



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

# **Higher Education Review Unit**

## **Programmes-within-College Reviews**

### **Report**

**Masters of Science in Nursing Programme**  
**School of Studies & Research**  
**RCSI- Medical Postgraduate University of Bahrain**  
**Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Date Reviewed: 15 -18 October 2012**

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## Acronyms

ABA	<i>An Bord Altranais</i>
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
HEC	Higher Education Council of the Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Bahrain
HERU	Higher Education Review Unit
ILO	Intended Learning Outcome
MSc	Masters of Science in Nursing
NAQQAET	National Authority for Qualification and Quality Assurance of Education and Training
NGP	Nursing Graduate Profile
NUI	National University of Ireland
PDR	Performance & Development Review
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
QEO	Quality Enhancement Office
RCSI Dublin	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
RCSI- MUB	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland - Medical University of Bahrain
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SNAC	School of Nursing Academic Committee
SON&M	School of Nursing & Midwifery
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

# 1. The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process

## 1.1 The Programmes-within-College Reviews Framework

To meet the need to have a robust external quality assurance system in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the National Authority for Qualifications & Quality Assurance of Education & Training (NAQQAET) has developed and is implementing two external quality review processes, namely: Institutional Reviews and Programmes-within-College Reviews, which together will give confidence in Bahrain's higher education system nationally, regionally and internationally.

Programmes-within-College Reviews have three main objectives:

- to provide decision-makers (in the higher education institutions, the NAQQAET, the Higher Education Council (HEC), students and their families, prospective employers of graduates and other stakeholders) with evidence-based judgements on the quality of learning programmes
- to support the development of internal quality assurance processes with information on emerging good practices and challenges, evaluative comments and continuing improvement
- to enhance the reputation of Bahrain's higher education regionally and internationally.

The *four* indicators that are used to measure whether or not a programme meets international standards are as follows:

### **Indicator 1: The Learning Programme**

*The programme demonstrates fitness for purpose in terms of mission, relevance, curriculum, pedagogy, intended learning outcomes and assessment.*

### **Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme**

*The programme is efficient in terms of the admitted students, the use of available resources - staffing, infrastructure and student support.*

### **Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates**

*The graduates of the programme meet academic standards compatible with equivalent programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally.*

### **Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance**

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

The Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Panel’) states in the Review Report whether the programme satisfies each Indicator. If the programme satisfies all four Indicators, the concluding statement will say that there is ‘confidence’ in the programme.

If two or three Indicators are satisfied, including Indicator 1, the programme will receive a ‘limited confidence’ judgement. If one or no Indicator is satisfied, or Indicator 1 is not satisfied, the judgement will be ‘no confidence’, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Criteria for Judgements**

Criteria	Judgement
All four Indicators satisfied	Confidence
Two or three Indicators satisfied, including Indicator 1	Limited Confidence
One or no Indicator satisfied	No Confidence
All cases where <b>Indicator 1</b> is not satisfied	

## 1.2 The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain

Programmes-within-College Reviews are specialized exercises, that focus on the academic standards of each programme and its delivery and the quality assurance arrangements within all learning programmes at Bachelor and Master levels within a college in a particular major disciplinary area. For the purposes of this Framework, while the term ‘College’ is used, it includes the terms ‘Faculty’, ‘School’, (or any other equivalent term) which offers a higher education programme. All programmes leading to a qualification at Bachelor or Master level are in scope and are subject to review with the exception of Masters that are done only by research. Foundation provision may also be reviewed depending on how it has been conceptualized by the institution, for example, if it functions as an extended curriculum rather than a standalone programme.

A Programmes-within-College review of the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain (RCSI-MUB) was conducted by HERU of the NAQQAET in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. The site visit took place on 15-18 October 2012 for the academic programmes offered by the School, these are: Master of Science in Healthcare Ethics & Law programme; and Masters of Science in Nursing programme (MSc Nursing). The review of the programmes offered by the School of Nursing & Midwifery (SON&M), which are Bachelor of Science in Nursing

and Bachelor of Science in Nursing-Bridging programmes, took place during the same period.

This Report provides an account of the review process and the findings of the Panel for the MSc Nursing programme based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by RCSI-MUB, the supplementary documentation made available at the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

RCSI-MUB was notified by the HERU/ NAQQAET in March 2012 that it would be subject to a Programmes-within-College Reviews of its the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research and the School of Nursing & Midwifery with the site visit taking place in October 2012. In preparation for the review, RCSI-MUB conducted its self-evaluation of all programmes offered within the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research and the School of Nursing & Midwifery and submitted the SERs with appendices on the agreed date in June and August 2012.

HERU constituted a panel for the review of the MSc Nursing programme consisting of experts in the academic field of Nursing and in higher education who have experience of external programme quality reviews. The Panel comprised three external reviewers.

This Report records the evidence-based conclusions, in relation to the MSc Nursing programme, reached by the Panel based on:

- (i) analysis of the Self-Evaluation Report and supporting materials submitted by the institution prior to the external peer-review visit
- (ii) analysis derived from discussions with various stakeholders (faculty members, students, graduates and employers)
- (iii) analysis based on additional documentation requested and presented to the Panel during the site visit.

It is expected that the RCSI-MUB will use the findings presented in this report to strengthen its MSc Nursing programme. HERU recognizes that quality assurance is the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. Hence it is the right of RCSI-MUB to decide how it will address the recommendations contained in the Review Report. Nevertheless, three months after the publication of this report, RCSI-MUB is required to submit to HERU an improvement plan in response to the recommendations.

HERU would like to extend its thanks to RCSI-MUB for the co-operative manner in which it has participated in the Programmes-within-College Reviews process. It also wishes to express its appreciation for the open discussions held in the course of the review and the professional conduct of the faculty in the RCSI-MUB.

### 1.3 Overview of the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research

RCSI-MUB was established in 2003 under license from the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain. RCSI-MUB is a constituent university of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI Dublin). It comprises three schools, namely: Medicine; Nursing; and Postgraduate Studies and Research. The MSc Nursing programme sits within the School of Postgraduate Studies. However, the programme is managed and staffed by the School of Nursing & Midwifery (SON&M) at the RCSI-MUB. The school also offers a Master of Science in Healthcare ethics and Law programme.

### 1.4 Overview of the MSc Nursing Programme

The MSc Nursing programme was developed and is delivered with the assistance and support of RCSI Dublin. The curriculum has been developed in accordance with nursing regulation for Ireland and Europe. The MSc Nursing programme started in September 2009. The first cohort of 16 students graduated in 2011. In 2012, 12 students graduated and 13 students are expected to graduate in 2013. There are four full-time faculty members from the SON&M, with responsibility for teaching and supervising the MSc Nursing students.

The MSc Nursing programme aims to produce postgraduate nurses with critical thinking and analytical skills, who are expected to practise safely using their enhanced competence as professional nurses and to assume a leadership role in their area of practice.

### 1.5 Summary of Review Judgements

**Table 2: Summary of Review Judgements for the MSc Nursing Programme**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
1: The Learning Programme	Satisfies
2: Efficiency of the Programme	Satisfies
3: Academic Standards of the Graduates	Satisfies
4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance	Satisfies
<b>Overall Judgement</b>	<b>Confidence</b>

## 2. Indicator 1: The Learning Programme

*The programme demonstrates fitness for purpose in terms of mission, relevance, curriculum, pedagogy, intended learning outcomes and assessment.*

- 2.1 The aims of the programme are clearly stated and are in line with the stated mission of RCSI–MUB. This alignment is apparent from the submitted MSc Nursing documents and the SER. The Panel examined the curriculum structure and the *An Bord Altranais* (ABA) Requirements and Standards for Post-registration Nurses-2010 and found them appropriate to ensure that the students develop critical thinking and analytical skills, a knowledge of research methodology and the ability to undertake a supervised research study.
- 2.2 The MSc Nursing programme is a part-time nursing degree. The programme is delivered over two academic years. It runs in semesters and is modularized. Each module is a unit of learning with specific content. In the second year, the students undertake a limited research study and dissertation under the supervision of an assigned faculty member. The Panel notes that the flexibility of the programme delivery matches the needs of the admitted students. This was confirmed during interview sessions by both students and employers.
- 2.3 The programme uses the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to direct the students' learning activities and workload required to achieve the programme objectives and learning outcomes. Under ECTS, learning can take place anywhere that can be measured and can be given a credit value; the credits can be accumulated as the student progresses through the programme. The credit hours for each module are recorded in the Marks and Standards document. The Panel notes that overall the aims of the programme and curriculum structure reflect an appropriate balance between the knowledge and skills and between theory and practice.
- 2.4 The programme has adopted an outcome-based approach in the curriculum which focuses on producing nurses who are professionally competent and able to take on leadership roles in their practice. The syllabus is constructed within the framework of the National University of Ireland and ABA in Ireland and through consultation. The ABA defines the professional knowledge, skills, values and attitudes expected of the postgraduate nurses upon graduation. The Board also provides a definite framework for the organization, delivery, evaluation and assessment of the nursing curriculum. The syllabus is comparable to the norms and standards of higher education in nursing & midwifery. However its 'stand-alone' nature, i.e. standing outside a research activity environment and delivered by very few lecturers and supervisors, in a small institution, is becoming less common. This could limit the

- programmes sustainability and ability to expand. Attention needs to be paid to ensure the sustainability of the programme.
- 2.5 The programme Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are clearly expressed and demonstrated and are appropriate to an MSc level learning. Particular emphasis is demonstrated on critical analysis, research methodology and conceptual models regarding healthcare and experience. This was confirmed during interview sessions with staff, students and external stakeholders.
  - 2.6 Module ILOs are developed and well documented. The alignment and mapping of the module ILOs to the programme are demonstrated in the documentation and it was apparent, through interview sessions, that they are understood by staff and students.
  - 2.7 A variety of teaching, learning and research study techniques and strategies are used in the delivery of the programme. These are expressed clearly in the student handbook and understood by the students. There is good integration with students' work environments, especially in the selection of studies for dissertation, with evidence from interviews with students and employers of changes in practice and quality of care delivery. However, the Panel is of the view that the programme team needs to formalize its relationship with the clinical partners/work environment regarding research work and project management in the students' work place. This may include sponsorship and, where appropriate, joint supervision.
  - 2.8 The mixed methods, including teaching, tutorials and one-on-one dissertation supervision are well integrated within the programme curriculum and support the attainment of outcomes at the present time. Particularly noteworthy is the highly structured approach to dissertation writing and management which starts at an early stage. There are clear and detailed dissertation guidelines. The second year of programme focuses on practices of research, which results in producing a research study in the student's chosen area in the form of a dissertation. Research supervision is provided from research proposal level in year 1, to completion of the dissertation in year 2. However, there are only four supervisors and the number of students has increased, with an intake of 22 in 2012. The methods, particularly in regard to dissertation management and pass attainment, may be compromised as the number of students increases. The programme team needs to pay attention to this matter.
  - 2.9 Examination policies and procedures are comprehensive with interaction between the programme delivery team, students, the institution (both RCSI-MUB & RCSI Dublin) and the School of Nursing Academic Committee (SNAC). There is a systematized process of preparation and moderation of examination papers internally and externally and students are well informed, in advance, about assessment requirements and marking schemes. The assessment of all written work,

including the dissertation, is achieved in the same 'marking' manner as stated in the Marks and Standards document. Students also get support and detailed feedback for the various learning activities and assignments they take. The *viva voce* arrangements, while competent at present, are limited as the programme external examiner hears the presentations from all the students in a single day. The current method is thus more a weighted presentation than a *viva*. The Panel suggests that the programme team revise and strengthen the role of the external examiner in the evaluation of the students' dissertation.

2.10 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Learning Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- There is a flexible, modularized system for programme delivery, matching the needs of the part-time students.
- Dissertations are highly structured and closely managed from the early stages of the programme.
- There is evidence of good integration with students' work environments.
- The assessment and grading processes are transparent, fair and rigorous.
- There is a systematized process of preparation and moderation of examination papers internally and externally.

2.11 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research in conjunction with the School of Nursing & Midwifery should:

- develop a formal partnership with students' dissertation study workplace
- revise and strengthen the role of the external examiner in the evaluation of the students' dissertation.

2.12 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **The Learning Programme**.

### 3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme

*The programme is efficient in terms of the admitted students, the use of available resources - staffing, infrastructure and student support.*

- 3.1 The Admission Policy of the MSc Nursing programme at the RCSI-MUB is clearly outlined in the Postgraduate School of Nursing Admission requirements document and available on the university website. The MSc Nursing programme admits registered nurses who hold a primary degree or equivalent with relevant experience and previous study. The applicant should have a minimum of IELTS 5.5 or TOFEL 550. Students apply through an online application process. There is an admission committee which consists of senior administrative and academic staff. This committee screens all applications, accepts or rejects applications based on the pre-determined criteria for student enrolment. There is evidence of continued reviewing of the admission requirements as part of a dynamic process of mapping the progress of students against entry qualifications. The Panel is of the view that the admission process is effective and the admission criteria are appropriate for the programme. However, the Panel recommends that the institution review the entry level of proficiency in English as the current requirement is low.
- 3.2 The proposed intake of students in any one year is 15. The first cohort of 15 students graduated in 2011, the second cohort was of 13 students, 12 of which graduated in 2012, 12 of the 13 students comprising the third cohort progressed to year 2. The fourth cohort of 22 students has now commenced year 1. The Panel notes that students are progressing smoothly from one year to the next and towards graduation with an exceptional completion rate.
- 3.3 The MSc Nursing programme is managed and delivered by SON&M. The Panel noted clear lines of authority and responsibility with regard to the management of the programme at the level of SON&M. Staff that manage the programme: the module coordinator; supervisors; academic director and the Head of SON&M have clear responsibilities and reporting lines. There is an academic committee at the SON&M level (SNAC) that oversees the implementation of the programme through monthly meetings. However, the management link with the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research is not clear. RCSI-MUB needs to revise the management link of the programme with the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research as the programme is offered formally by this School without any real linkage to it.
- 3.4 There are currently 36 students in the MSc Nursing Programme, and four PhD holders faculty members delivering the programme. This provides an accepted students-to-staff ratio. However, some of these faculty members are currently teaching some modules in the other nursing programmes. An examination of the faculty members' *curricula vitae* and modules being taught shows that they are

teaching in areas appropriate to their education and professional experience. The university provides support and encourages staff to carry out research activities and publish findings, and it facilitates attendance of conferences. However, the Panel notes that the faculty members are heavily involved in teaching and supervising students which leaves little room to engage in research activities. The Panel takes the view that the school needs to pay close attention to the high workload of teaching staff to allow for research and other scholarly activities. Moreover, an examination of the faculty members' research profile indicates that their research activities and areas are not directly linked with the key thematic research areas identified by the RCSI-MUB. The school needs to address this matter.

- 3.5 RCSI-MUB has a clear staff recruitment policy which outlines vacancies, job responsibilities, and selection procedures, and which is published on the university website. During interview sessions, the Panel was informed that there is an induction package for newly admitted staff. Interviewed staff members reported that induction was received and that they are aware of the specific requirements for promotion. There is a Performance and Development Review document that outlines the staff performance and development review cycle which is conducted annually. Interviewed staff expressed their knowledge and satisfaction with the current processes.
- 3.6 The institution uses the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) system and database to store admission and performance data. The Panel learned, during interview sessions, that students and teaching staff have been trained and are using the system. The staff reported benefits of the system with regard to storing, exchange, and retrieval of information in addition to the delivery of some module aspects. RCSI-MUB uses Moodle as a platform for the dissemination of teaching and learning materials such as lecture notes, links to web-based resources, electronic submission of assignments. The VLE platform is also used to engage students with group discussions and debates. Students reported their satisfaction with all online resources and online discussion forums. The Panel acknowledges the usage of the different learning resources in promoting a learning environment which is conducive to expanding students learning experience.
- 3.7 There is a detailed procedure for the security and management of student records and examination results. All student assessment data is stored and collated through the Quercus management system while finance information is collated by the Agresso data management system. To ensure the security of students' data and information, the student services database and VLE are held independently. The Panel learned that the information is secured and a daily backup on a separate disc is maintained. There is a designated examination room for producing examination answer scripts and storing examination records. The Panel appreciates the robust and detailed procedure for securing students' results and records.

- 3.8 The Panel toured the facilities and found the physical, and teaching & learning resources available to students to be adequate. During the site visit, the Panel learned that RCSI-MUB has a plan to extend its facility to accommodate any future increase in student numbers. There are adequate classrooms, halls, laboratories including simulation laboratory, and anatomy laboratory. The Panel also visited the Sports Centre and found it suitable and appropriate. The Panel was impressed with the library space and its layout. The library's study areas and discussion rooms are adequate to the needs of the programme. The library's stock of books, journals, IT infrastructure and access to e-resources are also adequate. The Panel learned that the students' usage of the on-line facilities generally is high and interviewed students expressed their satisfaction with the learning resources provided to them by the institution.
- 3.9 The institution uses a centralized timetabling system including booking of the lecture theatre and tutorial rooms. There is also a centralized tracking system of students' usage of the VLE and their involvement and engagement with the module and for the utilization of library. Staff confirmed that there is continuous evaluation of the usage of RCSI-MUB physical and VLE resources. The Panel acknowledges the effective usage of information and communication technology in the management of the programme.
- 3.10 Newly admitted students receive a student handbook and attend a one-day orientation, at the start of the academic year, in which they register, receive their student ID, and they are oriented to the library services and the use of the VLE. During interviews with students, they reported satisfaction with the orientation programme.
- 3.11 The Panel notes that there is an appropriate level of guidance and student support in relation to the usage of the library and provision of textbooks and e-resources. The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) promotes both self and communal learning. The student welfare officer supports the personal needs of the students in the form of counselling. The learning Drop-in Centre provides an environment for students who wish to meet a tutor to discuss their academic study. All new cohorts receive support from old students. Moreover, there is evidence of adequate support and facilities provided by the institution's welfare and English language departments to students who have English language problems. This was confirmed during staff and student interviews. The Panel appreciates the level of students' guidance and support the programme provides which was confirmed during discussions with the students.
- 3.12 The SON&M has a system to track the progress of students at risk of failure throughout the two years. In year 2, each student is allocated an academic supervisor who guides and assists the student throughout all stages of the research process until the student completes and presents the dissertation. Students with an academic

difficulty due to problems of a social or psychological nature are counselled by the programme coordinator or referred to the Student Welfare Office. During discussion with students and the programme team, the Panel found that there is an effective system for supporting and monitoring student progress. The Panel acknowledges the use and effectiveness of this academic student support system.

3.13 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Efficiency of the Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- There are clear procedures for the recruitment, orientation, appraisal and promotion of staff members that are effective.
- The learning environment is conducive to expanding the student experiences and knowledge through informal learning and the use of the VLE.
- There is a robust and detailed procedure for securing students results and records.
- There is evidence of the effective utilization of the IT facilities, library, laboratories and learning resources.
- Appropriate arrangements are in place for the induction of newly admitted students and for ensuring that all students receive continuing guidance and support.
- There is evidence of effective support given to students who have English language difficulties.
- There is highly interactive academic support that meets the individual needs of the MSc Nursing students.

3.14 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research in conjunction with the School of Nursing & Midwifery should:

- review the entry level of proficiency in English language of the MSc admission policy
- revise the management link of the programme with the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research
- address the high workload of teaching staff to allow for research activities.

3.15 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **Efficiency of the Programme**.

## 4. Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates

*The graduates of the programme meet academic standards compatible with equivalent programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally.*

- 4.1 The programme graduate attributes are clearly stated and documented. There is a clear link between the graduate attributes, the ABA Nursing Graduate Profile and the programme and module ILOs.
- 4.2 RCSI-MUB is the only institution currently providing an MSc Nursing programme within the Kingdom of Bahrain. Hence no local benchmarking activities can be done with a similar programme. The programme is benchmarked in line with the parameters described by ABA, the National University of Ireland (NUI), who have prepared their guidelines in the context of national and international standards. The programme is also benchmarked against the Bologna framework of learning, the International Council of Nurses and the National Framework Qualifications.
- 4.3 The Assessment Working Group has devised the institution's Assessment Strategy which is reviewed annually. All assessments are organised collegiately, not by individual teaching staff. Developments and changes are also monitored by the external examiner. The Panel appreciates the process of development of assessments. The programme and modules are mapped and demonstrated in the institution's Assessment Strategy document which ensures the alignment of assessment to learning outcomes. Assignment topics are created by the programme team and the students' works are cross-marked and internally moderated.
- 4.4 During the site visit the Panel examined a sample of assessment blueprints and found the process of matching the assessment to the module and to individual unit learning outcomes to be appropriate. The Panel is of the view that the assessments used are aligned with the modules ILOs and that level of graduates' achievement is high.
- 4.5 The Panel also examined samples of students' work and dissertations and found them to be cognate with masters study. The Panel noted that the research studies and dissertation are mainly concentrating on real health issues in Bahrain and that stakeholders are informally involved in students' research studies. This was confirmed during interviews with students, employers and external stakeholders.
- 4.6 RCSI-MUB has developed and approved a formal plagiarism policy that was adopted by the SON&M on 18 September 2012. The Panel notes the commitment of faculty members to address issues related to plagiarism. The institution is encouraged to develop a mechanism to disseminate its recently adopted formal policy, monitor its implementation and evaluate its effectiveness.

- 4.7 There is a mechanism for external moderation in a form of external examination. There is one external examiner who examines a selection of assignments and presides over the 30 minute dissertation presentations. The process is effective with present numbers, although the dissertation presentation model was considered to have reached capacity. Through interview sessions and studying external examiners reports, the Panel found the process of external moderation to be effective, but limited. With the growth in student numbers, the Panel recommends that the School revisits external examination arrangements for the MSc Nursing programme. (See section 2 of this report.)
- 4.8 The programme has only run for two complete cycles. The retention and success rate is exceptionally high, at almost 100%. The support and intervention of the programme team is high and has been successful with relatively low student numbers compared to the 2012 intake. The ability to maintain this high level of attainment may be compromised without academic and administrative capacity building. There are only four supervisors. The success in the future cannot be guaranteed, given the lack of capacity and supervisory infrastructure. The Panel is of the view that there is a need for a larger pool of competent supervisors. Moreover, at present there is no evidence on the direct connection between the attainment of a MSc Nursing degree and specific posts within the nursing employment market in Bahrain. This may change, however, as the value of the programme with the ambassadorship of the alumni becomes embedded.
- 4.9 Although this programme does not have formal work-based learning, the programme is entirely dependent on students having a work context to complete their dissertations. This has been successful for the first two cohorts. As the programme becomes more mainstream, the relationship, quality assurance and support/mentorship provided by the workplace needs to be considered and formalised. (See section 2 of this report.)
- 4.10 The Panel noted from submitted documents and through interview sessions that there is continuous informal input from different external stakeholders into the programme focus and intents. However, there is no formally developed programme advisory board. Moreover, there is little evidence to support systematic engagement with alumni, although different stakeholder groups expressed appreciation of the programme as a whole and reported their informal involvement with the programme.
- 4.11 There have only been two cohorts of graduates to date. There is emerging evidence, from interview sessions, that employers are satisfied with the level of performance of the programme graduates. There is also evidence of the studies and activity changing and improving practice as a result of their programme studies.

4.12 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Academic Standards of the Graduates, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- All assessments are developed and evaluated collegiately and the assignment topics are created by the programme team.
- There is an exceptionally good completion rate.
- There is evidence that the level of graduates' achievements is high and that employers and other stake-holders are satisfied highly with the graduates' achievements.
- There is good evidence that the studies and activities within the programme are changing and improving practice.
- Research studies and dissertation concentrate on real health issues within the Kingdom of Bahrain and stakeholders are informally involved in students research studies.

4.13 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research in conjunction with the School of Nursing & Midwifery should:

- increase the number of academics and appropriate clinicians to supervise dissertations
- formalize the relationship between the institution and its alumni
- formalize a programme advisory board.

#### 4.14 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **Academic Standards of the Graduates**.

## 5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

*The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance and continuous improvement, contribute to giving confidence in the programme.*

- 5.1 In 2010, RCSI-MUB underwent a review of all its policies and procedures to ensure their relevance to Bahraini students, as many had been originally developed for RCSI Dublin. Policies, regulations and guidelines relating to students are comprehensive and contextualized for Bahraini students. These are provided in the form of a Student Handbook and are published on the VLE. For staff, there remain some policies and guidelines which require contextualization (for example the Quality e-Handbook, but in interviews the Panel heard that staff are aware of this and are liaising with RCSI Dublin, as Dublin reviews its policies and procedures, to ensure they retain relevance to the Bahrain environment. The Panel concludes that there is a comprehensive suite of student policies and procedures readily accessible on the VLE. The Panel acknowledges RCSI-MUB's proactive approach to revising these policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure their suite remains current and relevant to Bahrain.
- 5.2 The organizational structure of RCSI-MUB is well established and being revised as the institution is maturing. A new position of Vice President for Academic Affairs has been created. The academic and administrative organizational charts are available on the VLE. Academic staff teaching in the MSc Nursing programme report to the programme director and the Head of SON&M who reports to the Vice President who is accountable directly to the President. No clear reporting is linked to the School of Postgraduate Studies and research, where the MSc Nursing programme is placed formally. Administrative staff are managed by the Vice President for Finance and Administration. There are curriculum steering team meetings, chaired by the programme director, which are held once a semester. Curriculum changes are considered by the programme director and forwarded to the SNAC and then to the Academic Board. The Board is responsible for all academic matters such as student admission policy, assessment, progression, development of research strategy, staff appointment and promotion. There is a student representative who sits on the Academic Boards and the minutes of Academic Board meetings are provided to the Academic Council in RCSI Dublin for noting.
- 5.3 As a part of the university's commitment to quality enhancement, a Quality Enhancement Office (QEO) was established in January 2012, with the Director recently recruited with the mandate to promote quality culture and enhancement of the academic programmes. A Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has been established in RCSI-MUB with representatives from each school. The Committee

reports to Dublin which plays a significant role in supporting the international campuses in their interaction with local Quality Assurance\Quality Improvement structure and process.

- 5.4 The QAC initiated a quality enhancement strategy for the university which is available to all staff on the institutions webpage. The quality enhancement strategy is built for internal and external quality assurance and will be intrinsically linked to the Quality Assurance\Quality Improvement processes already in place in RCSI Dublin. The strategy is informed through a variety of feedback mechanism from students, staff, alumni and stakeholders. QAC holds periodic meetings where subjects pertaining to teaching and learning, research committee and student progression are discussed. A schedule of activities for Quality Enhancement is developed and published in the institution's webpage. The QEO needs to provide an annual working plan, with monitoring of implementation and achievement.
- 5.5 There is a mechanism for the development of new programmes to ensure the programmes are relevant, fit for purpose, and comply with existing regulations. The Panel was informed that there is no formal policy for the approval of new programmes. However the programme team is clear on the process. The Panel recommends that both a policy and procedures be developed for the establishment of new programmes. Further, the policy should include the requirement that key stakeholders be involved explicitly at the stage of development and thereafter at regular and stated intervals, thus formalizing this vital mechanism of feedback from stakeholders.
- 5.6 Currently the curriculum development steering group, chaired by the head of SON&M, is responsible for reviewing the programme and proposing changes within the programme. Proposals are submitted to the SNAC for discussion and approval and then passed to the Academic Board for final approval. The Panel saw evidence of annual evaluation of the programme being carried out. However, there is no formal policy for the annual review of the programme to date. A five-year rolling calendar of internal/external reviews (administrative and academic) has been developed with the QEO responsible for coordinating these reviews. These reviews will commence in 2013. The Panel acknowledges this intention, and encourages RCSI-MUB to formalize the conduct and follow-up of the annual performance analysis reports.
- 5.7 A comprehensive system of student feedback is in place within the institution. A process for collecting student feedback is documented and managed through QEO. There is a draft policy on student's feedback which is available on the VLE and accessible by students. There is evidence that improvements had been made as a result of their feedback. This was also confirmed through students' interview sessions. The Panel acknowledges the commitment of staff to improving the

standard and quality of students, particularly in responding to feedback from students, external examiners and stakeholders. The Panel commends the students for their commitment to their studies and the commitment of teaching staff to their institution, RCSI-MUB. Though the Panel saw evidence of student feedback noted in SNAC, it encourages a more thorough recording of actions taken as a result of recommendations, with progress and timelines recorded so that SNAC can identify any actions, which have not progressed and assess the impact of changes as a result of actions. This needs to be coordinated with the QAO.

- 5.8 The institution also seeks feedback from different external stakeholders such as alumni, employer and other external stakeholders. However, this feedback is collected in an informal ways through *ad hoc* meetings or through collaborative activities. The Panel recommends that the institution formalize this process.
- 5.9 There is a Performance and Development Review (PDR) document which states that staff should be given the opportunity to share career aspirations and growth and an individual plan developed accordingly. There is a staff Learning and Development Policy, which encourages and outlines financial support for staff who wish to apply and study as part of their on-going professional development. Funding is available through staff learning development fund for courses and qualifications identified. Separate funds are available for the attendance of conferences especially international events, through academic staff conferences participation fund. Interviewed staff confirmed that they have had a PDR during the past year and staff development had been discussed with them. Staff also indicated to the Panel that peer evaluation is an important informal process, which can be conducted by colleagues at their request to improve their teaching and delivery of lectures. Staff interviewed were not aware of any calendar of professional development activities throughout the year. The Panel appreciates RCSI- MUB's commitment to ensuring an annual PDR review is conducted for all staff. However, it notes that there is little evidence of connection between staff development, a school growth strategy and an active plan to increase research and supervision capacity. The Panel recommends that the institution give attention to this issue.
- 5.10 RCSI-MUB realizes the valuable input of its stakeholders in its strategic plan. The stakeholders are also represented in the Board of Governance. Although the SON&M has not conducted any survey to scope the market needs, the School relies on Bahrain Labour Fund's (Tamkeen's) conducted analysis of the labour market needs, and the current and future gaps. Tamkeen also provides sponsorships to support the MSc Nursing Programme among others. All of the nursing programmes were offered as a result of labour market gaps as identified by Tamkeen. RCSI-MUB continues to monitor new opportunities, again as identified by Tamkeen and has plans to explore developing regional priorities.

5.11 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- There is a comprehensive suite of student policies and procedures contextualized to the needs of Bahrain and readily accessible on the VLE.
- There is a quality enhancement strategy which is available to all staff members on the institution's webpage.
- There is an effective feedback system from students with responses and identified actions published on the VLE.
- There is evidence of follow up on recommendations made by external examiners, students and employers.
- Staff development and conference funds are available and are used by staff members.

5.12 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the School of Postgraduate Studies & Research in conjunction with the School of Nursing & Midwifery should:

- develop a mechanism through which the Quality Enhancement Office and the relevant school communicate and coordinate enhancement activities to ensure follow-up of actions within a predefined timeframe
- develop a formal policy and procedures for programme development and reviews which includes stakeholder involvement
- ensure staff development plans are based on their identified needs and the programme's needs and are in line with the School's growth plans
- formalize a clear mechanism to ensure that recommendations from all external and internal stakeholders are addressed within a specified timeframe.

### 5.13 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance**.

## 6. Conclusion

Taking into account the institution's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the site visit, the Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the *HERU/NAQQAET Programmes-within-College Reviews Handbook, 2012*:

**There is confidence in the MSc Nursing Programme of School of Postgraduate Studies & Research offered by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland - Medical University of Bahrain.**