



هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب
Education & Training Quality Authority
Kingdom of Bahrain - مملكة البحرين

Directorate of Higher Education Reviews

Programme Review Report

Ahlia University

College of Business & Finance

**Doctor of Philosophy in Management Studies,
Operational Research and related fields offered by
Brunel University London**

Kingdom of Bahrain

Site Visit Date: 8-9 November 2021

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Acronyms

APRs	Academic Programme Reviews
AU	Ahlia University
AUCBF	AU's College of Business and Finance
BBL	Blackboard Learn
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
BU	Brunel University London
BURA	Brunel University Research Archive
CEAB	College External Advisory Board
CILOs	Course Intended Learning Outcomes
CME	Centre for Measurement and Evaluation
CMSR	Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
EDAMBA	European Doctoral Association of Business Administration
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
HEC	Higher Education Council
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILOs	Intended Learning Outcomes
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PhD (WR)	Doctor of Philosophy Without Residence
PILOs	Programme Intended Learning Outcomes
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RDA	Research Development Advisor
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SEC	Student Experience Committee

SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SITS	Student Information Technology Systems
SLB	Subject Liaison Librarian
UK QAA	United Kingdom Quality Assurance for Higher Education

I. Introduction

In keeping with its mandate, the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), through the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR), carries out two types of reviews that are complementary. These are: Institutional Reviews, where the whole institution is assessed; and the Academic Programme Reviews (APRs), where the quality of teaching, learning and academic standards are assessed in academic programmes within various colleges according to specific standards and indicators as reflected in its Framework.

Following the revision of the APR Framework at the end of Cycle 1 in accordance with the BQA procedure, the revised APR Framework (Cycle 2) was endorsed as per the Council of Ministers' Resolution No.17 of 2019. Thereof, in the academic year (2019-2020), the DHR commenced its second cycle of programme reviews.

The Cycle 2 APR Review Framework is based on four main Standards and 21 Indicators, which forms the basis the APR Reports of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The **four** standards that are used to determine whether or not a programme meets international standards are as follows:

Standard 1: The Learning Programme

Standard 2: Efficiency of the Programme

Standard 3: Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

Standard 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

The Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as 'the Panel') decides whether each indicator, within a standard, is 'addressed', 'partially addressed' or 'not addressed'. From these judgments on the indicators, the Panel additionally determines whether each of the four standards is 'Satisfied' or 'Not Satisfied', thus leading to the Programme's overall judgment, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Criteria for Judgements

Criteria	Judgement
All four Standards are satisfied	Confidence
Two or three Standards are satisfied, including Standard 1	Limited Confidence
One or no Standard is satisfied	No Confidence
All cases where Standard 1 is not satisfied	

The APR Review Report begins with providing the profile of the Programme under review, followed by a brief outline of the judgment received for each the indicator, standard, and the overall judgement.

The main section of the report is an analysis of the status of the programme, at the time of its actual review, in relation to the review standards, indicators and their underlying expectations.

The report ends with a Conclusion and a list of Appreciations and Recommendations.

II. The Programme's Profile

Institution Name*	Ahlia University - Brunel University London
College/ Department*	Brunel Business School / College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences (CBASS) – Brunel University College of Business and Finance – Ahlia University
Programme/ Qualification Title*	Doctor of Philosophy in Management Studies, Operational Research, and related fields.
Qualification Approval Number	AQ19-002
NQF Level	Level 10
Validity Period on NQF	5 years from Alignment Date
Number of Units*	N/A
NQF Credit	N/A
Programme Aims*	To graduate PhD holders who are able to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences. It is expected that graduates will continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level. They will have the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.
Programme Intended Learning Outcomes*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication; • A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice; • The general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or

	<p>understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust project design in the light of unforeseen problems;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.
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* Mandatory fields

III. Judgment Summary

**The Programme's Judgment:
Confidence**

Standard/ Indicator	Title	Judgement
Standard 1	The Learning Programme	Satisfied
Indicator 1.1	The Academic Planning Framework	Addressed
Indicator 1.2	Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes	Addressed
Indicator 1.3	The Curriculum Content	Addressed
Indicator 1.4	Teaching and Learning	Addressed
Indicator 1.5	Assessment Arrangements	Addressed
Standard 2	Efficiency of the Programme	Satisfied
Indicator 2.1	Admitted Students	Addressed
Indicator 2.2	Academic Staff	Addressed
Indicator 2.3	Physical and Material Resources	Addressed
Indicator 2.4	Management Information Systems	Addressed
Indicator 2.5	Student Support	Addressed
Standard 3	Standard 3: Academic Standards of Students and Graduates	Satisfied
Indicator 3.1	Efficiency of the Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.2	Academic Integrity	Addressed
Indicator 3.3	Internal and External Moderation of Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.4	Work-based Learning	Addressed

Indicator 3.5	Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component	Addressed
Indicator 3.6	Achievements of the Graduates	Addressed
Standard 4	Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance	Satisfied
Indicator 4.1	Quality Assurance Management	Addressed
Indicator 4.2	Programme Management and Leadership	Addressed
Indicator 4.3	Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme	Addressed
Indicator 4.4	Benchmarking and Surveys	Partially Addressed
Indicator 4.5	Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs	Addressed

IV. Standards and Indicators

Standard 1

The Learning Programme

The programme demonstrates fitness for purpose in terms of mission, relevance, curriculum, pedagogy, intended learning outcomes and assessment.

Indicator 1.1: The Academic Planning Framework

There is a clear academic planning framework for the programme, reflected in clear aims which relate to the mission and strategic goals of the institution and the college.

Judgment: Addressed

- In 2006, Brunel University London (BU) and Ahlia University (AU) signed an agreement to collaborate in offering quality educational programmes in the Kingdom of Bahrain mainly in the Business Administration discipline and to establish a Doctor of Philosophy Without Residence (PhD (WR)) programme in AU. The Doctor of Philosophy in Management Studies, Operational Research and related fields is a PhD (WR) research degree that is owned and offered by BU in partnership with AU, since 2007. BU is registered with the United Kingdom Office for Students in accordance with the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and received a confirmation in 2018. Furthermore, the PhD (WR) programme is a member of the European Doctoral Association of Business Administration (EDAMBA) which is an assurance of its meeting a set of quality standards. The PhD (WR) is licensed by the Higher Education Council (HEC) of Bahrain and complies with its regulations.
- The PhD (WR) programme has a clear planning process which is effectively implemented by the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board. The Board is responsible for the oversight of the management and administration of the programme and its decisions are sent for final approval to BU Education Committee and then to the Senate. The Programme and Partnership Lead, who is a full time BU academic staff member manages the programme locally and the Partnership Strategic Lead Director, another permanent academic staff of BU is responsible for the strategic development of the Partnership. In addition, the programme is supported by a supervisory team consisting of a principal supervisor from BU, a local supervisor and a Research Development Advisor (RDA), and by the Doctoral Committee and Student Experience Committee (SEC). The Panel is satisfied that the PhD

(WR) programme complies with the required regulations and has a clear planning process.

- The Self Evaluation Report (SER) indicates that academic standards and any potential risks are regularly discussed and handled at the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board meetings. Furthermore, during the interview sessions with the BU staff, the Panel was informed that BU oversees all the programme's activities, including potential risks which are discussed and given a special attention at their Senate Meetings. They also added that they are aware of the falling number of students registered in the programme and the need to address this issue. The explanation given for the falling student numbers was the implementation of the Pre-Application programme, which enabled the BU to ensure that only well qualified candidates who have the potential to progress and succeed get admitted into the PhD (WR). This has helped in reducing the number of student dropouts and thus maintaining the status of the programme. On the other hand, AU believes that the observed fall in student registrations is mainly due to the cessation of the government's student scholarships due to the economic uncertainty following the COVID-19 pandemic. During the interview sessions, the Panel learned that both sides (AU and BU) are planning to meet soon to discuss and find solutions to the falling number of registered students in the programme.
- The SER states that the PhD (WR) is quality assured by BU as per the United Kingdom Quality Assurance for Higher Education (UK QAA) Quality Code and UK QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and that it is aligned to Bahrain National Qualifications Framework (NQF) at level 10 as a foreign (cross border) qualification. The University has also provided the mapping scorecards of the activities of PhD (WR) which was mapped against Bahrain NQF Level 10 and UK FHEQ Level 8, appropriately.
- The PhD (WR) programme is titled a 'PhD (WR) in Management Studies, Operational Research and Related Fields' and offers a PhD degree in research carried out in subjects listed as Management Studies, Management Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics and related field. The Panel finds that the title of the PhD (WR) programme is too long and not very clear, particularly the term of 'Operational Research and Related Fields'. It is obvious that a PhD in Management Studies covers topics like human resources management, strategic management, leadership management, knowledge management etc. and thus the 'Related Fields' part of the title is not necessary as it may invite ambiguity. During interviews, the Panel was told that BU offers a 'Doctor of Philosophy' award and not a specific programme. Thus, they would accept any student whose proposal is considered appropriate and for whom a supervisor at BU is available, subject to the condition that the case does not infringe on the requirements of the HEC. This provision is in line with the Collaboration Agreement for the programme made between the two universities, which does not specify the programme's name, nor mention the subject or

discipline, but simply states the 'Doctor of Philosophy' award that will be given and the research title. This practice is quite common among PhD programmes offered in UK. Still, the Panel would like to suggest revising the PhD (WR) programme's title, so as to be clearer in reflecting the boundaries of the discipline/subject matter in which the award is given.

- The aims of the PhD (WR) in Management Studies, Operational Research and Related Fields have been benchmarked with the UK QAA FHEQ. The UK QAA FHEQ clearly states that the descriptors provided for this level of the framework (level 8 on the FHEQ) are for any doctoral degree and that 'Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated the achievement of 4 descriptors'. It also states what the qualification holder will be able to do (2 descriptors) and what attributes he/she will exhibit (1 descriptor). The aims of the PhD (WR) programme are the same as those expressed in the UK QAA FHEQ last 3 descriptors. In addition, the aims of the programme are too broad in their coverage of the subject/discipline and do not contain any specific aspect that reflects the title of the awarded degree. Nevertheless, the Panel is quite aware that this is in line with the general approach in UK and is consistent with the provisions of the Collaboration Agreement as mentioned above. The Panel also noted that the broadly stated aims of the PhD (WR) are consistent with the mission and vision of BU, AU and the AU's College of Business and Finance (AUCBF). The Panel is of the view that the aims are clear and appropriate but would like to suggest including additional assertions to specifically reflect the subject/discipline of the programme.
- The mission of BU is 'to bring benefit to society through excellence in education, research and knowledge transfer', whereas the mission of the AUCBF is 'to foster a vibrant learning environment in business and finance education to prepare students for professional success in their career'. The PhD (WR) contributes to the achievement of the HEC Strategic Objective (No. 2) 'to strengthen university research capacity', and also by 'increasing the number of the PhD holders in Bahrain', it contributes to the achievement of the HEC's Key Performance Indicator (KPI). Furthermore, through 'advancing women', the programme serves to achieve the National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women 2013-2022'. The Panel is satisfied that the aims of the programme, contribute, as indicated in the above paragraph, to the achievement of the mission, vision and strategic goals of the AU and the College as well as to the educational strategic objectives of Bahrain.
- The SER does not provide any information with regards to the availability of a valid binding agreement between the two institutions (BU and AU). However, upon submitting a request for a valid binding agreement between AU and BU for establishing and operating the PhD (WR) programme, the Panel was provided with the 'Agreement for Doctoral programme (Without Residence)' dated 12 August 2006, signed by both parties appropriately. As the agreement dates back to 2006 (15 years ago), the Panel requested evidence of monitoring of implementation and any revisions (updates) made to the

Agreement, but no document concerning this request was given to the Panel. Hence, the Panel recommends that AU/BU should monitor and revise the Agreement for Doctoral Programme (Without Residence), dated 12 August 2006.

- The Agreement clearly states that the overall responsibility for the academic management and control of the programme as well as maintenance, monitoring and evaluation of academic standards rest with the BU, while AU provides necessary staff, physical and financial resources needed. The PhD (WR) is a research-based programme and not a dual degree or joint programme and the award is given by the BU, as indicated by the sample certificate. The agreement shows the title of the degree as 'Doctor of Philosophy' and the name of the awarding institution (BU). The degree awarded by the BU is recognized both in Bahrain and in UK.
- The Agreement clearly states that the Senate of BU shall have the ultimate authority for all academic matters, including the academic management, delivery and control of programme, monitoring and evaluation of the academic standards. Students will be bound by BU regulations and their assessments will be governed by the relevant BU regulations. AU on the other hand is expected to get all necessary consent required by the Ministry of Education of Bahrain. Moreover, the Agreement clearly specifies the roles and responsibilities of the two institutions appropriately for the effective management of the PhD (WR). Information on the PhD (WR) programme is available on the web pages of both institutions.

Indicator 1.2: Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes

Graduate attributes are clearly stated in terms of intended learning outcomes for the programme and for each course and these are appropriate for the level of the degree and meet the NQF requirements.

Judgment: Addressed

- BU considers the aims of the programme as generic graduate attributes and thus no specific graduate attributes were given or mentioned in the SER. The aims (taken from UK QAA FHEQ) are written in the format of graduate attributes and hence the Panel considered the aims of the programme as the attributes of the graduates. Furthermore, the SER does not provide any mapping of the aims/generic graduates attributes against the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs). As written and with both being broadly stated and taken from the UK QAA FHEQ, the Panel was able to confirm that the aims and PILOs are consistent, and that the aims are appropriately embedded in the PILOs.

- Like the programme aims, the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) of the PhD (WR) stated in the programme are said to have been benchmarked with the UK QAA FHEQ. BU Senate Regulation 5 takes the descriptors (4 descriptors) stated under the heading of 'Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated' and state them as a general requirement of 'any' PhD programme offered by the University. The ILOs are consistent with the general purpose and provisions of the Collaboration Agreement between the two Universities. However, the Panel suggests that the PhD (WR) would benefit from adding one or two additional ILOs that are more specific to its subject/discipline.
- The PhD (WR) programme was aligned to the NQF in 2020. BU/AU have provided the scorecard that maps all the activities of the programme against the NQF of Bahrain and FHEQ of UK and listed the learning activities planned to be fulfilled. During the interview with the external examiners, the Panel learned that in assessing the performance of the PhD students at the *viva voce*, the external examiners follow the BU Senate Regulation 5, where the PILOs are expressed clearly, as their guidelines. While reserving its suggestions with regard to the content of the PILOs (see above), the Panel confirms that the PILOs are appropriately written, and that they meet the NQF requirements of Bahrain and UK.
- The mapping scorecards, prepared by BU for the alignment of the PhD (WR) programme to the NQF, list the chapters of the thesis to be written by the students along with their general requirements and explanations. Chapters required include, literature review, methodological framework, research methodology, conclusion and each chapter is cross referenced with the PILOs and the knowledge and skills to be attained.

Indicator 1.3: The Curriculum Content

The curriculum is organised to provide academic progression of learning complexity guided by the NQF levels and credits, and it illustrates a balance between knowledge and skills, as well as theory and practice, and meets the norms and standards of the particular academic discipline.

Judgment: Addressed

- The PhD (WR) programme is expected to be completed in three to four years' time and within this period the progress of the PhD students is followed year by year. In addition, the students receive skill training sessions through the Doctoral Skills Development programmes, which are organized twice a year (in Autumn and Spring), and offered by BU staff in three parallel sessions for PhD students in year 1, 2 and 3. Furthermore, the PhD students are monitored through regular meetings with their principal supervisors and also through the annual progression panel reports, all of which are recorded in e-Vision (an online BU system) appropriately. All of these implementations are confirmed during the interviews with the academic staff and the students. The Panel is satisfied that

there is a clear and effective study plan for the PhD students and that their year-on-year progression is followed appropriately.

- The PhD (WR) in Management Studies, Operational Research and Related Fields is a research-based PhD programme and there are no credit-bearing taught components in the programme. However, in addition to the Doctoral Skills Development programme, the PhD (WR) organizes a number of activities, such as annual PhD symposium, monthly seminars and poster meetings where the PhD students present their research to their colleagues. The Doctoral Skills Development programme is subjected to constant reviews and improvements according to the needs of the PhD students. This was confirmed during the interview sessions with the academic staff and students. Furthermore, the PhD (WR) programme is a full member of EDAMBA, a professional association that requires quality in teaching and learning for membership.
- In the delivery of the PhD (WR) programme, AU assumes the responsibility of offering the facilities and providing the local supervision to the PhD students, while BU has the ultimate responsibility of quality of provision and maintenance of the standard of the award which rests with the BU Senate. In this framework the PhD students are able to use the AU library which has about 11,000 conventional books across all disciplines offered by AU, and a digital library which provides access to tens of thousands of e-journals and e-books. Apart from this, all PhD students and AU supervisors are provided with a username and password to access BU London online databases.
- Each PhD student has a supervisory team consisting of a principal supervisor from BU who has the main responsibility of supervising the students' thesis, a local supervisor from AU, who has a recognized supervisor status, and an RDA from AU, who is familiar with the training opportunities at BU. The PhD student is expected to meet the supervisory team at least eight times annually (once in 6-8 weeks) and receives guidance and feedback on his research. The PhD student could also get assistance from the Programme and Partnership Lead. Furthermore, the performance of the PhD student is reviewed by the Annual Progression Review Panel (the membership of which excludes the student's supervisors) within the first four weeks from registration, then within nine weeks' time and then annually. In addition to the supervision, monitoring and assessment, the Doctoral Skill Development programmes along with the annual PhD symposiums and monthly seminars contribute to the achievement of the PILOs of the PhD (WR).
- BU has a very comprehensive policy and regulations on academic misconduct and appeals which are implemented effectively at BU and this applies to the PhD (WR) programme as well. The Doctoral Skills and Development programmes have a special section on the principles and ethics of scientific research. In addition, these issues are also supervised and monitored by the supervisors in their meetings with the PhD students.

- As mentioned above the PhD (WR) Management Studies, Operational Research and Related Fields programme is aligned with the NQF of Bahrain and is consistent with the expectations set out in the UK QAA Quality Code, the UK QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and the UK QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement.
- The PhD (WR) programme was developed in a mutual trust between both universities (BU and AU) and in consideration to the regulatory requirements as well as respect to the cultural and linguistic sensitivity. This was confirmed during the interview sessions with the programme management and the Panel did not see anything to the contrary.

Indicator 1.4: Teaching and Learning

The principles and methods used for teaching in the programme support the attainment of programme aims and intended learning outcomes.

Judgment: Addressed

- Apart from aiming to meet the expectations set out in the UK QAA Quality Code, particularly the UK QAA FHEQ and the UK QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristic Statement, BU has a Code of Practice for Research Degrees which sets out the policies and procedure for the PhD (WR) Programme. To enhance the research capacity of the PhD students, a number of activities as mentioned above (Doctoral Skills Development programmes, annual symposiums etc.) are implemented by the programme regularly. Initially, the principal supervisor meets the PhD student weekly until the student becomes confident with his/her research, then regular meetings are held eight times annually till the student completes his/her thesis and submits for examination. These meetings between the PhD student and the principal supervisor are scheduled through 'MyResearch' facility in the BU e-Vision and requires the PhD student to submit his/her work for evaluation by the supervisor. The principal supervisor provides feedback and guides the PhD student in his/her future work. All of the meetings of the PhD students with their principal supervisors are recorded and monitored by the Programme and Partnership Lead on behalf of the BU-College Deputy Dean. From interviews with the programme staff and the provided evidence, the Panel concludes that these activities develop the research capacity of the PhD students and are in line with the AU/BU's philosophy of teaching and contribute to the attainment of the programme ILOs.
- Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the PhD (WR) students were encouraged to attend various events organized by the BU Business School, online. As indicated in the BU Code of Practice for Research Degree, it is a policy of BU to provide to its research students basic preparatory courses online, these includes "Research Integrity Online Courses", "Research Development Framework" and "Annual Development Series". Currently, due to COVID-19 almost all of the programme's activities and events are conducted virtually

through the Microsoft Teams platform. Furthermore, PhD students and their local supervisors are entitled to access the BU library, where they can make use of the vast collection of books, articles and journals available at the BU library. Also, through the Blackboard Learn (a Virtual Learning Environment) they could access and benefit from various online resources, videos and recorded seminars. This was confirmed through interviews with the students. The Panel is satisfied that the virtual learning environment created and implemented both at AU and BU contributes to the achievement of the ILOs of the programme.

- All regular meetings between the PhD students and their supervisors are formally recorded and monitored by the Programme and Partnership Lead. In addition, the quality of supervision including the number of supervision meetings are monitored through the Annual Progression Reviews, which is conducted by a Panel consisting of a BU faculty member, AU recognized supervisor, and RDA, as well as through the SEC meetings. These processes and implementations are guided by the policies and procedures in the BU Code of Practice for Research Degrees. Feedback given to the PhD students during the supervision sessions and also during the presentations of their research at the annual symposiums and poster sessions with 3- minutes talks, provides the PhD students with a good opportunity to develop as an independent researcher and life-long learner.
- The PhD students are encouraged to visit BU London to work more closely with their principal supervisors and use the campus facilities. In this respect and to facilitate such visits, the Partnership Board took a decision to provide financial support for those students wishing to visit and work at BU. However, during the interviews, the Panel learned that so far, this policy has not been implemented due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions on travel. Apart from the scheduled regular meetings of PhD students with their supervisors, additional meetings are organized to discuss their research topics and share knowledge in the area of research methods, research ethics and research analysis. Annual PhD symposiums, seminars and poster sessions are all used for this purpose. The Panel is of the view that these activities provide a good formal, informal and non-formal learning environment where the PhD students can enhance their research capabilities and develop their creative and innovative abilities.

Indicator 1.5: Assessment Arrangements

Suitable assessment arrangements, which include policies and procedures for assessing students' achievements, are in place and are known to all relevant stakeholders.

Judgment: Addressed

- BU has a formal process (policies and procedures) for the PhD examination stated in the Senate Regulation 5 and the Code of Practice for Research Degrees which are followed

strictly by all stakeholders. Senate Regulation 5 outlines the standards that must be met by the candidate and specifies the learning outcomes to be achieved. The assessment of the PhD student is based on (i) a periodic assessment of his/her progress and (ii) the final assessment of the submitted thesis. PhD students go through formal progression reviews (four months, nine months and then annually) carried out by a Panel of three members, comprising a faculty member of BU, an AU recognized supervisor, and an RDA from AU/BU. The review process is monitored by the Programme and Partnership Lead and the PhD (WR) Office Administration and if the PhD student progress is evaluated as unsatisfactory, he/she could be downgraded to an MPhil. At the end of each progression review, the PhD student is provided with written feedback. For the student to be awarded the PhD degree, he/she must submit a written thesis and attend to a *viva voce* examination. During the interview sessions with BU academic staff, the Panel was assured that the assessments of the PhD students are implemented strictly and that they are consistent with the decisions and regulations of the HEC.

- The PhD (WR) programme follows the policies and procedures detailed in BU Senate Regulation 5 which are aligned with the UK QAA Quality Code, particularly the UK QAA FHEQ and the UK QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristic Statement, Code of Practice for Research Degrees. These documents are readily available to stakeholders on the BU website and are given/directed to on demand. This was confirmed in the interview sessions with the external examiners, who indicated that they are provided with these documents together with the thesis of the PhD student sitting for the *viva voce*. The PhD students interviewed informed the Panel that policies and procedures concerning their PhD journey are communicated and explained to them during the orientation sessions.
- The annual PhD symposiums aim at preparing students for defending their research at the *viva voce* as well as providing them with valuable feedback on a number of issues and as such, its attendance is compulsory. The PhD students are also provided with informal feedback during their meetings with the Programme and Partnership Lead as well as during unscheduled meetings with their supervisors. Another important source of feedback to the PhD (WR) students is the Annual Progression Review conducted by a Panel consisting of a BU faculty member, AU recognized supervisor and RDA from BU/AU. This formal feedback is considered partly as a formative assessment, since it determines the continuity of the student's status as a PhD student (see below), whereas the annual symposiums, seminars and poster sessions are all considered as formative assessments of the programme. Summative assessment of the PhD student is represented by the Thesis Examination which is conducted by a Panel consisting of an internal examiner, external examiner and chaired by an independent chair. The award is given only to those students who successfully pass the examination of the thesis and *viva voce*.
- Ethical issues and principles of scientific research are detailed in the BU Code of Practice for Research Degree. All staff and PhD students are accountable for observing the highest

standard of conduct in their research. BU's Research Integrity Code of Practice lays down the principles and supporting policies that apply to the ways in which research at the University is planned, conducted, interpreted, and disseminated. During the Doctoral Skills Development programmes, the PhD students are offered a section on research ethics and principles of scientific research. Interviews with the students confirmed to the Panel that they are informed about the expected academic behavior, ethical issues and principles of scientific research during their supervisory meetings.

- There is a planned and structured framework for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the PhD students which is implemented and documented appropriately. During the interviews, the Panel notes that both AU and BU attach great importance to the learning needs of the PhD students and support their fulfilment.
- The Annual Progression Review is a formal check points that BU use to evaluate the student progress and consequently confirm his/her continued registration status as a PhD student or if unsatisfactory, can lead to him/her being downgraded to MPhil. It is carried out by a panel composed of a faculty member of BU, an AU recognized supervisor and the RDA from Brunel/Ahlia. It is worth mentioning that this panel does not contain any member of the supervisory team of the PhD student, so as to assure the objectivity of the assessment of the PhD student. The policy and procedures on the execution of PhD examination, including the appointment of internal and external examiners and an independent chair, decisions of examiners and reporting outcomes are all set out in the Senate Regulation 5 and the BU Code of Practice for Research Degrees which are strictly observed. The Panel is satisfied that the assessments of the achievements of PhD students are fair and effective.
- The process for academic appeals for both undergraduate and postgraduate students are outlined in the BU Senate Regulation 12. Furthermore, any academic appeal against the decision of a formal Annual Progression Review or a final examination (viva voce) by the PhD student is made directly to BU, as it is the degree awarding body, in line with the Senate Regulation 5.40. The Panel considers that the provisions for dealing with academic misconduct and students' appeals are all in place.

Standard 2

Efficiency of the Programme

The programme is efficient in terms of the admitted students, the use of available resources - staffing, infrastructure and student support.

Indicator 2.1: Admitted Students

There are clear admission requirements, which are appropriate for the level and type of the programme, ensuring equal opportunities for both genders, and the profile of admitted students matches the programme aims and available resources.

Judgment: Addressed

- Admission to the PhD (WR) programme is carried out in line with the Admissions Policy and Procedures of BU and implemented uniformly on all its intakes, including candidates of the PhD (WR) programme. The Admission Policy, which is made available to all stakeholders, provides detailed information about the application process and the criteria expected for admission to the PhD (WR) programme. In addition, BU provides applicants with leaflets explaining how to apply to the programme. During interviews with the programme staff, the Panel was told that the PhD (WR) students are expected to have a minimum of 7.0 IELTS score or alternatively a BrunELT examination score of 68% minimum, write a proposal and pass the interview. Following consideration by the Postgraduate Director, the relevant Head of Department makes the final decision. According to the statistical information given at the end of the SER, female PhD students constitute at least 50% of the total registered students and in 2021, out of 16 registered students 10 were female. The Panel is of the view that there are clear and published admission policies and procedures to the PhD (WR) programme which are implemented on gender equality basis.
- The application and admission process, as explained above, follows the BU policy and procedures exactly at all stages, with interviews being conducted online due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19. All application documents are submitted and processed online via e-Vision. BU/AU are aware of the importance of admitting students who have the potential to complete the programme within the normal time (3-4 years) and to ensure this a pre-application support package is offered. During interviews with the PhD (WR) students, the Panel was very much impressed with their command of English, communications skills and overall academic backgrounds. The Panel is confident that

students admitted to the PhD (WR) programme are appropriate and their admission is consistent with the international academic standards.

- Considering the diverse backgrounds of the PhD applicants and to ensure that the admitted students complete their studies on time and also to reduce the drop-out rate, the BU/AU introduced a Pre-Application Support programme. This programme which is covered in over two months period (total 100 hours) not only helps the students in writing their research proposals and improve their English but also provides an opportunity to filter the PhD (WR) applicants, where those who are found unfit to complete the programme are advised early on not to continue with their applications. During the interview sessions with the programme management, the Panel learned that about 20% of the candidates enrolled in the Pre-Application Support programme are advised to withdraw. As a result, the dropouts from the PhD (WR) programme after the implementation of the Pre-Application Support programme went down to zero. The Panel appreciates AU/BU initiative to introduce the Pre-Application Support programme which improved the quality of PhD candidates admitted to the Programme, reduced the number of dropouts and enabled the students to graduate on time.
- As the PhD (WR) Programme does not include any credit bearing course, no consideration for course exemption through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is given. However, BU considers RPL through their clear and transparent policy, but this is not applicable to the PhD (WR) as RPL is not endorsed by HEC Bahrain. Thus, although the ultimate authority with regards to the admission process rests with BU, the regulations and requirements of the HEC are respected.
- BU/AU Partnership Board, through the Six-monthly reports prepared by the Partnership and Programme Lead, monitors the admission, progress as well as all other related activities such as the Doctoral Skills Development programmes, annual symposiums and seminars. As a result of such reviews, the aforementioned Pre-admission Support programme was introduced. During the interview with the PhD (WR) staff, the Panel learned that the admission policy is regularly benchmarked with local and international higher education institutions and revised. However, the Panel could not find any evidence supporting this claim and thus the Panel recommends that BU should carry out benchmarking with local and international higher education institutions with regard to admission process (criteria/policy).

Indicator 2.2: Academic Staff

There are clear procedures for the recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion, and professional development of academic staff, which ensure that staff members are fit-for-purpose and that help in staff retention.

Judgment: Addressed

- BU Academy of Supervisors Code of Practice and Code of Practice for Research Degrees, state that any academic staff of AU who wishes to locally supervise a student of the PhD (WR) programme must be a full member of the Academy of Supervisors and must be appointed by the BU Senate as a recognized supervisor. In order to be members of the Academy of Supervisors, AU academic staff must (i) show evidence of research capacity (at least three publications in the last five years) (ii) have experience in reviewing PhD proposals (iii) have undergone shadow supervision (iv) have experience in conducting a mock viva, and (v) attend supervisor training and other related sessions. However, recognized supervisors (AU local supervisors), as they are not academic staff of the BU, cannot be principal supervisors. Every six months a Supervisory Development programme is conducted, at the end of which successful AU academic staff become full members of the Academy of Supervisors. The Panel is confident that clear, transparent and effective policy and procedures are being followed in selecting recognized supervisors. Furthermore, the Panel appreciates the establishment of the Academy of Supervisors which contributed substantially to the supervision and research capacity of AU.
- Admission to the Academy of Supervisors requires that the AU academic staff member is active in research and has at least three publications in the last five years, in addition to the other requirements mentioned above. Continuous publication by the AU academic staff is required if he/she wants to stay as a full member of the Academy of Supervisors. Recognized Supervisors are also appraised against a set of criteria in order to remain members of the Academy of Supervisors. Those who could not meet the minimum requirements, have their memberships terminated. This was confirmed during interviews with the AU academic staff. The Panel is of the view that the Academy of Supervisors programme ensures the quality and continuity of scientific research at AU and is aligned with the research objective of the institution.
- AU has a workload policy that considers the rank of the academic staff and allocates nine teaching hours for full professor, 12 hours for associate professor and 15 hours for assistant professor. Currently (in 2021), there are nine professors, 17 associate professors and six assistant professors serving in supervision, academic management and BU/AU Partnership Board at the PhD (WR) programme, for the last five years. At AU there are 13 active recognized supervisors and 16 registered PhD students. The Panel is of the view that AU has sufficient academically qualified academic staff and recognized supervisors with appropriate workloads that permit them to conduct research and academic activities.
- BU organizes a number of professional development workshops for the academic staff of BU, which is open to all academic staff of AU, besides the recognized supervisors. These workshops cover a number of topics such as 'Process of Supervision', 'Viva and Beyond', 'Supervisor as a Critical Friend', 'Misconduct and Appeals' which are relevant for effective supervision of the PhD students and also for enhancing the research capacity of the

participants. During interviews, the academic staff of AU confirmed the benefits of such professional development workshops as well as the Supervisory Development programme which is conducted every six months.

- During the interview sessions with the AU senior administrators, the Panel was assured that they follow on their highly qualified academic staff and pay utmost attention to meeting their needs. As the PhD (WR) programme has 13 recognized supervisors against the registered PhD student of 16, academic staff retention and turnover is not an issue at the AU.

Indicator 2.3: Physical and Material Resources

Physical and material resources are adequate in number, space, style and equipment; these include classrooms, teaching halls, laboratories and other study spaces; Information Technology facilities, library and learning resources.

Judgment: Addressed

- According to the Collaboration Agreement between AU and BU, AU is to provide facilities and local supervision, whereas BU provides library and other related resources as well as principal supervisors and other necessary academic support. Currently, AU has 24 classrooms with 30-35 seats, a theatre with 84 seats and a 39- seat seminar room that are equipped with network connected-computers and Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Office and Antivirus programmes. In addition, AU reserves a dedicated PhD Room for the Doctoral students which is equipped with PCs and Printer. All classrooms and lecture halls have high-resolution projectors and smartboards. AU has twelve IT and engineering laboratories, all of which are internet-enabled and linked to the University LAN. Considering the facilities that AU possesses, the Panel is of the view that the PhD (WR) programme has sufficient facilities to conduct its academic activities, such as the Doctoral Skills Development programmes, Pre- Application Support programmes, supervisory training sessions, annual PhD symposiums and other related activities.
- All AU academic staff have a desktop computer connected to a shared printer and network. The network is maintained through a server and internet service is available 24 hours via Wi-Fi and LAN services. During the interview sessions with the academic staff and the students, the Panel was able to confirm that they are satisfied with the IT facilities and services offered at AU. The Panel is satisfied that the IT facilities are sufficient to meet the needs of the academic staff, PhD students and activities organized.
- AU has a library that provides adequate physical and electronic resources for all its students, including the PhD students. The library is maintained by a team of staff who also provide training and assistance to students in order to enable them to use the physical

and electronic resources effectively. Currently, AU library has more than 11,000 conventional books across all the disciplines and a digital library which provides tens of thousands of e-journals and e-books through subscription to many international on-line databases from various publishers. In addition, the PhD students and recognized supervisors have access to the entire electronic holdings of BU's e-library thereby accessing up to 139 databases. The SER states that the BU library provides access to more than 11,000 Electronic Books, a very large number of Electronic Journals and reference materials databases. Furthermore, AU reserves a dedicated PhD room for the Doctoral students which is equipped with PCs and Printer. During the interview sessions, the Panel observed that the academic staff and the PhD students are satisfied with the facilities at the library and the services offered to them.

- AU has a set of policies for maintaining and upgrading its Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources periodically. At the beginning of each semester, the AU ICT team checks and provides the required maintenance for the hardware and software of classroom computers and the ICT laboratory computers. If any additional hardware or software is needed by the academic staff and students, it is purchased in coordination with the College concerned. During the interview sessions, the Panel was able to confirm that AU management ensures the maintenance of the university facilities and closely monitor their sufficiency.
- AU attaches utmost importance to ensuring the safety of its students, staff and visitors on campus through providing the necessary arrangements. It has a certified first aider and a qualified nurse serving on campus during the office hours. In addition, AU has a well-equipped health clinic with a full-time licensed nurse to attend to any minor health-related issues. Furthermore, AU provides health insurance coverage for all its staff and PhD students while they are on campus. AU conducts fire evacuation drills regularly and provides training to all its staff and students on how to react in case of emergencies. In addition, a team is established to assist all during any emergency. Contact numbers of security staff are posted at the campus and made available on the website. The Panel considers these measures to be adequate and effective in ensuring the health and safety of all AU staff and students on campus.

Indicator 2.4: Management Information Systems

There are functioning management information and tracking systems that support the decision-making processes and evaluate the utilisation of laboratories, e-learning and e-resources, along with policies and procedures that ensure security of learners' records and accuracy of results.

Judgment: Addressed

- BU has a database, Student Information Technology Systems (SITS), where all the records and statistical data of the PhD (WR) programme are kept. On the other hand, personal students' information, records of their meetings with their supervisors, and Annual Progression Review Reports are all kept in the e-Vision of BU. Minutes of the meetings held by the Partnership Board, Doctoral Committee and SEC are all also kept in the e-Vision. The Partnership Board uses all such information to make informed decisions and present them to BU Education Committee.
- The Panel was not provided with sufficient evidence to demonstrate that both AU and BU have policies and procedures in place for tracking the utilization rate of its laboratories, e-learning and e-resources and that tracking reports are used in making appropriate decisions. Hence, the Panel recommends that AU/BU should develop a formal and effective mechanism to monitor the utilization rates of its learning resources and use them to make informed decisions about the programme.
- BU has a policy on Data Protection and a hierarchy of access and use, which are given in its website. Data related to students registered in the PhD (WR) programme could only be viewed by the supervisory team, the Programme and Partnership Lead and some official staff. Access and modification of students' personal data is limited to authorized staff only at the BU Student Center. Academic supervisors are authorized to add information to the students records on supervisory and progress meetings only. The Panel is satisfied that BU, by controlling the access and modification in this way, ensures the security of records and accuracy of results.
- As the PhD (WR) programme does not offer any credit bearing courses, BU does not issue any transcript to the students registered in the PhD (WR) programme. The certificates/diploma that BU offers to the PhD (WR) graduates specifies the title of the awarded degree as 'Doctor of Philosophy' and the title of the research. However, it does not specify the name of the programme as 'PhD (WR) in Management Studies, Operational Research and Related Fields'. This implementation is regarded by the Panel as consistent with the provisions of the Collaboration Agreement signed between AU and BU.

Indicator 2.5: Student Support

There is appropriate student support available in terms of guidance, and care for students including students with special needs, newly admitted and transferred students, and students at risk of academic failure.

Judgment: Addressed

- The Panel notes that the PhD students are supported appropriately in terms of learning resources and guidance given to them. At the beginning of every semester, BU librarian conducts an induction programme, where information is given to the newly admitted PhD

students about the existing library resources and how to access them. The Panel was informed during the interview sessions that career guidance is provided at the supervisory meetings. The Panel suggests establishing a formal career guidance service for the PhD students to assist them in planning their future careers.

- The supervisory team (principal and local supervisors and RDA) provide a range of academic services and guidance to the PhD students to assist them in their research and to identify students at academic risk through regular supervisory meetings. Student at academic risks could also be identified at the Annual Progression Reviews. Remedial support is provided mainly through the supervisory team as well as through the Doctoral Skills Development programmes and the one-to-one tuition. As mentioned earlier, the introduction of the Pre-Application Support programme has resulted in an improvement in the quality of the admitted students whereas the establishment of the Academy of Supervisors has enhanced the supervision process and thus completion rates increased while extensions reduced. This is confirmed during the interview sessions with the management team of the PhD programme.
- At the beginning of each semester the newly admitted PhD (WR) students go through an induction programme carried out by the Brunel Subject Liaison Librarian (SLB) and a member of Brunel academic staff. During the induction session, the academic staff goes over the whole PhD programme requirements, explaining how the PhD students start the research process, the general structure of a PhD thesis, and the literature review. The SLB on the other hand explains the online facilities of BU that can be accessed off-campus and demonstrates as how to navigate Brunel internal sites such as the Blackboard Learn (BBL), Journal archives, e-Vision etc..
- Apart from meetings with the supervisory team, the PhD (WR) students meet with the Programme and Partnership Lead where academic advising can be provided. The Partnership Lead implements an open-door policy but currently he is stationed at BU due to COVID-19 and thus, provides virtual support to students. This is confirmed by the Panel at the interview sessions with the PhD students who expressed their satisfaction with the academic supervision which helps them achieve their goals.
- BU and AU attach importance to the needs of women and maintaining equal opportunities for both genders, as evidenced by the annual conference they host, where the needs women are identified and equal rights are underlined. Since the initiation of the Conference in 2017, four series of conferences have been organized. Analyzing the gender composition of the registered PhD (WR) students in the programme, it is worth mentioning that in 2007 there were 15 female and 12 male students and currently (in 2021) the number of female students is 10 and male students is six. During the interview session with the management team the Panel was assured that both AU and BU attend appropriately to the needs of the students with special needs.

- The SER indicates that AU Centre for Measurement and Evaluation (CME) conducted an annual student satisfaction survey for the PhD (WR) students for the academic year of 2020-2021 and found an 84% satisfaction rate on “communication with the supervisor and support of the College of Business and Finance”. These results are discussed in the Partnership Board meetings and issues are noted and if necessary, actions are taken for improvement. The survey consists of two parts where the first part has only four questions about the effectiveness of the supervision and the overall satisfaction with the technical and administrative services provided by AUCBF. The second part simply asks to what extent the ILOs are achieved (before the completion of the programme). During the interview sessions the Panel learned that apart from this survey, BU does not conduct any other survey to take and evaluate the views of the PhD (WR) students on various issues. The Panel is of the view that the existing survey needs to have a wider coverage to include all of the services provided (academic and administrative) and all of the learning resources (classrooms, laboratories, IT hardware and software, Library etc.) and to be itemized and evaluated for their appropriateness and sufficiency. The Panel recommends that AU and BU should develop and implement a comprehensive survey attending to all aspects of the support services (academic and administrative), analyze the results and take actions to improve areas if needed.

Standard 3

Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

The students and graduates of the programme meet academic standards that are compatible with equivalent programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally.

Indicator 3.1: Efficiency of the Assessment

The assessment is effective and aligned with learning outcomes, to ensure attainment of the graduate attributes and academic standards of the programme.

Judgment: Addressed

- The SER indicates that BU Senate has delegated authority from Council, the governing body of BU, to ensure that its PhD (WR) programme meets the threshold academic standards by monitoring the progress of periodic assessments annually and in the final assessment of the submitted thesis. BU has policies and procedures for both these assessments as outlined in the Senate Regulation 5 [SM14; SER, pp.18, 46] and the Brunel Research Degrees Code of Practice. In addition, one of the outcomes of the PhD (WR) review which was conducted in 2016 by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Brunel University London, indicated that the level of assessments' complexity against the standard was met.
- The academic standards of the programme are further supported by the mechanism for considering the annual programme monitoring process (periodic assessment of progress) and ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to ensure routine improvements as well as enhancement priorities- as previously outlined in Indicator 1.5 - as well as the final assessment of the submitted thesis. All the assessments are benchmarked against good standard practice, such as reviews being conducted in terms of the level of the assessments' complexity. For example, in the annual review of PhD students' progression, BU use formal check points to evaluate the student progress to confirm their continued registration status as a PhD student. This annual progress review is carried out by a panel comprised of a faculty member of BU, an AU recognized supervisor and the RDA. The Panel is of the view that that monitoring the progress and ensuring the validity and reliability of all the assessments are achieved and implemented effectively by all stakeholders. The Panel is satisfied that the assessments of the achievements of PhD students are fair and effective. Furthermore, the Panel is satisfied with the standardised procedures and forms as well as the variety of feedback opportunities that enhance the validity and reliability of the assessments.

- As mentioned in Indicator 1.2, the graduate attributes are based on the programme aims. In turn, the aims are aptly embedded in the PILOs. Evidence of the standards that must be met by the PhD student and PILOs that must be demonstrated are articulated in the SER and provided in the Senate Regulation 5. These standards are derived from and benchmarked against the expectations set out in the UK QAA FHEQ, and the UK QAA doctoral degree characteristics statement.
- During the interview sessions with academic staff, the Panel was able to confirm that the assessments are aligned with the PILOs and graduate attributes. Furthermore, in the final examination, the thesis is judged according to the standard for awarding a PhD. However, as outlined in Indicator 1.2 these standards are general in nature and the programme aim and PILOs should preferably also contain competencies/attributes of the subjects/disciplines that they embrace. The College External Advisory Board (CEAB), alumni and doctoral researchers' 2020-2021 survey results indicated that they were all very satisfied that the intended PILOs were met. Despite this, the Panel is of the opinion that the surveys used should be improved to gather more in-depth and appropriate data to further enhance this alignment (See Indicator 4.4).
- AU recognized supervisors are also trained on the alignment of assessments with PILOs and graduate attributes, as stipulated in the Research Degrees Code of Practice and stated in the SER. The Panel is of the viewpoint that appropriate and well implemented mechanisms are in place to ensure the alignment of assessment with learning outcomes, graduate attributes and graduates' achievement.
- As mentioned in the SER, at a strategic level, the BU/AU Partnership Board, that meets at least twice a year in Bahrain, is responsible for the monitoring, implementing and improving assessment processes. At the interview session with the BU/AU Partnership Board, the Panel was told that this Board provides guidelines for monitoring and improving the quality and standards for the PhD (WR) students. Continuous formative monitoring takes place during the PhD student's research journey by means of periodic reviews as well as feedback from external examiners, as confirmed by the Panel in the interview session with the external examiners. In addition, the viewpoints from previous reviews, namely the BU Review in 2016 and AU Review in 2017, concurred that the mechanisms for monitoring, implementing and improving the assessment process were in place. The Panel is thus of the opinion that such mechanisms are in place and are soundly implemented.

Indicator 3.2: Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is ensured through the consistent implementation of relevant policies and procedures that deter plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct (e.g. cheating, forging of results, and commissioning others to do the work).

Judgment: Addressed

- As required by the Research Council in UK, the University must provide evidence of its adherence to the principles outlined in the concordat to support research integrity in their Annual Research Integrity Report. This is supported by policies on Research Integrity and guidelines provided in the Research Ethics Handbook and BU Code of Practice for Research Degrees. The research ethics process required documents and principles of scientific research are shared with the doctoral researchers, specifically at the orientation sessions. This was confirmed in an interview with the doctoral researchers. Furthermore, the Panel was also told in the interview session with academic staff that all AU recognised supervisors receive training on academic integrity at the Academy of Supervisors' workshops. Moreover, the Panel was assured at the same interview session, that any changes to the policy and procedure on academic integrity are communicated via email, workshops and meetings. The Panel is of the view that policies and procedures relating to academic integrity, including those related to ethics and research are well-disseminated and known by students and staff.
- Theses and all progression documents are analysed for homology (plagiarism/similar text verification) with published works through the CheckIt platform. The library provides information and guidance in this regard at the induction sessions. According to the Annual Monitoring of Postgraduate Research Degrees Procedure, all submissions to the supervisory team have to be submitted via the CheckIt platform. Furthermore, a similar requirement is compulsory at least two weeks prior to the formal submission of the doctoral thesis and before the final thesis is deposited on the Brunel University Research Archive (BURA). These soundly implemented processes are corroborated by the example of a copy of CheckIt evidence before a final thesis is submitted.
- The Senate Regulation 6, Academic Misconduct Procedure and the Student Disciplinary Procedure deal with academic and non-academic misconduct and the disciplinary procedures, respectively. In addition, there are clear procedures for investigating research misconduct as referred to in the Research Integrity Code of Practice. At the interview session with academic staff, the Panel was able to confirm that the abovementioned processes for deterring and detecting plagiarism and academic misconduct, are consistently applied.
- According to the Academic Misconduct Procedure any allegation of research misconduct is reported confidentially to the BU Secretary of Council and the BU ensures that investigations into such misconduct are done in a fair and timely manner. As indicated in the SER, the Panel notes that the policies, codes of conduct and processes that detect and govern academic misconduct and plagiarism as well as the process for appropriate actions are in place and implemented. For example, the efficiency of these processes and actions

taken was confirmed in the SER when one doctoral researcher breached Senate Regulation 6 by plagiarizing another's work in their thesis.

Indicator 3.3: Internal and External Moderation of Assessment

There are mechanisms in place to measure the effectiveness of the programme's internal and external moderation systems for setting assessment instruments and grading students' achievements.

Judgment: Addressed

- Formal procedures for the internal moderation of assessment are appropriately outlined in the Senate Regulation 5 and BU Code of Practice for Research Degrees. Some examples of the appropriate procedures for internal moderation of assessment, as indicated in the SER, include the progression reviews comprised of reviews at four-weeks, nine-months and annual reviews of student submission on the e-Vision Portal. As explained in the SER the purpose of the Progress Review Panel that meet annually at AU, is to ensure that an objective assessment of the doctoral researchers' progress and development is achieved. During the interview sessions, the Panel was informed that the procedures for the internal moderation of the assessments were implemented and adhered to. Overall, the Panel is of the viewpoint that these reviews are used to confirm the continued registration of the doctoral researchers and provide an appropriate verification of progress against the set targets.
- The BU Head of Departments or their nominees appoint a supervisory team of three before an offer of a place on a PhD (WR) programme is made to the doctoral researcher. Furthermore, the Supervisory Development programme provides an opportunity for local supervisors to receive a BU certificate of supervision skills to become a recognised supervisor. The Panel is of the view that appropriate procedures for selecting and appointing internal supervisors are followed.
- The Programme and Partnership Lead and the PhD (WR) Office Administration monitor the progression reviews of doctoral researchers. These reviews are key in identifying concerns and to propose responsive action plans, as outlined in the SER. BU/AU Partnership Board receive bi-annual feedback on these progression reviews and any corrective measures, if required. The Panel was informed at the interview session with academic staff that the supervision teams support each other in exchanging perspectives and on any improvements and matters of consistency in the progression reviews. Thus, providing some form of objectivity and consistency in the assessments as corroborated in the contents of the Programme and Partnership Lead and PhD (WR) Office Administration bi-annual report that are used for the evaluation of each academic year. The report shared with the Panel referred to the annual activities documented for 2020. The Panel is satisfied that these progression reviews contribute to the review and

improvement of the PhD (WR) programme and that the fairness in grading meets the professional and academic standards of the programme.

- As mentioned in Indicators 1.5 and 3.1 and in the SER, formal mechanisms exist at a strategic level that provides guidelines for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the PhD (WR) programmes' internal moderation. These formal mechanisms are supported by the supervisor's portfolio and progress report against assessment criteria, Annual Monitoring Enhancement Priorities Form, records of all supervisory minutes and feedback to the BU/AU Partnership Board.
- The procedures and requirements for the external moderation of assessments, as outlined in the Senate Regulation 5 and BU Code of Practice for Research Degrees are observed and implemented. These procedures ensure appropriate selection and appointment of external examiners and independent chairs. The College Postgraduate Office ensures that the external examiners and independent chairs receive copies of the Senate Regulation 5 document and process documents. In the interview session with the external examiners, the Panel were informed that appropriate procedures were followed in ensuring that formal procedures for the assessment of the final thesis meet the academic standard set in the PhD (WR) programme.
- External assessment and mechanisms for fair grading were previously explained in Indicators 1.5 and 3.1 and the Panel is satisfied that the external assessment of the achievements of the doctoral researchers are fair and effective. The examiners make use of a template report on which they have five options to choose from in making their recommendations. The Panel learned from the interview session with the external examiners that this template addresses the criteria used to assess whether the thesis meets the requirements of the standards, thereby ensuring consistency and fairness in grading responses. At the same interview session, the Panel learned that after the *viva voce*, the jointly agreed on written recommendation is submitted to the College Postgraduate Office using the proforma template report. During the interview session with academic staff, the Panel learned that supervisors share their previous experiences of the *viva voce* with current doctoral researchers. The Panel suggests that the *viva* reports of the external examiners to be shared with the supervisors so that they could learn from and extract main points raised in these reports to improve their own supervision capability. Overall, the Panel is of the view that the PhD (WR) has a complete set of detailed and explicit valid and reliable final examination assessments criteria and guidelines that meet the academic standards of the PhD (WR) programme and assist in ensuring that the final assessment is done in a fair and consistent manner.
- The standards of the PhD awarded to students registered on the PhD (WR) programme and its assessment fully comply with the QAA- UK requirements, as explained in Indicator 3.1. Furthermore, the quality assurance reviews of the PhD (WR) at BU in 2016

and AU in 2017 found that the formal mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of the programmes' external moderation met the academic standard for the PhD (WR) programme. As mentioned in the SER and as outlined in Senate Regulation 5 and the Brunel Code of Practice for Research Degrees, the effectiveness of the final assessment process is monitored and evaluated. In the interview session with external examiners, the Panel learned that the external examiners considered the examination process to be professionally managed and that they have an opportunity of providing feedback on the effectiveness of the process as well as making suggestions for improvement. The Panel is of the opinion that formal and appropriate mechanisms are in place and adhered to in evaluating the effectiveness of the programmes' external moderation.

Indicator 3.4: Work-based Learning

Where assessed work-based learning takes place, there is a policy and procedures to manage the process and its assessment, to assure that the learning experience is appropriate in terms of content and level for meeting the intended learning outcomes.

Judgment: *N/A*

Indicator 3.5: Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component

Where there is a capstone project or thesis/dissertation component, there are clear policies and procedures for supervision and evaluation which state the responsibilities and duties of both the supervisor and students, and there is a mechanism to monitor the related implementations and improvements.

Judgment: *Addressed*

- According to Senate Regulation 5, the award of the PhD is made based on the final assessment of the thesis and the *viva voce* examination held at BU, as guided by the clearly stated PILOs (standards) that are appropriately written and meet the NQF requirements of Bahrain and UK. While the award of the degree depends on the final formal examination process, the supervision process and its associated formative periodic review assessments culminate in the delivery of the final thesis. The general requirements of the thesis, the responsibility of the PhD researchers and supervisory team as outlined in BU Code of Practice for Research Degrees, also contribute toward attaining the PILOs.
- The roles and responsibilities of the supervisors and students are *clearly stated* in the relevant policies and procedures and are communicated to all stakeholders.
- The roles and responsibilities of the supervisory team and doctoral researchers are clearly delineated in Senate Regulation 5 and the Brunel Code of Practice for Research Degrees.

- The roles and responsibilities of the supervisory team are also clearly and iteratively conveyed to them in their Academy of Supervisors workshops. Likewise, the roles and responsibilities of the doctoral researchers are clearly conveyed to them at their orientation training workshop. At the interview session with academic staff, the Panel notes that both the recognised supervisors and doctoral researchers receive emails and material regarding any updates, including any changes in the roles and responsibilities of both the supervisors and doctoral researchers.
- Furthermore, at the interview session with academics, the Panel learned that the RDA, an important member of the supervisory team, is responsible for identifying training and development opportunities offered within their Department, by the College or at the University's Researcher Development programme. Any changes in policies and procedures, including the roles and responsibilities of the supervisory team or doctoral researchers could be dealt with in such training and development events. The Panel is of the opinion that the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and doctoral researchers are clearly stated and communicated to all stakeholders.
- The monitoring and review process of doctoral researchers' progress and documents that need to be delivered by the doctoral researcher are well stated in Senate Regulation 5 and the BU Code of Practice for Research Degrees. The satisfaction with the quality of the supervision process is monitored by means of the quality of feedback provided to the doctoral researchers in the supervision meeting reports and progression reviews, and through the Postgraduate and Partnership Annual Monitoring process, as well as through the SEC. The feedback provided by the SEC is presented and discussed at the BU/AU Partnership Board and the Brunel Education Committee. In addition, as outlined in the SER, the BU/AU Partnership Strategic Lead Director and the Programme and Partnership Lead actively manage the expectations of the students and supervisors. The Panel noted during the interview sessions that the doctoral researchers were pleased that their supervisors considered their feedback about improving the supervision process, while the alumni were very pleased with the quality of supervision process and the feedback they received.
- During the interview sessions with academic staff and doctoral researchers, the Panel noted that all the stakeholders were satisfied with the IT services and the library facilities and resources. The Panel also noted the doctoral researchers' satisfaction with the monitoring and reviewing of the supervision process. Feedback on the quality of resources and facilities in the 2020/21 student survey was very positive. Furthermore, Doctoral researchers are able to provide feedback on all facilities and resources through the SEC.
- The rigorously implemented mechanisms for the assessment of the thesis are clearly explained in the SER and outlined briefly in this indicator as well as in Indicators 1.5 and 3.1. In the interview session with the staff involved with quality assurance, the Panel was

informed that the PhD (WR) programme is benchmarked against other universities in the UK, particularly with regards to the time to completion.

- There are mechanisms in place for monitoring the supervision process, the progress of doctoral researchers and formative and final examination assessments (See Indicators 1.5 and 3.3). The mechanisms for monitoring and improving the supervision process and assessments were confirmed in at least five of the interview sessions. The Panel acknowledges that the mechanisms for monitoring and improving the overall process are effectively implemented.

Indicator 3.6: Achievements of the Graduates

The achievements of the graduates are consonant with those achieved on equivalent programmes as expressed in their assessed work, rates of progression and first destinations.

Judgment: Addressed

- In Indicator 1.1, the Panel confirmed that the PhD (WR) programme abides by the NQF qualifications design requirements of the UK QAA Quality Code and UK QAA FHEQ NQF Level 8 as well as being aligned to Bahrain NQF at Level 10 as a foreign cross-border qualification. As mentioned in the previous section of this Indicator 3.5, the level of the doctoral researchers' achievement is based on the scrutiny of their assessed thesis and, according to the SER, the standard of the awarded degree is also benchmarked against the sector by involving external examiners in all viva voce defenses. In the SER, it is mentioned that there are 146 Scopus Index publications by Alumni. This number of publications is confirmed in the minutes of the CEAB. According to the same CEAB minutes, the SER, a sample of research awards and the selection of papers viewed by the Panel, it is evident that innovative research outputs were published in a number of reputable journals in niche areas such as gender equality, sustainable growth and the digital transformation's impact on local and international society, supporting Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030. In addition, the SER clearly mentions that some of alumni serve on journal editorial boards while others perform peer reviews. The Panel learned from the alumni interview session that this was the case and that the alumni felt confident to write papers for publication in reputable journals and present conference papers. Furthermore, the Panel was persuaded in the same interview session that the PhD (WR) programme enhanced their ability to think differently and have different perspectives about their world of work and life in general. The Panel is of the viewpoint that the level of students' achievements is appropriate based on careful scrutiny of their thesis and reflects their ability to be creative, innovative and think differently.
- The statistical information provided in the SER reported on the number of students admitted to the programme, registrations and the number of graduates in the last five

years, 2017-2021. Despite the initial and additional cohort analysis information provided, it is not possible to draw conclusions based on the ratio of the admitted to the successful graduates for each cohort. Thus, the Panel suggests that consideration be given to conducting a cohort analysis to track the year-on-year progression and retention per cohort, especially as the number of graduates in each cohort may increase in the future. From the information provided, it is evident that the number of currently registered students have decreased rather dramatically from 2019 onwards. This was confirmed in the interview session by the BU administrators who explained that 20% of the applicants were advised not to continue at the Pre-Application programme stage (See Indicators 1.1. and 2.1). While this contributed to the improvement of the quality of the programme, the number of new applications is reduced. On the other hand, the Panel also learned in the interview session with the senior management of the programme that this decrease in the number of doctoral researchers admitted is largely attributed to the economic impact of COVID-19. However, the Panel was reassured that the PhD (WR) programme is regarded as being prestigious and that a recruitment campaign would be launched to increase the number of PhD applications, thereby ensuring the success of AU/BU collaboration. The Panel notes that the AU/ BU Partnership Board considers and monitors the numbers of applications, completion rates and registration status of all students and that the PhD (WR) programme is meeting the four-year maximum period completion rate, which was also confirmed in interviews with alumni and with staff involved in quality assurance.

- As previously discussed in Indicators 1.5 and 3.3, student progression and the assessment are tracked and monitored until the final approved thesis is submitted to the university repository, BURA, within the four-years period. Ensuring that student progression leads to graduating PhD researchers within the four-year period is observed by the Panel. Furthermore, the Panel learned at the interview session with staff that BU continuously benchmarks doctoral recruitment, retention and completion rates with other universities in the UK. Overall, the Panel's viewpoint is that the PhD researchers' progression meets the academic standard of the award. Additionally, according to the SER, the Alumni Club ensures that there is an interaction between current doctoral researchers, supervisors and graduates to share knowledge and experience. This was confirmed to the Panel during the interview session with the alumni. As outlined in the SER AU also tracks its contribution towards meeting the its KPI goals that are aligned with the HEC strategy 2014-2024. To date, 48 PhDs have been awarded, of which 28 are academics in HEIs, 13 are in leading government positions and seven consultants in research and development fields. In addition, the SER indicates that 21 women graduated, which is aligned with the National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women. The Panel confirms that student progression and graduate destinations data are used to ensure that academic standards are met.
- In the interview sessions, the Panel noted that both alumni and employers were very satisfied with the graduate attributes developed in the PhD (WR) programme. The

members of the CEAB and external examiners were pleased with the quality of research that is contextualised to the Bahrain context as well as the development of critical thinking ability, communication and presentation skills of the graduates.

Standard 4

Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance and continuous improvement, contribute to giving confidence in the programme.

Indicator 4.1: Quality Assurance Management

There is a clear quality assurance management system, in relation to the programme that ensures the institution's policies, procedures and regulations are applied effectively and consistently.

Judgment: Addressed

- There is a clear portfolio of institutional policies and regulations for the quality assurance of this programme. As a BU PhD programme, it belongs to the full range of programmes/awards offered by BU and as such it is covered by both internal institutional quality mechanisms as well as external reviews undertaken by the UK QAA. Policies and regulations cover the whole spectrum of activities in the programme and are clearly included in key documents of the University. Policies and regulations are outlined in great detail on the website of the programme and are made available to students and supervisors.
- The quality assurance management system, in relation to the programme within the College, is consistently implemented and adheres to the quality assurance management system used in BU. There is an annual internal compliance manual which guides the implementation of various activities. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that the quality assurance management is comprehensive, covering the whole spectrum of the student's experience from application to allocation of supervisors, to planned supervisory meetings, to the final examination.
- The implementation of policies and procedures across the College and the Departments is secured through a combination of regulations/procedures (e.g. Senate regulations for PhD programmes, annual monitoring and periodic reviews of the programme) and the involvement of academics/staff with hands on knowledge of the programme and experience in quality assurance practices, thereby ensuring that quality is being upheld and sustained by both partners involved. During interviews with faculty, staff and students, the Panel was able to detect that information pertaining to quality is disseminated to faculty and that there is a common understanding of quality assurance management system by all, which provides additional confidence to the overall quality assurance management system applied. The Panel appreciates the high caliber and

commitment of the staff entrusted with the programme, which reflects not only the strategic nature of the programme for both parties but also their commitment to resourcing it as required.

- Annual and periodic reviews are undertaken and allow for monitoring, evaluation and constant improvement of the quality assurance system. Internally, the performance of the programme is explicitly considered alongside other PhD research degrees offered by BU and this provides clear opportunities to monitor the programme, recognize good practices and recommend amendments/improvement in line with the continuous assurance and improvement of quality principles. From an external to the college perspective, the quality assurance management system is further scrutinized at the level of the University (periodic reviews) and through the UK QAA.

Indicator 4.2: Programme Management and Leadership

The programme is managed in a way that demonstrates effective and responsible leadership and there are clear lines of accountability.

Judgment: Addressed

- There is an enhanced clarity with regards to the management and leadership of the programme, which is made possible through a well-defined governance chart of the programme and partnership as well as a set of clearly articulated responsibilities and role descriptions of committees and individuals, all of which are appropriate for this programme. Critical to this is the BU/AU Partnership Board and the Doctoral Committee which include relevant people across all managerial levels of both partners. Reporting lines are clear and ensures wide dissemination of issues surrounding the programme as well as decentralized and local decision making, which is efficient and effective. As such, the Panel considers that this is quite an effective and agile structure and appreciates the well-established organizational and management structure, in partnership between BU and AU, with committed and effective leadership.
- All the management roles and committees in the partnership are supported by clear terms of reference, examples include the BU/AU Partnership Board, the Doctoral Committee, SEC, among others. Related to the above is the key role played by the AU/BU Partnership Strategic Lead Director who has a very detailed job description and a key bridging role between the requirements of the HEC from one side and that of the UK QAA from the other. The Panel acknowledges the significance of this role which reflects effective management of the programme and the commitment of BU to this partnership.
- Operationally, the programme is overseen by the AU/BU Partnership Board and delivered through the Programme and Partnership Lead and the Doctoral Committee. As stated in SER, 'The link at Brunel is the AU/BU Partnership Strategic Lead Director, the Secretary

to the Partnership Board and the Brunel Steering Group comprising staff drawn from the colleges, Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment (CMSR) Department, the Postgraduate Director and the Programme and Partnership Lead'. Direct contact between the AU/BU Partnership Strategic Lead Director, Programme and Partnership Lead and AU/BU Partnership Board Secretary is maintained with individual supervisors. Operational management of the student life cycle is undertaken by the College Postgraduate Office in the same way as all other postgraduate provision at BU is managed and supported administratively. Beyond this clear and all-inclusive operational responsibilities, BU maintains a full academic responsibility of the programme and, in close collaboration with AU, a joint custodianship of the academic standards and operational resources required for the effective and efficient running of the programme.

- In addition, there is clarity as regards to managing complaints or addressing missed deadlines and other obstacles as they arise, thus demonstrating effective and responsible leadership. A notable example of such leadership is the creation of the Academy of Supervisors which provides a better experience for students through developing local supervisory talents thus contributing to the academic skills and competencies of AU academic staff.
- As stated above there are important mechanisms/procedures to warrant the quality of the programme both in operational and strategic terms. All students of the partnership have equal access to BU educational resources as any other UK or international Brunel students. From interviews with academic staff, the Panel notes that an equivalent Brunel student experience is being provided which is directed and monitored by the Doctoral Committee and SEC, among others. It is worth mentioning here that based on the UK's Office for Students, UK universities bear full responsibility for the student experience they provide to all of their international partnership, irrespective of whether their student is resident or not in the UK.

Indicator 4.3: Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme

There are arrangements for annual internal evaluation and periodic reviews of the programme that incorporate both internal and external feedback and mechanisms are in place to implement recommendations for improvement.

Judgment: Addressed

- The programme is subject to annual and periodic reviews which cover the full spectrum of relevant management and quality issues. The process follows the annual/periodic reviews of BU and results in a report which is submitted to Brunel's Education Committee. This is followed by meetings with the Vice-Provost (Education) to identify enhancements. Recommendations and action points emanating from the annual and periodic reviews are

assigned well to relevant staff in the programme who are tasked with their implementation.

- The periodic review is supported by a clear policy and a comprehensive procedure which is in line with the UK QAA guidelines for the BU and as such it is included within the normal cycle of periodic reviews by BU. The PhD (WR) is one of many doctoral programmes delivered by BU and hence, it is not clear how much attention it receives at this level, both in terms of detailed analysis as well as attention. However, this is compensated quite well by the leadership of the programme. During the interviews with staff the Panel detected a clear sense of ownership and pride by everyone involved and a strong motivation to contribute to the sustainable success of the programme.
- The periodic review includes all relevant stakeholders of the programme. A detailed description of all the input considered is outlined in the Periodic Programme Review Procedure. Based on the interviews with employers, the Panel concluded that there is a significant support for the programme in Bahrain and willingness of external stakeholders to engage with it actively and prominently. Based on this, the Panel suggests that the programme leadership finds ways to further engage external stakeholders (e.g., employers, alumni, policy makers) in the strategic as well as operational development of the programme.
- As reported in SER, the programme has been subjected to three periodic programme reviews, the most recent being in 2017. The results of the periodic reviews are submitted and discussed at the College Education Committee, which is followed by meetings with the Vice-Provost (Education) in order to identify enhancements. Following approval by the Senate, actions are assigned to relevant faculty/staff and their progress is monitored by the Brunel/Ahlia Partnership Board. The last comprehensive review of the programme took place in 2017. There is evidence that recommendations emerging from that review guided continuous improvement of the programme. The provided evidence indicates that the team has reflected carefully on the programme, developed milestones and diligently matched them with tracked action.

This, in the Panel view, constitutes a very effective and widely engaging mechanism for assuring the implementation of the results from the periodic reviews.

Indicator 4.4: Benchmarking and Surveys

Benchmarking studies and the structured comments collected from stakeholders' surveys are analysed and the outcomes are used to inform decisions on programmes and are made available to the stakeholders.

Judgment: Partially Addressed

- Based on the SER, similarly to other doctoral programmes, the PhD (WR) is benchmarked through the UK QAA's qualifications framework and the QAA statement on doctoral degree characteristics. Further benchmarking against the sector in the UK is ensured through the rigorous examination process as set out in Senate Regulation 5 and the Code of Practice for Research Degrees. External examiners further ensure comparability of academic standards, and they are invited to comment on the standard of supervision.
- At the national level, the PhD (WR) was aligned with Bahrain NQF at level 10, which is equivalent to level 8 FHEQ. However, there was no evidence of any further benchmarking done locally against equivalent degrees offered by other universities in Bahrain, as none currently exist. Overall, there is a clear need for a better approach to benchmarking the programme. Hence, the Panel recommends that the PhD (WR) senior management should conduct a benchmarking analysis with carefully identified KPIs to compare its performance with other similar programmes in the region and internationally and use its findings for further improvement.
- There is some evidence of surveying the students from a survey taken in 2021, but nothing beyond that. While BU has not performed any survey on the students or graduates, AU has collected comments through surveys from the CEAB, Alumni and PhD (WR) students. The Panel examined these surveys and concluded that their contents could further be improved to be fit for purpose. The Panel thus, recommends that AU should revise the content of its surveys to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and after analyzing the results, implement action plans for improvement.
- There is no sufficient evidence to show how the survey results are analysed and used to inform decisions taken and improvements/amendments made to the programme. However, the close working relationship among administrative roles and faculty on the programme creates an environment where suggestions and any feedback from faculty and staff is taken into account and acted upon, as evidenced in the annual and periodic reviews explained earlier. The Panel is of the opinion that improving the aforementioned surveys will allow more and better insights and by implication more opportunities to inform decisions on the programme.
- As it was identified earlier, implementation of any improvements to the programme follows a formal approach in that improvements are assigned to different staff members in the programme and progress is monitored and then reported to the BU/AU Partnership Board. This is achieved through the annual and periodic reviews of the programme. During the meeting with alumni and the CEAB, the Panel was informed that improvements to the programme are communicated to these stakeholders during their meetings.
- During interviews with various external stakeholders, the Panel witnessed a full satisfaction of the stakeholders with the programme. Particularly students and alumni

who expressed their satisfaction with changes introduced such as the pre-application support package.

Indicator 4.5: Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs

The programme has a functioning advisory board and there is continuous scoping of the labour market and the national and societal needs, where appropriate for the programme type, to ensure the relevancy and currency of the programme.

Judgment: Addressed

- There is a CEAB, with clear terms of reference, consisting of significant figures from the local economy, employers and members of the alumni association which is run by the alumni themselves. During the site visit virtual interviews, the Panel noted the commitment and passion of CEAB and their keenness to support the programme.
- Given such strong identification of the CEAB and the alumni with the programme, the Panel would like to reinforce the suggestion provided earlier in Indicator 4.3 for further engagement of the CEAB. During the site visit interviews the Panel was informed by the alumni members of the CEAB that improvements such as the introductions of the pre-application support package and decision to provide financial support for student wishing to visit BU were initiated as a result of discussion at the advisory board.
- From interviews with the programme staff, the Panel noted that given the nature of the programme, it is difficult to define the relevant labour market, as graduates may follow different career paths and not only in academia or inside Bahrain. However, the partnership has a very good record of destination of graduates and their achievements which allows it to judge the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme. A clear assessment of these achievements and their direct alignment with specific objectives of Bahrain's national strategies is presented in the SER.
- From the very beginning of the programme there has been clear effort to align it with the Bahraini market and the national needs, particularly in terms of growing the number and research potential/output of PhD holders in the Kingdom. The KPIs of the programme are linked clearly to Bahrain's national strategy(ies) and plans for advancing society. This is noted by the Panel as it allows for a strong purpose-based positioning of the programme in the Kingdom, especially given its long-standing nature and outstanding achievements in terms of publication and career development of its graduates.

V. Conclusion

Taking into account the institution's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the virtual site visit, the Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the DHR/BQA *Academic Programme Reviews (Cycle 2) Handbook, 2020*:

There is Confidence in the Doctor of Philosophy in Management Studies, Operational Research and related fields offered by Brunel University London and College of Business & Finance, Ahlia University (AU).

In coming to its conclusion regarding the four Standards, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

1. The introduction of the Pre-Application Support programme which improved the quality of PhD candidates admitted to the Programme, reduced the number of dropouts and enabled the students to graduate in time.
2. The establishment of the Academy of Supervisors which contributed substantially to the supervision and research capacity of AU.
3. The high caliber and commitment of the staff entrusted with the programme, which reflects not only the strategic nature of the programme for both parties but also their commitment to resourcing it as required.
4. The well-established organizational and management structure with committed and effective leadership.

In terms of improvement, the Panel recommends that Brunel University London and/or College of Business & Finance, Ahlia University should:

1. Monitor and revise the Agreement for Doctoral Programme (Without Residence), dated 12 August 2006.
2. Carry out benchmarking with local and international higher education institutions with regard to admission process (criteria/policy).
3. Develop a formal and effective mechanism to monitor the utilization rates of its learning resources and use them to make informed decisions about the programme.
4. Develop and implement a comprehensive survey attending to all aspects of the support services (academic and administrative), analyze the results and take actions to improve areas if needed.

5. Conduct a benchmarking analysis with carefully identified KPIs to compare its performance with other similar programmes in the region and internationally and use its findings for further improvement.
6. Revise the content of its surveys to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and after analyzing the results, implement action plans for improvement.