



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

# Higher Education Review Unit

## Institutional Review Report

**Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-**

**Medical University of Bahrain**

Kingdom of Bahrain

**Dates Reviewed: 3 - 6 May 2009**

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## **1. The Institutional Review Process**

The review of Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain (hereinafter referred to as 'RCSI-MUB' or 'the University') was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to "review the quality of the performance of education and training institutions in light of the guiding indicators developed by the Authority" (Royal Decree No 32 of May 2008 amended by Royal Decree No. 6 of 2009).

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

## **2. Overview of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain**

RCSI-MUB was founded under license from the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain and was officially opened in October 2004. It is registered as a Single Person Company (SPC) and is wholly owned by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland operating in Dublin (hereinafter referred to as 'RCSI-Dublin' or 'the Parent University').

RCSI-MUB began its academic activities by establishing a School of Medicine (SOM) where students from 9 countries were admitted to a foundation year in Medicine in 2004. The School of Nursing & Midwifery (SON&M) was established later and enrolled its first students in September 2006. RCSI-MUB also offers a Master's degree in Healthcare Ethics & Law. The University is expected to graduate its first cohort of students in all these programmes in 2010.

The main site of RCSI-MUB is on a campus next to the King Hamad General Hospital (KHG), which is currently under construction. At present, the University has clinical teaching facilities at primary care centres in Bahrain, the Bahrain Defence Force hospital (BDF) and the Ministry of Health's Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC). It is an expectation of RCSI-MUB that KHG hospital, once commissioned, will be managed by RCSI-Dublin and used for the clinical training of the RCSI-MUB students.

RCSI-MUB has a staff complement of 27 full-time staff and 56 part-time staff members. It has made a substantial investment in new buildings including an on-campus sports centre. At the time of the site visit, RCSI-MUB did not provide accommodation for its students and is exploring an outsourced option for the provision of on-campus accommodation.

### 3. Mission, planning and governance

The Mission statement was first developed in 2005 and was revised in October 2007 through a staff questionnaire designed and administrated by the RCSI-MUB's Quality Assurance Quality Improvement group in October 2007. The University does not have a defined formal policy or process to review and approve its Mission statement and there is no suggestion as to when its next review will occur. Moreover, there was no consultation with external stakeholders, RCSI-MUB students or RCSI-Dublin prior to the finalisation of the current Mission. The Panel notes that RCSI-MUB has identified this shortcoming and encourages the University to build its future reviews of its Mission into the planning process and take into account inputs from external and internal stakeholders and role players involved with RCSI-MUB.

#### *Recommendation-1*

*HERU recommends that, in its periodical reviews of its Vision and Mission statements, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain develop and implement a process that includes inputs from internal and external stakeholders.*

While the University's Mission covers RCSI-MUB's activities in relation to teaching and learning and research, the Panel is of the opinion that RCSI-MUB should incorporate a commitment to enhancing health services in Bahrain in its Mission, as this stems from the University's Noble Purpose "...enhance health in Bahrain... education, research and services". The University did not provide evidence to show that it benchmarks its activities in teaching and research, and how these activities would benefit the health of the nations. More fundamentally, RCSI-MUB had not yet defined the 'nations' that are expected to benefit from the University's activities.

RCSI-MUB has not developed a strategic plan and states in its SER that it relies on the Strategic Plan of RCSI-Dublin, dated November 2003, and which is considered by RCSI-MUB itself to be outdated. Parts of that Strategic Plan may not be applicable to the situation in Bahrain and the region. The Panel urges the University to develop and implement its own Strategic Plan that will stem from the University's own Mission and Vision.

Notwithstanding the absence of the RCSI-MUB's own Strategic Plan, the University has developed operational plans covering the academic and support areas (e.g., Marketing Plan). The Panel noted that some of these plans are in a draft format and have had little circulation amongst stakeholders and role players. The University conducts some monitoring activities of its progress through the monthly Executive Committee meetings. However the Panel found that the structure and process for monitoring and evaluation of the different University plans were not clear, even to staff members, as in many instances the baseline indicators and targets have not been clarified. Where data is collected, it is *ad*

*hoc* and the reports do not provide adequate information for proper diagnostics and intervention.

RCSI-MUB has acknowledged that gaps exist in its strategic and operational planning. The Panel encourages the University to develop its Strategic Plan and to put operational as well as monitoring and evaluation plans and processes in place. These detailed plans should be supported by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and have clear time lines attached.

### ***Recommendation-2***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain develop and implement a strategic plan that would provide direction for the University to achieve its Mission and Vision, supported by detailed operational plans of different areas of institutional functioning, ensure that these plans are supported by Key Performance Indicators and a broad resource allocation policy that will enable the University to achieve its stated strategic goals.*

RCSI-MUB uses RCSI-Dublin's Medical and RCSI-MUB's Nursing Profiles as exit outcomes for its students. Both Profiles are in draft forms and need to be adopted formally, possibly after further scrutiny from external stakeholders. Given that both schools will produce their first graduates in 2010, it is not possible at this stage to evaluate the graduates themselves. However, during the site visit, the Panel noted that both the full- and part-time academic staff stressed that the RCSI-MUB's students were knowledgeable and displayed excellent skills and attitudes in clinical practice. Moreover, the Ministry of Health (MoH) in the Kingdom of Bahrain requires all those entering the medical profession in Bahrain to pass an entrance examination. This examination will thus serve as an external quality benchmark. There is no equivalent entrance examination for nurses. The Panel suggests that the University find a mechanism to benchmark its SON&M graduates both nationally and internationally.

RCSI-MUB has invested substantial resources in the Learner Resource Centres at both the University campus and the BDF hospital complex and has created a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for its students. However, space seems to be an issue in the Learning Resource Centre on the University campus. Moreover, while RCSI-MUB has invested substantially in the infrastructure of the VLE, the environment itself is not used optimally. The Panel is also concerned that the academic and administrative structures, both physical and human, do not appear to have kept pace with the growing number of students.

RCSI-Dublin provides extensive support for RCSI-MUB which may not be sustainable in the medium- and long-term, especially in context of increasing numbers of Foundation and Junior Cycle students in the medical programme, and the development of the nursing programme. The Panel was also made aware of the need for academic leadership for the Senior Cycle years and the clinical facilities. The Panel is of the view that RCSI-MUB needs to develop its own capacity so that it can reduce its reliance on RCSI-Dublin and sustain itself in the future.

The Panel noted from the site visit that, while there are policies in place for detecting and dealing with academic misconduct by students or staff, there are no processes for the implementation of such policies. The Panel also noted through interview sessions that common understanding of what constitutes academic misconduct was not always evident. For example, there was no clear agreement amongst the staff members as to what constitutes 'plagiarism'. Where academic misconduct, including cheating and plagiarism, has been detected, the structures and procedures for investigating and dealing with such infringements seem to be *ad hoc*. Moreover, there is no clear evidence that outcomes of the procedures are recorded or that the implementation of the policies is monitored. The Panel urges the University to develop and implement clear procedures in relation to academic misconduct and plagiarism, and to keep a detailed record of such cases.

### ***Recommendation-3***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain develop and implement a process to activate its Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism Policy, that it regularly monitor its implementation and effectiveness, and keep a detailed record of its execution.*

The University has a suite of policies, many of which are in draft form and are not familiar to staff members and students. Moreover, there is no clear procedure or framework for revision of policies across RCSI-MUB. The Panel urges the University to develop a framework for the review of all policies, including those adopted and adapted from RCSI-Dublin. The framework should emphasise the need for policies to take account of the local circumstances. The need for draft policies to be formally adopted and for procedures and review dates to be incorporated into the final policy is also emphasised.

### ***Recommendation-4***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain finalise, approve and implement all its draft policies.*

The Panel noted that policies, plans and structures to ensure Health and Safety still need to be developed, in spite of the fact that the President of RCSI-MUB bears the ultimate responsibility for 'life & limb'. The University has drafted Health and Safety policies which were approved by the Management Committee. However, the issues to be covered, especially in a health sciences university, are varied and go beyond traditional physical and mechanical hazards and risks. It includes biological, chemical, psychosocial and clinical risks to both staff and students. Some policies, structures and procedures will need to take account of the clinical training facilities where the students are placed and Senior Cycle academic staff members spend the bulk of their time. These will need to be incorporated into the Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with MoH and BDF as well as into training agreements with providers at primary health care level.

### ***Recommendation-5***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain urgently develop and fully implement a detailed Health and Safety Policy, Plan and the procedures associated with it.*

The University has developed organisational and management charts that were available to the Panel. Perusal of these structures revealed a number of problems. In some cases for example it was not clear which committees were specific to RCSI-MUB, which were specific to RCSI-Dublin and which were joint. In other cases, committees or positions appeared to have been omitted from the structures detailed in the documents. In interviews, it became apparent to the Panel that not all staff members were aware of how the positions they occupied were located within these structures and, more specifically, to which structures they were accountable.

The Panel was unable to obtain clarity on the role and function of the yet-to-be-formed Academic Council, in relation to the Academic Board neither from reading the SER nor from interviews. Other structural and functional relationships, whether through committees or individuals, internal to RCSI-MUB or external partners such as with RCSI-Dublin, MoH and BDF do not appear to have been fully defined. The Panel was concerned that some structures and relationships may overlap and may have conflicts of interest. The Panel encourages the Institution to ensure that these relationships are clearly defined and fully institutionalised.

### ***Recommendation-6***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain define its key relationships in a structured and detailed format with appropriate terms of reference, membership and reporting lines for all the committees.*

The lack of an appropriate communication strategy, plan and process within RCSI-MUB was highlighted through the interviews with external stakeholders, staff members and students. It became apparent to the Panel that electronic communication focusing on email and the VLE is the cornerstone of the University's communication system. However, in a largely diverse organisation such as RCSI-MUB which operates on multiple sites (RCSI-MUB campus, BDF hospital, SMC and primary health care centres) and which has numerous links with other organisations (with RCSI-Dublin, the BDF and the MoH, for example) communication needs to be considered carefully. In interviews, the Panel learned of problems with communication in relation to module and lecture content experienced by both part-time teaching staff and students. The Panel also heard of similar problems in relation to the administration of the University, although these could have been exacerbated by a shortage of administrative staff. The Panel suggests that the University develop an effective strategy for communication supported by the structures and resources necessary to implement the strategy and to assign dedicated personnel to support the communication function.

### ***Recommendation-7***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain develop and implement an effective strategy, plan and structure for internal and external communication.*

The Panel was pleased to note that many part-time members of the academic staff are active members of institutional committees. The coherence of the committee structures within the SON&M was also noted.

### ***Commendation-1***

*HERU commends the involvement of the part-time academic members of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain in the academic committees.*

The Panel notes and values the commitment of RCSI-Dublin to the development of RCSI-MUB as well as the consultative process that has occurred with the multiple stakeholders in Bahrain such as the Ministries of Education, Health and Defence as well as the teaching hospitals. RCSI-MUB is engaging fully with the Parents University and the external stakeholders whether through their presence in the Board of Governance and the management team, or through *ad hoc* discussion and debate.

### ***Commendation-2***

*HERU commends the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain for the highly consultative processes it has engaged in with the Parent University (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in Dublin), and its multiple stakeholders in Bahrain.*

The Panel took into consideration that RCSI-MUB is a young and developing University in Bahrain. However, the Panel is concerned that many of the relationships appear to be based on personal links and are not fully institutionalised. A key institutional document is the Charter of RCSI-MUB which details the various governance, academic and administrative structures of the University. As already noted, structural relationships between the counterpart structures at RCSI-Dublin have not been fully clarified; in particular the key structural relationship between the Board of Governors of RCSI-MUB and the Council of RCSI-Dublin needs more clarity. The Panel could not determine the relationship as it is not spelled out in the Charter. The reporting relationships of the senior functionaries e.g., the President of RCSI-MUB and the Deans also need clarification with respect to their roles in the academic and administrative functions and committees at RCSI-Dublin. These should be explicit rather than implicit given the extent of the support and funding that RCSI-Dublin is contributing to RCSI-MUB.

The minutes of the Board of Governors meetings indicate that these meetings focus mainly on the 'business' and financial aspects of RCSI-MUB. Clearly this is important as financial

viability is important for the sustainability of the Institution. However, the Panel encourages that the remit of the Board be widened to cover issues affecting academic quality (the core business of RCSI-MUB), risk and other matters of a similar order. This will ensure that the Board has greater oversight of the management of the Institution. No monitoring and evaluation plan or process other than a check on attendance at Board meetings is in place to monitor the Board's effectiveness. This has been identified as an area for improvement in the University's own self-evaluation.

#### ***Affirmation-1***

*HERU affirms the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain's decision to develop and implement a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Board of Governors.*

The current Board of Governors is the Founding Board and as such, did not participate in any induction programme. There is no limit on the number of terms a member of the Board of Governors may serve and there are no policies, processes or procedures in place to appoint or disqualify members. The Panel is of the view that the Board may benefit from having wider representation from the broader Bahraini community. This participation could be in the form of full membership or from members acting in an advisory capacity.

## **4. Academic standards**

At the time of the site visit, the University has students enrolled in three programmes, namely: Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery, Bachelor of Nursing, and Masters of Science in Healthcare Ethics and Law. All these programmes are recognised by the HEC.

The Medical undergraduate programme was developed entirely by RCSI-Dublin. The degree for this programme is awarded by RCSI-MUB. Moreover, at the time of the site visit the Panel was informed that the National University of Ireland (NUI) Senate has decided to extend its MB BCh BAO degree to graduates from RCSI-MUB. This indicates that the graduates of RCSI-MUB will be receiving two degrees from RCSI-MUB and NUI. The twin programme running in RCSI-Dublin has gone through two voluntary evaluations against the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME) standards. The first evaluation found the programme to be within standards while the final report of the second review had not been released at the time of this site visit. The programme offered in RCSI-MUB was similarly assessed and accredited by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Deans Committee in 2006.

The BSc Nursing curriculum has been developed at RCSI-MUB as a result of collaboration between RCSI-Dublin, experts from Bahrain and other GCC countries. The curriculum is aligned with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Prototype Baccalaureate Nursing

Curriculum. The degree associated with this programme is awarded by RCSI-MUB. The curriculum of the nursing programme meets the standards of the Bahraini Ministry of Health and the GCC Countries. The nursing programme also fulfils the requirements of European Union Directives and graduates are eligible for European Union registration.

The MSc in Healthcare Ethics and Law was similarly developed at RCSI-MUB in association with RCSI-Dublin and its degree is awarded by RCSI-MUB. The recognition by NUI of the degrees associated with the Bachelor of Nursing programme and the Master of Science in Healthcare Ethics and Law has not yet been clarified. The Panel urges the University to clarify this matter as soon as possible and communicate the outcome with the students.

RCSI-MUB has also developed curricula for Bridging and Access to Bridging programmes; a Bachelor of Science Bridging Programme and a Master of Science Nursing programme and is planning to add these programmes to its offerings soon. The Panel is of the view that the University needs to graduate its first undergraduate cohort and evaluate the outcomes of its graduates before attempting to start a postgraduate programme in Nursing.

The University has detailed programme structures for all its offerings and information about the programmes and subjects are available through the University's website and the student handbook. RCSI-MUB also has a clear credit transfer system.

RCSI-MUB states in its SER that academic programmes are benchmarked in both RCSI-Dublin and RCSI-MUB to WFME standards using both internal and external assessments. The GCC Deans undertook a review of the RCSI-MUB Medical School in 2005 even though at this point in time, the Institution was still relatively new with no students in the Senior and Intermediate Cycles of its programme. The Panel noted the willingness of RCSI-MUB to engage with external reviews of its medical programme but would also encourage the University to seek opportunities for affording the same scrutiny to its nursing and postgraduate programmes.

As would be expected of a health sciences university, admissions to the programmes are governed by stringent admissions criteria encompassing consideration of candidates' achievement in previous levels of study and an interview intended to assess their suitability for the health professions.

RCSI-MUB is an English medium university situated in a region where English is predominantly used as a second, rather than a home language. The University has addressed this by instituting entrance requirements for language competence. A minimum IELTS or TOEFL score is required and, in addition, applicants are required to take the Oxford English Language Placement Test at the interview stage of the application process. Performance on the Oxford English Language Placement Test is then used to inform decisions regarding enrolment on additional language courses. The assessment of language competence is complex especially in situations where cultural and social difference predominates.

Determination of levels of performance on various tests is necessary to ensure the students' capacity to engage with the demands of the curriculum. This can only be achieved through careful monitoring of the students' performance and through comparison of this performance with the entry level scores.

RCSI-MUB is a new institution which has yet to graduate its first cohort of students and where student enrolments have yet to reach full capacity. The Panel would nevertheless strongly encourage RCSI-MUB to track students' performance against their entry level scores, particularly in the area of language, in order to identify the minimum levels at which students should be admitted to the University. As new language courses are developed, moreover, the Panel would also encourage RCSI-MUB to consider the way the literacy and linguistic demands of the curriculum, rather than more general literacy and linguistic practices, should inform their design in order to ensure that culture-specific norms are not imposed on students.

#### ***Recommendation-8***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain track students' performance against their entry level scores and use the results as an indicator for reviewing its admission policy.*

The University has adopted an approach to curriculum design and delivery which focuses on the attainment of Learning Outcomes (LOs). In an outcomes-based curriculum, LOs describe what students need to be able to do (based on underpinning theoretical knowledge) in order to be classified as 'competent'. These descriptions of what students need to be able to do (along with the theoretical knowledge which underpins them) are then scrutinized by external observers for appropriateness and equivalence. LOs thus become standards against which assessment takes place. Checking that a student can indeed do what she/he needs to be able to do in order to be classified as 'competent' then allows for standards to be assured and maintained at all levels of the curriculum in a valid and reliable manner.

The School of Nursing & Midwifery (SON&M) has developed LOs for all its programmes and the Panel was especially encouraged by the way in which outcomes relating to behaviour and communication have been integrated into learning across the entire nursing curriculum and by the way the development of LOs had also been informed by the need to develop generic skills associated with problem-solving, critical thinking, self-directed learning, holism and ethical behaviour. The development of an outcomes-based Personal and Professional Development (PPD) module running across the entire nursing programme was also noted. This concern to work with the construct of the learning outcome is also evident in assessment practice in the SON&M. Through interviews the Panel heard staff members involved in the nursing programme describe the way learning outcomes guide their practice as teachers. The Panel is satisfied that there is capacity within the SON&M to work within an overall outcomes-based approach.

### ***Commendation-3***

*HERU commends the School of Nursing & Midwifery of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain for the way it has consciously engaged with the principles of an outcomes-based curriculum and succeeded in putting these principles into practice in the development of curricula and assessment in its programme.*

In contrast to the SON&M, the SER identifies the need to finalise learning outcomes for all modules and courses in the undergraduate medical programme along with the need to develop learning outcomes for generic skills in the same programme as areas for improvement. The need to finalise outcomes has implications at many levels of the programme including assessment.

Assessment has received considerable attention at RCSI in recent years. This attention is evidenced in the establishment of an Assessment Working Group (AWG) in Dublin and the development of an institutional Assessment Strategy that should be applicable at RCSI-MUB as well as RCSI-Dublin. However, the Panel is concerned about the lack of the presence of teaching staff from RCSI-MUB in the AWG or a formal mechanism for RCSI-MUB's input to be presented to the AWG.

The Assessment Strategy developed by the AWG in Dublin provides an account of the way current scholarship on problem-based learning and outcomes-based education in medical education has been used to inform teaching and learning at RCSI. According to the Assessment Strategy, consideration of research on the use of problem-based learning in medical education has led to the decision not to adopt problem-based learning in a wholesale manner but rather to adopt a hybrid model known as 'case-based' or 'patient centred' learning. The use of an outcomes-based approach to education is, however, endorsed. The Assessment Strategy notes that the purpose of assessment is to ensure that the overarching outcomes for the entire course (i.e. Medical Graduate Profile) are being met. In this way, Assessment Strategy affirms the need for assessment to be aligned with LOs in an outcomes-based curriculum.

Given the lack of LOs at module and lecture level across the entire undergraduate medical programme along with the need to develop generic skills outcomes in the same programme, the Panel is of the opinion that assessment in an outcomes-based curriculum is clearly problematic since, in the absence of clearly identified LOs, there is no way of ensuring that the assessment is indeed assessing what it is intended to assess (i.e. that it is valid) or that it assesses consistently across the board (i.e. that it is reliable). The Panel urges the University to consider the implications of not implanting these areas of improvement in the context of its need to provide valid and reliable assessment and, thus, ensure academic standards.

### ***Affirmation-2***

*HERU affirms Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain's identification of the need to finalise Learning Outcomes for its undergraduate medical programme.*

As already noted, RCSI-MUB is a relatively new institution which will produce its first cohort of graduates in Medicine, Nursing and Healthcare Ethics and Law in 2010. The use of individual and aggregated data to improve student performance and to maintain academic standards at RCSI-MUB needs to be considered in this context. In interviews, the Panel was informed of the way data is scrutinized in order to identify students who might be at risk of failure and of the way individuals, cycle co-ordinators and Deans act on information gleaned from this process. In addition, the Panel was told how student assessment data is fed into committees and of the way trends in performance are monitored and managed by those in leadership positions related to teaching and learning. The Panel is encouraged by this monitoring in an Institution which is still relatively young and affirms RCSI-MUB's own identification of the need to continue to develop and strengthen systems involving the use of data to monitor and enhance student and teaching performance.

The Panel also heard of interviews being conducted with students who were leaving the undergraduate medical programme and was particularly encouraged by the use of critical incident analysis to explore attrition in the nursing programme. The Panel concurs with the University's own identification of the need to continue to strengthen and develop work in this area.

### ***Affirmation-3***

*HERU affirms the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain decision to strengthen and develop the collection of student aggregated data and the use of these data in decision making.*

The SER describes in some detail the use of attendance records in the monitoring of student progress. RCSI-MUB identifies the use of educational technology (the VLE and the provision of laptop computers) as key to curriculum delivery. In interviews, the Panel heard students articulate very clearly the view that, in some cases, in the early years of the curriculum, lectures added little value to the teaching material available on the VLE. Where lectures were perceived to add value, students claimed that they would attend without fail. Where lectures were not perceived to add value, then attendance became less important. RCSI-MUB keeps records on lecture attendance. The use of data on lecture attendance could thus be more useful in evaluating courses and teacher performance in the Junior Cycle than in accounting for student progress. The Panel encourages RCSI-MUB to consider what data on student attendance could be useful in the context of the entire process of curriculum delivery used at the University. This is particularly important given that the need to

improve the system to monitor attendance against performance is identified as an area for improvement.

RCSI-MUB is a constituent University of RCSI-Dublin. In the medical programme particularly, RCSI-MUB follows the same curriculum, examinations and assessment policy as the Parent University. However, five years into the operation of the University, the Panel did not see evidence of a written agreement between the two institutions. The University Charter, which is still in draft format, does not explain the exact relationship between the two institutions.

The University states in its SER that “RCSI-MUB has sufficient control within the relationship, with its own management structure, budget and board of Governors”. However, during the interviews and through scrutiny of evidence such as the minutes of meetings of Board of Governors, it became apparent to the Panel that final decisions have to be made in Ireland rather than in Bahrain. An example of one such decision relates to the introduction of an undergraduate programme in dentistry.

#### ***Recommendation-9***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain clearly define in a policy document the relationship between the University and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Dublin.*

The University has clearly defined MOUs with all the training centres, hospitals and ministries with which it collaborates. Where deemed necessary, RCSI-MUB has joint committees with those bodies which manage the implementation of the MOU and the day-to-day dealings between the different partners. As a result of interviewing various stakeholders and scrutinising a range of evidence, the Panel is satisfied that the MOUs are effective and that their implementation is sound.

## **5. Quality assurance and enhancement**

RCSI-MUB notes in its SER that the Quality Assurance (QA) activities were initiated in the form of the Quality Assurance Working Party in 2005. This structure eventually developed into the Quality Assurance Group in 2007. Since its establishment, RCSI-MUB has demonstrated commitment to QA. This was evident to the Panel through interviewing staff at different institutional levels and from a number of activities conducted by the University, such as voluntary external QA assessments, the use of external examiners, and internal QA measurements within the University, such as students’ evaluations on both University and module level, staff surveys and questionnaires. The Panel praises RCSI-MUB for this commitment to the assurance of quality.

#### ***Commendation-4***

*HERU commends the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland–Medical University of Bahrain for its commitment toward assuring quality in its core functions.*

The Quality Assurance Group (QAG) consists of both academic and administrative staff. From the SER and the interviews it became evident to the Panel that the University has not yet identified the reporting lines of the QAG. The body is considered to be a ‘working group’ rather than a committee and hence it does not appear on the Academic Committee reporting structures of RCSI-MUB. The Panel was also informed that the QAG is an ‘advisory group’ that reports directly to the President or on some occasions, to the Academic Board. No groups or committees report to the QAG itself.

The Panel urges RCSI-MUB to formalise its existing quality structure as well as to consider the most appropriate location of the QAG within the governance structure of the University. The University should also consider whether institutional functioning would be improved if some of the committees currently reporting to the Academic Board were to do so through the QAG. The Panel also studied the QAG remit and suggest the remit be revised to cover all aspects of the quality assurance function as well as the quality enhancement/improvement of the student experience.

#### ***Recommendation-10***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland–Medical University of Bahrain review the status and the line of reporting of its Quality Assurance Group and revise the Group’s remit to cover all aspects of the quality assurance functions.*

As a result of interviews conducted at RCSI-MUB and the scrutiny of evidence submitted by the Institution, the Panel has come to the conclusion that steps taken to assure and enhance quality at RCSI-MUB are still in the early stages of development. Further steps should include the development of an overarching quality assurance framework and the associated development and implementation of a quality plan. Furthermore, attention needs to be given to the management of quality across the core functions, and, in particular to teaching and learning where the use of a more extensive data set for the production of KPIs for teaching and learning can be used to enhance the quality provision.

#### ***Recommendation-11***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland–Medical University of Bahrain develop a university-wide quality assurance framework, and after which develop and implement a quality plan.*

The University identifies as an area for improvement, the need to develop a quality handbook to support the QA process and that the handbook will include mechanisms

intended to identify, implement and recognise quality improvements. The Panel confirms the University's assessment of this need.

***Affirmation-4***

*HERU affirms the need of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland–Medical University of Bahrain to develop an internal Quality Assurance handbook that would include processes to identify, implement and recognise quality improvements.*

As noted earlier, RCSI-MUB conducts evaluation of the different modules taught in the University. However, the Panel observed inconsistency in the implementation and use of these evaluations. For example, from its meeting with part-time clinical staff, the Panel noted that some of the staff, particularly those involved in the medical rather than the nursing programme, had little or no involvement in the module evaluation process.

It was also evident to the Panel that data have not always been collected systematically; feedback to staff has not been provided consistently and therefore it has not been possible to develop improvement plans. In general there was not much evidence in the SER or the supporting materials on data being collected, analysed and used for informed decision making. The Panel urges the University to collect data systematically, analyse them and use the results for evidence-based decision-making.

***Recommendation-12***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland–Medical University of Bahrain develop and implement a process to systematically collect data on its core functions, analyse them and use the results for informed decision-making.*

## **6. Quality of teaching and learning**

RCSI-MUB prides itself on the way both its medical and nursing programmes meet international standards. This is reflected in the rigorous review and benchmarking processes undertaken as curricula for its programmes were developed. The SER notes that new programmes are developed in collaboration with RCSI-Dublin and that approval processes include consideration of budgeting and resourcing requirements. According to the SER, a review of the nursing programme is planned for the second semester of the 2009-2010 academic year to coincide with the graduation of the first cohort of BSc Nursing graduates. The Panel suggests the University consider developing a framework for programme review before the planned review takes place so that the actual review can be used to evaluate and strengthen review processes and, thus, facilitate reviews of other programmes. As the

review framework is developed, RCSI-MUB is encouraged to incorporate all elements of programme design and delivery and not only the curriculum design and content in the review processes.

Whilst the Panel agrees that the design and review of the MB BCh curriculum in Medicine by RCSI-Dublin provides some measure of oversight and international credibility, this may impede flexibility at local level and hinder adaptation of the curriculum to the health needs of the region. The Panel has no evidence that the health requirements in the Kingdom of Bahrain are considered, through formal structure and mechanisms, in the development and review of programmes and curricula. The SER notes that consultations with stakeholders “*are embedded in the everyday work of the RCSI-MUB nurse teachers*”. However, it does not state how the University ensures that these interactions are formalised. Similar comment can be made in relation to the School of Medicine.

Available documentation shows that RCSI-MUB has a clearly articulated approach to teaching and learning informed by current scholarship in the field. It was less clear to the Panel how this approach was put in to practice. In interviews, although staff members were familiar with terms such as ‘learning outcomes’ or ‘problem-based learning’ not all were able to describe how the principles related to these theoretical positions applied to their own practice as teachers and assessors. This is an important observation given the RCSI-MUB Noble Purpose to “*enhance health in Bahrain, the other GCC countries and beyond through endeavour, innovation and collaboration in education, research and science*”. In contrast to the innovative practice associated with theoretical positions such as outcomes-based education and ‘case based’ or ‘patient centred’ learning, the Panel found evidence that teaching and learning activities at RCSI-MUB are focused on traditional lines.

RCSI-MUB is able to draw on the expertise in Dublin for staff development *via* video-conferencing, electronic links as well as through actual visits by staff based in Dublin. In interviews, although the Panel was encouraged to hear that attendance at staff development sessions was growing, it was also informed that attendance did not extend to all staff. The development of academic staff as educators is an important issue and the experience of staff developers at RCSI-MUB with regard participation is by no means unusual at an international level. The Panel urges RCSI-MUB to intensify its efforts in the area of staff development and to consider ways in which the development of expertise in teaching and learning can be linked more firmly to appointments and promotion procedures.

### ***Recommendation-13***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain strengthen its staff development practices and ensure that expertise in teaching and learning is linked to appointments and promotion procedures.*

Teaching staff are recruited on the basis of qualifications and experience and all are expected to have the highest qualifications possible. While there is no doubt that high levels of

expertise in health science related fields are imperative at a health science university, qualifications and expertise in medically related disciplines are by no means the only important criteria for appointment (and promotion) in a university dedicated to providing first class medical and nursing programmes. A shift in institutional discourse to stress the importance of expertise in teaching and learning could be a key factor to the achievement of the purpose RCSI-MUB has set for itself.

In this regard, the Panel was encouraged to hear that medical and health sciences education has been identified as a possible research niche at RCSI-MUB. The development and acknowledgement of research-based expertise in teaching and learning has the potential to contribute to the development of the University overall and, most importantly, to the achievement of its Noble Purpose.

#### ***Affirmation-5***

*HERU affirms the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain's identification of medical and health sciences education as a possible research niche at the University.*

The use of outcomes-based and case/patient centred approaches to learning not only requires shifts in teaching practice but also in the development of learning materials/learning support. The SER identifies the need to quantify the extent to which teaching materials are 'up to date' as an area for improvement in relation to teaching and learning. While the content of the curriculum in a health science university needs to be informed by the latest research and advances in medical practice, it is also crucial for materials provided to students to be 'up to date' in the sense that they embody the principles of the approaches to teaching and learning adopted by the University. The Panel encourages the University to ensure that any review of materials considers the way they embody pedagogy and not only content.

This point is also pertinent to the use of the VLE at RCSI-MUB. According to the SER, "RCSI-MUB prides itself on the use of world class educational technology to help support and deliver the curriculum", which is evident in the provision of laptop computers to students and in the number of courses/modules with a presence on the VLE. In interviews, however, the Panel was informed that, to a large extent, the VLE was functioning as a device for the delivery of curriculum content rather than as a learning platform through which online learning activities are integrated with contact sessions in order to achieve an overall approach to curriculum delivery. This observation was supported by comments from students that some lecturers did not add value to PowerPoint presentations and other materials which could be found on the VLE. The lectures, rather, were simply a restating of material available on the VLE. If RCSI-MUB is to fulfil its Noble Purpose of achieving innovation in relation to the education it offers and if, moreover, it is to maximize the investment it has made in the provision of hardware and software for the electronic learning environment it values, then

attention needs to be paid to developing and rewarding the capacity of staff members to design curricula at module and course level which explore the full functionality of Moodle and which integrate online learning with class-based sessions.

***Recommendation-14***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons-Medical University of Bahrain further develop the capacity of the University's staff members to design curricula at module and course level which explore the full functionality of the Virtual Learning Environment available at the University and which fully integrate online learning with lectures and case-based sessions.*

The need for RCSI-MUB to utilize staff development expertise in Dublin has already been noted in this report. In Bahrain, an Academic Director has been appointed to work in the field of ICT in teaching and learning. Given the need for the functionality of Moodle to be explored to its full capacity if a true virtual learning environment is to be achieved, and the amount of support which will be required by academic staff in Bahrain for this to happen, ways for RCSI-MUB to be assisted more effectively through the provision of support from Dublin need to be explored more rigorously.

The Panel met with a large number of full and part-time members of the academic staff at RCSI-MUB and was impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment to their work as educators. While capacity to assure the quality of teaching and learning at a more junior level was evident throughout the visit, the Panel was deeply concerned about capacity at the more senior levels. Currently, Six Heads of Department (in Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Psychiatry, Medicine, Pathology and Family Medicine) have been appointed and a seventh position (in Paediatrics) remains to be filled. Three of the members of staff appointed to the senior positions have returned from retirement to teach at RCSI-MUB and have been appointed only on a temporary basis. The need to appoint Heads of Departments who can serve the University in a more long-term capacity is imperative to ensure continuity and viability.

***Recommendation-15***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain identify suitable individuals who can provide academic leadership and clinical mentoring and who are able to work in Bahrain on a more permanent basis than most current appointees to the posts.*

RCSI-MUB uses student feedback on course design and teaching extensively in order to gain insight into the effectiveness of its programmes. There is evidence on the use of these reviews by RCSI-MUB to develop further its modules, programmes and services. The Panel was pleased to note the care which had been taken to distinguish between feedback on course design and feedback on individual teachers and of the way feedback on teaching was

directed at the individuals concerned and not made public. The Panel was also encouraged by descriptions of the way peer review on teaching is conducted in the School of Nursing & Midwifery since the perspective of a peer provides an alternative to student perspectives and can be used as a form of triangulation in research-based evaluation. The Panel also noted that RCSI-MUB has identified the need to develop policies on evaluation in the near future.

#### ***Affirmation-6***

*HERU affirms the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain's decision to develop and implement policies on students' feedback surveys and peer evaluations.*

In the course of its visit to RCSI-MUB, the Panel visited the Bahraini Defence Force Hospital (BDF) and Al Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC). Observations at both these sites of clinical training suggested that students in the nursing and medical programmes had little contact with each other during their time at the hospitals and were not invited to share in the same learning opportunities during clinical rounds and clinical teaching activities. In interviews, the Panel gained the impression that, while the Deans of the Nursing and Medical Schools did interact with each other closely on matters related to management, interaction around curriculum issues was considerably less. This impression regarding interaction between the two programmes was then substantiated in interviews with members of teaching staff and students of both programmes. Given the dominance of team-based approaches to health care, the Panel urges RCSI-MUB to consider how the nursing and medical programmes can interact closely, particularly in clinical training.

## **7. Student support**

The University has a comprehensive handbook with detailed information on the course structure for both medicine and nursing. The Panel was informed that the handbook is updated on a yearly basis and is given to new students. Students continuing from previous years are not supplied with the new handbooks. The University has stated that students can access the handbook on the VLE. However, the edition uploaded on the VLE is not the most recent one and this could result in a failure to communicate important information and changes in University policies to continuing students. The Panel encourages the University to update the student handbook uploaded on the VLE at regular intervals.

RCSI-MUB states in its SER that students are informed of relevant administrative information such as examination dates through the VLE. However, in interviews with students, the Panel was informed of incidents where the wrong examination dates had been posted on the VLE. Moreover, since students are automatically enrolled in all students'

forums and news groups, they receive a large amount of email and information which, on some occasions, may lead to individuals failing to take note of important information. All changes in policies and procedures, class and examination schedules are announced through the VLE. Whilst the VLE can be utilised as a communication tool, it should not be the only tool on which the University depends. The University might like to consider a range of methods and schemes through which it can communicate with its multi-cultural student community.

The University provides its students with counselling services through one counsellor who serves both staff and students. At the time of the site visit, the Panel was informed that the student counsellor screens the students needing therapeutic counselling and refers them, if needed, to a list of clinical counsellors. The Panel was informed that RCSI-MUB would pay for a maximum of 10 therapy sessions for each student. The Panel was encouraged by this manifestation of concern with student well-being.

#### ***Commendation-5***

*HERU commends the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain for the attention it gives to its students through the provision of free therapy sessions from external providers.*

The counsellor also runs a number of workshops on study skills, stress management and wellness. Whilst the Panel appreciates the amount of work done in this area, it is of the view that the department capacity needs to be strengthened in the face of the increasing numbers of students and staff members.

The Student Support Office is the locus of all student services. It is responsible for liaison with all student societies, overlooking the establishment of new student societies, arranging with the Student Council their annual budget and some of their social activities. In addition, the Office supervises the arrangements needed to transport students to and from the clinical rotations at the health centres and hospitals. Due to the inadequate number of staff in the Office, the Panel heard that complaints can take a long time to be resolved and that there are delays in the provision of some services. The Panel advises the University to resource adequately the Student Support Office.

#### ***Recommendation- 16***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain strengthen all its student support services in order to meet the needs of the increasing number of students.*

Students of RCSI-MUB come from diverse educational, social and cultural backgrounds and more than 30 different nationalities are represented in medical and nursing programmes. The gender distribution is almost equal for the undergraduate School of Medicine while it is

tilted towards females in the case of the MSc Healthcare Ethics & Law programme and the undergraduate nursing programme. The University does not have any on- or off-campus residences available for its students, though the Panel was informed that it plans to build on-campus student accommodation. No date was given to the Panel about when on-campus accommodation will be available for students. At present, students arrange for rented apartments with some information being provided by the Student Service Office. In interviews, students indicated that arrangements for accommodation were unsatisfactory both in relation to cost as well as to their need to remain at the campus or at hospitals after hours as part of their study needs. The Panel urges the University to review the arrangements with respect to student accommodation.

#### ***Recommendation-17***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain provide students with assistance for off-campus accommodation while the University works towards building on-campus residences.*

Students enjoy representation at different levels of the University's structure by means of a range of student organisations as well as by means of the Student Council and a system of class representatives. As a result of interviews, the Panel came to the conclusion that discrepancies exist in the extent to which student representative bodies are effective. While the class representation system appears to work for resolving academic matters of a single class of students, the student council reported that it does not have power in resolving problems across the whole student body. This belief was shared among students generally. Moreover, the Constitution of the present Student Council states that students are elected onto the Student Council by receiving the majority of the students' vote. Since the number of medical students is larger than the number of nursing students, the present Student Council does not include participation from nursing students. This appears to have led to the perception amongst nursing students that the Student Council exists to represent medical students only. This perception appears to deter nursing students from standing for election. The post-graduate students appeared to be even more alienated from the Student Council's activities. The Panel suggests that the University engage with its students and develop a mechanism through which the Constitution could be reviewed to ensure that students in all programmes are represented in the Student Council.

#### ***Recommendation-18***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain engage in a dialogue with all its students in order to develop a mechanism through which the Constitution of the Student Council could be reviewed so that it ensures that students in all programmes are represented in the Student Council.*

The University offers transportation to and from the training hospitals. In interviews, however, the Panel heard that the timing of the service makes it almost impossible to use. Every morning, the buses leave the University campus at 6:30am, regardless of the students' schedule. This early departure makes it unfeasible for the students who are all living off campus to use the facility. Students are forced to arrange their own transport to the hospitals. The Panel advises the University to investigate ways in which this matter might be resolved.

'At risk' students are identified through the Student Progress Committee, where students who fail in more than one module are identified and channelled to the appropriate staff members and support structures. Identifying students who are 'at risk' once they have failed means that the support and development interventions are retroactive. The Panel encourages the University to develop a process for monitoring students that would identify and support students who are at-risk before they actually fail.

## **8. Human resources**

Since its inception in 2004, RCSI-MUB has met its staffing requirements through the secondment of staff from RCSI-Dublin and through local and international recruitment. At the beginning of the 2008-2009 academic year, three distinguished professors were recruited from Dublin as Heads of Departments on fixed term contracts to coordinate the teaching of Senior Cycles 1 and 2 of the medical programme. It is the view of the Panel that contributions by individuals of this calibre are vital to the long-term viability of the medical programme. It is therefore essential that the University should put in place a programme of succession planning so that individuals of similar stature can be identified to take over from the current incumbents of these senior posts when they leave.

Given the need for leadership at senior levels, the Panel noted that the post of Head of Paediatrics in the School of Medicine, which is currently vacant, needs to be filled with some urgency. The Panel was also concerned that the recruitment of part-time clinical staff to support the final stages of the medicine programme should be completed as soon as possible. In interviews, the Panel heard that although current staffing levels meant that basic activities in both undergraduate programmes are covered, the workload of the academic staff members is high and does not allow time for staff development and for research activities. The Panel urges the University to consider whether additional staffing might be necessary particularly for the 2010-2011 academic year.

The recruitment of support staff is ongoing. At the time of the production of the SER, a number of key administrative positions had been filled including posts in the areas of admissions, student records and ICT. A number of other key support staff positions remained unfilled at the time of the site visit, including the Director of Human Resources

(HR) and a Health and Safety Officer. Following meetings with the support staff and students, the Panel encourages the University to increase the staffing in Student Support as a matter of some urgency.

The Panel was impressed by the quality of the full-time and part-time teaching staff and in particular by their concern to contribute to learning and teaching of the highest standard. However, in interviews with full-time academic staff, concerns were expressed about recruitment and promotion procedures. The Panel was informed that the inclusion of research as a criterion in the recruitment process had been misleading as, in reality; staff currently had little or no time for research. In addition the promotion criteria are not transparent. The matter has been raised for consideration at the most recent meeting of the Academic Board. The Panel urges the University's management team to work closely with the academic staff to resolve this issue.

The Performance Development and Review process is in a very early stage of implementation. As a result, the Panel cannot make any comment on the effectiveness of the process. The University is, however, encouraged to continue with the process and to include an evaluation of the system at the earliest possible opportunity so that it can be refined. In particular, the link between the Performance Development and Review process and the continuing professional development needs of both the academic and administrative staff needs to be resolved. The Panel encourages the University to develop a clear plan for staff development that would formally use the data extracted from the Performance Development and Review process.

The SER identifies *inter alia*, as an area for improvement, recording the CPD requirements for professional registration and ensuring that staff are provided with opportunities and assistance to fulfil these requirements. The Panel views this as a potential area which could harm the reputation of the University. This issue is particularly pertinent to the secondment on fixed term contracts of academic staff from Ireland or elsewhere. The Panel advises the Institution to undertake a systematic investigation across all the professions represented in the University to assess the extent of the issue in order to safeguard the reputation of the University and to ensure that accurate information is provided to potential staff during the recruitment process.

#### ***Recommendation-19***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain undertake a systematic investigation across all the professions represented in the University to assess the problems surrounding the professional registration of the staff on secondment to the University, in order to safeguard the University and ensure that accurate information is provided to potential staff during the recruitment process.*

## 9. Infrastructure, physical and other resources

RCSI-MUB has moved recently to its new campus which is located in Busaytin, Muharaq, next to the King Hamad General Hospital (KHG) which is currently under construction. The Panel toured the facilities at RCSI-MUB. It found that the infrastructure in terms of lecture theatres and seminar rooms to be adequate for the needs of the number of students and type of programmes conducted. The Panel confirmed this finding in interview sessions with students and staff members.

The assessment of the library revealed a reliance on electronic facilities which are easy to access on and off campus. The designated reading and study areas in the library are very limited and insufficient for the number of students. This point was noted by students and by the University itself. During the site visit, the University indicated that there are plans to extend the learning resource area to provide more space for study and to include some other facilities that would enhance the students' abilities to use the University's learning resources. The Panel saw evidence of work being carried out to execute the plan.

### *Affirmation-7*

*HERU affirms the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain's decision to expand its learning resource area and its facilities.*

Eight electronic journal databases are available in the Library although most of these can be accessed at the level of abstracts only. However, the University has inter-library loan arrangements in place which means that an entire journal article can be sourced if needed. RCSI-MUB does not have access to the electronic databases in Dublin. The Panel encourages RCSI-MUB to consider enhancing access to on-line resources from RCSI-Dublin in order to provide students and staff with a wider range of learning and research material.

Students and staff members have access to wireless connectivity throughout the campus. Each student is assigned a laptop computer. Recently the University initiated a hot-desk for IT services located near the Learning Resource Centre.

The University uses a QUERCUS system for managing students' records and data. The system is operated on a local computer by authorized record management software. The system is backed-up on a weekly basis, with a monthly record of the backup stored off-campus. The Panel is satisfied that sufficient attention has been paid to ensure security and to safeguard data.

The University has two multipurpose laboratories for the use of medical and nursing students and one laboratory which is being readied for use by staff members for research activities. In addition, there is a simulation laboratory that is equipped with multipurpose

mannequins for the training of medical and nursing students. As both medical and nursing students are reaching the final years of their studies, the Panel believes there is an urgent need for equipping the laboratory with models which will allow students to develop more advanced clinical skills. The Panel was informed that the University is in the process of ordering and receiving more sophisticated models to be used in the simulation laboratory.

#### ***Affirmation-8***

*HERU affirms the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain's decision to equip the simulation laboratory with advanced models to be used for training medical and nursing students on advanced clinical and nursing skills.*

According to the SER, the multipurpose laboratories are equipped for running the practical components of the courses. The Panel toured the laboratories and spoke with faculty members and students who use the facilities. The laboratories depend on pre-prepared specimens and slides and are timetabled to be used for practical classes and by students for revision. Although capacity in the laboratories appears to be sufficient at present, the University will need to review its current infrastructure in the face of increased demands as students and staff numbers grow in the years to come.

The staff research laboratory is at an early stage of development and is poorly equipped. As the University starts to develop and implement its research strategy, the development of the research laboratory needs to progress to facilitate the implementation of the University's research activities. The University will also need to focus on building the infrastructure necessary to conduct research in identified niche areas.

The Panel has toured both the SMC & BDF hospitals where students of RCSI-MUB are exposed to clinical study. The BDF hospital has one auditorium equipped with video teleconferencing where medical staff and students can participate in weekly "grand rounds" conducted in Dublin, and where other academic activities are held. The hospital is also equipped with a small library housing desktop computers and is furnished with facilities necessary for wireless connectivity. At the SMC, small conference rooms equipped with desktop computers are available for students from different medical schools using the hospital for clinical training and for the medical staff of the SMC.

In both hospitals, the Panel found the infrastructure to be sufficient and conducive to learning needs. However, as the number of RCSI-MUB's Senior Cycle students increases, the physical infrastructure and carrying capacity of the hospitals for clinical training will come under pressure. This is especially the case since both hospitals are also used as training centres by other medical and nursing schools. The University indicated to the Panel that once the KHG is commissioned, it will be managed by RCSI-Dublin and used for the training of the RCSI-MUB students. However the Panel was not provided with any evidence

of this claim as the agreement has not yet been formulated. The Panel encourages the University to seek a finalisation of the agreement concerning the use of the KHG hospital with some urgency as the availability of an additional clinical training site will impact profoundly on students' learning and clinical experiences and, thus, the quality of their clinical training.

## 10. Research

Although research is seen as a component of the Mission statement and a key pillar in the Strategic Plan of RCSI-Dublin, little has been done in this regard at RCSI-MUB. Research activities started in 2007 with the development of a Research Committee which developed the Research Strategy, student research activities, documentation of faculty research, and allocation of 1% of the budget for research. In addition RCSI-MUB indicated that a Research Ethics Committee has been formed with the task of reviewing research protocols and investigating allegations of misconduct.

As a result of interviews with members of the Board of Governors, senior management, academics and graduate students and as a review of the Research Strategy 2008, the Panel found that the University acknowledges the importance of research at all levels and is committed to the development of the Institution and the promotion and standing of its faculty members through research.

While a commitment to furthering research was clearly evident, the Panel found that, until now, the University has not yet achieved its Mission in relation to the research component. The lack of appropriate research planning is evident in (i) the Institution's non-compliance with a guideline of the HEC to allocate 3% of its budget for research in the face of the need to allocate funding for the development of academic programmes and infrastructure; (ii) the Research Strategy not being comprehensive and not including detailed activities, possible external funding resources and collaborative opportunities with RCSI-Dublin or any international and regional agencies; (iii) a failure to build the capacity to conduct research in the three research areas identified in the Strategy, an observation supported by the fact that only one research capacity building workshop for staff appears to have been conducted at RCSI-MUB.

As already noted, the University has established a Research Ethics Committee (REC). The committee meets on *ad hoc* basis to examine all research involving human or animal subjects. The location of the REC in the organizational structures of RCSI-MUB raises an issue of how ethical matters are discussed in a transparent way, free of any conflicts of interest. The Panel encourages the University to review the REC structure to enable appropriate reporting and transparency in its workings.

The University offers a Master's degree in Healthcare Ethics and Law and is planning a Master's in Nursing Science programme which will commence soon. Given that graduate students will be involved in research work, the Panel encourages the University to identify processes for ethical approval of proposals for both student and faculty researchers. In addition, the University needs to consider how it will build the capacity of its academic staff and students to make decisions on ethical issues and codes of conduct in relation to human and animal research. The Panel also encourages the University to identify mechanisms which will guide students' research interests in the direction of the niche areas identified in the Research Strategy.

***Recommendation-20***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain review the processes used to review and approve research proposals submitted by both students and faculty members and that the University's Research and Ethics Committee commit to building the capacity of its students and staff members to make decisions in relation to ethical issues and codes of conduct in human and animal research.*

In interviews with academics, the Panel was pleased to note the emphasis placed on the need to research local health problems e.g., haematological disorders and diabetes. The Panel supports this emphasis and encourages RCSI-MUB to develop the capacity and provide the resources to achieve this focus. To this end, the Panel is of the view that that RCSI-Dublin has the potential to support RCSI-MUB through collaborative research activities and through the transfer of technology and the provision of research support.

***Affirmation-9***

*HERU affirms the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain's commitment to conduct research activities on local health problems.*

Although the review revealed evidence of some individual researchers conducting research activities it was evident to the Panel that the University had not yet developed a concerted institutional research thrust driven by a research strategy and plan. Since the lack of a research culture within the Institution has the potential to impact on the recruitment and retention of staff at the University, the Panel urges RCSI-MUB to focus on the development of an overarching research and implementation strategy which includes defining niche areas and identifying the mechanisms and support necessary for both established and aspiring researchers to be productive within them.

***Recommendation-21***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain develop and implement an overarching research strategy and provide the capacity and resources needed to attain the goals identified in it.*

## 11. Community engagement

RCSI-MUB comments that RCSI-Dublin has cooperated with the Kingdom of Bahrain for more than 20 years in order to provide undergraduate and postgraduate education and training across a range of healthcare subjects. The extent of this cooperation was made clear to the Panel through interviews with different stakeholders. RCSI-MUB made it clear that its own aim is to build on the longstanding relationship between RCSI-Dublin and the Kingdom of Bahrain.

During the site visit, the Panel interviewed a number of staff across the University on the current status of community engagement at RCSI-MUB. The Panel did not find a shared understanding of community engagement as being the third core function of the Institution. As noted in the SER, there is no policy on community engagement. The Panel urges the University to develop and implement a policy on community engagement which includes a mechanism for recording and evaluating community involvement activities.

### *Recommendation-22*

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain develop and implement a community engagement policy that includes a mechanism for monitoring, recording and evaluating its community involvement.*

In meetings with full-time students, the Panel heard that some community engagement activities had occurred recently as the result of action on the part of the student clubs and societies. An example of this is the students' involvement in donating a bottle of water to each of the 1400 construction workers engaged in building the King Hamad Hospital on a site adjacent to the University. However, there appeared to be very little, if any, involvement of staff in these student outreach activities or, for that matter, in any other activities focused on engaging with local communities. The management arrangements of RCSI-MUB with external stakeholders such as the BDF, MoH, SMC are mainly focused on the academic and clinical training needs of RCSI-MUB. By their nature, health sciences universities need to develop commitment to community engagement given that the clinical and community experiences that students and staff gain from their learning and research activities are from the individuals, families and groups within the community. RCSI-Dublin appears to have developed structured outreach activities, e.g., by initiating training programmes for teachers in schools in inner city communities. The Panel urges RCSI-MUB to explore the development of structures which will allow it to attain similar goals as the Parent University.

It is hoped that as RCSI-MUB grows, its staff and students will support the wider health service and community development initiatives in Bahrain and the region as outlined in its Noble Purpose. The Panel encourages RCSI-MUB to develop this function through a plan in which the University conceptualises its understanding of community engagement, integrates the community engagement activities into other core functions, details the way community

engagement activities will be reported upon at all levels of its governance structures, ensures adequate resourcing for this core function and outlines the way quality will be assured.

***Recommendation-23***

*HERU recommends that the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Medical University of Bahrain develop a plan in which the University conceptualises its arrangements for supporting the wider health services and community development initiatives in Bahrain and the region as outlined in its Noble Purpose.*

## **12. Conclusion**

RCSI-MUB is a young university that has invested substantially in its infrastructure and the development of its curricula. The Panel is encouraged by the robust commitment of RCSI-Dublin to the development of RCSI-MUB and by the consultative process that has been undertaken with multiple stakeholders in Bahrain. The Panel is also impressed with the standard of RCSI-MUB's full- and part-time academic staff and their involvement and concern for being part of delivering a quality teaching and learning experience. The commitment to the development of a quality higher education environment and programmes is also evident.

Nevertheless, as a health sciences university, RCSI-MUB faces a number of challenges. Firstly, there is a need to pay attention to health and safety issues with some urgency. Secondly, the University needs to move its relationships with various stakeholders into a more structured and detailed format that is agreed by all parties concerned. Thirdly, in line with the growth in student and staff numbers, the University needs to pay further attention to strengthening all layers of administration and support services and to developing the infrastructure which will sustain good quality teaching and learning and which will allow for the development of research.

Other major challenges facing RCSI-MUB are in recruiting and, to lesser extent, retaining senior academics who can provide leadership and depth in its programme offerings. A failure to meet this challenge will present a risk to the sustainability of the Institution as well as its academic standards.

The quality assurance and management system is in its early stages and needs to be developed. Further attention needs to be given to the management of quality across the core functions. Systematic attention to quality will allow the Institution to build on the foundations it has already put in place.

Addressing these challenges will enable will enable RCSI-MUB to go a long way in fulfilling its Noble Purpose and making a positive and lasting contribution to the health and welfare of the people of Bahrain.