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

Directorate of Higher Education Reviews

Programmes-within-College Reviews Report

Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication

& Public Relations

College of Arts and Science

Ahlia University

Kingdom of Bahrain

Date of the Review: 8-11 May 2017

HC105-C2-R105

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Acronyms

ADREG	Admission and Registration System
ATDC	Ahlia Training and Development Centre
AU	Ahlia University
AUQMS	AU Quality Management System
BMCPR	Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
CAQA	Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance
CEAB	College External Advisory Board
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CILOs	Course Intended Learning Outcomes
CME	Centre for Measuring and Evaluation
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
HEC	Higher Education Council of the Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Bahrain
HR	Human Resources
ILO	Intended Learning Outcome
MC	Mass Communication
MIS	Management Information System
PD	Professional Development
PILOs	Programme Indented Learning Outcomes
PR	Public Relations

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QAAC	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
TLAC	Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee
VP	Vice President

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The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process

A.   The Programmes-within-College Reviews Framework

To meet the need to have a robust external quality assurance system in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR) of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA) has developed and is implementing two external quality review processes, namely: Institutional Reviews and Programmes-within-College Reviews which together will give confidence in Bahrain's higher education system nationally, regionally and internationally.

Programmes-within-College Reviews have three main objectives:

- to provide decision-makers (in the higher education institutions, the BQA, the Higher Education Council (HEC), students and their families, prospective employers of graduates and other stakeholders) with evidence-based judgements on the quality of learning programmes
- to support the development of internal quality assurance processes with information on emerging good practices and challenges, evaluative comments and continuing improvement
- to enhance the reputation of Bahrain's higher education regionally and internationally.

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

Indicator 1: **The Learning Programme**

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

Indicator 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 3: **Academic Standards of the Graduates**

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

Indicator 4: **Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance**

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

The Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as 'the Panel') states in the Review Report whether the programme satisfies each Indicator. If the programme satisfies all four Indicators, the concluding statement will say that there is 'confidence' in the programme.

If two or three Indicators are satisfied, including Indicator 1, the programme will receive a 'limited confidence' judgement. If one or no Indicator is satisfied, or Indicator 1 is not satisfied, the judgement will be 'no confidence', as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Criteria for Judgements

Criteria	Judgement
All four Indicators satisfied	Confidence
Two or three Indicators satisfied, including Indicator 1	Limited Confidence
One or no Indicator satisfied	No Confidence
All cases where **Indicator 1** is not satisfied	

B.   The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process at the Ahlia University

A Programmes-within-College review of the programmes offered by the College of Arts and Science of Ahlia University was conducted by the DHR of the BQA in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. The site visit took place on 8-11 May 2017 for the academic programmes offered by the College; namely the Bachelor in Interior Design and Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations.

Ahlia University was notified by the DHR/BQA on 8 January 2017 that it would be subject to a Programmes-within-College review of the programmes offered by the College of Arts and Science with the site visit taking place in May 2017. In preparation for the review, Ahlia University conducted self-evaluations of the two programmes and submitted the Self Evaluation Reports (SERs) with appendices on 8 March 2017. The DHR constituted two panels consisting of experts in the academic fields of Interior Design, Mass Communication and Public Relations, and in higher education who have experience of external programme quality reviews. The Panels comprised five members.

This Report provides an account of the review process and the findings of the Panel for the Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations based on:

(i)   analysis of the Self-Evaluation Report and supporting materials submitted by the institution prior to the external peer-review visit

(ii)   analysis derived from discussions with various stakeholders (faculty members, students, graduates and employers)

(iii)   analysis based on additional documentation requested and presented to the Panel during the site visit.

It is expected that Ahlia University will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations. The DHR recognizes that quality assurance is the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. Hence, it is the right of Ahlia University to decide how it will address the recommendations contained in the Review Report. Nevertheless, three months after the publication of this Report, Ahlia University is required to submit to the DHR an improvement plan in response to the recommendations.

The DHR would like to extend its thanks to Ahlia University for the co-operative manner in which it has participated in the Programmes-within-College review process. It also wishes to express its appreciation for the open discussions held in the course of the review and the professional conduct of the faculty and administrative staff of the Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations.

C.   Overview of the College of Arts and Science

The College of Arts and Science is one of the four colleges of Ahlia University (AU), which was established in 2001. AU currently offers eleven undergraduate programmes in a range of disciplines and three postgraduate programmes in cooperation with Brunel and George Washington universities. The College vision is to 'achieve a position of international distinction by offering outstanding quality programmes in the areas of humanities and sciences'. The mission of the College is aligned with the vision and mission of AU, seeking to 'provide excellence in teaching and research in a stimulating learning environment conducive to creativity and innovation'. Currently, the College offers two bachelor degrees – one in Arabic and one in English- through two departments: the Department of Interior Design and the Department of Mass Communications and Public Relations. The statistics provided by the College during the site visit indicate that the total number of academic staff was 54; 41of them are full-time and 13 are teaching on a part-time basis.

D.   Overview of the Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations

The Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations programme was first offered in 2003-2004 through the Department of Mass Communication and Public

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Relations in Ahlia University. The programme was modified in the academic year 2012-2013, by adding more specialized courses in Mass Communication and Multimedia. At the time of the site visit, there were 208 students enrolled in the programme, and the total number of faculty members who participate in the delivery of the programme is 13 (9 full-time and 4 part-time). According to the provided statistics in the SER, the total number of graduates was 47 students in the academic year 2015-2016, and 113 since 2009.

E. Summary of Review Judgements

Table 2: Summary of Review Judgements for the Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations

Indicator	Judgement
1: The Learning Programme	Does not satisfy
2: Efficiency of the Programme	Satisfies
3: Academic Standards of the Graduates	Does not satisfy
4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance	Satisfies
Overall Judgement	**No Confidence**

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1.   Indicator 1: The Learning Programme

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

1.1   The Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations (BMCPR) Programme has a clear academic planning framework, which shows that there are clear aims that indicate the broad purposes of providing the programme. The Panel noted that the aims and objectives of the programme are clearly identified and described in the programme specification and are suitable for the type and level of the programme. The programme aims to prepare highly qualified journalists with a vast knowledge and skills in the fields of arts and culture as well as the fields of communication and public relations, graduate qualified scientific, professional and technical media cadres who meet the needs of the Bahraini, Gulf and Arab communities, and contribute to the development and improvement of the media profession. These aims are consistent with the university's mission to 'move forward the frontiers of human knowledge and enrich and elevate society', and vision 'to aspire to achieve a position of international distinction by offering outstanding quality programmes in the areas of humanities and sciences, with excellence in research responsive to the needs of the community'. The Panel acknowledges the existence of the academic planning framework for the programme and appreciates that the programme aims -generally- contribute to the achievement of the College and institution mission.

1.2   The study plan of the BMCPR is a combination of general Mass Communication, Broadcast, Journalism and Public Relations courses. The total number of credit hours of the programme is 134, divided as follows: 95 credit hours for core and elective courses of Mass Communication (MC) and Public Relations (PR), and 39 credit hours devoted to general courses required by the College and the University. The Panel studied the provided evidence and notes that, in general there is an appropriate distribution of credit hours throughout the year-by-year progression of the programme. Nonetheless, scrutinizing the current study plan revealed that some specialized courses need extra prerequisites while others are missing the suitable prerequisites. For example; 'Digital Journalism' (MASC 310) has 'Introduction to Computers and IT' (ITCS 101) as a prerequisite with no additional prerequisite from Mass Communication courses, like for example; 'Introduction to Journalism and Print Media' (MASC 201), or any other core writing course in Journalism. Moreover, the course 'Integrated Marketing and Communication' (PREL 340), which is a specialized and advanced level course in PR has 'Principle of Marketing' (MARKT 201) as a prerequisite, while the Panel is of the view that it should be built on skills learned by students in 'Advertising' (PREL 240) as a course prerequisite. In addition, although the SER states that 36 credits of the programme are classified as theoretical and 36 as

practical (with 9 credits being hybrid), the Panel notes that the balance between theory and practice in some of the practical courses is tilted more towards theory as evident from the course files. For example, the content and the teaching methods used to deliver some practical courses [e.g. 'Digital Journalism' (MASC 310)] are more lecture-based than laboratory-based. Furthermore, the Panel notes that the programme objective 1: 'Prepare media professionals with high degree of competence acquiring breadth of knowledge and skills related to culture, arts, general knowledge and related to communication and public relations', is difficult to be achieved with the current number of offered courses outside the Mass Communication Programme. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should revise course prerequisites to further ensure course progression results in knowledge accumulation by students, increase the number of arts courses to prepare well-rounded students in the field of mass communication, as programme objectives indicate, and enhance the practical content of the curriculum. Moreover, the Panel is concerned that the MC and PR courses listed in the study plan (2014-15) do not reflect the two specializations equally. The Panel is of the view that the programme could benefit from incorporating more courses in PR specialization such as: Writing for Public Relations, Public Relations/Advertising Campaigns, Advertising Copywriting, and Strategic Communication, as well as exploring more specialized courses in broadcasting and Journalism. In addition, the Panel concurs with the recommendations provided by the external examiner of the programme to include new courses to enhance the PR specialized courses such as: Public Relations Management, Public Relations and Electronic Media, and Public Relations Campaign Planning. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should revise the curriculum to ensure the balance between the two specializations Mass Communication and Public Relations, in line with the qualification title.

1.3   The course syllabi are stated in a common template detailing course name, code, content, learning outcomes, assessment methods, weekly delivery plan, and textbooks. The Panel studied the samples provided and acknowledges that the courses are relevant for the discipline, but largely lack the depth needed for this type of programme. For example, the course 'Integrated Marketing and Communication' (PREL 340) reflects a collection of topics that provide students with breadth of knowledge about integrated marketing communication with no depth in the subject. Moreover, the Panel noted that current trends in MC research and practice, especially those related to new media and convergence were not reflected in course content and teaching practices adopted by the Department. From interviews with faculty members, the Panel was informed that there are cases where faculty members' research has been incorporated into course syllabi, but the process is not done systematically; Hence, the Panel advises the College to place more emphasis on research findings that enhance the offered courses. Furthermore, the Panel notes that some important elements of integrated marketing communication, such as: branding, product placements, events, persuasion, sponsorship, packaging, and audience

awareness (Segmentation, targeting & positioning) are not included in the content of the courses. In addition, the content of the course syllabus for 'Research Methods in Mass Communication & Public Relations' (MPRM 498) lacks major topics in PR research, such as: PR Situation Analysis, Problem Statement in PR, Stakeholders and PR, Sampling, and analysing and reporting data. The Panel is of the view that many of the subjects listed in the current content of this course could be combined together to allow the aforementioned important topics to be taught. The Panel also finds that the course 'Ethics and Professional Practice in Mass Communication and Public Relations' (ETHC 393) could be delivered as a combination of media law and media ethics. Moreover, the Panel examined the provided evidence and noted that some textbooks used in teaching MC and PR courses are relatively old, in addition to the duplication of some offered courses such as; 'Communication Research Methods' (MCPR 360) and 'Research Methods in Mass Communication & Public Relations' (MPRM 498), and the similarity of topics covered in the content of some courses such as; 'The Practice of Public Relations' (PREL 350) and 'Introduction to Public Relations' (PREL 101). In conclusion and as discussed in paragraph 1.2, the Panel recommends that the College should revise the course syllabi, to ensure that the programme covers in depth and breadth all the important conceptual and professional elements and practices relating to Mass Communication and Public Relations.

1.4   According to the provided evidence, the BMCPR has 13 Programme Indented Learning Outcomes (PILOs) that are clearly expressed in the programme specification. The PILOs are grouped properly into four categories: A. Knowledge and Understanding, B. Subject-Specific Skills, C. Critical Thinking Skills, and D. General and Transferable Skills. The Panel studied these PILOs and is satisfied that they are well-written in a measurable format and are appropriate for the type and level of degree awarded. Moreover, the Panel notes that these PILOs are aligned with the programme aims and objectives and cover the theory and skills needed by the two specializations, in addition to the general and transferable skills expected from bachelor degree graduates of similar programmes offered regionally and internationally. Thus, the Panel appreciates that the PILOs are well-written and linked to the programme aims and objectives.

1.5   The SER indicates that there are clear Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs), which are defined in the course syllabi and mapped to PILOs. The Panel studied supporting evidence that show how the CILOs are covered through the topics discussed in the course syllabi and how these CILOs are assessed throughout the semester. The Panel was informed that before the beginning of each semester, the internal verification process is implemented to ensure that the delivery of each course is directly aligned to the PILOs. The verification mechanism used by the BMCPR programme is the implementation of standardized university templates to map CILOs with PILOs. During site-visit interviews, it was evident that faculty members are well-

informed on how to map the CILOs to their respective PILOs, moreover, the interviewed students stated that they are informed of the CILOs of each course by their course instructor through the course specification that gets distributed to them at the beginning of each semester. The Panel studied the course files provided, and notes that in general the CILOs are suitable for the course level and content and facilitate the achievement of the programme outcomes. Hence, the Panel appreciates that CILOs are clear, linked to the PILOs, and well-communicated to the students.

1.6   AU has internship guidelines, which contain a provision stipulating that 'any student who has completed 90 credits or more in the undergraduate programme and has a minimum university Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 2.00 is eligible to undertake the internship'. The internship course typically takes place at the end of the third year or beginning of the fourth year of study, and is awarded six credits (with a minimum fulfilment of 240 hours) as a replacement for two core elective courses, which the Panel finds unreasonably high comparing to the number of awarded credits in other regional and international programmes and to the actual working hours expected from the students. The Panel scrutinised the internship course syllabus, and finds that it includes 'concepts and theories, contemporary trends, problems and research, professional responsibility, problem solving, modelling and design, application of methods and tools, analysis skills, etc.', which are more relevant to a theoretical course than an internship course. Accordingly, the extent to which this practical course helps students to achieve the PILOs is not quite clear. Hence, although there are clear policies and procedures to guide students in their internship experience, the Panel recommends that the College should ensure that the credit hours allocated to the internship properly reflect the efforts exerted by students, and revise the internship syllabus to better reflect the practical nature of the course.

1.7   AU has teaching and learning policies as provided in 'AU Teaching and Learning Plan 2016-2020'. According to the SER, AU adopts approaches that encourage the use of a range of teaching methods such as; independent problem solving methods, group discussions and debates, practical sessions and literature search. The Panel studied the programme course files and was satisfied that a variety of teaching methods relevant to the type of the programme, including lectures, group discussions, presentations, and problem solving are captured in the course specification. During site-visit interviews, the Panel noted that the e-learning platform MOODLE supports faculty members in delivering their courses, by ensuring that students have access to all necessary recourses related to the courses delivered by the programme. Faculty members also use SharePoint to upload their course material. During interviews, the students were satisfied with the different teaching methods used by the faculty members in delivering the programme courses and indicated that they prefer hands-on teaching methods to lectures. Therefore, the Panel acknowledges the variety of teaching methods used by faculty members in course delivery and suggests adding

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more hands-on methods to deliver practical courses, especially given that stakeholders have raised concerns about the insufficiency of practical inputs in the curriculum's content and delivery.

1.8 AU has assessment arrangements and policies, which are explained in several documents such as: AU Assessment Manual, AU Guidelines for the Undergraduate Projects, and Roles and Responsibilities of Co-coordinators of Multi-sectional Courses. According to the provided evidence, and as confirmed during interviews with faculty members, course assessments include formative methods, which are used for all Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) through guiding students on how to approach an assessed task and providing them with feedback on their learning (e.g. quizzes, tests and assignments). This is in addition to summative methods, which provide evidence of achievement and inform decisions about progression or qualification with respect to the levels of learning (e.g. final examinations). Provided evidence shows that there are clearly stated policy and procedures for grade appeals in the AU Assessment Manual. Interviewed students informed the Panel that they could discuss and challenge their grades with the instructor - except for the final and laboratory examinations - and if failed they can resort to appeal procedures. During the site visit, the Panel was satisfied that faculty members are well-informed of assessment methodologies, especially on the application of the internal verification and moderation policies. They further explained that these policies are available to all staff either as hard copy or through the university website and SharePoint. During interviews with faculty and students, the Panel confirmed that these assessments are communicated to students through the Course Syllabus/Specification made available to students at the beginning of the course. Hence, the Panel appreciates that AU has elaborate assessment policies, which the BMCPR programme generally follows and that faculty members and students are well-informed of these policies. However, in reviewing course files, the Panel noted no comments or written feedback provided by faculty on a number of assessed projects. During interviews with students and faculty members, the Panel learned that assessed projects are often discussed and returned to students to check their grades. The Panel advises the College to place more emphasis on delivering written feedback to students on all their assessed projects. Provided evidence shows that AU has a clear policy for detecting and addressing plagiarism incidents, which is stated in the AU Assessment Manual. The University uses the software Turnitin to check plagiarism of content, and embraces a zero-tolerance policy towards any detected plagiarism. Related penalties range from having students repeat the work, being awarded an 'F' grade, to other serious penalties imposed by the University Council. Overall, the Panel is satisfied with the current assessment policies and arrangements.

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1.9   In coming to its conclusion regarding The Learning Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- The programme aims generally contribute to the achievement of the College and institution mission.
- The programme intended learning outcomes are well-written and linked to the programme aims and objectives.
- The course intended learning outcomes are clear, linked to the programme intended learning outcomes, and well-communicated to the students.
- AU has elaborate assessment policies, which the BMCPR generally follows and that faculty members and students are well-informed of these policies.

1.10   In terms of improvement the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- revise course prerequisites to further ensure course progression results in knowledge accumulation by students, increase the number of arts courses, and enhance the practical content of the curriculum
- revise the course syllabi, to ensure that the programme covers in depth and breadth all the important conceptual and professional elements and practices relating to Mass Communication and Public Relations
- revise the curriculum to ensure the balance between the two specializations Mass Communication and Public Relations, in line with the qualification title
- ensure that the credit hours allocated to the internship properly reflect the efforts exerted by students, and revise the internship syllabus to better reflect the practical nature of the course.

1.11   **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy** the Indicator on **The Learning Programme.**

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2.   Indicator 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.

2.1   AU has an admission policy, which is clearly communicated to stakeholders, and is available on the university website. Further information and inquiries can be sought through the 'admission hotline'. The Panel examined the provided evidence and noted that the admission criteria are discussed at the institutional level, and the admission policy is regularly revised. The admission criteria stipulate that an admitted student 'should hold a recently-issued and recognised secondary school certificate or its equivalent'. During interviews with the administrative staff, the Panel learned that the admission criteria are reviewed every year, and adjusted accordingly to attract more students. According to the SER, admitted students for the academic year 2015-2016 had a mean high school CGPA of 75.9% with a standard deviation of 7.3. From the provided evidence and as confirmed during interviews, there are no additional requirements for admission in the BMCPR programme such as placement tests other than English and Mathematics. Interviewed staff informed the Panel that there is a suggestion to add additional admission requirements in the new plan. Hence, the Panel advises the Department to strengthen its admission criteria, and explore additional admission requirements such as; interviews, and writing skills' tests, to ensure selecting students who prone to excel in news writing and editing for print and electronic media and in public speaking for public relations.

2.2   During interviews with faculty members and students, the Panel was informed that most students of the BMCPR programme are coming from government high schools. The Panel examined the students' profile and found that the actual high school grade average for admitted students is higher than the admission requirement. Moreover, the Panel was provided with a table generated through the Admission and Registration system (ADREG) that shows students' profile for the period from 2006 to date. The Panel examined the profile of 438 students, as provided, and noted that 90 of whom had a CGPA greater than 3.0, which is relatively good. Evidence also shows that 40 students have been dismissed and 67 have withdrawn since 2006. Statistics provided on retention, progression and the length of study indicate that most students complete their degree programme in due time, with the exception of part-timers - which is expected - and whose percentages have significantly decreased in the last semester. Hence, the Panel appreciates that the profile of admitted students fits the programme's objectives and shows that the admission policy is consistently implemented. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the BMCPR is delivered in Arabic, the Panel finds that students' level of English needs more focus, given the sought attributes of the programme graduates stated by the institution (this is further discussed in paragraph 3.1).

2.3   According to the provided evidence, the College organizational chart is appropriate for the management of the programme. The Chairperson of the Department is responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme and reports to the Dean. The Dean reports to the Vice President of Academic Affairs who in turn reports to the President and then to the Board of Trustees; furthermore, there are established committees to ensure equity and transparency of decision-making. During interviews, the programme management showed a conversant understanding of policies and due process and expressed a proper understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Hence, the Panel is of the view that the mechanism of reporting lines is clear and follows the institutional system of hierarchy. Interviews with faculty members showed that most academic issues and related tasks, such as: hiring faculty members or selecting external examiners, are examined at the department level and then follow the proper route in order to be finally approved and enacted. In some cases, the Department may opt for *ad-hoc* committees that would focus on specific issues to facilitate decision making in the department, college and university levels. During interviews with faculty members, they pointed out that they are satisfied with the working experience and the environment in the Department, and that conflicts -if any- are settled informally. They further stated that their contributions and concerns are raised at the Department Council, and when necessary, their inputs are brought to the attention of the College Council. Hence, the Panel appreciates that there are clear lines of accountability with regard to the management of the programme.

2.4   The Department employs six full-time faculty members (one professor, four associate professors and one assistant professor) and four on a part-time basis, two of whom are Ph.D. holders, in addition to a faculty member from the Department of Foreign Languages, who is responsible for the delivery of English courses. The students-to-staff ratio is around 19:1, which the University calculates by dividing the total number of students (208) by the total numbers of both full-time and part-time faculty members (11). The 'Academic Staff By-Laws' document stipulates that the total number of working hours is 40, 15 of which are allocated to teaching and the remaining hours are distributed for performing other duties listed in these by-laws. However, these duties are stipulated in general terms without working-hours allocations. During interviews with faculty members, the Panel confirmed that the workload varies according to academic rank and there are certain credit hours' reductions for the staff who hold administrative positions, such as; the Dean who has a reduction of six credit hours. The interviewed faculty members consider the teaching load, which is in line with HEC regulations, appropriate. The Panel examined staff CVs and found that most faculty members have professional experience in Journalism and PR, and many of them worked or provided consultations for more than three years in daily newspapers and PR agencies, which are relevant to the courses they teach. However, the Panel noticed that there are very few cases where faculty members teach outside their areas of specialization, which should be addressed by the College. With regard to faculty

research, provided evidence indicates that most of the faculty research is published, in general, in interdisciplinary journals, while some others are published in specialized Arabic-language journals. The Panel also notes the relatively high presence of part-time faculty members, which may affect the stability within the programme, in addition to their limited presence in the Department beyond teaching and office hours may not ensure quality supervision of students' progress in the curriculum. Moreover, the Panel notes that the part-time faculty members' profile, in general, lacks professional experience in the field. Thus, the Panel recommends that the College should draw part-timers from the professional world to ensure that the practical aspect of education and training is more salient in the curriculum and ensure that faculty members teach within their areas of specialization.

2.5   AU has clear policies and procedures for the recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion, and retention of faculty members, and these are included in the AU Academic Staff By-Laws document. During interviews with academic and administrative staff, the Panel was informed that recruitment is mostly based on the number of staff required for teaching the offered courses. Recruiting a new staff member is initially raised by the Chairperson who consults with the Department Council and raises the request to the Dean of the College and the University Council for approval. The induction programme for the newly appointed staff is conducted by the Department and covers university services and issues related to Human Resources (HR) and finance, as well as academic, admission and registration policies. The Panel notes that faculty members are evaluated through a long process involving many evaluators such as: students, Department Chair, Dean, Peer Evaluation, Vice President (VP), Committee of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA). The Panel also notes that there is an appropriate promotion policy and procedures in place. In the academic year 2015-2016, two academic faculty members were promoted and one (from associated professor to professor) is in the process. According to the SER, the University encourages promotion through incentives, which include salary increments, and research honoraria. However, no surveys or feedback forms on faculty satisfaction are provided and there is no evidence of support for promotion like reduction in teaching load for applicants. In meeting with faculty members, the Panel was informed that the timeframe at the institutional level for promotion is long. The Panel advises the institution to develop and implement a plan to further support the promotion of academic staff and assess their level of satisfaction in relation to the incentives and the services provided. Notwithstanding the above, during interviews with senior management, the Panel was informed that the Department has maintained all faculty members in the last three years. This is further confirmed by relevant evidence during the site visit, which showed that faculty retention rates are above 90% for the academic years 2012-2013 and 2015-2016. Overall, the Panel appreciates that there are clear policies for the recruitment and evaluation of faculty members which

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are implemented at a department, college and university levels and the high retention rate of faculty members.

2.6   ADREG provides the institution with different online features, such as: admissions, withdrawals, transfers, graduation data, assessments, time-tabling, and general student activities including complaints. This Management Information System (MIS) provides a transparent grading system and online access to a variety of information and forms for both faculty and students. The Panel confirmed, from the provided samples of the reports generated from the system and during interviews with staff members and senior management, that ADREG is used in generating reports to inform decision making in relation to student progression and programme management. Interviews with academic and administrative staff confirmed that the reports they receive from the system are adequate for their needs, and allow for effective decision making. They further affirmed that these reports are relevant to the programme management and implementation, including the identification and monitoring of at-risk students. The Panel appreciates that the MIS is efficiently adapted to the needs of administrative staff, faculty and students.

2.7   There are adequate policies and procedures in place at the institutional level to ensure security of learners' records and accuracy of results; such records include electronic documents, transcripts, course attendance sheets and other confidential information. All records are protected and stored in ADREG and are password-protected. ADREG consists of a number of sub-systems that are backed up on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis, furthermore, data is kept on- and off-campus. AU also uses anti-virus, firewalls, and secure connections to ensure the security of all records. Moreover, there are procedures in place for the entry and changes in grades, which require multi-level verification by the instructors, the Chairperson of the Department, the Dean and a quality assurance officer. The Panel confirmed during the site visit and through the tour that the physical security of all student records is in place and that the records are kept in a safe environment. In addition, there is an adequate disaster recovery plan, which includes software safeguards and a recovery plan for networks & communication and staff computers. The Panel appreciates that there are policies and procedures in place to ensure the security and accuracy of students' records.

2.8   During site visit, the Panel toured the facilities, and noted that they are generally adequate. The class size for practical courses is within international standards, which accommodates up to 20 students and the faculty's offices are acceptable. The Department uses the university's shared laboratories, which are equipped with software related to image and video editing. There is also one laboratory for desktop publishing and graphic design containing about 20 computers, and a radio studio with a separate control room that includes an audio mixer. The TV studio used by students is limited in space and there is a need to increase the number of cameras available for

TV production. The Panel recommends that the College should further develop the TV studio to allow students to have a full studio experience and environment while preparing and producing TV programmes. The library has sufficient e-resources including AL Manhal (an online Arabic-based database), and online databases with access to exhaustive lists of English references and journals. Interviewed faculty members and students were satisfied with the learning resources available. However, touring the library and scrutinizing the evidence provided revealed that the printed materials in the field of MC and PR are limited, where the section located for printed texts has a limited number of titles. Also, most books in the provided list relate to other disciplines. Moreover, the Panel is concerned with the limited study spaces available to the undergraduate students, both individually or as a group. Interviewed students have stated that they do not use library resources often and, when the need arises, they copy materials from assigned references. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should increase the number of discipline-related printed materials and texts in the library, and provide the BMCPR students with sufficient study spaces to work individually or as a group.

2.9   According to the SER, the Admission and Registration Directorate through ADREG tracks the usage of laboratories and classrooms and generates tracking reports, which subsequently are made available to authorized faculty and management. Furthermore, e-resources are tracked through database logs in the Library. The tracking reports of MOODLE usage can also be generated upon demand. The Panel acknowledges the availability of tracking systems that generate relevant reports. Nonetheless, there are no sufficient evidence to indicate that the tracking reports are effectively used to enhance the usage of the library and laboratories within the BMCPR programme. The Panel advises the College to develop a mechanism to utilize these tracking systems to inform decision-making in a consistent and efficient manner.

2.10   AU has ten shared laboratories staffed with six full-time IT specialists, who are responsible for providing technical support for students, faculty and administrative staff. The Library also has a manager and three employees available to assist the students on the use of the library and its online system. Moreover, AU has a Career Office, which provides guidance to students in terms of internships and permanent job opportunities. There are also provisions for students with special needs and the interviews confirmed that the College assigns dedicated persons to look after these students. In addition, each student is assigned to an academic advisor and AU has a student counsellor who helps students to deal with non-academic problems. However, the interviews with faculty and students revealed that students do not meet with their academic advisors regularly and are not familiar with the advising system, as they are not compelled to meet with their advisors unless they were identified as at-risk students. The Panel therefore recommends that the Department should strengthen the role of the academic advising to ensure that effective academic support is provided.

Furthermore, touring facilities, and interviews with staff members confirmed that staff members who teach specialized courses do not receive sufficient technical support. While faculty members who teach practical courses in Journalism receive assistance from a part-time desktop-publishing laboratory assistant, those who teach video production have no studio assistants. The Panel is of the view that the programme needs dedicated full-time specialized laboratory/studio assistants who can provide first-hand experiences and technical skills in the field of layout and design, video-shooting and editing. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the Department should hire specialized full-time laboratory/studio assistants to provide technical support for students in their practical courses and graduation projects.

2.11 AU has several arrangements for the induction of newly admitted and transferred students. These arrangements include university-wide induction sessions that are offered to all students at the beginning of every semester. AU also supplies all students with the Student Guide and the University Catalogue, which include useful information about AU's policies and regulations. The College of Arts and Science also arranges an induction day every semester in which students, including those who were not able to attend the university induction sessions, gain familiarity with MOODLE, Turnitin, guidelines for writing projects and other rules and regulations of the College. During interviews with students, the Panel learned that their questions and concerns are handled effectively during the induction sessions, and students who miss these sessions were advised individually by the Registration Department. However, no evidence was provided on how the induction sessions are evaluated. Hence, the Panel appreciates that there are proper arrangements in place for inducting newly admitted students and encourages the College to benefit from students' and staff feedback in enhancing the student induction.

2.12 There are policies and procedures in place for the identification of students at risk of academic failure. Students falling within GPA range (CGPA < 2.0 & drop in CGPA ≥ 0.2 since the most recent semester) are identified and red-flagged by ADREG. The student academic advisors, the Chairperson of the Department, the course instructors and the University Counsellor are subsequently notified by email. At-risk students are entitled to a reduced load and are not permitted to register in any course without a prior approval from their academic advisors. This information was confirmed during the interview sessions with college administrative and registration staff, academic advisors, and students. The college administrators and faculty members have also indicated that the current number of students at risk is limited to few cases. Hence, the Panel appreciates that the College is implementing and following clear policies and procedures for identifying, advising and supporting the students at risk of academic failure through proper mechanisms.

2.13   According to the SER, there are various opportunities for students to expand their experiences and knowledge through extra-curricular activities. The Panel learned during the site visit that there is an extensive range of informal learning activities for students, such as, student societies and clubs, cultural and social activities, visits to media institutions and media sites abroad such as Thompson Reuters Agency, and MBC Group in Dubai, and Egyptian Radio and Television Union, Media Production City in Cairo. This is evidenced by University Council decisions to enhance the learning environment within the University, in addition to organizing a number of workshops and special events such as; career day and project exhibitions. The Panel appreciates the informal learning opportunities available to enrich students' learning experiences.

2.14   In coming to its conclusion regarding Efficiency of the Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- The profile of admitted students fits the programme's objectives and shows that the admission policy is consistently implemented.
- There are clear lines of accountability with regard to the management of the programme.
- There are clear policies for the recruitment and evaluation of faculty members, which are implemented, and there is a high retention rate of faculty members.
- The Management Information System (MIS) is efficiently adapted to the needs of administrative staff, faculty and students.
- There are policies and procedures in place to ensure the security and accuracy of students' records.
- There are proper arrangements in place for inducting newly admitted students.
- The College is implementing and following clear policies and procedures for identifying, advising and supporting the students at risk of academic failure through proper mechanisms.
- There are informal learning opportunities available to enrich students' learning experiences.

2.15   In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- draw part-timers from the professional world and ensure that faculty members teach within their areas of specialization
- further develop the TV studio to allow students to have a full studio experience and environment while preparing and producing TV programmes
- increase the number of discipline-related printed materials and texts in the library, and provide the BMCPR students with sufficient study spaces to work individually or as a group
- strengthen the role of the academic advising to ensure that effective academic support is provided

- hire specialized full-time laboratory/studio assistants to provide technical support for students in their practical courses and graduation projects.

2.16   **Judgement**:

On balance, the panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the indicator on **Efficiency of the Programme.**

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3. Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates

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

3.1 AU has generic graduate attributes, which are clearly outlined in the Teaching and Learning Plan 2016-2020 and are embedded within the PILOs. Nonetheless, while the teaching and learning plan expects graduates to 'have self-assurance, demonstration of leadership and moral values in their chosen profession' and 'be competent in the use of English for effective communication', interviews with students and alumni conducted during the site visit did not reflect that. On the contrary, most of them did not exhibit enough independence or personal abilities and preferred to remain silent or conform to each other's answers. Also, it was evident to the Panel that students' English proficiency is limited. This was confirmed during alumni interview session, as members of the alumni suggested that the Department should have special emphasis on using English language, because it is an imperative skill in the market place. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should ensure that the two institutional attributes of graduates, which are leadership quality and English proficiency, are developed within the graduates of the programme.

3.2 AU has a Programmatic Benchmarking Policy and Procedure, which states that 'the focus of benchmarking should be at least on the learning programme structure and curriculum, number of credits, work-based learning, professional and practical components, delivery modes, learning outcomes and graduate attributes'. During interviews with faculty members involved in this endeavour, the Panel learned that the benchmarking process was done at the level of comparing individual courses and programme credit hours – available through benchmarked institutions' websites- without any benchmarking of other components of the programme such as: faculty and students' profiles, academic standards, resources, and learning environment. Furthermore, the Panel examined the provided evidence and noted that the benchmarking of the programme wasn't implemented in a holistic way, and the overall benchmarking - in general - was not done accurately. For example, one benchmarked programme includes only 36 hours of specialized courses (16 compulsory and 16 elective) and the rest are interdisciplinary courses, which is very different from the study plan of the BMCPR that accounts for around 100 credit hours of specialized courses. Moreover, given that AU's vision is to seek international recognition, it is advisable that the College benchmarks a programme whose vision and philosophy is compatible with that of the BMCPR's. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should revise the benchmarking policy to include all aspects of the programme and its outcomes, and benchmark against institutions with comparable philosophies.

3.3   AU has elaborate assessment policies, which are explained in several documents, as previously detailed in paragraph 1.8 of this Report. The AU Assessment Manual, which is revised and updated regularly, includes detailed procedures on assessing multi-sectional courses, undergraduate projects and internship courses. During interviews with faculty members, they explained to the Panel that in order to ensure fairness in students' marks, internal verification of final examinations policy is implemented. This internal verification seeks also to confirm that examination questions are appropriate to the level of the courses and that they assess CILOs. According to the SER, there are many entities and staff members responsible for monitoring the assessment policy and procedures' implementations namely: CAQA, the sub-committee of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC), the Chairperson of the Department, and the internal/external assessors. Hence, the Panel appreciates that there are clear formal mechanisms to revise and monitor, on a regularly basis, the implementation of the assessment policies and procedures. Moreover, the Panel notes that assessment policies expect that students' work would be scrutinized against plagiarism using Turnitin as detailed in paragraph 1.8 of this Report. However, the Panel studied the students' graded coursework and found that Turnitin is not often or widely used. Moreover, the Panel was informed during interviews that Turnitin submissions are limited to major piece of students' work. In addition, the Panel is concerned of the clear undetected plagiarism in the presented samples of final projects. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should expand the scope of Turnitin submissions to include all types of assessment tasks and ensure the consistent implementation of this practice.

3.4   AU has a mechanism to ensure the alignment of assessment with outcomes. The College uses a standardized matrix to align assessment with learning outcomes across courses at the theoretical level. However, the Panel is concerned that there is not enough evidence on how this is monitored, evaluated and used as a tool for enhancement of the course content. During the site visit, the Panel found that the common practice adopted within the programme is to grade and verify the achievement of the ILOs through numerical evaluation of students' marks, with no narration about what these numerical values mean. The evaluation of achievement of these ILOs is only conducted through a theoretical matrix of alignment in course outlines, while it should show how it is used for course content development and delivery. The discussion with faculty members reinforced this conclusion as their answers focused on processes of grading and verifications and not on assessment. Moreover, the Panel examined the sample of course files provided, and found that only some had the matrix for evaluating the achievement of CILOs and PILOs. In addition, the course files do not include reports on course assessment, and there are no independent templates for course assessment in some selected courses, like for example 'Graphics & Internet – site design' (MASC 450). Thus, the Panel recommends that the College should evaluate the effectiveness of its mechanism for aligning

assessment tools to CILOs and associated PILOs and for assessing their achievement within the BMCPR programme.

3.5   The internal moderation is viewed – by AU - as the verification process. The College has a lengthy process of verification and formal policy regarding, for example, examinations and how they are designed. According to the SER, the internal moderation is implanted through two stages: Pre-assessment stage in which a verifier assigned by the Chairperson fills a comprehensive rubric 'Internal Verification of Final Exam' and 'Internal Verification Major Piece of Course work' to review each question with respect to the CILOs being addressed; the second stage is post-assessment, which is conducted by an internal moderation committee. Based on interviews and provided evidence, the verification process is done through faculty members according to areas of concentration to ensure consistency. Nonetheless, the Panel is concerned that evidence provided through course files indicates that - in most occasions - the verifier ticks off available items based on certain criteria, without any comment in terms of content, alignment and ways of improvement. Furthermore, the Panel did not find enough evidence on whether the internal moderation process has significant impact on either course or programme development. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should assess the effectiveness of its internal moderation process within the BMCPR programme.

3.6   AU has formal procedures for the external moderation of assessments, which are conducted every semester for every academic programme at the University. During interviews, the Panel was informed by faculty members that the selection process of the external examiners is done at the department level and is subject to the approval of the College Council and the University Council. The Panel examined the provided evidence and noted that although it is stated in the selection criteria of external moderators that the duration of their appointment as external moderators is normally two years, the Department relied for a number of years on one of those moderators. Furthermore, during interviews with external moderators, the Panel learned that the selection of external moderators is usually done based on their CVs presence on the internet. In addition, external moderators rely mainly on informal contact with the Department for following-up the degree to which recommendations are implemented. During interviews with faculty members, the Panel was also informed that external moderation is effective and has led to the identification of a number of shortcomings in examination design. However, the Panel examined the examples of course modification based on the external moderators' recommendations, and noted that these modifications are limited. In all, the Panel concludes that the external moderation within the BMCPR programme is yet marginal, and its effectiveness on course or programme development is limited. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should opt for diversity, and transparency in selecting external examiners,

further implement the external examiners recommendations and improve the mechanism of following up with them.

3.7   During the site visit, samples of students' assessed work from different courses were studied by the Panel including examination answers, papers and video assignments, graduation projects. The Panel also viewed a list of students' awards, which shows that four students won video & film awards in a number of local and regional festivals. The Paned noted that the examined course files, with samples of students' answer sheets and paper assignments, show that the level of student achievement varies. In general, students' answers are short with little narratives such as explanations and analyses, even when the course is theoretical. Furthermore, in examining course files, the Panel was concerned that the assessment depends heavily on examinations without a clear focus on the effective assessment of critical thinking skills and practical skills *via* rigorous analysis in the assessments. During interviews with faculty members, the staff raised the issue of students' language deficiency, but added that improvements have been made. However, the Panel noticed some cases where the language syntax is incoherent, which is a high concern for a programme in mass communication and public relation. The Panel was also informed that students contribute to the publication of a special magazine - not published regularly - where they publish news and articles on a diverse range of issues. The Panel reviewed three issues of the magazine and found that it emphasizes, in its core content, official news. The Panel was also informed that the magazine's design and layout is done with external assistance. In conclusion, advises the College to further enhance the students' work to avoid the shortcomings detailed above.

3.8   According to the SER, students' achievements are evaluated formally through a variety of assessment tools including final examinations, tests, quizzes, assignments, laboratory reports, laboratory examinations and undergraduate major project. The Panel examined graduates' grade distribution and notes that it shows a normal distribution in line with what is expected in regional and international standards. The Panel also examined the list of students' undergraduate projects with student grades, and noted that it doesn't show the extent to which PILOs are achieved by students. The relation between students' achievement and PILOs is outlined in other individual courses, but there is no evidence that this is done for the programme as a whole. Moreover, during interview sessions, both the employers and the College Advisory Board members indicated that while the overall level of the graduates is satisfactory, most graduates lack enough practical and linguistics skills relevant to the profession of media and public relations. The Panel urges the College to address these shortcomings, as indicated in the recommendation under paragraph 3.1.

3.9   The SER and supporting documents provide cohort statistics of students which indicate that the mean length of study of the BMCPR graduates since the academic

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year 2014-2015 is 4.3 years with a standard deviation of 1.2 years, thus implying that about 68 % of the graduates completed their study within 3.1 to 5.5 years, which is somewhat on the high side for a four-year programme. The SER and statistics provided indicate that since the programme inception, 17.6% of the students have discontinued while the rest have either graduated or are currently enrolled in the programme, indicating that the programme is successful in retaining most of the students. Nonetheless, no sufficient evidence was provided on how the programme team utilises cohort analysis outcomes to inform programme improvement. During interview sessions, the Panel discussed these issues with faculty and university officials, but no satisfactory answer was provided. The Panel advises the College to conduct a more thorough and detailed analysis of the collected data.

3.10   AU has a clear policy and procedures to manage, monitor and assess the internship and to ensure that the learning experience is appropriate in terms of content and level. The Panel examined the provided evidence and noted that the grading of the internship is based on the mid-internship and end-internship evaluation reports filled by students and the internship site-supervisor. Provided evidence stated that 'after completing 90 or more credits, students are given the choice of either doing the INTR 400 course, or replacing this course with two other core elective courses', which gives students the freedom to choose two other courses instead of enrolling in the internship course. During interviews, it was explained that there are very few cases where students resort to elective courses but no statistics were provided. However, the Panel is of the view that the replacement option is contaminating the purpose of exposing all students to an effective internship experience and, thus, such an option needs to be clearly excluded. Faculty members stated that the academic advisor visits internees twice during the training period. Students are expected to fill-in the bi-weekly form and hand all completed forms to the internship coordinator, who enters the grades in ADREG. During interviews with stakeholders, the Panel noted that some of them, who provided internship opportunities to students, believe that students need to enhance their work-based skills in the field of MC and PR. However, they were satisfied with the readiness of students to learn during the internship training and their level of responsibility. Nevertheless, the Panel finds that there are no detailed rubrics for properly assessing the application of practical skills students usually gain from their internship experiences, as the assessment is based on a Pass or Fail grade. The Panel advises the College to develop detailed rubrics to properly guide the assessment of student internship achievement.

3.11   The programme includes a capstone (graduation project), which is offered in the fourth year as a traditional research course. The Panel reviewed the course file of MASC/PREL 499 and viewed a sample of students' works. The Panel found samples where the project did not include a draft of students' writing and production assignments that can be used as formative assessment to evaluate how students are

learning as they go through the processes of creating a website or producing a short film. In the same vein, the Panel examined the list of graduation projects and noted that out of 50 projects - most of them in MC, while only one in PR - 43 are theoretical, and seven are practical in the form of short movies or a magazine. Moreover, most projects are done individually, though there are cases of group projects as well, and generally they take the form of classical research with questions, review of literature, surveys and conclusions. Interviews with faculty members confirmed that most graduation projects are theoretical, but informed the Panel that there are efforts to include practical projects. According to AU's policies and procedure, supervisors of capstone projects have a number of responsibilities, including regularly meeting with students through supervision meetings recorded in ADREG, and monitoring student progress. The supervision records are tracked through ADREG by the Chairperson and the Dean to ensure that all supervisors are fulfilling their obligations to track students' progress in their projects. The SER indicates that the project is evaluated through a panel of three faculty members (the supervisor and two faculty members). During interviews with faculty members, the Panel was informed that professionals do not contribute to the evaluation because of the theoretical dimension of the current projects. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should enhance the students' experience within the graduation project through exposing students to practical projects and involving professionals from the field in the evaluation process. In addition, the Panel notes that while the grading is fair, one standardized rubric is used to grade/mark theory-based graduation projects and practical/broadcast production projects (short film). The Panel also notes that the template provided of the students' progress is only fit to document students' progress in theory-based graduation projects. The Panel recommends that the College should enhance assessing and grading practical projects through the use of suitable rubrics, in order to ensure consistency and fair grading of all types of projects.

3.12   The College of Arts and Science has a functioning External Advisory Board (CEAB), which, as indicated in the 'Roles and Responsibilities of the College Advisory Board', is scheduled to meet at least once every semester and is composed of four to seven members drawn from employers, experts in the field and alumni, and chaired by the Dean of the College. The Panel examined the provided evidence and learned that the CEAB met in the first semester of 2016-2017, where five out of ten members of the CEAB apologized for not attending. In discussion with faculty and CEAB members, it was indicated that the CEAB had met only five times since its inception in 2012-2013. A survey by the Centre for Measuring and Evaluation (CME) shows that the CEAB is generally satisfied with the BMCPR programme, while during the meeting with the CEAB external members, they touched on issues of graduate attributes, programme development and the CEAB's roles and responsibilities and suggested to revise the criteria for selecting CEAB members, as it is not that effective so far. According to the analysed survey conducted by CME, the CEAB suggested to increase practical

components to the programme, and the Department responded to this suggestion by developing an action plan in form of programmatic improvements and reflecting the enhancement in the revised programme's study plan, effective from the academic year 2017-2018. Furthermore, the Panel noted that contacts between CEAB members and the institution (University & College) are not maintained formally and systemically, and it is not clear how the CEAB has benefited the BMCPR programme beyond suggesting more practical training. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should ensure that the CEAB meets regularly and provides concrete contributions to students' learning, through the establishment of a clear process to implement the Board's recommendations and enhance its independency.

3.13   The College assesses the graduates and employers' satisfaction with the graduates' profile through a graduates' survey and an employers' survey, which both showed high levels of satisfaction with the graduates' profile. Graduates and employers' satisfaction is measured mostly through the university's CME. During interviews with employers and internship supervisors, they expressed their satisfaction with internees. However, they raised the need for more practical courses, especially at an earlier stage in the programme. The meeting with alumni confirmed this remark; as they further stated that the professional world requires more involvement in training. The Panel regards that it is important that more practical courses, such as media and public relations writing and editing, be offered in the first two years of study, to give students enough breadth to develop their style and creative identity. From the evidence submitted, the Panel finds that the surveys provided are recent (mostly 2016) and sporadic. Moreover, the evidence shows that the level of students' satisfaction is only moderate on most questions (60%-70%) and such revealing percentages are not discussed in any way. During interviews with alumni, they suggested that the quality of the programme could be improved through focusing on one area of specialization (mass communication or public relations) in the curriculum to avoid repetition & redundancy in courses, increasing the number of practical courses, and enhancing the use of English as a strong component within the curriculum. The alumni members also suggested greater emphasis on graduate quality as having a pro-active attitude and involvement in the practice of mass communication and public relations. In all, interviewed alumni had an ambivalent appreciation of their university experience; they were generally satisfied but wished they had more practical trainings and linguistic skills as required in the professional world. The Panel encourages the College to better utilize the results of such surveys to improve the programme.

3.14   In coming to its conclusion regarding the Academic Standards of the Graduates, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- There are clear formal mechanisms to revise and monitor, on a regularly basis, the implementation of the assessment policies and procedures.

3.15   In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- ensure that the two institutional attributes of graduates, which are leadership quality and English proficiency, are developed within the graduates of the programme
- revise the benchmarking policy to include all aspects of the programme and its outcomes, and benchmark against institutions with comparable philosophies
- expand the scope of Turnitin submissions to include all types of assessment tasks and ensure the consistent implementation of this practice
- evaluate the effectiveness of its mechanism for aligning assessment tools to Course Intended Learning Outcomes and associated Programme Intended Learning Outcomes and for assessing their achievement within the BMCPR programme
- assess the effectiveness of its internal moderation process within the BMCPR programme
- opt for diversity, and transparency in selecting external examiners, further implement the external examiners recommendations and improve the mechanism of following up with them
- enhance the students' experience within the graduation project through exposing students to practical projects and involving professionals from the field in the evaluation process
- enhance assessing and grading practical projects through the use of suitable rubrics, in order to ensure consistency and fair grading of all types of projects
- ensure that the College advisory board meets regularly and provides concrete contributions to students' learning, through the establishment of a clear process to implement the Board's recommendations and enhance its independency.

3.16   **Judgement**

On balance, the panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy** the indicator on **Academic Standards of the Graduates**.

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4. Indicator 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.

4.1 AU has sufficient policies, procedures and regulations that govern all aspects of the programme's management. The Panel had access to quality management practices stated in the University Policies and Procedure Manual 2017, and AU Faculty Handbook. The site visit interviews with faculty and senior management confirmed the existence of policies and procedures to define academic standards and other procedures pertaining to faculty evaluation, promotion and workload. Interviews with faculty also indicated that AU's policies, regulations and procedures are well communicated to faculty and staff through a variety of electronic means, such as SharePoint and non-electronic means as in the case of faculty induction and meetings. During interviews, faculty members explained how they implement policies pertaining to the BMCPR programme to ensure the quality of the programme and its delivery. Consequently, the Panel appreciates the existence of institutional policies and regulations that pertain to the management of the programme, and faculty and senior staff are aware of. The Panel also advises the College to further assess the effectiveness of their implementation within the BMCPR programme as indicated in different parts of this Report.

4.2 As documented in the SER, the Dean and the Chairperson of the Department carry out the operations of the Department and the College respectively in line with AU's policies, procedures and regulations; as well, they carry the responsibilities of monitoring the implementation of these policies and procedures. During the site visit, the Panel was informed that the Department of Mass Communication and Public Relations has an interim Chairperson. The Panel was informed also that decisions pertaining to academic issues usually arise at the level of faculty members and are then raised up to the Department Council for discussion and approval, after which they are sent to the College Council and to other higher administrative levels within AU for final endorsement. Hence, the Panel appreciates that the BMCPR programme has an effective and responsible leadership at both the college and the department level.

4.3 AU has a formal Quality Management System (AUQMS) that includes a set of processes and procedures to support the implementation of Quality Assurance (QA) arrangements at the University. CAQA is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the quality management system at the University; it is also supported by university-level committees and councils that complement its work. In

addition to the college's practice of conducting semester-based internal verification and internal and external moderation; the College also develops an operation plans, which lists certain activities such as benchmarking, market needs analysis, and feedback from external evaluators to be carried out by its departments in order to update its programmes. Furthermore, the provided evidence indicates that the Department of Mass Communication and Public Relations has implemented the verification of course syllabi and course specifications. During interviews with senior management and faculty members, the Panel learned that the Chairperson of the Department provides the College with an annual aggregate evaluation, as a mechanism to ensure the implementation of QA procedures within the Department. The Panel reviewed the Department's annual aggregate report, which includes the results of the external examiner/evaluator of the BMCPR programme, and found that the report concentrates mainly on one aspect of QA policies that is concerned with curriculum and doesn't include other aspects of quality assurance such as those related to faculty, facilities, student services, assessment. Hence, the Panel advises the College to expand the arrangements in place for monitoring the effective implementation of QA aspects of the BMCPR programme as a whole.

4.4   As stated in the SER, academic and administrative staff - at the college and department levels - are provided with training as part of the AUQMS process and have an understanding of the QA and its importance. The Panel reviewed the provided evidence, which contains survey results on a workshop to prepare faculty and staff for the programme review process. The survey results showed that 79.57% of the faculty of the Mass Communication and Public Relation Department demonstrate a high level of preparation for the programme review. Moreover, the Panel was provided with a list of QA-related Professional Development (PD) activities attended by faculty members for the last three years. During interviews with senior management, faculty, and staff, the Panel noted that QA procedures and policies are well communicated to faculty and staff. Moreover, the Panel was informed that new staff members attend an induction programme to strengthen their understanding of the teaching requirements and QA practices. Therefore, The Panel appreciates that staff members are aware of the college's quality assurance arrangements and are committed to the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures related to the programme.

4.5   AU has several documents that include detailed steps and procedures to be implemented during programme review and during the initiation of a new programme such as: Policies on the Development of New and Review and Closure of Existing Academic Programs, Revised Process for Developing Reviewing and Closing

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Undergraduate Programmes, Policy on the Needs Assessment and Analysis and Procedure for Needs Assessment and Analysis. The Panel notes that, although the Department did not initiate a new programme yet, the Panel is satisfied with the existence of policies and procedures to introduce new programmes whenever needed.

4.6   As stated in the SER, internal programme evaluation is conducted at the beginning of each semester. During interviews with faculty members from the Department, the Panel learned that the internal programme evaluation process includes verification of course syllabi/specifications in terms of CILOs, teaching and assessment methods, textbooks, and references. The verification criteria are clearly indicated on a form titled 'Internal Verification of the Course Syllabus/Specification'. During interviews, the Panel noted that the involvement of faculty members in the process is achieved through filling verification forms of course syllabi and course ILOs and assessment methods. Faculty members informed the Panel of changes they made, such as adjusting examination questions to be compatible with ILOs as an example of the types of actions that can take place after the internal verification of course syllabi and internal verification of examination questions. The Panel notes that although the process is clear and implemented, evidence of actions taken after the revision is not sufficient to provide further enhancement and improvement of the programme. Moreover, the Panel was not provided with sufficient evidence to show the effectiveness of the external moderation process in improving the programme. Therefore, the Panel urges the Department to further utilize the generated data from the annual programme review to improve its quality assurance system and strengthen the delivery of the programme (see paragraphs 3.5 & 3.6).

4.7   According to the SER, the Periodic Programme Review Process is implemented in accordance with the Processes for Developing, Reviewing and Closing Academic Programmes. From the provided evidence, the process primarily assesses the effectiveness of the programme in attaining its defined aims/objectives summarized in its ILOs with a view to continually enhancing the student learning experience and, hence, improving the quality of education provided to the students. Moreover, there is a review committee at the department level that implements a formal comprehensive review and assessment process of the programme once every three years. The Panel notes from evidence and interviews that the most recent programme review carried out by the Department was based on a range of inputs such as benchmarking outcomes, stakeholders and the CEAB's feedback, outcomes of student satisfaction survey and employers' survey, market needs analysis and external evaluators' reports. The Panel examined the BMCPR Programme Review Committee Report reflecting on feedback from the CEAB survey, which resulted in satisfaction

with programme content but recommended the adding of more practical courses to the study plan. The Panel noted that the report also reflected on market needs analysis, which resulted in recommendations to add communication skills to the PILOs. The report also stated that the market need is for TV presenters and directors and social media-related specializations. Nonetheless, the Panel was informed during interview sessions with employers that their feedback and opinions on the programme were verbally and informally solicited. Moreover, evidence provided does not show how these inputs are informing the periodic reviews in a holistic manner. Furthermore, the recommendations contained in the external assessors' reports on the BMCPR programme, although valid in the panel's view, are not fully incorporated into the new programme structure prepared by the Department and approved by the College and the findings of the Market Needs Report were not fully considered in the programme review as well. Hence, the Panel recommends that the Department should develop a clear structure for decision-making processes related to periodic reviews of its programme based on clear analysis of the inputs of all stakeholders.

4.8   AU has a mechanism for collecting feedback from stakeholders through surveys. According to the SER, the stakeholders of the BMCPR programme are the students, alumni, potential employers of graduates of the BMCPR programme and CEAB members. The Panel noted that exit surveys have been administrated and analysed to measure recent graduates' level of satisfaction with the quality of the BMCPR programme and the quality of their learning experience. According to the SER, the Alumni Division of the Directorate of Student Recruitment and Careers conducts the alumni surveys. During interviews, the Panel was informed that feedback and comments from the different surveys, including students' evaluations of course contents and instructors, are analysed by the CME and the results are forwarded to the Dean, the Chairperson of the Department and the concerned faculty member. Interviewed faculty also expressed their satisfaction with the results of the students' evaluations, as they led to enhancing their PD plans and improving the quality of the programme delivery. However, the Panel notes that the feedback from stakeholders is not fully implemented in an effective manner that leads to improvement of the programme and the academic standards of its graduates. The Panel also notes that there is no evidence that the outcome of implementation of stakeholders' comments is communicated to stakeholders. The Panel recommends that the College should adopt more robust mechanisms to respond to stakeholders' survey results at the programme level, and to communicate outcomes back to stakeholders.

4.9   According to the provided evidence, the Ahlia Training and Development Centre (ATDC) is responsible for the professional development of both academic and

administration staff. The PD needs of the staff are collected from multiple sources including the university's strategic plan, faculty evaluation and performance appraisals, as well as the HEC requirements. The Panel reviewed the 'Template for Faculty Annual Evaluation', which is developed by the ATDC and is satisfied that the template shows that faculty are given the opportunity to identify their own PD needs, and evaluate the effectiveness of the presented workshops. The Panel also examined the titles of workshops attended by faculty members during the academic year 2015-2016, and notes that these workshops are divert and closely related to faculty's professional work. During interviews, staff members expressed their satisfaction with the arrangements in place for PD and with the circulation of an evaluation form for each training session to collect feedback on these trainings. The Panel appreciates that there are arrangements in place to provide PD activities for academic and administrative staff. Nevertheless, although the Panel acknowledges that the appraisal system used includes a section on staff training needs, the Panel did not see evidence of a formal process to link the identified PD needs of academic staff to the actual training activities conducted. In light of this, the Panel recommends that the programme team should develop and implement a formal mechanism to link the annual performance appraisal to the PD activities attended by individual staff members.

4.10   According to the SER, scoping of the labour market at the department and the college levels is carried out *via* multiple channels to ensure the currency of the BMCPR programme and its relevancy to the market needs. Furthermore, among the many sources for collecting feedback, the BMCPR Department includes direct contacts with experts from the industry visiting the campus, surveying BMCPR alumni and employers, as well as seeking input from independent professionals in the industry, government and professional organizations through the CEAB. The Panel acknowledges that there are interactions between the QA management and the programme and between the programme and stakeholders to ensure that the programme is updated in accordance with input from stakeholders on labour market needs. However, the Panel concludes that the process of scoping the market is not systematic nor systemic. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should introduce an effective and formal systematic mechanism for the continuous scoping of the labour market needs, to ensure the currency and relevancy of the programme.

4.11   In coming to its conclusion regarding the Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- There are institutional policies and regulations that pertain to the management of the programme, and faculty and senior staff are aware of these policies.

- The BMCPR programme has an effective and responsible leadership at both the college and the department level.
- The staff members are aware of the college's quality assurance arrangements and are committed to the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures related to the programme.
- There are arrangements in place to provide professional development activities for academic and administrative staff.

4.12   In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- develop a clear structure for decision-making processes related to periodic reviews of its programme based on clear analysis of the inputs of all stakeholders
- adopt more robust mechanisms to respond to stakeholders' survey results, and to communicate outcomes back to stakeholders
- develop and implement – in collaboration with the programme team - a formal mechanism to link the annual performance appraisal to the professional development activities attended by individual staff members
- introduce an effective and formal systematic mechanism for the continuous scoping of the labour market needs, to ensure the currency and relevancy of the programme.

4.13   **Judgement**

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

BQA

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5. Conclusion

Taking into account the institute's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the site visit, the Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the DHR/BQA Programmes-within-College Reviews Handbook, 2014:

There is no confidence in the Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations of College of Arts and Science offered by Ahlia University.

BQA

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