



هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب
Education & Training Quality Authority
KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN مملكة البحرين

Annual Report 2023

Transforming Quality

Content

Overview	3
Who We Are	3
What We Do	3
Our Vision, Mission and Values	3
Board of Directors	4
Senior Management	5
Our International Advisory Board	6
Our Team	6
Annual Review	7
Our Strategy	7
The Strategy Delivery Unit	9
A Year At A Glance	11
Operations	12
Institutional and Programme Reviews	12
Kindergartens and Schools	12
Vocational and Training Institutes	14
Higher Education	15
National Examinations	15
National Qualifications Framework	16
Corporate Services	16
Local and International Engagement	17



Overview

Who We Are

Established by The Royal Decree in 2008, the Education and Training Quality Authority (BQA) is an independent national body that carries out its mandate and objectives under the guidance of its Board of Directors, and reports to the Cabinet of Ministers.

What We Do

BQA plays a critical role in providing learners, parents, employers, education and training institutions, policy makers and relevant stakeholders with an objective assessment of the quality of education and training in the Kingdom of Bahrain. BQA performs this critical role through three key functions:

- Carrying out reviews of education and training institutions and academic and vocational programmes.
- Conducting National Examinations.
- Administering the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

BQA helps in improving the quality of education and training in the Kingdom of Bahrain by:

- Helping all institutions to identify areas of success so, that they can build on them, and to identify areas for improvements, so that they can address them.
- Providing information on the quality of education and training in Bahrain to policymakers, and the public, enabling them to set better policies to improve both sectors and make informed decisions.
- Setting clear standards and indicators that describe the characteristics of a good educational institution or qualification, ensuring that all institutions are aware of good practices.
- Creating greater accountability among educational and training institutions for their performance.
- Enabling students/learners and parents to make informed choices about which institutions/ programmes to enroll in, based on an objective independent assessment of the quality of those institutions' performance and the qualifications they award.
- Promoting good practices and innovation by reporting on successes and providing blueprints for replication.

BQA's remit applies to all types of education and training institutions licensed to operate and award qualifications in the Kingdom of Bahrain: preschools, schools, vocational institutes, special needs institutions, and universities.

Our Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision

To be an effective partner in driving continual quality enhancement for world-class education and training sectors in Bahrain.

Mission

To play a critical role in advancing quality and raising trust in the education and training sectors, by providing reliable insights in a timely, responsive, and transparent manner.

Values

- Fairness ■ Competitiveness ■ Sustainability



Board of Directors

Appointed on 22nd of December 2022, and comprising public and private representatives, our Board of Directors provides invaluable guidance and support to our Senior Management team to ensure that we are delivering our strategic mandate in a timely manner.



H.E. Hamad bin Faisal Al Malki
Minister of Cabinet Affairs
Chairman of the Board of Directors



H.E. Shaikh Hamad bin Mohammed Al Khalifa
Chairman of Naseej B.S.C
Deputy Chairman of Hope Ventures
BQA Board Deputy Chairman



H.E. Mrs. Yara Redha Faraj
Coordinator - International Engagement
Prime Minister's Office



H.E. Mrs. Sara Ishaq Hasan
Coordinator
Prime Minister's Office



H.E. Dr. Faisal Isa Hammad
Undersecretary
Competitiveness & Economic Indicators
Ministry of Finance & National Economy



H.E. Mr. Munther Abdullatif Almudawi
Executive Director - Business Development
(Healthcare, Education, & Tourism)
Economic Development Board



H.E. Mr. Amer Hasan Marhoon
Managing Director
Skills Bahrain



H.E. Mrs. Dalal Iqbal Sangoor
Senior Legal counselor
Prime Minister's Office

Senior Management



Dr. Maryam Hasan Mustafa
Chief Executive



Esmat Jaffar
General Director
General Directorate of National Qualifications Framework and National Examinations



Dr. Khaled Albaker
Director
Directorate of Government Schools Reviews



Dr. Hasan Al Hammadi
Director
Directorate of Private Schools and Kindergartens Reviews



Dr. Sh. Lobna Al Khalifa
Director
Directorate of Higher Education Reviews



Ameera Jaffar
Director
Directorate of Human Resources & Financial Affairs



Ameera Al-Balushi
Director
Directorate of National Examinations



Dua'a Abdul Wahab
Director
Directorate of Vocational Reviews


Our International Advisory Board





Ms. Aileen Ponton
Area of Expertise:
Qualifications Frameworks





Mr. Chris Green
Area of Expertise:
School reviews





Mr. Dan Bray
Area of Expertise:
Examinations





Prof. Ian Cumbus
Area of Expertise:
Higher Education reviews





Dr. Stylianos Mavromoustakos
Area of Expertise:
Vocational reviews


Our Team

Statistics about our team.



During 2023, we appointed 4 senior management team members and hired 4 new employees, all of which are Bahrainis.

Our outstanding team represented Bahrain at 12 local and international forums.



Our General Director for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and National Examinations, Ms. Esmat Jaffar Akbar was awarded the National Action Medal, by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in December 2023.

Annual Review

The year 2023 witnessed the development of our 2023-2026 strategy, a culmination of 15 years of experience, extensive consultation, and resolution to meet and exceed national aspirations. Our progress against our key performance indicators in 2022 was strong despite the challenges we faced. This year, we renewed our commitment through an ambitious strategy and established a Strategy Delivery Unit to ensure implementation and continuous follow up.

As we emerge from COVID-19, a timely and comprehensive review of our institutional reviews frameworks was completed in 2023; Higher Education in August 2023, and Schools and Vocational in December 2023.

Grade 12 National Examinations were resumed in May 2023 after a 2 year pause, and Grade 9 National Examinations were piloted.

Our efforts this year positioned us well to begin 2024 with action and put us on the right track towards expansion of operations and sustainable growth.

Our Strategy

The next four years will build on our achievements and the lessons we have learnt over the past 15 years. Our strategic review showed that 88.6% of previous KPIs were met by December 2022, which is a testament to BQA's commitment to excellence despite the various challenges and barriers due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shifts in the education landscape.

The development of our Strategy 2023-2026 departs from our previous achievements. The process of strategic review started in February 2022 following a comprehensive reflection against our past objectives and an analysis of our areas for improvement, challenges, and growth opportunities.

Over the past 12 months, we held several conversations and consultations with:

- Representatives from government and private schools, universities, vocational training providers, and members from the private sector representing employers in the labour market.
- Parents and community members.
- International partners and strategic networks, including Cambridge Assessment International Education, and Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) for National Examinations planning.
- BQA's International Advisory Board (IAB), which consists of global experts in various areas of education and quality assurance.

We workshopped the plan internally, culminating with an entity-wide strategic planning workshop attended by all BQA staff and the new Board of Directors. We consulted international expertise and conducted benchmark studies of good practices. As a result, we identified 7 priorities that we then translated into 3 strategic goals, that will direct BQA's initiatives and efforts for the next 4 years.



Our Strategy

We identified 7 priorities that translate into 3 strategic goals.

Strategic Objective	Priority
Create a High Impact on National Education and Training Policies	<div>1</div> Adaptive Organisation We will build on our success and ensure we are responsive to national needs and aspirations.
	<div>2</div> Streamlined for value Our frameworks and processes will be streamlined to deliver value for the government and our partners in the education and training sectors.
	<div>3</div> Outputs that improve regulation and quality Our reviews, exam results and NQF operations will form a critical part of regulation and will support the systemic improvement of education and training.
Build Enabling Structures	<div>4</div> A skilled workforce We will ensure we have the knowledge and expertise we need through a flexible recruitment strategy, a talent retention programme and capacity building activities.
	<div>5</div> Sustainable growth We will develop a sustainable plan to enable our growth and expansion.
Increase Engagement and Accessibility	<div>6</div> Outreach and engagement We will be open and accessible to our different audiences, understand their needs and respond to them through improved client-facing communications.
	<div>7</div> Insights that improve national policies We will utilise the rich database we have acquired over the last 15 years, going beyond technical reporting, to support national education and training system development.



The Strategy Delivery Unit

Formed in July 2023, the Strategy Delivery Unit (SDU) serves as the catalyst for realising the BQA's ambitious Strategic Plan 2023-2026. This 13-member team, carefully chosen to represent the diverse range of strategic initiatives, is led by the BQA advisor, who brings extensive experience and guidance to the group. Convening monthly, the SDU acts as a central hub for monitoring progress, identifying roadblocks, and ensuring that initiatives are aligned with the overarching strategic vision.

The Unit's activities involve several key functions:

- **Planning and Review:** The SDU actively participates in developing, reviewing, and updating the 4-year strategic plan, ensuring it remains relevant and adaptable.
- **Delivery and Reporting:** The SDU oversees the execution of key projects, objectives, and milestones, tracking progress and ensuring timely delivery. Its monthly meetings serve as a platform for reporting on achievements and potential challenges, keeping senior leadership informed. Additionally, the SDU compiles and presents quarterly strategy progress reports to the BQA senior leadership and Board of Directors.
- **Monitoring and Escalation:** The SDU closely monitors the progress of each initiative. It identifies potential issues early on, escalates concerns to relevant stakeholders, and provides support or intervenes when necessary to keep initiatives on track.

SDU Highlights in 2023:

- **Built the Foundation:** Successfully developed the 2023-2026 Strategy, gaining approval from the Cabinet of Ministers and the Supreme Council for the Development of Education & Training.
- **Tracked Progress:** Published 2 comprehensive quarterly progress reports, keeping BQA staff, leadership, and the Board of Directors informed and engaged in the strategy.
- **Boosted Project Success:** Increased the rate of "on track" strategic projects from 80% in Q3 to 95% by Q4, demonstrating improved efficiency and execution.
- **Strengthened Collaboration:** Engaged with external stakeholders through advisory committees, fostering a broader understanding and support for the strategy.
- **Optimised Governance:** Restructured internal governance to prioritise and facilitate strategic delivery.
- **Enhanced Transparency:** Introduced robust project tracking and monitoring tools, offering clear insights into progress and potential roadblocks.
- **Empowered Staff:** Delivered informative strategy progress sessions for all BQA staff members, fostering understanding and ownership of the strategic goals.



SDU plans for 2024:

- **Boosting Transparency:** Design and deliver more frequent strategy progress sessions, aligning with training plans to increase employee understanding and ownership.
- **Amplifying Engagement:** Launch the BQA's refreshed brand image alongside a comprehensive communication strategy, effectively communicating impact to diverse stakeholders.
- **Achieving Operational Excellence:** Continue raising the bar for strategic initiative progress, aiming for 100% of projects "on track," showcasing efficiency and effectiveness.

With these ambitious goals and a commitment to collaboration, the SDU is poised to make 2024 a year of even greater progress and impact for the BQA. We look forward to partnering with all stakeholders to achieve our shared vision for the future.



A Year at A Glance

Quarter 1		
JAN New Board induction and first meeting	FEB Entity wide strategic planning workshop	MAR Unified framework developed with MOL and Tamkeen <small>Ministry of Labour</small>
Quarter 2		
APR 2023 - 2026 Strategy developed	MAY National Exams for Grades 9 & 12 conducted	JUN 2023 - 2026 Strategy published
Quarter 3		
JUL Internal governance re-structure completed	AUG New higher education Institutions framework approved	SEP SCQF MoU renewed
Quarter 4		
OCT Financial sustainability plan endorsed	NOV Schools and vocational institutes pilot reviews	DEC New schools' & vocational institutes review frameworks approved



Operations

Institutional and Programme Reviews

One of BQA's main roles is to frequently assess the performance of all education and training institutes. Institutional and programme reviews are carried out by our review teams guided by general review frameworks endorsed by the Cabinet.

Since the BQA's inception, we carried out more than 2000 reviews and helped our partners understand the areas that they are doing well in and the areas where they could do better.

This year, our review teams conducted more than 150 reviews in both public and private education and training institutes across all levels. This translates to:



BQA supports rewarding high performance and encourages sharing of best practices. In 2023, we awarded our Gold and Silver Seals of Quality to more than 20 institutions.



Kindergartens and Schools

Lessons Learnt from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Following a 2-year pause, due to the shift to virtual and hybrid learning, the schools review team resumed reviews in September 2022. The team conducted an analysis of the school's performance upon the return from the COVID 19, followed by the publication of the 'Lessons Learnt from the COVID 19' report which highlights the key measures taken by authorities to address quality provision of education in schools as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of the pandemic on schools and learners based on BQA's school reviews between 2022 to 2023.

77 government and private schools were reviewed between September 2022 and June 2023, with only a few schools having received an 'Outstanding' or 'Good' judgements, while the majority were 'Satisfactory' or below, indicating a trend of decline in schools' performance post-pandemic as they recover and readjust, which is also reflective of the global trend of education systems' recovery post COVID-19.

The report identified key strengths in high-performing schools that offer valuable lessons for improvement. These schools excelled in agile leadership, diagnosing student needs, supporting students with disabilities, and prioritising well-being.



While areas need improvement across the system included teaching and assessment practices, learners’ support, and integration of technology in learning and teaching.

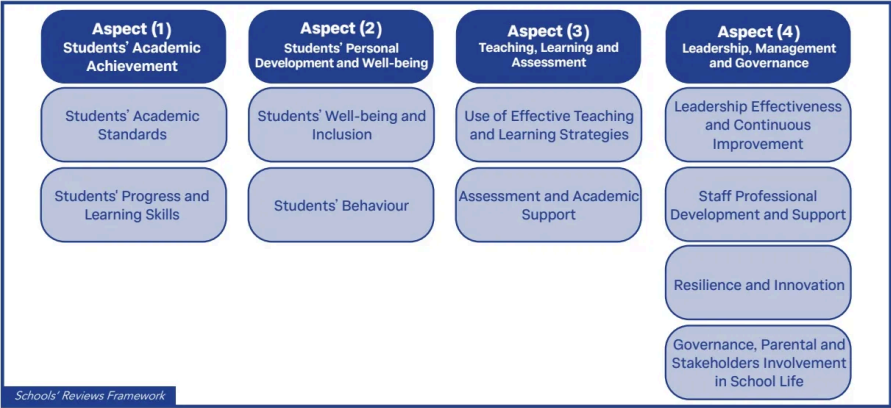
To address these issues, the report also outlines recommendations at both system and school levels. System-wide changes include curriculum review, stronger assessment policies, strategic investments in resources, and a revamped capacity-building programme. Schools, on the other hand, should focus on teacher development, establish clear assessment practices, and innovate in curriculum and teaching methods.

Comprehensive review of the Schools Reviews Framework

Understanding our critical role in quality enhancement through partnerships, our schools review team launched a comprehensive review of its review framework.



Through extensive consultations with our partners, and international benchmarking, we refocused our framework on what matters the most and what would have the biggest impact on the quality of provision in our schools. The new framework was approved in December 2023 will go into effect in March 2024 and will focus on 4 Aspects:



Building Capacity

Our schools review team is a pioneering team in the region, with 30 reviewers internationally certified in 2023, and over 100 reviewers certified since our inception, we have built a reputation of excellence and attracted regional clients to be trained and certified locally.

Kindergartens and SEN

The year 2023 saw the launch of sector scoping for Kindergartens and Special Education Needs (SEN) providers. This crucial step lays the groundwork for expanding the reach of quality assurance reviews in 2024, ensuring all students, regardless of their background or needs, benefit from an effective and equitable education system.

This proactive approach signifies our commitment to systemic improvement beyond just identifying issues, as we believe that a quality education system requires a holistic approach, encompassing all providers and catering to diverse student needs.

The upcoming reviews in 2024 will provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of kindergartens and SEN providers. This will inform targeted interventions and support, ensuring these critical sectors contribute effectively to Bahrain's overall education goals.



Vocational and Training Institutes

Vocational Institutes' Reviews

During the period from September 2022 to June 2023, 16 Vocational Institutes were reviewed, with 67% of institutes being judged as 'Good' or better, and only 7% being 'Inadequate' indicating the continuing growth towards improvement in the vocational sector. This translates to tangible benefits for the institutes, as high performing institutes qualify for funding opportunities and resources, which can be invested in providing better quality of training to learners.

Comprehensive review of the vocational reviews' framework

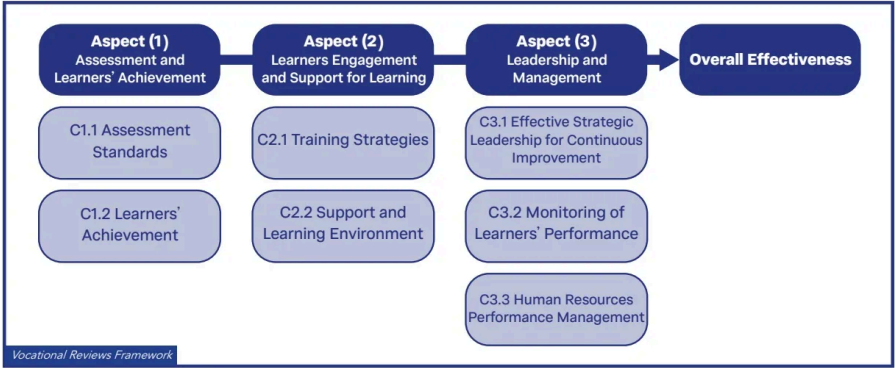
Recognising the evolving needs of the vocational training and education landscape, we have developed a comprehensive new Vocational Reviews Framework. The new framework was developed by the Directorate of Vocational Reviews, consisting of 7 expert reviewers, each with extensive knowledge and diverse experiences.

The framework development process involved extensive scoping to identify key areas for evaluation, benchmarking against international best practices, and consultative sessions with stakeholders including regulators, funding bodies, vocational institutes, industry experts, and trainers. This collaborative approach ensured the framework aligns with local and global standards, and our National Qualifications Framework (NQF) processes, while effectively assessing the quality and impact of vocational training and education in Bahrain.



The Vocational Reviews Framework indicates how the review team would obtain information and evidence to judge each Aspect and provides the interpretation of what is expected from the institutes against each of the seven Criteria. It also sets out the rubrics used to judge each Aspect and the Overall Effectiveness of the institute using a four-point scale: 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Satisfactory', or 'Inadequate'.

The Vocational Reviews Framework consists of three Aspects and seven Criteria - abbreviated by (C), as indicated in the below diagram.



To test its effectiveness, the new framework underwent a successful pilot in November 2023, with 3 institutes being reviewed. The pilot provided valuable insights allowing for final adjustments in the framework, which will be implemented starting March 2024.

The team has also invested greatly in capacity building through extensive training sessions conducted for main stakeholders including regulators and funding bodies, vocational institutes and internal and external reviewers, in preparation for the launch of the new reviews' framework, and to ensure consistent application of high-quality standards across all vocational reviews.



Higher Education

Programme Reviews

In 2023, 55 academic programmes' review reports were published, bringing the accumulative results of academic programmes to 88% of programmes receiving "Confidence" judgements. While 7% earned "Limited Confidence" and 5% "No Confidence". These results do not include the programmes that had been discontinued by the institutions or the regulators.

By identifying areas for improvement and supporting institutions in implementing effective solutions, our teams support in building a future where students receive a high-quality education and are well-equipped for success in the ever-changing world.

Comprehensive review of the Higher Education Institutions' Reviews Framework

A significant step forward in ensuring the quality and accountability of higher education provision in the Kingdom of Bahrain comes with the launch of the new General Framework of Higher Education Institutional Review. Approved by the Cabinet in August 2023, the framework was developed by the BQA in collaboration with the Higher Education Council (HEC), with a focus on aligning higher education regulations and quality assurance policies and processes. The framework is the culmination of extensive stakeholder consultation, benchmarking studies, and consultations with regulators. This ensures a holistic approach that incorporates diverse perspectives and aligns with international best practices.



The new framework will be launched with the start of the new institutional reviews cycle in May 2024.

To ensure a smooth transition, the BQA held four training workshops for higher education institutions, providing comprehensive training on the new framework and its application.

National Examinations

The Directorate of National Examinations plays a crucial role in assessing and improving Bahrain's education system. The directorate is responsible for developing, administering, and reporting on national examinations at the end of both compulsory (Grade 9) and secondary education (Grade 12). These examinations independently assess students' performance and ensure they meet national curriculum standards aligned with international benchmarks.

Grade 9 National Examinations

In May 2023, BQA piloted Grade 9 examinations, designed in alignment with the Ministry of Education's curriculum. The pilot exams were conducted with a sample of government school students, 4 core subject areas: Arabic, English, Mathematics and Science. The live exams for Grade 9 for all government school students will be conducted in May 2024.

Grade 12 National Examinations

In 2023, BQA resumed the National Examinations for Grade12 students following a 3 year pause due to the COVID 19 pandemic. 98% of our Grade 12 students participated in taking the examinations in 3 core subject areas: Arabic, English, Mathematical Skills.

Starting from April 2024, the BQA's National Examinations for Grade 12 students will measure the skills and competencies required for higher education entry. All government schools' students are required to take the National Examinations, and the results would be considered as one of the requirements for acceptance into the National Universities: the University of Bahrain, and the Bahrain Polytechnic.

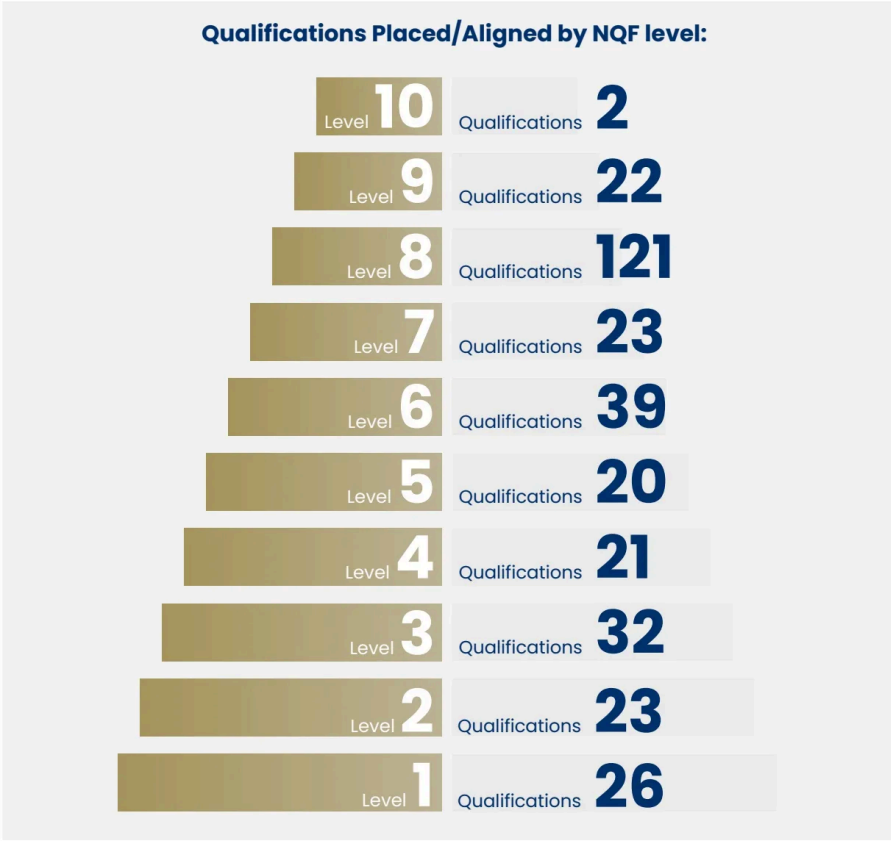


National Qualifications Framework

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is designed to provide a strong base for the understanding, comprehension, and recognition of national and foreign qualifications, thereby improving the understanding of employers, parents, and learners of the values of qualifications. The NQF assesses the relevance of qualifications to labour market needs and increases the accountability of education and training institutions towards maintaining high quality standards in their provision.

The NQF improves mobility and progression of learners within and across tertiary institutions and promotes the concept of lifelong learning.

The NQF is managed by the General Directorate of National Qualifications Framework and National Examinations and reports to the NQF Advisory Committee.



Corporate Services

Human Resources

Our outstanding performance is attributed to our distinguished team. We have realised a great record of milestones in developing national capacity internally and across the education and training sectors. To date, BQA trained and qualified more than 139 reviewers and built national capacity in quality assessments and qualifications.

As we seek to maintain our position as a center of excellence locally and regionally, we will continue to ensure that our staff and partners have the knowledge and skills to perform and improve quality of provision. We are shifting towards creative recruitment solutions to ensure our team is motivated, engaged and has the knowledge and expertise they need to perform their tasks.

In parallel, we will continue to feed the sector with future leaders. This year, BQA started with a cohort of 9 MOE secondees who will go through an intensive training to gain international recognition and transfer the knowledge back to the MOE.



Technology

Technology plays a vital role in enabling BQA to achieve its strategic objectives and advance both efficiency and effectiveness. Our second strategic pillar focuses on digitising and automating our internal operations and external services. This includes streamlining our processes, reducing manual tasks, and leveraging technology to enhance operational efficiency and accuracy.

During the past year, BQA successfully revamped its reviews hub and implemented automation tools, resulting in a 100% paperless digital review process. This achievement demonstrates our commitment to leveraging technology for continuous improvement. We are actively working on automating various operational processes across the organisation, leading to a more agile and efficient BQA.

Finance

In 2023, BQA achieved a commendable 6% reduction in annual expenditures. This result is directly linked to re-engineering our processes and review frameworks with a focus on efficiency and agility, and demonstrates strong financial discipline, cost management practices, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

We have also laid the foundations for the development of sustainable revenue generation model, which is crucial for long-term financial stability and growth.

Local and International Engagement

BQA serves as a leading authority on education and training in Bahrain. Over the past 15 years, we have conducted thousands of reviews and analysed data from national examinations, providing us with a deep understanding of the system's strengths and weaknesses. This year, we focused on improving accessibility and engagement. We underwent a brand assessment to enhance our internal and external image, and transformed client communications with a new, tailored reporting system. Our reports, categorised as Institutional, System-Level, and Thematic, cater to diverse stakeholder needs.



Local Collaborations

Strengthening partnerships and adding value nationally has been at the center of our work. In 2023, we took great strides in working collaboratively with various regulators on revised review frameworks, through various joint committees and advisory boards. For the development of the schools' review framework, we collaborated with the Ministry of Education and Bahrain Teachers' College (BTC), while for vocational reviews, we collaborated with Ministry of Labour and Labour Fund (Tamkeen). We also worked hand-in-hand with the Higher Education Council (HEC) on revising the higher education institutional review framework.

International Partnerships

GCC Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

The project to develop a GCC Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, which began in December 2022, is a collaborative effort between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with the BQA representing the Kingdom of Bahrain, under the supervision of the Gulf Network for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (GNQAHE). This framework will make it easier to compare qualifications across GCC countries, which will benefit students who want to move between countries for education and employment. The framework is nearing completion and will be submitted to GCC education ministers for final approval.

Partnering with Penta International UK

Building upon our commitment to international collaboration and quality assurance, BQA is proud to announce a new partnership with Penta International UK. This collaboration will enable us to offer joint reviews for British curriculum schools in Bahrain, paving the way for their qualification for the prestigious British Schools Overseas (BSO) voluntary accreditation scheme.

3 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) Signed

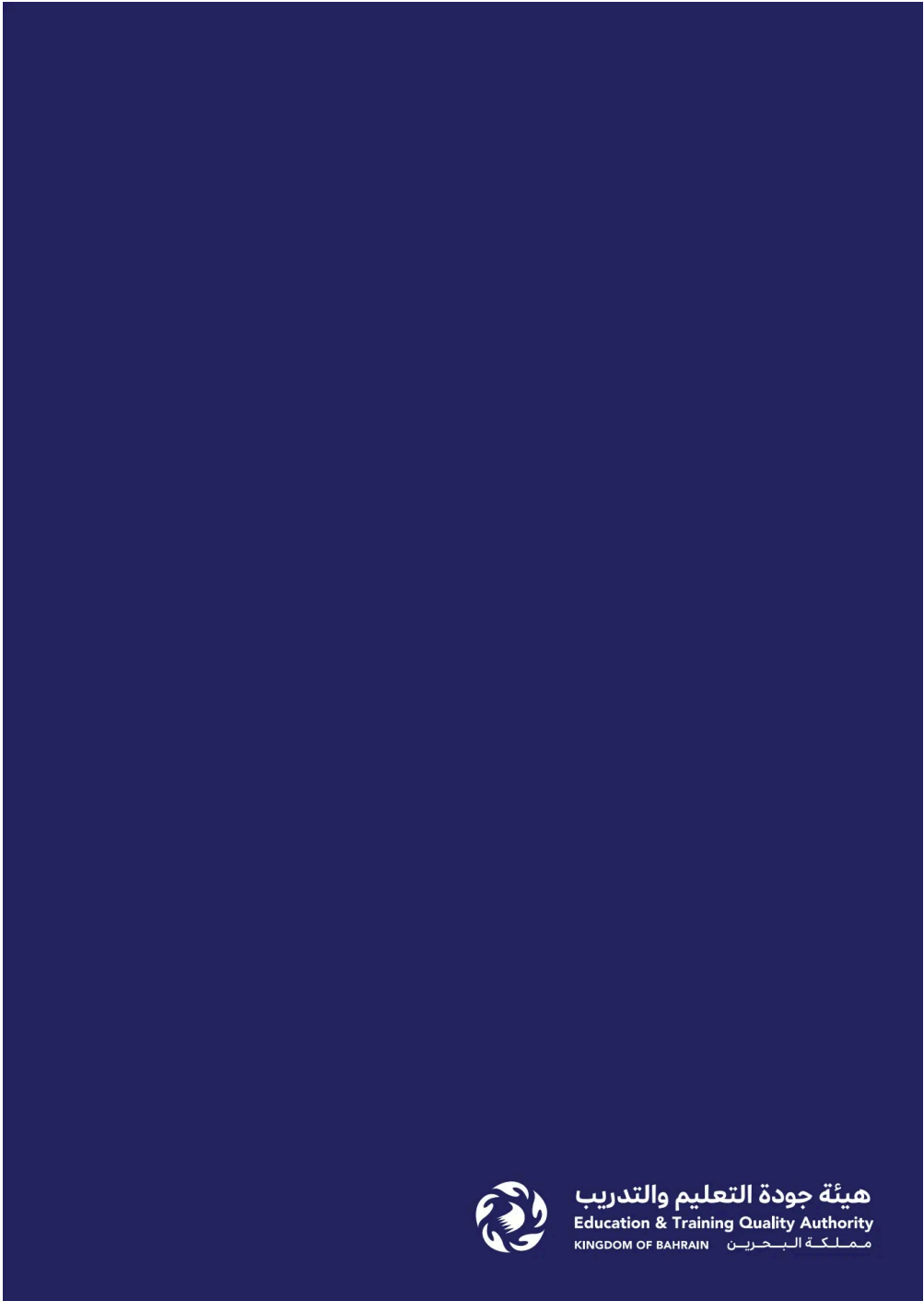
BQA remains committed to fostering strong regional and international collaborations to continuously enhance the quality of education in Bahrain. This year, we proudly signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with renowned organisations dedicated to education excellence:



Membership in International Networks

BQA actively participates in renowned international networks, further solidifying its commitment to global quality assurance:





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