



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

# Higher Education Review Unit

## Institutional Review Report

University of Bahrain

Kingdom of Bahrain

Dates Reviewed: 21 – 25 November 2010

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

The review of University of Bahrain was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to 'review the quality of the performance of education and training institutions in light of the guiding indicators developed by the Authority' (Royal Decree No 32 of May 2008, amended by Royal Decree No. 6 of 2009).

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

## **2. Overview of University of Bahrain**

The University of Bahrain (hereinafter referred to as 'UoB' or 'the University') was founded in 1986, although its roots date back to the late sixties when two higher education institutes were founded, namely, the Higher Institute for Teachers and the Gulf Technical College. In 1978, the Amiri Decree No. 11/1978 was issued to develop the Higher Institute for Teachers into the University College of Arts, Science and Education. The Gulf Technical College was then renamed the Gulf Polytechnic by the Amiri Decree No. 2/1981. These two colleges independently offered Bachelor's degrees in various disciplines such as Arts, Science, Education, Engineering and Business Administration. In 1986, the Amiri Decree No. 12/1986 was issued for the establishment of UoB by merging the two colleges. In 1999 the Amiri Decree No. 18/1999, was issued amending some provisions of the 1986 Decree. Today UoB consists of seven colleges, one professional college and one academy. These are: College of Arts, College of Business Administration, College of Engineering, College of Information Technology, College of Law, College of Science, College of Applied Studies, Bahrain Teachers College and the Academy of Physical Education and Physiotherapy. UoB offers both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It is the only national university and the largest institution of higher education in the Kingdom. Currently, the University employs 674 academic staff and 1126 administrative staff.

## **3. Mission, Planning and Governance**

The University of Bahrain's mission stems from the aims stated in Article 5 of the Amiri Decree No. 12/1986 establishing the University. The current Mission was developed

through an institution-wide consultation process involving internal and external stakeholders. It states that:

*The University of Bahrain is a national university dedicated to excellence in teaching and learning; innovative research; the generation and dissemination of knowledge; development of the student's personality, skills and knowledge; and building partnerships with the public and private sectors; through distinction in its academic programs, faculty and staff, student activities, fostering innovation, cultivating a culture for quality and reaching out to the local, regional and global communities.*

Moreover, the overarching aspiration of the University is clearly stated in its Vision statement:

*To be an internationally recognized university for excellence in student learning, innovative research and community engagement that contributes to the economic vitality, sustainability and quality of life in the Kingdom, the region and beyond.*

The Vision and Mission statements make clear reference to the three core functions of the institution i.e., teaching and learning, research and community engagement. The importance of the institution being a national university is noted. The Panel heard during interviews with a range of staff that this places a responsibility on them to provide excellence in education.

The University's Mission is further translated into five fundamental strategic goals. These are:

- *Raising the quality of teaching and learning*
- *Improving quality and increasing the amount of research*
- *Building national and international partnerships*
- *Aligning governance and administration with international best practice*
- *Sustainable infrastructure and resources.*

Both Mission and Vision statements are widely communicated across the University and the community; they are posted on the University's website and distributed in printed form to staff, students and external stakeholders. During interviews with senior management, the Panel learned, with appreciation, of the University plans to revise these statements, as part of the formal process of reviewing its Strategic Plan, and in response to internal and external challenges.

The University's latest strategic plan, *Strategic Plan 2009-2014*, was approved by the University Council in 2009. As the national University of Bahrain, the University was strongly influenced in formulating its strategy by the Kingdom's plan for economic development, *Our Vision: the Economic Vision 2030 for Bahrain (Vision 2030)*. The *Vision 2030*, in addition to having some general aims relevant to the University, such as raising the level of educational achievement and skills of the population of Bahrain, has specific aims that bear directly on the University's strategies, including setting standards for quality in university education and encouraging research and development.

The Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB) takes a close interest in the University's development. The Mission and top-level aims and objectives of the University were formulated in relation to *Vision 2030*; the President submits a quarterly report to the EDB on the University's progress against the Strategic Plan. Furthermore, the setting and confirmation of government funding for its operations depends on EDB's confidence that the University is making satisfactory progress.

The Panel noted from documentation and heard during interviews with a range of stakeholders that consultation on the *Strategic Plan* during development was very wide. All constituencies were approached, including ministers, donors, industrial, professional and business leaders, parents, staff and student members of the University. Formal internal consultation took place through University and College Council meetings. The managers responsible for key aims also held group meetings with faculty members at college level. Students were comprehensively surveyed.

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

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for its breadth and depth of internal consultation in the course of developing its Strategic Plan.*

The five 'pillars' of the *Strategic Plan* are associated with 24 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These have been grouped into nine areas, and a senior manager is responsible for each group. Each manager has an advisory committee. A *Strategic Plan* Project Management Unit collects data about the KPIs and is responsible for 'progress-chasing'. This Unit also publishes information about progress on the University website. The President reports progress regularly to the University Council, the Board of Trustees, and, on a quarterly basis, to EDB. The Panel was pleased to learn that more than 65% of the initiatives are currently on target for completion by due date.

The *Strategic Plan* is published as a handbook and summarised in a convenient small folder. It is accompanied by a larger publication describing its implementation, with targets, responsibilities and timelines. These documents have been distributed to all staff, and used as the basis for briefing sessions at college level. The University has a plan for wider dissemination to the media and other stakeholders, such as employers.

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

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for the comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan as well as the attention that has been given to its communication to all stakeholders.*

The University has a range of policies and procedures for all aspects of its work. However, there is no formal register of policies. It is becoming common international

good practice for such registers to be available in both hard copy and on institutions' websites. While many policies and procedures have been subject to review in recent years, the SER described an approach to the revision of policy that was unsystematic in its implementation. There is no central register of policies and procedures, and they are not reviewed on a regular basis. Senior members of staff acknowledged that lack of regular review is an omission, particularly in the light of the updated Strategic Plan. The University intends to employ consultants to help with this work, but as yet no timeframe for its initiation or completion has been set. The Panel encourages the institution to progress this work as soon as possible.

### ***Recommendation-1***

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain progress the work of reviewing its policies and procedures, compile a central register to track their coverage and currency, and establish a forward schedule to review them periodically.*

The University has documented policies and procedures to manage conflicts of interest in respect to financial matters, and there are arrangements for approved delegations of authority for financial and management decisions. The University is audited annually by external auditors and also periodically by the National Audit Court. There is an active internal audit department, which, as well as monitoring the proper management of the budget, is responsible for presenting regular management accounts to the President to enable him to effectively discharge his responsibility for financial accountability and ensure the sustainability of the University. The Panel found that there is an appropriate link between budget, planning and resource allocation which ensures that the learning programmes offered by the University are sufficiently resourced.

The University has developed an organizational chart that was made available to the Panel prior to the site visit. Upon careful examination of the chart, it was apparent to the Panel that all vice-presidents and deans (some 17 senior managers in all) report directly to the President. The Panel is concerned that managing such a large number of reporting lines constitutes a significant demand on the President in the context of his other responsibilities and suggests that this be reviewed. The Panel is of the view that issues which would be most appropriately addressed at college level should be delegated to college council, so that the University Council can focus on matters of general policy and strategy, and overall management of the University. This is a concern that was also emphasised by external members of the University Council. Senior management also confirmed during interviews the need for a revised management structure in order to streamline the administration processes at the University. According to the SER, the University is planning to undertake a number of actions to re-organize its governance structures and enhance the efficiency of its management processes. The Panel encourages the Institution to implement its plan in this regard.

### *Affirmation-1*

*HERU affirms the University of Bahrain's plans to review its management processes.*

The effectiveness of the University's communication processes was highlighted during interviews with senior management and staff members. It became evident to the Panel that regular Council and Departmental meetings are the main channels of the University's communication system. The President is informed of current issues *via* the monthly University Council, Quality Assurance Committee and Academic Committee meetings, in addition to his weekly meetings with the vice-presidents. University Council meetings are held at least once a month, in line with College and Departmental Councils. The offices of the vice-presidents, deans and heads of departments are responsible for communicating all information regarding new decisions, policies and University events. Besides the comments made above about reporting lines to the President, the Panel is satisfied that there is generally a well-functioning management structure.

The Student Council plays a major role in communicating student issues to the various University governance and management structures. The Panel was pleased to learn that students are represented on the various committees and councils of the University. During interviews with senior management, the Panel also learned that student representatives may, upon request, attend University Council meetings. The students interviewed confirmed that most of the issues raised to the Council are successfully resolved. While the Panel appreciates the way in which students are included in the various committees and councils, the University is encouraged to consider allocating permanent representation for students on the University Council.

According to the SER, the governance of the University is organized into a four-layer hierarchy starting with Department Councils, College Councils, University Council and ultimately the Board of Trustees. The President is accountable to the University's Board of Trustees, which has final authority for the oversight and general activities of the University, including its finances; and also many operational matters, such as the appointment of all senior staff who report to the President, and approval of all new academic programmes. The Board includes a number of government ministers, plus some industrialists, business and professional leaders who are appointed by a Royal Decree. The President may advise the Chairman of the Board on potential appointments.

While the Board is expected to have six meetings a year, it has met only once in the last year. Moreover, it has no forward schedule of meetings. During interviews with members of the Board of Trustees and University Council, the Panel learned that the demanding public responsibilities of its members made a forward schedule of meetings difficult to fix and that this has a significant impact on the management of the University; for instance, some new appointments could not be confirmed until a Board meeting takes place. The status of the Board members is useful to the University since it contributes greatly to its standing in the Kingdom and ensures that the strategic directions of the University are in line with the national interests. However, the Panel would like the University to have

discussions with the relevant authorities about increasing the levels of delegation to relieve the Board from operational matters, which in line with good practice internationally, would be delegated to university management. This change could enhance the functioning of the University through a clearer delineation of responsibilities between corporate governance structures, academic governance structures and University management.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain hold discussions with the relevant authorities about increasing the levels of delegation to management by the Board of Trustees, in line with international good practice.*

Although the EDB is not a governing body, it does play a significant role in shaping and evaluating the performance and direction of the University; this blurs the role of the EDB and the Board of Trustees. The Panel suggests that the University give consideration to this arrangement to ensure that there is no overlap of roles.

## **4. Academic Standards**

The University of Bahrain offers 86 academic programmes including five PhDs, 21 Master degrees, 38 Bachelor degrees, and 22 Diplomas delivered by its eight colleges. All of these programmes are recognized by the Amiri Decree No. 12/1986 and its Amiri Decree amendment No. 18/1999. The credit hours for these programmes are comparable to international norms; they range from 72 credit hours for PhD, 31-42 credit hours for Masters, 126-135 credit hours for Bachelor (with the exception of Architecture 166 credit hours), 21-32 credit hours for postgraduate diplomas and 63-70 credit hours for the associate diploma. In reviewing the supporting materials and documents on-site, the Panel noted that the fields of study are in line with programmes offered by internationally recognised universities and that they overall comprise a coherent body of knowledge. The Panel was pleased to hear during interviews that the University has embarked on a programme of benchmarking itself against other universities and of obtaining international accreditation for its programmes.

Detailed information about these programmes for prospective and enrolled students is posted on the University's website. The Panel also learned that the University has an orientation day during which the students are introduced to issues such as academic standards and they are informed about their selected programmes of study. In interviews with students, the Panel was informed that the duration of the orientation day is insufficient for the amount of information to be covered and that it could be increased to at least two days. The Panel concurs that a comprehensive orientation to the University is a pre-requisite for students to settle more easily into their studies. The University may

wish to consider reviewing the content and duration of its student orientation programme.

The admission criteria for the University's programmes are clearly outlined on the Deanship of Admission and Registration website. Applicants must have a high school score of at least 70% and must pass the University's aptitude test, in addition to special requirements set by some colleges. In interviews, faculty members pointed out the problems associated with these criteria which allow any student scoring 70% or more on the school leaving examination to enter the University. The 'readiness' of students to cope with higher education is a matter of concern in that it has the potential to impact negatively on academic standards and student success. Although there are plans to introduce a Foundation Year for some students, the Panel is of the view that this programme will need to be carefully designed and assessment rigorously monitored if international standards are to be met and maintained.

The SER indicates that, as contained in the Amiri Decree No. 12/1986, Arabic is the official language for teaching and communication; however, in most colleges such as Engineering, IT, Science, Business Administration, Applied Studies and Bahrain's Teachers College, English is the official language of instruction. The Panel was concerned to learn that there are no minimum requirements for English language competency (such as TOEFL or IELTS) in colleges that use English as a teaching medium. However, students with a high school grade of less than 90% are required to complete a one semester English language orientation programme prior to commencing their studies. In interviews, academic staff pointed out that the English orientation does not always adequately address the problem of English language competence and that there is a need to introduce additional English courses. The Panel was also informed by students that they encounter some problems in engaging with the curriculum as a result of English language difficulties which, in turn, impact on overall performance in courses. The Panel urges the University to assess the English language competency requirements for all colleges and implement measures to enable students to meet these requirements.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain assess the English competency requirements for all colleges, where relevant, and implement measures to ensure that all students meet these requirements.*

The University has recently introduced outcome-based education and assessment as a means of identifying academic standards and of ensuring that they are met and maintained. The use of learning outcomes and associated performance indicators in teaching and assessment often requires faculty members, who might have been accustomed to thinking of their teaching as mainly imparting disciplinary 'content', to think very differently about what they do as university educators. As a result, professional development of faculty members is particularly important. The Panel was

pleased to hear of the efforts made by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre (QAAC) to support and develop faculty members as this new educational initiative was introduced. In interviews, faculty members reported favourably on the workshops which they had attended and indicated that they appreciated the work of the QAAC in supporting their own learning about outcome-based approaches to education.

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

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain on the progress it has made in introducing outcome-based education and assessment as a means of setting and monitoring academic standards and in the way it has provided support and development opportunities to faculty members during its implementation.*

Although outcome-based approaches are a key means of identifying and assuring academic standards in many contemporary higher education systems, the academic literature on curriculum development also mentions some cautions regarding their use. By their very nature, universities deal with learning which is extremely complex and where the need to build coherent conceptual understandings which will underpin practical applications is paramount. Outcome-based approaches can result in gaps in the conceptual map of the discipline that students need to build if they are to be able to work independently once they have finished their studies and if they are to be able to continue to do postgraduate work. The Panel would like to encourage the University to engage with critiques of outcome-based education and assessment as it proceeds with its work on enhancing teaching and learning.

The University has identified raising the quality of teaching and learning as the first pillar of its Strategic Plan. One of the 'deliverables' identified in relation to this objective is the integration of outcome-based assessment into the curriculum. To this end, the recently produced IDEAS book describes the steps involved in developing an Assessment Model. These steps include the development of learning outcomes, the identification of performance indicators which will be used to assess whether or not students have achieved those outcomes and the selection of methods which will allow students to demonstrate performance. The same booklet then goes on to note that assessment methods might include case studies, simulations, portfolios, research papers and so on. A record of the assessment of performance in any course is then provided by means of a formal course portfolio by the relevant faculty member.

However, in spite of this emphasis on the use of a range of assessment measures to collect information about student performance, the course portfolios examined by the Panel showed a continuing reliance on traditional assessment tasks such as quizzes and examinations. This reliance on traditional assessment methodologies was confirmed by students in interviews although, in a few cases, students were able to describe the use of more innovative assessment practices.

Academic literature on teaching and learning stresses the idea that the nature and quality of assessment tasks drives the nature and quality of student learning. Assessment tasks which focus on the recall of information, for example, will lead to students focusing on simple remembering rather than on more challenging levels of cognitive activity. In the context of the University of Bahrain's decision to introduce outcome-based assessment as a key means of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, ongoing support will be necessary if faculty members are to be able to draw on the range of assessment practices which will promote student engagement at the high levels of cognitive functioning associated with higher education. As already indicated earlier in this Report, faculty members reported very favourably on the staff development opportunities made available to them as part of the introduction of outcome-based approaches. The Panel encourages the University to continue to provide its academic staff with the support and development necessary to ensure that outcome-based assessment does indeed play the role allocated to it in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Of more concern to the Panel than the continuing reliance on traditional assessment tasks was the fact that it found, in both course portfolios and from students' interviews, little evidence of use of formative assessment. The IDEAS book also makes no mention of the use of formative assessment. Formative assessment is intended to *develop* student learning unlike summative assessment which aims to measure that learning. In the academic literature on teaching and learning, the provision of formative assessment is identified as key to the achievement of learning outcomes because of its potential to guide students to appropriate performances and thereby raise achievement.

Although it can be difficult to provide formative assessment in large classes because of the amount of time needed to provide feedback to students on their learning-in-progress, the Panel would like to encourage the University to consider how this might be achieved. Development of the capacity of faculty members to use formative assessment methods and to provide feedback which guides, rather than only measures student learning would need to be included in any plan on the part of the University to include formative assessment in the introduction of outcome-based assessment.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain use formative assessment methods in teaching and provide professional development opportunities for staff in this area.*

In this context, the Panel was extremely concerned to find instances of undetected plagiarism, where the plagiarism involved unreferenced copying from electronic texts, in some of the student work included as part of the documentation prepared for the review. In interviews, faculty members confirmed that this sort of plagiarism was common in work submitted by students.

The University has a policy on Academic Integrity Policy although few of the faculty members and staff interviewed by the Panel acknowledged that they were aware of this document. According to the Policy, 'academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception'. The Policy then goes on to note that 'any reference materials in the preparation of an assignment, whether quoted or paraphrased, must be explicitly stated'. Having established these precepts, however, the focus of the Policy is on what might commonly be termed 'cheating'. On page 4, for example, the Policy states 'in cases of blatant plagiarism, only copies of the plagiarized material (annotated as needed) will be required for supporting documentation. In cases where the plagiarism is not word for word, the supporting information should provide a clear and significant link between the two students' work'.

As already indicated, the undetected plagiarism identified by the Panel involved copying from electronic sources rather than from another student's work. This sort of practice is indicative of an understanding of learning as reproduction rather than production of knowledge. Even at undergraduate level, students need to be able to read texts and make statements and claims on the basis of those texts which are essentially 'new' in that they do not simply reproduce what has been read. The Panel encourages the University to revise its Academic Integrity Policy in order to include examples of copying from published texts (either electronic or in hard copy) as instances of plagiarism and to stress more firmly that this sort of activity breaches academic integrity and has no part in academic work. In addition, the University could consider rewriting the Policy in language which would make it more accessible to students and also consider ways to make its policy more available to students.

Developing students' abilities to make claims and statements which are essentially 'new' takes time and requires careful teaching and support. Web-based services which match texts submitted by students against a data base of published and previously submitted work, can be extremely useful not only in identifying instances of plagiarism (and thus serving to deter it) but also in educating students about what plagiarism involves.

The University could consider the use of plagiarism detection software, where appropriate, as an educational tool in preventing plagiarism and in assisting students to develop the necessary academic skills of scholarly research or to recognise examples of plagiarism. If plagiarism detection software is used, it will be important for the University Council to monitor consistently across the Colleges the application of the software as a learning tool, to record instances of known plagiarism and impose appropriate penalties. The Panel encourages the University to consider further ways to mitigate the risks posed by plagiarism so that reasons for breaches of academic integrity are analysed and dealt with, including designing educational interventions and training academic staff in their use. Consideration could be given to the oversight of these processes and how to assess success in influencing and guiding appropriate behaviours in relation to academic integrity.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain revise its policy on plagiarism and develop mechanisms to ensure that such practices cease; to this end it can acquire a plagiarism detection software to address the threats to academic standards posed by academic dishonesty.*

## **5. Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

The SER notes that the approach to quality assurance takes the form of demonstrating a commitment to quality at the University through the development of structures and processes to implement, manage and monitor quality within a continuous improvement approach. The Panel was pleased to note that the Strategic Plan 2009–2014 has ensuring quality at the centre of teaching and learning, research, community engagement and administrative processes.

In 2009 the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre (QAAC) was established to coordinate and take responsibility for the oversight of all the quality assurance functions across the University. The QAAC is tasked to provide leadership and support, to demonstrate that the University is fulfilling its institutional Mission and to develop UoB as a community of scholars. At the college level, it promotes excellence in student learning, educational practices and quality of service by establishing and maintaining a culture of self-evaluation and of improvement. It is planned that it will support all units engaged in planning and improvement activities through assessment services and consultation, particularly programme review, annual progress reporting and support for programme accreditation. The Panel noted that, due to the fairly recent establishment of the Centre, a number of these functions have yet to be fully operational.

An advisor to the President for academic quality was appointed to support the development and implementation of the University-wide quality system. College Quality Assurance Offices (QAOs) have been established in each college to manage quality assurance and enhancement in programmes. Either newly formed departmental quality assurance committees or existing departmental curriculum committees have quality responsibilities at the local level. The Panel confirmed these arrangements and notes that, while they are still being fully implemented, there are already some examples of the sharing of good quality practices across the departments and colleges. The Panel notes the positive gains made by the Colleges of Engineering and Information Technology as a result of the rigorous review processes which they have undergone and concurs with the University that these practices should be extended to the other colleges. It will be important for the University to monitor the adequacy and number of the QAAC and QAOs staffing to provide the necessary competencies, leadership and capacity to implement the quality assurance plan.

#### **Commendation-4**

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for its commitment and the steps taken to assure quality in college academic programmes through the establishment of the Quality Assurance Accreditation Centre and college quality assurance committees with examples of their active collaboration through the sharing of good practices.*

The recently published quality assurance handbook, IDEAS: A University-wide Outcome-Based Assessment Process, captures the overall elements of the University's intended approach to quality for learning and teaching in the academic programmes, research and community service and administrative processes. It was evident to the Panel that the Handbook provides a comprehensive and helpful overview of how 'quality' is understood and will be implemented and monitored across the institution. The Panel encourages the University to ensure that as implementation of the quality system proceeds, the Handbook is adapted and reviewed in line with the insights and feedback gained.

#### **Commendation-5**

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for the development and formalisation of the comprehensive quality assurance handbook IDEAS: University-wide Outcome-based Assessment Process.*

The use of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) is one element of the approach which is currently under implementation. All academic programmes are expected to develop Programme Educational Objectives (PEOs), Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) and Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs). All programme objectives and outcomes are required to be made available on the web-based QAAC Assessment Information Management System (AIMS). The Panel observed that some programmes have yet to upload all the required data. Nevertheless, AIMS has the potential to be a valuable resource for management, staff and students.

#### **Commendation-6**

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for the development of the Assessment Information Management System (AIMS) as a major quality assurance tool to support the quality management and monitoring of academic programmes.*

A review of the evidence available to the Panel shows that significant progress has been made towards assuring the quality of academic programmes and in teaching and learning. It was reported that a number of successful workshops at University and college

level have been conducted to educate staff on the new quality system. Staff confirmed that the workshops were very useful, but that many more workshops are needed to promote university-wide shared understandings of quality and to develop the necessary quality assurance skills needed to implement the IDEAS Handbook. The University has, however, yet to ensure that all the elements of learning and teaching are appropriately integrated into the quality assurance system beyond embedding ILOs in the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. As detailed in IDEAS, the University is also encouraged to develop fully and implement appropriate quality systems for research, postgraduate education, and community engagement.

The University has identified the use of the Bahraini Business Excellence model to develop the quality system of the administrative and support units of the University. The University has outsourced this process to ensure its timely implementation. The University needs to ensure that the excellence model is appropriately developed, adapted and aligned with other internal academic quality assurance approaches to achieve the strategies and purposes of the University. The Panel urges the institution to ensure that its overall quality system does not become over-elaborate, which could diminish academic and administrative effectiveness and efficiency.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain ensure that the chosen Bahraini Business Excellence Model is appropriately developed, adapted and aligned to the internal academic quality assurance systems to ensure overall institutional effectiveness and efficiency.*

The University is acknowledged for the steps it is beginning to take to establish and embed a culture of quality and continuous improvement. There is a widespread awareness and commitment of staff of the need to ensure quality and standards in University processes, including quality enhancement. The Panel recognises that these initiatives are at the early stages of development and that it will take time to develop shared understandings of quality beyond compliance; implement new systems; and integrate and use data, benchmarking and survey information systematically to drive quality improvements in academic, research, community engagement, and administrative areas.

## 6. Quality of Teaching and Learning

The current profile of the University of Bahrain characterises the institution as a predominantly undergraduate teaching university. In this context, the Panel was pleased to note that the University had identified raising the quality of teaching and learning as the first pillar of its Strategic Plan.

The University's aspiration for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning is reflected in its rigorous processes for programme approval and review. Over the past decade, most programmes have been reviewed at least once, and several new programmes were introduced in order to keep up with recent advances in technology and labour market needs. The SER notes several examples of newly-developed programmes and colleges; these include the College of Law, B.Sc. in Media and Tourism, B.Sc. in Medical Physics, B.Sc. in Interior Design, B.Sc. in Electronics Engineering, B.Sc. in Process Instrumentation and Control Engineering, in addition to Master programmes in various disciplines. The Panel was impressed with the consistent involvement of external stakeholders in suggesting new programmes and reviewing existing ones. In interviews, the Panel was informed that all college councils have eminent external members from public and private sectors, and that all programmes are required to have external representatives in their Programme Advisory Committee. Moreover, student feedback is also taken into account through the Student Advisory Committee and the on-line surveys prepared by the QAAC.

The University has well-established processes for programme approval and review; these processes are formalized by the QAAC and are implemented across all colleges in order to assure academic standards. During interviews with academic faculty, it was evident to the Panel that all programmes are scheduled to be reviewed on a regular basis every five years. The Panel also learned that programmes applying for international accreditation have initiated review processes based on the criteria of the accrediting bodies.

### *Commendation-7*

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for its rigorous programme approval and review processes and the involvement of all stakeholders in these processes.*

The Panel heard consistently during a range of interviews of the positive role played by the QAAC in coordinating the programme review processes across all colleges. Since its establishment in 2009, the QAAC has worked closely with the University's programmes to develop and revise their mission, vision, Programme ILOs and Course ILOS. In interviews with members of QAAC and academic staff, the Panel was informed that QAAC plays a significant role in preparing programmes for international accreditation by providing feedback and guidance on achieving compliance with accreditation requirements. During the site visit, the Panel learned that in the period 2005–2010, the

University commissioned international agencies to review university-wide processes and conduct programme reviews for the purpose of developing the strategic plan and for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. These reviews provided useful suggestions, information and data for the University in formally developing its programmes.

The University has obtained accreditation for a number of its programmes, these include the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) for Engineering and IT programmes, and Canadian Society for Chemistry for the B.Sc. in Chemistry. Other programmes, such as the College of Business programmes and the Architecture programme are also seeking accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and National Architecture Accrediting Board (NAAB), respectively. The Panel commends these efforts and encourages the University to proceed in achieving its strategic objective of obtaining international accreditation for 70% of its programmes by 2014.

### ***Commendation-8***

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain on its efforts to obtain international accreditation for its programmes.*

In the context of the identification of raising the quality of teaching and learning as the first pillar of the Strategic Plan and of the introduction of outcome-based approaches to education in pursuit of this goal, pedagogy is clearly of central importance.

The introduction of outcome-based approaches to education not only requires the identification of learning outcomes and associated performance indicators but also a shift in teaching methodologies. The attainment of an outcome such as 'apply the concept of time-line based video editing to produce a short video plan' clearly requires more than a traditional 'chalk and talk' lecture since students would need to develop practical knowledge as well as conceptual understandings. In interviews, however, students informed the Panel that most teaching followed a traditional approach and involved faculty members lecturing to them or simply reading aloud from text-books and PowerPoint presentations. This is a practice that does not always facilitate the development of students to think critically and reach their own conclusions, and has been recognised as neither being appropriate for education in general, nor for higher education in particular.

Although, and as already noted, faculty members reported very favourably on the staff development opportunities which had been made available to them in relation to the introduction of outcome-based approaches, it is apparent to the Panel that more needs to be done if entrenched traditional pedagogies are to be shifted. According to the SER, 'staff development is a major concern at UoB'. To this end, two committees have been established to work on a development strategy for faculty and administrative staff respectively.

In response to the identified weaknesses in pedagogy the University offers a year-long Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) programme in conjunction with York St John University. The Panel was pleased to note that staff demand for this programme far outstripped the number of places available. According to the SER, 72 of the 650 or so faculty members currently employed by the University have completed the programme. In interviews, the Panel learned that, although enrolment on the PCAP programme was now open to all, initially it had been directed at newly qualified staff who lacked teaching experience.

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

*HERU affirms the University of Bahrain's offering of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice for the professional development of academic staff.*

The Panel was pleased to see the inclusion of eLearning in approaches to teaching at the University and was impressed by the facilities at the Zain eLearning Center. In interviews, moreover, the Panel heard from faculty members who were using eLearning in their course design in highly innovative ways. Although technical expertise for eLearning was clearly available to support this work, the Panel was concerned at the apparent lack of specialist expertise in educational technology and encourages the institution to take steps to address this matter.

There are a number of levels in the use of eLearning. In interviews, staff members responsible for supporting the use of eLearning suggested that current usage of eLearning platforms at the University of Bahrain would be located mainly at the lower levels of a hierarchy which ranged from the use of eLearning platforms mainly as a repository of learning materials to that of a dynamic, interactive learning space. The Panel encourages the University to consider how its investment in educational technology might be maximized if appropriate expertise to support its use were provided and how this might then contribute to the key objective of enhancing teaching and learning.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain consider appointing specialists in Educational Technology in the Zain eLearning Center in order to support its eLearning strategy more effectively.*

In interviews, the Panel also heard how the availability of different learning management systems (WebCT, BlackBoard and Moodle) was confusing for faculty members and how the phasing out of one tool might require time and energy to be expended re-developing courses on another. A decision needs to be made about the use of one single eLearning platform in order to avoid this confusion and wastage of time. The availability of

bandwidth to support eLearning is clearly another problem and is being addressed by the University. The Panel suggests that the University of Bahrain investigate the use of a single electronic learning management system for use across the University to eliminate inefficiencies of staff and students having to learn and use different systems.

The SER reports on the use of student surveys to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and course design at the University. The Centre for Measurement, Evaluation and Academic Development (CMEAD) is responsible for conducting course and teacher evaluations at the end of every semester. In interviews with staff members from the Centre, the Panel learned that a standardized instrument was used for this purpose.

A number of comments must be made in relation to these arrangements. The first relates to the use of a standardized survey instrument to collect feedback on *all* courses and *all* faculty members and the potential of such a tool to assume that 'good' teaching and course design is independent of the educational context. The danger of this assumption is that it has the potential to suppress innovative teaching methodologies and innovative approaches to course design which might be entirely appropriate in context. This is an important consideration as the teaching of, for example, physics is potentially different to that of Arabic literature. In the same vein, the demands of teaching a small class of students are very different to those of teaching a much larger class. In addition, the characteristics of faculty members as individuals and the way these individual characteristics impact on teaching style need to be factored in during the evaluation process.

As already noted, the use of a standardized instrument points to a single definition of what constitutes 'good' teaching and course design. Faculty members are then measured with regard to the extent to which they meet this norm. Their endeavours as university teachers might therefore run the risk of being directed at meeting a norm which, once met, might not then be improved upon. Rather than attempting to impart a standardized set of teaching skills or approaches for academic staff, contemporary understandings of the development of faculty members as university teachers tend to rely on what is commonly known as 'reflective practice'. Reflective practice involves an ongoing process of a university teacher 'observing' his/her own teaching by collecting the perspectives of a range of students and colleagues and then using his/her knowledge of theory to reflect upon that observation in a process of continuous improvement. From this perspective, teaching is never static as students change, the teaching environment changes and there are new developments in the academic discipline. 'Good' teaching is thus defined as teaching which is mindful of the need for ongoing reflection and adaptation on the basis of insights derived from this process. The Panel suggests that the CMEAD review its use of standardized survey instruments in order to ensure that the surveys are carefully used to include the monitoring and enhancement of teaching practice, as well as the evaluation of teaching, and are fit for purpose.

In interviews with those responsible for staff development, the Panel heard that the PCAP is based on a reflective practice model. This means that the initiative to develop faculty members as educators appears to be at odds with the evaluation mechanism used to assess their teaching and course design.

Another difficulty with the use of standardized surveys relate to their timing. As already noted, the survey is administered at the end of each semester. This means that it is not possible to use insights from the survey to improve teaching as it is taking place and course design as the course is running. In interviews, students commented on this problem noting that, since completing the survey could not result in improvements to teaching and course design in the actual course in the semester which they would experience, they were less motivated to complete the questionnaire in a serious manner. Students also indicated that they never received feedback on the problems the surveys had identified and on what the University planned to do to address these problems. This has also impacted on their willingness to complete the surveys.

The University does not appear to have a mechanism in place which supports staff once negative feedback has been received. In interviews, the Panel heard that departmental chairpersons were available to consult with faculty who had received negative feedback on the survey but that there was no specialist help available on issues related to teaching and course design. This means that the potential of evaluation in a process involving the identification of problems which is then followed by support and action to address those problems is not being maximized in spite of all the time and effort expended on the evaluation itself.

The Panel was also concerned to hear that comparatively little analysis is done of the very large amount of data which is collected. Insights from surveys not only have the potential to impact on the quality of individual courses and that of individual teachers but also on institution-wide planning around teaching and learning.

One final difficulty with the use of the survey in its current form relates to its potential impact on academic standards and on fairness in academic staff appraisal processes. Teaching which challenges students intellectually and which requires an increase in the time spent studying often draws a negative response. However, teaching which challenges students not only has the potential to raise and maintain academic standards but also to contribute to the development of students as intellectuals and individuals. The use of student feedback data in appraisal processes therefore has to be carefully managed and always has to be triangulated with perspectives of other stakeholders including that of the faculty member.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain evaluate and monitor its student feedback mechanisms.*

In the context of the University's goal of raising the standard of teaching and learning, the Panel was particularly pleased to hear of plans to introduce a Foundation Year. While foundation provision has the potential of impacting enormously on student readiness to engage with higher education, international experience would suggest that it is unlikely

to completely address the problem of student 'under-preparedness' for higher education study.

As already noted, the University has embarked on an institution-wide outcome-based assessment process. In order to do this, a number of Intended Learning Outcomes for the entire University have been developed. These graduate level competencies are developed over the course of an entire programme yet the attainment of them, for many students, will begin at foundation level. In this context it is important to conceptualise student development as extending beyond foundation level to the 'graduateness' of students developing over an entire degree curriculum. It is important for the work and learning which is begun at foundation level to interact with work and learning later in the curriculum. For example, if students are introduced to academic skills in the foundation year, teaching in later years of the programme should seek to strengthen these skills and provide opportunities for them to be practiced in supportive environments. Further, it is unlikely that all issues related to students' proficiency in the English language will be addressed in the foundation year. The development of English language competency will therefore need to be supported throughout the degree curriculum and faculty members will need to be aware of how language development can be supported using strategies available to any mainstream university teacher. The Panel suggests that the University ensure that graduate attributes and other identified skills and competencies are integrated in a coordinated way throughout the curriculum.

## 7. Student Support

All students are informed about the organisation, courses, services, policies and regulations of the University at an orientation day after enrolment. At the orientation day they are given a University *Handbook*, detailing the facilities available to students, and describing overarching academic regulations. Each programme in addition has a course outline, which contains information about the requirements of the course, its intended learning outcomes, and administrative matters such as timetable and assessment requirements. Despite the orientation day and the handbooks, students met by the Panel showed lack of awareness of the facilities that are available at the University. In some cases, course outlines had been provided well after the beginning of the course. These examples suggest that the measures adopted so far to provide the necessary information have been less effective than the University would wish. The Panel suggests that the institution conduct a review of the complete suite of information that is provided to students.

The University has a computer-based student records system, which is the authoritative source of data about students. There are arrangements for recovery of this data in the event of computer crashes and similar disasters. There are policies and procedures for the security, keeping and disposal of information about students including paper-based records. The registration systems ensure that the certification process is secure, and that no student who has not properly met the requirements for graduation will be issued with a qualification certificate. The effectiveness of systems is kept under review continuously

by the University's internal audit service, and checked annually by the external auditors. The Panel is satisfied with these arrangements concerning student administration and record keeping.

The University's orientation day for new students includes input from administrative staff. Information about non-academic services of the University are included in the *University Handbook*. The Deanship of Student Affairs is responsible for a range of services to students that support academic work, including personal support and guidance; help with study needs, and social activities. Other units, in particular the Career Counselling Service, supplement these services. The Panel learned of a range of activities undertaken by the Career Counselling Service including publishing advice and information booklets for students; providing short courses on such matters as preparing a curriculum vitae and how to behave during a job interview; providing individual guidance; and managing a career day where employers are invited to the University to talk about careers in their firms and industries. Employers met by the Panel confirmed the effectiveness of the Service.

The University has a unit for disabled students within Student Affairs. Wheelchair users are able to access all buildings and most classrooms, and the eLearning Center has a special laboratory to assist students with visual impairments. Facilities for students with hearing difficulties are less widespread. There is a University policy on inclusiveness. Students from overseas are limited in number, but some enjoy special arrangements, such as housing on campus which is not available to Bahraini students. The Panel is generally satisfied with the arrangements in place for meeting the needs of special groups.

The University's unit for Student Activities is responsible for encouraging and supporting a range of student clubs and societies. The Student Activities unit is also responsible for arranging opportunities for student volunteering. Students may be awarded academic credit for volunteering activities that they undertake.

The University has an Advice and Guidance Service, which includes a Student Development Unit. The Service has a head and seventeen staff, distributed around the campus in such a way that all major buildings have an Advice and Guidance counsellor on hand. Though this creates some inefficiency in the management of the Unit, it has the important benefit that the counsellors are close to the students, increasing the likelihood that students will use them. Co-location ought also to help exchange of information about student needs between faculty and Advice and Guidance staff. The Panel learned of a range of initiatives co-ordinated by the Service, including the provision of intensive IT workshops, and facilitating the student peer-tutoring scheme. Under the peer-tutoring scheme, high-achieving students give support to student experiencing study difficulties. The Panel was pleased to find that the service monitors and evaluates its effectiveness regularly.

### ***Commendation-9***

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain on the scale and activities of its Advice and Guidance Service.*

The SER states that every student has an academic advisor selected from among the faculty members, who advises the student throughout his or her period of study. However, the Panel met students who did not know the names of their advisors, and others who suggested that the availability or usefulness of their academic advisors was very limited. The Panel learned that there is no practice of referral of students with study difficulties from academic advisors to Advice and Guidance counsellors. It appeared to the Panel that the current system of academic advisors does not work.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its arrangements for Academic Advisors.*

An English Language Center provides foundation courses in English for newly enrolled students, and also provides some English language teaching within colleges. Arrangements were formerly in place to enable staff to refer students struggling with the English language for specific support; however, this service has now been discontinued. In general, support for students experiencing difficulties with their studies, including those at risk of failure, appear less effective due to lack of coordination between academic and support services. The Panel formed the impression that this weakness is not due to lack of effort from the student services departments. The Panel encourages the institution to investigate this problem and develop interventions to ensure that at-risk students are supported timeously.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain review its arrangements for at-risk students and students experiencing study or English language difficulties.*

Students are able to propose matters for discussion at the University Council, and may request to be present for agenda items that concern them. However, as already noted, students have no right of membership of the University Council. Colleges have student councils whose views are regularly sought. The Panel also noted that on specific matters, such as the improvement of arrangements for registration, senior managers have made great efforts to seek the input of students to improve their services. There was some indication from students met by the Panel that representation of students at programme

level was not universal, and the University may wish to consider the role of student representation at programme level.

As noted earlier in this Report, student views of their learning experiences are regularly surveyed at the level of the course; the University devotes considerable resources to implementing a regular student satisfaction survey, taking measures to achieve high response rate (some 80% in the latest surveys), and have established a Center for Evaluation and Measurement to analyse and distribute the results. As already noted, however, the survey is focussed strongly on the performance of individual faculty, and appears to be used almost exclusively as a staff-management tool. Results in the form of scores against the questions are returned to the individual staff-members concerned, to departmental chairs and college deans. It appears that the results of the surveys are not used or reported university-wide to evaluate institutional progress, and though the survey has been conducted for eleven years, no trend data has been commissioned or been used for research purposes to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Comments in student responses that bear on other matters material to the learning experience (such as resources or infrastructure) are not captured. On the other hand, individual colleges and units, such as the College of Information Technology, the Library and the Student Activities Department among others, have taken the initiative to establish their own surveys. It seems likely that the University's initiative for self-assessment, intended to apply to all programmes and services, which is in its very early stages, may help with this, but at present, though, the University devotes a great deal of resources to various measures of student satisfaction, their impact is reduced by their being un-coordinated. This is an area in need of attention by the University.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain collect and analyse the overall findings from the many separate surveys it conducts, in order to assess trends in institutional progress towards achieving its goals.*

## **8. Human Resources**

The University maintains a good record of its staff data covering both academic and administrative staff, including information about their level of qualifications, academic rank ratios, turnover rates and staff-to-student ratios. Academic staff at UoB refers to those faculty members who are employed permanently (Bahrainis) and to those who are employed on a contract basis (primarily non-Bahrainis). Similarly, administrative staff could be either employed permanently or on a contract basis. The University's student body is served by 674 academic staff and 1,126 administrative staff. 73% of the academic staff members (492 faculty members) are holders of a PhD degree. The remaining 27% are holders of a Master's degree. Academic staff members are graduates of well-respected

international universities in the USA, Europe, and elsewhere. As a result, the Panel has confidence that the staff have the necessary qualifications to meet the Mission of the University and their respective colleges and departments in terms of teaching, research, scholarship, and community and outreach service.

The ratio of academic-to-administrative staff of 1:2 is rather high compared to international norms. The Panel is concerned that if this ratio is maintained or increased then the expenditure on education will be increasingly allocated to administrative and support services and less to teaching, student services and research. The University is well aware of this problem and has identified it as an issue that needs to be tackled.

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

*HERU affirms University of Bahrain's decision to reduce the number of administrative staff in order to improve employee productivity and enhance the University's efficiency in providing quality teaching, learning, research and community engagement.*

A review of the various documents provided by the University shows that the faculty-to-students ratio varies considerably among colleges, with the highest reported for the College of Business Administration (1:60) and College of Information Technology (1:32) and the lowest for the College of Sciences and College of Arts (1:6). The Panel is concerned about the negative impact of these ratios on the quality of teaching and learning in the College of Business Administration and the College of Information Technology. During interviews with senior management from these two colleges, the Panel learned that the University is working towards increasing the number of academic staff. However, the lack of incentive employment packages is hindering the recruitment of high quality academic staff, as they are offered higher salaries by local professional firms. The University is cognisant of this problem and identified it as an area for attention in its SER.

### ***Affirmation-4***

*HERU affirms University of Bahrain's decision to address the remuneration packages for faculty members in specialization areas of high demand.*

The Panel also studied the report on Academic Ranking for the periods of (2000-2001), (2005-2006) and (2009-2010), from which it was evident that the majority of academic staff members are located at the assistant professor rank (64%). It was also clear that the percentage of assistant professors has remained the same over the past decade (64%) while the percentage of full professors has slightly increased from 11.3% in 2000 to 14% in 2010. These numbers are an indication that few faculty members are being promoted and accordingly, the Panel encourages the University to provide better mentoring, support

and guidance to junior faculty members to enable them to advance in the academic ranks. The University has stated in its SER that it is working on raising the number of full and associate professors in order to improve the quality of teaching and research, and consequently achieve its strategic goals.

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

*HERU affirms the University of Bahrain's plans to increase the number of full and associate professors, as part of achieving its strategic goals.*

Academic faculty members' work responsibilities include teaching, research, advising and serving on committees. University by-laws require that faculty members work 40 hrs/week including 12 teaching hours for PhD holders and 15 teaching hours for Master and Bachelor degree holders. During interviews, the Panel learned that some faculty members teach fewer hours, depending on committee assignments and other administrative duties. New faculty members are also given a lighter teaching load in the first semester in order to adjust and prepare for their teaching responsibilities. The Panel also heard several complaints about the high teaching load and the need to adjust the required teaching hours according to the academic ranks, so that full professors and associate professors teach fewer than 12 hours. A decreased workload would allow the faculty member to do research, keep up to date in the discipline area and engage in professional development programmes. The Panel finds that, as the University has future plans to put more emphasis on research, it is becoming increasingly important that the work load policy for academic staff is reviewed once again.

#### ***Recommendation-12***

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain review the faculty workload allocation policy so that it effectively supports the strategic goals of the University and supports staff in performing their duties.*

The Panel reviewed the existing procedures for academic and administrative staff recruitment. In the case of academic staff members, recruitment is based on the needs of the programmes as approved by the departmental council. The Human Resources Department advertises for the vacant positions and sends all received applications to the concerned department. Consequently, these applications are screened and candidates are short-listed by the departmental 'Faculty Recruitment Committee'. Top candidates are generally interviewed over the phone after which the selected candidate is offered the post after reference verification. Final appointment requires the approval of the departmental council, the concerned college's Dean and the University Council. During interviews, the Panel heard that some new expatriate faculty members arrive late to assume their positions because of the lengthy process taken to appoint them, including

the time it takes to secure their working visas, which consequently places an unnecessary burden on the General Services Department. Fewer problems are experienced in the appointment of administrative staff as they are mostly Bahrainis. The Panel suggests that the University coordinates the duties of the Human Resources Department, the General Services Department and the Colleges in the recruitment of academic staff in order to ensure the speedy appointment process and the timely arrival of appointed expatriate faculty members.

During the site visit, the Panel learned that expatriate faculty members are offered two-year contracts that are renewed based on their appraisal performance, whereas Bahraini faculty members have permanent contracts. The Panel is of the view that this situation may create an environment where some faculty may not realize their full potential in terms of research and scholarship, either Bahraini or expatriate. As the University's Strategic Plan includes research as one of the main pillars, the Panel recommends that contractual procedures for all faculty members are revisited to ensure that adequate research activity take place.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain evaluate its current procedures for all faculty contracts and the research arrangements as the current system is not conducive to achieving the future research plans of the University.*

The staff turnover statistics provided by the University revealed low turnover rates. For academic staff members, the turnover rate, as a result of termination of contracts and resignation, is 3.1% (for 2008-2009) and 6.2 % (for 2007-2008). The turnover rates for administrative staff are even lower with 4.4% and 1.9%, for 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, respectively. This might indicate that there is an overall satisfaction of the working environment at UoB.

A particular gap in the University's approach to human resources is the lack of a formal performance appraisal system for its academic faculty. There is no formal system of annual appraisal; academic staff members are generally evaluated when they apply for contract renewal (in the case of expatriate faculty) or when they apply for promotion. The Panel heard consistently about the evaluation of faculty members by their students, as part of the course evaluation conducted by the Centre for Measurement, Evaluation and Academic Development (CMEAD). A copy of this evaluation form was provided; it is mainly a quantitative form aimed at monitoring the quality of course teaching and design. The problems associated with using a standardized instrument for evaluating all courses and all faculty members have already been highlighted earlier in the Review Report [Chapter 4: Academic Standards]. The University is taking steps towards improving the course evaluation forms; this was confirmed during interviews with staff from CMEAD.

The Panel also learned that the results of these surveys are used for contract renewal and promotion purposes. However, they are neither linked to the identification of professional development needs; nor aligned with the University's strategic goals. The University has identified, in its SER, this gap in the faculty appraisal system and is aiming to establish an accountability system for reviewing its faculty member performance and linking the faculty evaluation results with the faculty professional development needs.

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

*HERU affirms University of Bahrain's decision to establish an annual faculty member performance appraisal system linked to the identification of staff development needs and aligned with the University's strategic goals.*

On the contrary, administrative staff members are annually evaluated by their immediate supervisors. The evaluation form is quantitative covering different aspects of performance, and leading to a summative judgement. As in the case of academic faculty, there is no correlation between the results of this evaluation and the identification of staff development needs.

Promotion guidelines are in-place; teaching, research, community service and other activities are taken into consideration in arriving at the final decision. During interviews, faculty members indicated that they have mixed feelings about the appropriateness of the stated criteria. The University is encouraged to review the criteria to ensure that they are appropriately aligned to the strategic goals of the University and that they are generally supported by staff.

According to the SER, a SWOT analysis conducted by the University revealed that staff development is a major concern at the University and is in need for immediate improvement. To this end, the University has undertaken several measures to address the professional development of academic and administrative staff. The Panel learned that the Administrative Training Office (ATO) conducts regular training courses, aimed at administrative staff, covering areas such as language proficiency, IT and communication skills. The Panel was also informed that the Office enlists the support of the Bahrain Institute of Public Administration (BIPA) in conducting these training programmes. The Panel was pleased to learn that the ATO conducted a survey in 2009/2010 to identify staff training and development needs. Another on-line survey was also conducted in collaboration with BIPA. However, during interviews with administrative staff, the Panel learned that they are not completely satisfied with these training programmes as they are not of direct relevance to their areas of responsibilities and duties. The Panel is of the view that the University needs to improve on its efforts towards the identification of needs and provision of staff development programmes.

As indicated earlier, professional development for academic staff is provided through the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) Programme. Since its initiation in

2006, 72 faculty members from different colleges have participated in this programme. During interviews with some participants, they informed the Panel that enrolling in the PCAP has significantly enhanced their teaching practice and overall professional development. The Panel also heard that the University encourages the research faculty to attend conferences in Bahrain and abroad and provides conference support. Moreover, Bahraini faculty members are eligible for a sabbatical leave; however, only 2 academic staff have benefitted from this opportunity between 2007 and 2009. The University is encouraged to investigate the reason for the low uptake of staff on the sabbatical programme and its effectiveness to ensure that its intended purpose is realised. As part of the University's commitment to enhance its human resources, two committees have recently been established to develop a strategy for academic and administrative staff development. These committees aim at restructuring the existing training programmes and linking them to the University's Strategic Plan.

#### *Affirmation-7*

*HERU affirms the University of Bahrain's work towards restructuring its professional development programmes and their alignment with the University's strategic goals.*

## **9. Infrastructure, Physical and other Resources**

The Panel toured the campus of the University and found it generally impressive. It has a very fine set of buildings, many of the most important of them designed by a world-renowned architect, and which meets the needs of the University community and indeed is capable of inspiring staff and students alike to engage in academic and research activities. Additionally, the physical grounds and periphery are attractive, remarkably clean and litter-free, and well maintained. The Panel toured many of the facilities, laboratories and class rooms, and found them, in general, to be well equipped and maintained and to be a potentially good environment in which to work. The physical resources available to students for their extra-curricular activities are to be commended; these include sport facilities (gymnasiums, swimming pool, football playgrounds, and running tracks), food courts, rest areas, prayer rooms, designated rooms for societies and clubs, in addition to a variety of outdoor gathering spaces. During interviews, both students and staff reported themselves pleased with the physical environment in which they worked, and its upkeep and support. However, in noting the research infrastructure of the University, the Panel reminds the University that as it implements its research strategy, as part of achieving its second strategic goal "Improving quality and increasing the amount of research", it will need to provide the required infrastructure to carry out advanced research that has direct relevance to Bahrain's community and which is aimed at meeting the expectations articulated in Bahrain's Vision 2030.

### ***Commendation-10***

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for its good infrastructure and campus environment that contributes to students receiving a quality learning experience.*

The University is served by four libraries and a number of specialized branch libraries. The Panel visited the Central Library and was impressed by what it saw. It had a good stock of books, with a collection nearing a quarter of a million printed books, in addition to access to a digital library that includes over 20,000 journals; 50,000 current electronic books and one and half million electronic theses. The designated reading and study areas in the library, comprising 966 study seats and 214 computer stations with internet access, are adequate for the number of students and researchers. During interviews with faculty members and students, it was confirmed to the Panel that it is possible to access the literature they need either on-line or by requesting material from the British Library, which provides a prompt service. The Panel also met with the library management and staff, and noted what appeared to be good user-service provision; these include: loan services, inter-library loans, on-line search services and reprographic services. The library also offers a range of programmes aimed at educating users on the resources that are available in the library.

During interviews, the Panel also learned that the library has developed formal mechanisms for surveying user satisfaction; these include suggestion boxes, annual satisfaction surveys as well as having librarians attend academic department meetings. The results from these surveys are used to improve the library; this was confirmed during interviews with students who expressed a high level of satisfaction with the continuous improvements with library services. However, some students, particularly postgraduate students, indicated to the Panel that the library hours need to be extended in order to better serve their research needs.

The Panel also heard about the ways in which the Library benchmarks itself in comparison to similar libraries; this is mainly achieved via its participation in international surveys as well as the adoption of the American LibQual+ survey for use as a benchmark tool. The library's membership in the GCC committee for Academic Libraries also enables the University to assess and compare the adequacy of its library and information resources.

### ***Commendation-11***

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for its excellent Library facilities and services.*

The University has an Information Technology Centre. Services provided include: Enterprise Directory Services; server registration; software licensing; website hosting and updating; maintaining UoB-wide databases and information systems; email services and

technical support. The Centre is staffed by 26 well-trained and certified individuals covering the different divisions of the centre: Information Systems (8), Information Network (6), Technical Support and Maintenance (7), and Internet Services Division (5). The Panel was pleased to learn that over the past decade, the Centre has successfully designed and developed in-house a range of information systems needed for the University; these include admission, on-line registration, intranet advisory, staff records, recruitment, payroll, payment and financial auditor system.

#### ***Commendation-12***

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for its high quality Information Technology services that fulfil the needs and have enhanced the performance of the University's administrative and academic units.*

During its visit to the IT server room, the Panel was briefed about the University's IT infrastructure and the regular back-up procedures that are in place. The Panel was concerned that the 'IT Disaster Recovery Plan' which, although proposed in 2006, is still under consideration by the UOB administration and has not yet been implemented. This is an area of significant risk and requires the urgent attention of the University. This issue is identified by the University as an IT focus and on-going implementation area in its SER.

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

*HERU affirms University of Bahrain's recognition of the implementation of the 'IT Disaster Recovery Plan' as an IT focus area.*

During the site visit, the Panel observed a number of well-equipped IT laboratories, all of which are connected to the UoB electronic network and have internet access. The Panel was particularly impressed with the general use computer laboratory housed in the IT department, which has more than 200 terminals and is accessible from 8:00 -17:00 for the use of students. In interviews with students and staff, they all agreed that the services provided by the IT centre were more than adequate. However, some of those interviewed felt that the software provided by the University was not adequate and not up-to-date and that some of them are now obsolete. The Panel itself observed this in at least one case: that of the absence of software designed to detect plagiarism. The University would be well advised to consider this issue carefully. The Panel also heard many reports of difficulties with the speed and bandwidth of IT provision; the University is well aware of this problem, and is working to deal with it. During interviews, management and staff of the IT Centre confirmed that the University is in the process of upgrading the internet speed from 20 Mb per second to 50 Mb per second. It is also negotiating with Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) to introduce an IT package for non-profit organizations.

### ***Affirmation-9***

*HERU affirms the University of Bahrain's decision to enhance the IT speed and bandwidth services.*

The Panel toured the e-Learning Support Centre, financed and supported by a partnership with Zain Telecommunications, and concurs with the University that it has an efficient and effective functioning Centre. Students and staff appeared satisfied with the services offered by the centre and feel adequately supported in this area.

The Panel also learned that the University has initiated a process for the evaluation of its IT services. A survey was conducted in 2010 to assess the faculty satisfaction with internet services; the subsequent improvements are, however, yet to be implemented. The Panel encourages the University to continue with its IT survey implementation plans and include a wider range of services for survey and increase the number of stakeholders to be surveyed.

During the site visit, the Panel heard of good facilities offered to students with special needs, including those with motion disabilities and visually impaired. In particular, the Panel was pleased to learn that Braille computer facilities are available and that students with impaired vision are provided with laptops equipped with suitable reader software.

As part of its physical resources management strategy, the University keeps detailed records of its physical resources and conducts a stock audit every three years. The University has also established a number of services to address the safety and security issues within its campuses and a recent survey conducted in 2010 showed a high level of satisfaction with these services by faculty staff.

## **10. Research**

UoB aims to be active in research over a wide area of disciplines. The Panel visited several departments and saw staff and students who confirmed that there was good research work being undertaken. Furthermore it could see that many of the faculty members had published papers in refereed journals of good standing, and that these publications are carefully monitored and collected by the University. The Panel saw and heard of some excellent and up-to-date equipment for research in some areas of science and technology, and observed that the library and the IT structure allowed staff and students to access published work from all over the world. It was impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication of research-active staff. Nevertheless, it also saw several serious impediments to further progress which it would like the University to address.

The Self-Evaluation Report confirms that the University is developing a research strategy, and that there is an allocated budget for research activity. The Panel interviewed staff and students on their general attitude towards research and discovered a degree of

confusion about the University's fundamental research philosophy and related policies in this area. It is unclear what the University's plans for research are and how they are compatible with its other policies. A number of issues arise from this confusion and are addressed below.

### ***Affirmation-10***

*HERU affirms the University of Bahrain's work in establishing a research strategy.*

Many of those interviewed commented that the University is doing a good deal of useful research in areas of immediate value to the people and business of Bahrain, a country in which there is not otherwise a strong research culture. The Panel agrees that this is a useful area in which the University could make a strong contribution and encourages it to make this a matter of priority. However this would imply a change of focus in several directions. In particular, for example, that policy is incompatible with the present emphasis on refereed publications in international journals as a measure of the success in research of faculty members, since such work would often be difficult to publish in that form. Additionally the Panel heard of the particularly high rewards given for single-author publications. These are rare in disciplines, where multi-author papers are the norm. The Panel encourages the University to review this policy.

In general, the University should consider the extent to which research work is valued in terms of promotion, prestige, and support, and should ensure that high quality research is properly rewarded. The Panel heard reports that at present it is difficult to get promoted because of the individual's research profile, and that in some departments such work is discouraged because of the pressure of teaching duties. Indeed, it appeared that in some departments, research is actively discouraged and essentially non-existent. If meaningful research is to be done, staff must have dedicated time in which to do it.

There are other ways in which a culture of research could be encouraged. The Panel heard a range of accounts of the extent to which the campus remains open after the normal closing time of 4.30 pm. It is clear that there is some work after that time, but also that it is not normal practice to be there late. Research demands time and that time must be available. The Panel encourages the University to reconsider its policies in this area.

Active research work demands an atmosphere in which research is discussed, debated, and encouraged. The Panel heard of very little in the way of seminars, reading groups, journal clubs or other ways in which both students and faculty can keep up to date and hear of new ideas. Colleges and departments should consider introducing such practices as a regular part of academic life.

There is a budget for research that the SER confirms is at present much lower than the 3% of the total stipulated in the HEC's regulations. The Panel was pleased to hear of plans to increase this budget to a much higher figure of around one million BD, and agrees with the University that there should be a separate budget for learning and teaching allocated

to each department. However even this increased sum is not a large amount for an institution of the size of the University of Bahrain.

### ***Affirmation-11***

*HERU affirms the University of Bahrain's decision to increase its budget for research and the introduction of separate departmental budgets for learning and teaching.*

Other funds are available for research at the University and the Panel saw equipment that had been bought with such funds. Nevertheless, it gained the impression that it was very rare, if not unknown, for researchers to seek financial grants from elsewhere. Such funding is the norm for research in most countries and the Panel suggests that the University should encourage applications for funding from business, charities and so on in Bahrain and elsewhere.

Another major issue in this area is the work of postgraduate students. In many institutions, it is these same students who, in practice, do much of the research work and contribute greatly to the research culture. The Panel was surprised to find that the University had essentially no students working towards a PhD and that there are very small numbers working towards a master's degree (only about 1% of the total student enrolments). Many departments have no such students at all. The University should consider increasing these numbers, as this is one part of establishing a vibrant research culture.

The Panel found that Master's students at the University were not always satisfied or well supported. At present, almost all Master's students work part-time. Many are taking a long time to complete their degree. Indeed less than half of the 29 master's students who started work in 2005 have so far graduated.

Employers reported to the Panel that the higher degree graduates lacked inter-personal skills. This is perhaps not surprising, since many of the students interviewed by the Panel reported that the teaching was still done in a way more appropriate for undergraduate work, for example didactic in its nature, and assessed at least partly by multiple-choice examinations. The University should make it a priority to increase substantially the number of master degree students, attempt to have at least some of them working full-time and encourage departments to consider how best to establish a culture that is more conducive to research activity.

### ***Recommendation-14***

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain develop an improved culture of research, in which research is properly funded, encouraged, and developed, and in which those active in research are properly rewarded for their efforts.*

The Panel heard about the way in which postgraduate theses and dissertations are examined. It learned that it is customary for the candidate's supervisor to be the Chair of the examination committee, so that he or she can make representations on behalf of the candidate, e.g. that a particular question is unfair or is not something the candidate can reasonably be expected to answer. This is not line with international good practice in thesis examination. The examination process needs to be objective and unbiased. The Panel urges the University to cease this practice immediately.

#### ***Recommendation-15***

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain, as a matter of urgency, discontinue having the supervisor of a postgraduate student as Chair of the examination committee of that student.*

## **11. Community Engagement**

As the national provider of higher education in the Kingdom, UoB strives to maintain a positive and effective relationship with the local industry, professional bodies, other higher education providers, and the community at large. The University's Mission and Vision, statements encompass a clear commitment to achieving excellence in community engagement; moreover, the importance of building national and international partnerships is emphasized further in its third strategic plan goal and initiatives.

Upon reviewing the University's documentation and meeting with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, the Panel was provided with commendable examples of ways in which academics, students and general staff engage with the local and regional community at several levels. This engagement manifests itself in various ways including, offering professional development courses, providing locally-targeted advisory and consultancy services, conducting public lectures and speaking engagements, serving on professional boards and appointment Panel, as well as hosting events for professional bodies.

#### ***Commendation-13***

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain on its work to foster a fruitful relationship with the wider community.*

The Panel was particularly impressed with the University's success in acquiring substantial financial support from its partnership with the private sector. These

partnerships resulted in the establishment of several administrative and educational centers which have led, in turn, to great improvements in the educational experience of students. During the site visit, the Panel toured the campus and saw several of these centers including, Zain E-learning Center, Credit Media Center, Road and Transport Center, Legal Advice Center and Center for Historical Studies. The Panel was also informed that the private sector has contributed to the construction of lecture halls, the Registration and Admission building and food courts.

#### ***Commendation-14***

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain for its successful partnership with the private sector leading to the improvement of the facilities on campus.*

While the University has succeeded admirably in fostering its community partnerships, the Panel is of the view that there is a need for a more coordinated approach towards the implementation of community engagement initiatives. During interviews with academic staff, the Panel learned that each college organizes its own community activities and that there is no centralized management plan to coordinate these activities on an institutional level. Furthermore, the staff expressed their concern that the University has not yet identified a mechanism for sharing good practice in community engagement across colleges. The Panel also heard in interviews with staff from the Community Service Center that the University does not have a formal policy or framework to coordinate and monitor its community activities and that it does not keep a comprehensive register of its contributions to the community. The Panel suggests that the University takes active steps towards the management of its community services' activities in order to align these efforts with the its strategic plan.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain develop a conceptual framework, policies and implementation mechanisms that enables the coordination, management and monitoring of its community engagement activities.*

Nevertheless, it is clearly apparent that the Institution has made some attempts towards the management of its relationships with external parties. These include the creation of a position of 'Vice-President for Community and Alumni Affairs' as well as a position of 'Director of Continuing Education Program' in each college. Moreover, the University recently approved the establishment of the 'Center for Community Service and Continuous Education' which is expected to take the responsibility for developing community service frameworks. The Panel supports these initiatives and encourages the University to continue in its efforts to centralized coordination and management of its community services.

What was also apparent to the Panel is the significant potential for the University to enhance further its links with the local industry and employers. During the site visit, the Panel heard several good examples of industrial collaborations. These include the offering of short courses, consultancy services and having industry representatives in college councils and Program Advisory Committees. Some of the academic staff interviewed by the Panel were also able to point out ways in which their research interests intersect with the needs of local industry. However, the Panel noted that the interaction with the industry and employers varies among colleges, and that it is left up to faculty members to initiate and sustain successful partnerships. From several discussions and interviews, the Panel heard consistently from various external stakeholders of the urgent need for linking the University's teaching and research to 'real world' issues. The Panel concurs, and is of the view that being Bahrain's only national university, the Institution must assume a leading role in addressing the research needs of the key industrial stakeholders in the kingdom.

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

*HERU recommends that the University of Bahrain develop a formal mechanism to enhance its interaction with the local industry and harness the full benefits of these partnerships.*

The University has graduated students for over two decades. The Panel was informed that many of these graduates hold eminent positions in the community and make significant contributions to the economic development of the Kingdom. However, during interviews with internal and external stakeholders, the Panel learned that the participation of graduates in the University's activities is very limited and that the University needs to strengthen its relationships with its alumni. The University has recognized this weakness as an area for improvement in its SER and has taken some measures towards establishing an active alumni organization. In its *Strategic Plan 2009-2014*, the Institution included "Increase alumni participation in a broader range of roles at the University" as one of the main initiatives towards achieving its third strategic goal "Building national and international partnerships". The University has also established the "University of Bahrain Alumni Club" which is managed by the graduates under the leadership of the Vice-President for Community Service and Alumni Affairs.

#### ***Affirmation-12***

*HERU affirms the University of Bahrain's initiatives towards strengthening its relationship with alumni and establishing an active alumni organization.*

In interviews with some alumni members, the Panel heard that the establishment of the Alumni Club was welcomed by the graduates who are eager to support the University in this initiative. They also emphasized the need for developing an alumni database about

graduate destination in order to maintain a strong link with the University. The Panel concurs since such a database can strengthen strong links with industry and business, as well as enable the gathering of evaluative information from graduates.

The Panel was pleased to learn about the services offered by the Career Counselling Office (CCO) which operates under the supervision of the Vice-President for Community and Alumni Affairs. During interviews, the Panel learned that the Office maintains a database of the Kingdom's public and private institutions in order to identify training opportunities for the students in line with their field of specialization. It also organizes an annual career day which is attended by over 50 of the major companies in the country, hence providing the students with an opportunity to meet with a wide range of prospective employers. The Panel was also provided with a list of workshops carried out by the CCO aimed at preparing the students for the labour market. These include workshops on writing curriculum vitae, preparing for interviews, work ethics, employment skills and career planning. The Panel was impressed with the significant increase in the number of those benefiting from the CCO activities from 1988 in 2006/2007 to 12,728 in 2008/2009. Senior students interviewed by the Panel expressed their satisfaction with the training and counselling workshops organized by the center. In interviews with key employers, they confirmed the effectiveness of these services and suggested that the CCO get involved with students from the first year rather than at later stages in their studies.

#### *Commendation-15*

*HERU commends the University of Bahrain on the services offered by the Career Counselling Office and the positive link it has established with employers.*

## **12. Conclusion**

The Panel is cognisant of the fact that the University of Bahrain is the national university of the Kingdom and that this results in the University having a special relationship with the government as well as with the Economic Development Board. The latter being the structure initiated by the Crown Prince, that is, spearheading the social and economic growth and prosperity of the Kingdom and its people. The Panel appreciates the University's commitment to playing its part in making Economic Vision 2030 a reality. This is being done through addressing new and emerging public and private sector needs as the country moves from being an oil-based to a diversified economy.

The University of Bahrain is going through a transformation process in which it is positioning itself to provide leadership through providing the Kingdom with high quality graduates who can compete successfully in the national and global labour marketplace. It also intends to conduct high quality applied research that is appropriate for the needs of the Kingdom as it increasingly diversifies its economy. This will not only lead to a more prosperous citizenry but will also become an acknowledged centre of excellence

recognised by Bahrain's most significant industries, which range from aluminium to gas to Islamic banking. In these ways, the University of Bahrain can make an important contribution to the realisation of the various aspects of Economic Vision 2030.