

الهيئة الوطنية  
للمؤهلات وضمان جودة التعليم والتدريب  
National Authority for Qualifications &  
Quality Assurance of Education & Training



# Higher Education Review Unit

## Institutional Follow-Up Review Report

University of Bahrain - Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 10 December 2012

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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 National Authority for Qualifications & Quality Assurance of Education & Training (NAQQAET) 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 Appendixes. 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.

The University of Bahrain (UoB) 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 17 Recommendations contained in the Institutional Review Report. In October 2012, UoB submitted its One Year 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 two 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 December 2011 and the Institutional Review Report. The Institution submitted supporting evidence during the site visit. Interviews were held during the site visit with a range of senior managers, academics, administrative staff, students, employers and alumni. These interviews allowed the Panel to triangulate the evidence.

The follow-up visit took place on 10 December 2012, the purpose of which is (i) to assess the progress made in quality enhancement and improvement of the UoB since the institutional review in November 2010, for which the review report was published in May 2011; and (ii) develop a report which outlines the progress made regarding 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 2011 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 December 2012.

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

The University of Bahrain (hereinafter referred to as 'UoB' or 'the University') was founded in 1986, although its roots date back to the late sixties when two higher education institutes were founded, namely, the Higher Institute for Teachers and the Gulf Technical College. In 1978, the Amiri Decree No. 11/1978 was issued to develop the Higher Institute for Teachers into the University College of Arts, Science and Education. The Gulf Technical College was then renamed the Gulf Polytechnic by the Amiri Decree No. 2/1981. These two colleges independently offered Bachelor degrees in various disciplines such as Arts, Science, Education, Engineering and Business Administration. In 1986, the Amiri Decree No. 12/1986 was issued for the establishment of UoB by merging the two colleges. In 1999 the Amiri Decree No. 18/1999, was issued amending some provisions of the 1986 Decree. On 30 October 2011, the Cabinet issued a resolution to move the College of Health Sciences (CHS) from the aegis of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to the University of Bahrain (UoB). The college is currently in a transition phase. However, at the date of writing this report, operations including administrative, financial and human resources are still run by the MoH. UoB consists of ten colleges, these are:

- College of Arts
- College of Business Administration
- College of Engineering
- College of Information Technology
- College of Law
- College of Science
- College of Applied Studies
- Bahrain Teachers College
- College of Physical Education and Physiotherapy
- College of Health Sciences

The colleges are spread over three campuses: Sakhir campus is shared by all colleges except for the College of Engineering and CHS. The College of Engineering is located in Isa Town, while CHS is located in Salmaniya Medical Complex, Manama.

UoB offers both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It is the only national university and the largest institution of higher education in the Kingdom. Currently, the University employs 811 academic staff and 1188 administrative staff.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, the student enrolment was 15,417 with the largest enrolment at three colleges, namely the College of Business Administration with 4390 students (28%), followed by the College of Engineering with 2446 (16%) students and the College of Information Technology with 1541 (10%) students.

### **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 that the University of Bahrain progress the work of reviewing its policies and procedures, compile a central register to track their coverage and currency, and establish a forward schedule to review them periodically.*

*3.1.2 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain hold discussions with the relevant authorities about increasing the levels of delegation to management by the Board of Trustees, in line with international good practice.*

UoB established two work-streams, 21 and 16, to review its policies and procedures respectively. The former conducted a review of the policies after which the revised policies were sent to the deans, the vice presidents and advisors for comment. A final revision then took place. Some of these policies have been approved and have been implemented whilst others are in various stages of review and approval. Administrative policies and procedures are being reviewed in line with the Civil Service Bureau's regulations. Whilst a central register has not yet been created, policies which have been approved have been uploaded on the university's website. This will extend to all approved policies. The institution has yet to establish a schedule for periodical review of policies and procedures.

With respect to the delegation of authority, a committee consisting of senior managers was established to review the functions of the Board of Trustees (BoT). A comparison of its functions with those of many US state universities found that these are broadly in line with those of UoB and its bylaws. The University acknowledges that the difficulties of holding regular BoT meetings is due to its high level membership. To address this, it was concluded that decision-making could be more promptly made if the executive committee of the Board was re-activated. This proposal will serve at the next BoT's meeting.

## 3.2 Academic Standards

- 3.2.1 *HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain assess the English competency requirements for all colleges, where relevant, and implement measures to ensure that all students meet these requirements.*
- 3.2.2 *HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain use formative assessment methods in teaching and provide professional development opportunities for staff in this area.*
- 3.2.3 *HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain revise its policy on plagiarism and develop mechanisms to ensure that such practices cease; to this end it can acquire a plagiarism detection software to address the threats to academic standards posed by academic dishonesty.*

The English language competency requirements have not changed since the original institutional review in November 2010. The University is of the view that this recommendation is tied to the more general challenge of high dropout rates and decided that a more appropriate way to address issues around English language competency was through the provision of a foundation year in which English language skills would be one component. Whilst a foundation year curriculum was developed it has yet to receive approval and a corresponding budget. As a result the foundation year did not commence in the 2012-2013 academic year as planned. The University needs to expedite the approval and implementation of the foundation year.

A university decision was taken in 2011 that 60% of assessment should be formative and 40% final. A range of assessment methods are generally now used. There is now a requirement that all colleges prepare course files that show that student work has not only been assessed but that there are comments that support the assessment. Furthermore, the University Council took the decision that marked students' work should also function as a teaching mechanism and so should be returned to students so that they can study the comments, which will build on students' knowledge. However, whilst this is helpful this occurs after the point of assessment and does not allow for interventions to be made during the students' learning experience. Formative assessment needs to be incorporated into classroom practice so that adjustments to the learning process can be made, which in turn will assist students' in achieving the set Intended Learning Outcomes. The Panel suggests that the concept of 'formative assessment' be further explored since interviews with staff members showed that there was an incomplete and fragmented understanding of this concept.

The Office of the Vice President has organized some professional development activities on formative assessment for staff. Postgraduate Certificate in Academic

Practice (PCAP) staff also identified this as an area of professional development programmes and will offer these in the coming year. The Panel encourages UoB to ensure that the outcome of such programmes results in the development and implementation of a range of formative assessments methods during the learning process so that academics can make interventions in time to improve student attainment.

The University indicated in both its Improvement Plan (December 2011) and Follow-up Progress Report (September 2012) that a revised plagiarism policy will be developed by March 2012; however, at the time of follow-up site visit, only a draft of the plagiarism policy was provided to the Panel. During interviews with senior management, the Panel was informed that the policy draft was produced in June 2012 and is currently being revised. The Panel also learned that recently (November 2012), a sub-committee was established with the mandate to develop the university's plagiarism policy and procedures, and to submit them to the University Council for approval by January 15, 2013. Interviewed committee members indicated that a series of plagiarism awareness workshops for academic staff are planned, starting December 2012. Evidence of the purchase of a plagiarism software was provided to the Panel. Moreover, submitted copies of the PCAP schedule indicate that plagiarism is included among the topics covered during this programme. Staff and students interviewed by the Panel, however, did not have sufficient awareness of plagiarism and its impact on the achievement of academic standards. The Panel urges the University to progress its work on the development of its plagiarism policy and procedures and to ensure their effective dissemination and implementation.

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

*3.3.1 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain ensure that the chosen Bahraini Business Excellence Model is appropriately developed, adapted and aligned to the internal academic quality assurance systems to ensure overall institutional effectiveness and efficiency.*

The University has used the Bahrain Center of Excellence (BCE) model to develop and implement a quality assurance system for the administrative and support units. During the site visit, the Panel found that the University has also aligned the BCE model to the current internal quality assurance system in order to achieve the strategies of the University.

The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre (QAAC) has conducted several training sessions on the Competitiveness Lab that covered registration and administration competitiveness, developing students' personality competitiveness, developing teaching and learning competitiveness, and developing research capabilities competitiveness.

The QAAC staff submitted reports that were reviewed and implemented, with consultation of the BCE. During the site visit, the Panel saw evidence of the integration model between the university's internal quality assurance and the BCE model. The Panel is of the view that the University needs to develop a mechanism to monitor the effectiveness of the integration model between the university internal quality assurance and the BCE model.

### **3.4 Quality of Teaching and Learning**

*3.4.1 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain consider appointing specialists in Educational Technology in the Zain eLearning Center in order to support its eLearning strategy more effectively.*

*3.4.2 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain evaluate and monitor its student feedback mechanisms.*

The University's attempts at recruiting educational specialists at the Zain eLearning Center have not been successful. During different interviews, the Panel heard consistently of the obstacles encountered by the Center, the most important of which are the budgetary restrictions, the recently implemented Civil Service Bureau recruitment processes, the limiting organizational structure, as well as the difficulties in attracting specialized instructional designers in the Middle East region. Senior staff in charge of overseeing the university's eLearning strategy informed the Panel that several initiatives have been implemented to counteract the deficiency in the number of specialists currently employed at the Centre. Among these initiatives are the use of e-books instead of regular textbooks, the internal recruitment of staff from other departments, in addition to the training of staff in different colleges on the use of eLearning. The Panel encourages the University to explore all available options that would support the effective implementation of its eLearning strategy.

The students' evaluation of courses is conducted by the Centre of Measurement, Evaluation and Academic Development (CMEAD) at the end of every semester. The Progress Report refers to several initiatives to be undertaken by CMEAD to improve the student feedback mechanisms, and which are expected to be completed by the end of 2012. During the Follow-up Site Visit, however, the Panel learned that all these initiatives are still 'In Progress' ranging from 20%-50% completion rates.

CMEAD staff interviewed by the Panel indicated that the student feedback processes have been reviewed to address all the shortcomings outlined in the UoB Institutional Review Report. For example, the standard student evaluation form has been modified to include forms specific for practical courses and eLearning courses. Moreover, there are plans to run the evaluation electronically in 2013, thus allowing the students to provide their comments throughout the semester. The Panel was also

informed that the design of the workflow of the new electronic student evaluation system has been submitted to the university's Information Technology (IT) consultants, and is awaiting approval and implementation.

Staff and students interviewed by the Panel expressed their dissatisfaction with the current student evaluation process, most importantly because they do not receive any constructive feedback on the outcomes of the survey analysis. The Panel urges the University to progress the implementation of the electronic student survey system and to use the analysis results in the institution-wide planning around teaching and learning.

### **3.5 Student Support**

*3.5.1 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its arrangements for Academic Advisors.*

*3.5.2 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain review its arrangements for at-risk students and students experiencing study or English language difficulties.*

*3.5.3 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain collect and analyse the overall findings from the many separate surveys it conducts, in order to assess trends in institutional progress towards achieving its goals.*

The University established a committee (Workstream 2) to evaluate the current advising system and to address the weaknesses outlined in its Institutional Review Report. During interviews with the committee members, the Panel learned that an academic advising handbook, detailing all advising and mentoring processes, was developed in 2012 and was distributed to all staff and students. Moreover, an electronic advising system that enables the advisors to follow-up on their students throughout the semester, was piloted in the College of Engineering.

The Panel was informed during interviews with academic staff from different colleges that the electronic advising system is made available by the IT Center to all the university's staff; however, it has so far only been implemented at the College of Engineering and the College of Information Technology. Academic staff from other colleges indicated that they will require awareness and training sessions in order to be able to implement successfully the new advising system. Interviewed students expressed their dissatisfaction with the current advising system, indicating that they have limited accessibility to their academic advisors. The students suggested that 'Advising Hours' are allocated for each advisor and that the advising system is communicated to them through the use of media on the university's website and on TV screens around the campus. The Panel encourages the University to set deadlines

for the implementation and monitoring of the new advising system in all colleges, and to communicate effectively advising information to all stakeholders.

The University has not yet developed an institution-wide policy for dealing with students at risk of academic failure. During interviews with senior management, the Panel learned that the University has conducted a study on the causes of at-risk students and the dropout rate at the different colleges and programmes; however, a copy of this study was not made available to the Panel. The University has undertaken a number of initiatives to address the weaknesses in its arrangements for at-risk students. The main initiative is the establishment of the English Language Clinic (ELC) which comprises a writing centre, a speech club, a library and a peer-tutoring area. ELC staff informed the Panel that the clinic organizes a number of workshops to help students with their academic studies, and that the staff continuously encourage the students to benefit from the clinic's services whenever they encounter difficulties in their studies.

The Panel was informed by the academic staff from the College of Engineering and the College of Information Technology that the new electronic advising system enables the advisors to keep track of variations in the students' GPAs and to make the necessary interventions. Academic staff from other colleges, on the other hand, still need to approach the Registration Office to obtain a list of at-risk students. A social counsellor is allocated for each college to provide advice to students encountering social problems that may impact on their studies.

From the different interviews, it is evident to the Panel that there is insufficient coordination between the academic and support staff with regard to the arrangements for at-risk students. The Panel urges the University to develop and implement an institution-wide policy and procedures that detail the steps to be undertaken in dealing with at-risk students, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the corresponding academic and support units.

The QAAC has undertaken the responsibility of developing and implementing the university's main quantitative surveys. These include: Alumni Survey, Employer Survey, Faculty Survey, Senior Exit Survey and Course Evaluation Survey. During interviews with QAAC staff, the Panel was informed that these surveys are regularly analysed and graphs as well as dashboards are generated to show trends. The analysis results are consequently forwarded to the colleges which, in turn, produce an action plan to address the outcomes of these surveys as part of the self-evaluation reports that they submit annually to the QAAC.

The Panel also learned that the QAAC produces an annual report, that summarizes the outcomes of all surveys, which is submitted to the University Council to assess the university's progress towards achieving its strategic goals. The Panel encourages

the University to provide the QAAC with the support it needs to ensure the sustainability of the surveys' analysis processes and its establishment as a good practice towards the enhancement of the teaching and learning quality at UoB.

### **3.6 Human Resources**

**3.6.1** *HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain review the faculty workload allocation policy so that it effectively supports the strategic goals of the University and supports staff in performing their duties.*

**3.6.2** *HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain evaluate its current procedures for all faculty contracts and the research arrangements as the current system is not conducive to achieving the future research plans of the University.*

The University has reviewed the faculty workload allocation policy and developed Performance Guidelines and Indices for academic faculty in order to promote employee relations and mutual respect between the academic faculty and the University. These guidelines ensure that academic staff share a common understanding of work performance, have a quick easy reference for the management of work performance, and prevent arbitrary and discriminatory actions by departmental chairpersons and deans toward employees. During interviews, however, several staff members were not aware of the new Guidelines. This needs to be addressed. On examining the Guidelines, there was no indication of the optimum teaching load; it is assigned by the chairperson. The Panel is of the view that the University needs to indicate clearly the teaching load for all faculty members to ensure equivalence across the colleges.

The University has introduced an Academic Incentive Programme intended to reward systematically and fairly academic activities (all activities related to teaching, research and service at various committees at departmental, college and university level). The University has also developed an annual evaluation for academic staff and incentive proposals, such as 'Teaching Productivity Incentive', 'Research Publication Productivity Incentive', and 'University Service Productivity Incentive'. During the site visit interviews, the Panel found that these task performance indicators have still not been approved due to financial constraints, and other tasks have still to be approved by the University Council. The Panel encourages UoB to expedite the process to finalize, obtain the necessary approvals, and make the newly established policies and procedures operative, and disseminate these policies and guidelines to all staff members.

The University has started reviewing and assessing the current recruitment processes and practices for faculty members in order to investigate the difficulties faculty members face through the recruitment process and to develop a new recruitment

process for faculty members. During the site visit, the Panel heard that the recruitment process starts with the department council, college council, the Vice President for Academic Affairs and ends with the University Council. The Panel heard in different interviews that the contracts are offered for a period of two years, and can be renewed based on appraisal performance. The University did not evaluate the current procedures for all faculty contracts. The Panel urges the University to implement the new recruitment process and revisit the contractual procedures for all faculty members to ensure that adequate research activity takes place.

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

No Recommendation was given under this theme

### **3.8 Research**

*3.8.1 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain develop an improved culture of research, in which research is properly funded, encouraged, and developed, and in which those active in research are properly rewarded for their efforts.*

*3.8.2 HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain, as a matter of urgency, discontinue having the supervisor of a postgraduate student as Chair of the examination committee of that student.*

A Research Strategy is in the final stages of development after which it will need to be approved by the University Council. Nevertheless, the University has identified a number of initiatives to develop a research culture, many of which are at the early stages of implementation. These include: the establishment of a Publishing Research Center and the approval of the establishment of seven online journals which will have international editorial boards and will be subject to peer review. The first volumes of two journals are now online. Financial incentives have been put in place to encourage academics to publish in international journals, particularly in applied research relevant to Bahrain. With respect for funding for conferences apart from academics, postgraduate students can submit research papers and, if accepted, the institution will sponsor the student. At the time of the site visit no student has taken advantage of this new initiative. Partnerships with industry are being sought and some have come to fruition.

However, the Panel is concerned about the viability of the draft research strategy. This will require considerable financial and human resources. No budget has yet been drawn up. The Panel heard during a range of interviews with staff of the need for a reduction of teaching loads so that research can be conducted. This also has budgetary implications. The University needs to develop and gain approval for a

dedicated budget both for the achievement and sustainability of the research strategy.

The postgraduate regulations have been amended so that the supervisor is no longer the chairperson of the examining panel for postgraduate theses; the highest ranking examiner is appointed to that role. Whilst supervisors serve on such panels they do not take part in the decision-making process.

### **3.9 Community Engagement**

**3.9.1** *HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain develop a conceptual framework, policies and implementation mechanisms that enables the coordination, management and monitoring of its community engagement activities.*

**3.9.2** *HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain develop a formal mechanism to enhance its interaction with the local industry and harness the full benefits of these partnerships.*

A committee was formed to develop the university's conceptual framework and policies for the management and monitoring of community engagement activities across the institution. However, the University was unable to provide the Panel with a copy of the draft framework. During interviews, it was apparent to the Panel that there is no shared understanding among the staff members of what constitutes a conceptual framework. Furthermore, each college organizes its own community activities as there is still no institutional plan to coordinate these different activities. The Panel encourages the University to finalize and implement a community engagement conceptual framework which is aligned with the university's mission and vision. It also needs *inter alia* to monitor the effectiveness of these activities so that it can better serve its community.

The University has established a Center for Community Service and Continuing Education to promote the continuing education courses. Many activities have been organized within every college. During the site visit, the Panel heard several examples of consultation with different stakeholders, however, there is not yet any coordination between all these activities. There is no formal mechanism to enhance the interaction between the University and the industry. The Panel urges the University to develop and implement a mechanism to strengthen the interaction with the industry and monitor and coordinate these activities with the colleges.