



هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب
Education & Training Quality Authority
Kingdom of Bahrain - مملكة البحرين

Directorate of Higher Education Reviews Programme Review Report

**Ahlia University (AU)
College of Information Technology
Doctor of Philosophy in Information Systems,
Computing and Mathematics and related fields
offered by Brunel University**

Kingdom of Bahrain

Site Visit Date: 23–25 November 2020

HA005-C3-R005

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Acronyms

APRs	Academic Programme Reviews
AU	Ahlia University
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
BU	Brunel University
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
HEC	Higher Education Council
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ILOs	Intended Learning Outcomes
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PhD	Philosophy Doctorate
PILOs	Programme Intended Learning Outcomes
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education - UK
SER	Self Evaluation Report
WR	Without Residence

I. Introduction

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

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

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

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

Standard 1: The Learning Programme

Standard 2: Efficiency of the Programme

Standard 3: Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

Standard 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

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

Table 1: Criteria for Judgements

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

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

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

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

II. The Programme's Profile

Institution Name*	Ahlia University (AU)
College/ Department*	College of Information Technology Department of Information Systems
Programme/ Qualification Title*	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD-WR) in Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics and related fields offered by Brunel University
Qualification Approval Number	Cabinet of Ministers Decision No. (1626-03) of 2001 Higher Education Council Letter No. (2008/م أ ت - 81) of 2008
NQF Level	Aligned to Level 10
Validity Period on NQF	20 January 2020 - 20 January 2025 (Valid for five years)
Number of Units*	Not Applicable
NQF Credit	Level 10
Programme Aims*	“To graduate PhD holders who are able to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences. It is expected that graduates will continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level. They will have the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments”
Programme Intended Learning Outcomes*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LO1: The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication; • LO2: A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice; • LO3: The general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust project design in the light of unforeseen problems;

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• LO4: A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry. |
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* Mandatory fields

III. Judgment Summary

The Programme's Judgment: Confidence

Standard/ Indicator	Title	Judgement
Standard 1	The Learning Programme	Satisfied
Indicator 1.1	The Academic Planning Framework	Addressed
Indicator 1.2	Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes	Addressed
Indicator 1.3	The Curriculum Content	Partially Addressed
Indicator 1.4	Teaching and Learning	Addressed
Indicator 1.5	Assessment Arrangements	Addressed
Standard 2	Efficiency of the Programme	Satisfied
Indicator 2.1	Admitted Students	Addressed
Indicator 2.2	Academic Staff	Partially Addressed
Indicator 2.3	Physical and Material Resources	Addressed
Indicator 2.4	Management Information Systems	Addressed
Indicator 2.5	Student Support	Addressed
Standard 3	Standard 3: Academic Standards of Students and Graduates	Satisfied
Indicator 3.1	Efficiency of the Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.2	Academic Integrity	Addressed
Indicator 3.3	Internal and External Moderation of Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.4	Work-based Learning	Not Applicable
Indicator 3.5	Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component	Addressed
Indicator 3.6	Achievements of the Graduates	Addressed

Standard 4	Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance	Satisfied
Indicator 4.1	Quality Assurance Management	Addressed
Indicator 4.2	Programme Management and Leadership	Addressed
Indicator 4.3	Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme	Partially Addressed
Indicator 4.4:	Benchmarking and Surveys	Addressed
Indicator 4.5:	Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs	Partially Addressed

IV. Standards and Indicators

Standard 1

The Learning Programme

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

Indicator 1.1: The Academic Planning Framework

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

Judgment: Addressed

- Brunel University (BU) London strategically partnered with Ahlia University (AU) in 2007 to offer the PhD Without Residence (WR) programme in the subject areas of Information Systems, Computing, Mathematics, and Management Studies. AU in coordination with BU ensures that the PhD WR complies with and licensed by the Bahrain Higher Education Council (HEC) regulatory requirements as well as BQA requirements. The awarded PhD is a single award made by BU in accordance with its Royal Charter and Statutes (Appendix 1). The mission of BU states that 'it brings benefit to society through excellence in education, research and knowledge transfer'. The PhD programme is governed by the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board that reports to the Brunel University Education Committee. The Panel finds that the planning framework of the PhD WR is relevant and contributes to the vision and mission of the AU as well as those of BU.
- The Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board discusses regularly the issues related to the partnership and PhD WR programme. Arising matters regarding academic standards and any potential risks are discussed regularly and handled. The Programme and Partnership Lead, who is a full-time BU staff but resides in Bahrain is responsible for all delivery aspects of the PhD WR programme.
- The PhD WR is aligned to the Bahrain National Qualification Framework (NQF) as a foreign (cross boarder) qualification at level 10 as per the Alignment Decision of the BQA. The Programme is also aligned to the UK NQF level 10.
- The Panel believes that the programme's title as written in the provided documents 'PhD in Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics and related fields' is too long and general. However, during the virtual interviews with the programme management, the Panel was informed that the formal title that appears on the award certificate is only 'Doctor of Philosophy'.

- The Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board discusses regularly issues related to the PhD WR programme, including revisions and compliance with the set of standards of BU. The Panel is satisfied that the programme aims, referred to as Standards by Brunel University, are clear and appropriate. The Board includes in its membership student representatives. However, it is not clear from the submitted materials whether local stakeholders are consulted in the revisions related to the programme and its aims. The Panel recommends that the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board should ensure that improvements to the PhD WR aims and other matters related to the programme are done in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.
- The programme aims are aligned with AU mission and College of IT mission. The PhD WR directly addresses the HEC strategic research-related objective, which is 'Strengthen University Research Capacity'. The programme has also enabled AU to increase the number of Doctorate degree holders in Bahrain. The Panel is of the view that the programme aims contribute to the AU and College mission and strategic goals.
- Academic planning is implemented by the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board, which ensures regular review of PhD WR operations. The Board also ensures the adherence to local (Bahrain) regulatory and quality assurance requirements as well as Brunel University Quality Assurance requirements. The SER and the provided evidence reflect the binding agreement between BU and AU that presents the governance and management structure with clear composition of roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the provided evidence and interviews with senior management show that the binding agreement of the PhD WR is valid and arising issues are regularly discussed by the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board. Hence, the Panel is satisfied that the binding agreement is valid and regularly revised.
- The Governance of the Brunel-Ahlia Partnership, the Terms of Reference and Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board clearly state the nature and mode of delivery of the PhD programme. The Panel notes that the agreement states clearly the status of the programme as a BU programme with the degree being awarded by BU.
- The SER specifies the title of the awarded degree. Although HEC list of approved programme and the NQF Alignment Decision mentions the area of the PhD WR degree offered by AU, the provided sample certificate shows the awarded title is Doctor of Philosophy and the name of the of the awarding institution is Brunel University.
- The Panel notes from the provided documents that BU's rules and policies pertaining to teaching and learning, assessment, student admission, support, staffing, etc. are applied with the help of AU. However, the College of IT website does not contain any details on the PhD WR programme. The Panel suggests that the College of IT maintains information about the PhD WR on their website for current and potential students.
- With regards to the academic governance and management of the PhD WR, roles and responsibilities are assumed at three levels. These are: (1) Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board, which is responsible for the academic governance of Brunel Programmes delivered at AU and for the partnership with AU, as set out in its Terms of Reference; (2) the Doctoral

Committee, which reports to the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board and is responsible for the local management of the operational delivery of the programme; and (3) the Student Experience Committee, which is chaired jointly by the Programme Director and an elected student representative and reports to the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board. As for research supervision, the PhD WR is a research-based programme in which students are jointly supervised by faculty members from both Institutions. The Panel finds these arrangements pertaining to the Brunel/ Ahlia Partnership Agreement clear and appropriate.

Indicator 1.2: Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The generic graduates' attributes at the institutional level of AU are clearly stated and shown in the Teaching and Learning Plan 2016-2020. However, the SER and the evidence submitted do not show mapping between the AU's generic graduate attributes and the PhD's Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). Hence, the Panel suggests that the College of IT conduct a mapping between the graduate attributes and the PhD's ILOs.
- The SER states that the programme has clearly stated ILOs. However, the SER and the submitted evidence do not show a mapping between these ILOs and the programme aims. It was noted during the interview with the PhD WR programme management that BU uses 'Standards' to refer to programme aims, and that a mapping between the Standards and PILOs is in place. The Panel suggests that the College of IT published on its website the mapping between the PILOs and the programme aims as well as the mapping between the graduate attributes and the PhD's ILOs.
- The SER lists the four PhD ILOs. The Panel notes that the four PILOs are appropriate for the level intended. The PhD WR is aligned to the NQF as a foreign qualification (cross boarder) at level 10 as per the BQA Alignment Decision. The Panel is of the view that the alignment of the PILOs to the NQF is appropriate.
- The PhD WR is a research-based degree and aligned to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education-UK (UK QAA) and Bahrain NQF.

Indicator 1.3: The Curriculum Content

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

Judgment: *Partially Addressed*

- The SER states that the programme is 'designed to ensure doctoral researchers' year-by-year progression'. During interviews with the PhD WR programme's management, the Panel was informed that the programme is a research-based, and that doctoral students' progression is monitored through the recordings of the supervision meetings minutes. However, neither the SER nor the evidence provided show a Dissertation syllabus. The Panel suggests that a Dissertation syllabus be developed and distributed to students.
- The ILOs of the PhD WR are derived from and benchmarked against the expectations set out in the UK QAA Quality Code. This was also confirmed in the interviews with the programme's academic staff.
- The PhD WR is a research based and does not include any taught components that are credit bearing. However, skill training sessions are delivered twice a year by academic staff from BU at the Autumn and Spring Schools held at AU. BU ensures that doctoral researchers and AU supervisors are fully supported and thus able to meet the requirements of BU regulations and the Brunel Code of Practice for Research
- Although the programme intended learning outcome are clearly stated in the provided documentation by AU, these documents do not show an evidence that the PhD ILOs are covered and achieved. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the BU should devise a mechanism to ensure that the PhD WR ILOs are covered, regularly measured, and achieved.
- In addition to the supervision meetings, the programme offers doctoral students training in research skills, in the form of compulsory workshops, under the Doctoral Skills Schools Programme. This was confirmed in interviews with the programme's management team. The content of the Doctoral Skills Schools Programme ensures that the skills developed by the doctoral researchers support the programme of research. The workshops are delivered twice a year by academic staff from BU at the Autumn and Spring schools held at AU. The workshops' training sessions are related to critical analysis of the literature review, research methodology and ethical standards.
- The PhD programme learning outcomes meet the standards derived from the expectations set out in the UK QAA.
- The SER indicates that the PhD WR was developed with a consideration of the diversity and linguistic sensitivity of Bahrain through the admission screening process. Applicants are supported by proposal writing workshops and a specific English Examination

(BrunELT). The programme was also developed with a consideration of the regulatory requirements of both universities. The SER, indicates that the programme is in line with the Quality Provision of Cross Border in Higher Education of the UNESCO and OECD.

Indicator 1.4: Teaching and Learning

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The PhD WR does not include any credit-bearing taught courses since it is a research-based. The aim of the programme is to support the doctorate student to conduct research that will lead to a thesis. BU has a Code of Practice for Research Degrees, such as the PhD WR offered by AU. The Code of Practice sets out the policies and procedure for the PhD WR programme.
- During the meeting with the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board, the Panel was informed that the supervisory process is in line with the teaching and learning philosophy of BU for PhD programmes. Moreover, students are provided with skills training programmes. Although these programmes are without credits, they train students on various types of skills such as, critical analysis, research methodologies, ethical standards, literature review, statistical analysis, and writing. In addition to the skills training programmes, students benefit from direct feedback from their supervisors during the supervisory process. The supervisory process involves a frequent contact with supervisors as often as weekly, during the first few months following registration. The frequency of supervisory meetings will decrease as the doctoral researchers becomes more confident in their work. BU regulations require that formally recorded supervision meetings take place every six to eight weeks from the initial registration until the doctoral researcher submits his/her thesis for examination. This was confirmed during the interview with the PhD students. The Panel is of the view that the teaching and learning methods of the programme are based on BU regulations and contribute to the achievement of ILOs.
- Since the PhD WR is a cross-border programme, several of these supervisory meetings will be conducted through electronic means. Doctoral researchers are provided with a username and password to access BU online databases to search for books, articles, journals, Blackboard, and other online services. The Panel notes during the interview with the PhD students that E-learning is a major tool in teaching and learning in the PhD WR programme and thus online services are made easily accessible.
- The Code of Practice for Research Degrees and interviews with the students confirmed that, since the PhD WR is research based, students are provided with ample opportunity to be engaged fully in their learning process. The Panel notes that the developed skills, through workshops and seminars conducted by BU, help the PhD students in becoming independent researchers and lifelong learners.

- PhD researchers are provided with access to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) such as Blackboard, which contains various online videos and recorded seminars to support them throughout their research journey. Researchers are also provided with licensed software as supporting tools for their research. The Panel notes that students are expected to survey the existing literature and submit a thesis proposal that will contribute to development of a state-of-the-art ideas in their respective areas of research. Submitted thesis proposals are reviewed by their supervisors to ensure they contain sufficient contributions to the field of research. During the meeting with the BU staff, the Panel was informed that the nature of the thesis work at the PhD level motivates the students to create and innovate.
- Through their research work and training workshops, the PhD researchers develop various skills of research, such as oral presentation, technical writing, etc. These skills help PhD students in becoming lifelong learners.

Indicator 1.5: Assessment Arrangements

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The SER indicates that all assessments of the doctoral researchers are in line with the standards and learning outcomes presented in the Senate Regulation. They are also in line with the HEC requirements and are strictly implemented. The assessments of PhD WR students are divided into two categories, periodic research progress assessment and final examination. The periodic assessment of the research progress is a formal check on the progress and achievement of students to ensure that they are on track to meet their expected submission dates and the standards required of a Brunel PhD student. The provided evidence shows a sample of a student's thesis work progression reviews, which indicates a timeline of the student's meetings with the supervisors, the purpose of these meetings, and the required documents from the students. There is also the final examination of the submitted thesis and viva voce, which takes place at the Brunel University London Uxbridge campus. The PhD degree awarded by BU is based on the examination of a thesis submitted by the candidate following a three to four year of original research.
- During the interviews with the faculty members and students, the Panel notes that the policies and procedure of assessment are accessible to faculty members and external examiners through university documentations and are communicated to students during the induction days.
- The SER, indicates that the formal reviews of the PhD students' progress are regularly monitored by the Programme and Partnership Lead, and the PhD WR office administration. The Panel was informed during the interview with academic staff that the

award of the PhD degree is based solely on the summative assessment (examination of the thesis and viva voce). On the other hand, formative assessments are part of the feedback system that monitor the research progress. Furthermore, formative assessments such as Annual PhD Symposium, Monthly Seminars, and Poster Session and a 3 Minute talk are conducted to support the PhD researchers' progression throughout their research journey.

- The evaluation of research considers the ethics and principle of scientific research as set out in the Code of Practice for Research Degree. Students should adhere to the highest standards of conduct in their research. The Panel notes during the interviews with the external examiner, supervisors and the PhD students that ethical conduct is dealt with during the review of the thesis proposals and final examination of the thesis.
- During the interview with the academic staff, the Panel notes that the evaluation of research conducted by students is structured and documented on regular basis. The evaluation is performed by the recognized supervisors and monitored by the principle supervisor.
- The SER indicates that students' achievements are evaluated regularly by a team of supervisors and monitored by the Programme and Partnership Lead. The Panel notes during the interview with the faculty that the final examination, through the viva voce, offers an example of a transparent evaluation of a student.
- The BU has a procedure that sets out the way in which the University considers and responds to concerns about academic misconduct. Concerns about research misconduct is first reported to the Secretary to Council, who may determine whether the matter should be referred for consideration under the Academic Misconduct procedure. A student may submit a request to appeal against the misconduct decision made under the Academic Misconduct procedure. BU provides a research ethics handbook, which all students and staff must abide to. BU has special forms to facilitate the process of academic appeals, such as the Academic Appeal Form, which is filled out by the student and submitted along with a supporting evidence, and the Academic Investigation Form, which is filled by an investigator. Due to the small number of enrolled students in the PhD WR since its inception, no such cases were raised.

Standard 2

Efficiency of the Programme

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

Indicator 2.1: Admitted Students

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The SER indicates that the entry requirements are published in several BU documents as well as on the BU website. In addition, the Brunel Admission Policy and Procedure are published in a booklet. The Panel notes that the admission requirements provide equal acceptance opportunities regardless of gender. During the interview with PhD WR students, they indicated that it would be beneficial if the newly admitted students could get the chance to hear about the experiences of previous students from the students themselves. Therefore, the Panel suggests that the programme management arrange for some of the senior students or alumni to speak to the newly admitted students during the induction days.
- The selection of doctoral students is monitored by BU, where all students' admission decisions are signed off by the relevant Head of Department at BU. Application standards are applied to ensure that candidates admitted to the programme have the potential to complete their PhD within the timeframe stated in the Senate Regulations and the Brunel Research Degree Code of Practice. The admission process is managed by BU London; however, the HEC requirements are also considered. The Panel finds the admission requirements for the PhD WR appropriate for the programme's level.
- The PhD WR programme is research based and hence, does not have any remedial courses. However, all international students must show evidence of the English language requirement, which is a score of 6.5 in IELTS (with no less than 6.0 in any section). This applies to all applicants, even if English is the native language of the student's home country, as indicated in the BU website and SER.
- The Panel notes during the interview with the programme management team that recognition of non-formal and informal prior learning is not endorsed by HEC Bahrain and thus not applicable to PhD WR students.

- From the submitted evidence and interviews with the programme staff, the Panel learned that regular review of the applicants' admission is conducted by Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board and that the admission policy is regularly benchmarked and revised.

Indicator 2.2: Academic Staff

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

Judgment: Partially Addressed

- The SER indicates that the AU academic staff participate in the PhD WR programme as recognized supervisors; however, the principle supervisor must be an academic staff from BU. All recognized supervisors must meet the requirements of the BU Academy of Supervisors as set out in the BU Code of Practice for Research Degrees. An assessment procedure for selecting supervisors is in place and the supporting materials provided an example. The Panel is satisfied that the procedure for selecting supervisors are clear and transparent.
- The policy regarding supervision of doctoral students indicates that for an AU academic staff to become a recognized supervisor, he/she should be a full member of the Academy of Supervisors in order to be trained as a supervisor. Admission to the Academy of Supervisors requires that an academic staff member shows evidence of research capacity, which is having at least 3 publications in the last 5 years, in addition to experience in supervision of students. This was confirmed during interviews with the academic staff. Recognized supervisors who are members of the Academy of Supervisor are evaluated regularly to ensure that they maintain the minimum requirement to remain as members of the Academy.
- The teaching load of an academic staff at AU is 15 hours across all ranks, which is considered relatively high by the Panel as compared to other universities in the region. During an interview with senior faculty, the Panel notes that other duties (administrative, supervision, etc.) are counted towards the 15-hour load. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AU should consider reducing the teaching load of faculty members acting as recognized supervisors to give them more time for quality research.
- The number of academic staff at the AU College of IT is nine: one associate professor, five assistant professors and three lecturers. In addition to two support staff. The six PhD-holders, which include the Dean of the College, serve all the programmes within the College (two BSc programmes, one MSc and one PhD). The SER does not indicate how AU manages to distribute the teaching, community engagement, research and admin loads among the six faculty members. In addition, the SER does not show how the faculty load is calculated to maintain their loads in line with the regional and international

standards. Hence, the Panel recommends that AU develops a workload policy that is in line with the regional and international standards.

- As stated in the SER and confirmed in interview with faculty, the BU Academy of Supervisors, which runs training workshops, was established on AU campus to improve the skills of AU academic staff in the supervision of research students. Members are regularly evaluated to maintain their status as members of the Academy of Supervisors. The Panel is satisfied that procedures of maintaining the membership in the Academy of Supervisors are regularly monitored and evaluated.
- The Academy of Supervisors provides professional training to the academic staff at AU to become recognized supervisors and be eligible to co-supervise PhD WR students with the main supervisors who are full-time BU academic staff. Such professional training is required from all AU academic staff who request to become recognized supervisors. The Panel appreciates the role that the Academy of Supervisors play in the effective preparation of the AU staff to become recognized supervisors.
- During the interview with staff, the Panel was informed that AU has policies and procedures, which are part of the Human Resources Manual, in place to monitor staff retention. The Panel notes that the number of staff involved in the PhD WR programme as recognized supervisor is too small (four members) to provide useful statistics. The number of students that graduated from the PhD WR programme is five and there were no dropouts among them.

Indicator 2.3: Physical and Material Resources

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The AU facilities include classrooms, teaching laboratories, general purpose laboratories, library and internet/network access facilities. The SER indicates that these facilities are available for PhD related activities such as the PhD Autumn and Spring Schools, and for conducting workshops and seminars. However, the SER and the provided video of facilities do not show whether any specialized research laboratories are available at AU campus. The Panel believes that having specialized research laboratories at AU would provide new students with a wider spectrum for selecting a research topic. Hence, the Panel suggests that BU and AU consider establishing specialized research laboratories at AU to be used by PhD WR students, should the need arise for practical experiments.
- During the interview with the PhD WR management team, the Panel notes that IT related policies are in place at BU. Study rooms in the library and offices are equipped with internet via WIFI and LAN services. The Panel was informed during the interview with students that they are satisfied with the IT facilities, computer labs and WIFI.

- AU has a library that provides physical and electronic resources for faculty and students. It accommodates a collection of standard books and references across all the disciplines, as well as provides access to all its digital resources. In addition, PhD WR students are provided with an access to library resources at BU London. This was also confirmed in interviews with students and staff. It was noted during the interview with the BU staff that a study of the adequacy of the library resources is regularly conducted. The Panel is of the view that the library resources provided by BU are adequate.
- The SER indicates that AU maintains IT facilities to support its programmes, faculty and students. This support is by means of software and hardware provisioning and maintenance. The SER presents the different measures and facilities that AU uses to support the safety and security of the library and its visitors. Moreover, AU ensures the maintenance of its learning facilities such as classrooms and laboratories. During the interview with the PhD WR management team, the Panel notes that AU provides adequate mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of the university resources and facilities.
- AU has professional security services to take care of campus security and ensure the safety of faculty, staff and students. AU ensures the health of its staff and students by providing them with health insurance. Additionally, First Aid Kits are available in different places in the AU campus. The Panel is of the view that AU provides appropriate arrangements for the health and safety of staff and students.

Indicator 2.4: Management Information Systems

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The SER indicates that the PhD WR students' records are stored at BU on its Student Information Technology Systems (SITS) database. Furthermore, students' progress reviews and information about the students' meetings with their supervisors are stored in e-Vision at BU. The Panel learned during the interview with the programme management team that these sources of detailed information on the students' progress and records are used by the supervisors and programme leaders to make informed decisions.
- E-Vision keep detailed records of PhD WR students' progress in their research work. During the interview with the PhD WR management team, the Panel notes that reports of e-learning and e-resources are used by the BU administration to make decision regarding the quality of supervision and continued registration of students.
- The SER indicates that the PhD WR students' data may only be viewed by the Supervisory Team, the Programme Lead and professional staff. The Panel notes during the interview with the BU staff that the BU has policies and procedure on the protection of students' data, which are published on the BU website.

- The Panel notes that the awarded certificates are accurate in describing the title of the degree. The provided evidence shows an example of the endorsed certificates by HEC at the Kingdom of Bahrain. The Panel notes that the certificates are accurate and issued in a timely manner.

Indicator 2.5: Student Support

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The PhD WR students are given full access to all facilities at BU both remotely and physically when visiting the campus. During interviews with the programme staff and students, the Panel learned that the students are introduced to all e-resources and e-learning facilities by BU staff upon admission. The Panel notes during the interview with the programme management team that the students are provided with several skill development programmes during their research work. Hence, the Panel is of the view that student support services are appropriate.
- The PhD WR students are provided with a range of academic support services including the support by their supervisors (Principle and recognized supervisors). The Panel understands that career guidance is not a common service given to PhD students. The Panel suggests that BU and AU establishes a career guidance service for PhD WR to help them in planning their future careers.
- According to the SER, newly admitted PhD WR students are invited to join an induction session that is usually conducted by a Brunel subject liaison librarian (SLB) and a member of Brunel academic staff. During the induction session, the PhD students are familiarized with all online facilities available through off-campus access such as Blackboard, Journal archives, eVision etc. PhD WR students confirmed during the interview that the induction helped them be familiarized with the various online facilities and services at BU.
- Supervisory teams provide academic support to PhD WR students through holding regular meetings with the students to help them achieve their targets within the timeframe allocated for their research work. The Panel notes during the interview with the students that regular meetings with the supervisors help them achieve their targets. Therefore, the Panel is satisfied that academic advising of the PhD WR students lead to the achievement of learning outcomes.
- The SER, indicates that AU in coordination with BU hosts an annual conference to ensure equal opportunities for both genders. During the interviews with the Programme management team, the Panel learned that students with special needs receive appropriate support. The SER, indicates that PhD WR students who are at risk academically are given

intensive supervision to ensure they can complete their work in timely manner and achieve their targets. During interviews with supervisors the Panel learned that through regular research progress meetings, supervisors identify at-risk students; as a result, supervisors set more frequent meetings with such students to help them overcome their research difficulties. The Panel is of the view that the procedure for helping at-risk students to achieve their target goals is suitable.

- The Panel notes in the interview with staff that the BU in collaboration with AU, conduct Students' Satisfaction Surveys regularly; and that the results of these surveys are used to improve support services

Standard 3

Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

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

Indicator 3.1: Efficiency of the Assessment

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The assessment process is detailed in the Senate Regulation 5 and Code of Practice for Research Degree. The SER indicates that the PhD awarded by BU London is based on the examination of a thesis submitted by the candidate following a three to four year of original research. The Panel notes during the interview with the programme management team that the procedures and process of the PhD WR follows the normal practice of most PhD programmes in other universities in the UK and is in accordance with the normal practice of PhD award in other universities.
- The graduate attributes of the PhD WR are not described explicitly but embedded within the programme aims and are translated into four ILOs. The ILOs are implicitly mapped to the graduate attributes of (1) make informed judgements... (2) communicate their ideas and conclusions ... (3) undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level ... (4) have the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment. To attain good practices that meet the academic standards, an assessment framework is used based on the UK Framework for Higher Education FHEQ Level 8 and Bahrain NQF level 10. By following this framework, the programme ensures that the assessment is aligned to the ILOs and graduate attributes. Hence, the students and graduates of the programme meet the academic standards that are compatible with equivalent programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally.
- The SER indicates that the criteria of evaluation is based on the candidates' ability to demonstrate 'the creation and interpretation of new knowledge', 'systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge', and 'the general ability to conceptualize, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge' in the written thesis and viva voce examination. The Panel acknowledges that the assessment process detailed in the Senate Regulation and in the Code of Practice for Research Degree to be effective and is aligned to the learning outcomes. The Panel is of the view that the assessment process ensures the attainment of the graduate attributes and academic standards of the programme. As such the Panel finds that the programme has put in place relevant mechanisms to align the assessment of the ILO with the graduate attributes.

- The SER indicates that the examination and review teams provide objective feedback on the assessment since they are independent of the supervisory team. However, it is not clear how the assessment process is improved based on the stakeholders' feedback. Therefore, the Panel recommends that BU and AU should develop a mechanism for improving the assessment process based on reviewers' feedback.

Indicator 3.2: Academic Integrity

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The Panel notes that policies and procedures on academic integrity are in place and well-disseminated. The BU policies and procedures relating to academic integrity are subdivided into two categories: Research Integrity and Research Ethics. During interviews, the Panel learned that students and academic staff are expected to abide by the requirements of the Senate Regulation 5 and Code of Practice for Research Degrees.
- During interviews with the Programme management team, the Panel notes that BU has a procedure that sets out the ways in which the University considers and responds to concerns about academic misconduct. The Academic Misconduct Procedure and the Non-academic Misconduct Procedure are clearly set out in the provided evidence. Concerns about research misconduct is first reported to the Secretary to Council, who may determine if the matter should be referred for consideration under the Academic Misconduct Procedure.
- During interviews with the current doctoral students and alumni, the Panel notes that they are aware of the policies and procedures of academic misconduct and the consequences of violating them. The Panel acknowledges that the academic integrity checking mechanisms are well in place. However, there were no formally reported cases of academic misconduct among the doctoral students of this programme. The Panel learned during interviews with the programme management team that no incidence of academic misconduct has been recorded due to the small number of students involved in the programme.

Indicator 3.3: Internal and External Moderation of Assessment

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The SER indicates that the procedures of internal and external moderation of assessment follow the standard of practice in UK universities. The internal and external moderation for this programme is done *via* the periodic assessment of the research progress and the final examination of the thesis, as described in Indicator 1.5.
- The internal moderation is embedded in the periodic assessment where an annual review of the doctoral candidate progress is conducted by the progression panel from BU/AU faculty. The panel comprises of a member of Brunel faculty, an Ahlia recognised supervisor, and a Research Development Advisor from AU/BU. Each member of the progression panel is appointed by the candidate's Head of Department. The Panel noted that the candidate supervisors are not included as members of the progression panel to ensure the independency of the periodic assessment. The progression review is conducted annually until the candidate completes his/her thesis. After each review the appointed panel reports the outcome of the review and make one of the recommendations set out in paragraph 17 or 18 below to the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs) of the candidate's College. The Panel notes that an independent internal moderation process and mechanism is in place.
- The external moderation is embedded in the thesis examination. For the thesis examination and viva voce, the independent chair from BU ensures that the University rules and regulations pertaining to assessment are adhered to at all time. The selection of external examiners begins with recommendation from the college to the BU Senate using template report forms.
- The SER indicates that examiners are required to provide independent preliminary reports prior to the viva voce and to complete a template report after the viva containing their recommendations to BU Senate. This concur with the statements given by the external examiner during the interview. The external examiner stated that he was required to produce a preliminary report prior to the viva voce and after the viva voce he was required to submit a report based on a given template with his recommendations. The Panel acknowledges that the assessment reporting practice is similar to the practices of other doctoral programme in other universities in the UK.
- The SER indicates that the overall assessment process and outcomes are monitored as part of the annual monitoring process and periodic review process. The Quality Assurance Committee reviews the PhD examination reports of external examiners periodically to determine their opinion on adoption of good practices in the examination process and also to determine whether the practices in BU is comparable with those of other universities. In this report the Quality Assurance Committee stated that there were no issues raised on

the examination process but highlighted that external examiners raised the issue of minor operational. The Committee took note and recommended the University to review the Code of Practice for Research Degrees and Senate Regulation 5 to ensure that best practice is reflected. In addition, the Quality Assurance Committee highlighted that BU offers training sessions that provide opportunities for Chairs of research degree examinations to share good practice. Feedback provided at the training sessions has been used to inform revisions of the Code of Practice for Research Degrees. Hence, the Panel acknowledges that the programme has put in place formal and relevant mechanisms for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme's external moderation, which follow the standard of practice in UK universities and other international universities that follow the UK systems.

Indicator 3.4: Work-based Learning

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

Judgment: Not Applicable

Indicator 3.5: Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The SER indicates that the award of PhD is based entirely on the examination of the thesis submitted by the candidate at a viva voce examination held at BU London. Information about the dissertation requirements and expectation are spread out in different documents that record the policy and the code of practice. The SER indicates that detailed subject-specific requirements such as knowledge related to the research methodologies and plan of study, either in explicit or tacit form, are provided by the supervisory team. The thesis assessment criteria as seen in the Examiner Report are: (1) 'The thesis is the genuine work of the candidate' is aligned to PILO1; (2) 'The thesis forms a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject' is aligned to PILO1; (3) 'The candidate has given evidence of a broad knowledge and understanding of the discipline and of the associated techniques and has shown that they have been successfully applied' is aligned to PILO2, PILO3 and PILO4; (4) 'The thesis is satisfactory with regard to literary presentation' is aligned to PILO1; (5) 'The thesis is suitable for publication as a work of higher degree for BU' is aligned to PILO1.

The Panel acknowledges that the alignment of assessment of thesis to PILO is well addressed and that the thesis component contributes effectively to the achievement of the PILOs.

- The roles and responsibilities of the supervisors and students are clearly stated in the Code of Practice, where responsibilities of the supervisory team are described in detail. Both the supervisors and students interviewed indicated that they are aware of their roles and have access to the Code of Practice either in the print form or electronic form from the BU Website. As stated in the SER and confirmed in interviews, members of the supervisory team are regularly updated through workshops conducted by BU staff. The Panel acknowledges that the roles and responsibilities are well conveyed to both supervisors and students.
- The Panel acknowledges that the regulatory time frame required for the doctoral researchers to submit their thesis, which is a maximum of 4 years from their registration date, is in line with other PhD programmes in UK. During the interview with the programme team, the Panel notes that regular monitoring and review of doctoral researchers' progress is a key element in this programme to enable doctoral students to submit their thesis within the allotted timeframe. This is confirmed by the reports on registration matters submitted to the AU/ BU Partnership Board. Supervisors interviewed indicated that they closely monitor their students' progress and one of the supervisors stated that in some cases more supervisory meetings are held than the minimum number set by the University Policy. The students interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the regular meetings they have with their BU and AU supervisors and agreed that this close monitoring has helped them keep their progress on track. The Panel is satisfied with the level of supervision in the programme.
- The Panel acknowledges that the mechanisms for the assessment of dissertation are well in place, as described in Indicator 3.4. During interviews with the external examiners, the Panel learned that the mechanism for thesis assessment is in line with that of other PhD programmes in the UK. Hence, the Panel acknowledges that the mechanisms for the assessment of dissertation is in accordance with the standard of practice of doctoral programmes in other UK and international universities.
- From the provided evidence and interviews with the programme management team, the Panel learned that a mechanism for monitoring implementations and improvements of the process, known as the Annual Monitoring Enhancement Priorities Form, is in place. The monitoring mechanism takes the form of an annual conversation led by the Vice-Provost (Education) and informed by data and the priorities discussed at the Board of Studies for postgraduate programme. The discussion on the monitoring of the PhD programmes addresses the enhancement priority and actions issues such as the PhD office environment, improving the research culture among the doctoral researchers and building successful PhD symposia. This mechanism indirectly improves the thesis building and assessment processes which in turn benefits the doctoral candidates. The Panel appreciates the effort made by the university to improve their PhD programme offering

through implementing mechanisms for monitoring implementations and improvements made.

Indicator 3.6: Achievements of the Graduates

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

Judgment: Addressed

- From the AU publications record and the publication of the Annual PhD WR Doctoral Symposium 2018–2019 (Annual Symposium Proceeding Published Knowledge E:), the Panel notes that the doctoral researchers and alumni publish their research findings in journals, conference proceedings and proceedings of the AU postgraduate symposium. The supervisors and students interviewed indicated that they have published their work in conferences and reputable journals. One of the supervisors also informed the Panel that he insists that his students publish in the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) conferences and publications. During the interview with the external PhD thesis examiners, the Panel was informed that the achievements of the programme graduates are at par with that of graduates of equivalent programmes. The Panel acknowledges that the doctoral researchers/graduates of the PhD WR have produced academic publications as expected from a PhD programme.
- During interviews, the Panel learned that the programme has graduated a small number of PhD students since its inception. The cohort analysis shows the total number of students admitted to the programme since 2004 to 2020 is 18. The number of students admitted from the intakes 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 are 13 and 8 have graduated. It has also been observed that there were no new doctoral researchers registered in the period from 2008-2009 to 2016-2017. For the cohorts of 2004 to 2008 the average ratio of successful graduates is 61.5%. This ratio is comparable to international ratio of successful PhD graduates.
- The SER indicates that AU in collaboration with the programme's alumni and the Programme and Partnership Lead established an Alumni Club to track graduate's career progression and academic progression and also to collect data on the number of publications and intellectual contribution. The establishment of the Alumni Club, allowed the programme to keep annual records of the graduate's destination and achievements, most of whom are working in leading positions in the governmental sector of the Kingdom of Bahrain and other Gulf Countries and as full and part time lectures in the Higher Education Sector.
- During the interviews with the PhD WR management team and external stakeholders, the Panel notes that the programme has produced graduates who have taken leading roles either in the government sector or the local industry. During these interviews, the employers have expressed their satisfaction with the PhD WR graduates.

Standard 4

Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

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

Indicator 4.1: Quality Assurance Management

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The SER indicates that the PhD WR programme follows the policies and procedures for Doctoral Programmes at BU, which has institutional policies and regulations for PhD programmes. The PhD WR programme is managed by the partnership agreement between AU and BU. As stated in the SER and published under the Quality Assurance Agency UK website, the last institutional review for BU London took place in 2016, where the BU was found to meet the UK QAA requirements with several areas of good practice. The provided evidence shows that BU has a University Education Committee that defines the University-wide quality Assurance Policies. In addition, AU has a chapter in its Quality Assurance Manual, dedicated to quality review of international collaborative provision. The Panel notes that the QA policy and procedures which are applied to any programme at BU, including the PhD WR are regularly revised as per the UK QA website.
- The programme has a clear quality assurance management system that is supported by both BU London in UK and AU in Kingdom of Bahrain. The QA of the PhD WR programme is managed by BU London. The procedures for the annual monitoring of postgraduate research degrees are explained in the provided evidence. During interviews with staff, the Panel notes that the PhD WR follows the quality assurance system of Brunel University London.
- There is a mechanism in place to monitor the quality of all the PhD programmes offered by BU, including the PhD WR programme, which is hosted by AU. The PhD WR programme undergoes annual monitoring, after which the findings are reported to the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board. The last annual monitoring research report for the PhD WR programme was conducted last academic year 2019 – 2020. During the virtual visit interview with the quality assurance management teams from both universities, the Panel notes that there is a coordination between both teams in AU and BU as the BU considers the PhD WR programme as part of their regular programme offerings in terms of applying quality assurance policies and procedures.

- The academic staff members of the PhD WR programme are from both the BU and AU (refer to Standard 2, Indicator 2.2). The main PhD supervisor is a full-time staff at BU and the co-supervisor, called recognized supervisor, is an AU academic staff. During the interview with the PhD WR faculty and staff, the Panel notes that the staff involved in the programme are aware of the policy and procedures related to the quality assurance, which is maintained by BU.
- AU has recently (April 2020) developed a new chapter in its Quality Assurance Manual for quality review of collaborative provision framework. The purpose of this addition is to define all relevant terms and procedures for monitoring and measuring international programmes. The SER indicates that the PhD WR programme follows the annual review audit set by the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership agreement. The presented evidence, which is an Annual Monitoring Enhancement Priorities Form, dated November 2019, shows that the PhD WR programme adheres to the annual monitoring procedures of postgraduate research degrees.

Indicator 4.2: Programme Management and Leadership

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

Judgment: Addressed

- There is a clear and recently approved Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Governance Structure. The Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board oversees the academic and administrative management of the PhD WR Programme. There are several Programme Directors, a Doctoral Committee, and local Boards of Study. In addition, the BU Steering Group for the AU provision has been established for addressing operational issues for this strategic partnership. The Panel is satisfied with the leadership of the programme and the governance structure introduced in the updates of the Brunel-Ahlia Partnership from January 2019.
- The indicates that the PhD WR programme is directed and managed by a Programme Partnership Board, co-chaired by a representative of BU and AU. The Board reports formally to the University Education Committee at BU and the composition of the Board membership is set out in its Terms of Reference and membership. There is a Doctoral Programme Committee with clearly defined terms of reference, including the composition of members. As for the PhD students' supervision, the academic staff of BU act as the main supervisors, whereas those of AU serve as the second (local) supervisors. The Panel observes from interviews with the management team that the programme management structure and reporting lines facilitate communication and are appropriate for such type of programme. Interviews with the PhD students revealed that the second (local) supervisor is their first point of contact in issues related to their studies and academic progress.

- There are well-defined terms of reference for several posts related to the PhD WR programme, such as the role of Brunel-Ahlia Partnership Strategic Lead Director, the Doctoral Programme Committee and the Partnership Lead position. The Panel notes that the committees related to the programme are jointly managed and controlled as per the partnership agreement.
- As defined in the provided evidence, the Governance of the Brunel-Ahlia Partnership, PhD WR programme is the responsibility of Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board. The Doctoral Committee as well as the Student Experience Committee for the PhD WR report to the Board. The Board, in turn reports to the Brunel University Education Committee which is the focal point for the academic programme quality committee at the University level. The Panel notes that the College of IT and the Dean of the College are responsible for the operational plan and the necessary actions for supporting the recognized supervisors and PhD students.
- During interviews, the Panel learned that the Partnership Strategic Lead Director and the Programme and Partnership Lead at AU are the main entities responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the programme. The Programme and Partnership Lead follows up directly on the students and supervisors. In case of issues related to their study, students can contact the Programme and Partnership Lead, Secretary of the Partnership Board as well as the College Postgraduate Office. The Panel notes during the interviews that the students are aware of whom they should contact on various matters related to their study.
- The PhD WR programme is considered as a strategic programme to the BU and governed in accordance with Brunel University London Regulations. The Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board has a representative from both Universities at the highest level of administration. The programme follows the same policies and procedures as any other regular PhD programmes at BU. This was also confirmed in interviews with the programme staff.
- The SER mentions that AU and the College of IT are responsible for the provision of the necessary resources, including faculty members for site supervision in addition to the information communication technology laboratories. As per the conducted interviews, the Panel notes that students enrolled in the PhD WR programme have access to the library resources at BU and are provided with similar opportunities as those provided to regular PhD students at BU home campus. Although the PhD WR students do not have physical access to the research laboratories at BU because of the geographic distance, they have the option to travel and conduct their practical experiments (if needed) at BU London.

Indicator 4.3: Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme

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

Judgment: *Partially Addressed*

- The annual programme evaluation follows the annual monitoring of postgraduate research degree procedures at BU. The procedure is defined by BU London for all postgraduate research programmes. A recent report has been submitted to the College Education Committee, which is for the academic year 2019-2020. However, the submitted report is a general annual monitoring report of the Postgraduate Research Degree at the Department of Computer Science, BU, and not specific for the PhD WR programme. The Panel recommends that the programme should conduct and document an annual internal programme evaluation based on the newly defined criteria of the AU Quality Assurance Manual for international degrees, in parallel with the running of the three-year programme evaluation cycle managed by BU.
- As per the monitoring procedures, recommendations from the College Education Committee are reported to the University Education Committee. In the PhD WR programme governance structure, the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board will then endorse these recommendations to be forwarded up to the university level. From the evidence provided, the Panel notes that several proposed actions are listed in the annual monitoring enhancement priorities form of the programme. During interviews with the programme staff, the Panel was informed that those actions were addressed as per the recommendations.
- The PhD WR programme follows the academic programme reviews cycle as shown in the Periodic Program Review Procedure. The last quality review was conducted by BU in 2017.
- The periodic review report shown in the SER is a comprehensive report with several recommendations for improvement. It includes feedback from internal stakeholders, such as students, however there are no mention of the external stakeholders' input. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the programme should include feedback of the external stakeholders of the programme as one source of input in the upcoming programme reviews.
- The SER indicates that there is a mechanism to implement recommendations for improvement coming from the periodic and annual reviews. There is evidence that the University Education Committee discuss these recommendations and monitor the implementation. The Panel appreciates that the recommendations for improvement coming from the periodic and annual reviews are well monitored by the University Education Committee.

Indicator 4.4: Benchmarking and Surveys

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

Judgment: Addressed

- The PhD WR programme is managed by BU London in the UK, the benchmarking of the programmes follows the UK QAA Statement on Doctoral Degree Characteristics. The Panel suggests that AU conducts benchmarking with similar cross-border postgraduate programmes in Bahrain or the Gulf region.
- The SER asserts that the code of practice for research degree as well as the final examination process state that the programme should be benchmarked. The Panel learned from interviews with faculty involved in the programme, that enhancement in relation to the external examiners in the viva voce were recently made based on the benchmarking done by BU with the recently updated (February 2020) UK QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement.
- During the interview with the PhD WR management team, the Panel learned that feedback and comments from internal and external stakeholders are managed by BU. The evidence provided shows students survey summary report for the academic year 2020-2021 as well as photos of regular meetings with alumni.
- During the interview with PhD WR management team, the Panel notes that BU collects feedback from stakeholders, however there is no formal mechanism in place for collecting feedback from local stakeholders. The Panel recommends that a formal mechanism is developed for collecting data from local stakeholders for further analysis and considerations.
- During interviews, the Panel was able to confirm that the stakeholders of the PhD WR programme including, the College Advisory Board, the students and the students' advisors are informed about the recent updates and enhancements of the programme. The dissemination process of the updates and enhancements is overseen by the academic staff who, owing to the limited number of students in the programme, are able to directly interact with them.
- The satisfaction rate with the programme updates is high as per the recently conducted students survey. From the conducted virtual site visit interviews with the students, employers and advisory board, the Panel notes that most of the stakeholders are satisfied with the programme and the updates made based on their feedback and comments. The Panel acknowledges that feedback from stakeholders is used by the programme to inform improvements and that changes are communicated to the stakeholders.

Indicator 4.5: Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs

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

Judgment: *Partially Addressed*

- The College of IT at AU has a functioning College External Advisory Board with clear terms of reference, as stated in the Role and Responsibilities of College External Advisory Board. The SER indicates that members of the College External Advisory Board include directors and executive managers in the IT and Computer Sciences domain.
- The Panel notes during the interview with the AU academic management team that the College External Advisory Board is common for all the programmes in the College of IT. However, upon examining the minutes of the advisory board meetings, the Panel found no feedback about the PhD WR programme being given by the advisory board. The Panel recommends that the programme should strive to ensure that the College External Advisory Board is involved in the PhD WR programme as it represents an important local stakeholder.
- As stated in the PhD programme Justification of Needs Study for Doctor of Philosophy and confirmed in interviews with the programme management team, the programme contributes towards the Kingdom of Bahrain's economic vision 2030.
- The Panel notes that there is no supporting document that specifically addresses the PhD WR programme's alignment with the labour market. Therefore, the Panel recommends that BU and AU should conduct a study on the local labour market needs and then align the programme outcomes to the labour market needs in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

V. 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 Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the DHR/BQA *Academic Programme Reviews (Cycle 2) Handbook, 2020*:

There is Confidence in the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD-WR) in Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics and related fields offered by Brunel University and hosted by Ahlia University.

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

1. The role that the Academy of Supervisors play in the effective preparation of the AU staff to become recognized supervisors.
2. The effort made by the university to improve their PhD programme offering through implementing mechanisms for monitoring implementations and improvements made.
3. Recommendations for improvement coming from the periodic and annual reviews are well monitored by the University Education Committee.

In terms of improvement, the Panel recommends that the AU should:

1. Ensure that improvements to the PhD WR aims and other matters related to the programme are done in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.
2. Devise a mechanism to ensure that the PhD WR ILOs are covered, regularly measured, and achieved.
3. Consider reducing the teaching load of faculty members acting as recognized supervisors to give them more time for quality research.
4. Develop a workload policy that is in line with the regional and international standards.
5. Develop a mechanism for improving the assessment process based on reviewers' feedback.
6. Conduct and document an annual internal programme evaluation based on the newly defined criteria of the AU Quality Assurance Manual for international degrees, in parallel with the running of the three-year programme evaluation cycle managed by BU.
7. Include feedback of the external stakeholders of the programme as one source of input in the upcoming programme reviews.
8. Develop a formal mechanism for collecting data from local stakeholders for further analysis and considerations.

9. Strive to ensure that the College External Advisory Board is involved in the PhD WR programme as it represents an important local stakeholder.
10. Conduct a study on the local labour market needs and then align the programme outcomes to the labour market needs in the Kingdom of Bahrain.