



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

# Higher Education Review Unit Institutional Follow-Up Review Report

Gulf University  
Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 28 November 2011

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## 1. Overview of the Institutional Follow-up Process

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

At least one year after publication of its Institutional Review Report the institution submits to HERU a report which clearly shows how the institution has maintained and/or enhanced the commendations of the Review Report and specifies how the institution has met its affirmations and recommendations. The institution substantiates its claims with supporting documents, in the form of Appendices. Details of how the institution is monitoring and evaluating the improvement activities should also be provided.

This follow-up review process applies to all higher education institutions that have had institutional reviews undertaken by HERU.

Gulf University (GU) submitted an Improvement Plan to HERU in the required time set out in the Handbook for Institutional Reviews. In this Plan, actions were identified to tackle the 40 Recommendations contained in the Institutional Review Report. In October 2011 GU submitted its Progress Report, which contained a narrative and documentary evidence about the progress the institution has made thus far in implementing quality improvements.

The Panel responsible for the Follow-up comprised the Executive Director of HERU and three Senior Directors, one of whom was the Director responsible for co-ordinating this site visit. The evidence base included: the Institutional Improvement Plan and the appendices submitted in October 2011 and the Institutional Review Report. The Institution also submitted supporting evidences on 24 November 2011 and during site visit. Interviews were also held during the site visit with a range of senior managers, academics, administrative staff, students, employers and alumni. These interviews allow the Panel to triangulate the evidence.

The Follow-up site visit took place on 28 November 2011, the purpose of which is (i) to assess the progress made in quality enhancement and improvement of Gulf University (GU) since the institutional review in June 2009, for which the review report was published in June 2010; and (ii) develop a report which outlines the progress made about the extent to which the Recommendations have been addressed.

This Institutional Follow-up Review Report sets out the findings with regard to the Recommendations contained in the published Review Report. For ease of reading the Recommendations made in the 2010 published Review Report are clustered together (in italics) at the beginning of each sub-section where a different theme is considered. The text that follows reflects the findings of the Panel during its visit in November 2011.

## **2. Brief Overview of Gulf University**

Gulf University (GU) was established in 2001 under the name Gulf University College, which was later changed to Gulf University. The University is located at Sanad in the Middle Governorate of Bahrain. The campus currently comprises a four-story building and a compound of six smaller buildings and an additional 3-storey building in the neighbourhood.

GU consists of five Colleges, namely, College of Administrative and Financial Sciences; College of Engineering; College of Computer Engineering and Sciences; College of Law; and College of Education. There are fourteen academic departments within these five Colleges. A large number of programmes, consisting of 18 Bachelor's, 26 Master's and 21 Doctoral degrees, are offered by the 5 Colleges of the University. However, at the time of the follow-up site visit, many programmes were not accepting new students, limiting the new admission to 13 Bachelor and 17 Master programmes.

## **3. Findings of the Follow-up Review by Theme**

In the following sub-sections, the progress made in addressing the Recommendations under each theme is considered. The Recommendations from the Institutional Review Report are clustered together in italics.

### **3.1 Mission, Planning and Governance**

- 3.1.1. *HERU recommends Gulf University review its Mission in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and ensure there is good understanding and support for the Mission as the foundation and key driver of University activities.*
- 3.1.2. *HERU recommends that Gulf University activate the Board of Trustees and ensure that they meet regularly to discharge their responsibilities for governance of the University.*
- 3.1.3. *HERU recommends that Gulf University ensure that there is a clear separation of management and governance functions with clear articulation of the boundaries and different accountabilities.*
- 3.1.4. *HERU recommends that Gulf University put in place appropriate mechanisms for including students in decision-making processes at various organisational levels.*
- 3.1.5. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement its policies and procedures across the institution and develop a strategy to ensure staff awareness and understanding.*

3.1.6. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement a comprehensive strategic plan accompanied with key performance indicators that is in line with the University's Mission.*

3.1.7. *HERU recommends that Gulf University give adequate delegations authority and control of the budget to the Deans so that they are empowered to lead and manage their colleges effectively.*

GU now has a new mission statement that was developed through a wide-ranging consultation process across the University. While the President gave a clear articulation about what the statement means, the Panel did not find the written statement to be as rich and reflective. As it stands the Panel is not convinced that the Mission provides the foundation as the key driver of the University's activities. However GU's vision statement is very full and could be more aptly referred to as a mission statement. This fills any gaps found in the mission. Of the four scholarly activities that are part of the vision, two of the core functions are explicitly mentioned; i.e. teaching and learning and research. Community engagement could be thought to be implicitly embedded within the fourth scholarly activity.

There is now a functioning Board of Trustees which has three standing committees; Finance, Academic Affairs, and Membership. There is also provision for *ad hoc* committees. The Panel was pleased to note that part of the remit of the Membership Committee is to assess the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees. In October 2011 the Board of Trustees adopted new bylaws which clearly define its responsibilities and authority. This is one aspect of its attempt to separate the governance and management functions of the University. In one of the bylaws it states that performance appraisal of the President will be conducted. The Panel received a rather scant job description of the role of the President and so was uncertain how a meaningful performance appraisal could take place.

GU has new policies and procedures which have been developed by consultants and discussed in departments and the College Council. These have been adopted by the University Council. Policies are disseminated in a number of ways, such as handbooks, the website, college and department meetings.

GU's Strategic Plan was developed and has clear key performance indicators. It was adopted in July 2011 and endorsed by the Board of Trustees in October 2011. The Colleges are now drafting their strategic plans in the light of the institutional plan. As the latter has not long been adopted it is in the early stages of implementation and therefore its effectiveness could not be assessed.

The budgeting process now starts in the departments and after going through various GU procedures it is consolidated and approved by the Board of Trustees. Once approved, the Deans now manage their budgets which establishes the link between budget, resource allocation and the provision of programme offerings.

Students representatives now participate in all standing committees of the University with the exception of the Board of Trustees.

GU has now put in place a number of functions and policies that gives it a good foundation to grow the University. However, given its current status the Panel encourages GU to refrain from admitting postgraduate students and to focus their attention on providing undergraduates with a quality teaching and learning experience so that it produces graduates who have the necessary attributes to compete successfully in the world of work and who contribute to the betterment of society at large.

## **3.2 Academic Standards**

- 3.2.1. *HERU recommends that Gulf University address with urgency the discrepancies between the actual credit hours of its offered programmes and the general specification of the credit hour range adopted by the University.*
- 3.2.2. *HERU recommends that Gulf University involve external stakeholders, such as employers, industry experts, professional bodies and academic peers from other universities, in the development and review of all its programmes to ensure currency and relevance to the labour market.*
- 3.2.3. *HERU recommends that Gulf University establish an appropriate mechanism at University level for the systematic review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the admission criteria in all programmes.*
- 3.2.4. *HERU recommends that Gulf University seek appropriate ways of ensuring that the agreements and MOUs it has entered into with other universities are used effectively to enhance the design, delivery and quality of its programmes as well as the quality of the student experience.*
- 3.2.5. *HERU recommends that Gulf University refrain from the use of any statements inferring that “the University of London and other British, American and Canadian universities” are currently involved in the design and delivery of its programmes.*
- 3.2.6. *HERU recommends that Gulf University ensure the articulation of learning outcomes for all offerings, including postgraduate programmes and that course descriptions and syllabi made available to students specify the intended learning outcomes.*
- 3.2.7. *HERU recommends that Gulf University introduce external moderation as part of its assessment system and in addition, implement mechanisms to ensure the internal validation and integrity of the examination process.*

GU stated in its progress report that the University has reviewed all its programmes to ensure that there are no discrepancies between the general university specifications and the actual credit hours requirements for each of its offerings. The University has also reviewed its general specifications for its offerings. It is stated in its Student Handbook and Advisory Guide Handbook that the minimum credit hours requirements for the completion of a degree is 120, 42, and 60 for Bachelor, Masters and PhD degrees respectively, except for student registered in PhD programmes prior to the academic year 2009 – 2010 who are required to complete 90 – 94 credit hours. Studying the

university's catalogue, the Panel notes that all newly designed programmes are now within the University's general specifications.

GU has established, for each department, an advisory board comprising regular external members who have the right to vote and *ex officio* members that include the Dean, head of department, faculty members and students representatives. A document on articles of organisation of these boards was approved by the University Council on 9 May 2010.

During the site visit, the Panel met with a range of external members and saw evidence that the boards are active and have been involved in the review of most of the programmes offered by the University. The Panel, however, encourages GU to expand further the range of industrial representation within those boards and ensure that, in line with the articles of organisation of these boards, the chairman of the board is a regular member.

GU has also contacted a number of businesses seeking information about its graduates. However, limited feedback was received at the time of the site visit. There is also some evidence of feedback received from external examiners who have been appointed on a single time base to evaluate the content and management of a given programme, examination process and the content of some specific courses' examination papers and their assessments. However, when studying the documentation of the programme reviews conducted during the first half year of 2010, it is evident that there is no formal system for incorporating the external feedback within these reviews.

One of the admission criteria of GU requires that applicants for undergraduate programmes have a high school score of 70% or higher in their 'Tawjehia' or equivalent high school diplomas. Applicants with lower scores are requested to take preparatory courses. To evaluate the efficiency of its admission criteria, GU conducted a comparison of achievements between students who have taken preparatory courses and students who have been accepted directly to a programme of study. Studies were conducted both on a College and on a programme level. In both studies the performance of students who have completed preparatory courses was compared to students who did not have to take preparatory courses. The studies came to the conclusion that, except for Law programmes, preparatory courses improved student performance. The studies are vague; student samples were selected randomly and all other admission criteria were not taken into consideration or normalized. For example, the high school score, the preparatory courses undertaken and the achieved grade are not specified. Moreover, the studies were conducted on a small sample size (four to five students) and for a single student cohort. It is not clear whether the findings are statistically significant or not. The University did not review all its admission criteria for undergraduate programmes and did not do any study on its admission criteria for graduate programmes. While the Panel notes the two studies discussed above, it urges the University to develop a formal mechanism for the systematic review and evaluation of the effectiveness of all its admission criteria for all its offerings.

GU states in its progress report that the University has established several partnerships that are providing real benefits. This includes signed Memoranda of Understanding

[MoU] with Wales University (UK), Middlesex University (UK), Al Azhar University (Egypt) and Applied Science University (Bahrain). In addition to joint academic collaboration, GU envisages that the MoUs signed with the first three institutions will enable GU to offer joint programmes on both undergraduate and graduate levels. These MoUs, however, are awaiting HEC approval. Meanwhile, the Panel saw evidence of some activities on academic levels such as inviting faculty members from these institutions to perform as external examiners or to review some of GU's programmes. The Panel encourages the University to expand further such collaboration to benefit fully from these MoUs.

At the time of the first institutional review conducted by HERU of QAAET (June 2009), the Review Panel found that GU used the caption 'working together with the University of London, British, American and Canadian universities' in its promotion materials. As the caption was misleading and was not reflecting the real situation, GU was recommended to refrain from using it. At the follow-up review, the Panel found that the University has replaced the caption with another that reads 'Your first choice for quality higher education'. The University could not, however, state the factual basis upon which such caption can be said to reflect its real status. The Panel suggests that GU chooses a caption that stems from its current status and its claims can be supported with clear evidence.

The Panel saw evidence of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) being developed and reviewed both on programme and course levels. The ILOs are clearly documented in the programme specifications and course syllabi which is said to be distributed to students in the first week of each semester. Through discussion with the students, however, it was evident to the Panel that student knowledge about the course ILOs and their relations to programme ILOs was minimal. Moreover, studying the samples of course files submitted by the University as extra evidence revealed that for a number of courses taught in Arabic, the detailed syllabi documents were provided in English only, limiting its usefulness among students and faculty members. GU needs to ensure that ILOs, course descriptions and syllabi are available in the language specified for the teaching of the course and that students are informed about the ILOs and the reason for them.

In the last two years, GU has introduced the use of external examiners as its external moderation system. The Panel saw evidence that GU has engaged in a process of appointing external examiners to some of its programmes. In most cases, however, these processes were *ad hoc* with no clear terms of reference. The services provided by external examiners ranged from a full quality review of a given programme to the review and evaluation of the assessment methods and examination content. GU has developed an external examiner guideline which was reviewed in May 2011. The guideline stipulates the purpose of the external assessment, the role, the procedure of nominating and appointment of external examiners, feedback from external examiner and its use in programme review and improvement. In the revised guideline, the academic standards of graduates from the HERU programme review handbook are used to define the purpose of external examination. The guideline has been approved recently and there is no evidence as yet of its implementation. The Panel suggests that the University

develops a mechanism to monitor the implementation and to evaluate the effectiveness of its external examiner system across all colleges and programmes.

The university-wide Examination Board, re-established in October 2010, is responsible for the management of all examination processes and for maintaining the integrity of the execution of the examination. There is evidence that examination processes and procedures have been reviewed and updated. Once the examinations are graded by the lecturers and final course grades are assigned, they are reviewed and approved by the head of department and then by the College Council. In case of anomalies, grades are discussed with the faculty member in charge of the course. During the site visit, the Panel was also informed that a committee has been established to revise the academic assessment system. The Panel encourages GU to develop further an internal moderation system that is proactive and ensures that examination and grade assigning is consistent among all its colleges and programmes.

### **3.3 Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

*3.3.1. HERU recommends that Gulf University develop a systematic and robust approach to quality assurance which is centred on continuous quality improvement rather than compliance and correction and is integrated with all aspects of the University including governance, administration and the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.*

The University has established a Quality Assurance Directorate comprising three units these being, Internal Quality Assurance Unit, Quality Planning Unit and Evaluation & Accreditation Unit. Policies that outline the responsibilities of the Directorate and the Director's duties have also been developed as part of the University's policies. In interviews, the Panel was informed that the Directorate's staff meet on a regular basis; every month in addition to informal daily meetings to oversee the implementation of quality assurance practices throughout the University. A strategic plan was also recently developed by the Directorate's staff and includes four strategic objectives, initiatives and Key Performance Indicators.

The Panel also learned that the Directorate has carried out several initiatives, such as delivering workshops, conducting surveys as well as internal quality audits. In interviews, the Panel heard some examples of good practices being shared across colleges such as the writing of self-evaluation reports and internal review of programmes. The Panel encourages the University to build on these initiatives and to progress its work on the development of the Quality Assurance Manual as well as regularly monitor the achievement of its quality assurance strategic goals, in order to have a systematic approach to quality assurance that is embedded in all aspects of the University.

### 3.4 Quality of Teaching and Learning

- 3.4.1. *HERU recommends that Gulf University formulate an institution-wide academic standing committee for the consideration of all academic matters including approval of new programmes and courses referred through the departmental and college councils.*
- 3.4.2. *HERU recommends that Gulf University implement systematic reviews of programmes and courses such as outlined in the Gulf University Policy document and include ratification by a university-wide academic advisory body.*
- 3.4.3. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop an appropriate teaching and learning strategy for weekend students that ensure that they have an equivalent and quality learning experience as the full-time students.*
- 3.4.4. *HERU recommends that Gulf University review the number of postgraduate qualifications it offers to align with its capacity and infrastructure to support postgraduate courses and students.*
- 3.4.5. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop a statement of philosophy and a plan, to guide its approach to teaching and learning at an institutional level.*
- 3.4.6. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop, disseminate and implement a policy on assessment that allows for appropriate form of assessment and which includes processes for dealing with cases of plagiarism.*
- 3.4.7. *HERU recommends that Gulf University review and assess the effectiveness of its internship programmes.*
- 3.4.8. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement a system of collating the data from student evaluations and provide the data to teaching staff and heads of department so that all individual staff are aware of assessments made of their work by the students whether that is negative or positive.*
- 3.4.9. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop graduate, alumni and employer satisfaction surveys and utilise the results of these surveys to inform planning.*

GU has established an Academic Council on the 3 October 2010 which lies between the University Council and the College Councils and has a primary responsibility of commenting on all academic matters before a final decision is made by the University Council or the President. The mission statement of the Academic Council was developed by the Vice President: Academics. The Panel encourages the University to develop an inclusive mechanism for the development and review of the Academic Council's mission statement and ensure that there is a shared understanding of the mission amongst the Council's members and the University as a whole.

The remit of the Academic Council has been revised recently to ensure that there is no overlap between its role and the role of the University Council. Generally the role of the Academic Council is advisory where it can endorse academic proposals that would be

passed to the University Council for approval. The Academic Council has among its members a wide range of academics as stated in the GU policy (100.70.2). However, the criteria for the selection of the specific individuals is not stated clearly and is left to the judgement of the University President. As the Academic Council has only been established recently, it is too early to evaluate its effectiveness. However, the Panel encourages the University to develop a clear set of criteria that is used to select the Council's members and a mechanism to evaluate its performance and measure its effectiveness.

The Panel saw evidence of academic programmes being reviewed in the last two years across all colleges within GU. These reviews have resulted in changes of the curriculum of some programmes and in the closing of other programmes. Scrutinising the supporting materials submitted to the Panel reveals an inconsistency in the range of data and inputs from external and internal stakeholders used and the way through which the reviews were executed. As part of the GU policy 2011, the University developed a document on educational policies that includes an Academic Review Policy. However, the review principle section of the Policy is plagiarised from an international university. The Panel urges the University to develop a mechanism to ensure that such practice does not recur in the future. GU needs to develop its own review principle that stems from GU's own ethos.

The Review Policy calls for a regular two-year review cycle for all programmes offered by GU. An Academic Review Committee (ARC) is established to oversee these reviews. The President appoints the members of the Committee. However, the policy does not state the criteria for selection and whether the ARC consists from internal or external members. Moreover, while the policy stipulates that the Committee is appointed by the University President in phase 2 of the review (after a self-evaluation report is submitted), it also states that the Committee is responsible for the overall scheduling of the review. A matter that might cause some confusion. The Panel urges the University to revise its Review Policy to address these matters and to develop a monitoring mechanism that ensures the systematic and consistent implementation of the revised policy across the University and to measure its effectiveness in improving the learning experience of the students.

GU offers its programmes on a regular five weekday schedule and a two-day weekend schedule. 60% of all GU students are registered as weekend students. The University has taken some measures for better managing the administration and availability of learning resources for weekend students. An assistant dean has been appointed to deal with administration issues in relation to weekend students, faculty members are expected to allocate the same office hours in weekends as in weekdays and students attending weekend classes are expected now to meet the same number of hours as regular students. The Panel was also informed that the teaching hours per day of the weekend students has been reduced to an acceptable level. To overcome the differences, students are encouraged to register the remaining hours in sessions taught during the weekdays. The Panel saw evidence of a single study conducted by the Dean of Admission and Registration comparing the performance of weekend students and regular students according to average GPA achieved and pass percentile in a number of offered courses

within a single academic year. The Panel encourages the University to conduct a detailed annual cohort analysis by which it can evaluate weekend student performance and hence, take informed-decisions.

As a result of an overall review of its offerings, the University Council took a decision on 9 May 2010 to close 30 of its programmes, specifically 17 PhD programmes, seven master programmes and six BSc programmes. The decision is said to have been taken as a result of an evaluation of resources available, both human and infrastructure, and the demands from students. The Panel saw evidence of such a discussion both at departmental and college levels.

GU has developed a learning and teaching plan issued on 23 December 2010. Further to its approval, a set of workshops was conducted to familiarise the faculty members with the plan. The Panel was informed that the plan has been revised in light of the outcomes of these workshops. It is stated that the teaching philosophy of GU is based on the student being 'the core and most important element by whom all university activities are revolved around'. The Plan stipulates six main objectives to be achieved during the period 2011 – 2015 with some strategies to achieve these goals. These objectives are included in the University's Strategic Plan together with Key Performance Indicators and timeline. The Panel encourages the University to develop a university-wide mechanism to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its implementation.

GU has developed a policy on Plagiarism and installed a software 'Turnitin' used to detect and report on plagiarism. The Panel was informed that all PhD and MSc theses have to be subject to this system. However, it is left to the lecturer's discretion to decide on other course assignments. During the site visit, the Panel was informed that students caught plagiarising for the first time will be asked to resubmit their work; for the second time they will get a warning; and for the third time they will get a zero mark for their work. The student guide has a section on dealing with cases of plagiarism. It defines plagiarism and sets the punitive disciplinary action which is somewhat different than that explained by faculty members. The Panel suggests that GU ensures that there is a shared understanding of its plagiarism policy in line with what is published in the student guide. Moreover, the Panel is of the view that such punishment is lenient and might not prevent students from trying to attempt such action in other work.

The Panel saw evidence of the assessment policy being reviewed and goals being set to disseminate improvement. However, the Panel did not see evidence of input from different stakeholders, such as external examiners and students, being fed into the review process. Moreover, the Panel did not see evidence of the systematic dissemination and implementation of these improvements. The University needs to develop a mechanism to monitor and assess the implementation of the suggested improvements.

The review of the assessment policy conducted in December 2009 revealed that there is no clear policy in the evaluation and assessment of GU's internship programmes. The Academic Council has approved recently a policy to regulate the process. Committees are established on a College level to oversee the execution of the policy. The Panel saw

evidence of employer evaluation. Although the policy calls for a monthly visit by an assigned faculty member to the intern, this is not possible most of the time as 60% of the students are weekend students who are resident in another country. Moreover, the Panel did not see evidence of reporting on such visits. The Panel suggests that the University monitor the implementation and measure the effectiveness of its policy and try to find a way to follow up with students who are attending internship programmes outside Bahrain.

The Quality Assurance Directorate administers the student course evaluation surveys at the end of each semester. Results of these surveys are sent to the Dean who discusses these results and the improvement needed with the concerned faculty member. Till recently, students did not receive any formal feedback on the result of these surveys. However, from the end of the first semester of the academic year 2011-2012, the University started to post the survey results on its webpage. Moreover, the students felt, through some actions taken by the University, that their point of view is considered.

GU established an Alumni Association and its charter was approved by the University Council on 8 February 2010. Committees to follow up with the University's graduates were also developed on a university and college level. As a result, a database containing the details and emails of the University's graduates has been established. The University has also developed an employer survey which was sent to employers, through the University's graduates. However, the received response is very weak. Another survey was conducted to measure graduate satisfaction and a third to measure alumni satisfaction. Moreover, the results of these surveys have not been properly analysed or systematically used in decision-making. In general, most of these activities were conducted very recently and their effectiveness cannot be assessed.

GU needs to develop a systematic approach to the way it demonstrates, analyses, reports on, and uses the results of these surveys.

### **3.5 Student Support**

- 3.5.1. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and support academically weak students.*
- 3.5.2. *The HERU recommends that Gulf University provide professional counselling, career planning and health services to students to contribute to their well-being and academic success.*
- 3.5.3. *HERU recommends that Gulf University allocate a budget to support the work of the Gulf University Student Union.*
- 3.5.4. *HERU recommends that Gulf University review its academic advising system to make it more consistent and accessible for students needing advice and information.*
- 3.5.5. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement a system that ensures the integrity of examinations and in which students have confidence.*

The University has developed clear guidelines and procedures for the support of academically-weak students, the details of which are outlined in the University Regulation GU24-09. This regulation is included in the Student Manual, the Academic Advising Handbook, and the Faculty Handbook. In interviews, the Panel learned that the registration office has introduced a flagging system in its student information system which aims at identifying the students at academic risk. Once identified, the main responsibility for the monitoring of these students lies with their respective academic advisor, in collaboration with the Counselling Center and the Deanship of Students Affairs. In interviews with teaching faculty, the Panel was informed that the procedures for supporting at-risk students are consistently applied across all colleges. All the students interviewed by the Panel were aware of this system and were satisfied with the support provided by their academic advisors and the Counselling Center.

The University has recently established several student support facilities including the Student Guidance and Counselling Center, the Career Center and a medical clinic. The services of these facilities are overseen by the Dean of Student Affairs. The Panel heard in several interviews that the Guidance and Counselling Center plays an important role in the coordination among the academic advisors and the students. The Panel also learned that the Center's Board, which includes a student representative, meets on a regular basis to discuss its activities. The Panel was provided with a list of planned activities for the academic year 2010-2011; however, the Panel was informed that none of these proposed activities had yet been conducted. In interviews with the students, the Panel learned that the Center operates for only 3 hours daily (10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.) from Sunday to Thursday, and is staffed by six faculty members who dedicate three hours per week for the Center. The Panel recommends that the University extends the working hours of the Center and to appoint a full-time staff member in order to maximise the benefits and services offered by the Center.

The Panel also learned that a Career Center was established in November 2010 to act as a link between the students and the local labour market. The Center's Director informed the Panel of the various activities carried out by the Center including the establishment of databases for current students and alumni, the conducting of alumni surveys and the planning of career days. In interviews, the students expressed their satisfaction with the Center's services, particularly the database of potential jobs for which they receive e-mails whenever a new job is available.

The University has also issued a University Order in December 2010 regarding the setting up of a medical clinic and outlining the services it offers. During the visit to the clinic, the Panel was informed that it was established in September 2011 and is currently operating daily from 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 pm. The clinic is staffed by two nurses who provide first aid nursing services and follow up on chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma; critical conditions, on the other hand are forwarded to nearby health centres and hospitals. The students find the services offered by the clinic to be adequate for the monitoring of their health status and initial treatment.

Interviews with the university senior management and members of the Student Council confirmed that a budget (9,000 B.D. per year) has been allocated to support the students'

activities effective 2010. The students interviewed by the Panel also expressed their support and satisfaction of the Council's activities which has contributed to the enhancement of their learning experience. Copies of the Student Council's 2010-2011 expenditures were provided to the Panel; the students indicated that the allocated budget has made it possible to conduct all the listed activities.

The University has rectified the weaknesses in its academic advising system so that timely advice is provided to all students in an accessible and consistent manner. An Academic Advising Handbook (2011-2012) was recently developed and is made available to all faculty members and students. During different interviews, the Panel was informed that, upon enrolment, each student is assigned to an advisor who is responsible for guiding him/her throughout the course of his/her studies. Copies of weekly timetables of faculty members from all colleges were provided to the Panel; these clearly indicate the hours dedicated to student advising. Upon examining these timetables, the Panel noted that the designated advising hours vary from three to nine hours per week depending on the number of students assigned to each advisor. The Panel was informed, through student interviews, that they are satisfied with the revised academic advising system as it provides them with the required guidance on their academic concerns.

The University has also undertaken a number of measures to ensure the integrity of its examinations procedures. An *ad hoc* committee, comprising both faculty members and students, was formed in October 2010 to assist the Examinations Committee and suggest new improvements in the examination system. In interviews with members of the Examinations Committee, the Panel learned that new regulations have been implemented including those for proctoring arrangements, students grievance, and enhancing examination security. The Panel was also provided with the results of the survey conducted by the committee regarding examination procedures, and the actions undertaken by the University in the light of these results. Students interviewed by the Panel confirmed that there have been improvements in the examinations system and gave specific examples of new measures implemented to curtail cheating in examinations.

### **3.6 Human Resources**

- 3.6.1. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement a systematic process for the induction of new staff.*
- 3.6.2. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement a proactive approach to performance evaluation as part of a staff performance management plan that also identifies staff development needs.*
- 3.6.3. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop the staff grievance and appeals policy and develop a mechanism to ensure staff awareness of the policy.*
- 3.6.4. *HERU recommends that Gulf University review its current academic staff workload practices and introduce a carefully monitored workload policy that gives due*

*consideration to time allocations for the three core functions of teaching, research and community engagement.*

The University has developed a policy and procedures for the induction of new staff, which clearly indicates the required documents and activities to be carried out, and with whom the responsibility lies for each activity. The implementation of this policy was confirmed in interviews with newly recruited staff members who have undergone the induction process. The Panel learned that the induction process is initiated by the Human Resources department which ensures that all required documents and forms are complete and provides new staff with a 'Joining Documents File'. The Panel was also informed that, in the case of academic staff, Heads of Departments introduce new staff to their respective colleges and their job responsibilities, and provide them with an induction package that includes the faculty handbook. In interviews, new staff expressed their satisfaction with the induction process and found the induction materials provided to be adequate.

Policies and procedures for annual staff performance management have recently been developed and implemented by the University. Copies of appraisal forms of faculty members from different colleges, for the academic year 2010-2011, were provided to the Panel. In interviews, staff members confirmed that they are aware of, and satisfied with, the appraisal process and the criteria on which the evaluation is based. They also informed the Panel that results of the appraisals are discussed in the Department and College Councils meetings, and that any gaps in training needs are identified. The Panel also learned that the University has conducted 21 professional development workshops for faculty and staff in the academic year 2010-2011 to address the training needs identified in the Training Needs Analysis form filled in by staff members.

The Panel was provided with a copy of the university's Training and Development policies and procedures; upon examining this document, the Panel was disappointed to find out that these are plagiarised from other higher education institutions. Unsurprisingly, when inquiring about an item in this document (Certificate in Academic Practice), none of the senior management or staff members were aware of its existence or content. The Panel strongly urges the University to develop mechanisms to deter plagiarism by its staff members and ensure the authenticity and academic integrity of its core documents.

The University's Human Resources Manual includes a 'Grievance Procedure'; however staff members interviewed by the Panel were not yet aware of it, as apparently cases of staff grievances are rare. The Panel encourages the University to increase the staff's awareness of the grievance and appeals procedure.

The University has implemented policy no. 100-80, which sets the teaching load for faculty members at 15 hours per week (five courses), effective the academic year 2010-2011. This was confirmed in the provided timetables of faculty members from all colleges. In interviews with Deans, Heads of Departments and teaching faculty, the Panel was informed that most faculty members teach an average of four courses per semester and supervise a maximum of six theses. Faculty members who teach more than

15 hours, not exceeding the 21 hours stated in the HEC regulations, are reimbursed for the extra teaching load. The teaching faculty expressed their satisfaction with the recently implemented policy as it enables them to devote more time for the other core functions of research and community engagement. The Panel heard several examples of faculty members being able to publish more research papers and be promoted over the past two years. The students also informed the Panel that the quality of teaching and learning has also improved as the teaching staff have more time for improving the course contents, thesis supervision and student advising. The University may want to consider further reduction in the teaching load of Deans and Heads of Departments to allow them more time for performing their administrative duties. Moreover, the Panel noted that a number of senior faculty members hold administrative positions. The University needs to increase its administrative manpower so that faculty members are not burdened with extra administrative work.

### **3.7 Infrastructure, Physical and Other Resources**

- 3.7.1. *HERU recommends that Gulf University urgently address the issue of safe accommodation for students on campus to ensure there is no risk to the health and safety of students and staff.*
- 3.7.2. *HERU recommends that Gulf University make a major investment in improving its library collections and professional services to cater for the current and projected growth in numbers.*
- 3.7.3. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement an ICT disaster plan that includes the storage of back-up data in a separate location.*

The number of registered students in GU has extensively dropped in the past few years to reach at the time of this site visit 1023 students. In 2009 the GU's senior management had an enrolment target of 7000 students, but this view has changed since to have a target of about 2000 students as stated by senior management. The university campus has undergone major improvements, it now has 32 classrooms that can accommodate 25 students each. All classrooms are equipped with multimedia projectors, smoke detectors, and are well maintained. The University has published class size guidelines prohibiting class size larger than 25 for undergraduate students and 15 for postgraduates. This was evident in the students enrolment list though two breaches of the guidelines were noticed, registering 26 in a section and 27 in another. The campus hosts 13 engineering laboratories for the different disciplines; four computer laboratories; two libraries, one of which is a separate three storey building that hosts the bookshop; two canteens; two prayer rooms; a clinic; and a multi-function hall that can hold up to 700 students. Interviewed students expressed satisfaction with the available resources and facilities and were happy with the improvements that took place in the past few years. During a site tour the Panel noticed that the campus is well maintained, and that all fire extinguishers have recently been checked.

GU currently hosts two libraries, the first for engineering sciences and the other for humanities. The Panel was informed that the University has tripled its library holdings

to reach over 7,000 titles. The first library is located in the main campus building and is devoted to engineering and sciences studies. It has reading space for about 60 students and two computer laboratories for 25 students each enabling access to e-library services, one of which is devoted to postgraduate students. The second, is a separate three storey building and is devoted to humanities studies. The university bookshop and the borrowers' bookshelves are on the ground floor. The collection of periodicals and master's theses are on the first. The second floor contains reading areas for undergraduate and postgraduate students, a computer laboratory, and a lecture room.

In terms of e-resources the library offers its users access to books, journals, and periodicals through the Springer's digital library accessible from within the campus and outside. For students studying in the Arabic medium the library offers on campus limited access (to three users only) to the digital library of the Arab Organisation for Administrative Development that holds periodicals, masters and PhD theses, conference proceedings, the Arabic Islamic Management Encyclopaedia, and all publications by the organisation. The availability and access to e-library resources is well noted by the Panel, but is limited and an inter-library loan service would be a plus.

Since HERU's last institutional site visit GU has developed and implemented a disaster recovery plan with emergency response action plans in case of fire, power failure, and virus outbreak. There is a backup and restoration policy and data backup and recovery procedures in place now. Backup logs show that weekly backups are systematically carried out and are countersigned by the IT director and the chief operations officer after which they are transported to a secure remote site for safe storage.

GU has also developed a wide range of IT policies including the 'IT Information Systems Acceptable Use Policy' that prohibits the use of personal copies of software a matter that was highlighted in the original institutional review report.

### **3.8 Research**

- 3.8.1. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop an institutional research framework which includes a plan with clear Key Performance Indicators; policies to guide implementation and provide appropriate resources to support this core function.*
- 3.8.2. *HERU recommends that Gulf University enhance the range and effectiveness of support the University provides to its postgraduate students in order to assure the quality of the programme outcomes in term of research training, adequate supervision, and access to journals and other materials.*
- 3.8.3. *HERU recommends that Gulf University develop and implement a policy and procedure for the selection and approval of external examiners at the postgraduate level.*

The University has developed a strategy for its Research that is included in its institution Strategic Plan 2010 – 2015. The Plan has stated KPIs and timelines. The University has also developed a detailed Research Plan. However, the two documents are not in line

with each other. The Panel suggests that the University revise its Research Plan in line of the institution's overall Strategic Plan.

GU addressed the issue of research training to its postgraduate students by incorporating two courses titled 'Statistical Research Methods' and 'Research Skills and Thesis Writing' as part of the compulsory courses in all masters programmes. The colleges have also introduced an induction meeting with the college dean and newly registered postgraduate students in which the available research facilities and related rules and regulations are explained. The number of postgraduate research students have lessened in the past two years, due to HEC's ban on registration at GU, resulting in few students assigned to supervisors, but according to the university rules a faculty member is expected to supervise a maximum of six students in addition to his or her academic, administrative, and research assignments. However, in some cases when specialisation is rare and demand is high faculty members might be requested to supervise up to ten theses. As for the students, they are expected to meet their supervisors at least once a month. Given that many students are from outside the country it is most unlikely that this rule applies regularly. The Panel encourages the University to reconsider these rules by allocating fewer students to a supervisor and making meetings more regular to ensure effective supervision, guidance and monitoring of students' progress.

Postgraduate students now have special computer rooms and reading space in both libraries. They also have access to Springer e-library holdings in the university and outside. Access to e-resources for researchers in the Arabic medium still poses a limitation as the available resources of the 'Arab Organisation for Administrative Development' e-library can only be accessed by three users at a time and from the university libraries only. The Panel encourages the University to establish and offer its postgraduate students an inter-library loan service with well-known libraries.

The University adopted a policy of selecting external examiners for their masters' thesis examinations. The examination committee including the external examiner is nominated by the relevant department and forward to the relevant Dean for approval. Once approved it is forwarded to the deanship of higher studies for approval and then submitted to University Council for final approval. The external examiner can be a local resident in Bahrain or from abroad. The main criteria for selection are the examiner's appropriate qualifications and expertise. In all cases the external examiner's fees, visas, expenses, and accommodation are covered by the University.

### **3.9 Community Engagement**

*3.9.1. HERU recommends that Gulf University develop a conceptual framework, coordinating structures, policies and resource allocation for community engagement so that individual efforts become part of an institutional plan, that is implemented, monitored and reviewed.*

GU has recently established its community engagement directorate to be the main body responsible for planning and implementing community service activities. The appointed director is currently engaged with his academic duties with no special administrative

support made available to him nor appropriate allocation of resources. He has recently published a brief document outlining the vision, mission, and goals for the directorate and its yearly plan of activities. Community engagement is also part of GU's strategic plan for 2011-2015 though it is brief and lacks the allocation of resources. University and colleges committees have been established; the former chaired by the director of community engagement and its members are from the colleges' committees. A number of community engagement activities have been carried out such as, newspaper articles, site visits for students, participation in competitions, workshops, and consultancy services. Although these activities were approved by GU there is little evidence to suggest that they were systematically planned rather than based on faculty members initiatives and external requests.

The Panel welcomes GU's efforts in establishing the directorate for community engagement, but has a number of concerns. Firstly, there is no clear allocation of appropriate resources for the new directorate and community engagement as a whole. Secondly, GU has not yet conceptualised its own understanding of community engagement and made it known to its stakeholders. Thirdly, it has not yet highlighted the importance of community engagement by tying it with the faculty members' performance assessment and integrating it as a core academic function. Therefore the Panel encourages GU to revise its community engagement framework and set a clear operational plan, implement, monitor, and regularly review it.