



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Program Review Report

Bachelor of Business Administration Programme

Applied Science University, Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 11-12 January 2009

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1. Programme Reviews

1.1 The Programme Review Framework

Four indicators that are used to measure whether or not a programme meets minimum standards are as follows:

Indicator 1: Curriculum

Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

The summative judgment falls into one of three categories:

- (i) *The programme satisfies all four indicators and gives confidence, or*
- (ii) *There is limited confidence because up to two indicators are not satisfied, or*
- (iii) *There is no confidence in the programme because more than two indicators are not satisfied.*

1.2 The programme review process at Applied Science University

The programme review of the Bachelor of Business Administration of Applied Science University (ASU) 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 higher education in Bahrain. This document provides a summary of the findings of the Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by ASU, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit. The programme review site visit took place on 11th and 12th January 2009. It is expected that the College of Administrative Science of ASU will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Business Administration programme.

The Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree is offered by the Department of Business Administration which is located within the College of Administrative Sciences. Delivery of the programme commenced in 2005. The minimum period to complete the degree is 3 years. There are presently 195 students enrolled in the Department, 20 students had graduated a week before the institutional visit by the Review Panel. Of these, 17 students were from the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration programme.

2. Indicator 1: Curriculum

The programme complies with existing regulations in terms of the curriculum, the teaching and the assessment of students' achievements; the curriculum demonstrates fitness for purpose.

- 2.1 The programme aims are clearly articulated and are consistent with the mission of the University and that of the Department in which it is located. The overall aims of the programme reflect an appropriate balance between the knowledge and application of business management theories and the development of transferable and life-long learning skills. While there appears to be no formal process of information gathering, discussions with academic staff suggested that these aims are informed by the needs of the students, the market as well as those of society.
- 2.2 Courses/subjects covered in the programme are typical of those expected of a Business Administration degree. The breadth of study was evident and commented on positively by graduates.
- 2.3 The programme is to a large extent similar to that offered by the Applied Science University of Jordan. The course team indicated that faculty from the Applied Science University of Jordan offer assistance to ASU in shaping the content of the curriculum and that the curriculum process is furthermore informed by market trends, student input, and HEC requirements. The Panel found no documentary evidence supporting this position beyond the formal relationship which exists between the University and the Applied Science University of Jordan and the University of Mu'tah. There appears to be no formal mechanisms for translating the views of graduates into the development of the curriculum although the views of existing students are regularly sought.
- 2.4 Students are offered a number of options within respective areas of the programme. In so doing, they receive guidance on option choices by academic advisers. The Review Panel was unable to establish the formal process by which this was achieved. However, all students interviewed confirmed that they have assigned academic advisers, and commented positively on the support and advice provided by these advisers. In addition, the curriculum includes a compulsory "field training" which provides students with an opportunity to apply their knowledge in a real and practical setting.
- 2.5 The structure of the curriculum, which is primarily delivered in Arabic, enables the programme to meet institutional requirements. There are 4 courses that are offered in English, 2 of which are English Language specific courses. Students and staff acknowledged that the relatively weak level of English on the part of some of the student body made delivery in English demanding. The Panel also heard from

- students of the need for more courses to be offered in English so that they are adequately prepared for the workplace.
- 2.6 Within individual subject areas, the academic staff members prepare course specifications which are consistent in structure and content.
 - 2.7 The Panel found that learning outcomes at programme level are embryonic and in part included within the department outcomes contained in the SER. However it is acknowledged that learning outcomes at individual subject level are yet to be developed. The absence of specific subject-related learning outcomes makes it difficult for the Panel to establish depth of study across the different levels of the curriculum. Nevertheless, it was evident from discussion with students and graduates that they considered that the degree of complexity, difficulty and depth increases from one level to the next. This was generally verified by the Panel following an examination of student work. There is acknowledgement of the importance of "critical thinking" and "transferable skills" but again these are not fully or formally reflected in descriptors. The Panel suggests that this is an area that should be addressed in the future development of learning outcomes.
 - 2.8 The SER indicates that teaching is delivered through a combination of lectures, seminars and workshops. Students are expected to participate actively in their learning with emphasis being placed on the application of theory. Teaching is largely done through lectures. Good practice includes the provision of student handouts by some lecturers and the posting of some lecture notes on-line. There is, however, little evidence that this is systematically followed. The Panel is of the view that the formal development of a departmental/programme teaching and learning strategy would assist in ensuring consistency in this practice.
 - 2.9 The applied or practical orientation of the programme is reinforced by lecturer use of examples and case studies. Although students acknowledge this, they still felt that a greater emphasis on applied aspects across all subjects would further enhance their learning. Field training which involves placement of students in a real working environment is a compulsory component of the degree. At present this is not formally credited. Graduates spoke positively about the experience of field work. In addition, students undertake an Applied Research course during the final semester of the programme. Students are required to present and defend their work in front of a Committee of academic staff.
 - 2.10 The department seeks to use a variety and balance of assessment mechanisms. Evidence of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment was provided. Assessment involves a combination of essays, reports, projects and examinations but the balance is weighted heavily towards traditional examinations. There was less

evidence of the assessment of transferable skills. This may in part be explained by the absence of specific learning outcomes in this area. These need to be developed.

- 2.11 At subject level, individual lecturers have responsibility for the development of assessment instruments as informed by University requirements and under the general guidance of the Dean. There was no evidence of any formal departmental policy to complement university requirements or guide the development, implementation or review of assessment. For subjects involving more than one lecturer, the staff members concerned agree on aspects that need to be contained in the examination. The academic staff demonstrated an awareness of the importance of having a variety of appropriate assessment instruments although this is not always reflected in practice. Both students and graduates of the programme commented favorably about the fairness and breadth of the assessment and content.
- 2.12 Perusal of the course content and examination question papers confirmed attempts aimed at ensuring a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application. In later years of the programme, assessment is designed to cover conceptual, research and report writing skills. The latter is evidenced by the completion of a final semester project.
- 2.13 Assessment is reviewed in terms of marks distribution. Feedback is consistent with university regulations. However, there is very limited evidence of systematic moderation of assessments or examinations papers. The Dean has proposed the introduction of an external examiner system. The Panel recommends that this initiative be implemented as a matter of urgency. It also suggests that this should be included within the development of a more systematic assessment policy which formally documents existing activities and procedures. This should be developed and informed by good practice and will assist in ensuring consistency in teaching and learning practice across the programme. Grading systems are consistent with university regulations. There is less explicit evidence of clear assessment and grading criteria.
- 2.14 In coming to its conclusion regarding the curriculum the Panel notes with appreciation the following:
- The development of programme aims which are consistent with the University and that of the Department within which the programme is based
 - The construction of a syllabus which is broadly consistent with the content of similar degree programmes within the business field
 - A commitment on the part of academic staff to exploit a range of teaching and learning methods and recognize the benefit of variety in assessment methods.
- 2.15 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the department should:

- Construct clear and specific learning outcomes at **both** programme and subject level to inform and enhance the quality and delivery of provision
- Develop an explicit teaching, learning and assessment policy which develops, documents and formalizes procedures and guides practice in the area
- Develop and implement a formal monitoring and evaluation process through which feedback of internal and external stakeholders can be documented and used to inform the development of the programme
- Implement a system of external examination.

2.16 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on curriculum.**

3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

The programme is efficient in terms of the use of available resources, the admitted students and the ratio of admitted students to successful graduates.

- 3.1 The quality of academic leadership in terms of qualifications and experience is impressive. Most members of the teaching staff have PhDs obtained from different countries, including Iraq, USA, and the UK. This diversity and considerable collective experience in the higher education sector provides the Panel with the confidence that the academic staff is equal to the task of providing a quality programme. The new Dean provides strong and effective leadership and has identified areas for improvement. This was borne out during interviews with staff.
- 3.2 It is evident however, that academic staff have excessive teaching loads. Whilst the Panel notes the commitment and enthusiasm of the Faculty in dealing with these workloads, it has considerable reservations that the standards of support for students can be maintained in the absence of additional human resources – particularly if the proposed expansion plans are to come to fruition. The Panel notes that a new Head of Department was appointed in the course of the site visit.
- 3.3 Students enrolling into year one of the programme are required to satisfy the minimum entry requirements of the University. In addition, there is provision for the transfer of students from other universities. The effectiveness of this was evident in discussion between the Panel and existing students/graduates. Each group indicated they received positive information about the University from friends and relatives and only to a lesser extent from marketing efforts undertaken by ASU.
- 3.4 The Panel notes that the programme includes the delivery of a small number of courses in English. Both students and staff acknowledge challenges in meeting this

commitment. It is recommended that the programme team reconsider the minimum level of English required to ensure that all students in English-medium classes are in a position to benefit from the learning available.

- 3.5 Discussions confirm that each student is allocated an Academic Advisor on registration. Each advisor has about 20 students. A student guide is also provided for students. This is considered by students to be helpful and informative.
- 3.6 The Panel identified a strong commitment to student support. Lecturing and office hours' schedules are posted outside each faculty members' office. Students and graduates commented positively on the support from lecturing staff and the welcoming ethos of the institution. Graduates spoke about their increasing self-confidence on completion of the course.
- 3.7 Information relating to student performance/progression was not contained in the SER. The degree is relatively recently established and has only one set of graduates. As yet there is no formal process to track the first destination of graduates. It was also acknowledged during the site visit that performance data by year of programme was not readily available. A document provided in the course of the visit revealed a balanced distribution of students by semester and suggested smooth progression. However, the Panel was unable to assess the number of students progressing from each cohort of the course. It is recommended that such an analysis should be formalized to assist the programme team in reviewing performance across the programme.
- 3.8 The University has invested in a range of facilities to support teaching and learning. 6 large LCD screens are placed strategically around the campus providing a range of student information. Security cameras have been installed in the hallways. State-of-the-art computers are available, accessible and provide internet access. The computer/student ratio is 1:10. Internet connection is also provided in the cafeteria complemented by WI-FI capabilities around the campus.
- 3.9 Teaching accommodation is varied and appropriate to the needs of the curriculum. Lecture rooms are comfortable. Rooms differ in size to accommodate class sizes. New lecture rooms are equipped with data projectors/data shows in addition to whiteboards. Comfortable seats, with a foldable writing facility, are provided.
- 3.10 The recently established library has a contemporary stock and the volume of books in Business and Management is appropriate to the curriculum. However, there appears to be no systematic process for updating the collection. Presently, this is limited to acquisition of textbooks upon requests by departments. At least 2 textbooks are made available for each course/module. The university is in the process of creating an electronic database of 7000 books and acquiring electronic periodicals.
- 3.11 The library offers a comprehensive card-based electronic loan system with back-up manual facilities. Differential loans are available to undergraduates, graduates and

university staff. The Panel considers the system to be well-established and effectively managed. Additional computer terminals are available in the library for student use. Sitting space is limited relative to the number of students. The student cafeteria provides enough seating space although other social space is at a premium.

3.12 The institution continues to invest in infrastructure. There are well-developed plans to build a new campus which will have the capacity to accommodate up to 4000 students. This reflects management's confidence of growth opportunities.

3.13 In coming to its conclusion regarding efficiency the Panel notes with appreciation the following:

- Established and experienced Faculty committed to the development and support of students
- Teaching accommodation appropriate to the needs of the curriculum with contemporary facilities including data shows and whiteboards.

3.14 In terms of improvement, the Panel *recommends* that the department should:

- More explicitly document the arrangements for student support and consider the introduction of cohort analysis to assist in the evaluation of the programme
- Review entry requirements for students enrolling on English stream-modules
- Monitor workloads of academic staff to ensure that the curriculum and students can continue to be supported particularly in the light of projected growth.

3.15 **Judgement**

On balance, it is the judgment of the Panel that the programme **satisfies the indicator on efficiency.**

4. **Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates**

The graduates of the programme meet acceptable academic standards in comparison with equivalent programmes in Bahrain and worldwide.

4.1 There is cooperation with the Applied Science University of Jordan and the University of Mu'tah for standard setting and research collaboration. This cooperation is documented and signed agreements exist. In addition, the Ministry of Education sets regulations that govern institutions operating in Bahrain. These requirements are adhered to and reflected in the university regulations. It is suggested that the special needs of Bahrain are arrived at by soliciting views of business, employers, society, students and graduates. The Panel was unable to confirm the formal processes for the consideration of such views. The potential perspective of employers could not be

corroborated in the absence of a meeting with the Panel. There is no formal mechanism for benchmarking standards against similar programmes in universities.

- 4.2 There is only one cohort of graduates to date. The Panel was impressed by the contribution made by graduates to the discussions. Graduates indicated that the staff at ASU is supportive of students. Use of real life cases, field work and practical examples were cited by graduates as a means of extending their knowledge of the business environment. Fieldwork also provided an additional opportunity to enhance skills and develop confidence.
- 4.3 Confirming the relative level of graduate achievement is difficult in the absence of well-established learning outcomes. Programme aims are clearly stated but the SER suggests there is no formal process to assess the extent to which these aims are achieved. Review of grade distribution and confirmation of standards through internal and external independent scrutiny does not occur.
- 4.4 In term of assessment the Panel found evidence of an appropriate range of student performance across the Business Administration programme. Differentiation of performance at course level is in part verifiable. However, a sample of examination papers provides some evidence of testing basic knowledge questions in areas which lead to memorization of work rather than a display of developmental, applied or higher level skills.
- 4.5 In coming to its conclusion regarding the effectiveness of programme management and quality assurance, the Panel notes with appreciation the following:
 - Commitment of graduates to the institution and the positively expressed views regarding teaching, learning and the provision of academic and related support.
- 4.6 In terms of improvement the Panel *recommends* that the department should:
 - Institute formal arrangements for the development of learning outcomes against which the academic standards of the programme can be specified and assessed
 - Extend benchmarks beyond the universities in Jordan and develop a formal process by which the needs of other external stakeholders can be reflected in programme
 - Initiate a formal process relating to the development and evaluation of grade distributions supported by internal and external review.

4.7 **Judgement**

On balance the Review Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy the indicator on academic standards of the graduates.**

5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

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

- 5.1 The nature of programme management and quality assurance at ASU is informed by regulation and procedures developed at university level. The SER acknowledges that a Quality Assurance Committee was recently formed and terms of reference developed. However, the Panel found that there is limited awareness among staff with regard to the terms of reference and the potential contribution that the outcomes of such a Committee could make towards assuring quality at departmental or programme level.
- 5.2 At departmental level, it is not clear to the Panel where the opportunity for formal review of the programme occurs. Staff members recognise that there is a requirement to implement and formalize quality processes across a range of areas. It is appreciated that these should be embedded within the department and linked to established university procedures. The SER acknowledges that no such improvement plan has been developed. In the view of the Panel, the acknowledged weaknesses included in the SER, and its over-reliance on the documentation of university regulations suggest formal quality processes are at an early stage of development and implementation.
- 5.3 Students are offered an opportunity to evaluate courses. Information is collected from student surveys although it was not clear to the Panel how the outcomes of these surveys are assessed and subsequently used to inform improvements at programme level. The SER further acknowledges that the views of other stakeholders are not assessed on a regular or systematic basis. In the course of the site visit it was acknowledged that improvements in the soliciting of such information should be initiated. This is a view endorsed by the Panel.
- 5.4 Ensuring the quality of provision requires a clear process for effective staff development. It is acknowledged in the SER that such a process does not exist. The Panel recommends that an appropriate process of staff development and review be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency. Academic staff members acknowledge such an initiative could enhance teaching and learning, support the promotion of a quality culture and provide a basis for the review of performance.
- 5.5 In coming to its conclusion regarding the effectiveness of programme management and quality assurance, the Panel notes with appreciation the following:
 - Establishment of a Quality Assurance Committee at University level
 - Commitment by departmental staff to the future development of a quality culture and an acknowledgement of current shortfalls.

5.6 In terms of improvement the Panel *recommends* that the department should:

- Institute formal arrangements for the regular monitoring and review of the programme including the performance of students
- Benchmark standards of performance/progression should be instituted at subject and programme level. This should complement proposals relating to the development of a strategy for teaching, learning and assessment
- Review the system of collecting information on the views of students and institute a formal process by which the outcomes of these surveys can be analyzed and used to inform programme developments
- Initiate a formal process by which the views of graduates, employers and other external stakeholders can be ascertained and used to inform programme developments
- Develop a formal process of staff development and review.

5.7 **Judgement**

On balance, the Review Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy the indicator for effectiveness of programme management and quality assurance.**

6. Conclusion

Taking into account the institution's own self evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the site visit, the Review Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the *HERU/QAAET Programme Review Handbook, January 2009*:

There is limited confidence in the Bachelor of Business Administration programme offered by the Applied Science University.