



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

# Higher Education Review Unit

## Institutional Review Report

**Bahrain Polytechnic**

**Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Dates Reviewed: 16 – 19 January 2011**

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

The review of Bahrain Polytechnic was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and 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, appendices, and supporting materials submitted by Bahrain Polytechnic, the supplementary documentation requested from the Institution, and interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

## **2. Overview of Bahrain Polytechnic**

Bahrain Polytechnic (hereinafter referred to as 'BP', or the 'Institution') was created as one of the key education reform initiatives taking place in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It was established by Royal Decree No. 65 on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2008 and opened its doors to 235 students in September, 2008. BP is situated in Isa Town and operates from the University of Bahrain's campus. The Institution is organized into three Faculties: Business, Engineering Design Technologies, and Humanities and offers a number of undergraduate programmes. The Institution has grown from 235 students and 35 staff to 1400 students and over 300 staff within two years. Of the 1400 registered students, 509 are enrolled in the Foundation programme. Of the 880 students enrolled in Bachelor's degrees, 566 or 64% are studying for the Bachelor of Business degree.

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

BP has clearly stated Vision and Mission statements underpinned by a set of Core Values. The Vision and Mission statements are generally appropriate for the Institution. These statements, along with a range of planning and other documents, were drawn up at an early stage in BP's history as part of the original approval process to establish a polytechnic. With regard to the three core functions of a higher education institution, teaching and learning, is clearly articulated. The institution has positioned itself as providing students with the knowledge and practical skills needed to be successful in their chosen industry. In interviews with senior management the Panel received confirmation that the focus is on ensuring that Bahrainis graduate with the technical skills and competencies to meet labour market needs. The core function of research is absent and that of community engagement is at best implicit in the statements. As the Institution is engaging in a strategic review of its Vision and Mission it needs to consider its distinctive nature, i.e. as a polytechnic committed to providing technical and professional education. The other two core functions also need to

be included. However in the case of research it needs to be appropriate to the institutional type (i.e. practical applied) so that there is a clear delineation between the different institutional categories of 'university' and 'polytechnic'.

### ***Recommendation 1***

*HERU recommends that the Bahrain Polytechnic ensure that the revised vision and mission statements reflect all the core functions of teaching and learning, research projects appropriate for its institutional type, and community engagement.*

Both the Vision and Mission statements are widely publicised. They are posted on BP's website and are available in a variety of print form for staff and students. The Panel was pleased to find from a range of interviews across stakeholders that there is strong awareness of the Vision and Mission.

BP has developed a five-year Strategic Plan 2010-2014 that sets out the objectives, targets and measures for ensuring that its Mission and Vision are realised. In some areas of the Strategic Plan, such as an aspiration to world-class provision, the Panel was able to discern clear lines of development, extending from the Strategic Plan through to operational practices which are intended to make the Vision a reality. In other areas, this development is less clear. In particular, the Panel encountered during interviews a range of different views over the precise sense in which the distinctive nature of a Polytechnic (as opposed to a university) might be manifested in meeting local industry needs. For example, the Panel heard different views about the nature and role of Problem-Based Learning as a means of addressing the human resource requirements of industry. Moreover, there is no shared understanding across the Institution of the distinctive character of industry-led or practical applied research in a polytechnic context. There are also different views about the preconditions for future developments in these areas, and hence the likely timescales for strategic shifts in direction. The Panel is of the view that there is scope to achieve a stronger shared understanding of the future strategic development of the Institution if such matters were articulated and debated more widely within the Polytechnic and with its stakeholders.

Lastly, the Panel noted that BP is in the process of reviewing its strategic plan despite it being in mid-cycle. The Panel learned with appreciation that this is because the institution has been operating for three years and the review is being undertaken to ensure that the identified goals and activities are fit for purpose. However, while conducting this review, the Panel encourages BP to hold institution-wide discussions on what it means to be a polytechnic as opposed to a university and secondly, a polytechnic operating in Bahrain. This conceptualisation will assist the development of a Strategic Plan that has a clear growth

trajectory in relation to the three core functions and will ensure that there is no academic drift.

### ***Recommendation 2***

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic engage in an institution-wide debate to reach a shared understanding of firstly, what it means to be a polytechnic as opposed to a university; secondly, what it means it needs to be a polytechnic operating in Bahrain.*

The role of the Board of Trustees (BoT) is set out in Article 7 of the Royal Decree. Responsibilities include: the development and monitoring of policies; overall planning to achieve the goals of the BP; approval of research and education and training programmes; the awarding of qualifications; oversight of BP's scholarships and grants; appointment of staff, financial management; and monitoring other aspects of BP activities.

The composition of the Board is well-balanced and includes senior representatives of key stakeholder groups who are able to provide the Institution with high calibre strategic advice and support. For instance, the Panel learned how the members of the BoT supported the development and implementation of the Vision and Mission from BP's inception.

### ***Commendation 1***

*HERU commends Bahrain Polytechnic for the clear and appropriate understanding among the Board of Trustees of their role in the governance structure, and for the ways in which the Board supported the development and implementation of the strategic vision of the Institution in the first phase of its existence.*

Each newly appointed member of the Board receives a handbook containing key information about the polytechnic, which serves as an induction. The CEO also spends time with the new Board member to ensure that he/she is familiar with the expectations of the role. The Board meets regularly and is provided with a range of management information. Board members reported that the Senior Management Team provides helpful briefings with an appropriate level of detail. However, in relation to some key strategic issues, the Panel is of the view that there is scope for the Board to receive more effective strategic reports on the Institution's progress in achieving key performance milestones.

The Panel noted that the current Board of Trustees includes senior representation from important stakeholder communities including government as well as local and regional industries. It is clear from the interviews that the strategic guidance which such senior and experienced figures are able to provide is very valuable to the Institution. The Panel notes that many members of the Board are now approaching the end of their term of office, and it will be a challenge for the Board to refresh its membership while maintaining the same high calibre of representation. The Panel is of the view that at least some of the existing BOT members should be retained to ensure continuity and stability.

The role of the student association in providing representation for students in governance and decision-making is not yet fully established. The Panel found no evidence of arrangements to enable students to participate in decision-making through a student association or representation on relevant governance and management committees. The one structure representing students, namely the Students' Association, has until now been involved only in social functions. The Panel is of the view that there is potential for a more active role in decision-making for the Students' Association. The Panel encourages the Institution to empower the Students' Association and include representation from the Association in the governance and other appropriate structures; a first step would be to agree and approve its constitution as soon as possible.

### ***Recommendation 3***

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic put in place appropriate mechanisms for including student representation in decision-making processes at various organizational levels.*

BP has established a management structure which provides academic and administrative leadership and clear lines of reporting and accountability. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) exercises an effective leadership role and actively defines and maintains a clear and coherent vision of the Institution and its future development. The CEO engages directly with staff, including an extensive input into the induction process, and has been effective in ensuring that staff hold and actively support a shared vision of the Institution as a dynamic and high quality education institution.

The Panel noted that BP has recently revised its organizational structure as well as filled a number of administrative positions, particularly in areas such as the Library, ICT and teaching support services. Among other things, this revision has involved a change in the lines of reporting of the Faculty Deans from the CEO to the Director of Academic Affairs. However, the Panel noted that a number of key positions are not yet filled. Furthermore, the

current arrangements for deputising in the absence of the CEO are *ad hoc* and informal. The lack of a clearly defined deputy CEO role represents a source of strategic risk to business continuity. The Panel urges BP to complete the filling of all key appointments.

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

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic ensure that major vacant posts in the organization structure are filled as a matter of urgency.*

The Senior Management Team (SMT) is responsible for the co-ordination of all divisions and faculties within the Polytechnic and for the activities of the various committees through the Directors charged with their oversight. Within faculties and divisions there are clear middle-management structures. The respective roles of the BoT and SMT are clearly delineated and well understood by all concerned.

BP has an effective communication strategy to ensure that staff and students are kept abreast of any developments and current events. This includes using a range of instruments such as e-forums, newsletters, Sharepoint, and Moodle. The Panel noted with appreciation that a Communication Review Committee has been established to consider communication challenges that have arisen and to make recommendations to senior management on how these may be overcome.

The Institution has a comprehensive suite of policies and regulations for academic conduct and administrative operations, with robust and effective mechanisms of audit and version control. The documentation is in two languages to ensure inclusivity. While these policies are now being systematically reviewed to reflect the developing nature of the Institution, the initial set of policies provided a very sound framework for the first phase of BP's operations.

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

*HERU commends Bahrain Polytechnic for the development and implementation of a set of academic and administrative policies from an early stage in the Institution's existence.*

BP's policies and procedures are stored in a central register within the Quality Management System on Sharepoint. The Panel noted that the Institution has taken steps to make these policies more accessible linguistically to students and staff by using plainer language.

## 4. Academic Standards

BP has a two-pronged approach to the offering of learning programmes. The first is to purchase already packaged programmes from other institutions. The second is to develop the programmes internally. The Business and Engineering programmes that are currently offered were purchased from Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand (AUT), whereas the Information and Communications programme was purchased from Monash University in Australia (MU). Terms and conditions relating to the provision of intellectual property and services relating to these programmes are set out in Purchase Agreements with the respective institutions. The Panel heard during interviews with management that the role of both institutions in the delivery of these programmes has been largely limited to providing 'pre- and post-moderation' reports during the first cycle of delivery. Provision is also made in the Purchase Agreements for AUT's and MU's possible involvement in future reviews of these programmes. The Panel learned that all the purchased programmes have since been contextualised to suit the local needs of Bahrain, albeit without any significant involvement from either AUT or MU.

The remaining programmes (Visual Design, Web Media and International Logistics Management as well as the Foundation Programme) have been developed internally with the assistance of 'expert consultants'. The Panel acknowledges that this two-pronged approach to the development of programmes affords the Institution a unique benchmarking opportunity. The Panel concurs with BP in its plan to develop its own internal capacity to design and develop programmes in line with being a higher education institution. This should also include relevant industry input through programme advisory boards and appropriate benchmarking.

Detailed brochures have been compiled for all programmes and are made available to students in a variety of media including the institution's website. A standard programme template exists which includes programme aims, information about courses and levels of study, and entry requirements. The Panel noted that all courses of study have been assigned credit points based on the learning hours required to achieve the stipulated learning outcomes. The SER states that the assignment of levels of study and credit points to courses have been benchmarked against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. This provides external markers on the levels of BP's qualifications.

Admission to all BP programmes is governed by stringent criteria which include general admission criteria as well as programme-specific criteria. In order to ensure that students are able to cope with English as the medium of instruction, the Institution has included English Language requirements in its general admissions criteria. Students are admitted to the Certificate in Academic Preparation (Foundation Programme) if they have an IELTS score of between 4.0-4.5 or directly into a degree programme if their IELTS score is 5.0 or above. This is appropriate. The Panel heard from both teaching staff and students that there is an

effective system in place for advising prospective and enrolled students about the requirements for the various qualifications. Information in this regard is made available in a wide range of documents including the Institution's website, enrolment guides and course brochures.

BP is a new institution which has yet to graduate its first cohort of students. Nevertheless, the Panel is of the view that there is a need at these early stages to track students' performance against their entry level scores, particularly in the area of language, in order to assure itself of the appropriateness of the admission requirements.

BP has measures in place to maintain academic standards and to benchmark these against relevant external references, although as yet no cohort of students has graduated from any of the degree programmes. Existing moderation contracts with Monash University and Auckland University of Technology (AUT) as noted above, only apply for the first cohort of students after which the Institution will need to put in place a formal external moderation process. Other similar institutions to BP will need to be sought so that BP can benchmark itself.

The Institution has an explicit plan for future programme development. One aspect of the plan is to develop a marketing strategy to enable it to assess and stimulate demand for industry relevant short courses. However, more needs to be done to build a shared understanding among all external stakeholders about the optimum timetable and scope of short course development. The Panel is of the view that since BP is still at an early stage of development and has yet to graduate its first cohort of students, its energies would be better focused on assuring itself that its diploma and degree awarding programmes are of the highest quality and meet the labour market needs of Bahrain before it expands into short course delivery.

BP has an Assessment Policy which provides a framework for the assessment of teaching at the Institution. There is also an Assessment Regulations document that deals with issues relating to re-sits, supplementary assessment and reporting of results. The policy makes provision for 'pre- and post-moderation' of assessment. BP acknowledges that the policy on assessment is not applied consistently across all academic departments. For example, reports from moderators are not always tabled for consideration at Faculty Board meetings. The Panel concludes that this could seriously impact on the ability of Faculties to moderate assessment results. The Panel is therefore pleased to learn that BP has introduced a mandatory professional development programme to enhance skills and knowledge in assessment and moderation practices and to support a consistent application of approved policies and procedures, which should be completed as soon as possible by all teaching staff.

### ***Affirmation 1***

*HERU affirms Bahrain Polytechnic's work to introduce a mandatory professional development programme for all teaching staff to enhance skills and knowledge in assessment and moderation practices to support a consistent application of approved policies and procedures. This should be completed by all teaching staff as a matter of urgency.*

BP has recently introduced a student management system called *Banner* to manage student records. Both staff and students have securely controlled access to the system but at different levels – teaching staff are able to enter attendance and assessment results and to view timetables and student information in their subject areas; mentors are able to view information about their mentees; and students are able to view their assessment results. Programme Managers, such as Deans and Heads of Schools, can also obtain summary reports that are used in improving student performance. The Panel acknowledges the introduction and implementation of the student management system.

The Institution does not currently offer academic programmes with other institutions. However, as already noted, the Institution has sound purchase agreements with MU and AUT for the provision of some curriculum. The awards for those programmes are made by BP subject to the approval of the Academic Board, and in accordance with the *Policy on the Naming and Awarding of Qualifications*. These agreements allow the use of intellectual property of materials for Bahrain Polytechnic. During the teleconference with both institutions, the Panel heard that the role of both institutions in the delivery of these academic programmes has been largely limited to providing 'pre-and-post-moderation' of the first cycle of delivery for each unit. The Panel suggests that BP consider expanding its relationship with institutions beyond purchasing programmes.

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

BP has clear policies on quality assurance and enhancement and there is a commitment at all levels within the Institution to assure, maintain and enhance the quality of the students' learning experience. This is evident through the publication of appropriate policy documents, the development and use of a range of quality monitoring procedures, and through interviews with a wide range of staff and students within the Institution.

There is an established Quality Assurance Unit which is effective in managing the Institution's quality systems, and in supporting a wide network of 'quality champions' across the academic community. BP also has an Academic Quality Assurance Committee and a Quality and Audit Committee which have an appropriate range of functions and responsibilities. The Institution's Quality Manual is still at an early stage of development. The Panel encourages the Institution to complete the quality documentation. The Panel

noted that the Institution starting to address the recommendations made by the independent reviews, however, a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess the effectiveness of its quality assurance system needs to be developed and implemented.

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

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic complete the full range of quality documentation needed for an effective quality assurance system as a matter of urgency.*

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

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess the effectiveness of its quality assurance system and ensure that identified gaps are closed.*

The Institution has extensive documentation which explains its quality processes. These processes are well understood by staff and are clearly explained within the staff induction process. There is a pervasive and systematic use of student surveys at course and programme level for all of the Institution's programmes. Some of the survey instruments are better designed than others; however, there is a process currently underway to review the design of these tools. Nonetheless, the Panel was impressed by the universal commitment of staff to the generation and analysis of student survey data as a central aspect of the quality assurance process.

In interviews the Panel heard that students understood the purpose of these surveys and found them easy to complete. However, students commented that they were often unaware of the impact of these surveys, largely because most surveys were taken at the end of semester and any changes were likely only to affect new cohorts of students. Staff members are aware of this issue and are considering ways to provide more rapid feedback and action as a result of surveys. Some teaching staff expressed an interest in issuing shorter and more focused questionnaires to seek feedback on specific aspects of their teaching. The Panel encourages such experimentation although care needs to be taken not to generate 'questionnaire fatigue' through excessive surveys of the same student cohort.

The Institution conducts a systematic analysis of the results of student satisfaction surveys. This provides useful information at the level of individual tutors, courses and programmes. The programme level analysis provides helpful strategic information on some key aspects of the student experience, and most of the results indicate high levels of satisfaction. However,

in the one area where the analysis indicates significant levels of student dissatisfaction – specifically, the operation of the mentoring system – it is not clear how the Institution intends to use the feedback to address this area of student concern. This matter needs to be given attention.

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

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic develop further mechanisms to ensure that the mentoring system for students is fit for purpose and that a monitoring and evaluation process is implemented.*

Although the Quality and Audit Committee provides clear leadership in considering and addressing issues identified through student surveys, it is less clear how the Institution takes a strategic view of other forms of quality information relating to teaching and learning, such as pass rates and progression rates for different courses and programmes. However, the Institution has a demonstrated commitment to strengthen its capacity in this area through external benchmarking. This is supported by the planned recruitment of a specialist expert in measurement and analysis within the Quality Assurance Unit to increase the Unit's capacity to support wider processes of benchmarking and monitoring. While programme committees and Faculty Boards have responsibilities for monitoring assessment outcomes and addressing outlying performance issues, it is too soon to form a view on the effectiveness of these processes, particularly in relation to the maintenance of academic standards of awards.

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

*HERU affirms Bahrain Polytechnic's work to build capacity in external benchmarking of key quality indicators and a more extensive analysis of student performance data, as important steps in the effective management of quality and standards.*

## **6. Quality of Teaching and Learning**

During a range of interviews the Panel heard of BP's commitment to the development and delivery of programmes that are relevant to, and required by, the labour market in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Mechanisms are in place, including the Curriculum Advisory

Committees, the work of the Marketing and Industry Liaison Team, plus a number of individual initiatives by members of the teaching staff and administration, to establish links with employers and to gain intelligence that informs the development of new programmes, and contextualization and refinement of existing ones. It is evident to the Panel that BP is striving to satisfy existing labour requirements and is also looking to future needs, such as in the Marine Sciences, Health, and Applied Science fields.

The information gained through consultation with employers feeds into the production of 'Concept Briefs' and 'Impact Reports' that are considered by the Senior Management Team and Academic Board. The stage of production of 'Impact Reports' engages with all units where there are resource implications, such as the Library Learning Centre, and the IT unit. The BP Academic Plan demonstrates a clearly defined sequence and roll-out of education programmes for the first eleven years of the Institution's operations (until 2018/19). This is for full-time programmes only and appears reasonable and carefully planned. However, the Panel was made aware of significant developments in shorter training course provision and part-time programmes. The Institution will need to ensure that resources are not over-stretched and the core programmes remain the priority and are subject to periodic reviews.

Following discussions with programme developers, the Panel was given a documented framework for addressing the needs for external programme accreditation. This framework includes international awarding bodies and professional organizations, considered to be worthy targets for future accreditation. The Panel acknowledge this work to align curricula with international standards.

### ***Affirmation 3***

*HERU affirms Bahrain Polytechnic's work to align curricula with international standards.*

The skills and competencies identified by potential employers have shaped the 'BP Academic Plan' and the 'BP Profile' that describe the teaching and learning strategies to be developed. These learning strategies include Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and e-Learning, all of which are under development and only partially implemented at this stage. The Panel's interviews with external members of Curriculum Advisory Committees provided evidence of specific changes to curriculum content in order to meet the requirements for knowledge and skills in the local contexts of IT and chemical industries. The Panel encourages BP to ensure that its demonstrated commitment to the provision of education that results in work-ready graduates who can meet local industry requirements is central in the revised vision and mission statements.

The Panel understands the rationale to import some core curriculum in particular disciplines from other institutions in order to initiate the Institution's study programmes. The Panel is satisfied that due diligence is applied in the selection of partner institutions and their programmes of study (interviews with BP administration and teleconference interviews with AUT and MU). The Panel concurs with the views of the interviewed teaching staff, many of whom recognized that extensive adaptation is required to make the learning and assessment materials suitable for Bahrain Polytechnic students. For example, the level of English language used in the learning materials requires clarification for students for whom English is a second language. Further adaptation is on-going with regard to the teaching, learning and assessment strategies now adopted by the Institution.

The Academic Board is the principal decision-making body in relation to programme development. Its decisions are then ratified by the SMT. Currently there is no detailed policy to guide the possible closure of courses/programmes. This policy gap is recognized by BP and the Panel supports the proposal to develop policy in this regard. This will need to address the arrangements and institutional commitment to 'teaching-out' the identified course/programme so that students' interests are protected.

The Panel heard during a range of interviews that the pedagogical method that is being introduced into BP is Problem-based-learning (PBL). To assist in attaining this goal a Problem Based Learning Steering Committee has been established and has commenced work. Instruction is to be given through a blend of PBL, case studies, team-based learning, didactic sessions, e-learning, and learning through projects related to the workplace. This variety and innovation in pedagogy is to be encouraged as a way in which BP can fulfil its role as a polytechnic in Bahrain.

The commitment to small group teaching is noted as characteristic of the Institution's approach to teaching. Class sizes are currently small with between 10 and 20 students accommodated in the classrooms that are well-equipped with multimedia projectors and smartboards. The Panel found evidence of a commitment to this mode of teaching by teaching staff and students across different programmes. Students interviewed by the Panel cited the relatively small class size as a highly valued feature in their selection of BP for their education and expressed satisfaction with their programmes. The Panel notes that this commitment to small group work may become more difficult to maintain as the Institution grows unless there is an equal concomitant growth in teaching staff numbers.

The Panel attended a presentation on e-learning developments at BP. The use of the Moodle virtual learning platform has been successfully introduced and has become an important conduit for dissemination of programmatic and student management information. The Panel was impressed by the level of engagement with Moodle by such a large proportion of the teaching staff (70%) in such a short period of time. The usage has moved beyond a simple repository for hand-outs and PowerPoint presentations; for example, it is used now for discussion forums, assessment activities, and access to a range of learning resources. This

has been achieved partly through involvement of 'e-learning champions', and through the enthusiasm of the ICT staff at BP.

### ***Commendation 3***

*HERU commends Bahrain Polytechnic for its implementation of a virtual learning environment and staff participation in e-learning.*

BP has developed curricula for a Foundation Programme which seeks to provide an alternative access to the formal undergraduate programmes at the Institution. The programme is also aimed at providing students with the personal and academic skills that are required to succeed in degree level study, and includes courses in English, Information Technology and Mathematics. Placement into the Foundation Programme is based on the outcome of a diagnostic test. The Panel found that the majority of students who are currently enrolled in degree programmes at the Institution have successfully completed the Foundation Programme.

Programme review procedures are well-defined and implemented in many areas. Notably, the Foundation Programme was reviewed recently. This has resulted in many changes to improve the programme, including the introduction of electives and greater flexibility in progressing through the constituent levels in the disciplines. The Panel is of the view that the Foundation Programme is providing a sound preparation for students who are transitioning from a traditional, didactic high school educational model to a more interactive and pro-active learning style. Students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses during the Foundation Programme. This results in a significant number of students (20%) who decide to change their original choice of major.

### ***Commendation 4***

*HERU commends Bahrain Polytechnic for establishing the Foundation Programme as a major route for widening access and the responsiveness of the programme team to feedback in a process of continuous review and improvement.*

The progression criteria from the Foundation Programme to the diploma or degree programmes are clearly defined and implemented. However, students raised some concerns over the possible delays to their advancement through weaknesses in a single area of

competency. BP might like to investigate the options to provide a full programme of study in appropriately selected courses during this transition period. Moreover, the Panel suggests students' performance be tracked against their Foundation Programme scores in order to determine the effectiveness of the Foundation Programme.

The Institution has developed a clear set of responsibilities and assignment of duties to staff for course and programme coordination and management. Group meetings are held on a regular basis and records are kept and forwarded to appropriate committees. The Institution has a policy on workload for teaching staff which defines the maximum number of class contact hours that can be allocated to a member of the teaching staff. The responsibilities assigned to staff are recognized through adjustments to teaching loads but the allocation of release time, although apparently generous, is not consistently applied across the institution. While this may not be a serious source of dissatisfaction at present when classes are small and teaching loads are generally low, in future this could be a cause of tension and should be resolved through the consistent implementation of this policy.

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

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic ensure that its teaching workload policy is consistently implemented across all departments and all teaching staff.*

The Institution's approach to curriculum design and delivery focuses on student-centred learning and the attainment of Learning Outcomes (LOs). The Panel was especially encouraged to find that all programme brochures include LOs. The Panel notes, however, that LOs for individual modules and courses are not always specified. This obviously has implications on assessment. The Panel is pleased to note that the course descriptor template is currently being reviewed and modified to reflect the way that the Institution plans to define and categorise LOs. Further, the Panel acknowledges BP's plans to implement learning outcomes for its courses, which are consistent with the programme aims and reflect an appropriate level of knowledge, competencies, and skills. The Panel is satisfied that BP is engaged in an on-going programme of training for teaching staff in the development and evaluation of appropriate learning outcomes.

The outcomes-based approach to the BP curriculum is welcomed and encouraged by the Panel as a sound basis for evaluating student performance through monitoring of measurable achievements at a course and programme level. The Institution recognizes that the development of appropriate learning outcomes is challenging and new to many teaching staff and must be supported by an on-going programme of staff development.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has been adopted by the institution as a method of programme delivery. While it is noted that the Institution has been engaging with staff on PBL in a variety of ways, during interviews it became apparent that not all staff shared a common understanding of PBL. The Panel encourages BP to ensure that the concept of PBL is properly understood by all teaching staff.

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

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic actively engage all its teaching staff with the principles of Problem-Based Learning with a view of ensuring a common understanding of it as a teaching methodology.*

The Institution systematically and routinely surveys the level of student satisfaction with courses and tutors. Satisfaction levels are generally high and the institution is responsive to identified weaknesses. However, BP recognizes that the survey procedures across all units require an integrated survey framework that can be referenced to appropriate KPIs to evaluate changes made. The Panel suggests that the indirect measures of satisfaction produced from surveys, be combined with direct measures of performance in programmes of study and support services, as appropriate to the activity.

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

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic develop and implement an integrated system to monitor student progress and satisfaction.*

The Panel was provided with information on teaching staff qualifications and their teaching assignments. In a number of cases there was a mismatch between industry experience and qualifications with the demands of the assignment. The Panel recognizes that the degrees offered at BP are applied in nature but the theoretical content still demands a level of knowledge to underpin practice whilst substantial industry experience is also required.

### **Recommendation 11**

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic ensure that there is an appropriate match between teaching staff qualifications and/or industry experience with their assigned teaching duties.*

Teaching staff are required to complete the 15 credit in-house programme, Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning (CTTL). Courses include: *The Adult Learner, The Adult Learner and Classroom Practice*, and *The Use of Technology in Teaching and Learning*. This is compulsory for new teachers and experienced instructors alike and is to be completed as soon as possible. The Panel heard during interviews that this training is supported by classroom observation and mentoring support mechanisms. Teaching staff spoke positively about the value of this programme and some suggested that it should be expanded in time and credit value. Evidence provided on student survey feedback on tutors is generally positive. The Panel congratulates BP for the implementation of this professional development programme and is of the view that it should be further developed as well as maintained as a compulsory programme for all BP teaching staff (including instructors) with all completing the programme as soon as possible.

### **Commendation 5**

*HERU commends Bahrain Polytechnic for its structured Certificate programme in Tertiary Teaching and Learning for all teaching staff and the quality of its implementation and support mechanisms.*

## **7. Student Support**

BP provides its students with many support services in areas such as the Library Learning Centre offering study support, the Personal Academic Learning (PAL) as part of the Foundation Programme, a mentoring programme, a Career and Employment Centre and counselling services. Students receive support and advice on a variety of issues related to student welfare. The Panel acknowledges the availability of these services that will enhance the students' learning experience.

There is overwhelming evidence of a student-focused culture at BP. All staff members, both teaching and administrative, demonstrate a commitment to student learning and well-being. Students assured the Panel that staff - including the Heads of Department and the CEO - are

readily accessible to students and responsive to their needs. The students also confirmed that all students are treated with equal respect and consideration.

### ***Commendation 6***

*HERU commends Bahrain Polytechnic for the effectiveness of its range of student support services and its culture of responsiveness to individual student needs.*

Scholarships are available to students with good grades on the basis of a satisfactory interview and evidence of financial need.

The Institution has a mechanism to monitor and identify students who are at risk of failure at the Faculty level and this is reported to Academic Board. When an 'at-risk' student is identified, he or she is put on a list and receives extra individual support from within the Faculty and Library Learning Centre. The Institution recognizes a need for more formalised procedure for managing referrals for such assistance. The Panel encourages the Institution to develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and support academically weak students.

### ***Recommendation12***

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and support academically weak students.*

BP has established a Students' Association that manages a wide range of recreational activities within the Institution and the Bahraini community. The Panel met with the President and several members of the Students' Association, and heard that the Association has raised a range of teaching and administrative issues with the Institution following student feedback; however, in many cases student members were of the view that more could have been done by the Institution's management to resolve these issues promptly. There is an allocated budget to support student activities but it is not under the direct control of the Students' Association. The Panel encourages BP to give the students control of this budget and to find more ways for the Association to influence the operation of the Institution for the benefit of students.

## 8. Human Resources

The Institution has, since its inception in 2009, relied mostly on expatriate staff to fulfil its staffing requirements. A large proportion of both the teaching staff and the senior management have been recruited mainly from countries such as New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom. Expatriates currently comprise 86% of the teaching staff complement. The Panel heard from the BoT and senior management that the Institution has no immediate plans to increase the proportion of Bahrainis at different staff levels although there are ear-marked positions. However, the Panel is of the view that this may not augur well for the long-term viability and sustainability of the Institution. The Panel strongly encourages the Institution to address this matter and to put in place a system of mentorship when such positions are filled.

### *Recommendation 13*

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic implement strategic and departmental plans to increase the number of Bahraini staff at all levels in the Institution, and in particular at senior management level. A mentorship system also should be developed and implemented.*

The Panel heard that the Institution's staffing plan is related to the student enrolment plan. BP currently has a total of 143 teaching staff. The Panel heard that teaching staff play a significant role in the recruitment of teaching staff. All teaching staff are currently appointed on a full-time basis. Given the nature of the Institution, the Panel is of the view that BP could also make use of persons with robust industry expertise as part-time tutors but stresses that this is to augment and not to replace full-time teaching posts.

The Panel heard of the importance that BP places on developing its teaching staff to help the Institution give substance to its identity as a student-centred institution. In this regard, all newly-appointed staff are required to participate in a one-week orientation programme. As already noted other staff development initiatives include the Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning programme.

Responsibility for teaching staff development rests with the Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU), which offers a range of services through the Professional Development Centre (PDC). The Panel is impressed by the work of the TLU and the various initiatives it has put in place to support teaching and learning at the PDC, and congratulates the centre for the commitment of its staff.

### ***Commendation 7***

*HERU commends Bahrain Polytechnic for its various staff development initiatives it has put in place, including the staff orientation programme.*

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

The campus of BP is located in Isa Town in an area formerly occupied by the University of Bahrain. Expansion of the campus is planned through the acquisition of the remaining facilities of University of Bahrain when the latter completes its move to its new location. There is continuous dialogue with officials of the University of Bahrain about the timetable but with no resolution. BP is reaching critical decision points about this matter. For instance, the shared facilities for practicums in the Faculty of Engineering & Design Technologies are a source of concern and if not resolved this has the potential to impact negatively on the quality of the learning experience of students in these programmes. The Panel urges the Institution to ensure that adequate facilities are available so that there is continuity and quality in programme delivery.

The laboratories consist of facilities and components that are diverse and relevant to the courses being offered. Some laboratory work, especially in Engineering is performed at University of Bahrain facilities. While this is convenient for the time being, procurement of specialized laboratories and equipment is necessary to support the courses after the departure of the University of Bahrain. The Panel notes that there is a master plan in place for a new campus after BP completes acquisition of the allocated facilities. It strongly encourages the institution to bring the plan in this regard to fruition.

### ***Recommendation 14***

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic ensure that the academic programmes have access to appropriate facilities so that students have a quality learning experience and that specialized laboratories and equipment is purchased timeously to ensure there is no gap in academic provision.*

The Panel toured BP's campus and observed that classrooms, laboratories and other facilities are adequate. The teaching staff office space is designed around an open architecture model. While this is not uncommon in other countries, there is a question about its suitability in Bahraini culture with staff having limited privacy. Parking facilities seem to be adequate for

the time being since the institution has yet to approach its potential capacity. BP uses a built up area criteria of 15 m<sup>2</sup> per full-time student for facility planning purposes, which is in line with international good practice.

The Panel noted during the site visit and from discussions with representatives of the Students' Association that there are several weaknesses in facilities for student life on campus. For example, there is a lack of healthy eating outlets and cafeterias. There is no female prayer room and female private sports grounds. The Panel urges BP to address these student needs.

### ***Recommendation 15***

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic provide students with a range of extracurricular facilities as well as address cultural and gender requirements in order to ensure that students have a quality learning environment.*

The library is a main centre for student support where books, journals, reference material can be accessed for their studies and projects. A major refurbishment is underway to renovate the upper floor of its library building. Library staff are available not only for material access but also for specialized help. Students with special needs get individualized attention from information specialists and a counsellor. Furthermore, there is ample space for students to work on their projects where they can access computer facilities to work and print their reports. The book and journal collections are limited but the Panel saw ambitious plans for acquisition of major collections of electronic journals and books. The library has recently been properly staffed with a director, technical support, public service and learning resource staff to render a comprehensive service.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is 'state of the art', for example, the laboratories, furniture, audio-visual aids and IT facilities, which also meet high ergonomic standards. However, the Panel is of the view that the ICT facilities in particular require more effective ventilation.

Staff members are well trained in information literacy at the beginning of their appointment and beyond. The provision of ICT resources and networking is available for staff and students and there is no apparent lack of wireless coverage. BP adopted e-learning to be a major platform for information resources throughout the system. All staff and students make use of the Moodle virtual learning environment for various applications. Training and learner support is available at all stages. Of special note is the Turnitin facility to counter plagiarism. External audits and benchmarking are also conducted for ICT facilities. The current systems for admission, HR and finance are not entirely compatible but work is

underway to implement fully the Banner system to allow single source reference and compatibility.

The Panel was concerned to note that back-up data is stored on campus, although regular back-up procedures are in place and the systems incorporate a measure of redundancy that provides some protection. As a matter of urgency BP needs to back-up data in a separate location, preferably off-campus in order to ensure business continuity.

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

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic provides back-up data in a separate location, preferably off-campus, in order to ensure business continuity.*

## **10. Research**

The research function in BP is at an embryonic stage. There is a Research Committee that is surveying staff to gauge their research interest. An international tour for similar but exemplar research institutes was conducted to help in formulating the research policy. There is a clear concept document on a strategic research plan that can guide the research activities at BP. The document discusses research resources, capabilities and capacity and sets out preliminary forms for grant application and processing.

Current research and development (R&D) support consists of allocation of BD300 for each member of staff to subsidize research and development activities. A seed fund totalling BD25000 is also available for initiation of key research activities. Academics take good advantage of the available R&D support. In the past two years 60 staff members have attended conferences, seminars and professional courses. Student research is encouraged through PBL and facilitated by tutors and course co-ordinators.

BP has yet to develop a comprehensive research plan appropriate to its institutional type that has clear KPIs and in which equipment and facilities needed to allow practical student research and innovative work are identified. Furthermore, the provision of BSc degrees requires staff that are active in practical applied research and who can guide the students in their senior level industry research projects.

### ***Recommendation 17***

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic develop and implement a research plan appropriate to its institutional type that is aligned to its strategic objectives and has clear key performance indicators and which caters for the resources needed to support this core function.*

BP undertakes research at the institutional level and this has included conducting surveys on student satisfaction, faculty satisfaction and institutional 'wellness'. The results are fed back to relevant departments for improvement. There is also an ambitious study to define clearly course learning outcomes and their relationship to graduates' attributes and employability skills. The Panel acknowledges this work.

## **11. Community Engagement**

The Institution has initiated a number of productive links with the community. However, the specific goals and objectives for community engagement are not clear to the Panel, and are yet to be articulated in a comprehensive community engagement strategy. The BP Strategic Plan includes 'Service to Society' among its stated values but the Plan has no distinct objectives and targets related to this, other than those related to external inputs to inform curriculum development.

### ***Recommendation 18***

*HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic develops a section of its Institutional Strategic Plan to detail the plans for community engagement, with clear objectives, and key performance indicators related to full and mutually beneficial engagement with the communities it has chosen to serve.*

The Institution has established posits and working groups to spearhead the community initiatives that includes three focus areas – education, corporate & commercial, and stakeholder relations. A Workplace Development Specialist has been allocated responsibility. Most efforts to date have been directed at community linkages to inform the development of the curriculum and to identify the requisite knowledge and skills sought

after by prospective employers of BP graduates. This is understandable in the light of the newness of the Institution.

A programme of High School visits is operational and is well-staffed and resourced. The report on the 2010 programme indicated 29 such visits in the year and these were delivered effectively. These school visits are aimed at the promotion of the Bahrain Polytechnic in general terms, and to recruit students, particularly into new areas of the curriculum that are less familiar to school students, such as International Logistics Management, and Visual Design. The Institution has recognized the value of including current students in the school visits. In Panel discussions with staff groups engaged in the various facets of community interaction, it is clear that all such activities and events are subject to evaluation on their value in meeting the institutional objectives.

The CEO and other members of the SMT informed the Panel of the long-term aspirations and plans for community engagement through a portfolio of short training courses, part-time provision and flexible learning opportunities. At present the curriculum is delivered to full-time students in 'office hours' but the long-term plan is to extend the provision into evening classes and more flexible delivery. The Panel considers this activity to be appropriate to the Mission of BP and the expectations of society for an institution designated as a Polytechnic. The Panel witnessed some short course delivery during the campus review, contracted with a specific industrial company, but development and delivery of a full portfolio of courses awaits approval and financial support from the Bahraini authorities. (The Panel commented on the offering of short courses in section 4 of this report.)

## 12. Conclusion

Bahrain Polytechnic as a new institution is establishing its identity and reputation as a provider of vocational education in Bahrain. There is much goodwill and support for BP from its major stakeholders. BP has a strong commitment to providing a quality education and to meeting industry needs in Bahrain. Further there is a well-developed governance structure as well as comprehensive policies and systems. With regard to teaching and learning the offering of a Certificate Programme in Tertiary Teaching and Learning with its demonstrated high quality in implementation as well as robust support mechanisms is a key innovation as it supports the recruitment of staff with strong industry experience. The introduction of problem-based learning is another key initiative which has the potential to produce high quality industry-ready graduates.

Notwithstanding the above, there are clearly many challenges ahead. These include the development of the campus and provision of the required facilities for practicums; the need to develop further a distinctive character as a Polytechnic; beginning the process of

Bahrainisation; and achieving an appropriate balance of teaching staff qualifications and strong industry experience. However, the Panel is of the view that the Board of Trustees, management and staff of the Polytechnic have the vision, commitment and expertise to meet these challenges successfully.

The Panel concludes that BP has laid solid foundations and is making considerable progress in achieving its vision and mission of graduating Bahrainis that can meet the growth in current and emerging industries in Bahrain.