



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

# **Higher Education Review Unit**

## **Programme Follow- Up Review Report**

**Bachelor of Business Administration**

**Applied Science University**

**Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Date Reviewed: 30 November 2010**

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# 1. The Programme Follow- up Review Overview

The follow-up site visit by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) Programme Review is part of a cycle of continuing quality assurance, review, reporting and improvement by the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in The Kingdom of Bahrain.

This follow-up review process applies to all programmes that have been reviewed in 'Cycle - 1' of the programme reviews undertaken by HERU, and that received a 'limited confidence'. Whilst those that received a 'no confidence' judgement are subject to a full new review.

The subsequent sections of this Report have been compiled as part of Phase 2 of the HERU/QAAET's programme follow-up cycle highlighted in the HERU Programme Review Handbook, and associated with the on-going process of Institutional and academic quality and enhancement review of Higher Education Institutions operating in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

## 1.1 The aims of the follow-up review are to:

- (i) Assess the progress made in quality enhancement and improvement (in accordance with the four QAAET indicators) of the Applied Science University's Bachelor in Business Administration Programme (BBA) since the original programme was assessed in January 2009, for which the review report was published in June 2009.
- (ii) Provide further information and support for the continuous improvement of academic standards and quality enhancement of higher education provision, specifically within the BBA degree at Applied Science University, and for higher education provision within the Kingdom of Bahrain, as a whole.

## 2. The Institutional and Programme Context of the Review

The original programme review of the Bachelor in Business Administration Programme, at the Applied Science University (ASU) in the Kingdom of Bahrain was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in January 2009, and the review report was published in June 2009.

The overall judgement, in accordance with the HERU/QAAET Programme Review Handbook of the original Review Panel was that of **'limited confidence'** in the Bachelor in Business Administration Programme, at ASU. Consequently the follow-up review process incorporated the review of the evidence presented by ASU to HERU/QAAET, the Improvement Plan, the second Self-Evaluation Report SER(2) and during the follow-up site visit and other key documents relevant to the review.

The original External Review Panel's judgement on ASU's Bachelor of Business Administration Programme for each indicator was as follows:

*Indicator 1: Curriculum; 'satisfied' the Indicator*

*Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme; 'satisfied' the Indicator*

*Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the graduates; 'did not satisfy' the Indicator*

*Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance 'did not satisfy' the Indicator".*

As a result of the above, most of the time, during the follow-up site visit, was focused on re-examining the Programme and the quality assurance and enhancement processes associated with those Indicators that did not satisfy the minimum HERU/QAAET standards at the time of the original site visit in 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> January 2009, (i.e. *Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates and Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance*) and determining the extent to which the original Review Panel recommendations for these indicators had been demonstrably reflected in the Improvement Plan and were fully implemented in the BBA Programme, at ASU at the time of the follow-up site visit.

It should be noted, however, that the indicators for Curriculum and Efficiency; were also considered in relation to the recommendations made by the original Review Panel in 2009 during the site visit of November 2010.

The aim of the following sections of this follow-up Review Report is to evaluate the progress made in ASU's BBA Programme since its original review, and to determine the extent to which the Programme's Improvement Plan has been applied in a manner which satisfactorily demonstrates that the recommendations of the original review report have been adequately implemented.

## **2.1 External Reviewers' Overarching Comments on the Progress demonstrated for Applied Science University's Bachelor of Business Administration Programme**

Sections 3-6 of this Report go on to discuss the extent to which ASU's BBA Programme Team has adequately addressed the 15 original Review Panel recommendations stipulated in the Programme Review of January 2009, and published in the review report of June 2009.

This evaluation is based on the evidence contained in the SER(2) submitted in September 2010, the relevant appendices of the SER(2), the Programme review report, the Programme Improvement Plan, and relevant supplementary materials submitted to the Panel up to 18.00 hrs on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2010.

The institution and its Programme Team are to be commended for the considerable effort they have put into developing supporting evidence since the original submission of the Improvement Plan to QAAET, consequently, addressing the lack of specifics in the original action plan when addressing the review report's recommendations.

In addition, the detailed responses on the day of the site visit from ASU's External Reviewer, members of the External Advisory Group and the BBA students' verbal feedback concerning the curriculum and effectiveness recommendations were very positive. As a result, it appeared that a cycle of quality assurance and enhancement is emerging and this impression was further supported by the provision of additional supporting documentation supplied to the Panel on the day of the follow-up site visit (23 documents in total).

This was further evidenced by the responses from the College and ASU representatives during the 'call-back' session whereby the delineation of the specific actions; the responsibilities of individual faculty/institutional representatives; the quality initiatives introduced, the implementation of quality enhancement interventions and the outline of future scheduled completion dates and related decisions for continued improvement were further clarified and additional evidenced cited.

### 3. Indicator 1: Curriculum Follow-Up Review

*This section evaluates the extent to which the Bachelor in Business Administration Programme, Applied Science University, has complied with the recommendations outlined in the Programme review report of June 2009, in terms of curriculum, the teaching and the assessment of students' achievements; and as a consequence contribute to the Panel's decision regarding the level of implementation of recommendations for this indicator and whether the Programme has met or exceeded the implementation thresholds as outlined in 'Appendix 1: The Five Implementation Thresholds for Delineation of Recommendation Implementation Progress', of this Report.*

3.1 In coming to its conclusion regarding Curriculum the Panel notes with appreciation that:

- Intended Learning Outcomes for the Programme and the individual Course have now been delineated.
- A student assessment policy and guidelines for implementation have been developed for the Programme.
- A mechanism for monitoring and evaluating feedback from key stakeholders has been developed and implemented for the Programme.
- The Institution has developed a policy for the use of external examiners to moderate the grading and academic standards of graduates which also encompasses the BBA Programme.
- The institution has made extensive efforts to develop Memorandum of Understanding with partner institutions whereby good practice may be shared and standard equivalence determined.
- Academic standard equivalence determination has been initiated for the Programme *via* review of academic standards by a Senior member of staff from Ittihad University of the United Arab Emirates, this input is part of a phased introduction of External Academic equivalence determination by Ittihad.
- University staff, planned to be implemented across the Programme for academic year 2011-2012.

3.2 The Panel suggests that the College of Administrative Science of ASU address the following matters of particular importance in its search for continuous improvement of the BBA Programme:

- The Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), for some courses, appear to be focused on lower level outcomes (i.e. knowledge enhancement, comprehension improvement, application capability, analysis) rather than the higher level competences (i.e. a capacity for synthesis, evaluation, creativity). Consequently the Panel encourages the Programme Team to incorporate higher level learning outcomes in courses delivered, particularly, in the later levels of the Programme.
- The progress of learning enhancement over the duration of the Programme is not fully differentiated between levels and subject areas for the BBA Programme. The Programme Team needs to consider incorporating ILOs that more clearly delineate the intended academic progression and deepening as well as widening of understanding knowledge and practical skills development as the student progresses from one [academic] level to another.
- Currently, the detailed procedure as to how the external examiner policy will be rolled out for the next academic year (2011-2012) has not been formalised in written evidence e.g. the selection of external examiners, the balance of local versus international examiners, the tenure of employment, the level of remuneration, the scope of external examiner's subject areas, courses, notional examiner workload, the levels covered by the policy, the powers and authority of the external examiner. The Panel is of the view that more detailed operating guidelines and specific requirements re subject and level coverage, as well as the duration of appointment and the level of authority of the external examiner, a calendar of scheduled meetings with external examiners and BBA Examination Boards/committees should be delineated as a priority and in advance of the commencement of the next academic year.
- The teaching and learning and assessment policy should differentiate between levels or subjects. Currently the policy contains description not explanation of policy and its implementation. There also remains a lack of distinction between the roles of 'formative' and 'summative' assessment in the formal assessment policy for the BBA Programme. The Panel suggests that a clearer distinction be made regarding the teaching and learning and assessment policy between levels and subjects, and differentiate between the roles of 'formative' and 'summative' assessment in the formal assessment policy for the BBA Programme and circulate the revised policy to the relevant stakeholders for comment, prior to implementation.

### 3.3 Conclusion

**On balance, the Panel finds that evidence exists that the June 2009 Review Panel's recommendations for Curriculum have been adequately addressed and implemented for Indicator 1: Curriculum.**

## 4. Indicator 2: Efficiency Follow-Up Review

*This section evaluates the extent to which the Bachelor in Business Administration Programme, Applied Science University, has complied with the recommendations outlined in the Programme review report of June 2009, in terms of efficiency related to the use of available resources, the admitted students and the ratio of admitted students to successful graduates; and as a consequence contribute to the Panel's decision regarding the level of implementation of recommendations for this Indicator and whether the Programme has met or exceeded the implementation thresholds as outlined in 'Appendix 1: The Five Implementation Thresholds for Delineation of Recommendation Implementation Progress', of this Report.*

4.1 In coming to its conclusion regarding Efficiency the Panel notes with appreciation that:

- A cohort analysis within individual courses has been implemented and used to inform course content and academic policy (e.g. the Mathematics and English language subject areas and the subsequent course content and academic support *via* remedial action as a result of poor performance).
- The policy regarding staff loading is more formalised, and some attempts are made to address workload allocation on a formal basis compared with the January 2009 site visit.
- A 'Student Handbook' and 'Advisor Handbook' has been developed and circulated to stakeholders.
- Feedback surveys from employers, the Advisory Group and host internship organisations have been embedded into the quality monitoring and enhancement processes for the Programme.
- Student representation has been enhanced on key BBA committees, most notably the Department Council.

4.2 The Panel suggests that the College of Administrative Science of ASU address the following matters of particular importance in its search for continuous improvement of the BBA Programme:

- While a system for grade analysis within courses is in place for the BBA degree, the level of cross-subject comparison was limited. The spread of marks and cohort analysis within courses would appear to be undertaken at a limited level. Much of the analysis of this data appears to be in the form of simple descriptive statistics rather than more sophisticated cross-course and level comparisons. Consequently the

Panel is of the view that a more appropriate approach that facilitates a more detailed diagnostic statistical cohort analysis be adopted and implemented for the BBA degree. In addition the Programme Team is encouraged to review, develop and implement a system whereby student performance tracking and comparison (from entry to exit) be a transparent, explicit and embedded part of the management of the Programme.

- The faculty member's teaching shows some improvement since the last review, and this is reflected in the new policy whereby the Dean, HoD, and other faculty members with administrative responsibilities will have a reduced workload. However, for most faculty members, the staff workload planning allocation still remains near the high end. The Panel suggests that a Resource Allocation Management workload model be adopted as soon as possible, for faculty members' work allocation, that permits more time for staff training, academic development, research and other related scholarly activity and that adequate resources be allocated from the institution in order to fund such initiatives.
- The clarification of the formal entry requirements for admission into the English language stream of the BBA Programme has been only partially addressed by the Programme Team. The Panel, however notes with interest that a new staff member has joined the ASU faculty, to assist in this area. The Panel is of the view that more formal and transparent requirements for admission into the English language stream on the Programme needs to be incorporated into the formal Programme regulations, as well as the individual course requirements, and that adequate resources needs to be allocated to the new Centre for English language to increase and support the number of students following the English language stream. In addition, recognized entry and exit points for English language competence needs to be incorporated into the formal BBA accreditation structure.

#### 4.3 Conclusion

**On balance, the Panel finds that evidence exists that the June 2009 Review Panel's recommendations for Efficiency have been adequately addressed and implemented for Indicator 2: Efficiency.**

## 5. Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

*This section evaluates the extent to which the Bachelor in Business Administration Programme, Applied Science University, has complied with the recommendations outlined in the Programme review report of June 2009, relating to meeting acceptable academic standards in comparison with equivalent Programmes in Bahrain and worldwide; and as a consequence contribute to the Panel's decision regarding the level of implementation of recommendations for this Indicator and whether the Programme have met or exceeded the implementation thresholds as outlined in 'Appendix 1: The Five Implementation Thresholds for Delineation of Recommendation Implementation Progress', of this Report.*

5.1 In coming to its conclusion regarding Academic Standards of the Graduates the Panel notes with appreciation that:

- The development and partial implementation of a new 'External Examiner' Policy for the institution and by implication, the BBA degree.
- The institution has made extensive efforts to develop a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with partner institutions in an attempt to share good practice academic standard equivalence determined in a number of local and non-local institutions.
- Specific steps have been taken by the institution for academic standard equivalence determination *via* a review of academic standards of the BBA degree, by a Senior member of staff from Ittihad University of the United Arab Emirates, this input is envisaged by the Programme Team, to be the start of a phased introduction of External Academic equivalence determination by Ittihad University staff, intended to be implemented across the BBA Programme for the academic year 2011-2012.
- The recruitment of external stakeholders from the local employers, academic and business community to form a new External Advisory Group and their subsequent input have demonstrably contributed to the evolution of new processes for equivalence determination and specifications employability skills; setting of targets for graduates and provided specific feedback on the expected quality of graduates, and advice as to how the emerging standards benchmarking policy should be implemented.
- The selection of a number of 'target' institutions located in foreign markets for quality and standards benchmarking in the USA (York University, California); England (De Montford, Leicester); Australia (Wollongong, NSW) as well as contacting the main providers of BBA degrees in the Kingdom of Bahrain and other parts of the Gulf region is noted with interest.

- That surveys of stakeholders have been undertaken and have, in some cases impacted on course and Programme content

5.2 The Panel suggests that the College of Administrative Science of ASU address the following matters of particular importance in its search for continuous improvement of the BBA Programme:

- The development, and the anticipated implementation, of a new external examiner policy would suggest that the Review Panel's recommendations are being addressed *via* relevant actions and that an improvement cycle is beginning to emerge, but has not fully emerged for academic standard equivalence determination. The Panel suggests that more explicit, formal, rigorous, systematic and detailed guidelines re the criteria and selection of benchmark (academic) institutions, BBA Programmes, external examiners; other stakeholders (e.g. potential and current graduate employers) graduate standards mapping and outcome equivalence setting, be articulated and deployed.
- It should be noted that to date, the process of selection and the detailed scope of the external examiner role has not been fully realised in this process. The Panel suggests that the detailed scope of the external examiner role be addressed as soon as possible (e.g. maximum number of course covered by the external, balance between local and international external examiners, the roles responsibilities and powers of external examiners, the frequency and form of formal contact and liaison, the input into programme design and teaching and learning policy, also the budget and resource allocation should be delineated, how the new external examiners are inducted to the ASU systems and procedures).
- The cohort analysis available for external scrutiny and standards benchmarking appears to be limited and confined mainly to descriptive statistics. The data provided to the Panel was highly aggregated and did not indicate the spread of marks across the Programme, nor provide sufficiently detailed the analysis of entry point and subsequent performance across the cohorts. The Panel is of the view that a procedure for more detailed cohort analysis *via* evaluation of grade distribution, determination of the 'exit velocity of graduates', statistical tracking and evaluation within and across years needs to be adopted and implemented as soon as is possible. In addition a more formal policy for the implementation of strategies to identify and avoid grade inflation *via* internal moderation need to be devised, implemented and articulated.
- The ILOs outlined in the Programme schemata and the course outlines tend to focus on description and practical application rather than synthesis, critical appraisal and application of constructs, frameworks paradigms. This has led to the predominance of evaluation in later years of the Programme of the assessment of 'surface' learning

*via* the use of short answer questions, quizzes and MCQs rather than determining the occurrence of 'deep learning' *via* more exacting essay type closed book examination questions, academic thesis etc. (A notable exception to this was the 'intern-ship' report). The Panel encourages the Programme Team to revise the assessment strategy to allow for the assessment of higher level learning outcomes (i.e. deeper learning).

- The Programme Team indicated to the Panel that internal grade moderation occurred in a chiefly reactive manner to student appeals or as a result of aggregate grade distribution analysis. However, there is no evidence of a policy for proactive internal grade moderation that is automatically applied across levels, courses and subjects. The Panel is of the view that a formal programme of internal moderation be established and implemented which will more formally address potential grade deflation and inflation in order to ensure that appropriate academic standards and graduate level (employability) skills expectations are applied across the Programme, prior to external moderation or scrutiny.

### 5.3 Conclusion

**On balance, the Panel finds that evidence exists that the June 2009 Review Panel's recommendations for Academic Standards of Graduates are being addressed *via* relevant actions and that an improvement cycle is beginning to emerge for Indicator 3: Academic Standards of Graduates, and as a result the Programme now satisfies the HERU/QAAET requirements for this Indicator.**

## 6. Indicator 4: Follow-up Review of Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

*This section evaluates the extent to which the Bachelor in Business Administration Programme, Applied Science University, has complied with the recommendations outlined in the Programme review report of June 2009, relating to the arrangements in place for managing the Programme, including quality assurance; and as a consequence contribute to the Panel's decision regarding the level of implementation of recommendations for this Indicator and whether the Programme have met or exceeded the implementation thresholds as outlined in 'Appendix 1: The Five Implementation Thresholds for Delineation of Recommendation Implementation Progress', of this Report.*

- 6.1 In coming to its conclusion regarding Effectiveness of quality management and assurance the Panel notes with appreciation that:
- The College is addressing the need for benchmarking standards with equivalent institutions in order to determine the equivalence academic standards and student experience for ASU BBA students.
  - A quality enhancement and review process is applied in key areas *via* the use of surveys, student representation on the Department Council in order to inform course and Programme content and respond to identified problems and issues associated with the management of the BBA Programme (for example in the areas of English language support and Mathematics/Quantitative methods).
  - The establishment of a 'Centre for Academic Development' and the utilisation of workshops, symposia and briefing documents (for example in the area of 'How to Write Intended Learning Outcomes') are evidence that there is a commitment to staff development and that attempts are being made to cascade information about quality enhancement and monitoring.
  - Greater institution and College commitment to generating data to support quality enhancement initiatives is increasingly evidenced, particularly in the use of external and internal stakeholder surveys, student representation on key BBA committees, and the active participation of the External Advisory Group reflect this commitment and evidence emerging good practice in this area.
- 6.2 The Panel suggests that the College of Administrative Science of ASU address the following matters of particular importance in its search for continuous improvement of the BBA Programme:

- A quality enhancement and review process is on-going, it is evident that the process has begun to inform the management of the Programme and subsequent quality enhancements. The documentation of such initiatives, in the form of written evidence and the interrelationship between Programme and College and University level structures and management processes and functions is underdeveloped and does not adequately reflect the emerging initiatives and commitment of the institution, College and Department level, and faculty members to quality monitoring, enhancement and Programme content demonstrated during the site visit. The Panel is of the view that a more formal (written) strategy for programme quality enhancement and monitoring should be developed that reflects how future programme improvements will be addressed, clear goals for quality enhancement be set, guidelines for implementation of such strategies *via* new policies and guidelines be incorporated into College and Programme Handbooks of academic practice, and the relationship between the Department Council, other academic and quality committees and units be clearly and formally mapped out in order to communicate better to key stakeholders how the quality management process is operationlaised *via* the committee and organisational structure within Applied Science University, the College of Administrative Science and the Department Council.
- It is clear that a number of initiatives have been taken by the College to contribute to building a quality assurance culture. Such initiatives are reflected in the development of a unit dedicated to the enhancement of academic practice, and the establishment of a Quality Assurance Unit, as well as *ad hoc* initiatives including workshops and symposia. Such initiatives are to be commended. However, during the site visit it was evident to the Panel that for some Institutional members 'quality enhancement' still appears to be driven by the expectation that the establishment of a network of institutional wide collaborative agreements *via* the adoption of a strategy of 'institutional diversification' is the solution to the need for standards benchmarking and quality enhancement. This reflects the assumption that 'quality' is something that is done 'to faculty members', rather than something that is 'owned by faculty members'. The Panel suggests that this be addressed *via* a more structured system of training and staff development, and that the strategy of (institutional link) diversification be reconsidered in favour of a more focused and systematic approach, e.g. select programmes that are exemplars of 'best practice', and determine selection of external examiners based on their individual competences (and personal academic profile) as well as their representation of BBA programmes that are leaders in their field (locally, regionally, and internationally) in relation to subject quality, programme management and delivery.
- The teaching and learning and assessment policy needs to be more explicitly informed by the Programme and course ILOs, for example in relation to employability skill development. The Panel is of the view that this needs to be

addressed *via* appropriate content changes in Programme, faculty members, student advisor, and student handbooks.

- The Panel suggests that more resources be allocated to supporting ASU's BBA alumni networks and for conducting systematic graduate exit and destination surveys and undertaking the necessary accompanying analysis.

### 6.3 Conclusion

**On balance, the Panel finds that evidence exists that the June 2009 Review Panel's recommendations for Effectiveness are being addressed *via* relevant actions and that an improvement cycle is beginning to emerge for Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance, and as a result the Programme now satisfies the HERU/QAAET requirements for this Indicator.**

## **7. Overall Conclusion**

**The outcome of the follow-up review process by HERU/QAAET for the BBA Programme offered by ASU is as follows:**

**That the BBA Programme at Applied Science University has successfully addressed the recommendations stated in the June 2009 review report and has implemented its improvement plan. The Panel now has confidence in the Programme**

## ***Appendix 1: The Five Implementation Thresholds for Delineation of Recommendation Implementation Progress***

- I. Extensive good practice is evidenced as a result of the comprehensive implementation of the Review Panel's recommendations for the Indicator; or**
- II. That the Programme Team has adequately addressed and has fully implemented the Review Panel's recommendations for the indicator; or**
- III. That the Review Panel's recommendations for this indicator are currently being addressed via relevant actions (beyond the establishment of a new policy or committee) and that an improvement cycle is beginning to emerge, (but has not yet fully emerged) for the Indicator; or**
- IV. That documented evidence exists that the Review Panel's recommendations for the Indicator have been addressed in the improvement plan, and are anticipated [by the Programme Team] to be implemented at some later date; or**
- V. That the Review Panel's recommendations for the Indicator have not been adequately addressed in the action plan nor in the interventions by Faculty of the institution.**