makes provision for the transfer of students from other universities. Procedures are in place for work done at other universities. Students achieving GPAs of under 70 are required to undertake additional preparatory courses in Mathematics, Computing and Psychology before progressing to the degree. The Panel suggests that the Programme Team continue to monitor closely the progress of those students with

lower GPAs to ensure that the entry courses remain valid indicators of future success on the programme.

- 3.3 Formal induction is undertaken at University level with several sessions held during the registration period at the beginning of each semester. Each student is allocated a College-based academic adviser who provides students with continuous support throughout their period of study. Guidelines on the nature and role of advice are fully documented. This was confirmed and commended by students. Additional information is provided in a Student Manual distributed to all students. Students highlighted the positive, considerate and supportive approaches adopted by University staff in supporting their studies.
- 3.4 Information relating to student retention and progression rates was not included within the SER. Given that the first set of students enrolled on the programme only in 2005/06, there were no graduates of the B.Sc. Business Administration at the time of the visit. It is also not possible to reflect on the ratios of admitted students to successful graduates. In the course of the visit, grade profiles of Business Administration students were made available but it was not possible for the Panel to come to any clear view on progression within different cohorts of students. The Panel recommends that a formalized process of cohort analysis is established to assist the department in reviewing performance across the degree.
- 3.5 The Panel has no doubt that the academic staff contributing to the B.Sc. Business Administration is capable of delivering a quality programme and ensuring that the academic needs of students are appropriately addressed. There are sixteen academic staff associated with the delivery of the programme and its associated courses. This is not to say that they are all dedicated to the programme. These staff members are qualified to postgraduate level and include fourteen PhDs and three full Professors. Academic experience and qualifications derived from a diverse range of countries including Iraq, Egypt, USA UK, Greece and Jordan suggest a Faculty which can draw from a range of experience to underpin the management and development of the degree. It is apparent, however, that academic staff members have extensive teaching loads. The absence of additional teaching resources may undermine the future development of the programme. This is acknowledged in the SER where the need to plan to secure additional staffing resource is recognized.
- 3.6 The SER acknowledges that resources are for the most part adequate to support the needs of the curriculum. The Panel confirms that teaching accommodation is varied and

appropriate to the needs of the programme. A tour of facilities highlighted an appropriate range of classroom facilities – air-conditioned and suitably furnished with the majority having data-show equipment. Computer facilities are accessed *via* the College of Computer Engineering and Science. The College of Business Management and Finance plans to establish a new laboratory with specialized software for the use of students.

- 3.7 Internet access is provided for staff and students through both wire and wireless connections. Computer facilities are also available within the Library which is open for 12 hours per day. Student use of these facilities is not routinely monitored. The Department is working on expanding the range of business and management titles available.
- 3.8 In coming to its conclusion regarding efficiency the Panel notes the following with appreciation:
- Established experienced Faculty committed to the development and support of students through clear induction policies and the provision of academic advisers at College level
 - Formal induction process for new students
 - The allocation to students of one adviser who provides continuous support throughout their studies
 - Teaching facilities appropriate to the needs of the curriculum.
- 3.9 In terms of improvement the Panel *recommends* that the department should:
- Introduce cohort analysis to assist in the evaluation of the programme and provide a means by which progression and retention rates can be documented and assessed
 - Keep entry requirements for students with lower tawjehia scores under review to ensure that preparatory courses provide a sound basis for the prediction of future success on the degree
 - Monitor the use of IT and Library facilities to ensure that the curriculum and students can continue to be supported
 - Give attention to the high workloads of teaching staff in order to allow for professional development.

3.10 **Judgment**

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

4. Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

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

- 4.1 As noted previously in this report the B.Sc. Business Administration commenced in 2005/06. As a result there are currently no graduates from the Programme. The Panel is therefore unable to ascertain the experience of graduates on the degree or obtain the views of employers on the appropriateness of the graduate output. This makes it difficult to come to a definitive conclusion on the academic standards of graduates. As a result the Panel used this indicator to consider the potential of graduates.
- 4.2 Programme aims and outcomes are clearly stated in the programme specification. Revised outcome-based course descriptors have been developed recently and distributed to students. The comments relating to programme/course aims and learning outcomes in the section on curriculum are relevant here. Overall programme outcomes could be more effectively summarized and re-constituted whilst skill-based ILOs within individual course descriptors are not always consistently developed and presented.
- 4.3 The SER outlines a number of benchmarking initiatives including those with other universities with whom the Gulf University has MOUs/bilateral agreements. However, beyond specific references to the University of London, the Panel was unable to establish exactly how these relationships had been used to inform developments or standards within the Business Administration degree itself.
- 4.4 The SER confirms that the University conforms to the regulations published by the Council on Higher Education of the Ministry of Education. It is suggested that contacts within the business sector and discussions with graduates in key positions are also used to inform standards on the programme. In the meeting with representatives of employers, the Panel was unable to establish documented instances whereby employer input had specifically influenced the Business Administration programme.
- 4.5 The Panel endorses the view expressed in the SER that there is a need to develop a more systematic or formal approach to benchmarking. This would help the Programme Team to document and identify specific ways in which this may contribute to the Business Administration degree.

- 4.6 The absence of graduates makes it impossible for the Panel to reflect on the achievements of graduates or reflect on the distribution of marks achieved by graduating students.
- 4.7 The SER suggests the department has no formal process for comparing the relative level of student performance against comparative programmes in Bahrain or elsewhere. It is also not evident that there exists any formal means by which the standard of graduate work can be independently assessed and reviewed. The Panel suggests that the introduction of some form of external examiner/review system would help to demonstrate the academic standards of programme graduates.
- 4.8 Since the ILOs were recently formulated it was not possible to demonstrate how these link to work already undertaken by students. In reviewing assessments, a sample of student work demonstrated an appropriate range of performance with differentiation of achievement reflected in the marks awarded.
- 4.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standards of graduates the Panel is significantly constrained by the absence of graduates from the Programme.
- 4.10 In terms of improvement the Panel *recommends* the department should:
- Formalize a system of benchmarking and surveys to ensure that internal and external reference points including other universities, and key stakeholders are used to inform programme developments and enhance standards
 - Develop and implement a formal mechanism for obtaining feedback from potential employers on industry requirements and use such feedback to enhance the quality of the learning programme. The establishment of a Programme Advisory Board may be the most appropriate mechanism here.
 - Institute a formal process by which the relative achievement of programme graduates can be verified by comparison with standards achieved in Bahrain and elsewhere.
 - Formalize a system of review which ensures that the achievement of graduates as reflected in final results/grade distributions and is subject to internal and external independent scrutiny.
 - Develop and implement a formal mechanism for obtaining feedback from potential employers on the human resource competency skills and knowledge required for success in the industry and use such feedback to enhance the quality of the programme.

4.11 **Judgment**

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

5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

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

- 5.1 The Panel recognizes the extensive quality assurance processes being developed and implemented at Gulf University. This was evident in the Self-Evaluation Report particularly in Appendix II where the policies and procedures which underpin quality management of the programme are clearly documented. The policies, procedures and regulations are clearly stated and made available to faculty staff. As acknowledged in the SER and confirmed in discussion with Panel members, the “Manual of the teaching process at Gulf University” is issued annually and distributed to the faculty members. It provides guidelines and regulations that are related to the faculty members’ work at the university. The “Student Manual” is issued annually and distributed to the students (and faculty) each semester at registration. The manual “includes the regulations of the registration process and related guidelines which concern the student and other guidelines and regulations that govern the university life”.
- 5.2 In the SER the University recognizes the need for effective mechanisms to meet the continuing professional development needs of the faculty members. However, as acknowledged, in practice this is still below expectations and a plan to address this issue is being developed. The Panel welcomes this initiative. It could be seen as forming part of a process of promoting the new quality assurance environment. It is an issue to be factored together with the development of aims and ILOs at programme level and the means by which departmental processes and procedures fit in with the University requirements as a whole.
- 5.3 The Faculty of the Department of Administrative Sciences, College of Business, Management and Finance are responsible for setting the programmes aims and the Panel has commented previously on these aims within this document. The extent to which external business requirements and academic benchmarks informed the development of Programme aims and content was not always formally evident to the Panel. The SER notes that the Department of Administrative Sciences is to develop a plan to cooperate with the business sector to receive their feedback regarding the graduates’ skills and knowledge and the area of development required. The Panel considers implementation of this initiative to be an important development.

- 5.4 The SER notes that the Gulf University practices regular internal review of several of its activities, which includes the Business Administration programme. This is documented in the published quality assurance calendar. The operation of this cycle was confirmed by members of staff. It is part of the framework designed to help in monitoring the University's performance during an academic year.
- 5.5 The Panel found evidence of activities that are aimed at providing guidance on the review of curricula and also to reflect on examination results. The mid-term and final examination results are scrutinized for each course, every semester, by the senior university officers (the President and the Vice President for Academic Affairs) and, as noted in the SER, are discussed with the concerned faculty members in cases where the results are unreasonably skewed to analyze the reasons and remedy them. Course evaluation surveys are also conducted and analyzed and summarized by the Quality Assurance Unit. The results are sent to appropriate administrative officers to inform decision making and curricula developments. This practice was verified by the Panel as upon request examples of change initiated as a result of this process were provided.
- 5.6 The overall Gulf University Policy outlines the process of academic review and sets the cycle of review every two years. The SER acknowledges that this process was loosely adhered to in the development of the new programme. However it is noted that a review of the Business Administration programme did take place and as a result the programme was revised by faculty members and modified to accommodate recent developments as well as to fit the restructuring of programmes into the departments. This new programme was approved by the University Council upon the recommendation of the College Council. The Panel considers that there is a significant commitment to the process of quality management within the Department. Members of the Department were particularly passionate in the commitment to quality and the enhancement of the student experience within the B.Sc. programme. The Panel notes this commitment but suggests that at Programme level there needs to be more documentation of the formal process through which programme evaluation and review takes place (and the associated outcomes) and in what ways this would enhance the quality of the degree. The proposal to identify a departmental member of staff to act as a liaison officer with University quality assurance colleagues is welcomed.
- 5.7 As outlined in the SER the University conducts a survey at the end of every semester to evaluate courses given that semester. The Business Administration programme participates in these surveys. The survey questionnaires are analyzed and the information obtained is studied by the concerned people and responded to. The results

are taken into consideration in faculty evaluations. Students are also encouraged to submit their suggestions for improvement. A “suggestions box” is provided for this purpose. Students may also make submissions directly at various offices on campus. The Panel found instances where student feedback resulted in improvements in the teaching and learning programme. It is also noted that the President of the University receives student delegations and other officials to discuss their needs and requests. This is an effective way of solving immediate and long-term problems. It is suggested that student electronic sites are monitored for suggestions concerning university work. The Panel was, however, not able to establish this. Nevertheless, the Panel was satisfied that the institution uses student surveys to inform provision and recognizes the need to develop surveys to cover a wider range of stakeholders including business sector and graduate employers.

- 5.8 As acknowledged in the SER, plans are in place to cope with the demands of expansion in the number of students and the programmes offered. The main challenges are represented by the need for an increasing number of faculty and more spaces and equipment and furniture. The number of faculty in the University has grown over the years; from only 9 full-time faculty members in the year 2002/2003 to over 80 full-time faculty members in 2008/2009. The number of classrooms and laboratories has also increased to support this provision. The Panel notes that plans to develop further the library and other facilities are also in place.
- 5.9 The Panel was not able to interview students who attend the weekend classes in the Business Administration programme. Furthermore the Panel was not able to clarify the extent to which there is equivalence of learning experience of the weekend students with those that are based in Bahrain. The Panel suggests that the institution undertake an analysis of the teaching hours, tutorial support, the percentage of self-study courses in which weekend students engage, and the grade marks received by its full-time, evening, and weekend students. In the light of this analysis, where areas in need of enhancement are identified, the institution should develop and implement mechanisms to ensure that all students receive a quality and equivalent learning experience in the B.SC. Business administration programme.
- 5.10 In coming to its conclusion regarding effectiveness of quality management and assurance the Panel notes the following areas with appreciation:
- The use of course evaluation surveys to enhance the quality of the programme.
 - The conduct of a programme review which led to revision of the curriculum.

- A demonstrated commitment on the part of programme and related staff to develop a quality culture informing the process of programme review at departmental level.

5.11 In terms of improvement the Panel *recommends* that the department should:

- Formalize and document the process of quality and related review at departmental level to ensure that the review process is clearly articulated, known to all stakeholders and the outcomes of review identified.
- Promote the culture of quality assurance within the proposed plan for professional staff development.
- Develop and implement appropriate quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that weekend students have an equivalent learning experience to full-time and evening students.

5.12 **Judgment**

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

6. Conclusion

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

There is limited confidence in the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration programme offered by the Gulf University.