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

Directorate of Higher Education Reviews

Programme Review Report

Gulf University
College of Administrative and Financial Sciences
Bachelor in Mass Communication
Kingdom of Bahrain

Site Visit Date: 18–20 April 2022

HA053-C3-R053

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Acronyms

ACEJMC	Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
APRs	Academic Programme Reviews
BMC	Bachelor in Mass Communication
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CILO	Course Intended Learning Outcome
CIPR-UK	Chartered Institute for Public Relations- United Kingdom
CTLAC	College Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
GU	Gulf University
HEC	Higher Education Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HoD	Head of Department
IT	Information Technology
MIS	Management Information System
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PIAB	Programme Industrial Advisory Board
PILO	Programme Intended Learning Outcome
QADC	Quality Assurance & Development Centre
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SER	Self Evaluation Report
SIS	Student Information System
UPDRC	University Programme Review & Development Committee
UTLAC	University Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee

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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	

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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 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.

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II. The Programme's Profile

Institution Name*	Gulf University
College/ Department*	College of Administrative and Financial Sciences
Programme/ Qualification Title*	Bachelor in Mass Communication
Qualification Approval Number	Cabinet Decision No. (1649-03)
NQF Level	-
Validity Period on NQF	-
Number of Units*	48
NQF Credit	-
Programme Aims*	• Develop students' knowledge and understanding of theoretical and applied media studies including communication systems, theories, history, linguistics, communication technology, humanities, social sciences, economics, management, and research methods. • Develop students' practical and technical skills to produce various innovative media materials within contemporary media practices in the digital age • Equip students with critical thinking, problem-solving, research skills, independence, and lifelong learning skills appropriate for media professionals including digital media and social media in delivering messages to the target audience effectively • Provide opportunities to foster creativity, reflexivity in the media production, content creation, distribution, and circulation of different media forms through multiple channels within the context of culture and professional standards. • Empower students with ethical, legal, and professional principles in the pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, diversity, and responsibility towards societies. • Provide a dynamic learning environment including specialized

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	labs and studios, software, multimedia platforms that can expose the students to industry practices with media writing, presentation, production, and digital skills.
Programme Intended Learning Outcomes*	**LO1: K-TU:** Demonstrate the knowledge and understanding with communication concepts, principles, theories, and historical, social, political, cultural backgrounds along with their application in the media field.
	LO2: K-TU: Demonstrate the awareness of role of changing technologies, including digital tools and new technology in designing and producing all types of Media production considering the target audience.
	LO3: K-TU: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the role of the media contents in shaping the culture and developing society.
	LO4: K-TU: Describe the stages of media production within the socio-economic context and culture.
	LO5: K-TU: Discuses in-depth knowledge and awareness of professional practice ethics and responsibilities towards the mass communication industry, society, and environmental sustainability.
	LO6: K-PA: Practice media editing and publishing skills by using a variety of digital media platforms.
	LO7: K-PA: Apply various skills, ranging from data analysis and numerical and statistical skills to web-based technology to carry out pre and post media production.
	LO8: K-PA: Produce media work by using a wide range of new and relevant communication technologies for all forms of media production, including sound, images, videos, written word, and all forms of digital media.
	LO9: K-PA: Translate media texts into English and vice versa for the traditional and new media framework.
	LO10: K-PA: Apply legal, ethical, and other regulatory frameworks related to media production, culture, circulation, and reception of different media messages.

	LO11: S-A: Analyse collected evidence that helps in finding the truth and solving communication issues in the real-life practices. **LO12: S-A:** Interpret the information to formulate arguments conclusively and effectively for written, oral, visual, and digital forms. **LO13: S-PS:** Analyse the most appropriate approaches in writing research, articles, and reports, based on convincing arguments for the target audience. **LO14: S-PS:** Develop creative ideas and innovative solutions in the media fields related to creating content, distribution, circulation, and receiving. **LO15: S-PS:** Evaluate media and communication forms, considering academic and professional agreements, issues, and discussions. **LO16: S-C:** Communicate effectively and persuasively in oral, written, and visual communication forms appropriate for the target audience. **LO17: C-A:** Take the responsibility of self-learning in conducting media projects and research and demonstrate the tenacity for life-long learning and adaptability to multicultural perspectives. **LO18: C-C:** Participate in a group or team and display team building and leadership capabilities within a team for collaborative tasks. **LO19: C-C:** Take the initiative to complete the assigned tasks within a specific time. **LO20: C-R:** Adhere to ethical and professional rules to successfully engage in social development during media practices.

*   Mandatory fields

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III. Judgment Summary

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The Programme's Judgment: Confidence

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

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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	Addressed
Indicator 4.5	Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs	Addressed

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IV. Standards and Indicators

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Standard 1

The Learning Programme

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

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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: *Partially Addressed*

- As per the Self Evaluation Report (SER) and supporting documentation, the Bachelor in Mass Communication (BMC) programme is delivered by the Department of Media and Public Relations, College of Administrative & Financial Sciences at Gulf University (GU) since the Academic Year 2007-2008. The SER clearly describes the planning process of the programme, which is done in line with the GU policies and procedures. The programme academic plan is following a clear systematic process which complies with the college and university regulations. The Panel noted during the site visit interviews and from the evidence provided that the programme revision was discussed with the Programme Industrial Advisory Board (PIAB). The Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) meet many of the standards set by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC). The programme is also recognised by the Chartered Institute for Public Relations- United Kingdom (CIPR-UK) which the Panel appreciates. The Panel finds that the programme is relevant, fit for purpose, and complies with the regulations.

- At the institutional level, GU has a Business Continuity Policy and Procedures for risk assessment and analysis in the following areas: physical infrastructure, Information Technology (IT) and information sources, finance, staffing, and learning resources. At the departmental level, the Panel was provided with evidence of a risk management plan for the academic year 2021-2022 which addresses possible risks such as student intake, readiness to adapt to the new mode of teaching, learning resources, staffing, and financial sustainbility. The Panel recommends that the College should develop and maintain a plan for the identification of risks at the programme level, as well as an analysis of these risks and their mitigation.

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- The SER states that during the academic year 2019-2020, the application for qualification placement was prepared and the programme is ready to submit the application for qualification placement on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) once the required notification letter comes from the General Directorate of NQF & National Examinations. In 2019, the College Dean formed two independent panels one for mapping and the second for confirmation. The initial mapping scorecards were prepared by course instructors and reviewed by the mapping panel. Finally, the confirmation panel approved the proposed NQF level and credit value of the course/unit and the overall programme/qualification after thorough revision and discussion with the mapping panel. The Panel found that the programme adheres to the NQF's qualification design requirements as well as the related mapping and confirmation processes although it has not yet been officially placed.

- The formal title of the programme is Bachelor in Mass Communication. This is a standard degree title, which includes three tracks: Public Relations, Journalism, Radio and Television. The Panel was provided with a sample certificate in Arabic and a sample transcript in English, both reflect accurately the title of the degree. The title is properly documented on all programme description documents and the university website. The Panel found that the title is misspelled in the Student Handbook pages 11 and 42 with the letter 's' at the end (communications instead of communication). The Panel advises the Department to fix the misspelling in the Student Handbook to exactly match the title. The Panel also advises the College to add the study track of the graduates in the certificate to reflect their specialisation.

- The Panel notes that the programme aims, which have been mapped with the university and the college missions, are six in the evidence provided to the Panel while they are only five in the SER. The aims have also been mapped with the university graduate attributes. As it has been six years since the last benchmarking of the programme aims, this academic year (2021-2022) the Department has started a new cycle of reviewing the aims. The Panel examined the SER and the evidence provided but could not find any evidence of consulting stakeholders while revising the programme's aims. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should revise the programme aims in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and in all the related documents to ensure consistency.

- With respect to missions and strategic goals, the programme aims are aligned with the university mission and with the mission of the College. Knowledge of research methods and research skills are mentioned in the programme's first and third aims and 'research with sound impact' is one of GU's strategic directions. The programme aims are mapped with the university strategic directions. The Panel is of the view that the programme aims contribute to the achievement of the college and university missions and strategic goals.

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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*

- A list of eight graduate attributes are defined at the institutional level. In addition, these attributes are embedded in the BMC's PILOs. The BMC PILOs are mapped to the Programme Graduate Attributes which in turn are mapped to the University Graduate Attributes. Overall, the Panel acknowledges that the BMC PILOs reflect GU's graduate attributes.

- The BMC programme has a total of 20 PILOs. The PILOs are clearly stated and available to all stakeholders on GU's website. They are also mapped to the programme aims. The Panel considers the number of the BMC PILOs excessive and recommends that the College should revise this number in order to be consistent with international good practices.

- The BMC PILOs have been mapped to the ACEJMC. During the interview with with the senior management, the Panel was informed that the programme plans to apply for international accreditation from the ACEJMC starting from June 2022. The Panel examined the provided evidence and found that the PILOs are appropriately written and measurable. The Panel also found alignment of PILOs to NQF level descriptors.

- The Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs) are developed based on benchmarking with similar programmes and courses locally, regionally, and internationally. The SER states that course instructors refer to the NQF level descriptors for levels 5, 6, 7, and 8 to ensure the appropriateness of the CILOs in terms of NQF requirements. The Panel is of the view that the CILOs are measurable and aligned with course assessment methods.

- The CILOs have been mapped to PILOs and the CILOs/PILOs mappings are included in the BMC programme course specifications. The Panel found that the CILOs are appropriately mapped to the PILOs.

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: *Partially Addressed*

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- The BMC is a 4-years (8 semesters) programme. The Panel examined the provided BMC programme study plan for the academic year 2021-2022. The Panel found a mistake in writing the code of 'Journalism Layout' course in the study plan, which it is written as JOR351A (a prerequisite for the 'Internship 2' (INT341A) course). In the interview with the faculty members, the Panel found that the correct code is JOR451A. The Panel did not find any rationale to set 'Arab & International Communication' (COM284A) course as a prerequisite for 'Special Topics in Communication' (COM452A) course. The Panel recommends that the College should revise the prerequisite course(s) for 'Special Topics in Communication' (COM452A) and replace the 'Art of Influence & Persuasion' (PRL282A) course with a 'Public Speaking' course. Furthermore, the Panel recommends that the College should change 'Journalism in Social Media' (JOR394), 'Direction of Radio & Telvision' (RTV365A), 'Online Public Relations' (PRL490A), and 'Advertising Campaigns' (PRL384A) to compulsory courses because these courses either keep up with new trends in communication practices or are essential for any communication student who majors in Journalism, Broadcasting, or Public Relations & Advertising respectively.

- The Panel suggests changing the names and syllabi of the 'Public Opinion & Propaganda' (COM282A) course to be 'Public Opinion, as the term 'Propaganda' is not widely used anymore, and the 'Arab & International Communication' (COM284A) course to be 'International & Intercultural Communication' to cover more important and more recent topics of intercultural communication. The Panel also suggests changing the names and syllabi of 'Media & Development' (COM303A) course to be 'Media & Society', and the 'Journalism Layout' (JOR451A) course to be 'Digital Design of Publications', in order to cover the modern trends in the relationship between media and society and new forms of media and journalism. Moreover, the Panel suggests changing the names and syllabi of the 'Contemporary Communication Theories' (COM362A) course to be 'Communication Theories' as students have to be exposed to all theories either traditional or contemporary, and the 'Print Adveritising' (JOR495A) course to be 'Online Advertising' as print advertisments are not anymore important as online advertising. In addition, the Panel suggests deleting 'Photography in Public Relations' (PRL489) and 'Tourism and Hospitality in Public Relations' (PRL385) as photography is not limited to Public Relations; it is one of multiple skills and it does not need a whole course, while Tourism & Hospitality is not part of Public Relations; Public Relations can be practiced in so many sectors and organisations.

- During the interview with senior management, the Panel noted that future changes are planned to take place which include creating two new tracks: Digital Media and Digital Public Relations, in addition to adding graphic design courses with more emphasis on writing skills in both Arabic and English languages, and finally more emphasis will be given to critical thinking. The Panel has been provided with evidence on the curriculum annual reviews. The annual review recommendations were discussed in the Department Council, then in the College Programme Review and Development Committee who

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forwards them to the College council, and finally to the University Programme Review & Development Committee (UPDRC). The Panel notes that although there is evidence of reviewing the curriculum, little has changed in the BMC programme since the last periodical review which was conducted in 2016. The Panel is of the view that media and communication is a fast-moving field; accordingly, the Panel recommends that the College should ensure that the curriculum is regularly updated to keep up with the recent developments in terms of the majors offered and the courses' contents and titles.

- The Panel examined the programme study plan and a sample of course syllabi and found that there is a balance between theory and practice, and between knowledge and skills in the curriculum in general. Thirty seven out of the 68 courses offered in the programme study plan have a laboratory or studio component. The SER lists the internship, field visits, guest speakers from industry, graduation project, the use of external jurors, and project-based learning as mechanisms to ensure the balance in the curriculum. However, the mechanisms to ensure an appropriate balance between theory and practice, and between knowledge and skills are not clear and consistent. The Panel is of the view that the BMC programme is appropriately balanced but suggests that mechanisms to ensure this could be better defined and more consistent. The Panel also advises the Department to ensure that 'Communication Research Methods' (COM273A) and 'Conferences, Ceremonies & Protocol' (PRL391A) have theoretical and practical hours and that the language of instruction is clearly stated in the study plan for every course.

- The Panel was provided with samples of course files and noted that in general the courses in the programme are a relatively standard set of media and communication courses. The Panel examined samples of course teaching materials and found them comparable to similar courses offered regionally and internationally. The Panel also examined textbooks and references in a sample of course specifications, lesson plans, and course files and found that the textbooks are mostly current and were published within the five-year limit stated by the BMC programme.

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*

- GU has a Teaching and Learning Policy that was issued in September 2018. The teaching and learning methods stated in the programme specification document follow GU's Teaching and Learning Policy. Each course specification also includes the teaching methods mapped to CILOs and to each section of the course content. Some teaching methods were added such as self-learning, problem-solving, brainstorming, team-based

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learning, and blended learning (e.g. the flipped classroom approach), which were not mentioned in the university policy. The Panel did not find teaching and learning methods informed by current research findings. The SER mentions an example of research done in teaching and learning by a faculty member but it does not explain how it was used in improving the teaching methods. The Panel recommends that the University should update the Teaching and Learning Policy more frequently to add the latest methods and to ensure that the current research findings are more considered to provide a better learning experience for the students.

- In November 2020, GU issued the Distant Education Policy preceded by E-learning & Distant Education Procedure in April 2020. Both documents emphasise the importance of attaining the intended learning outcomes with the new mode of teaching. MOODLE is used as a learning management system whereas classes are conducted in MS Teams. The teaching, learning, and assessment were redesigned under the guidance of the University Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (UTLAC) to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

- GU's Teaching and Learning Policy gives more attention to teaching and does not mention explicitly the students' participation in learning. The programme specification describes the students' role in learning better. The exposure to professional practice/ application of theory is covered by the internship, and the University has issued internship procedures to implement consistent practices across the programmes. The graduation project is another way to demonstrate the students' capabilities to apply what they have learnt during the four-years learning journey and to be independent and lifelong learners. The Panel is of the view that the Teaching and Learning Policy encourages students' participation in learning, exposure to professional practice/application of theory, and the development of independent and lifelong learning.

- The SER states that during the past three academic years, 10 students' research papers in collaboration with faculty were published and two of them were awarded in students' research competitions. In the academic year 2020-2021, one student participated in a students' research competition in Al-Qasimia University, UAE and two students submitted their graduation projects in regional students' competitions in Egypt and won the first and third place. on April 20, 2021, the College of Administrative and Financial Sciences organised a Research Open Day, and one session was devoted for media research. GU also organised a Graduation Project Expo in May 2021. The Panel was provided with a sample of students' graduation projects and finds them comparable to the same work submitted in other institutions in the region in terms of creativity and innovation. The Panel appreciates that the learning environment strengthens the students' perceptions and research capabilities and motivates them to create and innovate.

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- Lifelong learning is part of GU's mission and is reflected in the BMC programme's learning outcomes. The SER states that the BMC students participated in extracurricular activities such as visits, talks, workshops, and lectures. The Panel notes that many courses such as 'Media Production for PR' (PRL485), 'Radio & TV Production' (RTV468A), 'Internship 1' (INT271A) and 'Internship 2' (INT341A) have practical components that support lifelong learning.

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*

- GU has an assessment framework, which includes policies and procedures. The policy and procedures emphasise participation (which includes many detailed methods such as class presentations, role-plays, practical exercises, etc.), course work (which includes assignments, homework, problem-solving activities, case studies, laboratory, group projects), quizzes, and the major examinations. During the interviews with the senior management, the Panel noted that the assessment of courses is verified internally and externally, rubrics are in place and reviewed by verifiers, projects' progression assessment is taking place for graduation projects, internal and external moderators are involved in all assessment methods, and jurors participate in assessing students' work. The Panel finds the assessment policies and procedures appropriate for the type and level of the programme and are implemented strictly and regularly.

- The policies and procedures and related documents are available on SharePoint. The assessment framework and principles are available in the Quality Assurance Manual. Assessment guidelines are available in the Student Handbook and the Programme Manual which can be accessed from GU's website. The SER mentions that students are informed about the assessment guidelines during the induction, and through the course specifications which are shared and explained by the courses' instructors in detail and this has been verified during the interviews with faculty members. The Panel is of the view that the assessment policies and procedures are adequately disseminated to relevant stakeholders.

- A variety of assessment methods are used to cover both formative and summative assessments. GU has specific assessment procedures for the internships and graduation projects. GU has a marking scheme to be implemented by assessors of courses, with more emphasis on written assessment methods for low-level and theoretical courses and more emphasis on student involvement and coursework assessment methods for high-level and practical courses. The coursework rubrics provide clear criteria for marking. The SER

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states that the instructors provide feedback to the students on their assessed work within one week, and for midterm examinations in the first lecture after the examinations period. During the interviews with the senior management and the students, the Panel found that the students get feedback on their assessed class work after three days, and one week for mid-term and final examinations because of the post moderation which has to be done for examinations. The Panel is of the view that the BMC has formative and summative functions with clear criteria for marking, and appropriate mechanisms for providing students with prompt feedback on their progress and performance, which assists further learning.

- There are Research Policy, Conduct of Research Procedures, and Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct Policy that take care of the ethics of research. The SER states that all the research manuscripts are checked using Turnitin to show any similarity in the text, and a similarity report is sent to the Chair of the University Research Council for necessary action. The Panel has been provided with a sample of this report. The Panel acknowledges the evaluation of research which takes into account the ethics and principles of scientific research in terms of plagiarism.

- The UTLAC conducts internal moderation (post assessment) by specialised members for all major assessments (midterm and final examinations) relevant to the specialisation, on selected samples from batches of answer books from all courses. External moderation is applied for the entire course file which includes a sample of marked students' work. The Panel has been provided with evidence of internal and external moderation filled forms. For non-examination assessment, the Panel found during the interview with the department's senior management that rubrics are used after being verified internally and externally, in addition to the internal and external moderation for the whole course. During the interviews with the external moderators, reviewers, verifiers, and jurors, the Panel was able to confirm that there are transparent mechanisms for grading student achievement in assessments.

- GU has a Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures. It also has guidelines on student academic honesty but the provided document does not have a cover page with official information defining it. The Panel was provided with evidence of students' appeals and action taken against academic misconduct. The Panel acknowledges that there is evidence of addressing academic misconduct and the provisions for this.

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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*

- GU's admission policy is clearly stated, and it is published on the university website and through social media platforms. In addition, high school visits and recruitment fairs are also used as a means of publishing the admission requirements. The Panel notes that the acceptance process is on an equal basis between females and males and there is no discrimination in terms of gender, race, religion, or nationality in any admission decision. However, the Panel advises the University to cross-reference the policy in the admission procedures.

- The admission requirements are generally appropriate. The required score of 60% and above in secondary school is low as many established regional and global institutions opt for 70% and above to attract the best candidates and impact on quality education. This observation also applies to applicants whose score is below 60% even though the University offers a relatively effective preparatory programme for such students to enhance applicants' ability to study and compete. The PIAB raised concern over the low-score of 60% requirement but the issue was not followed through. During the interview with the external stakeholders including the PIAB, the Panel noted that the concern over the low score of 60% is not there anymore given that students of this kind do acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to perform like other students and the quality of the programme's graduates is competitive.

- Remedial courses are provided for inadequately-prepared students. The BMC preparatory programme for applicants with a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) less than 60% involves one course in communication 'Introduction to Media Studies' (COM012A). The course content and learning outcomes of the preparatory courses have been regularly revised.

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- A credit transfer (internal and external) option is provided for transferring students. The SER mentions the completion of at least one semester in the current programme, excluding withdrawal semesters among internal transfer criteria. During the interview with the admission staff, the Panel confirmed that the semester requirement for transfer is 12 credit hours.

- The admission policy revision is based on the performance of the students and other mechanisms such as market research. External stakeholders such as external reviewers and the PIAB also provide their insight on programme improvement and entry requirements.

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: *Partially Addressed*

- GU has clear procedures for the recruitment of academic staff. The recruitment procedures start with a need analysis at the department level and once the Human Resources Department receives all recruitment plans from the different departments and units, they are sent to the University President for approval. After that, the Human Resources Department prepares a job advertisement and implements the recruitment procedure. Shortlisting of candidates is undertaken by the Dean, following which a committee is formed to conduct the interviews and a selection is made. The chosen candidate must be approved by the University President.

- New staff induction is conducted at three stages: pre-arrival, on arrival and ongoing induction. The Panel was provided with samples of Powerpoint presentations used for this purpose. The Staff Appraisal Policy and Procesures clearly describe the appraisal process. Outcomes from this process are used to inform decision-making regarding the staff development needs and are used to set objectives for the upcoming semester/year. Samples of staff appraisal were provided to the Panel. The faculty promotion is examined at the level of the College Promotion Committee and subsequently at the level of the University Promotion Committee.

- GU has a Research Policy, Conduct of Research Procedures, and a College Research Plan which are deployed and have resulted in research outputs by the BMC faculty members (11 and 20 publications in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 respectively). The SER states that GU recognises any publication in journals/conferences which are indexed in well-known International/Arab Databases and funding is provided in accordance with such

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stipulations. The SER provides a list of published collaborative research (between students and faculty) which is aligned with the University as well as the College's Research Directions. The Panel appreciates the fact that students, especially those in Com273A 'Communication Research Methods' are incorporated in research and co-author publications with faculty.

- The Panel noted that most of the research is published in journals which are not Scopus indexed. This was confirmed in the interviews with the faculty members who stated that they are seeking to publish in Scopus-indexed journals and few attempts to publish in such journals have been successful. The Panel suggests that faculty members should target Q2 and Q1 Scopus-indexed journals to have more exposure and impact on a global stage and this includes taking part in international conferences sponsored by renowned journals to have access and opportunity to publish in such specialised journals.

- The Faculty Workload Policy details the staff workload. The faculty teach on average five courses a semester (the credit hours vary from 2 to 3 hours for each course). GU take into consideration the special needs of women and its bylaws stipulate 40 hours a week including teaching, research, community service, advising, etc.. In some cases, the faculty's workload is increased by having to split a large section into two. Furthermore, during the interviews, it was brought to the attention of the Panel that the process of allocating graduation project students among supervisors is not systematic, such that instead of it being a part of the workload requirement, supervisors receive an extra pay for each graduating student they supervise. The Panel is of the view that the workload is above average. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the BMC should reconsider its approach to the distribution of graduation project students among the academic supervisors to make it more systematic, and reduce the teaching load of associate professors to allow more time for research and better benefit from their potential in research.

- A total of 13 faculty members (three Associate Professors, eight Assistant Professors and two Lecturers) contribute to the BMC programme. The majority of academic staff are majoring in Public Relations (6) followed by equal numbers in Radio and Television (3) and Journalism (3), and finally Graphic Design (1). The Panel notes that there is a need for more faculty majoring in Graphic Design. The faculty-students ratio is relatively high (1:35) as of Spring 2021. In recent statistics, where the number of students in the Spring 2021 is 304, the ratio is lower (1:27 and 1:23) if faculty teaching interdisciplinary courses and part-timers are included. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should recruit more faculty members in the area of graphic design and for other prospective courses in digital media.

- The staff professional development needs are identified through a training needs' analysis as well as the staff appraisal. The SER mentions that 'there is allocated budget for staff

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development activities as well as to support staff enhance their skill and competence and stay updated'. The majority of the staff have received the UK Higher Education Authority Fellowship. The programme was able to effectively provide the necessary technical training for teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic, including teaching practical courses through the hybrid media, as described separately in interviews with college and department senior management, faculty and students.

- GU has a Staff Retention Policy which aims to retain competent and talented employees. Two faculty members left the BMC in the last three years. The SER states that an Exit Survey is deployed to collect data about the reasons staff leave but no samples of this survey were provided. The Panel advises the College to expidite the implementation of the Exit Survey.

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: *Partially Addressed*

- The programme has a variety of well-equipped facilities including classrooms, laboratories and studios. However, the Mac, Multimedia, and Journalism laboratories have only 12 computers each, which the Panel finds insufficient given that most practical courses have more students than the number of computers in these three laboratories. The only laboratory with enough number of computers is the Public Relations/General laboratory. The Panel recommends that the College should adhere to the international standards of having laboratories with 20 computers for practical courses, and these courses should not exceed 20 students per section.

- With the exception of the computer laboratories mentioned above which have an insufficient number of computers, there are adequate IT facilities provided to students and faculty. The Wi-Fi and emails are provided and meet the students' needs. During interviews with faculty members and students, the Panel confirmed that students and facuty had adequate access to IT even during the Covid-19 pandemic. The students, for example, were given the opporutinty to remotely access computer laboratories for their practical courses.

- The SER specifies the number of Mass Communication resources available in the library (2055 printed books, 163,161 e-books and 293,861 e-journals), but the number of printed journals is very limited (3 print journals). The library provides a range of facilities for informal study, such as computer workstations, individual and group reading zones,

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individual and group work and study rooms, presentation facilities, access to the internet and databases, printing and photocopy machines, help desk, etc.

- There is a formal mechanism to ensure the maintenance of the resources and facilities and to measure their adequacy, including studios maintainance contract and infrascture tracking. Furthermore, the University provides heath and safety arrangements on campus, such as having an infirmary that provides first aid facilities to staff and students; ensuring the safety and security of premises with access granted to authorized people only; taking some measures to ensure health and safety like fire alarms, fire extinguishers, providing guidance on how to evacuate in case of emergency/ emergency exit, and finally conducting annual fire drill sessions in collaboration with the civil defense.

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*

- The programme makes use of a range of management information systems. The Student Information System (SIS) is used for registering students in courses (enrolment), drop out, transfer, documenting, grading, CGPA, progression, transcripts, results, etc.. In addition, the Learning Management System allows students to access course materials, upload assignments, attend online live assessments, etc.. These systems also generate different types of reports which facilitate decision-making.

- The SER mentions that the computer laboratory tracking mechanism utilises Labstats software to track the usage of computer systems and software applications. The KOHA system has been implemented consistently to track library access and usage of learning resources. The SER states that tracking reports are sent to the concerned Head of departments (HoDs) and deans for decision making. For example, the list of students at risk of academic failure was discussed at the departmental council meeting and a decision was made to follow up with these students. However, During the interview with the library staff, the Panel noted that the library tracks students' use of library resources but this is done in general terms and no compiled data is available for the BMC programme. The Panel recommends that the programme should track the BMC students' use of the library.

- The SIS includes functions for proper entering and verifying of student data on enrolment and grading with back up of records to preserve their integrity and confidentiality. Furthermore, GU has a Backup and Restoration Policy as well as Backup, Restoration and

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Retention Procedures which ensure that information is disseminated only to those individuals who are entitled to access it.

- The awarded certificates and transcripts are accurate in describing the achieved learning by students, and are issued in a timely manner. There are procedures for certification and authentication and the University ensures that certification issued in its name is an accurate and valid record of a student, who passed all the courses and achieved all the credits necessary for the qualification in accordance with the NQF.

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 library staff are highly qualified with sufficient years of experience to guide the students in their effective search for learning resources. They are available and willing to support the students from Saturday to Thursday. Given that most references are online, students and faculty have direct access through the library webpage and digital library tag to many databases in the form of electronic books and journals such as Al Manhal database in Arabic. The IT staff provide the support needed to the students in the laboratories. The IT Department also manages and maintains the MOODLE for all e-learning purposes. The Student Counseling Office provides support to students in non-academic issues.

- Students receive some information on possible careers in their programme specification and from their academic advisors and course instructors. This is reinforced by the contribution of the Internship and Career Development Office in exploring career opportunities. The Office also maintains a database of companies in the public and private sectors to identify training opportunities for the students as per their specialisations. The Panel notes that the role of the Internship and Career Development Office is limited in providing effective links and networking with the media market and, therefore, suggests developing a plan to remedy this.

- Induction sessions are given to new and current students on different aspects of educational and learning processes. Induction sessions are conducted to increase the awareness of the students leading to better social, psychological, and academic standing in the University. Students, for example, receive induction regarding the conduct, rules and regulations of midterm and final examinations. The SER indicates that the students' induction sessions at the start of the semester include information about the access and

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use of the library services, and samples of the available resources for the offered programmes at the University.

- GU has Academic Advising Policy and Procedures, which aims to support students in achieving graduate attributes and learning outcomes. The students meet advisors at least once a semester either physically or virtually, preferably after the mid-term examination to discuss their performance or whether the student has any academic concerns about any academic matter.

- There are appropriate provisions to integrate women's needs, ensure equal opportunities for both genders, and support students with special needs. For example, female students are members of the Student Council and the female basketball team competes at the national level. Furthermore, according to the Examination Conduct Procedures, students with special needs are given additional time to complete their assessments. They are also provided with the necessary assistance they need to move from one classroom to another.

- At-risk students are identified by the Adimission and Registration Unit. At the end of each semester, the unit extracts a list of students whose CGPA is below 2 and flags them as 'At-risk students'. After that, special support is provided to these students which includes advising sessions and teaching and learning support. If progress is not achieved, the academic advisor sends a formal request to the course instructor to provide office hours, tutorials, additional homework and encourage the student to participate more in class. As a result of adopting these measures, the percentage of at-risk students decreased from 28.4% in 2017-2018 to 17.7% in 2020-2021. The Panel concludes that the support for at-risk students and the monitoring system are adequate.

- The provided support services are regularly assessed and improved through regular surveys that elicit feedback from both internal and external stakeholders in relation to students' needs. The Institutional Performance Measurement Office conducts such surveys and sends the data to the departments concerned to see their performance and achievement. In addition, the Quality Assurance & Development Center (QADC) also conducts a general satisfaction survey for students to measure the level of satisfaction towards aspects of teaching, learning, advising, IT, internship, etc. The results of the survey are used to support the University in enhancing its services and facilities.

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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: *Partially Addressed*

- GU has clear Assessment Policies and Procedures. The SER indicates that the Department Council discusses the appropriate assessment methods that suit the nature of the BMC programme such as final project juries, reflective reports, practical examinations, problem solving exercises, laboratory assessment, etc. and the particular assessment of each course based on the nature of the course (theoretical or practical) and level (from level 5 to 8). However, the Panel notes that the grades are generally tilted towards higher grades. The issue of grade inflation is further supported by the suggestion made by an external examiner highlighting the need to increase the level of examination difficulty in response to the positively skewed grades. Furthermore, the Panel notes that the assessment of practical courses is not standardised and often left to the faculty member in question to make their own assessment plan based on the general guidelines for assessing students' performance. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the College should increase the level of examination difficulty and ensure that the BMC students' assessed work is rigorously scrutinised to reflect a normal grade distribution and grading consistency among teachers. The Panel also recommends that the College should unify the assessment tools as well as the weight of each assessment tool for practical courses, within the established GU assessment guidelines.

- The BMC programme specification document lists the PILOs in addition to listing the teaching and learning methods as well as the assessment methods to be employed in the programme, to facilitate the evaluation of the achievement of each particular outcome. Also, as per the provided samples of course specifications and assessments, assessments in each course are mapped to its learning outcomes, CILOs are mapped to the PILOs, and the courses themselves are mapped to the PILOs in the mapping included in the programme specification document. The PILOs are mapped to the graduate attributes and so collective achievement of the PILOs through the assessments in the courses guarantees achievement of the attributes.

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- Evidence provided revealed to the Panel that the PILOs listed in the programme specification document are presented with more than one assessment method for the measurement of their achievement and evaluation. To measure the achievement of the PILOs, GU relies on a two-stage process: Stage one involves a CILO Achievement Matrix, which is prepared at the end of each semester for every course offered; and stage two involves a template for mapping the achievement of PILOs against the CILOs.

- PILOs achievement in the programme is also measured indirectly, alongside the evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the programme, through the survey results of alumni, and employers, and external jurors, which happen to indicate considerably high satisfaction rates toward the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through the programme.

- There are several monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of the assessment policy. The course instructors are required to develop assessment methods that are aligned with the course learning outcomes. The alignment of the assessment methods with the intended learning outcomes is checked and verified by the College Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee (CTLAC). The committee also checks and verifies if the assessment method and each element of the assessment method are appropriate to measure the students' achievement of the mapped learning outcomes. In addition, at the end of each semester, a course instructor prepares a course report and the feedback is implemented in the same course delivered in the following semester.

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*

- The College has several documents that address the importance of maintaining academic integrity such as the Handbook on Integrity and Originality of Student Work and the Guidelines on Student Academic Honesty states that during the induction day, students are oriented to practice academic integrity and ethics. Course instructors make them aware about plagiarism in the first day of classes while sharing the course specifications, and regularly emphasise the importance of honesty and integrity before any kind of research and assessment submission during the course.

- There are sound implemented processes for deterring and detecting plagiarism and academic misconduct, which are consistently applied. These procesdure are formulated in the Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures and explained to

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students in induction sessions. The University subscribes to Turnitin, a plagiarism detection software, which provides text similarity reports. Other softwares such as Google Image and Tin Eye are also used to assess students' submitted work.

- The SER states that the Disciplinary Committee dealt with all the cheating and plagiarism cases which were recorded and amount to 37 cases of academic misconduct by students in the BMC programme in the fall and spring semesters of 2020-2021. Twenty-six of the reported cases were proven to be actual cheating/plagiarism, and they received a zero mark in the midterm assessment of spring 2020-2021. Furthermore, 11 cases were investigated for plagiarism/cheating in the final project/final examination and nine of them were awarded an F grade in the course. Regarding academic misconduct in physical examination halls, the record shows that during the fall semester 2019-2020, 10 cases had been reported in the midterm examination and seven of them received an F grade in the midterm examination for the relevant course.

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*

- GU has formal and appropriate procedures for the internal moderation of assessments. The process of internal moderation is carried out by the CTLAC. The different courses are verified and moderated by internal verifiers and moderators. This includes midterm examination, final examinations and general assessments. The process includes specifics like reviewing the alignment of assessment components with the learning outcomes, and the appropriateness of the assessment methods to the course level and type. The Panel examined a sample of pre- and post- assessment forms filled by internal verifiers and moderators and finds them appropriate. However, the Panel is of the view that more input is needed from moderators beyond making to ensure that alignments exist and are consistent. The instructors and the HoD both give feedback on the internal moderation for continuous improvement. The UTLAC and CTLAC prepare a final report on the effectiveness of the moderation process.

- There are formal and appropriate procedures for the external moderation of assessment. In addition, there are formal and appropriate procedures for the selection of external moderators. During interviews with external verifiers and moderators, the Panel noted that they were satisfied with the assessment process and explained that their suggestions were taken into consideration. They also confirmed that these assessments are consistent and aligned with the programme's and courses' outcomes. The external moderators are

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from regional universities only. The Panel, therefore, suggests to involve reviewers from renowned international universities for more input and exposure.

- External moderation contributes to the review and improvement of the courses and the programme. The instructors and the HoD prepare regular feedback reports on the moderation process to ensure the improvement of the assessment tools. The CTLAC and The UTLAC provide feedback on the moderation process. The HoD prepares an improvement plan based on the recommendations of the external moderator. The external moderator submits a feedback report on the implementation of his/her recommendations. After reviewing the evidence provided and meeting with the external verifiers and moderators, the Panel concludes that there are formal and appropriate mechanisms for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme's 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: *Addressed*

- The BMC programme requires students to complete two internship courses. 'Internship 1' (INT271A) is a one-credit course with 100 working hours (equivalent to four weeks) of workplace training conducted in the summer of the second year. The eligibility criteria require that students successfully complete 40% of the programme's total credit hours including the pre-requisite course 'Editing Press News' (JOR263A). 'Internship 2' (INT341A) is a two-credit course with 200 working hours (equal to eight weeks) of workplace training held in the summer of the third year, where students are anticipated to have completed 60% of the programme's total credit hours and INT271A. Prerequisite courses have been added to the three tracks (Public Relations, Journalism, Radio and Television) to guarantee that students are ready for the internship courses. During the interviews, students appreciated the requirement for two internship courses, stating that the first one allows them to have first-hand job experience within the specialisation, which may further assist them in the decision-making process in cases where students contemplate a change of specialisation.

- The internship procedures clearly outline the responsibilities and tasks of interns, academic supervisors, field supervisors, Career Development Office, and relevant personnel and entities. Internship orientation sessions are provided for both academic staff and students to ensure a shared accurate understanding of duties and responsibilities. The internship course specifications for INT271A and INT341A further explain the responsibilities and expectations in planning, supervising, monitoring, and

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evaluating interns. During the planning phase, an internship plan is developed with input from academic and field supervisors. Students must report to their academic supervisor every 50 hours of training. Academic supervisors meet with interns and field supervisors on a regular basis. The internship mechanism ensures that all stakeholders, including students, field supervisors, and academic supervisors, are on board in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation phases of the internship. During the interviews, the relevant stakeholders showed an overall accurate understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

- The internship course specifications for both INT271A and INT341A highlight the course objectives and CILOs, and map them to the PILOs. The internship plan further specifies the expected outcomes and maps them to the course learning outcomes. Student performance and hence achievement of the expected learning outcomes in the internship is regularly monitored by the field and academic supervisors. The assessment forms and mechanisms provide a holistic framework for evaluating the achievement of the CILOs. The provided samples of student work show varying degrees of achieving CILOs, including enhancing employability skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, etc.) and technical skills (i.e. managing media, writing for media, etc.).

- The Panel finds sufficient evidence that the internship contributes to the PILOs. In the interviews, students indicated a general satisfaction with the internship experience and highlighted its value and contribution to their employability skills. The Panel appreciates the well-articulated internship regulations and processes which guarantee that students have a consistent and organised internship experience.

- The internship course specifications clarify the assessment mechanisms. The internship assessment is based on evaluations from the academic supervisor (30%), field supervisor (40%), and a final jury panel (30%). The academic supervisor provides evaluation based on the periodic reports and site visits. The field supervisor evaluates the student performance in the assigned tasks in addition to communication, critical thinking, autonomy, teamwork, and technical skills. A final report and presentation reflecting on and summarizing the internship experience are submitted to the internship jury which consists of three faculty members. Assessment of the final report and presentation is based on a simple and clear rubric. The Panel finds the assessment to be comprehensive, well-managed, consistently implemented, and appropriate in terms of content and level.

- The effectiveness of the internship programme is primarily measured through the (i) assessment of interns' achievement of CILOs and (ii) satisfaction surveys distributed to students and academic and field supervisors. Internships are also discussed and reviewed in the PIAB and recommendations of enhancements and appropriate internship providers are implemented. For example, a recommendation to increase the internship hours from 100 to 200 was highlighted in the PIAB meeting on May 18, 2017. The recommendation was implemented in the updated degree plans.

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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*

- The 'Graduation Project' (COM484A) is a three-credit hour course offered in the eighth semester. To be eligible for the course, students are required to successfully complete 85% of the total credit hours and take pre-requisite courses, including one from the fourth semester, in each of the three tracks (Public Relations, Journalism, Radio and Television). The graduation project is intended to be a culminating experience where students apply concepts and skills and create an output suited for the corresponding industry. The COM484A course specification document states the CILOs and map them to the teaching/learning methods and assessment. The CILOs include producing a product such as short movies, documentaries, campaigns, magazines, etc. and are mapped to the PILOs, indicating that the course contributes to their achievement. To further ensure relevancy to the labour market, the PIAB proposes a number of graduation project themes and topics that are considered to be of national priorities and these are shared with prospective graduation project students.

- The graduation project procedures and course specification clearly state the roles and responsibilities of the academic advisors, the HoD, supervisors and students. The academic advisors are responsible for identifying eligible students and graduation project topics and themes. The list of eligible students and their topics is shared with the HoD, who assigns academic supervisors, and then sends the list to the Dean for approval. Prior to embarking on the graduation project, a departmental committee is formed to ensure the ethical adherence of the graduation projects.

- Academic supervisors are primarily vested with the responsibility of monitoring and reviewing the progress of students. In the planning phase, the supervisor meets with the student and prepares a graduation project plan. The academic supervisor conducts weekly meetings to follow up with the graduation project progress. Students are required to present their topics to an internal jury at the beginning of the semester. The internal jury evaluates the project aims, quality, and expected outcomes as well as the presentation quality and gives feedback. Throughout the semester, students submit reports to their academic supervisors. In addition, graduation projects are discussed in department council meetings, as part of the monitoring process. In these meetings, academic supervisors share the progress of their graduation project students. The Panel notes that

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this departmental monitoring ensures consistency and accountability in the supervision process.

- In accordance with the Graduation Project Procedures, the assessment of the graduation project is a joint responsibility of the academic supervisor and internal and external jury panel members. The assessment is conducted at different phases (milestones) of the project, starting with the initial seminar where the student presents the project plan and followed by the pre-jury (internal panel) and project progression (a continuous evaluation of student progress), and finally the final jury which consists of internal and external panel members. The assessment process is supported by various forms and rubrics. However, the Panel suguests enhancing the assessment of the graduation projects by fine-tuning the rubric elements and aligning them with CILOs (e.g. creativity or innovation is one of the CILOs, but it is not specifically addressed by the rubrics).

- A coordinator is assigned to collaborate with the academic supervisors to ensure shared understanding and consistent implementation of the graduation project. Furthermore, the QADC conducts audits to monitor the implementation of the graduation project procedures. Additionally, feedback is sought from students, and academic supervisors to gauge their satisfaction and identify opportunities for improvement. The graduation project course is also subjected to the evaluation of external moderators and external jury members as well as the PIAB, who assess the appropriateness of the assessments. Opportunities for improvement and actions to be taken are discussed in the department council meetings. The PIAB's recommendation to add an external member in the jury panel of graduation project, made on May 18, 2017, has been implemented in the current practices.

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*

- Graduate attributes and CILOs are clearly articulated and mapped to NQF and ACEJMC, and benchmarked with local, regional and international universities. Student achievement of CILOs is measured through a variety of tools that reflect a wide range of skills including the ability to create and innovate. Internal and external jury members are frequently involved in the assessment process to further evaluate student work and to ensure that the programme is at an appropriate and similar level to equivalent programmes.

- The Performance Measurement Office prepares and analyses the cohort-based data and prepares the progression, retention and study duration results. These results are shared

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with the Programme Leader and Dean and discussed during college and department meetings. The retention rate is reported to be within the normal range of 85% to 92% and the completion rate is close to four years. The Panel finds the progression, retention, and length of study to be similar to those of other programmes and universities.

- Tracking graduate destinations is governed by the Alumni Policy and Procedures. As per the policy, the Alumni Office is in charge of tracking graduates and maintaining and sharing their records. The office contacts alumni every six months after graduation for information regarding employment status, job relevance, skills and competencies required, need for professional experience, etc. The 2019-2020 graduate destination report indicates that employment rates ranged between 55% (2017-2018) to 90% (2018-2019). The average employment rate for the BMC graduates in the past four years is 73%. In addition to the alumni tracking survey, the Performance Measurement Office conducts an exit survey for graduating students and the reports indicate a general satisfaction with the programme quality and fitness for purpose.

- The BMC programme has a mechanism in place to gauge graduate and employer satisfaction with the graduates' profile. The Alumni Office in the Institutional Performance Measurement Unit maintains contact with alumni and employers and seeks their feedback through surveys. The SER indicates that there is an overall general satisfaction with the graduate profile from both alumni and employers. Feedback from these surveys highlights many opportunities for improvement which are included in the annual and periodic programme reviews. Interviews with both the alumni and employers revealed that the BMC graduates generally satisfy the expectations of the labour market.

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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*

- The management and operation of the various aspects of the academic programme (such as recruitment, teaching and learning, assessment, moderation, programme design, review and development, academic advising) are governed by a set of well-developed policies and procedures and terms of references. Policies and procedures are subjected to regular reviews by the University Policy Development and Review Committee. During the academic years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, a number of policies were developed and revised. Furthermore, in response to the pandemic, policies on distance education and e-learning were developed.

- Polices, regulations, procedures, and relevant forms are electronically communicated with stakeholders *via* SharePoint and are compiled in handbooks. These are also communicated to students during the induction programme and reiterated through email, text messages, and social media.

- The BMC programme's quality assurance and management system is regulated in accordance with the Quality Assurance and Development Framework, facilitated by a set of policies and procedures, and is primarily monitored by QADC. The QADC consists of three units, namely, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Unit which includes the Institutional Performance Measurement Office, Planning and Development Unit, Staff Professional Development Unit . Staff members receive regular training and information to enhance their quality assurance related knowledge and performance and ensure the nurturing of a culture of quality and excellence.

- The quality assurance committees at the college and university level contribute to promoting quality assurance culture and ensuring the programme's consistent adherence to policies and standards. Membership in these committees ensures full representation of not only the various colleges, departments and programmes, but also students. Two college quality assurance committee meetings per semester are conducted to check and review files related to courses, activities, and assessments among other things, and

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recommendations are submitted to the Dean. In addition to the committees, the QADC conducts regular quality audits to ensure the quality management of academic programmes, policy implementation, and adherence to standards.

- GU has a mechanism to ensure the consistent implementation of policies and procedures across the various departments. Consistent policy implementation is chiefly monitored by the University Council, College Council, and Department Council. Regular meetings are conducted to ensure consistent adherence to policies and procedures. In addition, the QADC conducts quality audits to monitor performance and ensure the programme's total adherence to quality standards. Improvement plans are prepared by the Department to address the audit recommendations. The QADC conducts a follow-up visit to ensure the implementation of these improvements. Ad hoc audit visits are also conducted to monitor and review the performance of committees and departments.

- GU has a mechanism to promote understanding of quality assurance among staff. Quality assurance policies are made accessible to staff through SharePoint. Induction sessions are also conducted to ensure understanding of the organisational structure, policies and procedures, as well as the expected roles and responsibilities. Information on policy and procedures' updates are shared with staff *via* email. Membership in committees further ensures information dissemination across various departments.

- The SER states that academic and support staff are fully aware of their role in ensuring the effectiveness of provision. Training sessions are also conducted to ensure that staff members comply with accreditation and quality standards. International guest speakers are invited to further enhance capacity building and acquaint staff with emergent trends in quality education. Evidence of improvements that took place during the transition to distance learning is also evident. Interviews with the BMC management and staff confirmed to the Panel their understanding of quality assurance and their role in ensuring effective operations.

- The SER states that the QADC reflects on its practices and benchmarks them with external bodies. A review of the QADC performance is included in the action plan and is documented in the progress reports. External reviewers were requested to examine the quality assurance management system and provide recommendations for improvement. Improvement plans were prepared to address these recommendations as well as the BQA's recommendations in the Institutional Review report. The external reviews recommended that the QADC adopts a more reflective approach and develop outcome-based indicators. Although recommended improvements have been implemented, examining the supporting materials reveals larger emphasis on quantity rather than quality, which may jeopardise the reflective mission of the centre. The Panel, therefore, advises that the QADC should expand its auditing scope to scrutinise the quality of the

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different aspects of the programme, especially the grades, as was referred to in Indicator 3.1.

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*

- The college organizational structure is clearly defined and communicated to stakeholders through the GU website, handbooks, and reports. The College Council - chaired by the College Dean and including HoDs, the Chairs of the CQAC and the CTLAC, a faculty member, and a student representative – is vested with the responsibility of providing leadership and monitoring all aspects of the academic programmes. The Department Council is vested with monitoring and reviewing the performance of the academic programme and proposing improvements. The structure is supported by a well-developed set of policies, procedures, terms of reference, and job descriptions. Programme management is further supported by a number of college- and university-level councils and committees which ensure appropriate information dissemination and shared decision-making. The Mass Communication and Public Relations, which is one of three departments under the College of Administrative and Financial Sciences, is sometimes referred to as the Media and Public Relations, thus it is advised that a consistency in the name be enforced.

- The reporting lines are in alignment with the hierarchy of the organizational structure and is regulated as per the Communication Policy and Procedures and Monitoring and Review System Policy. Regular meetings at various levels of management are conducted to ensure effective communication and reporting and to facilitate decision-making. Faculty members report to the HoDs (i.e. Programme Leaders). College-level committees report to the College Dean and university-level committees report to the University President or the Vice President for Academic Affairs as is the case of the University Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee. Based on the evidence provided and interviews with the university staff and students, the Panel concludes that the reporting lines are appropriate and ensure effective communication and decision-making.

- Terms of reference are clearly defined for the University and College Councils and committees. The policies and procedures, by-laws, job descriptions further specify the roles and responsibilities of different posts. As per the terms of reference, committees and councils conduct regular meetings, contribute to the annual activity calendar, and prepare semester and annual reports to ensure effective communication and reporting. Interviews

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with various management posts confirmed to the Panel a shared understanding of the respective terms of reference and expectations.

- The terms of reference and job descriptions identify the authorities entrusted of maintaining academic standards at the university, college, and departmental levels. There is a clear reporting line and decisions are made based on scrutiny and review by a hierarchy of authorities and councils. The committees at both the university and college levels ensure proper communication and effective management and support of the academic programme.

- There is a mechanism to ensure that the programme management is appropriate and reflects effective and responsible leadership. This mechanism is supported by a well-defined organizational structure, clear terms of reference for college- and university-level councils and committees, clear job descriptions for various positions including the HoD, a hierarchy-based reporting system, qualified faculty members, full representation of departments in college and university committees, effective planning, monitoring, auditing, and follow-up from the QADC. Through interviews with the programme management team, the Panel concludes that the management is appropriate and effective.

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 Review and Development Policy and Procedures clearly articulate the mechanism for programme evaluation which takes place annually and periodically (every 4-5 years). The annual programme review aims to continually enhance the quality of the programme by introducing and implementing minor changes related to course and programme learning outcomes, content, teaching, learning, and assessment strategies, and prerequisite and elective courses.

- In accordance with the Programme Review and Development Policy and Procedures, the annual review is initiated by the Programme Leader and the Department Council who form a review team. The team reviews the programme and proposes modifications/changes based on input from student surveys, internship, graduation project, peer reviews, the PIAB, etc. The proposed minor changes are reviewed in the Department Council and then forwarded to the College Programme Review and Development Committee and the College Council for review. Upon final approval, the

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College Dean issues a resolution for implementation in the following year and shares the resolution with the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

- There is a mechanism for communicating the College Dean's approval of annual evaluation recommendations and for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations primarily by the Programme Leader. An improvement plan detailing the enhancement areas, responsibilities, and timeframe is developed and shared with the College Programme Review and Development Committee and University Programme Review and Development Committee to ensure proper implementation. The Programme Leader follows up with the various bodies and updates the Department Council to ensure the execution of the improvement plan. The QADC conducts audits to monitor the implementation of the improvement plan and improvements (e.g. restructured assessment) which are discussed in the University Quality Assurance Committee and other relevant committee meetings.

- The Programme Review and Development Policy and Procedures clearly articulate the mechanism for the periodic programme review which is entrusted to a Programme Review Team. The periodic review, conducted every four to five years, evaluates the programme in light of the accreditation standards, requirements of professional and regulatory bodies, benchmarks, feedback from internal and external reviewers and market research. A review team is assigned the responsibility of reviewing the programme. Based on feedback from various stakeholders and reviewers, a justification for change report is prepared and improvements are discussed in meetings. Newly-developed courses are mapped to PILOs, University Vision and Mission, graduate attributes, and NQF levels. Teaching, learning, and assessment are also mapped with the CILOs. The last periodic programme review was conducted in 2015-2016. The BMC programme is currently subjected to another periodic review. The Panel concludes that the periodic reviews are comprehensive.

- After the approval of the periodic programme review recommendations by the University Council, improvement plans are prepared. Implementation of the recommendations is monitored by the HoD and the College Dean and discussed in meetings with the College and University programme Review and Development Committees and the QADC. The QADC conducts follow-ups to monitor the implementation of improvement plans.

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: *Addressed*

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- The Benchmarking Policy and Procedures provide a framework for institutional, departmental, and programme benchmarking. The BMC programme is informed by a range of local, regional, and international benchmarks and internal and external reference points. As part of the 2015-2016 periodic review, the programme review team conducted a comprehensive benchmarking with several universities to further ensure the compatibility of the programme with international standard. Another benchmarking was conducted in 2021-2022. GU has signed a Memorundum of Understanding with local and international universities and identified benchmarking areas to facilitate the benchmarking exercise. The BMC programme also seeks external regional and international reviewers to verify the programme's comparability with other programmes offered regionally and internationally.

- Benchmarking outcomes are used to enhance the quality of the programme. New courses including 'Press News' (JOR263A) and 'Investigative Journalism' (RTV472) were introduced as a result of the 2015-2016 benchmarking. Course benchmarking has also been conducted to ensure the compatibility of the courses with their equivalents from regional and international universities. The results of the 2021-2022 benchmarking exercise are being discussed to inform future directions.

- There is a mechanism, primarily governed by the QADC, to collect feedback from internal and external stakeholders. Surveys are regularly conducted to seek feedback and gauge satisfaction from students, alumni, staff, faculty members, and employers. Focus group discussions are also conducted to secure feedback from industry leaders to ensure the programme relevancy. Students are also represented in university- and college-level committees to ensure their perspectives are represented.

- Surveys are analysed by the Performance Measurement Office, and shared with the College Deans and Programme Leaders. Programme Leaders discuss the surveys in Department Council meetings. Input from the surveys, benchmarking studies, and focus groups are discussed in meetings and necessary actions are taken.

- Recommendations for improvements based on benchmarks, external reviews, and surveys are forwarded to relevant departments so that they prepare improvement, implementations, and follow-up plans. The SER lists examples of such improvements, including revising the graduation project and internship procedures and adding more collaborative projects. In 2017, the PIAB made recommendations to include external jury members in the evaluation of graduation projects, conduct an alumni survey, and to increase the internship hours to 200 hours. During the interviews, the Panel was informed that the external reviewers recommended appointing a coordinator for internship. These recommendations were all incorporated and implemented as current practices.

- The QADC reviews and audits the implementation of the recommendations. Outcomes are communicated to stakeholders through bulletins and meetings. During the interviews

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with external moderators, reviewers, verifiers, and jurors, a number of suggestions were highlighted to enhance the quality of the programme (e.g., updating the degree plan, updating student skills, updating the assessment mechanism, increasing the number of faculty members). During the interviews with the alumni, they also highlighted the need for skill-based courses (e.g. Digital Public Relations, Arabic Grammar, Presentation Skills for Talk Shows). Students also suggested adding more technical courses that focus on graphic design and premiere software as well as foreign languages. During the interviews, the PIAB also highlighted the need for enhancing student English language skills, incorporating electronic journalism and social media, and adding more practical courses. The Panel advises the BMC to address these suggestions in the current periodic review of the programme.

- There are arrangements to close the feedback loop by informing stakeholders, mainly students and external reviewers, of the changes made based on their recommendations. These include meetings where students are represented, Questions & Answers sessions with students, focused meetings, and alumni gatherings . The PIAB is also informed of the implementation of their suggestions during meetings. From interviews with various stakeholders, the Panel concludes that there is general satisfaction with the implementation of feedback elicited from them through various channels.

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*

- The BMC programme is supported by an independent PIAB to ensure the relevance and currency of the programme. The PIAB consists of professionals and alumni from the media industry. The board has clear terms of reference and meets at least once per semester. The PIAB is formed every two years. Improvement plans are prepared by the HoD to ensure the implementation of the PIAB approved recommendations.

- The PIAB's feedback is documented and translated into an improvement plan to inform programme decision-making. The SER indicates that the BMC programme has incorporated the PIAB's suggestions related to internship, embedding technology, training courses, and curricular and extra-curricular activities. PIAB members are regularly engaged in the university activities and so they are familiar with the system. Interviews with members of the PIAB confirmed to the Panel that their feedback had been used to inform programme decision-making.

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- There is a mechanism to ensure the relevancy of the programme to the labour market, national and societal needs. The mechanism includes the formation of committees and associations such as the PIAB, Alumni Association, and Focus Group Discussions with Representatives from the industry. Surveys are regularly conducted by the QADC to identify the emerging needs of the labour market. A market research is conducted to inform the periodic programme review. Feedback from the internship field supervisors is also used to detect emerging skills and needs. Roundtable events bringing academic and industry together are also held to ensure programme relevancy.

- Scoping of the labour market and national needs is conducted on a regular basis through the market research and relies on a number of tools including market research and published studies and reports. The market research provides a comprehensive view of the contextual landscape of BMC with analysis of economic projections and competitors and input from various stakeholders. Published reports include a range of documents that provide future projects of the labour market in Bahrain and the GCC.

- Recommendations based on the market research are discussed in the Department Council and improvement plans are prepared. The SER indicates that the QADC monitors the implementation of these recommendations through audits and provides an audit report as evidence. In October, 2021, the QADC conducted an audit to monitor the effective implementation of the labour market scoping and recommended collating the improvement plans into one document, revising courses to reflect the relevance and currency of the programme, and conducting a systematic analysis of surveys, focus groups, and interviews to inform future programme improvements. The Panel agrees with the QADC that these enhancements are necessary. The Panel also recommends that the applied scoping mechanisms should be regularly and systematically reviewed to ensure the programme's relevancy to the labour market and societal needs.

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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 Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication of the College of Administrative and Financial Sciences offered by Gulf University.

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

1. The BMC programme's recognition by the Chartered Institute for Public Relations- United Kingdom.

2. Strengthening the students' perceptions and research capabilities and motivating them to create and innovate through the learning environment in the programme.

3. The fact that students especially those in Com273A 'Communication Research Methods' are incorporated in research and co-author publications with faculty.

4. The well-articulated internship regulations and processes which guarantee that students have a consistent and organised internship experience.

In terms of improvement, the Panel recommends that Gulf University and the College of Administrative and Financial Sciences should:

1. Develop and maintain a plan for the identification of risks at the programme level, as well as an analysis of these risks and their mitigation.

2. Revise the programme aims in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and in all the related documents to ensure consistency.

3. Revise the number of the programme intended learning outcomes in order to be consistent with international good practices.

4. Ensure that the curriculum is regularly updated to keep up with the recent developments in terms of the majors offered and the courses' content and names.

5. Revise the prerequisite course(s) for 'Special Topics in Communication' and replace the 'Art of Influence & Persuasion' course with a 'Public Speaking' course.

6. Change 'Journalism in Social Media', 'Direction of Radio & Television', 'Online Public Relations', and 'Advertising Campaigns' to compulsory courses.

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7. Update the Teaching and Learning Policy more frequently to add the latest methods and to ensure that the current research findings are more considered to provide a better learning experience for the students.

8. Reconsider the BMC's approach to the distribution of graduation project students among the academic supervisors to make it more systematic, and reduce the teaching load of associate professors to allow more time for research and better benefit from their potential in research.

9. Recruit more faculty members in areas of graphic design and prospective new courses in digital media.

10. Adhere to the international standards of having laboratories with 20 computers for practical courses, and these courses should not exceed 20 students per section.

11. Track the BMC students' use of the library.

12. Increase the level of examination difficulty and ensure that the BMC students' assessed work is rigorously scrutinised to reflect a normal grade distribution and grading consistency among teachers.

13. Unify the assessment tools as well as the weight of each assessment tool for practical courses, within the established GU assessment guidelines.

14. Regularly and systematically review the applied mechanisms of labour market research to ensure the Programme's relevancy to the labour market and societal needs.

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