



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Institutional Review Report

Ahlia University

Kingdom of Bahrain

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1. The Institutional Review Process

The review of Ahlia University was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to 'review the quality of the performance of education and training institutions in light of the guiding indicators developed by the Authority' (Royal Decree No 32 of May 2008, amended by Royal Decree No. 6 of 2009).

This Report provides an account of the HERU institutional review process and the findings of the Expert Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), appendices, and supporting materials submitted by AU, the supplementary documentation requested from the Institution, and interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

2. Overview of Ahlia University

Ahlia University (hereinafter referred to as 'AU' or 'the University') is licensed by the government of the Kingdom of Bahrain under the Cabinet Decision No. 03-1626 dated 25 March 2001. The University is owned by a private holding company 'the Arab Academy for Research and Studies' which is registered as a for-profit institution. However, the University is said to operate as not for-profit within that organization.

AU accepted its first cohort of 50 students to its programmes in February 2003 and has increased its capacity to accommodate over 2000 students studying in 18 programmes at the time of the site visit, with the first batch of students graduating in 2006.

In May 2010 the University comprised six Colleges offering a total of 12 Bachelor and four Master degrees. AU also facilitates candidates for the Brunel PhD-Without Residence in Information Technology and Business Programmes.

At the time of the site visit, around 70% of students were from Bahrain, 20% from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman and 5% from outside of the Gulf regions. With regard to gender, there are more females (962) than males (767) enrolled at AU, which is in line with international trends. In the BSID and BSPT programmes the female to male ratio is 1:4.4 and 1:2.9 respectively, which is in accordance with international stereotypical patterns. It is interesting to note, however that there is a considerably higher percentage of females to males in programmes such as the BSAF, MBA, and MIYCS, which have traditionally been the domain of male students.

Approximately 80% of full-time faculty members have doctorate qualifications from a wide range of countries and in May 2010 there were 16 professors, 11 associate professors, 38 assistant professors and 19 lecturers. There were also six part-time faculty members. The administrative staff comprised 79 full-time and 4 part-time staff members. Staff-to-student ratios at AU compared favourably with international norms.

3. Mission, Planning and Governance

AU has clearly stated Vision and Mission statements translated into Goals and Core Values. The Panel notes that the Vision and Mission statements make reference to the three core functions of a university with emphasis on teaching and learning and a focus on graduate attributes. However, in its Strategic Plan, AU does not address its Vision of 'providing high quality professional services and research to the community', though it touches somewhat on its commitment towards fostering strong community engagement.

There is evidence that the Vision and Mission statements have been revised on a number of occasions. The first revision was undertaken in 2008. However, the University does not have a systematic process for how and how often the statements should be reviewed. Moreover, although the SER claims that external and internal stakeholders were involved in the review of the Mission statement, no evidence was found to support such a claim. The Panel suggests that AU define the internal and external stakeholders who should be involved in these reviews and undertake future reviews of its Mission through a formally planned inclusive process.

Recommendation-1

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a formal process to review periodically its Vision and Mission statements that includes inputs from internal and external stakeholders.

The Mission and Vision statements are posted on the University's website and were clearly visible throughout the University's Campus during the site visit. They also appear in the University catalogue.

AU has developed, recently, a five-year Strategic Plan for the academic years 2010–2011 to 2014–2015. The Plan is comprehensive and well documented with clear strategic goals, objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Commendation-1

HERU commends Ahlia University for its comprehensive and well documented Strategic Plan.

While there is evidence of a wide debate and engagement by different internal stakeholders during the development phase of the Strategic Plan, it was evident to the Panel from a range of interviews that many stakeholders, especially staff at the junior level, need to gain a better understanding of the University's Plan. The Panel is of the view that the institution needs to develop a shared understanding of the Plan so that it can be more successfully implemented and deepened across all sectors of the University.

Recommendation-2

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a mechanism to disseminate and institutionalize its Strategic Plan across the University.

The Panel saw some evidence of departmental operational plans for the next academic year, which indicate allocated responsibility and timelines linked to strategic goals. The Panel acknowledges such steps and encourages the University to develop further a mechanism to monitor systematically and evaluate its achievements.

As stated earlier, the institution has taken the right steps in this direction through the identification of its strategic goals and KPIs. However the Strategic Plan does not specify how these goals and objectives should be prioritized. Moreover, in some cases, measures of KPIs are not identified. In a number of interviews it was not evident to the Panel that senior management staff have tools to measure the achievement of some KPIs. The Panel suggests that these measurements should be included in this otherwise well-developed Strategic Plan. The University is also reminded that the achievements of its objectives need to be monitored and managed on a continuous basis.

All programmes offered by AU are approved by the HEC in Bahrain and recognized by the Ministries of Higher Education in Kuwait and Oman as well as some of its programmes being validated and accredited by Brunel University, UK.

One of the University's main goals that has been stated in a number of its documents is to *integrate liberal studies and professional education*. However, through interviews, the Panel did not see a shared understanding of what this statement meant to faculty members or even to senior management staff members. The Panel suggests that the University takes steps to

ensure that there is a shared understanding, and knowledge of how to integrate liberal studies and professional education in the programmes of all the Colleges.

AU has undertaken a number of internal benchmarking exercises where each of its programmes was compared with six different international and regional counterpart programmes. However, evidence provided by the institution shows that these exercises are limited to curriculum mapping. AU is aware of the need for benchmarking and is currently in the process of developing policies and procedures for benchmarking. This is evident through its establishment of the Centre for Measurement and Evaluation (CME) and the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) and the review of their minutes of meetings. However, the Panel is of the view that AU needs to identify more clearly how effectively the quality of its programmes is being improved by such activities. Moreover, AU needs to develop formal external benchmarking processes that would assist AU in evaluating its programmes and form a part of its toolbox to measure the University's performance towards attaining its Vision.

Affirmation-1

HERU affirms Ahlia University's decision to develop and implement a formal benchmarking process.

The University has a student plagiarism policy which has zero tolerance towards plagiarism and cheating. The Panel was encouraged by seeing evidence of this policy being implemented.

The University has a suite of policies, procedures, regulations and bylaws that institutionalize its operations and functions. There is evidence that policies are revised as needed, and that when the need for new policies is identified, acted upon. The policies are then developed, usually, through *ad hoc* committees, and brought to the University Council for discussion and in some cases, such as promotion policies, circulated to staff for comments and then finalized and approved by the University Council. A portal has been created recently which contains policies and procedures. Through interviews, it was apparent to the Panel that staff are aware where policies are and how to access them. The Panel appreciates the University's conscientious effort to develop and review policies and procedures.

Commendation-2

HERU commends Ahlia University for its effort to institutionalize its operations and core functions.

While most of the policies exist in both Arabic and English, some are in Arabic only. This places faculty members who do not speak Arabic at a disadvantage. The University is aware of the problem and the Panel saw evidence that it is in the process of providing all its policies, procedures and bylaws in both languages.

Affirmation-2

HERU affirms Ahlia University's decision to provide all its policies, procedures and bylaws in both Arabic and English.

There is no formal procedure or framework for the periodical revision of policies across the University. The Panel suggests that AU develops and implements a mechanism for the development and the periodical revision of its policies and procedures.

Recommendation-3

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a formal policy development and review process that would include a periodical, scheduled review of its existing policies.

In terms of risk management, whilst the University claims in its SER, and the Panel heard during interviews, that it is in a sound financial position, financial risk is not the only risk faced by an academic institution. There is academic risk, IT risk, etc. AU does not have a comprehensive risk management policy or register. The Panel encourages AU to develop and implement an integrated risk management strategy that includes risk assessment and mitigating factors, which is continually monitored and revised.

Recommendation-4

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a risk management policy that includes risk assessment and mitigation.

The University has an organizational chart that was updated recently to include the three newly established centres. The University is managed by the President, three Vice Presidents (VPs) and the University Council. The latter appears to play an essential role in the academic management of the University. The University is also managed through an Executive Committee consisting of members elected from the Board of Directors. The Committee meets on a regular basis and discusses different aspects of University management. There are a number of University committees that are renewed on an annual basis through the University Council. At the time of the site visit there were 12 different University committees, five of which are chaired by the University President and three chaired by the Vice President for Planning. Most of these committees report to the University Council, and a scrutiny of the University Council's minutes of meetings show that the committees' works are continuously discussed and examined by the University Council.

AU has a budgeting system based on the principle of Zero Based Budgeting, which develops Operating/Financial budgets and Capital Expenditure budgets on an annual basis. The University's main income is student tuition. It appears to have financial stability, and has been producing annual net profits. AU states in its SER that 'the University is organized as a non-profit organization'. However the annual budgeting and financial statements of the holding company and AU are integrated in a way that makes it hard to separate the two incomes, costs and profits from each other. This will become even more complicated as the holding company is in the process of initiating other activities. The Panel encourages the University to separate the financial arrangements of the holding company and the University.

Recommendation-5

HERU recommends that Ahlia University separate its financial arrangements from its holding company to ensure the University's autonomy and independence.

There is evidence that the financial and accounting systems include processes to prevent and detect fraud, including the use of accredited external financial auditors. Through interviews with senior staff, the Panel was informed that the University is also in the process of employing an internal auditor. The Panel suggests the University consider expanding the remit of the internal auditor to include performance auditing against planned activities linked to the budget in addition to financial auditing.

The development of the budget is an inclusive process. The expenditure, however, is centralised and different Colleges and units are not informed about the final budget allocated to them. The Panel suggests that the University considers developing a mechanism by which Colleges and administrative units have more autonomy with the budget allocated to them. This, in turn, will assist the University to achieve its strategic goals and to provide a quality teaching and learning experience for its students.

AU is governed by a Board of Directors (BoD) consisting of 11 members elected from the holding company's shareholders. The BoD meets on an annual basis and approves the annual budget, main policies and strategies of the University. The BoD also elects a committee from its members to be the Executive Committee, which meets regularly and is responsible for promptly executing the BoD responsibilities towards the University. The BoD was also operating as the Board of Trustees (BoT) until 2007 when an independent BoT was established. The BoT is said to be the highest authority within the University and is autonomous.

The BoT usually consists of nine members. However, at the time of the site visit, the BoT consisted from eight members, four of which, including the Board's chair, are shareholders of the Arab Academy which own AU. This heavy presence of the shareholders might cause a blurring between governance, management, and ownership. The separation of ownership, governance and management is essential to avoid potential risks of conflict of interest, which have the potential to impact negatively on the quality of education provision. The Panel suggests that the University reconsider its BoT structure and clarify its roles and responsibilities. Moreover, no monitoring and evaluation plan or process is in place to monitor the effectiveness of the two Boards. The Panel urges the University to address this weakness.

Recommendation-6

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a formal process for the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of its Board of Trustees and Board of Directors.

The Panel notes the Student Council's role in the governance of the institution and that they have the opportunity to include matters on the College Council meetings agenda in which they participate. The Panel found that students were generally satisfied with the institution and their participation in governance structures. In addition to this, the Panel was pleased with the ease with which students engaged with the President. However the Panel noted that members of the Student Council were not included in the self-evaluation process conducted by the University and the preparation for the Quality Review process until a final briefing meeting prior to the site visit, although those students serving on the College Council were aware of the process. The Panel suggests that the University consider including students in any Review Process as this provides all stakeholders with an opportunity to engage with processes which lead to quality enhancement.

4. Academic Standards

AU delivers 12 Bachelor's, four Masters and two Brunel-issued doctoral degrees - Without Residence (WR) through six colleges.

All AU's programmes (except Brunel's PhD (WR) hosted programme) follow the credit hour system. Credit hours for programmes are in line with international norms and the HEC licensing requirements. The study plan for any Bachelor's programme is structured around 132 credit-hours, except for the Bachelor's Degree in Physiotherapy which has 154 credit-hours. All Bachelor's programmes consist of 24 credit-hours of University-required courses, which include 18 credits for six compulsory core courses and six credits [two courses] chosen from the humanities and social sciences plus six credits [two courses] of free electives. College-required courses vary between different programmes, as do departmental-required core courses and electives. All of the Masters degrees consist of 36 hours based on 18 credit hours for six core courses, six credit hours for elective courses and 12 credit hours comprising either a specialization track or a dissertation track requiring either nine credit hours for elective courses and a single project dissertation in an area of specialization or a 12 credit-hour dissertation.

AU fields of study are modelled on programmes offered by recognized international universities, such as Brunel University with which AU has a strong partnership (programmes in the College of Business & Finance, Physiotherapy in the College of Medical & Health Sciences, programmes the Colleges of IT and Engineering); the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Georgia State University, and the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism (Mass Communication and Public Relations).

International professional certification courses, which have been integrated into the main curricula in the Colleges of IT and Engineering, provide students with in-depth knowledge and hands-on experience on the latest technologies, and prepare them not only in technical skills required by the job market but also for certification examinations offered by MICROSOFT, Cisco and Oracle. The Panel acknowledges the University's effort to integrate professional certification courses into the main curricula of some of its offerings.

Commendation-3

HERU commends Ahlia University for the integration of international professional certification courses into the main curricula in the College of Information Technology and Engineering.

Although AU is comparing, informally benchmarking and reviewing its curricula with established partner institutions and others, there is no evidence of a systematic approach to formal benchmarking, as discussed earlier.

Admission criteria for students are set and entry scores are marginally above the minimum set by the HEC. No student is admitted without English and Mathematics proficiency as demonstrated by their SAT score. These criteria are in line with international standards and are detailed in the AU Catalogue, published on the website, in its Student Guidebook, leaflets and brochures, which are available to all applicants and other stakeholders.

Students entering directly into Bachelor degree programmes must have high school qualifications recognized by the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The Panel noted that these entry level grades are increasing and that around half of those who apply are admitted to the University. However, as indicated in the Strategic Plan of the University, AU needs to develop a formal process for the review of its admission criteria. It also needs to identify input to this process, for example, links between entry level, grades and academic performance.

Affirmation-3

HERU affirms Ahlia University's decision to develop and implement a formal process for the review of its admission criteria.

Applicants are provided with complete information, in writing, about the requirements of the particular programme in which they are enrolling. They receive a letter of acceptance which stipulates the total number of hours they are required to complete and the total fees for the programme. A copy of the study plan is attached to the letter of acceptance and students are informed about programme costs.

All students have access to the AU Catalogue and are given a copy of the Student Guidebook. An explanation is given on the programme study plan and programme requirements, such as specific course pre-requisites, types of courses (e.g. core, major electives, free electives, humanities and social sciences courses), the credit hours system, and the grading system. Other alternative choices for students within the programme of study, such as the internship track and professional certification courses are given to students. In addition, course syllabi/specifications that are distributed to students at the beginning of each course indicate the prerequisites.

Applicants who have undertaken coursework at other tertiary institutions may be admitted as transfer students according to AU's policy, which specifies the criteria: completion of one or more semesters in a recognized institution of higher education; satisfaction of the English

language proficiency requirements; submission of official transcripts, syllabi and course descriptions for courses taken matched to those for which transfer of credits is sought. When an applicant applies for transfer admission, the Admissions and Exemption Committee evaluates the transcript, verifies it, and determines the number of transfer credits to be awarded on a course-by-course basis and subject to the rules and regulations of the HEC and AU. Applicants are informed in writing about the number of transfer credits awarded. The admission criterion to Masters programmes is based on the applicant holding a Bachelor's degree at least at the minimum GPA level from a recognized institution.

Admission to Doctoral programmes is in accordance with Brunel University's guidelines, which require applicants to hold a Masters degree from a recognized institution. Students entering the MBA programme whose first degree is not in Business are expected to take an additional three courses. However this is at the discretion of the Programme Director and based on the work experience of the applicant. The Panel did not see evidence that the performance of students who enter programmes through this route is monitored. AU is encouraged to develop a formal guideline for assigning students with these additional courses and develop a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the decision taken by the Programme Director against the students' performance.

Recommendation-7

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement formal criteria for the assigning of additional courses to students entering the MBA programme and monitor their performance.

As indicated in the AU Catalogue and on the website, with the exception of two programmes in mass communication and public relations, the language of instruction is English. English language competency is set at a TOEFL score of 500 (or equivalent IELTS) and anyone not meeting this entry requirement must enrol in Orientation English. As in the case of English, students entering with an unsatisfactory level in Mathematics must take a Placement Test. Students who fail the Placement Tests in both English and Mathematics are required to enrol in the orientation programme which is for one semester (15 weeks) with six hours of tuition per week per subject. Students who pass Orientation English can then commence with first-year courses. English language requirements for the PhD (WR) are set by Brunel University and were documented as being 6.5 IELTS with a minimum of 6.0 in writing or paper-based TOEFL 580 as at 01.02.2009. All entrants to the programme have met or exceeded this requirement. The Panel suggests that AU evaluate students' achievements against the English entrance level to enable the University to make informed decisions when reviewing its admission requirements. (See Affirmation 3.)

All programmes at AU have clearly defined learning outcomes. However, all course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) have not yet been mapped to the programme ILOs. This is a work in progress. (See section 6 of this Report for more details.)

The VP: Academic Affairs, Dean of Student Affairs, the Deans of Colleges, Chairpersons of all the departments, and the lecturers work in close coordination to ensure that AU's assessment policy is implemented across the University. As part of the process to ensure that the students achieve the programme aims and ILOs, final results and grade distribution are subject to review by the relevant Chairpersons and Deans. A wide range of assessment methodologies is in evidence at AU.

As mandated by the University Council, more than one assessment is required for each course and in the case of multi-section courses there are explicit rules for coordination. The types of assessment vary between programmes and courses and include multiple choice tests, quantitative analyses, case studies, essays, group work, class presentations, projects, short tests, practical tests, mid-term papers, final examinations (closed book or open book), and for Masters students, dissertations and *viva voce* defence presentations. However, the dominant assessment methods in most courses are written examinations and quizzes.

Students appreciate opportunities to be assessed in different ways and by challenging students throughout the term, faculty members can identify students at risk earlier in the course. Lecturers monitor students' continuous learning outcomes and this monitoring serves as an early warning system to identify areas where students have difficulties in learning. However, there is no formal process, such as a personal tutoring system, in place at present and dealing with at-risk students is left to the discretion of the lecturer. As AU grows there may be a need to review the current informal system.

Examination policies and processes are clearly articulated by the Office of the Dean of Students Affairs in the Catalogue and examination requirements and schedules are updated at the commencement of each examination period. However, there have been a number of reported incidents where students complained that lecturers do not post the dates of the mid-term examination at the beginning of classes. Moreover, cases were reported where mid-term examinations were not undertaken until near the end of the semester which might hinder the ability of the lecturer to identify at-risk students and assist them before they fail. This has caused the University to over-exploit the use of Incomplete (I) grade so that students are given a chance to improve their performance. AU is aware of these problems and the Panel concurs with the University that such matters need to be addressed.

Grading schemes are governed by the attainment of scores linked to standard letter grades and for any course, a final grade is computed based on a weighted score on various assessments as indicated in the course syllabus/specification sheet distributed to students at the beginning of the course. Marking criteria are indicated on test and examination papers.

Internal moderation is instituted by faculty members and distributions are reviewed by the respective departmental chairperson.

There is no formal moderation system followed in the assignment of final grade for each subject. This, as the Panel was informed, is left to the discretion of the faculty member and head of department. Although AU recognizes that the moderation of students' assessed work by peers is a critical component in validating the success of its students in its core objectives in teaching and learning, the Panel found no evidence of external moderation at the undergraduate level. One of the strengths of AU is the number of faculty members with teaching experience in Europe, North America and Asia and these faculty members are acquainted with levels attained by students at their former academic institutions. However there is no form of external scrutiny of samples of papers in the low, middle and high range of grades to verify the levels being given and no evidence of double marking for papers at the pass/fail margin. The Panel urges AU to develop an external moderation system that includes external examiners to ensure that its assessment policies and practices are in-line with regional and international practices in programmes of the same level and field of study.

Recommendation-8

HERU recommends that Ahlia University benchmark its assessment policies and practices with other regional and international institutions to ensure consistency and enable it to monitor the standards of its marking levels.

External scrutiny has been employed in the assessment of MSc dissertations through the use of external examiners. External examiners approve and endorse the grade awarded to the student for the dissertation or project dissertation. Guidelines for Good Practice Supervision of Masters Degree Project Dissertations were released by the University Council on 24.2.2010. The document includes detailed roles and responsibilities for supervisors and students; however it does not specify requirements for external examiners. There are no consistent instructions given to external examiners who tend to use their own professional judgement on the standard of dissertations and weight their marks according to their own emphasis or experience. The Panel urges AU to address this matter.

Recommendation-9

HERU recommends that Ahlia University provide explicit guidelines and moderate the comments from external examiners given on the prescribed feedback forms in order to ensure consistency across the criteria used by external examiners of Masters Degree Project Dissertations.

The Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) has been established relatively recently. One of its assignments is researching best practice on assessment and disseminating findings to the Deans of the respective Colleges. It also monitors the implementation of the assessment policy throughout the University. The CAQA is in the process of benchmarking and developing internal and external reference points for use in determining and verifying the equivalence of academic standards with other similar programmes in Bahrain and worldwide. In cooperation with the newly-established Centre for Measurement and Evaluation (CME), the Teaching, Learning and Research Committee (TLRC) is in the process of evaluating current student assessment policies and methods, identifying the most appropriate tools for measuring student learning, and developing an improvement plan based on best practices. The Panel recognises this is a work in progress and encourages AU to ensure that there is a well-defined and coordinated approach to setting and monitoring assessment standards implemented between centres and across all departments.

Affirmation-4

HERU affirms Ahlia University's efforts in researching and adopting best practices on assessment policies, and its work to implement them and monitor their implementation throughout the University.

There is evidence that the University recognises the importance of developing its staff in order to measure effectively course and programme learning outcomes through the appropriate design of assessment and use of varying assessment tasks. The VP: Academic Affairs is charged with coordinating staff development with respect to assessing transmission of knowledge to students incorporating subject and programme learning outcomes through an optimal mix of assessment methods. However the Panel did not find evidence of a coordinated approach to staff development for faculty members. The Panel encourages AU to ensure that faculty members have access to staff development opportunities in particular with regard to the range and efficacy of assessment methodologies.

To assist in monitoring standards and quality improvement in line with the 34 KPIs in the Strategic Plan, an integrated information system, ADREG, has been developed. The ADREG system modules are continuously populated with data related to students and staff such as student enrolments, letters sent, registration details, assigned advisers, examinations, placement tests, scholarships, graduation lists, transcripts, alumni details, GPA distribution, withdrawals, changes of course, pass rates, drop-out rates, internships, and staff-to-student ratios. The data can be disaggregated to produce time series performance reports by course, gender, nationality and faculty. In addition, there are modules on fees payment, facilities and equipment maintenance, room/laboratory allocations, security such as permission on

data access and passwords for assigned users. Senior management receive regular data reports and, based on these reports, they identify issues and make decisions that resolve problems. For example, courses are cancelled by Deans when registration reports indicate a small number of registered students or, if too many students register, courses are split into multiple sections. Data are backed up regularly and stored in a fire-proof safe. The Panel was impressed by the functionality of the ADREG MIS, which is considered good practice.

Commendation-4

HERU commends Ahlia University for the functionality of its Management Information System.

The ADREG MIS system was installed recently and the University is yet to benefit from the data and statistics available from the system. The Panel is of the view that, in order to enhance the functionality of ADREG and thereby better ensure that management has sufficient information to monitor progress on performance against its KPIs, the University could include data and analyses from student and other intended surveys in new ADREG modules. This will enable the University to make better use of the ADREG system and assist senior management to make informed decisions.

AU has MOUs and Agreements with a number of international and local higher education institutions. Collaboration with Brunel University is extensive and spans three Colleges: the College of Business & Finance, the College of Engineering and the College of IT. The programmes at AU have been accredited and validated by Brunel University in accordance with the British Quality Assurance Agency requirements. Two Doctoral programmes – one from the Brunel University School of Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics and the other from the Brunel Business School – are conducted at AU for students without residence (WR) as required by Brunel. 39 students are currently enrolled as doctoral candidates in the PhD (WR) programme.

The relationship with Brunel University was entered into after careful due diligence. The Brunel PhD (WR) programme offered in Bahrain is awarded by Brunel University. The roles of each institution are clearly specified in the Agreement which indicates admission policies, supervisors' roles, and programme requirements. The AU staff working with the PhD (WR) students have access to short courses and workshops conducted by Brunel University. For admission to the PhD programme, Brunel has granted recognition of prior learning for AU undergraduate and Masters degree programmes. There is evidence, however, that the 2+2 programme, in which the student attends Brunel University in the final two years of undergraduate study in designated fields, and in which Brunel University issues the Bachelor degrees, has not been as successful in attracting students into the programme.

Various mechanisms are in place for AU to meet its obligations to students should any partner organization fail to meet its obligations. For example, for the PhD (WR), the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research ensures that Brunel University fulfils its obligations through frequent interaction with counterparts at Brunel University. The Quality Assurance (QA) representative from AU, the Head of Brunel's International Programmes Unit and PhD (WR) student representatives monitor the conduct of the programme through bi-annual meetings at AU. Clauses in the Agreement give AU sufficient power to enforce the Agreement to ensure that Brunel University meets its obligations. If obligations are not met, AU can invoke the termination clause. The Panel was pleased to learn that the AU PhD programme team coordinates and follows up on satisfaction with all elements of the delivery of the PhD programme; identifies areas that need to be addressed by Brunel University; and the QA representative at AU frequently interacts with their QA counterpart at Brunel University.

The Panel was informed that, although AU has signed a number of Agreements and MOUs, most are inactive or have not yet delivered on expectations, for example, those with the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, USA, and George Washington University, USA. However the Agreements with Brunel University and EPITECH in France for IT student exchange have been productive. The first group of male exchange students from EPITECH were completing their programme at the time of the site visit and a second group of students from AU will go to EPITECH later this year. The Panel found evidence, in interviews with staff and students involved in programmes conducted under the Brunel and EPITECH agreements, of satisfaction with the PhD (WR) and Exchange arrangements.

Commendation-5

HERU commends Ahlia University for the well-constructed and managed relationship it has developed with Brunel University through its PhD Without Residence programme and EPITECH through the student exchange arrangements.

Under an Agreement with Bahrain Institute of Technology (BIT), AU IT and Engineering students take two courses at BIT and are then given the option to take up to four additional professional BIT courses. The Bachelor's degree is awarded by AU. Students receive a certificate of attendance from BIT after completion of each MICROSOFT, Oracle and Cisco course undertaken at BIT. These professional courses are customised, conducted within AU rules and regulations and taught by BIT certified lecturers in BIT laboratories. The agreement between AU and BIT ensures that BIT delivers stipulated IT courses to AU students according to the academic standards prescribed by AU. The Agreement is contingent on BIT maintaining its certified deliverer status from the software vendors. Course materials, course syllabi, examinations, timetabling, laboratory facilities and the quality of teaching are continuously monitored and corrective actions taken where necessary by an academic and administrative coordinator at AU, who monitors the delivery of the

courses by BIT throughout the semester. The Agreement provides AU with the ability to compel BIT to meet its obligations to AU. (See Commendation 4.)

Although AU has entered into an Agreement with George Washington University, USA with a view to launching its MBA (Engineering Management) programme at AU, the Panel was informed that this MOU is inactive because it has not been approved by the HEC. The Panel suggests that AU review its formal MOUs and Agreements with other institutions to ensure they are active, mutually beneficial, of advantage to students and staff and in line with the Strategic Plan.

5. Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The Panel's interactions with senior staff as well as the documentations provided by the University have allowed the Panel to conclude that the Institution takes quality and quality assurance seriously. The commitment of the President and the Board of Directors to quality in the University is noted. AU has an understanding of 'quality' in terms of fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, transformation and the development of a quality culture throughout the institution in which all staff members have responsibility.

The University has gone through a substantial process in developing an internal Quality Assurance (QA) system which is expected to play an integral part in providing all University stakeholders with systematic feedback on performance of the programmes. Through its attempt to develop an internal QA system AU has entered a debate with which most faculty members are engaged. The Panel saw evidence that AU leadership fully supports the provision of quality education and provides the University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC) and the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) with needed funds. This commitment is also evident from interviews with members of the governing boards, the University executive management, and staff members, and from the number of workshops provided for the QA unit in and outside Bahrain. This support has helped to create a culture of quality and is an effective tool toward achieving the University goals and objectives.

Commendation-6

HERU commends Ahlia University for its demonstrated commitment towards quality assurance and for its efforts to engage all its internal stakeholders in creating a culture of quality among all its staff members.

The Panel appreciates that the current quality assurance policy is in its early stages of development at AU. Therefore most of the supporting materials and evidence provided are input to the process making it difficult to verify the effectiveness of the University's QA systems at this stage. As a next step, the Panel encourages AU to evaluate and review systematically the effectiveness of its QA system. This would act as a sound basis for the institution's commitment to providing high quality scholarship.

Recommendation-10

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a monitoring system that systematically evaluates and reviews the effectiveness of its Quality Assurance system.

The Panel found ample evidence (e.g. University policy and procedures manual, minutes of UQAC, workshop) to show that the recently developed internal quality assurance policy is being implemented and there is a commitment from all staff and faculty members to quality assurance and enhancement. There are clear processes for the institution to follow, and a well-defined self-evaluation process for institutional activities and programmes. The Panel, however, did not see a defined process for quality enhancement. The University is encouraged to develop further a process to move quality assurance from a compliance culture into one of enhancement.

QA champions and team members are chosen from among different Colleges and administrative units and each champion has their own team. The main task to date assigned to these champions was to develop the SER. One of the QA responsibilities is to provide all University stakeholders with systematic feedback on performance of the programmes, but it was not clear during interviews with employees and students that this has been fully operationalised across the University, particularly in the administration levels. Members of the Administration units are under the impression that their responsibility towards quality assurance ends by providing the University with a suite of data and information to evaluate the overall performance of the University. The Panel suggest that AU develops a shared understanding on the crucial role that the administration staff members need to play in managing the quality within the institution as a whole and within their own units in particular.

Recommendation-11

HERU recommends that Ahlia University, through a University-wide debate, develop a shared understanding about the role of the administration units in managing quality within the institution as a whole and within their own units in particular.

6. Quality of Teaching and Learning

The University has established processes for approval and review of its programmes to ensure standards. As mentioned earlier, the University currently offers 18 graduate and undergraduate programmes which include, in conjunction with Brunel University, a PhD programme. At present there are no examples of programmes being externally accredited although this forms part of the University's plans for the future. The system of external examiner scrutiny is only applied to Masters' dissertations and projects. The quality of teaching and learning could be enhanced by more external examination of students' work and the University may wish to consider the adoption of an external examiner system for all assessed work. (More details are provided in section 4 of this Report.)

There is a policy on the three-year review of programmes and there is a process for the approval of new programmes. However, through interviews, it was evident to the Panel that the three-year review is not scheduled consistently and not all staff members are aware of the existence of such a policy. AU is encouraged to put in place a long-term review schedule to ensure all programmes are reviewed within each cycle.

Recommendation-12

HERU recommends that Ahlia University put in place a long-term review schedule to ensure that all programmes have regular and consistent cycles of review that leads to continuous improvements.

The Panel notes that different departments within AU revise their programmes to ensure that they meet international standards based on good practices. For example, the IT Department has used the ACM/IEEE IT curriculum guidelines 'Information Technology-2008: Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate Degree Programmes in Information Technology' to review and revise its undergraduate programme. The Masters programmes in IT and Computer Science are being aligned to standards in the 'MSIS 2006: Model Curriculum and Guidelines for Graduate Degree Programmes in Information Systems'. The College of Business and Finance is in the process of revising its undergraduate and MBA programmes in accordance with the guidelines of the Association of Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), and all of the undergraduate programmes in the College of Business & Finance are closely modelled on equivalent Brunel undergraduate specializations for which Brunel has AACSB accreditation.

The Panel studied the Teaching and Learning Plan provided through the Self-Evaluation Report. It provides objectives but these are not sufficient. Moreover, there was no evidence, through different interview sessions, of a shared understanding of this Plan. Teaching and

learning issues are fragmented throughout different committees and councils. The VP: Academic Affairs has a strategic role for academic affairs and advises faculty members when required. However the VP: Planning and Development chairs the TLRC and e-learning committees. Whilst the VP: Academic Affairs provides valuable advice to academic staff, there appears to be a gap at the operational level in organising learning and teaching development. The Panel urges AU to adopt a strategy to operationalize its Teaching and Learning Plan so that it provides further direction, develop a process to monitor the implementation of the Plan, and coordinate staff development programmes on teaching methodologies, assessment and pedagogies in a more centralized manner.

Recommendation-13

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a strategy to operationalize its Teaching and Learning Plan and develop and implement a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Plan.

Recommendation-14

HERU recommends that Ahlia University strengthen the mechanisms to maintain a coordinated overview of the Teaching, Learning and Research Committee, the Curriculum Committee and the E-Learning Committee.

In meetings with faculty members, the Panel was pleased to note faculty members' commitment to teaching and research. Likewise in meetings with students it was confirmed that the majority of students were generally satisfied with the academic staff and their teaching. Faculty members, including part-time staff, clearly articulated their understanding of programme and course learning outcomes.

During interviews with students, the Panel heard that faculty members are approachable and helpful. Faculty members make clear to students their office hours. This includes part-time faculty members who are allocated their own offices and have the same opportunity as full-time faculty members to contribute to scholarly activities. In addition, the President meets with the students both formally and informally.

Commendation-7

HERU commends Ahlia University for the commitment of teaching staff and the ready access students have to teaching staff members and senior management.

The University uses Moodle as its Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and the head of Information Communication Technology (ICT) is charged with training staff in the use of Moodle. However, the Panel did not find any support provided to advise faculty members on the use of this technology to enhance learning and teaching. Moodle at present is used as a management tool and a system for depositing some learning materials. Although all faculty members are encouraged to use Moodle it is clear from interviews with students and from studying the online system that not all faculty members place their course materials online. Students are trained by faculty members on how to access the course materials on the VLE. Technologies impact on all aspects of the learning process, including teaching, assessment and communication. The Panel suggests that in the light of continued changes in technologies and the changing role of e-learning in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, AU needs to reconsider its use of VLE.

High level decisions on teaching and learning are made by the University Council. The University has a separate committee for learning, teaching and research and an e-learning Committee. There does not appear to be a strong link between these two committees. If e-learning is to be fully integrated into teaching and learning then these two committees need to work closely together. This would enable technology to be used to enhance learning and teaching, as at present it is an add-on, with too much focus on the technology and not enough on the pedagogy.

Recommendation-15

HERU recommends that Ahlia University provide faculty members with development opportunities and appropriate levels of support to ensure that full advantage is taken of its e-learning facilities in enhancing teaching and learning.

The teaching rooms are traditionally laid out and teaching and learning pedagogy is largely focused along traditional lines. There are lectures, workshops, practical sessions, seminars, and presentations; the University also offers internships in organisations. Faculty members use a range of assessment methods, including formative assessment by means of quizzes and in class tests. Summative assessment includes assignments, examinations, presentations and practical projects. In addition students who are on internships or practical placements are given an evaluation of their work. Whilst employers are requested to evaluate internships, the Panel found that employers are not given any guidance on what they should include in their reports. They are not asked by the University to contribute to curriculum design, the only exception to this being on the Physiotherapy programmes. The University needs to develop and disseminate the criteria through which internship students can be evaluated.

Recommendation-16

HERU recommends that Ahlia University clearly develop and implement a process through which students on internship and practical placements are evaluated by well-defined assessment criteria.

There are very few common learning spaces for students to undertake group work and as a result some students arrange to meet off-campus. Each lecture room, however, has a data projector and computer. Students have access to computer laboratories but there is no system which allows them to book these facilities. The Panel suggests that this be addressed.

The University appoints a faculty member from the relevant field of study as an academic advisor for each student in order to help them make responsible decisions when developing their study plans, e.g. to ensure their plans are compatible with their academic potential and with their career and life goals. Students are also encouraged to talk to other faculty members and registration staff. The Panel found that students do not always make use of their academic adviser and may prefer to discuss matters with Student Council representatives in their College. The Panel is of the view that AU needs to evaluate its student advisory system to ensure that it is useful to students and that faculty members have detailed guidelines on the scope of their role as an academic advisor.

Recommendation-17

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its academic advising mechanism and to ensure that faculty members are well informed about the scope of their role as academic advisors.

All programmes at AU have Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). Each programme is designed to ensure that its learning outcomes include the skills and knowledge which the students must acquire under that programme. The University Council appointed an *ad hoc* committee, to develop ILOs in accordance with international standards and disseminate them to faculty members for inclusion in syllabi/course specification sheets. Such ILOs address generic skills and general knowledge (sometimes referred to as 'graduate attributes') as well as specific skills and particular knowledge pertaining to each programme and course. The ILOs focus on promoting student-centred learning, life-long learning and encapsulate the generic skills and knowledge that all graduates of the institution should possess. To an extent this has been successful. Programme descriptions, including their ILOs, are made publicly available by AU through the Catalogue, programme-specific brochures and the website. However, all course ILOs have not yet been mapped to the programme ILOs. This is a work in progress. The format of course files for every offered programme has been standardized across the University.

Staff development programmes are conducted in departments on how to structure course files and incorporate ILOs into course syllabi/specification sheets. Each Chairperson of a department monitors learning outcomes contained in syllabi written by department members and reports to the Dean of their respective College. Chairpersons of all departments provide advice to faculty members on the appropriate documentation to be produced, including how to map ILOs. However, it is not clear to the Panel how assessment is linked to ILOs. There is evidence in examples of course syllabi provided to the Panel that there is some linkage. AU should continue to ensure that ILOs are developed for every course and that they are mapped, not only to course content, but also to assessments at all levels. (For more details on assessment see section 4 of this Report.)

Affirmation-5

HERU affirms Ahlia University's efforts in continuing to develop and review its programme and course Intended Learning Outcomes and to link them to assessment.

The University monitors the satisfaction of students through student surveys, exit surveys and alumni surveys, the latter two being works in progress. Satisfaction surveys conducted to date reveal a high level of satisfaction with the institution and in particular the standard of teaching. The online survey tool has been developed by the Director of IT through consultation with the Centre for Measurement and Evaluation (CME), and results are automatically generated thus making the gathering and analysis of data very efficient. This is now obligatory and students cannot access their examination results until they complete the survey. The results of this survey are fed back to: the individual lecturer, the heads of departments, the Deans, the VP: Academic Affairs, and the Office of CME and the University President. Action is taken to investigate any problems emerging out of the survey. Enforcing students to complete the survey might, in the Panel's opinion, lead to results being unreliable. This concern was also raised by faculty members. There is no evidence on improvements being achieved as a result of these surveys or that results of the surveys being fed-back to the students.

The quality of teaching is also judged through the peer evaluation programme. This scheme however is only at the pilot phase and to date only four lecturers have been observed. It is therefore too early to make a judgement on this scheme but the Panel encourages the University to continue to roll out this initiative and evaluate its progress. (See Affirmation 8.)

The University's processes for supporting teaching and learning are generally operating effectively and the support given to students provides a firm foundation for their learning experience. There is an appropriate staff/student ratio.

Faculty members are well qualified with many of them holding PhD qualifications and the institution places emphasis on research and there is a growing research agenda. Faculty are given a financial bonus for publications in refereed journals and presenting papers at conferences. At present research helps faculty members gain promotion but more work is needed to assist faculty members in starting and advancing their research activities and to ensure that research directly advantages the University; the Panel did not find evidence on how research underpins teaching. (This will be addressed in section 10 of this Report.)

The University Council has decided to introduce external advisory boards which are attached to each College. The advisory board members will comprise local and global business representatives. The Panel suggests when introduced, this initiative is monitored and evaluated.

Affirmation-6

HERU affirms Ahlia University's decision to introduce external advisory boards for all its Colleges.

7. Student Support

All AU students are given a copy of the Student Guidebook, which contains details on admission, programme study plan and programme requirements. (See section 4 of this Report.) Students are also assigned, after registration, an academic advisor. However, the Panel was informed through interviews that the academic advisory system is underutilized in most cases. (See section 6 of this Report.) Students registered in the Brunel PHD WR programmes are allocated a secondary supervisor from AU, the primary supervisor being from Brunel University. The Panel notes with appreciation that the PhD students interviewed by the Panel were satisfied with the feedback and support they receive from both advisors and the overall support they receive from AU.

The University attracts students from other countries, mainly from neighbouring countries and the Panel is pleased that there is an International Officer to assist foreign students. AU's international links with other institutions are established and such links could be viewed as a means of ensuring the relevance and quality of AU's higher education provision. The Panel encourages the University to give systematic attention to the role that internationalisation of the student body plays in AU's understanding of its Mission of responding to regional skills and technology needs.

The Dean of the Student Affairs is responsible for overseeing all student services provided by the University. Students are provided with counselling services. At the time of the site

visit, there was only one counsellor for over 1800 students and there was no counsellor for staff members. The Panel was informed that the student counsellor provides students with counselling sessions as needed and that she follows cases with great care. The counsellor's office is at the centre of the campus making it easy for students to spot. However, this might hinder the privacy some individuals need. Through interviews, the Panel found that AU is in the process of employing a professional therapist. The Panel supports the University's action in this regard.

While AU has a room dedicated as a nursing room, the University does not employ any medical support personnel. It depends on the lecturer teaching in the physiotherapy department to intervene during emergency cases. The Panel was assured, through interviews that the University is in the process of employing a chartered nurse. The Panel supports this initiative.

Affirmation-7

HERU affirms Ahlia University's efforts to strengthen its student support services.

AU provides other student support, such as accommodation for female international students, (see section 9 of this Report) and transportation to and from clinical training sessions through the Student Service Office, which reports to the Dean of Student Affairs. Whilst the Panel appreciates the amount of work done in this area, and acknowledges the commitment of the staff delivering them, it is of the view that the department's capacity needs to be strengthened in the face of the increasing numbers of students and staff members.

The Student Activities Services provides a wide range of activities such as sports, arts, cultural, and academic activities and recreation trips. The Panel also notes the financial support the University provides to its Student Council. It was encouraged by the amount of financial, physical and moral support students receive from AU staff, including the senior management. AU's commitment towards the students' well-being is evident through its support of the Student Council activities and through providing access for its students to use sport facilities outside the campus, in its attempt to overcome the limitation exerted by the lack of facilities on the present campus.

Commendation-8

HERU commends Ahlia University's commitment to the physical and emotional well-being of its students.

8. Human Resources

The University employs appropriate and qualified faculty members and staff which enable it to achieve its Vision and Mission and provide good quality education. There has been a growth in student numbers which has been matched generally by a growth in staff numbers. The staff student ratio is appropriate. The recruitment of support staff is ongoing but further support is required as a result of growing student numbers. There are many policies governing the activities of the Human Resource (HR) Department and the University keeps records of all staff which includes detailing their nationalities, qualifications and work status. The HR Department also keeps records of staff development.

All staff members joining the University undertake an induction programme which involves an introduction to the University. The University provides a detailed staff handbook which is circulated among staff members. There is no induction for teaching and learning nor is there a formal induction programme for faculty in their departments. Although mentors are assigned to support new faculty, this has been introduced only recently and so its effectiveness cannot be measured. The teaching load for staff is 15 teaching hours per week and the remainder of the hours (40 in total) are dedicated to administration, research, research supervision, and academic guidance. Each faculty member is expected to teach five courses per semester, however, the Panel found that some senior staff members have a reduction of this teaching load. In addition, office hours are made available for students. This was confirmed in conversations with students. Administrative staff members use a clocking in system and also work 40 hours per week.

All new faculty members are expected to be highly qualified, usually possessing a PhD. The University also provides support for staff members through training programmes organised by the HR department. As stated in section 4 of this Report, development of faculty members is shared across three departments. Research development is managed by the Dean of Graduate Studies, whilst other academic development needs are considered by the Director of Continuing Education. The Training Officer also provides some courses for faculty members, such as improvement in IT and Moodle capabilities. There is no centre for pedagogical and scholarship development. However, TLRC is assigned with researching and disseminating best practise in assessment. Through interviews and documentations, the Panel could not find evidence of synergy between the operations of these structures. From 2008-2010 a total of 28 workshops have been organised; of these eight were delivered by Brunel University around the PhD WR programme and there is a repetition of themes of some workshops. The Panel is of the view that AU needs to develop a more systematic approach towards its faculty development in order for them to remain abreast in teaching, and learning, research.

Recommendation-18

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a systematic and coordinated approach for the development of faculty members, in order for them to remain up-to-date in teaching, and learning and research.

There is a budget to support research development. Some faculty members who do not possess a PhD are given the opportunity to pursue the PhD programme offered jointly by AU and Brunel University. At present six members of staff are enrolled on the PhD programme. Faculty members are encouraged to produce good quality journal research papers. The scheme to increase the research output of staff members provides incentives in two ways: staff members are given time to pursue research and there is also a financial reward once staff members have papers published. Faculty members are fully financed to attend up to two conferences per year. The Panel would like the University to develop a mechanism to support emerging researchers in line with the institution's strategic goals.

There are performance assessments for administrative staff which enables managers to evaluate their staff and identify training needs. This assessment is reported annually. However the evidence reveals that the reviews do not use the rubric provided and the assessments are not detailed. They mainly consist of a summative judgement supported by a one line evaluation. In addition, the person being evaluated does not see or sign off the evaluation. Moreover, the connection between this process and training and development is unclear. The Panel encourages the University to address this matter.

At present there is no equivalent process for faculty members. However evidence were provided that, from mid-June 2010, in addition to peer review reports and results of student satisfaction surveys, each member of faculty will be asked to complete a self-evaluation survey which will be passed to the College Dean and then to the Dean of Graduate Studies and onto the CME. All these reports will be summarised and submitted to the VP: Academic Affairs and the President. At present, the Deans make decisions regarding the professional development needs of their staff. The Panel was unable to reach any firm view about the efficiency of these newly devised arrangements. However, the Panel suggests the University link the output of the performance evaluation process of faculty members to their development plans.

Affirmation-8

HERU affirms Ahlia University's effort to develop and implement a formal, multi-input process to assess the performance of its faculty members.

Recommendation-19

HERU recommends that Ahlia University further develop and implement a mechanism to connect its faculty professional development process to the staff performance assessment.

The Panel learned from interviewees that the intended system for the performance management of faculty members does not measure achievement of individuals' responsibilities with regard to institutional goals, but is rather used as a means to promote individual development. The Panel is of the view that this limits the usefulness of the performance management system to drive progress towards achieving the University's strategic goals.

There is a clear promotion policy for faculty members which emphasises good teaching, research output and community service. Promotions are considered through the Appointments and Promotions Committee, which is headed by the President. This policy is accessible on the website. The Panel was pleased to learn from interviews that faculty members, including new staff, are aware of the policy and are clear upon what they need to do to be promoted.

9. Infrastructure, Physical and other Resources

At the time of the site visit AU was leasing 16,000 sq m of the GOSI complex (originally built as a shopping mall) located at Manama, the capital city of Bahrain. The Panel toured the facilities in the current campus. It found, through interviews, that most of the students and the staff members are satisfied with AU's campus due to the proximity of facilities to downtown and the friendly atmosphere. However, teaching and learning spaces, including classroom sizes and organizations were identified as a problem, due to the limitation in the layout of the current campus. The Panel recognizes the limited current physical infrastructure in some of the services, such as the library and the car parking lot. The space problem in the Panel's view might make some of the University plans unrealistic to be implemented before AU moves to its envisaged new campus.

The Panel saw evidence of land being leased from the government and some elements of a plan, such as budget allocation and timeframe, for the proposed new campus. The Panel acknowledges the University's Plan to move to a permanent purpose-built campus and suggests that AU develops a detailed plan on the objectives, projected capacities and functionalities of the new campus with a clear timeline to commence with the finalisation of the plans and building of the new campus.

Affirmation-9

HERU affirms Ahlia University's plans to move to a purpose-built campus.

The current campus accommodates special needs students and takes particular care to facilitate students with mobility impairment. Bathrooms, lifts, ramps, classrooms are accessible by persons with disabilities.

AU provides 12 flats to accommodate 23 international female students and has employed recently a dormitory supervisor at the students' request. Transportation is provided from and to the dormitory. During interviews with international students the Panel heard of their satisfaction with the services they receive. Male students are provided, upon request, with a list of possible accommodation through the Student Service Office.

Policies on health and safety are in place and because the GOSI complex is a government owned property, it meets occupational health and safety regulations of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Furthermore, AU provides a suite of insurance coverage for health and safety. While AU does not have a health and medical clinic, it uses a dedicated room for nursing and utilises its physiotherapy physicians when needed. (More details are provided in section 7 of this Report.)

The institution provides sustained access to sufficient information and learning resources to achieve its Mission and fully support all of its academic programmes. For example, there is a list of 17 online databases which can be accessed both on- and off-campus. PhD WR students are provided access to Brunel electronic resources. The Library has two full-time and one part-time librarian to assist the students and staff members with their needs. They also provide orientation tours upon request. The library physical layout and size, however, is very small to serve the six Colleges with 18 graduate and undergraduate programmes. It has a total of 4754 hard copy books (4300 titles) and has 17 computers to be used by students and by staff members conducting orientation programmes. The designated reading and study areas in the library are very limited and insufficient for the number of students. All interviewees indicated that the library needs more space and more books and periodicals. There is evidence that the University provides the library with books requested by faculty members. However, this is on an *ad hoc* basis. The Panel suggests that, while occupying the current campus, AU expands its library and provide more space for study, including general study rooms to accommodate the needs of its student body.

Recommendation-20

HERU recommends that Ahlia University expand its learning resource area and its library facilities.

Students and staff members have access to wireless connectivity throughout the campus and e-mail services which are managed by the Information Communication Technology Centre (ICTC). All classrooms are provided with data show projectors. AU has six computer laboratories with around 20 computers in each room. Two of these laboratories are equipped with more advanced computers and are used for design courses. General purpose computer laboratories can be used by students when there are no teaching sessions. However, there is no mechanism for booking these laboratories in advance. The ICTC provides the support needed including training end users and through interviews, it was evident to the Panel that both students and staff members are satisfied with the amount and quality of services they receive.

The ICTC structure and remit has been reviewed and restructured recently and is expected to play a main role in supporting the University in achieving its strategic goals and objectives. Roles and responsibilities for ICT management within the institution are clearly stated and the ICTC appears to have clear objectives, defined processes and adequate tools. The University has a process for the maintenance and replacement of physical ICT resources. This appears to be adequate at the present time. The ICTC has a secure infrastructure and follows local periodical data storage backup procedures for all services. The Centre has a clear IT risk management strategy plan in place and a clear vision of benchmarking itself with national, regional and international universities.

Commendation-9

HERU commends Ahlia University for the varied, high standard, Information Technology services provided by the University

The Panel notes the measures used to ensure security and to safeguard data. However, it encourages the University to provide provision for off-campus backup. This area for improvement is identified by the University in its SER.

Affirmation-10

HERU affirms Ahlia University's decision to provide an off-campus backup of its data and its plans to enhance further its Information Technology's disaster recovery system.

In addition to the six general-purpose computer laboratories, AU has purpose-built laboratories for physiotherapy and interior design. The two laboratories designated for physiotherapy are limited in size and infrastructure. The Panel is of the view that the laboratories are under-equipped and need to be up-graded. Clinical training for the Physiotherapy Programme is furnished through Salmany Medical Centre and different health centres within Bahrain.

Recommendation-21

HERU recommends that Ahlia University further develop its physiotherapy laboratories to provide students with an appropriate teaching and learning experience.

10. Research

AU has developed recently a Research Management Plan which is part of the University's Academic Plan. This plan was developed as part of the University's self-evaluation exercise in preparation for the institutional review conducted by this Panel. The Plan specifies AU strategic goal in relation to research activities. Although there is an awareness of the need to have some sort of institutional approach to research, the Panel did not see evidence of a shared understanding of a strategic approach towards research. Senior management is yet to discuss and agree on the niche areas in which the University can conduct and concentrate its research activities.

Whilst the Panel acknowledges the individual efforts and research outputs of some academic staff, the Panel is of the view that AU needs to develop a comprehensive research plan, which includes a conceptual framework for research, which is aligned to the institution's Mission, an implementation plan and identify the appropriate governance and management structures, which will be responsible for the implementation, monitoring and reviewing of the plan. This should be in line with the University's five-year Strategic Plan and directed to the growth of a research culture and capacity building. Furthermore, the Panel is of the view that the plan should contain elements that suggest that students, even in their early years of study, can be motivated by their lecturers to pursue postgraduate studies.

Recommendation-22

HERU recommends that Ahlia University (i) develop and implement, through a University wide-debate, a comprehensive research plan that identifies the University's niche research areas and which includes a conceptual framework and an implementation plan that is aligned with the institution's Mission and its Strategic Plan, and (ii) identify the appropriate governance and management structure responsible for the implementation, monitoring and reviewing of the Plan.

The Panel recognises senior management's commitment, support and investment to promote and develop a research culture at AU. Academics, generally, are pleased with the incentive schemes associated with the production of research outputs, especially the support provided to attend conferences, other financial incentives, and the fact that research outputs contribute to their promotion opportunities. There is evidence that staff members receive reduced workloads if they are working towards their postgraduate studies. However, there does not appear to be in place a formal workload formula at the University and from information received by staff, research is undertaken as an add-on to their normal duties.

The Panel did not find that AU has a comprehensive Research Code of Ethics that gives expression to the standards and values that apply and to which all AU researchers commit themselves. This is of concern especially in the presence of a Health and Science College. In its effort to develop a comprehensive research plan the Panel encourages AU to develop and implement clear policies and procedures for the security of research proposals and appropriate structures. This could also include a committee that deals with research ethics issues and intellectual property rights to ensure that research is not only linked to the strategic directions of AU but is appropriately managed.

Recommendation-23

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement clear policies and procedures for research proposals and implementation and that includes a research code of ethics, an ethics committee, and intellectual property rights.

AU developed recently a policy for assigning external examiners for Masters Degree Dissertations. The policy was released on 24 February 2010 and is yet to be implemented. Through interviews with external examiners, the Panel found that to date, external examiners have been evaluating Masters Dissertations with no guidance or documents besides a one page evaluation form on which to record the student's score. External examiners reflect on their experience elsewhere to evaluate AU's student dissertations. The new policy of assigning external examiners does not provide information that would assist examiners in evaluating the work of the Masters students. Moreover, external examiners are

not invited formally to provide their feedback on the evaluation process. The Panel encourages the University to develop a policy that would provide external examiners with needed information on assessing individual student's work. (See Recommendation 9.)

In its efforts to institutionalise its core functions, AU has recently developed a Post-Graduate Studies and Research By-Laws which were approved by the University Council and released on 24 February 2010. They govern all postgraduate studies and research activities at AU. The By-Laws are not widely known as they have not yet been disseminated throughout the University. The Panel endorses the University's actions and encourages the University to disseminate the By-Laws among its postgraduate students and staff.

Affirmation-11

HERU affirms Ahlia University's development of a Post-Graduate Studies and Research By-Laws and encourages the institution to disseminate them amongst its graduate students and staff.

11. Community Engagement

AU has established a Continuing Education Centre where a number of short courses and workshops directed toward industries, business and social groups are conducted. In addition to serving communities, these short courses are a source of income for the University. However, due to the international financial crisis, the Centre did not meet its targets. The University also arranges for conferences and symposiums that cover different aspects of community issues and scholarship. Students, through the Office of the Dean of Students' Affaires, are also involved in different activities, such as charity work.

The Panel notes the wide range of community engagement and service activities conducted by the different members of the University, including students. However, Community activities are fragmented and there is no evidence on how they are managed, let alone evaluated.

AU drafted a policy for community engagement on 29th April 2010 which is yet to be approved. The policy consists of the University's objective; vision and core values towards its community and key elements for implementing the policy. The policy is very broad and general. It does not identify how and who will manage community engagement. Moreover, the Panel did not find a shared understanding of community engagement or service as being the third core function of the institution as stated in the University's Mission. Given the newness of AU this is understandable. However the Panel would like to encourage the University to develop a detailed plan through which the institution: (i) conceptualizes its own understanding of community engagement; (ii) integrates its identified activities into the other core functions; and (iii) ensures that there is allocation of appropriate resources. Moreover, AU needs to develop and implement quality assurance mechanisms to monitor and evaluate community engagement.

Affirmation-12

HERU affirms Ahlia University's effort in developing an overarching Community Engagement Policy.

Recommendation-24

HERU recommends that Ahlia University develop and implement a community engagement plan to operationalize its policy, and to develop clear lines of reporting, budgeting, and a monitoring system.

12. Conclusion

Ahlia University is a young and developing institution that has developed a clear Strategic Plan and has taken major steps in institutionalising its operations and core functions and in developing key policies. The commitment of the University to quality is noted. AU has an understanding of 'quality' in terms of fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, transformation and development of a quality culture throughout the institution in which all staff members have responsibility. The University has gone through a substantial process in developing an internal QA system which is expected to play an integral part in providing all University stakeholders with systematic feedback on performance of the programmes. AU has taken a number of steps in assuring its academic standards of its programme offerings. The Panel is pleased to note the standard of AU's full- and part- time academic staff and their involvement and concern for the students' academic achievements and their well-being.

Some challenges remain. Firstly, for its internal quality assurance system to be more robust, AU needs to have a shared understanding about the role of quality assurance in relation to accountability and improvement; and how this is given effect in the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Secondly, while AU had made important moves to form linkages with highly reputed institutions globally through which the University aims to ensure its academic standards, AU now needs to implement the use of formal external benchmarking to validate the standards of its programme offerings, assessments and graduates. Thirdly, although there is an awareness of the need to have some sort of institutional approach to research and community engagement, there is no shared understanding of a strategic approach towards these two core functions. AU needs to develop comprehensive plans, that include conceptual frameworks for these two core functions, and that are aligned to the institution's Mission.

In sum, Ahlia University has set for itself a growth trajectory which is well-underway. It has a clear compass to achieve its strategic goals as outlined in its Strategic Plan; the realization of which will make a positive contribution to the social and economic development of the Kingdom of Bahrain.