



الجامعة الأهلية  
AHLIA UNIVERSITY  
BAHRAIN

# MARKET NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT 2023

ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYER CONSULTATION  
AND STAKEHOLDER'S FEEDBACK







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## INTRODUCTION



In line with Ahlia University (AU) Strategy which is aligned to Bahrain National Strategies and Economic Vision 2030, AU aims to produce highly qualified graduates, suitable to the market needs and equipped with competitive and life-long learning skills.

AU ensures engaging stakeholders in improvement of academic programmes, including employers, industrial experts through consultative advisory boards, alumni, students, academic and support staff. On annual basis Employer Consultation Form is conducted by the Professional Relations Directorate to capture employers' feedback on the latest labor requirements and key skills required. In addition, Centre for Measurement and Evaluation conducts an annual survey to measure the satisfaction of stakeholders with the overall outcomes of the graduates.

The results of the surveys analysis are translated into actions by Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) and utilized towards continuous enhancement of the academic delivery. This report will provide in-depth analysis of Labor Market Needs Analysis Report 2023 – based on Employer Consultation and Stakeholder's input and illustrate recommendable actions that could be used by academic educators and professional institutions to consider bridging the gap between graduates and employer requirements.





# OVERVIEW



While higher education institutions (HEIs) believe that they are adequately preparing graduates for the labor market, employer engagement is vital in the revision or development of academic prorammes. Higher Education Council (HEC) requirements and Bahrain Education & training Quality Authority (BQA) standards enabled education sector to ensure producing high-quality graduates to the market that are equipped with the required skills and knowledge.

However, a possible source of gap in perceptions is that employers and educators have different understandings of the types of skills valued in the labor market of today. A study conducted by the World Economic Forum (2023) stated that the recent economic, health and geopolitical trends have resulted in disparate outcomes for labor markets globally (World Economic Forum, 2023). Thus, leading to a dynamic and constantly changing labor market. These accelerating transformations post-pandemic have and continue to reconfigure labour markets around the world and shape the demand for the specialization and skills of tomorrow (World Bank, 2022). Companies and organizations identify skills gaps and an inability to attract talent as the key barriers preventing industry transformation and economic inclusion and growth (PWC, 2022).

The Kingdom of Bahrain’s national development strategy aspires to achieve economic inclusion to ensure the enduring well-being and prosperity of all Bahraini citizens. Ahlia University, an HEI leader in the Kingdom of Bahrain, aims to contribute towards Bahrain’s Vision 2023 by producing well-rounded graduates in the field of humanities and science who are able to meet new challenges and responsibilities in a technology driven society. Therefore, to meet the needs of the labor market, AU continuously seeks the input of employers, alumni, external advisory board (representatives from the industry) and other stakeholders. In line with its mission and goals, the university organized the 11th Employer Consultation Forum to engage academic faculty with industrial experts. The 11th Employer Consultation Forum attracted 91 organizations in Bahrain attended the Consultation Forum. The respondents worked at private and public sectors in Bahrain ranging from government entities, telecommunication sector, aviation services, banking and auditing sectors, societies and charities, education, consultation, engineering, hospitality, insurance, ICT, media, and interior design. Thus, covering a wide sample representing all the university’s programmes.



# EMPLOYER SATISFACTION WITH AHLIA UNIVERSITY GRADUATES



As per the World Economic Forum Report (2023), it is suggested that university degrees as a hiring criterion remain most recognized among companies operating in Bahrain. Additionally, more than 80% of organizations in Bahrain and the Gulf Region prioritize the young labour force. Therefore, AU recognizes the importance of employers as crucial stakeholders and their feedback as vital to the sustainable success of HEIs.

During the Consultation Forum, the Human Resources (HR) representatives stated that AU graduates are their employees of choice as they normally stand in a better position compared to other graduates. They further stated that Ahlia University graduates have proven that they are excellent candidates with the appropriate employability skills needed for any role or available vacancy. The Bahraini Market considers AU leading higher education institution in the Kingdom of Bahrain. This is evidenced by the high satisfaction scores of employers with the graduates of Ahlia University in different specializations as identified in Figure 1 Employer Satisfaction with AU graduates per specialization





## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The following section presents the discussion during the 11th Employer Consultation Forum and the resulting commendation/recommendations which have been made by HR representatives, employers, and the external advisory board (henceforth referred to as respondents). In addition, to research conducted by CME and CAQA to align the expected requirements to the market needs as well as Bahrain National Strategies.

As stated previously, AU has established itself as one of the best universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It has marked its position as a leader in the higher education and labor markets whereby employers and other stakeholders commend its graduates, their employability skills, and their readiness for the labor market. The WEF (2023) clearly states that Bahraini employers emphasize the importance of cognitive, engagement, management, and technological skills. The respondents agreed that AU graduates have a competitive advantage in terms of their transferable skills and knowledge. It was affirmed by the employers that AU's graduates are fully equipped with soft and transferrable skills including life-long learning skills which is a requirement by World Economic Forum (2023) as well as emphasized on by UNESCO to maintain sustainable quality education.

AU graduates have high presentation, analytical, engagement, communication, problem-solving and team-work skills. It was validated by the employers and industrial experts that AU's graduates have the ability and the confidence to communicate issues effectively, deliver innovative ideas and present their knowledge efficiently to any audience. This finding indicates that AU is in the right path in terms of incorporating the appropriate employability skills in their curricula such as analytical skills, creative thinking skills, communication skills, research skills and presentation skills.

Moreover, as management skills is considered as highly important in Bahrain, the majority of AU programmes include a fundamental of management course which focuses on developing the managerial abilities of students.

Nonetheless, the employers recommend that graduates must attend more practical-based training orienting them and preparing them for the labor market. Prior to graduating and entering the job market, employers recommend that students need to understand their right, accountability, and responsibilities in the workplace. Employers mainly focused on the need for enhancing the professional understanding of graduates as well as their awareness of life skills, especially in terms of accountability.

In terms of technical skills, employers stipulated that it is important for graduates to have a good grasp of the tools, software and applications used in their fields. Graduates who have been trained to use such tools will be highly employable regardless of their previous experience. HR representatives stressed the need to embed technical platforms so graduates could be equipped with different types of skills and tools related to the field, thus increasing their acceptance of various technologies needed for the job.

Similarly, to support this recommendation, it was highlighted within the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2023) that technology adoption will remain a key driver of business transformation in the next five years. The majority of the organizations surveyed globally by the World Economic Forum identified that increased adoption of cutting-edge technologies and broadening digital access as the trends most likely to drive transformation in their organization. The need for digital transformation is a key strategy in the Kingdom of Bahrain. During 2022 a digital transformation strategy was published with a focus to digitalize all public sector services.

They respondents also emphasized the importance of professional certifications which contribute positively to the currency and relevancy of the graduate in the labor market.

Therefore, graduates with the appropriate technological skills and professional certifications become head and shoulders above the rest. This is further supported by AU internship site supervisors who believe that interns should have awareness of the relevant professional certificates available to them. Academic scholars, agree that employers are increasingly using professional certification as a signal of an applicant’s competencies and likely future performance, to increase the efficiency of the selection process (Thornhill-Miller, et al., 2023; PWC, 2022). This practice will in increase the value of AU graduates and alumni. Accordingly, the respondents suggested that an association between Ahlia University and Tamkeen would be an excellent step to provide financial aid to students to proceed with these certificates.

It is worthy to note that several of AU’s programmes have accreditations and exemptions from professional bodies, signifying the strength and relevancy of its programmes. These include for example exemptions from the ACCA (9 exemptions for Accounting and Finance Specialization), CIMA (5 exemptions for Management and Marketing Specialization). However, it was suggested to align the academic programmes to more professional certifications to ensure equipping graduating with practical applications in different areas including:



Digital Marketing

An important point made regarding internship placement is that there needs to be a separation between the internship period and a teaching/learning semester. Students are encouraged to take internship for a whole semester (and more) without having classes to concentrate on. This allows graduates to focus on their job as well as integrating themselves fully into a professional environment; thus, allowing them to get oriented and used to the workplace.

Moreover, the employers recommended that before the internship begins, there needs to be a procedure for interviewing interns (online or in person) to assess their abilities. The duration of the internship was also discussed in terms of extending it to 3 months to be equal to full time employment probation period.

The respondents further stressed the importance of diversity in specializations and skills offered by the universities in Bahrain. They agreed that there are certain specializations that are highly vital for the Bahraini labor market. These are Data Science, Agricultural Engineering, Education, Hospitality management, Insurance, Cybersecurity and intelligent Logistics, Taxation in FinTech, Graphic Design, and Risk Management-related programmes. The World Economic Forum (2023) report highlighted important specializations which overlap with the recommendations made by the respondents.

IMPORTANT SKILLS WITHIN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS:

- |   |  |   |                                   |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|
|    | Technological literacy                 |    | Technological acceptance          |
|    | Analytical thinking                    |    | Creative thinking                 |
|    | Self-Efficacy                          |    | Self-awareness and empathy        |
|   | Life-long learning and curiosity       |   | Data analysis and decision making |
|  | Engagement skills and active listening |  | Leadership and social influence   |
|  | Quality Assurance and Control          |  | Resilience                        |
|  | Commitment and Ethical Standards       |  | Social and local citizenship      |



Moreover, employers and HR representatives discussed the significance of the collaboration between universities and the industry where a partnership between the various parties involved need to be properly and appropriately planned. It was encouraged to collaborate between universities and industries to support learners’ engagement – while they are in secondary school- to draw a clear path for each. The current dilemma is school graduates need to be advised at early stages about career pathways and future education toward the right specialization. Therefore, AU will sustain this practice and increase the relationship with both schools and industries.

According to the UNESCO and World Economic Forum Reports (2023), the awareness and application of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards within organizations will also have a significant impact on sustainable success. AU firmly recognizes its responsibility to support the society in their transition toward sustainability. AU considers social Responsibility and sustainability as part of its prioritized strategies that is embedded in its core functions including teaching, research and community. To create a more sustainable future, all the programmes at AU incorporate professional, ethical, and social responsibility in their courses. Therefore, graduates are exposed to ESG standards through their courses, programmes, extracurricular activities, and research.

In addition, the employers highly applauded the Entrepreneurship Centre at AU and its various activities that have contributed to increasing the practical skills of its students. They commended the research skills of the graduates and praised AU’s scientific research initiatives that have put Bahrain’s name on the map. However they have suggested extended Entrepreneurship courses/training to be offered to all specialization to allow graduates to have insight or business development skills and develop their own businesses to create employments for future generations.

However, due to the dynamic changes globally, it was suggested to consider more trendy specializations that are directly focused on specific feild in this regard a list of important specialization was stated and emphasized upon as classified on the right:

- 

Supply Chain, Logistics, and Intelligent transportation
- 

Cybersecurity and Networks
- 

Data Science
- 

E-commerce, digital trade, and digital marketing
- 

Special Education
- 

Insurance
- 

Risk Management and compliance
- 

Artificial intelligence and cloud computing
- 

Media and entertainment
- 

FinTech
- 

Sustainability and Environmental Issues
- 

Agricultural Engineering
- 

Hospitality management
- 

Graphic Design and video editing
- 

Information Technology Audit and Governance
- 

Digital Media



As an HEI and market leader, AU has either started offering many of these relevant specializations:

- **Master of Science in Intelligent Transportation and Logistics Systems (MILTS)**
- **Master of Science in Forensic Accounting (MSFA)**
- **Master of Science in Financial Technology (FinTech)**

The academic programmes are periodically reviewed and revised, the current programmes were updated in terms of content to include important components such as, (taxation, digital marketing, entrepreneurship, data analytics, cloud computing, big data, digital media, digital marketing and social media, engineering management, digital media and public relations).





## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENDATIONS



### Commendations:

- AU graduates are the employees of choice and have a competitive advantage over their peers.
- AU graduates are equipped with advance level of understanding, knowledge, practical and transferable skills.
- AU graduates are equipped with flexible skills and life-long learning skills to support their employability skills and are easily rotated among multiple jobs.
- AU graduates are equipped with professional and research skills to produce high quality reporting.
- The Entrepreneurship Center at AU is exemplary, and its various activities enhance the business-related and management skills for students.

### Recommendations and Areas for considerations:

- To offer practical-based orientation sessions prior to graduation
- To offer micro-credential in Entrepreneurship
- To offer customized career and specific career counselling sessions to individual students.
- Increase workshops and classes on preparing their profiles, CVs and job presentations.
- To extend the internship period or offer internship in a separate non-teaching semester.
- To embed more technical tools, applications, and software into the programmes such as Phyton.
- To increase awareness and acceptability of different types of technologies for multiple specialization
- To offer workshops and seminars to increase awareness about professional certifications relevant to each programme.
- To align the academic programme to more professional certifications.
- To form formal partnerships with the industry as well as schools, therefore establish a relationship that would benefit students throughout their educational journey as well as their career.



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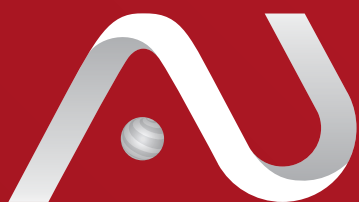
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