



Directorate of Higher Education Reviews

Programmes-within-College Reviews Report

**Bachelor's Degree in Management Information
Systems**

College of Business and Finance

Ahlia University

Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 18-20 November 2014

HC055-C2-R055

Table of Contents

1. The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process.....	4
2. Indicator 1: The Learning Programme	8
3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme	14
4. Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates.....	21
5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance	28
6. Conclusion.....	34

Acronyms

ADREG	Admission and Registration System
ATDC	Ahlia Training and Development Centre
AU	Ahlia University
BSAF	Bachelor's Degree in Accounting and Finance
BSBF	Bachelor's Degree in Banking and Finance
BSEF	Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance
BSMIS	Bachelor's Degree in Management Information System
BSMM	Bachelor's Degree in Management and Marketing
CAQA	Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance
CEAB	The College External Advisory Board
CILOs	Course Intended Learning Outcomes
CME	The Centre for Measurement and Evaluation
CRC	Curriculum Review Committee
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPA	Grade Point Average
HEC	Higher Education Council
ILOs	Intended Learning Outcomes
ISG	Institut Supérieur de Gestion

KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MBA	Master's Degree in Business Administration
MIS	Management Information Systems
PILOs	Programme Intended Learning Outcomes
QA	Quality Assurance
QQA	National Authority for Qualifications & Quality Assurance of Education & Training-Bahrain
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
TLAC	The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee
UC	University Council
UQAC	University Quality Assurance Committee

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 Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR) of the National Authority for Qualifications & Quality Assurance of Education & Training (QQA) 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 QQA, 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 Indicator 1 is not satisfied	

1.2 The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process at the Ahlia University

A Programmes-within-College review of the programmes offered by the College of Business and Finance of Ahlia University was conducted by the DHR of the QQA in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. The site visit took place in November 2014 for the academic programmes offered by the College, these are: Bachelor’s Degree in Economics & Finance (BSEF), Bachelor’s Degree in Banking & Finance (BSBF), Bachelor’s Degree in Accounting & Finance (BSAF), Bachelor’s Degree in Management & Marketing (BSMM), Master’s Degree in Business Administration (MBA) and Bachelor’s Degree in Management Information Systems (BSMIS).

This report provides an account of the review process and the findings of the Panel for the Bachelor of Management Information System based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by the Ahlia University (AU), the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

AU was notified by the DHR/QQA on 12 May 2014 that it would be subject to a Programmes-within-College review of programmes offered by its College of Business and Finance with the site visit taking place in 18-20 November 2014. In preparation for the review, AU conducted its College self-evaluation of all its

programmes and submitted the SERs with appendices on the agreed date on 27 July 2014.

The DHR constituted a Panel consisting of experts in the academic field of Business Administration, Economics & Finance, Banking & Finance, Accounting & Finance, Management & Marketing, Management Information System, and in higher education who have experience of external programme quality reviews. The Panel comprised eight external reviewers.

This Report records the evidence-based conclusions 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 AU will use the findings presented in this report to strengthen its Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems programme. The DHR recognizes that quality assurance is the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. Hence it is the right of AU to decide how it will address the recommendations contained in the Review Report. Nevertheless, three months after the publication of this Report, AU is required to submit to DHR an improvement plan in response to the recommendations.

DHR would like to extend its thanks to AU for the co-operative manner in which it has participated in the Programmes-within-College review 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 Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems and the AU staff in general.

1.3 Overview of the College of Business and Finance

The College of Business and Finance is one of six colleges at AU, it offered its first programme in 2003. Currently the College has the following departments: Department of Accounting and Economics, Department of Management and Marketing, Department of Banking and Finance, Department of Management Information Systems. The College offers five undergraduate programmes; Bachelor's Degree in Accounting and Finance, Bachelor's Degree in Banking and Finance, Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance, Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems and Bachelor's Degree in Management and Marketing, in addition to a Master's Degree in Business Administration. At the time of the site visit, the total number of students registered in the College was 1437 and the total number

of (46) specialized faculty members contributing to all programmes offered by the college.

1.4 Overview of the Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems

The Management Information System (MIS) department was established with a programme that was intended to prepare graduates for meeting the challenges of the 21st century enterprise in the information age. Following the pattern of the equivalent programme offered by Brunel University, Ahlia University has developed its Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems (BSMIS) programme to match curricula offered by Brunel's undergraduate programme in MIS. The BSMIS programme had its first intake in February 2003 and graduated two students as its first batch in February 2005. Currently there are 128 students studying on the programme, and to date the programme has graduated 64 students. There are four faculty members in the Department who are responsible for the management of the programme supported by nine full-time administrative. A total of 24 teaching staff contribute to the delivery of the programme.

1.5 Summary of Review Judgements

Table 2: Summary of Review Judgements for the Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems

Indicator	Judgement
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
Overall Judgement	Confidence

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 Ahlia University has clearly stated vision and mission statements that are displayed at various localities on the university premises and are publically available on the university website. The College has developed a clear and suitable academic framework for the BSMIS programme with clear aims that indicate the broad purposes of providing the programme. These aims are aligned to the vision, mission and the strategic plans of the University. In its SER, AU clearly identifies and discusses relevant market intelligence and states that the University has developed the BSMIS programme aims, to meet local requirements, enhance educational opportunities, make a positive contribution and develop the capacity of the workforce in Bahrain. The Panel appreciates that the aims of the programme are well defined and aligned to the vision and mission statements of the College and the University.
- 2.2 The BSMIS programme consists of 132 credit hours (44 courses) of which 78 credits are for major courses. Of the 78 credits required, six credits are elective and the remaining 54 credits combine an eclectic mix of information systems, management, computer science, telecommunication engineering, and multimedia science. As described in the submitted SER and the Student Guide, the 132 credits are underpinned by 24 credit hours of University requirements and 24 credits hours of College requirements. These parts of the curriculum are used to deliver transferable skills and contextual studies which are required to support students' ability to engage effectively in contextual studies courses delivered in English and meet mandatory general AU requirements. The curriculum supports the staged development of knowledge and skills which are relevant to the award of a BSMIS degree. The subject content of the courses as presented each year reflects the development of more complex concepts which require the student to demonstrate increased critical thinking skills and the ability to integrate and synthesize new and prior knowledge. As described in the SER, the BSMIS programme has a clear programme structure (8 semester study plan) with workload ranging from 15 to 18 credit hours per semester. The Panel notes that student workload is suitable and consistent with regional and international practice in terms of allocation of credits awarded for hours of study, prerequisites, and assessment. The Panel further found, during interviews with students, general satisfaction with the workload involved in undertaking the modules. The Panel appreciates that the curriculum is well organized to demonstrate progression and that the workload involved is appropriate. The Panel notes that the internship course (INTR400) does not explicitly

occur in the eight semester study plan. This will be covered in section 2.6 of this Report.

- 2.3 AU has developed its BSMIS programme on the pattern of the equivalent MIS programme curricula offered by Brunel University and other leading undergraduate programmes. After reviewing several course syllabi, the Panel concluded that the description of the syllabus matches what would be expected in an undergraduate programme in the Management Information Systems discipline. There are ten MIS specialisation courses that are offered starting from semester one which become more advance in the final semesters. These include two in depth elective courses that provide advance concepts and techniques in the specialisation. There are a mix of other appropriate breadth courses that include management, computer science economics, and finance as well as business ethics. The curriculum is routinely updated to maintain currency and relevance of the materials used to support delivery of the syllabus. Documentation describes the syllabus, the indicative content and teaching materials and indicates how each part of the syllabus is supported by particular teaching methods and helps students to achieve the overall aims of the programme. There is also evidence from reviewing the syllabi provided that research components are well documented to impact the depth of the knowledge offered to students. This is particularly exemplified well in the courses BFRM498, 'Research Methodologies in Business & Finance' and ITMA499, 'Project in ITMA'. The Panel appreciates that the syllabus reflects current norms and trends in the discipline.
- 2.4 Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) are described in the programme Specification. These cover Knowledge and Understanding (A), Subject-specific Skills (B), Critical Thinking Skills (C) and General and Transferable Skills (D). Each is sub-divided into more detailed sub-categories (A1, A2, A3; B1, B2, B3; C1, C2, C3; and D1, D2, D3, D4). An examination of the PILOs demonstrates that these are appropriately linked to the six BSMIS programme aims and are suitably mapped to each level of the BSMIS Major Course requirements. For example, the learning, activities and assessments of the core course, ITMA 411 are aligned with the relevant levels of the programme learning outcomes and are measured by using tests, final examination, oral presentations, problem set, and group project proposal. During interviews, staff indicated that they are aware of the skills and competencies which the degree programme seeks to develop and the importance of demonstrating achievement of the programme learning objectives. Students indicated that they are aware of the programme ILOs since these are included in the syllabus of each course and the instructors discuss them during the first week of each semester. The Panel appreciates that the programme ILOs are appropriately aligned with aims of the programme and reflect the range of knowledge and skills that would be expected in a Bachelor's degree in Management Information Systems programme.

- 2.5 The Course ILOs are clearly defined and described for the individual courses which comprise the programme and also are mapped both to the overall programme aims and to the assessments used to demonstrate the extent to which students have achieved the intended learning outcomes for particular courses. The Panel met with academic staff and noted that they have taken into consideration that the Course ILOs are appropriate to the aims and levels of the course and they are mapped to the programme ILOs and course contents. Nonetheless, through reviewing the syllabi of some courses, the Panel noted that the course ILOs listed in the syllabi of a few courses (for example E-Commerce and Strategic Management) are not consistently mapped to the programme ILOs. Also, that the guidelines for undergraduate internship programme does not give details of the ILOs and how they are linked with the programme aims and outcomes or with the assessment. The Panel recommends that the college revise the courses specifications to ensure that the mapping of the course ILOs to the programme ILOs is maintained.
- 2.6 The SER and the Guidelines of Internship Programme documents state that internship is 'compulsory', however, the study plan of BSMIS does not include a compulsory internship requirement as shown in the 2013-2014 catalogue. According to the guidelines, students are to be engaged in a 6-credit hours internship course (INTR400) typically at the end of the third year or the beginning of the fourth year of studies where a minimum GPA of two and completion of 90 credit hours are specified as a pre-requisite. The Panel is of the view that the allocated credit hours for the internship is on the high side considering the expected amount of work from students. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that the College revise the number of credit hours allocated for the internship course. The procedures and assessment policy for the internship are clearly defined where students are required to complete a minimum of 180 hours of work at the internship worksite where bi-weekly reports are submitted as well as a final report for the internship. The Course Description section of the AU catalogue for the years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 indicates that the internship is: 'This course is taken as a substitute to two courses (3 credits hours each) from the programme core elective courses'. The Panel studied the programme specification and noted that the internship course does not appear in the study plan, instead the two elective courses that the internship course could replace are mentioned in the plan. Nonetheless, it is not clear how the internship course would contribute equally to the PILOs as the two-elective courses. Furthermore, during interviews with students, the Panel noticed that some students were exempted from the internship course. However, no clear evidence were provided on the basis upon which students were exempted. The Panel recommends that the College revise the contribution of the internship course and specify reasons for exemption to ensure equivalent learning outcomes are achieved amongst all students despite the options they take.

- 2.7 There is a formal teaching and learning plan that was made available to the Panel. The teaching principles and methods are based around the use of blended and flexible learning methods which employ appropriate pedagogical approaches to enable students to meet the intended learning outcomes. This is well documented in the course syllabus specifications that are distributed to the students and includes teaching methods, which are appropriately linked to the learning outcomes. Teaching staff apply a range of pedagogical approaches to support the progress of the students who have different qualifications and experiences when admitted to the programme, which further ensures that the individual learning needs of students are met. During interviews with faculty members, the Panel was provided with examples of how these plans are implemented. Examples provided included the use of face-to-face practical sessions, independent problem solving methods, dedicated office hours for consultation, encouragement to discuss and debate issues, assignments solved informally in groups, discussion forums on the Learning Management System (LMS) and several different types of questions in quizzes, tests and examinations to build student confidence and allow them to reflect on the progress of their learning. During interviews with staff members, it was noted that they are trained in the use of 'Moodle', which is used to manage communication with students, provide access to teaching materials, support student interaction and encourages personal responsibility for learning. In addition, staff elaborated on how they are supported by their peers in using different approaches to teaching and learning. The Panel appreciates the formal teaching plan that is implemented by the faculty members and enables students to achieve the ILOs.
- 2.8 There are clear policies and procedures for assessment and examination arrangements to ensure transparency and equity in the treatment of students. Furthermore, there are marking guidelines for all assessments, which are reflected in the provided sample of course file documents and confirmed during interviews with staff and students. The Assessment Policy encourages formative assessment through providing timely feedback to the students. Except for the final examination, assessments and their test scores are promptly returned to the students. This is known to faculty members who, during interview sessions, were able to identify numerous ways in which this is practiced, such as setting practice examinations, class problem solving exercises, case discussions and presentations. As described in the syllabi and course materials provided to the Panel during site visit, there is a blend of assessment methods that are mapped to the ILOs, which test theory and practice. This includes mid-term and final examinations as well as assignments and projects. During interviews, the Panel noted that the students are also aware of the appeal procedures in case they would like to challenge their grades. Nonetheless, the Panel noted that the Student Guidebook does not include a section detailing all aspects of assessment. Students confirmed receiving prompt feedback from faculty usually within a week of the due date of the assessment. Staff also confirmed the use

of a committee of three to assess the merit worthiness of final BSMIS examinations before dissemination to students to verify that questions reflect the course aims and ILOs. This committee also ensures that the mix of theory and practice on the examination are appropriate to the course's content, and are in accordance to the procedures detailed in AU's assessment manual. The Panel also noted from reviewing the course syllabi and their meetings with academic staff that marked assignments and projects account for at least 30% by using case studies and informal group work whereas class examination such as Midterm Assessment and Final Examination account for at least 20% and 40% respectively. The Panel notes that 60% of the weight is assigned to the examination form of assessment, which is applied as a unified policy to all courses. This may not be appropriate for all types of courses, especially the courses that rely heavily on the practical aspect of learning, such as programming. The Panel suggests the College to review the course assessment components that takes into consideration the level of the course, as well as the theoretical-practical balance in that course. The Panel appreciates that there are transparent and fair policies for student assessment which includes formative and summative assessment and that students and staff are well informed of these.

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

- The programme aims are well defined and aligned to the vision and mission statements of the College of Business and Finance and the University.
- The curriculum is well organized to demonstrate progression and appropriate workload.
- The syllabus reflects current norms and trends in the Management Information Systems discipline.
- The Programme Intended Learning Outcomes are clearly stated and reflect the range of knowledge and skills expected in a Bachelor's degree programme in the MIS discipline and are aligned with the Programme aims.
- Appropriate formal teaching and learning plans are in place and are implemented by the faculty members to enable students achieve the ILOs.
- There are transparent and fair policies for student assessment which includes formative and summative assessment.

2.10 In terms of improvement the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- revise the courses specifications to ensure that the mapping of the course ILOs to the programme ILOs is maintained
- revise the number of credit hours allocated for the internship course, revise the contribution of the internship course to the programme, and specify reasons for exemption to ensure equivalent learning outcomes are achieved amongst all students despite the options they take.

2.11 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 Ahlia University has an overall university admission policy which stipulates a provision of acquiring a secondary school certificate (or equivalent recognized secondary certificates) for admission at the undergraduate degrees. However, no minimum score is specified for the high school certificate. There is an English placement test for all students prior to registration in the degree programme. Applicants with international tests such as IELTS or TOEFL would be exempted from the English Language test. The Panel is concerned that no exact cut-off marks were given for the secondary education score, the score of the English placement test and the score of IELTS or TOEFL to be exempted from the English placement test. Applicants holding secondary education certificates older than five years are considered mature students and are required to pass, in addition to the English, a Mathematics examinations. Transfer students are accepted in the programme if they have successfully completed at least one semester in another recognised institution where a maximum of 66% of the courses can be exempted if at least a C grade was obtained. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that AU revise the admission policies to clearly state its requirements for the high school score and placement tests and make these available to all its stakeholders.
- 3.2 The current student cohorts show a variation in profile. The Panel noted that averages of admitted student high school scores are above 70%. Students joining the programme came from varying disciplines ranging from Commerce, Technical, Science, Industrial, Literary, General, etc. Their high school scores ranged between 57.6, and 95.9 with a good number of them being above 70 and only a few below 60, which matches the programme aims. According to the AU catalogue, an orientation programme of one-semester, consisting of one English and one Mathematic course, is offered to undergraduate students who intend to pursue their education in their respective colleges at AU but applicants are exempted if they graduated from a high school where English is the language of teaching. Although the Panel is satisfied that the profile of admitted students matches the aims of the BSMIS programme, during the interview sessions, faculty members could not clarify to the Panel what additional support is provided to bring students from Arts, Commercial and Technical secondary school backgrounds to the same level of students entering the programme from science route. The Panel recommends that the College conduct a study to evaluate students' profile, especially the ones who are not coming from the Commercial or Science track, against their academic performance and progress to ensure their success. Furthermore, the Panel recommends that the College clearly state measures to prepare those students for the requirements of the programme.

- 3.3 The provided organizational chart suggests that there are clear lines of accountability with regard to the management of the BSMIS programmes in the College of Business and Finance and is in accordance with the University By-Laws. The Chairperson of MIS Department reports to the Dean of College of Business & Finance and manages the day-to-day responsibilities of the programme. The Panel noted from interviews and meeting sessions with staff that there were mechanisms implemented to demonstrate effective management. The Panel noted that many faculty members from other Departments are delivering the major courses within the Department. With the programme being heavily delivered by faculty members from other departments, the Panel encourages the Department to ensure their involvement in the programme management.
- 3.4 As of the academic year 2013/2014, there is four full time faculty members in the BSMIS department to deliver the MIS major courses (one full professor, and three assistant professors, while other courses such as Computer Science and Business are delivered by specialised staff from other departments. During the site visit, the Panel performed a thorough examination of faculty CVs, studied the details given in the submitted documents and SER, and learnt from the extensive discussions with staff members that among the four members of staff three of them have been through an MIS programme at one stage of their studies. The curriculum of the BSMIS programme has 10 MIS Specialisation courses amongst other courses from a variety of disciplines which indicates that the number of faculty in the MIS department is sufficient to teach those courses. However, with two of the four staff members being more into medical informatics and general business, the Panel is concerned about the depth of specialisation of faculty members. Moreover, the Panel noted that the published work by the faculty members has an inclination towards areas other than the area of specialization (rather than the pure area of specialization (e.g. MIS) and that there were no reported publications in peer-reviewed journals related to MIS. The Panel encourages the College to strengthen its specialised staff within the Department.
- 3.5 There are well-documented policies related to recruitment, appraisal and promotion for staff and mechanisms for their consistent implementation. As per the SER recruitment is typically initiated at the department, where the department chairperson in coordination with the department council forwards the department councils recommendations of human resources needs to the college council, after which the names of the selected candidates are forwarded to the Appointment and Promotion Committee for review and vetting. The AU promotion process is documented in the By-Laws of the Academic Promotions which mentions that 'A faculty member who has spent five years in his/her academic rank is eligible to apply for promotion to higher rank according to the rules and criteria specified in these bylaws'. During interview sessions, the Panel was informed that there were four

promotions within the College in recent years and one staff member is currently applying for promotion. The Panel noted that with the heavy teaching load and administrative/service engagements, staff members have little time to further their research interests. According to the SER faculty appraisal is conducted annually based on Process of Overall Annual Faculty Evaluation document. The appraisal process incorporates self-evaluation by the faculty, student and chairperson evaluation as well as the evaluation of the faculty member's contribution to research, teaching and other contributions to the University and the community. Interviewed staff members expressed their satisfaction with these arrangements and confirmed that they are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. The Panel appreciates that there are adequate mechanisms to ensure consistent and transparent implementation of staff recruitment, promotion and appraisal policies. Moreover, The Panel notes that the retention improved, for example the retention rate was 50% in 2012-2013 and 100% in 2013-2014 and there is no exit documentation on why staff leave which requires addressing. The Panel suggests that the college conduct an exit survey for the staff. All newly appointed staff undergo an induction process, during which both full-time and part-time academic staff learn about the assessment policy and other academic policies before commencing teaching. During the interviews, staff expressed the view that the induction process has been very effective and is generally well organised. The Panel appreciates that there is a well-functioning induction process for newly appointed staff.

- 3.6 The University has an Admission and Registration software system (ADREG) which consists of subsystems for managing applications, admissions, withdrawals and transfers, timetabling, assessments, graduations, alumni affairs, and general student activities including complaints. The Panel confirmed during interviews with staff members that ADREG is used effectively in generating reports to inform decision making in relation to programme management, student progression and also for facilitating the early identification and support of 'at-risk students'. For example, the Chairperson consults ADREG to verify that students have missed 25% of classes before authorizing the enforced withdrawal. During interviews, students also confirmed that they are given training on how to use the ADREG system to manage their registration online and access their assessment results and feedback from staff. The Panel notes with appreciation that AU has a dedicated team in the office of the Deanships of Student Affairs to add new features to the ADREG system as required which was noted during the tour of the facilities. The Panel appreciates the robustness of the ADREG system, and how it is effectively used by both staff and students to enhance students learning experience and as a functioning management information system to inform decision-making.
- 3.7 AU has explicit policies for ensuring the security of learners' records and accuracy of results. According to the policies electronic record, transcripts, course attendance and

other personal information, are reposed solely in ADREG in which: all records are password-protected and are backed-up on two levels. The Panel learnt during the site visit and from interview sessions that the first level records are backed up on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis with respect to different services; and on the second level, records are backed up remotely off-campus. Accuracy of results (grade entry) is ensured by multi-level verification through the instructor, the Chairperson, and the Dean of the College. Change in grade requires multi-level verification by the Chairperson, the Dean of the College and the Dean of Students' Affairs. In addition, there is a Quality Assurance (QA) officer specifically charged with the verification of the accuracy of the students' records, who carries out audits of results to assure data integrity. Security of the records is ensured by anti-virus, firewalls, and secure connections. Moreover, there is a disaster recovery plan. Prescribed by policy, physical records, examination scripts and student files, are kept under lock-and-key. Graded Examination scripts are kept for a period of two years in a secured place in the college's custody. The Chairperson has the responsibility of collecting and storing the examination scripts in the custodial facility. The Panel established during the site visit that the security arrangements are functioning effectively. The Panel appreciates that there are adequately implemented procedures in place to ensure the security of learner records and accuracy of results.

- 3.8 Following a tour to the University campus during the site visit, the Panel visited a number of lecture halls and computer laboratories, the university library, and other facilities. The Panel visited the main library and noted having hardcopy titles and the electronic library and databases. The Panel encourages the College to continue in increasing the library holdings as related to the BSMIS programme. The Panel notes that limited private study spaces are available in the library for the students. The Panel noted that the bookshop is located inside the library. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AU move the bookshop from the library to allow more space for students in the library and to ensure that the library is not crowded especially at the beginning of the academic semester. During the campus tour, the Panel visited some computer laboratories and noted that the log reports are provided to monitor the laboratories during class time. During interviews and while touring the facilities, the Panel confirmed that the University provides adequate internet services, email services, troubleshooting support, and access to the university services appropriate for the BSMIS programme students and faculty. During interviews with management and staff and while visiting the resources, the Panel noted that special measures are taken to support students with certain disabilities by providing ease of access. The Panel is satisfied with these arrangements in place to ensure that sufficient resources are available to all students.
- 3.9 Ahlia University uses ADREG to track the usage of resources in laboratories as well as the classroom usage. E-resources (including usage of electronic databases and

'Moodle') are also tracked through the database logs in the library that are generated by the library staff, and are used to inform decisions on whether to renew subscriptions to databases. Tracking reports of 'Moodle' usage can be generated easily upon demand and are used for decision making, as was noted from the provided documents. The Panel is satisfied with the ADREG tracking system determining the usages of laboratories and e-resources (databases) and allowing for the evaluation of the utilization of these resources.

- 3.10 During the site visit, the Panel noted that there is a regiment in place to provide support for students in the laboratories, library, guidance and support and for the use of e-resources. 'Moodle' plays a very crucial role in all this. All courses in the College are available on 'Moodle' and support e-learning. There is also a career office that provides guidance to students on how to secure internships and permanent jobs. The Panel noted that the student counselling support unit is located in an exposed area which might not maintain student privacy. Every student is assigned an academic advisor, who provides continuous and necessary support to the students in the course of their studies and there is a student counsellor who addresses non-academic problems on which students may require guidance. In the results of the student satisfaction survey as well as in interviews, student expressed satisfaction with the support and academic advising services that are made available to them. The Panel appreciates the range and quality of support services that are made available to students. However, the Panel recommends that AU relocate the Student Counselling Support Unit to a more appropriate location to maintain students' privacy.
- 3.11 All students at the beginning of every academic year are supplied with the Student Guide and the university Catalogue which detail for them all the essential information about AU's policies and regulations. Orientation is provided to newly admitted students as well as those transferred from other institutions at the beginning of every academic year. The orientation programme includes sessions on university-wide processes where aspects of the AU Student Guide and AU Catalogue are discussed, as well as college-level and programme-specific processes and requirements, including a discussion of the BSMIS programme specification. In interviews, students expressed satisfaction with the efficacy of the orientation programme in providing valuable information about AU's policies and regulations. From interviews with current and former students the Panel was informed that the orientation programme is provided by both the University and the College, but not specifically by the MIS Department. Students who are unable to attend the orientation programme usually receive copies of the Student Guide and other documents to read on their own. The Panel encourages the College to introduce a proper arrangement in place to orient students who miss the induction at the beginning of the academic year, besides the Student Guide. In addition to assigning

an advisor to every student to provide them continuously with all the necessary guidance and support they need throughout their studies, the Panel expresses the need that students might benefit from induction and orientation for new and transfer students by the departments' own staff.

- 3.12 There is a mechanism in place to provide academic support in general and for at-risk students in particular. Part of the academic advising is monitoring academic progress of students. According to AU's student at risk policy, students are to be monitored before their GPA falls within GPA range stipulated in the Catalogue and identified (red flagged) by the ADREG system (below 2.0) and notifications of students at risk cases are sent by email to the student academic advisor, course instructors, the University counsellor and, the Chairperson. Students at risk are called by their student academic advisor and the University counsellor to agree on an action plan. The Panel found evidence of minutes of meetings and interventions that have been taken to support identified students at risk. The Panel learnt during staff interviews that the ADREG system red flagged students at risk based on their GPA only which is known at the end of a semester. The Panel appreciates the mechanisms that are in place to identify and support students who are at risk of failure. Nonetheless, the Panel encourages the College to establish a proactive system to monitor the 'students at risk' during each semester based on their progress in midterm examinations and other course assessment activities.
- 3.13 AU has a learning environment that facilitates opportunities for students to develop through informal learning such as the extra-curricular activities: the AU Magazine, Psychology Club, charity fund raisers, participation in Student Government where representatives of the student council participate in the College council. It is also possible for students to attend a semester of one year- abroad as an exchange student with the Institut Supérieur de Gestion (ISG) Paris France or through the Brunel 2+2 exchange programme. This provides students with an opportunity to understand different cultures and to improve foreign language skills as well as the Brunel 2+2 exchange programme. Since the inception of the Brunel 2+2 exchange programme, a total of 12 students from AU have participated in the programme, of which only one was from the BSMIS programme. The learning environment is enhanced through several visits to work sites involving visits to corporate HR departments exhibiting HR management information systems in the current academic year, besides visits to foreign countries including GCC countries and having Special Events (career day, culture day, exhibitions). The Panel acknowledges the faculty's endeavours to provide opportunities for expanding student experiences and knowledge through informal learning.
- 3.14 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Efficiency of the Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- There are adequate mechanisms to ensure the consistent and transparent implementation of staff appraisal, promotion and retention policies, which are complemented by a well-functioning induction process for newly appointed staff.
- The effective use of the ADREG system to enhance students learning experience and as a functioning management information system to inform decision-making.
- There are clearly stated AU policies and procedures to ensure the security of the learners' information that are implemented consistently.
- The range and quality of support services that are made available to students.
- The mechanisms that are in place to identify and support students who are at risk of failure.

3.15 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- revise the admission policies to clearly state its requirements for the high school score and admission tests, and make them these available to all its stakeholders
- ensure that the student intake from different specialisations are prepared to meet the requirements of the programme
- move the bookshop out of the library to allow more space for students in the library
- relocate the Student Counselling Support Unit to a more appropriate location to maintain students' privacy.

3.16 **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 Ahlia University has clearly stated university-level Graduate Attributes that include generic skills and knowledge statements. These are specified in the AU's Teaching and Learning Plan. The BSMIS programme specifications lists the aims and the intended learning outcomes of the programme that enables the achievement of the graduate attributes as outlined in the BSMIS degree features in AU catalogue and in the Programme Specifications. The assessment methods as discussed below are linked to the CILOs which are mapped to the PILOs and hence assess the achievement of the graduate attributes. Notwithstanding the above, the Panel noted that there is no explicit mapping of the PILOs to the graduate attributes. The Panel is of the view that there is a need to consider the determination of student attributes at the outset of the composition of a programme as the map for the construction of the programme. In this respect, the attributes will then underline how the programme is constructed in terms of its individual courses, and the programme and course learning outcomes to reflect the attainment of those attributes along with the knowledge and understanding constituting the goals of a particular course. Whilst the Panel appreciates that there are clearly stated graduate attributes that are embedded within the programme specification, the Panel encourages that the College explicitly link the stated graduate attributes to the programme ILOs.
- 4.2 There is a benchmarking policy developed by AU. During the process of developing the updated BSMIS study plan, local, regional, and international benchmarking was conducted. As mentioned in the SER and during the site visit it became clear that the benchmarking is limited to programme structure and course content while in 2004 Brunel University validated programmes at AU. The Panel acknowledges the programme teams' effort in including ACM and model curricula in their benchmarking. However, the Panel is of the view that benchmarking cannot be restricted only to course offerings and the content of other institutions, and should include benchmarking of programme objectives and programme, course intended learning outcomes, assessment tool and graduate achievements. The Panel noted that the benchmarking activities conducted were informal and utilised information available via publically available sources, which limits the benefit of these activities. The Panel recommends that the college formalise its relationship with the institutions it benchmark itself with and expand the benchmarking activities to cover local and regional universities.
- 4.3 AU has an assessment policy with supporting procedures for course assessment and grading. Students are informed about the assessment policies and procedures at the

point of induction and in the syllabi of courses. The Panel noted that faculty members and students are aware of the plagiarism policy and the mechanism for its implementation. The Panel notes the college's efforts to eliminate plagiarism and ensure ethical academic practices. Assessment procedures ensure that assessments are monitored and reviewed by internal examiners and external reviewers, and by the department faculty through discussion of the analysis and report of the students' attainment levels of Course ILOs as presented in each course's evaluation report. There is evidence from documentation and interviews conducted that assessment policy and procedures are consistently implemented, monitored and subject to regular reviews and are made available to students. The monitoring is carried out by the Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) in coordination with the Department. The University Teaching and Learning and assessment committee receives feedback from the CAQA on the implementation of these assessment procedures and conducts periodical reviews with the aim of incorporating any improvement whenever needed. In addition, the student grade distribution is approved by the Chairperson before it is published to students. The Panel appreciates that the assessment methods and procedures are transparent, consistently implemented and subject to regular reviews.

- 4.4 New staff members are provided 'with regular training as part and parcel of the AU Quality Management System process carried out College-wide under the supervision of the Dean of the College and the Chairperson with intervention on the part of the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA)'. The Panel notes that course specifications provide a mapping between assessment and learning outcomes and course portfolios provide a mapping between Programme ILOs and Course ILOs. For example, the guidelines for undergraduate projects include outcome related rubrics to ensure consistency in the marking of projects across various courses. Whilst evidence provided in the course files indicates that in general, assessment is properly linked to the CILOs, the Panel noted an inconsistent approach of how individual ILOs are aligned to particular assessment methods in a few of the viewed course specifications/syllabi. The Panel suggests that the College revise these course specifications to ensure the consistency of these mappings and alignment between assessment and learning outcomes within these courses.
- 4.5 An internal moderation process to evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment instruments is devised for the programme and is in place for mid-term and final examinations. Final examination is subject to internal verification where a faculty member is nominated by the department chairperson and is requested to evaluate the final examination and ensure the relevance of the question to the course level, structure of the question paper, marking scheme and appropriateness of the assessment tools to measure the achievement of the learning outcomes by adhering to the unified ILO assessment matrix. Feedback is submitted, *via* a form to the

department Chairperson. There is also a post-moderation that is conducted by an internal moderation committee, which is responsible for moderating mid-term and final examinations scripts through scrutinising samples of these scripts with high, average and lowest marks. The whole process is monitored by the CAQA office. However, the Panel is of the view that the role of the internal moderation, which is currently limited to assessing the examination papers, should be expanded to include evaluation of the effectiveness of assessment instruments other than examinations. Moreover, the Panel has some concerns about the quality of the feedback received from the internal moderation and recommends that the College monitors the process and ensures the moderations are effectively implemented.

- 4.6 According to the SER and from the interview sessions with staff members, the Panel learnt that external moderation occurs annually for the BSMIS programme. The College nominates an external assessor subject to the approval of the University Council. The remit of the external assessor is stated explicitly in the Assessment Manual, a copy of which is supplied to each assessor. Assessors are charged with filling out an external assessor's report that details such elements as linkage between course and programme ILOs, fairness and validity, difficulty and reliability of the final examination questions, etc. These feedbacks 'are taken into consideration the next time the assessment is repeated in the subsequent academic year'. The Panel acknowledges the adoption of external moderation by AU and advises the College as it continue with implementing the external moderation process to adopt a mechanism that assesses the effectiveness of the process. Moreover, the Panel recommends that the College expand the role of the external assessor to cover all types of assessment.
- 4.7 The Panel scrutinized the provided samples of students' work and found that in general, students work is of an acceptable level. Notwithstanding the above, the Panel noted that the difficulty of the final examination questions in a few instances need to include more analytical flavoured questions especially for the fourth year level, in order to better assess the level of students' achievement. Moreover, it was noted that there is room for improvement in relation to graduation projects. The Panel noted while the level of work within these projects are of an acceptable level there were some cases where the projects offered focused mainly on what students have learnt in a limited number of courses and did not include some MIS core courses such as programming. Therefore, the Panel suggests that the scope of BSMIS graduation projects be revisited by the College to allow a variety of projects that include what the student learns in the MIS core courses.
- 4.8 The level of achievement of the programme aims and the ILOs by the graduates is demonstrated in the final results, grade distribution, as well as by the sampling of graduating students, alumni, and employers. The data provided in the SER shows

that more than one third of the graduates (2010-2013) totalling 22 have GPAs between 3.0-3.49 which falls into the Distinction level with a bell-shaped curve, although the bell is slightly skewed to the left with the bottom-most category (2.0-2.49) exceeding the top-most category (3.75-3.89) by three students. During the site visit, a series of interviews conducted with employers and alumni reflected their satisfaction with the achievements of the graduates. The Panel met with the programme graduates and noted that their MIS related knowledge and acquired skills is a good reflection of graduates meeting the programme aims and ILOs. The Panel notes that the level of achievement of graduates as expressed in the samples of students' responses and grades distribution is appropriate to the level of the BSMIS programme.

- 4.9 The length of study period to complete the programme in the last three years document indicates that the mean length of study of BSMIS graduates since the 2010-2011 academic year is 3.9 years with a standard deviation of 1.03 years, which is good for a four-year programme. The data shows an increasing trend in the number of years for the study period of graduates from a low of 2.5, when transfer students were enrolled, to a high of 5.7 where a higher number of part-time students were enrolled. Since the inception of the programme in 2003 the total number of admitted students is 259 with the total number of graduates to date being 64 and the number of current students being 128. The number of discontinued students is 67, indicating an acceptable total retention rate of 74% which has increased during the last academic year to 93.1%. Using the 169 enrolments until 2010-2011 as a basis for comparison, i.e. excluding 2011-2012 to 2014-2015 cohorts who are still studying and the 67 students who left the programme, 63% of the students graduated from the programme. This represents a reasonable but somewhat low throughput rate, even after accounting for the high rates of dismissals, suspensions and withdrawals. While these figures have improved over the last three years in particular, the high number of withdrawals is still of concern. Out of the 22 graduates in the last three years an average of 38.8% proceeded to appropriate employment with a trend of decreasing number of graduates finding appropriate employment from 45.45% in 2010-2011 down to 33.33% in 2012-2013 indicating that the number of graduates proceeding to appropriate employment is low and is decreasing further. In interviews with employers, the Panel learnt that graduates from the BSMIS programme are sought after in different areas of employment specialisation due to the graduates being educated with a wide range of skills that enable them to engage in related areas of employment and the decreasing number of opportunities for MIS graduates in the market. The Panel acknowledges that the majority of the BSMIS graduates have found employment. The Panel is concerned, however, that the percentage of students (24%) who discontinued their studies of the BSMIS programme since its inception is rather high. The Panel recommends that the cause of the rather high attrition rate to be investigated and a mitigating strategy based on a careful review of the causes of

withdrawal and a review of how the admission criteria are linked to the attrition rate to be developed and implemented.

- 4.10 In the BSMIS programme, the work-based learning takes place through the internship programme guided by Guidelines for the Undergraduate Internship Programme. The internship programme can be replaced by taking two elective courses, as detailed under Indicator 1, and some students are exempted if already working, as the Panel learnt during interviews with staff. Mentors are assigned to students to monitor and review their participation in the internship. This includes the appointment of an academic and an on-site supervisor. There are guidelines that set out the requirements for academic and on-site supervision and include the assessment rubrics that are used. According to the provided document, students spend a minimum of 180 hours of work at the internship worksite. Students are required to submit bi-weekly reports and a final report for the internship. These reports, along with the academic and on-site supervisor reports, form the basis for the mark awarded to the students. The Panel was provided with samples of these reports and acknowledges that the policy and procedure for managing and assessing the work based learning is consistently implemented. Since the academic year 2009-2010, the cumulative number of BSMIS students engaged in an MIS internships (INTR400) is 17, reflective of a cumulative participation rate of 68% of the students who graduated from this programme during the same period. The Panel learnt from graduates interviewed during the site visit that, during their internship these graduates worked in clerical and administrative positions rather than in MIS related areas (developers or users of information systems). The Panel recommends that the College develop and implement a more focused placement plan to ensure that the internship experience is aligned with the programme aims and objectives.
- 4.11 The Guidelines for Undergraduate projects provides the needed policy, among other details, that cover the processes for the undergraduate project, roles and responsibilities of the various parties, examination, storage and deadlines. Flowcharts provide a clear overview of processes of the undergraduate project that the student can follow. It also includes the various report forms that are used. A full-time member of the Department with at least a minimum rank of Lecturer, three years teaching experience at university-level, and evidence of recent or current research activity, is usually appointed as the Internal Examiner, whose responsibility is to reach an independent judgement on the quality of the written report as well as the oral examination. An Examination Committee is convened to finalise the assessment and inform the student of the result, and typically consists of the supervisor and two other internal examiners. According to the SER, guidelines have been periodically rewritten over the past five years by an *ad hoc* committee for student undergraduate and post-graduate projects of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC) Independent monitoring of the project supervision

process is undertaken by the CAQA. Nonetheless, and as indicated earlier, the scope of BSMIS graduation projects need to be carefully revisited by the College to synthesise what students learn in the MIS core courses and to help improve employability of BSMIS graduates which needs to be address as stated previously. The Panel appreciates the availability of a policy that governs the BSMIS graduation project and that the processes related to the supervision of projects are well managed and are appropriate for the BSMIS programme.

- 4.12 The Panel appreciates the existence of College External Advisory Board, which convened in 2013, that is governed by terms of reference. Although it has four members, the Board members are well qualified for their role. They have years of experience in a range of industries and businesses, and all hold senior positions. The Advisory Board has representations from the private and the public sectors with experience in areas related to the BSMIS programme, meet regularly and provide feedback to the BSMIS programme. In a meeting with the members of the Advisory Board, the Panel confirmed that the Board plays an important role in linking the College with industry and providing valuable feedback for the College to improve the programme. The Panel appreciates that there is an active Advisory Board that provides constructive feedback which is reflected in the newly revised curriculum plan.
- 4.13 The Centre for Measurement and Evaluation is responsible for conducting two surveys, one for the graduates and one for the employers. Reports and analysis of Alumni follow-up surveys as well as the reports and analysis of Employer of BSMIS graduates surveys provide evidence of graduate and employer satisfaction with the programme. Employers are highly satisfied with the graduates' profile, which was further confirmed during the interview sessions. The Panel appreciates the high satisfaction indicated in the employer surveys with the BSMIS programme.
- 4.14 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Academic Standards of the Graduates, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- There are clearly stated graduate attributes that are embedded within the programme specifications.
 - The assessment methods and procedures are transparent, consistently implemented and subject to regular reviews.
 - The policies that governs the MIS graduation project and the processes related to the supervision of projects are well managed and are appropriate for the BSMIS programme.
 - There is a College External Advisory Board that is governed by terms of reference, and whose feedback is reflected into the newly adopted curriculum plan.

- Alumni and the employers are satisfied with the standard of the BSMIS programme and its graduates.

4.15 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- formalise the relationship with the institutions that are benchmarked with and expand the benchmarking activities to cover local and regional universities
- develop mechanisms to monitor the internal moderation process and ensure that moderations are effectively implemented
- expand the external moderation processes to cover all types of assessment
- investigate the underlying causes of the high attrition rate of students enrolled in the programme and develop and implement a mitigating plan
- develop and implement a more focused placement plan to ensure that the internship experience is aligned with the programme aims and objectives.

4.16 **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 The AU Policies and Procedures Manual contains a wide array of institutional policies and procedures ranging from HR, accounting, purchasing, ICT and safety, to general administration. The Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance has the overall responsibility for monitoring the implementation of these policies and procedures across the University. The quality management system at AU consists of a committee structure and a range of QA policies and procedures. Related University level committees and structures that complement the CAQA's work include the University Council (UC), University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC), Teaching and Learning and Accreditation Committee (TLAC), Curriculum Review Committee (CRC), and the Centre for Measurement and Evaluation (CME). Parallel committees also exist at the college and departmental levels, such as College and Departmental Councils, College and Departmental Quality Assurance Committees, etc. Being a small college, this might cause overlaps and duplication of the committee functions. The Panel suggests that AU review and assess the effectiveness of the current committee structure, given the small size of the institution. From submitted documents and interviews with academic, administration and QA staff the Panel is satisfied that the institution's policies are applied effectively with the involvement of the staff. The Faculty Handbook summarises the university policies and procedures while the 2010 University By-Laws provides more details of these policies. The quality assurance manual includes policies and procedures on admissions and development, review and closure of academic programmes, as well as regulations pertaining to academic study. Ahlia University's policies, procedures and regulations are periodically subject to revision and revised accordingly, are centrally warehoused in the Ahlia Centre for Information and Documentation and key decisions are made available to all staff through a variety of electronic and non-electronic means. Electronic media include the AU website, intranet (Share point) and emails sent to faculty through to their respective Ahlia email accounts as well as SMS alerts and through applications like whatsapp. The Panel appreciates that there is an implemented mechanism to ensure the consistent application of the policies and procedures across the College.
- 5.2 From the SER and interviews with senior faculty members, the Panel learned that the BSMIS programme is managed under the aegis of the College of Business and Finance, led by the Dean of the College. The Chairperson of MIS Department is responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme and according to the SER, the Chairperson interacts regularly with a range of stakeholders who also

provide a wide range of different types and sources of information pertaining to the programme and its management. The Department Council headed by the Chairperson evaluates the options for effective decision making concerning the BSMIS programme. The Chairperson represents the department in the College council and preserves the interest of the BSMIS department and programme. The Panel also interviewed academic and administrative staff, including representatives from CAQA, who were provided evidence of the effective leadership of the programme. The Panel acknowledges the measures in place to achieve effective and responsible leadership of BSMIS programme. From the interview sessions, the Panel noted that the Chairperson of the MIS Department is overloaded with the assigned work besides coordinating the quality efforts and teaching duties. The Panel is concerned that the high administrative load with the long list of responsibilities of the Chairperson including the involvement in most of the departmental standing committees could prevent the Chairperson from assuming his/her role in providing effective leadership. The Panel recommends the College to review the responsibilities of the Department.

- 5.3 AU has developed a comprehensive Quality Assurance Manual in 2012 to provide 'a one-stop shop' for policies and procedures relating to quality assurance. As previously noted, that the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance has the overall responsibility for monitoring the quality of programmes across the University. The CAQA is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the quality management system at the University-level to ensure consistent implementation and quality delivery of the BSMIS programme and is supported by an array of university level committees and structures that complements the CAQA's work. The Panel found that both the College Council and Department Councils play a significant role to complement the work of the CAQA. The Panel was provided with evidence of several meetings to show the involvement of these structures in monitoring and evaluating the quality management system in relation to programmes offered within the College. The Panel appreciates that the quality management system is consistently implemented, monitored and evaluated.
- 5.4 The CAQA conducts regular training workshops to acquaint staff with the policies and procedures pertaining to the programmes offered by the College in particular, and best practice approaches in teaching and learning in general. The Panel established that the training workshops that were conducted between 2011 and 2014 were very well attended by staff. The QA policies and procedures are also made available on the university intranet for easy access by staff. During interviews with the academics and support staff, the Panel noted that they have a good understanding of the implemented quality assurance arrangements in the College and their role in ensuring effectiveness of provision. The Panel appreciates the

commitment of the AU staff in ensuring the quality of delivery of the BSMIS programme.

- 5.5 The policy and procedures for the development of new programmes are contained in the Policy on Developing, Reviewing and Closing Academic Programmes and an accompanying Process for Developing, Reviewing and Closing Academic Programmes. The process of developing new programmes is typically initiated at the department or college-level following a needs assessment and feasibility study, and recommendations thereafter go through a series of approvals which eventually culminate at the University Council for approval before submission to the Higher Education Council for licensing. The Panel established that the College did not identify the need for establishing new programmes since the establishment of its current programmes and rather concentrated on improving the existing programmes. During the interviews with the senior management, the Panel learned that there are plans to introduce a host of new programmes when the University eventually relocates to its planned new campus. The Panel acknowledges the procedures AU has put in place for the development and approval of new programmes.
- 5.6 According to the SER and through discussions with staff and by reviewing relevant documents it is evident that internal programme evaluations are typically conducted at the beginning of each semester by the Department in collaboration with CAQA and the TLAC. The process involves 'validation' of programme specifications and course syllabi in terms of learning outcomes, teaching and assessment methods, textbooks, etc. and making use of an Internal Verification of Course Syllabus/Specification template. From interviews, the Panel learnt that student evaluations are conducted at the end of each semester to generate feedback on teaching and learning. Minutes of meetings and interviews with the academic staff confirmed that the process of student evaluation has led to improvements in specific courses in the BSMIS programme. The Panel notes the internal programme evaluation conducted and that the end-of-semester student evaluations compliment the course and programme validation system to generate an ongoing and effective feedback on the quality of teaching. The Panel appreciates the adequacy of the arrangements for internal evaluation of programmes.
- 5.7 The AU Policy and Procedures for Developing, Reviewing and Closing Academic Programmes requires programmes in the Faculty of Business and Finance to be comprehensively reviewed every three years. In terms of the policy, programme reviews are the remit of the Curriculum Review Committee with support from the TLAC and other related surveys, and overseen by the CAQA. The process for reviewing the programme provides for the incorporation of external reference points such as feedback from course tutors, alumni and employer surveys, benchmarking

and market research studies, student evaluations, and input from the College External Advisory Board into consideration in programme reviews. The Panel confirmed that the review process uses various external input and feedback from external examiners, alumni and employers, and the College External Advisory Board (CEAB). The Panel found evidence of instances where programme review recommendations have been implemented to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum. According to the SER, in the academic year 2009-2010 the programme was revised by adding more quantitative coursework college-wide (STAT 202) and, in 2011-2012, the research component of all programmes including BSMIS, was augmented by the inclusion of a research methods course designed specifically for business research (BFRM 498), which became a prerequisite for all undergraduate projects in business. In the academic year 2013-2014, the MIS department undertook a revamping of course content in a range of MIS core courses like (ITMA 201, ITMA 401 and ITMA 412). In addition, a course on business ethics (ETHC 391) was included in the curriculum of all undergraduate business programmes starting in 2013-2014. The Panel appreciates the frequency and diligence with which BSMIS programme is periodically reviewed.

- 5.8 The Centre for Measurement and Evaluation (CME) periodically conducts surveys of AU students and alumni, and employers. The student satisfaction surveys tackle the quality of course offering and evaluation of the instructors. Feedback collected from the students surveys flows to the University Council, College Council and Department Council meetings for discussion. The alumni surveys collect information on the quality of the BSMIS programme and their learning experience. The CAQA implements a 'Quality Periodic Programme Review and Utilization of Feedback' procedure in order to ensure that feedback is utilised in improving the programme. During the site visit, the Panel was provided with some of the recently conducted surveys and follow-up meetings and action plans that has emanated from these surveys which were highlighted previously. The Panel is satisfied with the dedication and enthusiasm of the CME staff in conducting these surveys.
- 5.9 AU has a dedicated unit, namely the Ahlia Training and Development Centre (ATDC) which is responsible for the professional development of both academic and administration staff members. The Panel confirmed that the Centre has designed a formal staff development plan that seeks to identify the training and development needs of staff, and respond with the design and delivery of appropriate professional development workshops to address any gaps. The Panel noted that the training programmes are also geared towards attainment of individual staff needs, and hence staff are able to attend courses in areas that are unrelated to their normal course of duty. The ATDC has furthermore developed a template for evaluating the effectiveness of the workshops that are presented. The Panel found evidence that many academic and administrative staff members of the College of Business and

Finance have attended workshops on topics such as the use of 'Moodle', design and mapping of programme and course ILOs, teaching and learning and assessment methodologies, among others. Furthermore, AU has an Annual Professional Development Plan (2013-2014) which staff helps staff to attend external workshops and participate in conferences as mentioned earlier. Interviewed staff showed full awareness and clear understanding of these policies and procedures and indicated that they benefited from all workshops organised by the University. The Panel appreciates the effective arrangements that are put in place to identify and meet the individual and professional development needs of both academic and non-academic staff.

- 5.10 The Panel found evidence that surveys have been conducted with alumni and some employers with an aim to gather intelligence about the labour market and ensure the currency of programmes offered by the College of Business and Finance. Other sources that have been relied upon to scope the labour market include the expertise within the College External Advisory Board. The Panel, however, did not find any systematic approach that is used to target and collect data from specific segments of the labour market that are directly related to the BSMIS programme. The Panel is concerned that the current methodology has the potential of overlooking relevant organizations and market segments in which no alumni are employed. The Panel recommends that the College routinely and systematically scope the labour market by targeting and collecting market intelligence from appropriate segments of the labour market.
- 5.11 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:
- There is an implemented mechanism to ensure the consistent application of the policies and procedures across the College.
 - The quality management system is consistently implemented, monitored and evaluated.
 - Both the academic and non-academic staff are committed to ensuring the quality of delivery of the BSMIS programme.
 - There are adequate arrangements in place for the internal evaluation of the programme.
 - The frequency and diligence with which the programme is periodically reviewed.
 - There are effective arrangements to identify and meet the professional development needs of both academic and non-academic staff.

5.12 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- review the responsibilities of the Department Chairperson to ensure effective leader ship
- develop and implement a formal mechanism that routinely and systematically scopes the labour market needs to enhance the programme design and its delivery.

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 DHR/QQA *Programmes-within-College Reviews Handbook, 2012*:

There is confidence in the Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems of the College of Business and Finance offered by Ahlia University.