



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

Directorate of Higher Education Reviews Programme Review Report

**Ahlia University
College of Business and Finance
Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance
Kingdom of Bahrain**

Site Visit Date: 25 – 27 October 2021

HA032-C3-R032

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Acronyms

ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
ACID	Ahlia Centre for Information and Documentation
APR	Academic Programme Review
AQAC	Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee
AU	Ahlia University
AY	Academic Year
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
BSEF	The Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance
CAB	College External Advisory Board
CAQA	Quality Assurance
CBF	College of Business and Finance
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CILO	Course Intended Learning Outcome
CME	Center for Measurement and Evaluation
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
HEC	Higher Education Council
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICTC	Information and Communication Technology Centre
ILO	Intended Learning Outcome
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMS	Learning Management System
NQF	National Qualification Framework
PILO	Programme Intended Learning Outcome
PRC	Programme Review Coordinator
QA	Quality Assurance
SIS	Student Information System

TLAC	Learning and Assessment Committee
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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
College/ Department*	College of Business and Finance Department of Accounting, Finance and Banking
Programme/ Qualification Title*	Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance
Qualification Approval Number	Cabinet of Ministers Decision No. (1626-03) of 2001 Higher Education Council Letter No. (٨ / 2008- 81) of 2008 Higher Education Council Decision No. (93) of Meeting (11/2008) of 2008
NQF Level	8
Validity Period on NQF	5 years from Revalidation Date
Number of Units*	45 Core Courses
NQF Credit	548
Programme Aims*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To equip students with in-depth knowledge and multi-perspectives on sustainable economics and finance. • To provide student with competence to practically apply professional standards related to economics and finance • To develop student's innovation and leadership potential through a variety of soft skills such as communication, teamwork and global citizenship. • To develop awareness and appreciation for social and ethical responsibilities at the societal and global levels. • To equip students with creative and innovative skills to adapt lifelong learning and research
Programme Intended Learning Outcomes*	<p>A1. Concepts and Theories: Demonstrate critical knowledge and understanding of theoretical fundamentals of economics and finance, their application to contemporary issues to derive alternative solutions.</p> <p>A2. Contemporary Trends, Problems and Research: Investigate and interpret contemporary trends, major issues related to economics and finance through the execution of defined research projects</p> <p>A.3 Professional Responsibility: Demonstrate knowledge and adherence to professional responsibilities and business practices, as a business professional, in the field of economics and finance</p>

	<p>B1. Problem solving: Use specialist-level computational and technological skills to analyze economic and financial data and generating output used in decision-making</p> <p>B2. Modelling and Designing: Demonstrate creativity in using economic models, grounded in econometrics and statistics, to empirically identify causal factors underlying, as well as to predict economic trends</p> <p>B3. Application of Methods and Tools: Apply specialist software-based information systems and statistical tools, to generate economics and financial sustainable and reliable data used in decision-making</p> <p>C1. Analytic Skills: Critically analyze and interpret economic and financial information using specific economics and finance tools</p> <p>C2. Synthetic Skills: Demonstrate insight of economics and financial principles and theories in conjunction with professional judgment to generate conclusions in a range of relevant contexts.</p> <p>C3. Creative Skills: Demonstrate creativity in identifying complex contemporary economics and financial issues as well as the implementation of relevant solutions</p> <p>D1. Communication skills: Use specific skills to communicate technical concepts and theories to a variety of audiences by oral, electronic and written means.</p> <p>D2. Teamwork and Leadership: Operate at specialized level teamwork skills, and lead, multiple and heterogeneous teams within the framework of jointly tackling problems encountered in collaborating efficiently in a variety of professional contexts.</p> <p>D3. Organizational and Developmental skills: Demonstrate organizational skills and life-long skills needed to support personal and professional development aligned with independent learning.</p> <p>D4. Ethics and social responsibility: Demonstrate and appreciate ethical and social reasoning in the decision-making of corporate and governmental organizations in terms of stakeholder welfare including a comprehensive examination of the importance of sustainable development to the economy and society.</p>
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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	Partially Addressed
Indicator 1.3	The Curriculum Content	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	Addressed
Indicator 2.3	Physical and Material Resources	Addressed
Indicator 2.4	Management Information Systems	Addressed
Indicator 2.5	Student Support	Addressed
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	Addressed

Indicator 3.5	Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component	Partially 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	Addressed
Indicator 4.4	Benchmarking and Surveys	Partially Addressed
Indicator 4.5	Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs	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

- The Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance (BSEF) programme is delivered by the College of Business and Finance (CBF) at Ahlia University (AU). It was validated and placed on level 8 of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) in 2016, then revalidated in 2019. The programme is offered under license from the Higher Education Council (HEC) of Bahrain. The SER clearly describes the operational planning process of this programme. In particular, the planning process is closely linked to the institutional mission and strategic goals and supported by the Teaching and Learning Excellence Plan, which is operationalized on annual basis at the department level. The Panel was provided with evidence on consultation processes relating to compliance with the plan and is satisfied that the planning process is relevant and fit for purpose.
- The SER states that there is a university standing committee dealing with risk management issues at the university level, while at the programme level, risk management is carried out by the Department Council and then raised to the College Council. Various decisions at the university level were provided to demonstrate discussion of actions taken to deal with course delivery and assessments during Covid-19 restrictions and lockdown; however, the Panel could not find any items in these minutes related to risk issues. The Panel examined the Risk Management Plan Register and noticed that it is very generic. Overall, the Panel was not provided with sufficient evidence to demonstrate that potential risks, particularly those related to the quality of the BSEF programme *per se*, are regularly identified and effectively dealt with. The Panel recommends that the College should review and regularly update its Risk Management Plan Register, to ensure that the potential risks related to the quality of the programme are mitigated appropriately.

- As per the SER, the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) of the BSEF programme are mapped to the corresponding NQF level descriptors. The evidence provided to the Panel and interviews with faculty members confirmed that the mapping and confirmation processes are done meticulously, with relevant trainings and workshops provided. Evidence on internal verification and reviews conducted to ensure strict adherence was also provided. The Panel is of the view that BSEF programme conforms to the NQF's qualification design requirements.
- The title of the programme is a Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance, which, in the Panel's view, is a standard degree title and indicative of the qualification type and programme content. The SER describes how this title is consistent with the programme contents, verified by the NQF and accurately documented on students' transcripts. The Panel examined the Programme Specification Form as well as sample transcripts and certificates and found that the name of the programme as documented was accurate. The AU website also confirms the name of the programme/qualification as documented.
- The programme has five broad aims which are clearly stated in the Programme Specification Form. The aims have a particular focus on equipping students with in-depth knowledge, practical and professional competence, innovative and leadership skills, social and ethical awareness, as well as creativity. These programme aims are supported by the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) with various mappings of individual courses to them. The SER states that regular review of the programme follows a clear process in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the College External Advisory Board (CAB), alumni, employers, students as well as external programme evaluators. Furthermore confirmation was obtained from interviews with various stakeholders during the site visit. Additional evidence provided to the Panel confirmed revisions of the programme aims to specifically incorporate sustainability, leadership, social and ethical perspectives as well as creativity.
- The programme aims are mapped with the college and the university vision and mission statements and are aligned with the AU strategic goals. Programme aims are regularly assessed and contribute to achievement of strategic goals *via* regular assessment of PILOs and graduate attributes. The Panel discussed these issues with faculty and is of the view that there are clear linkages between programme aims, PILOs, college mission and strategic goals of AU and acknowledges that these linkages contribute to achievement of AU's mission and strategic goals. Based on the evidence provided, the Panel acknowledges that the programme aims are clear, appropriate, regularly revised in consultation with relevant stakeholders and contribute effectively to the achievement of the college and institutional mission and goals.

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: *Partially Addressed*

- There are ten generic university wide graduate attributes defined by the AU's Teaching and Learning Excellence Plan (2021-2026). The SER describes these attributes and states that graduate attributes are embedded within the PILOs. During interviews, the Panel discussed graduate attributes with faculty and noted the mechanisms that are in place to ensure that these are embedded within the BSEF PILOs. The Panel acknowledges that BSEF PILOs are linked to the stated graduate attributes and there are mechanisms in place to ensure that these are embedded in PILOs .
- The BSEF programme has clearly defined 13 PILOs. The PILOs are mapped to the programme aims and are supported by the Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs). The Panel examined the PILOs, as stated in the Programme Specification Form of 2021 and of the view that they are appropriate for the type and the level of the BSEF programme.
- The BSEF PILOs are clear, well-written, measurable, mapped to the NQF level descriptors and meet the international standards for the qualification. As described in the SER, the PILOs had been benchmarked as part of the periodical review of the programme. The Panel was provided with a detailed PILOs assessment matrix and was satisfied that they were regularly assessed. However, the Panel examining the PILOs noted that they are written in long sentences with more than one verb which would require special attention in their assessment. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should revise its PILOs in the next periodic review, to have simplified sentences with fewer verbs to make it easy for their assessments.
- According to the SER, the CILOs are clearly stated in the course syllabus for each course. However, the Panel finds that most of the course CILOs are too long with more than one verb or more than one issue to be attended. This makes the assessment of CILOs difficult and complicated. Furthermore, all of the courses have more than eight CILOs and some of the courses have 12 CILOs, which makes the assessment even more difficult. Besides, first and second year courses are expected to have more of ILOs from Knowledge and Understanding (A) and less of Subject Specific Skills (B) and Critical Thinking Skills (C) domains. Likewise, the courses in the third and fourth years are expected to have fewer of ILOs from Knowledge and Understanding (A) and more of Subject Specific Skills (B) and Critical Thinking Skills (C) domains. Furthermore, during the interview session with the external moderators, the Panel learned that they had advised the programme team to reduce the CILOs to a manageable number. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the

College should review the CILOs to reduce their number, improve their measurability, and ensure that courses in the third- and fourth-year courses are more focused on critical thinking and subject specific skills.

- The Panel acknowledges that there are mechanisms in place to ensure the appropriateness of the CILOs through the mapping and confirmation processes in line with the NQF requirements; though, the large number of the CILOs makes most of the courses attend to most of the PILOs. This makes it very difficult to assess the CILOs and the efficiency of the curriculum. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should review the mapping of the BSEF programme's CILOs to the PILOs to ensure effective assessment of achieved learning.

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: **Addressed**

- The BSEF programme study plan contains a clearly organised list of courses corresponding to each level of study with a clear list of appropriate prerequisites. The programme has 134 credit hours which can be taken over a period of four years or eight semesters, and this reflects a standard progression through the courses. The Panel notes that the study plan makes no reference to the corresponding NQF level; however, it is clear from the available evidence that the BSEF programme has been validated and placed on the NQF level 8. Overall, the Panel is satisfied that the progression of the programme is appropriate.
- According to the SER the curriculum is updated mainly *via* benchmarking studies with local, regional and international equivalent programmes. The programme has also been benchmarked to a major accountancy professional body (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountant ACCA) which confirms that a careful validation and mapping process is adhered to. The regular revision of the programme was confirmed during interviews with stakeholders and faculty members. The Panel is of the view that there are appropriate mechanisms in place for regular updating of BSEF programme' curriculum. Overall, the Panel acknowledges that the programme has a well-designed study plan with clearly stated required and elective courses, prerequisites, workloads assigned to students in each semester.
- According to SER, there are formal mechanisms in place to ensure balance between theory and practice and between knowledge and skills in the curriculum. The SER states that this

is achieved *via* CILOs, which include these key components at their design stage, and their attainment *via* assessments and their linkage with PILOs. According to the SER, the BSEF programme is a dual mix programme in Economics and Finance, therefore, balance between theory and practice and between knowledge and theory in the curriculum are achieved *via* inclusion and mixing of individual Economics and Finance courses covering theory and practice as well as imparting knowledge and skills. The Panel was provided with a sample of course specifications and noted that these courses include elements of theory and practice as well as elements of knowledge and skills.

- The SER provides a detailed account of Economics and Finance courses of the BSEF programme and the way these courses are mixed on a year on year basis to ensure depth and breadth in this blended programme. The Panel reviewed the Course Directory and a sample of course syllabi and noted that course contents are appropriate in terms of depth and breadth.
- According to the SER, there is an internal verification process at the end of each semester to ensure that 'textbooks are current and are at appropriate level'. There are also references made by the SER on the inclusion of published research findings in some of the third and final year courses. The Panel verified this claim by examining a sample of course syllabi. During the interviews with faculty, the Panel was able to confirm that there are mechanisms in place to ensure textbooks and references are current and that faculty members make use of research findings in teaching.

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

- As per the SER, AU's Teaching and Learning Plan (2016-2025), which has been recently revised for the years 2021-2025, is aligned with the institutional Teaching and Learning Excellence Plan (2021-2026). The policy emphasizes the use of a range of teaching and learning tools such as innovative teaching, blended learning, and virtual learning. The Panel was provided with evidence indicating that there is effective use of the teaching tools in general and, particularly, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the interviews with students, the Panel noted a high degree of satisfaction with the use of digital teaching and learning methods *via* Moodle platform.
- The SER states that AU teaching and learning methods are in line with the teaching and learning philosophy derived from the institutional teaching and learning goals. The teaching goals emphasise commitment to innovative teaching aimed at preparing students

for success, among others. The BSEF Programme Specification Form lists a variety of teaching methods, including problem solving, independent learning, hands-on case evaluation and analysis, research-based and development projects, as well as presentation. The SER states that participation by students in research related activities *via* research seminars and symposia is encouraged as part of student teaching and learning activities. The faculty clarified the teaching and learning methods during interviews and the Panel noted that these are in line with AU's Teaching and Learning Plan and philosophy.

- The institutional Teaching and Learning Excellence Plan (2021-2026) pays particular attention to enhancing e-learning as part of the strategic goals. The SER lists e-learning as part of the teaching methods informed by AU teaching and learning philosophy to enable its students to attain the course and programme ILOs. According to the SER, the CBF has applied e-learning to all courses offered in the BSEF programme *via* Moodle platform. The Panel was provided with a demonstration on the use of e-learning in teaching, and noted from interviews that the students are satisfied with the use of e-learning methods.
- According to the SER, the Teaching and Learning Plan (2016-2025) is committed to student's learning through exposure to professional practices and development of independent learning. The SER outlines a number of examples to illustrate this point, such as field trips to visit various companies where students learn the nature of their operations, INJAZ Bahrain Company Competitions where they develop a business plan with the academic and industry supervisors, TradeQuest Competition where students trade at virtual stock exchange guided by industry mentors, etc. The Panel noted the usefulness of these activities during the interviews with students and alumni. The Panel appreciates the opportunities the BSEF Programme provides to its students, which include participating in a variety of competitions where they develop their practical application of theories, independent and lifelong learning competencies.
- The Teaching and Learning Excellence Plan (2021-2026) aims to foster the research capacities of the students through 'research-based projects as part of a range of teaching and learning' (Initiative 3). Students are encouraged to present and publish their final year projects, in collaboration with their supervisors. Also, students are encouraged to attend a number of competitions, mentioned above, where they develop their research capacities and creativity. The Panel is satisfied that the learning environment provides students the opportunity to develop their research capacities and motivates them to create and innovate.
- According to the SER, AU Teaching and Learning Plan (2016-2025) encourages exposure of students to various formal and informal learning environment to support students learning and creativity. The ABC Club of CBF provides students with opportunities to engage in formal and informal learning activities. Students organize a number of events

such as, inviting guest speakers, professional bodies and organizing workshops, all of which contribute to the development of their skills, including communication, leadership and teamwork. During the demonstration of AU Student Information System (SIS), the Panel observed how students on their own could read, learn a topic online and take quizzes with appropriate feedback.

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

- AU has an assessment framework consisting of policies and procedures within the institution's Assessment Manual, which covers a wide range of assessment tools, including quizzes, assignments, examinations, projects, among others. It also covers policies on the measurement of ILOs attainments, assessment weightings, level of difficulty in line with the NQF descriptors, transparency, as well as conformity with the HEC guidelines. According to the Manual, each course syllabus must include the assessment method to be used to assess its CILOs and to indicate the corresponding assessment mark to be allocated. The Panel discussed the assessment policies and procedures during the site visit interviews and further examined several course files provided. Based on the available evidence, the Panel is satisfied that the policies and procedures in place provide an appropriate assessment framework for the BSEF programme.
- According to the SER, there are various methods for disseminating AU's policies and procedures to programme stakeholders. These methods include, for example, publishing on the university's website and SharePoint and conducting workshops for updating staff on the new version of the Assessment Manual. During interviews, the Panel noted that faculty are well aware of assessments methods and their application, as described in AU Assessment Manual and that students are also aware of assessment methods *via* the Student Handbook.
- The Panel notes that the assessment framework encourages both summative and formative assessments. The Panel examined the Assessment Manual and noted a clear emphasis on providing constructive feedback through the different types of assessments. The feedback policy and procedures recommend a turnaround period of between 3-14 days depending on the weightage of the assessments; these include minor assessments (with less than 20 percent weighting), and major assessments (with 20 percent weighting or more). Interviews with faculty members confirmed this variable feedback turnaround period but within the limits enshrined in the Assessment Manual. The Panel examined a

sample of marked assessments and noted that the mark per question as well as the mapping of questions to ILOs were provided on the front page of the assessment forms. The Panel also noted that detailed written feedback that was provided for students.

- The BSEF programme has a course on ethics offered to students in the third year of their studies named 'Ethics and Professional Practice in Business' (ETHC 391). Furthermore, all projects including the final year projects are subjected to a similarity test of Turnitin, which is properly and strictly implemented. The Panel discussed ethical issues with senior management and faculty members. Based on the evidence provided, the Panel is satisfied that the assessment at AU appropriately considers ethical issues and principles of scientific research.
- As per the SER, AU has clear procedures for internal and external moderation of assessments and transparent mechanisms for grading students' assessed work. These procedures are set out in the Assessment Manual and are carried out at the department level. A sample minutes of the Department Council shows a swift move to address the external moderators' concerns. Interviews with external moderators and faculty members confirmed the effective review of assessment and achievements.
- AU Assessment Manual includes a policy on academic misconduct that classifies six types of misconduct, which are plagiarism, data falsification, cheating, free-riding collusion, recycling collusion and active personation. The Manual also contains a section where the policies and procedures for appeal are explained in detail and clearly. There is also a Discipline Committee to assess misconducts and prescribe appropriate penalties in line with the Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism Policy. Academic misconduct and plagiarism issues were discussed with senior management and faculty members, and the Panel was provided with a sample academic misconduct warning letter. There were no recorded misconduct appeals due to very low incidence rate.

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

- AU has an Admission Policy that is published in the Student Handbook. Admission requirements are made accessible to prospective students and the public through the Admission Brochure and the University website. In accordance with the Policy, admission to the BSEF programme is based purely on academic achievement, and this criterion applies equally to female and male applicants. The Panel examined the data provided in the SER and noted that the number of male students admitted into the programme has averaged 53, as compared to an average of 52 for female students, over the Academic Years (AYs) 2016-2017 to 2020-2021. During interviews with faculty and support staff, the Panel learned that the admission process is centrally supervised by the Deanship for Student Affairs, and a dedicated Directorate of Admission and Registration is charged with the implementation of admissions in conjunction with the Academic Department.
- The BSEF admission criteria ensure that only students who are appropriate for the level of the programme are admitted. Applicants for BSEF require a Tawjihia score of at least 60% for unconditional acceptance, while applicants with a score between 50% and 60% are conditionally accepted subject to passing an interview. The data on BSEF admitted students for AY 2020-2021 showed a mean tawjihia score of 88.8% with a standard deviation of 6.05, suggesting that the students admitted into the programme do generally have appropriate acceptable score. The Panel noted that the Department Council and University Council took a decision that the required level of English language proficiency would be IELTS 5.0; however, this is noted as IELTS 5.5 in the Student Handbook and from the interviews with administrative staff and the students. The Panel considers this as a material mistake and suggests that it is corrected at the earliest convenience. According to the SER, the entry requirements of the BSEF programme are benchmarked

with local and international institutions and appropriately reviewed and revised with approval by the Departmental, College and University Councils

- The criteria for admission to the BSEF programme include a placement test in both English Language and Mathematics. Students who obtain 60% or more in the placement tests are exempted from the foundation programme. Furthermore, students who have obtained 85% or more in English Language or Mathematics in Tawjihia are exempted from the placement tests. The Panel found that very few students have attended the foundation programme over the last three years. The students interviewed indicated that none of them have attended the foundation programme and confirmed that this is because they had all achieved a Tawjihia score of more than 60%.
- According to the SER, AU policies and procedures related to access, credit transfer and progression are in line with the HEC rules and regulations. The recognition of prior learning is limited to credit transfer between the AU's programmes and from other recognized HEIs. Students transferring from other HEIs are given exemptions to the courses they took in the other HEIs, provided that the contents are equivalent to the courses to be exempted. The Panel examined the data provided in the SER and noted that the proportion of transferring students in comparison with regular students is minimal.
- The SER states that AU has recently revised the programme-specific admission criteria for the BSEF programme following feedback from relevant internal and external stakeholders and benchmarking with national and international universities. The Panel found evidence that the programme-specific admission requirements were last revised and approved by the University Council in July 2018. Also, a revised version of the AU Admission Policy was approved by the University Council in July 2021. During the interview with administrative staff, the Panel was able to confirm that the admission policy is appropriately and regularly revised based on the performance of the students and feedback received from relevant stakeholders.

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: Addressed

- The policies and procedures for the recruitment and appointment of staff are contained in the Human Resources Policy and Procedure Handbook. Academic staff appointments conform to the Academic Staff Bylaws, which deal with the appointment and promotion of faculty members, among other things. The Human Resources Directorate conducts staff

orientation programmes for new staff and faculty at the beginning of every semester. Interviews with the academic staff and senior management confirmed that the procedure for recruitment, induction and promotion of academic staff is consistently implemented, and academic staff are made aware of the rules for faculty promotion as contained in the AU Academic Promotion Bylaws. with regard to the appraisal of the academic staff, the Panel was offered completed faculty appraisal forms and had the chance to evaluate them. The appraisal form included assessments by the Chairperson of the Department, Dean, Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, Director of the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA), and the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

- The AU Academic Promotion Bylaws clearly specify the requirements for promotion and the respective weighting attached to each of the three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. The Panel is satisfied that the weighting for promotion is a sufficient motivation to encourage academic staff to engage in research. The SER states that AU has a Research Plan (2021-2025), which details the policies and procedures for encouraging academic staff to conduct quality scientific research. The incentives include funding, promotion, and monetary awards for high quality research, among others. Interviews with the senior management and academic staff confirmed that academic staff are encouraged and appropriately incentivised to engage in research-related activities such as conference attendance and publications in local and international journals as stated in the SER. The Panel found evidence indicating that the AU academic staff are actively engaged in research with publications in several high-ranking research journals.
- The SER states that due consideration is given to the core functions of research and community engagement when determining faculty teaching workloads. AU has approved regulations for faculty teaching loads which meet HEC requirements. In terms of the regulations, the number of credit hours/courses taught depends on the rank of the faculty and ranges from 9 credit hours (3 courses) for professors to 15 credit hours (5 courses) for lecturers. Additional faculty workload covers dissertation supervision with a range of three to five dissertations per faculty. The Panel found evidence to confirm the teaching load of the academic staff for the current year, and is of the view that the teaching load is appropriate.
- As per the SER, there are currently 40 faculty members serving at the CBF, consisting of: six professors, five associate professors, 15 assistant professors, 11 lecturers, and three research fellows, in addition to two support staff. The Panel reviewed the CVs of the academic staff and was satisfied that the academic staff have appropriate academic qualifications, specialisations, and professional experience to teach in the BSEF courses.
- The Academic Staff Bylaws contain policies and procedures for identifying and supporting the continuing professional development of faculty members. The Panel

learned during interviews with senior management that a Professional Development Plan is prepared annually based on an analysis of needs using a variety of instruments such as, the Faculty Evaluation Feedback Forms or by faculty members proposing their needs through the Department Council. The Panel also learned during the interviews that five faculty members were sponsored, during the last five years, to do their master's degrees, while a further fourteen were sponsored to do their PhDs. A list of the sponsored faculty members was provided to show that all the master's candidates and six of the PhD candidates have since completed their studies. Therefore, the Panel appreciates the arrangements in place to support the professional development of the academic staff, in particular, the sponsorship of their postgraduate studies. As noted in the SER, the College has arrangements in place to train faculty members (PhD holders) to supervise PhD students. This arrangement is with Brunel University, and a list of the staff members who have undergone this training was provided as evidence to the Panel. The Panel appreciates the arrangement with Brunel University to develop the faculty's capacity for PhD research supervision.

- The SER notes that incentives to motivate and retain academic staff include salary increments, research grants for publications, seminars and supervision. The Panel learned during interviews with the senior management that the incentives have been effective in ensuring a high faculty retention rate of 92% in 2019 and 95% in 2020 as noted in the SER. The Panel was provided with evidence to confirm that the staff retention rate over the last 3-5 years was high. The Panel acknowledges that there are appropriate arrangements in place to promote academic staff retention.

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

- AU has a total of 24 classrooms with a capacity seating ranging from 20 to 35, all of which are equipped with high resolution projectors and computers for teaching. Each lecture hall has smart boards and a white board. There is also an 84-capacity lecture theatre that can be used for large events, and a 39-seater seminar room that is normally used for research related activities. The virtual site visit tour confirmed that the AU facilities are well equipped and appropriate to cater for the needs of the BSEF students and staff.
- AU has 12 dedicated computer laboratories that cater for multimedia and research needs. It was confirmed during the interviews that all the laboratories are internet-enabled and linked to the University LAN. All computer laboratories are equipped with high

resolution projectors and computers for the delivery of lectures, smart boards and a white board. The Information and Communication Technology Centre (ICTC) maintains a server that manages user access controls. Students have 24/7 access to the internet by using their credentials to access the free University WIFI service anywhere on campus.

- AU library has several workstations that are used by students for self-study and several informal study areas that can be used for group work. AU has a virtual library with 24/7 access to e-journals and e-books through subscriptions to online databases. AU library provides access to more than 2,500,000 e-journal reference materials and 12,000 e-books through 46 databases in management and information technology and other disciplines. Mechanisms to ensure that the library resources are adequate include a follow up with departments and colleges every semester to order new textbooks and references. Students confirmed during the interview sessions that they are generally satisfied with the service they have received from the library.
- The ICTC provides regular maintenance of the AU facilities to ensure that they are fit for purpose. It is responsible for the provision of all programme-specific software that are required for teaching and learning. The Panel learned during the interview sessions that there is effective coordination between the academic staff and the Centre to ensure regular maintenance of the facilities.
- Safety on campus is assured through a campus access control system. Provision is made for students with special needs to use ramps and the basement parking, which is equipped with special access cards. A professional security services company provides campus security. Security guards are stationed at all entrance points and visibly patrol the campus. The campus is also monitored by a closed-circuit television system. A health and safety leaflet is made available to students, staff and visitors to raise awareness to health and safety matters such as fire escapes and fire assembly points and location of first aid kits. The Panel learned during the interview sessions that fire evacuation drills are conducted regularly by the university emergency team. Furthermore, there is a well-equipped health clinic with a full-time medical professional on campus to attend to minor health-related issues.

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 Panel notes during interviews with senior management as well as with the support staff that the Department and the College Councils rely on the ADREG system for decision making. The Panel was presented with a demonstration about the ADREG functions and how the system is used to generate various reports on student and staff data, including faculty workload, student progression and identification of at-risk students. In addition, Moodle system is synced with ADREG to manage course enrolments and to facilitate communication between faculty and students. The Panel found evidence of Moodle utilisation reports for the CBF. Faculty interviewed also indicated that they find the AU management information system user-friendly.
- The Panel learned during interviews with stakeholders including, senior management, academic staff, and the CAB that they are provided with timely reports/data for decision making from the ADREG system when needed. The Panel also examined a sample of Department, College and University councils' minutes of meetings that confirm the use of the generated ADREG tracking reports in the decision making process at the various levels.
- The SER describes the procedures AU has in place for the approval and authentication of certification. The authority for the issuing of certificates involves a number of approvals and verification steps, starting with the Graduation Officer to the President of the University. The Panel examined a sample of the issued certificates and noted that each of them is signed by the Dean of Student Affairs, Dean of the College and President of the University. In ensuring the security of data stored on its servers, AU has a set policy and procedures in taking backups of the servers. AU policies and procedures also ensure that certificates are genuine and protected against fraud. In addition, the ADREG system generates a 29-digit security key for each certificate to protect it from fraud. The ADREG system also has a dedicated Graduation Module which tracks all the stages leading to graduation, from the flagging of the student for graduation until the issued certificate is endorsed by the HEC and collected by the student.
- Both the certificate and transcript are printed directly from the ADREG student system. This ensures that they accurately reflect the academic achievement of the student as recorded in the ADREG system. The Panel examined a sample of issued graduation certificates and transcripts and noted that the certificates display the qualification title and the achieved degree class and are signed by the Dean of Student Affairs, Dean of the College and President of the University. Timeliness of certificate issuance was discussed satisfactorily with senior management and students.

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 SER describes several mechanisms available to support students and enhance their experience. The support services include induction and a wider range of library services, well-equipped laboratories, blended learning (e-learning), e-resources, counselling, cultural and social support, among others. Both the SER and the interview sessions confirmed that student support falls under the Deanship of Student Affairs with dedicated directorates for student counselling, admissions and registration, professional relations, as well as a directorate for student activities. A dedicated officer is assigned to follow up with student enquiries and complaints and direct them to the appropriate channels for resolution. The Panel notes with appreciation that several workshops have been conducted to support students in handling stress and maintaining a balanced mental health and well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Panel had the opportunity to discuss the support services provided to students during the interview sessions and is of the view that the support services in place are appropriate.
- The Directorate of Professional Relations within the Deanship of Student Affairs provides career guidance services for students in the form of career day events and internships. Information about programme-related career opportunities is published in the Student Handbook. Students and alumni interviewed expressed satisfaction with the services of the Directorate of Professional Relations in helping them with their career paths.
- The Deanship of Student Affairs organizes an orientation day at the beginning of every semester to introduce students to the university rules and regulations and the various support services that are available. A college orientation day is also held by the College Dean, Department Chairs and faculty to provide newly admitted students with academic information on the offered programmes. Sample student induction timetables and PowerPoint presentations were made available to the Panel. There is no specific mention of new students who have transferred from other universities in the SER; however, the Panel confirmed from the site visit interviews that a common induction is held for all students transferred to the programme.
- AU has an Academic Advising Policy in terms of which every student is allocated an academic advisor for the duration of his/her programme of study. The policy states that the academic advisor is the student's primary resource regarding academic issues relating to his/her study plan and progression. According to the policy, each student is required to meet with his/her academic advisor at least once every semester. The Panel learned during

the interview sessions that the academic advisor is alerted through the ADREG system when a student's Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) falls below a certain level and he/she is deemed to be at risk of academic failure. The students and alumni interviewed were generally satisfied with the support provided by their academic advisors.

- The Panel notes that AU has provisions in place that ensure equal opportunities for all its students and integration of women's needs in terms facilities and participation in different extracurricular activities and competitions like INJAZ Bahrain and Trade Quest. AU also has mechanisms for supporting students with special needs. Students are encouraged to describe any special needs they may require on the application form which is then taken up by a Special Needs Committee. The ADREG system is able to flag students with special needs on class lists so that reasonable adjustments can be made to support them. The Panel notes during the interview sessions that the Directorate of Student Counselling ensures that arrangements are made for special needs students and coordinates with faculty members about any adjustments needed.
- The AU Policy for Identifying At-Risk Students states that at-risk students include students who have successfully completed between 16 and 95 credits and have CGPA within the range of 2.0 and 2.3. AU has a number of mechanisms in place to provide targeted support to at-risk students. These include extra time for academic advice, and also extra teaching and learning sessions. Students who have underperformed in any assessed work are given extra assistance and are offered additional academic support. Faculty members set out office hours which are now displayed to students on the ADREG system as well as Moodle. During Covid-19 pandemic, office hours were conducted virtually through the use of Microsoft Teams.
- The Panel notes that AU uses surveys to collect information on students' satisfaction with the support services. Interview sessions with administrative staff confirmed that support services are also assessed through feedback and information obtained from ADREG reports, Student Council reports, and from students and administrative staff represented on the College and Department Councils and various committees. The collocated feedback and information help AU identifying areas for improvements. The SER, for example, mentions changes made to office hours of the academic staff, which are currently conducted virtually *via* Moodle, as an improvement that has emanated from student surveys.

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 methods at AU are informed by the university's Assessment Manual, which, according to the SER, is regularly revised in line with the quality assurance (QA) standards. The assessment weights and the level of complexity follow the regulations in the Assessment Manual and are in line with NQF requirements. The sample of course syllabi and assessments provided to the Panel indicate that different assessment methods (e.g., tests/quizzes, assignments, project, practical exercises, and examinations) are used to evaluate students' achievements (e.g., problem solving, analytical and critical thinking skills). The course work component of each course assessment typically contributes 40% to the final mark, while the final examination contributes 60%. The evidence provided also indicates that the assessments go through internal and external verifications/moderations.
- The course syllabi provided to the Panel include the mappings of assessments to CILOs, which are in turn mapped to the PILOs. The PILOs are subsequently mapped to the generic university wide graduate attributes. The alignment of the assessments with the ILOs and graduate attributes are verified by independent external evaluators once every two years in line with AU Guidelines for Evaluating Academic Programmes. For the indirect assessment of the PILOs, the survey given to the students is simply a satisfaction survey and it is not an exit survey covering all of the PILOs and asking students to what extent they have achieved the PILOs at the time of graduation. Thus, although the Panel acknowledges that there are formal mechanisms in place to ensure alignment of assessments to learning outcomes and graduate attributes, the Panel recommends that the College should develop its capacity to assess the CILOs and map the assessment to them appropriately.
- As stated in the SER, the achievement of graduate attributes is measured from the achievements of ILOs. To measure the achievement of ILOs at the course and programme levels, a comprehensive ILO attainment matrix and PILO assessment matrix are used.

There is a requirement for a minimum attainment rate of 60% for each CILO and PILO. The congruence between the assessments and graduate attributes were discussed during the site visit interviews. Overall, the Panel appreciates the mechanisms in place to ensure that graduates' achieved learning meet with the PILOs.

- The SER states that feedback from the internal and external verification/moderation processes are used to improve the programme. The Panel notes from the Department Council's minutes of meetings that the feedback from the verification process is acknowledged, and action/improvements plans are put in place to address any concerns. The monitoring of the implementations/improvement plans are done jointly by the CAQA and the Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC). The Panel examined a sample of the TLAC minutes of meetings and was satisfied with the monitoring mechanisms in place.

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

- As stated in the SER, AU's policies and procedures relating to ethics and scientific research are documented in AU Assessment Manual and the Guidelines for Supervision of Undergraduate Project. These documents clearly state and explain the different forms of misconduct, including plagiarism and data falsification, with advice on how to avoid them. Penalties related to misconducts are also stated. Furthermore, brief plagiarism statements are made in the sample of course syllabi provided to the Panel. The Panel discussed AU's stance on academic integrity with senior management and academic staff during the site visit interview sessions. The Panel is of the view that the dissemination of the policies and procedures relating to academic integrity is appropriate.
- The University relies on several procedures to detect plagiarism and other academic misconducts. For instance, Turnitin is used to check every assignment/project report as they are submitted through the Learning Management System (LMS). The maximum percentage of similarity that is considered acceptable for undergraduate courses is 30%. The policies and procedures require that identified similarity cases are carefully checked even when the overall similarity score falls below the cut-off point. Sample screenshot of plagiarism checks was provided to the Panel as evidence. For other forms of assessment such as in-class tests and examination, the use of multiple versions and randomization of questions, among other measures, are mentioned in the procedures. The Panel confirmed

from the site visit interviews with academic staff that the documented process is consistently implemented.

- The SER states that appropriate actions are taken against plagiarism and other academic misconducts in line with AU Assessment Manual. The Panel was presented with a sample of Turnitin screenshots with similarity scores lower than the threshold of 30%. The Panel was also provided with a sample academic misconduct warning letter issued in 2016 (in Arabic) as additional evidence. The Panel learned during interviews, that this was due to the adequate dissemination of relevant policies and procedures, which led to spreading the awareness between students about the academic integrity, in addition to effective dealing with any suspicious cases of exceeding similarity percentage at early stages.

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 states that AU has formal procedures for internal moderation. The details of the procedure are documented in AU Assessment Manual. The internal moderation is conducted at the department level every semester by the Internal Moderation Committee. The Chairperson of the Department appoints the Internal Moderation Committee which is composed of the Chairperson and two members of the Department. At the end of the examination, a Moderation Summary Report is completed. The moderation follows a detailed set of procedures, and a clear guide is contained in the moderation forms. The moderation covers all major pieces of assessments, including the examination scripts and graded samples to ensure accuracy of the grading. The Panel is of the view that the internal moderation procedures are appropriate.
- As per the policies and procedures guiding the conduct of internal moderation, internal moderations cover course syllabi and all major assessments and culminates with moderation reports. The Panel examined the detailed policies and procedure relating to the moderation, sample internal moderation forms with comments and graded assessment samples. The Panel was provided with a sample internal moderation summary reports as additional evidence and noted that the reports covered the alignments of the assessments with ILOs and the fairness of the grading and marking. Internal moderations issues and resulting improvement in courses were satisfactorily discussed in the virtual site visit interviews and the Panel was able to confirm that there are appropriate internal moderation mechanisms in place for the BSEF programme.

- AU has formal mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the internal moderation of the BSEF. According to the SER, the internal moderation forms are submitted as part of the course files to the external moderators for feedback. Furthermore, as per the Assessment Manual, the internal moderation summary reports are submitted to the College Dean for review and feedback. The Panel learned from interviews with faculty that internal moderation summary reports are also submitted to the TLAC for review.
- AU has clearly stated policies and procedures for external moderation of assessment. The external moderation process has a wide scope, covering 20% of the total courses with a clear requirement for the coverage of every offered course within a two-year cycle. The moderation is conducted at the department level, with the Department Chairperson or the Programme Review Coordinator (PRC) having the responsibility for the process. The external moderator submits completed moderation forms to the Department Chair or PRC for discussion at the Department Council. The appointment of external moderators is done by the College Council, and they must satisfy the selection criteria. External moderators are required to possess a PhD or Master's degree with extensive academic experience as a prerequisite for appointment.
- Feedback from the external moderation process is noted on the completed external moderation forms. The Department Council reviews the feedback and implement remedial actions. The most recent feedback from the external moderator was constructive and offered an avenue to improve the CILOs mapping and marking of the assessments. Interviews with external moderators during the virtual site visit confirmed that their feedback is taken into consideration.
- The external moderation of the BSEF programme is monitored by the CAQA in partnership with the TLAC. As noted in the SER, the TLAC records and implements all relevant actions to be taken based on the external moderation. The sample minutes of the TLAC provided to the Panel suggests that the implementation of these actions is carefully monitored. The Panel acknowledges that appropriate mechanism are there to evaluate the effectiveness of the external moderation. Based on the scrutiny of all the provided evidence with regard to the internal and external moderation, the Panel appreciates that there are appropriate procedures for selecting internal and external moderators and suitable mechanisms to improve the programme based on the external examiners' input, which are monitored and evaluated properly.

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: Addressed

- The Internship Programme Guidelines includes policy and procedures for managing the work-based learning course. According to these guidelines, every student on the BSEF programme undertakes a three-credit internship course as part of the requirements for successful completion and award of the degree. The internship course is available to students after achieving a minimum of 90 credits and 2.0 CGPA. According to the SER, work-based learning is managed by the Internship Office, which is responsible for placing students to relevant organizations and ensuring that they gain similar real-world work experiences. The Panel notes that AU has a tendency for placing a maximum of five students with any organization, which ensures efficiency of supervision.
- The Internship Programme Guidelines clearly state the roles and responsibilities of all relevant stakeholders. The internship providers, academic supervisors, training supervisors and students, have clearly stated roles and responsibilities, which underpin the student conduct, mentorship, assessments and evaluation, among others. During interviews with faculty, students, and site supervisors, the Panel noted that they are aware of their responsibilities as stated in the Guidelines.
- The contribution of the internship course to the overall achievement of the programme aims and ILOs is demonstrated by the mapping of the CILOs to the PILOs. The Panel examined sample site supervision forms, academic evaluation forms and monthly reports. Both the alumni and external stakeholders interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the internship course and how it contributes to the programme aims and ILOs.
- The assessment of the internship course is based on the site supervisors' evaluation of students' achievements (50%), academic supervisors (10%), bi-monthly reports (20%), and a final project (20%). The Panel examined a sample internship survey reports and found that there was an overall satisfaction of the site supervisors with respect to the preparedness of students for the course and the achieved learning attributes. The Panel examined sample site supervision forms, academic evaluation forms and monthly reports and noted that although the percentage of the weighting allotted to the site supervisor is relatively high, the mechanism for ensuring their rigorous is lacking. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should develop a formal mechanism for ensuring that the work-based assessment conducted by the site supervisor is standardised.
- The management of the internship allows for the site supervisors to provide feedback to the College. The Panel confirmed that the site supervisor feedback was all positive, with percentage average satisfaction rate of 86.4%, for the second semester of AY 2020-2021. The Panel examined a sample site supervisors survey reports and noted that all questions were directed towards evaluating the level of achievement of each and every CILO rather than specific issues related to the internship as to how to improve and make it more effective. The Panel notes that results of the site supervisors' survey are discussed in the

Department Council; though, such discussion was very superficial, and nothing was discussed specifically for the improvement of the internship. Feedback from students is collected through the bi-monthly and final evaluation reports; however, no evidence was provided to show how their feedback is used to improve the course delivery and work placements. During interviews, the Panel noted that the site supervisors and employers had a high perception about AU students and graduates; however, the Panel recommends that the College should review and improve the content of the site supervisors survey report to include elements other than evaluating the PILOs, and to ensure the proper utilization of the site supervisors' and students' feedback in improving the effectiveness of the internship course.

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: *Partially Addressed*

- Students on the BSEF programme undertake an undergraduate capstone project course (ECON499/FINC499) to gain and demonstrate practical experience in research, teamwork and other subject-specific skills. The course is available to all final-year students who fulfill the prerequisite requirements. However, the current implementation of the capstone project could make the measurement of achieved learning problematic. For instance, the guidelines for the project list the development of teamwork skills as one of the three aims of the project, yet the interviews with academic staff and students show that few students are allowed to take the project on an individual basis. It is difficult or almost impractical to demonstrate teamwork skills in a project conducted in a non-team setting. Moreover, the Panel notes that external moderators consider the number of CILOs of the capstone project to be excessive. Although capstone project contributes to the achievements of PILOs; the Panel is of the view that there is a need for a careful revision and updating of capstone project's CILOs and their alignment with PILOs. The Panel concurs with the recommendation under indicator 1.2 to revise the CILOs of the courses, including the capstone project, and reduce their numbers with appropriate contents aligned with PILOs, in order to assess their achievements appropriately. There is also a need for a more robust and clear policy on how a student might complete a capstone project either individually or within a group. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should develop an appropriate clear policy on how a student is allowed to take a capstone project, either individually or within a group, for a fair and effective assessment of the performance of the students.

- As stated in the SER, the role of students and supervisors are clearly stated in the Project Guidelines document which is available online. Students have a clear responsibility to complete and submit a relevant proposal, attend supervision seminars and sessions, adhere to related university regulations, submit and present the final project and complete amendments as prescribed. Likewise, supervisors have a set of roles which covers the provision of academic guidance, record keeping and assessment, among others. The Panel is satisfied with the arrangements in place.
- The Project Guideline document places significant emphasis on monitoring student progress. Students first develop and submit a project proposal for approval, and thereafter they attend practical sessions with a designated supervisor who oversees their progress. The evidence provided to the Panel does not raise any concerns with regards to the resources available to students. The Panel learned during interviews with the academic staff who are involved in the supervision of research projects that the Chairperson of the Department is responsible for tracking supervision records of individual supervisors on the ADREG system to ensure that supervisors are meeting their obligations. However, the Panel could not identify any survey on the evaluation of the supervision and the supervisor by the students and there is no mention of it in the SER. The Panel acknowledges that there are appropriate procedures in place for monitoring students' progress, while at the same time recommends that the College should implement a student evaluation survey for the capstone project in order to assess its effectiveness.
- The SER describes the assessment process of the capstone project, which is clearly stated in the AU Assessment Manual. An examination committee, composed of the supervisor and two internal examiners, is appointed by the Department Chairperson to assess the project. The assessment consists of an evaluation of the submitted project (70%) and an oral examination (30%). The assessment is graded using appropriate rubrics in line with the CILOs and PILOs. The Panel found no reference to the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process neither in the project guidelines nor the SER. However, interviews with faculty members confirmed that samples of graded project are sent to external moderators for evaluation. The Panel finds the arrangements for grading of a student who has contributed to the completion of a group project unclear. The Panel, thus, recommends that the programme should implement robust and clear assessment mechanisms for the assessment of group projects to ensure effective assessment of each CILOs on an individual basis of each member of a group.
- The SER states that the undergraduate project guideline is regularly reviewed by the TLAC to incorporate feedback from CAQA for improvement. The minutes of the Department Council, dated 15 October 2020 mentioned a revision of the project course to allow students to work in small groups. The Panel acknowledges that the mechanism in place to monitor and implement improvements to the student project is appropriate.

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

- The BSEF programme design and the assessment of students' achievements are based on comprehensive policies and procedures to ensure that the level of their achievements is appropriate. The level of students' achievements is based on the attainment of the PILOs and the CILOs, where 60% or more is the expected level. A second approach used to measure the level of achievements, as elaborated during interviews, is the number of students' publications in reputable journals; and the number of BSEF graduates who have been accepted into postgraduate programmes in local and other international universities. The Panel learned also from interviews that the significant number of BSEF research projects have been published in reputable international journals and was able to confirm this from the provided evidence; therefore the Panel appreciates that the research projects of the BSEF students are published in reputable international journals. The Panel examined sample graded assessed works at different levels and noted that the assessments are carefully constructed to reflect the core competencies at various levels. The Panel further examined substantial evidence such as internal verifications forms, internal moderations forms and external assessor reports. The Panel notes from employer survey reports that the students demonstrate an overall very high level of achievements.
- Over the last five AYs (2016-2017 to 2020-2021), the number of students admitted (year-on-year) to the BSEF programme is 40, average about 8 admitted students per year. This number has seen a steady decrease since 2017-2018 and this issue was discussed during the site visit interviews. A high proportion of the admitted students have made appropriate progress over the years. Year-on-year progression and cohort analysis show that the average retention rate ranges between 86% and 100% over the five-year period. The evidence also shows that four and nine of the students admitted in AYs 2019-2017 and 2018-2019 respectively have, since graduated, representing an average graduation rate of approximately 63%. The students take four years to graduate on average. Considering that many of the students are in full time employment while they are studying, the Panel is of the view that the graduation rate is satisfactory.
- As per the SER, the BSEF programme has a formal mechanism for tracking graduate destinations. The available data suggests that an appreciable proportion of graduates proceed onto programme-related or other employments. The Panel was provided with additional evidence showing an analysis of graduate destinations by place of employment and gender. Evidence provided and interviews confirmed that data collected from different surveys is discussed in the College Council meetings, and suggestions and

recommendations are made accordingly. Graduate destination data, which are also used as a tracking mechanism of the graduates, contributes to the improvement of the programme and provides AU with insight on the employability and career options open to graduates.

- AU has a formal mechanism to obtain feedback from employers and the CAB on their satisfaction with graduates' profile. The latest CAB and employer satisfaction survey reports show overall satisfaction rates of 89.42% and 83.78% respectively. On students' satisfaction, AU conducts a survey to solicit feedback from students on their satisfaction with the BSEF programme. The latest student's satisfaction survey report shows an overall satisfaction rate of 82.66%. The Panel confirmed the high graduate and employer satisfaction with the programme and acknowledges that, overall, there is adequate evidence of satisfaction with the graduate's profile.

Standard 4

Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

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

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

- AU has a well-established Quality Management System in place, which aims to ensure that the quality management processes and accreditation standards are implemented consistently across the Institution. The QA Manual was recently revised to ensure that it complies with the requirements of BQA and NQF standards. The Manual was approved by the University Council and presented to both academic and administrative staff through a workshop. It is also available electronically on AU SharePoint and all of the policies and procedures related to quality are maintained at Ahlia Centre for Information and Documentation (ACID). During the virtual site visit interview sessions, the Panel learned that academic staff and students are informed about the main QA policies and procedures during staff induction and student orientation days.
- According to the SER, the CAQA, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC), and the TLAC are responsible for the overall quality of all the activities that are carried out by the University. AU Quality Management System is managed and monitored by CAQA, which is mainly responsible for coordinating all QA internal and external activities at the institutional level. The findings of CAQA's monitoring activities are communicated to relevant Colleges for remedial actions, when necessary. At the college level, the AQAC and TLAC in coordination with the College Council ensure the implementation of the QA policies and procedures across the College and its Departments.
- All of the QA-related policies and procedures are easily accessed by staff and students on the AU website and SharePoint and staff are updated on changes in QA policies *via* emails and meeting sessions on a regular basis. These policies and procedures are also summarized in the staff and student handbooks. In addition, CAQA organizes a number of workshops to support staff and to increase their awareness of QA processes. The Panel

noted during the virtual site visit interviews that the academic and support staff have a good understanding of QA arrangements and their roles.

- According to the SER, CAQA produces periodic QA reports which are submitted to the College Council for review and decision making, and thereafter to the TLAC and AQAC, which are chaired by the President of Academic Affairs and the University President respectively, for action. This was confirmed during the interview sessions with the programme administrators and also with the academic staff, by the Panel. The programme operations, in this respect, are monitored, evaluated, and improved *via* CAQA and its associated committees.

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

- The Organization Chart of the CBF shows clear lines of responsibility cascading from the Dean to the two Department Chairpersons, one for the Department of Accounting, Finance and Banking, and another for the Department of Management, Marketing and Information Systems. The Chairperson of the Department of Accounting, Finance and Banking is responsible for the operations of three bachelor programmes in Accounting and Finance, Banking and Finance and Economics and Finance. The Panel notes that there are no programme coordinators and most committees operate at the institutional level. The Panel discussed these issues with the senior management who confirmed the current arrangements and explained that the current organizational chart provides an efficient management of the three programmes, and reflects the fall in undergraduate student numbers admitted to the College on a year-on-year basis since 2016. Nonetheless, the Panel advises the College to consider appointing programme coordinators and adding committees at the college and department levels.
- The Panel reviewed the mechanisms in place to ensure effective management of the BSEF programme as outlined in the SER. The Panel further reviewed a sample of the Department Council and the College Council minutes of meetings and the University Bylaws. The Panel met with senior management and QA staff and discussed the existing reporting lines and decision-making process. Based on the provided evidence and site visit interviews, the Panel is of the view that the existing reporting lines are clear and ensure effective communication and decision-making for the BSEF programme.
- The University Bylaws state the roles and responsibilities of the various institutional and programme management and leadership committees which include the Board of

Directors, Board of Trustees, University Council, College Council and Department Councils. The Department Council, under the leadership of the Department Chairperson, is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Department of Accounting, Finance and Banking which is responsible for the BSEF as well as the other two bachelor's degrees. Issues raised at Department Council meetings are reported to the College Council for further consideration. The terms of reference for the different management posts and committees are clearly stipulated in the University Bylaws.

- According to the SER, the Department Chairperson is responsible for the academic custodianship of the academic standards of the programme at the departmental level, while the Dean oversees the implementation of the rules and regulations of the University within the College as a whole. Both the Department Chairperson and the Dean work in coordination with their respective Councils and other units such as CAQA, the Center for Measurement and Evaluation (CME) and Student Affairs to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. The Panel noted during the virtual site visit interviews that faculty and QA staff are aware of the mechanisms in place to ensure the academic standards of the programmes.
- The Panel reviewed and discussed the management arrangements of the BSEF programme with the senior management and QA staff. The Panel notes that the roles and responsibilities of the senior management and the different committees are clearly stated in the University Bylaws, demonstrated in the organizational chart of the College, and implemented. Hence, the Panel is of the view that the programme management is appropriate in terms of demonstrating effective leadership.

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: Addressed

- The SER indicates that AU has appropriate arrangements in place for the annual evaluation of its academic programmes. The Panel was provided with the Annual Programme Review Procedures; however, the Panel was not provided with a comprehensive annual evaluation report of the BSEF Programme. The provided Programme Evaluation Reports of external evaluators evaluate mainly the aims, mission, curriculum structure, CILOs and PILOs in 2-3 years-time. The Panel was also provided with a sample of End of Semester Reports, which were initiated by CAQA and implemented from AY 2020-2021. These reports provide tables for CILOs and PILOs and their achievements, all of which appear to be achieved for all the three programmes

offered by the Department for both Fall and Spring Semesters of AY 2020-2021. The End of Semester Reports list the courses which are verified, textbooks to be followed and methods used for teaching; however, these reports do not contain detailed evaluation of courses, such as their grade distributions, number of students taking the course and retention rates, course/faculty evaluation data, and analysis of main Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with previous years and other programmes achievements, etc. The Panel recommends that the College should revise its End of Semester Reports to include detailed information and evaluations of courses and KPIs of the BSEF programme.

- The Panel was provided with course files, which contain a set of appropriately compiled documents of the courses; however, the Panel could not identify a course report where all these documents would be summarized. The Panel is of the view that the programme would benefit from preparing course reports that include student numbers, grade distributions, retention rates, course/faculty evaluation results, achievements of CILOs and suggestions for improvements. Such reports could be reviewed by the TLAC and discussed at the Department Council. The information in course reports could be also used in developing the BSEF End of Semester Reports. The Panel, thus, advises the College to consider preparing course reports that contain relevant and detailed information about each course that can be used in giving useful feedback to course instructors and in developing the End of Semester Reports.
- As indicated in the SER, CAQA is the body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the annual programme review process. The Panel learned from the interview sessions that CAQA requires all Departments to document the feedback obtained during the review process and identify appropriate actions for improvement. Furthermore, as stated above, CAQA has recently introduced the End of Semester Reports which include a review of the programme structure, courses, assessment and resources allocated. The Panel was provided with CAQA's summary report analysis of the Programme End of Semester Reports and a recent Report of 2021 on the Operational Plan whose follow-up is to be carried out in the upcoming year.
- The policy and procedures for academic programme periodical reviews are documented in the AU Quality Manual. The process includes self-evaluation analysis, a site visit by an external panel, and a loop closure and enhancement. Furthermore, the BSEF programme is reviewed by an external evaluator who prepares a report about the appropriateness of the aims and objectives of the programme, the study plan, graduate attributes, CILOs and PILOs every two to three years-time. The Panel is of the view that AU has a comprehensive and appropriate policy and procedures for the periodic review of its programmes and suggests the periodic review to be done every four years after the graduation of each cohort.

- Prior to making a revision and improvement to an existing programme, the Department conducts a benchmarking study with similar programmes and seeks feedback from stakeholders such as the CAB members, external moderators, students, alumni and employers. The programme team collates feedback and comments from internal and external stakeholders (meetings and surveys) and prepares End of Semester Reports, which are discussed at the Department Council and College Council. The provided evidence includes a list of recommendations and implementation plans. Recommendations requiring major changes such as adding a new course go to the curriculum committee to be considered and implemented. There are thus mechanisms in place for proper implementation of periodic reviews and associated improvement plans as detailed in the SER and related policies. The Panel discussed these mechanisms with the QA staff and acknowledges that these mechanisms are fit for purpose.

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: Partially Addressed

- AU has a Benchmarking Policy which details the process for the comparison of 'the performance' of its programmes against similar programmes on the national, regional and international levels, as well as, internal benchmarking against other programmes offered by AU. The policy states that a 'formal benchmarking' to be carried out as part of the three-year programme review cycle. The provided evidence indicates that the BSEF programme benchmarked its curriculum against two local programmes, two regional programmes and two international programmes. The Panel noticed that these benchmarks were all informal and the information for the benchmarking was mainly obtained from the web pages of the universities. The Panel is of the view that benchmarking practices should not only be limited to improvement in curriculum, but also enhancement of the programme's KPIs. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should carry out formal benchmarking for assessing and comparing the BSEF programme's KPIs against similar programmes.
- The Panel reviewed the provided evidence and discussed with faculty how the results of benchmarks are used to inform the decision making of the BSEF programme in practice. The SER states that an outcome of the Department's benchmarking exercise has led to the introduction of new courses (i.e. ACCT441) in the BSEF programme. The Panel acknowledges that the benchmarking outcomes are used to inform decision making in order to improve the academic content of this programme and to maintain alignment with international standards.

- AU has a system for collecting structured feedback from its internal and external stakeholders, including students, alumni, employers, and CAB members. Interviews with the internal stakeholders (faculty, staff and students) and external stakeholders (alumni, employers, external examiners and CAB members) confirmed that there are implemented mechanisms for seeking their feedback on a regular basis. The Panel had the opportunity to review a number of surveys, such as Course/Instructor Evaluation Survey, Student Satisfaction Survey, Alumni Satisfaction Survey, Employer Satisfaction Survey, CAB Survey, Industry Site-Supervisor Survey and found that with the exception of the Course/Instructor Evaluation Survey, all other surveys either have limited questions (alumni survey only 6) or questions which are not suitable for the participants and hence, not fit for purpose. Thus, the Panel recommends that College should ensure that the contents of the surveys given to internal and external stakeholders comprise appropriate questions that elicit useful feedback and increase the number of respondents to enable informed decision making.
- The SER states that the data collected from surveys are analyzed by the CME and forwarded to the respective Department and College Councils for review and decision making. The Panel confirmed from the supporting evidence that the outcomes of student and alumni satisfaction surveys led to an increase in the number of the required major electives in the BSEF programme from one to two, while the range of elective courses has also been expanded. The Panel is, however, of the view that there is a need for a more systematic data collection and analysis and advises that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that data from internal and external stakeholders are collected and collated at the same intervals.
- The Panel learned from interviews with students, alumni, employers and CAB members that students are informed of improvements to programme in class. Alumni and employers are notified through annual alumni gatherings which are conducted by the Professional Relations Department, and the CAB members are notified during the CAB meetings.
- The Panel confirmed from the supporting evidence (i.e. minutes of the CAB meetings) and from interviews with various external stakeholders that they are generally satisfied with changes implemented based on their feedback. In particular, the CAB members cited their satisfaction with recent modifications that have been made to the BSEF programme.

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: Addressed

- The CBF has a functioning CAB, which was re-formulated in April 2021 and approved by the University Council for a term of three consecutive academic years. The responsibilities of the CAB are stipulated in its terms of reference to include 'providing consultative feedback on the overall programme structure' and 'providing linkages with industry'. The provided evidence shows that the CAB includes discipline experts, industry representatives, employers and alumni. The SER states that the CAB meets on a regular basis to ensure that the views of employers and alumni are considered in programme reviews. This was confirmed at the interview sessions. The Panel is satisfied with the credentials of the CAB members and their ability to contribute to the BSEF programme's academic development.
- Members of CAB interviewed cited some examples to demonstrate that the College systematically uses their feedback to inform programme decision-making. This is done formally through surveys and CAB meetings as well as informally through specially arranged one-to-one meetings. The Panel was also provided with evidence showing that recommendations of the CAB are implemented.
- AU has a Policy on Needs Assessment and Analysis which was approved by the University Council in July 2014. The SER states that the policy seeks to maintain an up-to-date awareness of market and societal needs and future employment opportunities in the relevant field of study. The implemented mechanisms, as per the policy, includes analysing and benefitting from published market research studies. The industry representatives interviewed expressed the view that the BSEF programme meets the needs of the labour market. Furthermore, the alumni interviewed were confident and expressed their satisfaction with the programme, which equipped them with the knowledge and skills that contributed to their success and promotions at their work places.
- The Panel was provided with supporting evidence of a Market Needs Study and Employability research which was conducted to assess the future skill requirements for Economic and Finance. The study had identified 'communication skills and 'creativity and digital technology know-how' among the key skills that would be required in future. The future skills mapping with the BSEF programme at AU shows that the graduate attributes and PILOs are aligned with the future skills and competencies. This indicates that the BSEF programme is relevant and up to date.
- The Panel observed that there is a mechanism in place to analyze findings of the market study, various survey results, inputs from CAB, employers and alumni in the Departmental Council Meetings in order to update and enhance the employability of the BSEF programme. The Panel has not, however, found evidence of a systematic and well-documented monitoring mechanisms for this purpose in place, and would thus

recommends that the College should regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of mechanisms used to ensure the relevancy and employability of the BSEF programme.

V. Conclusion

Taking into account the institution's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the virtual 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 Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance of College of Business and Finance offered by the Ahlia University (AU).

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

- 1- The opportunities the BSEF Programme provides to its students, which include participating in a variety of competitions, where they develop their practical application of theories, independent and lifelong learning competencies.
- 2- The arrangements in place to support the professional development of the academic staff, in particular, the sponsorship of their postgraduate studies.
- 3- The arrangement with Brunel University to develop the faculty's capacity for PhD research supervision.
- 4- Several workshops have been conducted to support students in handling stress and maintaining a balanced mental health and well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5- The mechanisms the Department has in place to ensure that graduates' achievements meet the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes.
- 6- The appropriate procedures for selecting internal and external moderators and the suitable mechanisms to improve the programme based on their inputs, which are monitored and evaluated properly.
- 7- The research projects of the BSEF students are published in reputable international journals.

In terms of improvement, the Panel recommends that the Ahlia University should:

- 1- Review and regularly update its Risk Management Plan Register, to ensure that the potential risks related to the quality of the programme are mitigated appropriately.
- 2- Revise the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes in in the next periodic review, to have simplified sentences with fewer verbs to make it easy for their assessments.
- 3- Review the Course Intended Learning Outcomes to reduce their number, improve their measurability, and ensure that courses in the third- and fourth-year courses are more focused on critical thinking and subject specific skills.

- 4- Carefully review the corresponding mappings of Course Intended Learning Outcomes to the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes to ensure effective assessment of achieved learning.
- 5- Develop the college's capacity to assess the Course Intended Learning Outcomes and map the assessment to them appropriately.
- 6- Develop a formal mechanism for ensuring that the work-based assessment conducted by the site supervisor is standardised.
- 7- Review and improve the content of the site supervisors survey to include elements other than evaluating the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes, and to ensure the proper utilization of the site supervisors' and the students' feedback in improving the effectiveness of the internship course.
- 8- Develop a clear policy on how a student is allowed to take a capstone project, either individually or within a group, for a fair and effective assessment of the performance of the students.
- 9- Develop a student evaluation survey for the Capstone Project in order to assess its effectiveness.
- 10- Develop clear assessment criteria for the group projects to ensure effective assessment of each Course Intended Learning Outcomes on an individual basis of each member of a group
- 11- Revise its End of Semester Reports to include detailed information and evaluations of courses and key performance indicators of the programme.
- 12- Carry out formal benchmarking for assessing and comparing the programme's key performance indicators against similar programmes.
- 13- Ensure that the contents of the surveys given to internal and external stakeholders comprise appropriate questions that elicit useful feedback and enable informed decision making.
- 14- Regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of the mechanisms used to ensure the relevancy and employability of the BSEF programme.