



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Programme Review Report

Bachelor of Marketing and Management
Ahlia University
Kingdom of Bahrain

Dates Reviewed: 25-26 May 2009

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1. Programme Reviews

1.1 The Programme Review Framework

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

Indicator 1: Curriculum

Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

The summative judgment falls into one of three categories:

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

1.2 Overview of the Programme at Ahlia University

Ahlia University (AU) is a private university, established in 2001, licensed by the Government of Bahrain. It is an autonomous institution independently chartered, funded and managed by the private sector. Ahlia University became operational in January 2003. It consists of five Colleges, namely, the College of Arts, Science & Education, the College of Business and Finance, the College of Engineering, the College of Information Technology and the College of Medical and Health Sciences.

The programme under review, the Bachelor in Marketing and Management, is located in the Department of Marketing and Management, one of four departments within the College of Business and Finance. There is no specific mission statement of the Department of Marketing and Management. However, a mission statement for the College of Business and Finance is being developed, which will apply to the Department of Marketing and Management.

In the academic year 2008-2009 there were some 92 (82 full-time; 10 part-time) undergraduate students enrolled on the programme, of whom 62 were Bahraini and the remainder were from other Gulf states. There were 51 male and 41 female students. There are eight full-time members of the College academic staff teaching on the programme; their contribution to the programme represents some 3.5 full-time equivalent staff (FTE). In addition, staff in other departments of the University teach 50 courses on the programme

(equivalent to 5 FTEs) while staff from outside the University contribute some 1.5 FTEs. At the time of the visit there were 115 students enrolled (79 full-time and 36 part-time), giving a staff-student ratio of approximately 1:11.5.

2. Indicator 1: Curriculum

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

2.1 The overall aims of the programme are congruent with the University and College missions. There is no separate departmental mission. The programme aims to provide students with sufficient knowledge to be able to pursue a career in marketing or management, and/or advanced further study. In order that students are able to accomplish this, the programme seeks to provide students with the analytical skills necessary to apply their knowledge in the organisations in which they are employed, to acquaint them with changing techniques and practices in the professional world, to develop their competence in marketing strategies formulation and to enhance their communication skills.

2.2 The intended learning outcomes for each course are described in the course syllabus. Overall programme intended learning outcomes are that graduates should be able to:

- apply management principles to business activities including planning, organising, leading and controlling
- conduct business ethically
- identify and solve managerial problems effectively
- use marketing techniques effectively
- apply information technology skills in business to enhance management and marketing activities
- employ analytical skills
- employ cognitive skills
- employ skills of synthesis
- work effectively in teams
- manage time efficiently
- communicate well.

2.3 These intended learning outcomes are appropriate. However, no standard format is used for course descriptors, which makes their usefulness to students variable. Similarly, different titles are used for these documents (Course Plan, Course Outline, Course Outline and Student Guide and Course Syllabus), which is confusing. In discussion with the Review Panel, staff offered different opinions on the nature and purpose of course outlines and course syllabuses. The Review Panel welcomes the commitment of the University to ensure standardisation of title and content. The University Catalogue provided on a CD is an informative and well-presented source of reference for students and staff.

- 2.4 The programme comprises four levels. A total of 132 credit hours are required for successful completion. Students take 44 three-credit courses of which 38 are compulsory and six are electives. While the content is generally appropriate, the department might wish to consider the inclusion of courses such as business ethics in the electives.
- 2.5 Curricular progression is not always evident. The curriculum is being reviewed and the Department may wish to take advantage of this to review necessary prerequisites in order to ensure that student progression is facilitated. There is a final year project. This provides an opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate analytical and communication skills at the higher undergraduate level. However, there is no specific requirement clearly stated in the curriculum to ensure the students have the necessary academic knowledge and skills to undertake this. The department will need to address this.
- 2.6 The curriculum is generally well matched to the intended learning outcomes although the documentation could make the place of practical skills in the curriculum more explicit. There are opportunities for students to engage in work placement consultancy roles with companies. However, this is optional. The reviewers recommend that consideration be given to making the work placement (internship) compulsory, whether or not students have had industry experience. This would contribute towards allowing all students to apply their newly acquired business concepts and skills in real situations. A concomitant of this would be to employ more innovative assessment tools to measure students' attainment of these skills.
- 2.7 The teaching, learning and assessment strategy takes cognisance of University regulations, the nature of existing physical resources and the growing number of students on the programme. A central tenet is the use of English as the medium of instruction and assessment. Teaching and learning schemes and associated assessments for each course are drawn up to address the intended learning outcomes. These are communicated effectively to students. A particular strength of the programme is the emphasis on the development of students' presentation skills which takes place progressively over the four years of the programme.
- 2.8 Teaching methods and materials used vary. Academic staff employ materials and delivery methods that they consider most appropriate for the course content, lesson purpose, level and preferred learning styles of students. The syllabus for each course specifies course methods and materials, as well as providing evidence that individual course objectives directly contribute to programme-level intended learning outcomes. Course syllabuses and the Self Evaluation Report state that many of the courses are delivered primarily through lectures; however, in discussion with staff and students it is clear that this term may include a wide variety of teacher-student and student-

student interaction, including, in the later years of the programme, group activities, student presentations, outside speakers and visits to business organisations. However, student exposure to external speakers and visits to workplaces is uneven and not all students have benefited from such activities. Given the vocational nature of the programme, the department should seek greater engagement with the business community.

- 2.9 Students reported high levels of satisfaction with the standard of teaching. Students appreciate, and benefit from, the relatively small class sizes and consider staff, particularly full-time staff, to be accessible to them. Academic staff are highly qualified. Texts and other learning materials are current and used effectively to underpin student learning. Students are exposed to an appropriate balance of national, regional and international aspects of business. Lecturers draw upon their research and other experience to ensure relevance and currency in their teaching. One member of staff uses the virtual learning environment extensively, but, further use of this could be made by other staff to support student learning, as use of this medium is well received by students.
- 2.10 Assessment methods for each course are set out in the course descriptor given to students at the beginning of the course. In general, the assessment instruments employed are appropriately matched to the intended learning outcomes and include formative and summative elements. However, there is scope for further assessment of student competencies in terms of practical, business-related skills. The department may wish to consider the videoing of student presentations as a formative and summative assessment tool for students' presentation skills. Currently, the project is reviewed and examined internally. The department may wish to consider the desirability of external moderation for this work.
- 2.11 Students generally receive prompt feedback, on an individual and group basis, on submitted work, although the amount of detail provided, and hence its usefulness in supporting student learning, is variable. There remains scope for ensuring that feedback refers specifically to student performance against the intended learning outcomes for each piece of assessed work. In the main, however, students valued the constructive feedback they received. Although feedback is generally prompt, there is no stipulated minimum turnaround time for the return of student work. As a result the timeliness of the return of student work depends heavily on the member of staff involved. There is a need for an agreed late submission policy and universal adherence to deadlines by staff and students. Students reported some bunching of assignments and the department may wish to consider a more systematic, coordinated approach to assignment scheduling to address this issue.

- 2.12 The assessment process is administered fairly and efficiently. Grade submission by academic staff is undertaken electronically. There is a robust internal pre-assessment moderation system which ensures consistency and fairness in assessment procedures. For each course, individual student grades and the overall grade distribution are given to the Chairman, for approval and copied to the course file. 'Turnitin' software is being piloted in order to detect plagiarism. The assessment policy, examination dates and procedures for assessment are communicated to students through course outlines. There are two in-course tests plus an end of course final examination. Students are clear about the nature of the assessments and what is required of them. Assessment procedures are carried out effectively and efficiently, in accordance with university guidelines.
- 2.13 In coming to its conclusion regarding the curriculum, the Panel notes with appreciation the following:
- The curriculum content and its delivery are well-matched to the intended learning outcomes
 - Varied teaching approaches are used to match intended learning outcomes to student learning styles and needs
 - There is a commendable emphasis on the development of students' communication skills
 - Academic staff are highly qualified, accessible and helpful
 - Assessment criteria are clear and well understood by students and staff
 - Student in-course work is marked and returned promptly
 - The University Catalogue provided on a CD is well-presented source of reference for students and staff
 - There is a robust internal pre-assessment moderation system which ensures consistency and fairness in assessment procedures.
- 2.14 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:
- Standardise title, format and content of course outlines and course syllabuses
 - Consider making the work placement compulsory
 - Engage more fully with the business community, including work visits for students and use of outside speakers to give guest lectures
 - Increase use of the virtual learning environment to underpin further student learning
 - Implement a more systematic, coordinated approach to assignment scheduling to reduce bunching
 - Institute a more formal, uniform, approach to deadlines and late submission policy to ensure equity of treatment for students.

2.15 **Judgement**

The Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on curriculum.**

3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

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

- 3.1 The profile of students admitted is appropriate. The Department attracts high calibre students, including a significant number of direct entrant students into later years of the programme. Such entrants benefit from a credit transfer scheme which permits a maximum of 60% transferred credit.
- 3.2 The Department has six full-time academic staff, of whom three hold PhDs and three Masters. The small staff base means that the range of specialisms available is limited and staff are required to teach in some areas that are not their main areas of expertise. This restricts staff opportunities to conduct research in their specialist field. It also limits students' exposure to a diversity of approaches and specialist knowledge. The Department seeks to mitigate this feature by ensuring that staff bring a wide range of professional experience to the teaching team. Staff are highly motivated and all have graduate qualifications and experience gained outside Bahrain which they bring to bear in their teaching. The employment of part-time staff can make a significant contribution to the currency and range of expertise available. However, currently there is a heavy dependence on such staff. This inevitably limits student access to some of their tutors and requires rigorous procedures to maintain quality and ensure that the student learning experience is not jeopardised. The Review Panel suggests that the Department should seek to employ more full-time academic staff and reduce its dependence on part-time staff.
- 3.3 Physical and material resources available to students, in particular library space and stock, require improvement. The library offers a pleasant, welcoming environment, including an area specifically for PhD students, but research for staff and students is hampered by the lack of library resources. Students reported that they make little use of the library. This weakness may be rectified when the University moves to a new location where more space will be available.
- 3.4 IT provision is adequate and well-used by students although there is scope for the institution to establish a dedicated business and management IT facility. Students are encouraged to access the electronic library and their usage of on-line journals and internet facilities generally is high. However, a number of students indicated that they would like to see a more academic environment in which to study on campus. Students utilise library resources available elsewhere, including the UNDP library.
- 3.5 Student admissions and induction is well-organised and highly regarded by students. Students, including direct entrants to Year 2, are provided with a well-designed

induction ('orientation') programme supported by clear comprehensive documentation. Students report that the induction is informative and that staff are helpful in easing their entry to the University, the College, the Department and the programme. Current and former students reported favourably on the high level of pastoral support and guidance, although this often operates on an informal basis. The Department may wish to codify and formalise it as an example of good practice.

- 3.6 Overall progression rates are good with approximately 89% of students admitted to the programme graduating. Nine students graduated in 2007-2008 and 15 are expected to graduate this year. In all there have been 61 graduates from the programme since its commencement. Students typically take the standard four years to complete successfully. Of the most recent cohort to graduate, over half proceeded to appropriate employment. Employers reported that Ahlia graduates are highly employable and graduates felt that the programme prepared them well for their employment. However, first destinations are known for 88.8% of graduates and of those with known first destinations, 92% have secured employment. The Dean of Student Affairs and the University generally, are aware of shortcomings in data on student progression and first-destinations of graduates.
- 3.7 The credit accumulation system makes it difficult to obtain clear and meaningful data on overall student progression. The ease with which students can, and indeed are encouraged to, transfer between programmes, departments and faculties can make it difficult to track overall student progress. Data collected by the Office of the Dean of Students do not routinely include year-on-year progression statistics.
- 3.8 In coming to its conclusion regarding efficiency, the Review Panel notes with appreciation the following:
- The programme attracts high calibre students
 - The academic staff are highly motivated
 - The professional experience of staff represents a considerable resource
 - Student induction (orientation) is well-organised and highly regarded by students
 - The programme produces highly employable graduates.
- 3.9 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:
- Employ more academic staff to teach on the programme
 - Improve physical resources supporting the programme, and in particular increase the size of the library and its stock
 - Reduce the dependence on part-time staff
 - Develop further the collection and management of student data.

3.10 Judgement

The Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on efficiency.**

4. Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

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

- 4.1 The Self Evaluation Report sets out the aims and objectives of the programme including expected academic standards and these are clearly linked with intended learning outcomes. The programme aims and intended learning outcomes are clearly benchmarked against national and international norms for similar programmes. Initially this was a reflection of the use of the Brunel programme specification. Since then there has been some modification to meet and reflect local and regional needs and expectations. Graduates confirmed that the programme met their and their employers' expectations. The process of benchmarking has relied heavily on staff drawing upon their experience of non-Bahraini higher education. There is a reliance on these informal processes, rather than a formal structure, to ensure appropriate benchmarking of academic standards. This will need to be addressed whether or not the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation is sought.
- 4.2 Consideration should also be given to greater internal and external scrutiny of academic standards. While the project is double or triple-marked, other assessed work is not. The project is marked internally only and the Department may wish to consider whether to adopt a form of external examining for this, and other assessments. The planned adoption of an explicit methodology for benchmarking student performance and consideration of the introduction of an external examination process is encouraging. This will be of some importance whether or not the department intends to achieve AACSB accreditation.
- 4.3 Students' results reflect their entry qualifications. Since the programme's commencement there have been 61 graduates, of whom 60% achieved a classification of 'good' or better. Student work scrutinised by the Panel demonstrated an appropriate level of attainment and was in keeping with the aims and objectives of the programme. The spread of marks and grades was acceptable although evidence of detailed and constructive feedback on scripts was patchy. Academic standards appear to be equivalent to those on similar programmes elsewhere. Students reported finding the programme demanding, but motivating and rewarding as it develops them personally as well as academically. Employers welcomed the enthusiasm of Ahlia graduates and considered them to have particular strengths in communication skills and the ability assume responsibility.
- 4.4 In coming to its conclusion regarding the academic standard, the Review Panel notes with appreciation the following:

- Academic standards accurately reflect programme aims
- Graduates confirm that the programme meets their, and their employers', expectations
- Students find the programme demanding but motivating
- The programme aims and ILOs are clearly benchmarked against national and international norm for similar programmes.

4.5 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:

- Undertake more formal benchmarking of academic standards
- Consider employing greater internal and external independent scrutiny
- Develop and implement an external moderation system.

4.6 **Judgement**

The Review 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, give confidence in the programme.

- 5.1 There is a strong commitment at University, College and Departmental level, to maintaining and enhancing quality. Quality management and assurance has been overseen by University Quality Committee since 2007. There are structured procedures, including a well-understood process to elicit proposals for curricular change and the subsequent progressing of these through the College and University structure, and regular, minuted staff meetings. These processes were effective in facilitating the formulation of an improvement plan, although there is scope for greater clarity and transparency in the way in which these are documented. The University publishes an annual catalogue, available on CD which sets out clearly the University's policies, procedures, regulations and curricular offerings.
- 5.2 The University is currently reviewing the processes for internal review and reporting. Proposals outlined to the review team suggest that these will be rigorous and effective. To ensure this, there is a need for more transparent reporting structures and the establishment of clear audit trails for decision-making within the programme, Department and College and their linkages with University management. Standardisation to ensure consistency of templates, their titles, and content would present a more professional approach.
- 5.3 Student views are canvassed, including use of end-of-semester course evaluations, and there are student representatives drawn from the Student Council. Students report that their views are considered sympathetically and responded to appropriately. Surveys have been carried out for each course, each programme and of alumni. There are proposed procedures to extend stakeholder input, including an Advisory Committee of employers and other relevant parties.
- 5.4 Improvement planning is evident, drawing upon staff, student and external comment. However, this often appears to be informal and dependent upon individuals. A strengthened university structure and procedures would provide a more formal, structured framework for improvement planning at both departmental and institutional levels.
- 5.5 Staff teaching loads leave relatively little time for professional development, as well as for carrying out research, which is one of the core functions of a university. What is undertaken is largely personally-based. The Review Panel encourages the department

and the institution to ensure that there is a more structured approach to continuing professional staff development. The Review Panel noted that there are two staff are enrolled in the Brunel University PhD Programme. New staff members are allocated a mentor for their first year in post and find this helpful.

- 5.6 The department may wish to consider implementing a formal Workload Allocation Model (WAM) with appropriate weightings, to recognise, explicitly, demands upon staff time and to formalise provision for research and other scholarly activity within staff timetables. The SER is very light on staff research, both in terms of actual publications and in terms of an overall research strategy. This is largely due to heavy teaching loads. However the Review Panel was encouraged to learn that the university recognises this and of senior staff research plans and the appointment of a Dean of Research to develop this area. Developments under consideration include: sabbatical leave, teaching relief for major research projects, and funding for international conference attendance. There is already significant participation by staff in international conferences and seminars and some financial inducements to undertake research. Two members of staff are being supported to obtain PhDs. The University Appointments and Promotions Committee, chaired by the President, and the preparation of a Human Resources Manual, as part of the University Policies and Procedures Manual, promise to provide a more formal, structured approach to fostering and supporting staff professional development.
- 5.7 There is a paucity of readily available information which would enable continuing, effective, monitoring and evaluation of programme performance and development. There is a need to ensure the generation, accuracy and utilisation of key management information, including student intake targets, tracking of student progression and first destinations, programme resource allocation and learning resources utilisation. Use of action planning would establish responsibilities and facilitate progress-chasing.
- 5.8 The Review Panel is required to report on the effectiveness of quality management and assurance at the time of the visit. In consequence, this report highlights a number of important issues that need to be addressed. However, the Panel is encouraged and impressed by the University's planned developments in which most, if not all, of the recommendations in this report will be adopted.
- 5.9 In coming to its conclusion regarding the effectiveness of quality management and assurance the Review Panel notes with appreciation the following:
- There is a strong commitment at University, College and Departmental level, to maintaining and enhancing quality
 - The appointment of a Dean of Research to provide strategic direction as the institution develops this core function
 - The formulation of an Improvement Plan through internal processes demonstrates a clear commitment to enhancement.

- 5.10 In terms of improvement, the Review Panel *recommends* that the Department should:
- Generate and utilise accurate key management information, including student intake targets, tracking of student progression, including first destinations of graduates, programme resource allocation and learning resources utilisation in order to inform quality management
 - Develop a structured approach to continuing professional development of staff.
 - Reconsider teaching loads to allow for academics to engage in research, a core function of a university
 - Finalise and implement the university procedures for internal monitoring and review, which incorporate extensive stakeholder input, will strengthen quality assurance.

5.11 **Judgement**

The Review Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies the indicator on 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 Review Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the *HERU/QAAET Programme Review Handbook, 2009*:

There is confidence in the Bachelor of Marketing and Management programme offered by Ahlia University.