



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

Higher Education Review Unit

Programme Review Report

Bachelor of Business

Royal University for Women

Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 12 - 13 October 2009

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. The Programme Review Process | 1 |
| 2. Indicator 1: The Curriculum..... | 3 |
| 3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme..... | 6 |
| 4. Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates..... | 9 |
| 5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance | 12 |
| 6. Conclusion..... | 15 |

1. The Programme Review Process

1.1 The Programme Review Framework

The *four* indicators used to measure whether or not a programme meets minimum standards are as follows:

Indicator 1: Curriculum

Indicator 2: Efficiency of the programme

Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

Conclusions reached are in terms of minimum standards, and the summative judgment falls into one of three categories:

- (i) *The programme satisfies all four indicators and gives confidence, or*
- (ii) *There is limited confidence because up to two indicators are not satisfied, or*
- (iii) *There is no confidence in the programme because more than two indicators are not satisfied.*

1.2 The programme review process at the Royal University for Women

The programme review of the Bachelor of Business (BB) at the Royal University for Women (hereinafter referred to as RUW) was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. This report provides an account of the HERU programme review process and the findings of the Review Panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by the RUW, the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit which was conducted on 12 – 13 October 2009.

RUW was notified by HERU/QAAET in January 2009 that it would be subject to a programme quality review of its BB programme during 2009. In preparation for the programme review, RUW conducted its programme self-evaluation and submitted a SER with appendices on the agreed date in June 2009. It is expected that the RUW will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its BB programme.

The RUW was founded in 2004 and currently offers Bachelor degree programmes in four subject disciplines and these are administered within a Faculty structure. These are:

- Art and Design.
- Business and Financial Sciences.

- Education.
- Information Technology.

The programmes which relate to this review are those offered by the Faculty of Business and Financial Sciences, which offers a Bachelor of Business with majors in:

- Banking and Finance
- International Business
- Human Resource Management
- Marketing.

RUW developed its initial degree programmes in collaboration with 2 reputable universities, McGill University in Canada and Middlesex University in the UK. Under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding with West Virginia University in the US, RUW is exploring the possibilities of student exchanges and offering post-graduate courses.

The Faculty enrolled its first students in 2005, all of whom have majored in Banking and Finance, and on June 17th 2009 the first cohort of 8 undergraduate students attained their Bachelor's Degrees.

Enrolment to the programme has grown steadily and by 2008/9 there were a total of 191 enrolled women students across all years of the programme. The majority of these students are Bahraini 132 (69%); 51 students (27%) were from other Gulf States (mainly Saudi Arabia which accounts for 48 of the total); and 8 students (4%) from other nationalities. At the time of the site visit 31 students were enrolled in the fourth year of the programme and of these 18 were majoring in Banking and Finance, 10 in International Business and 3 in Human Resource Management.

2. Indicator 1: The Curriculum

The programme complies with existing regulations in terms of the curriculum, the teaching and assessment of students' achievements; the curriculum demonstrates fitness for purpose.

- 2.1 The aims of the programme are clearly articulated and communicated to students in the Student Handbook. The aims are clearly consonant with the Mission and Vision of the RUW and are reflected in the content of the curriculum. However, the Panel considered that the vocational emphasis which is explicit in the aims should be more clearly reflected in the learning outcomes of the majors which are currently being offered (Banking and Finance, Human Resource Management and International Business) and in the assessment strategies used to test achievement of these learning outcomes.
- 2.2 The curriculum is based on the American credit hours system and was developed initially in collaboration with Middlesex University (UK) and McGill University (Canada). The programme consists of 120 credits which students normally complete in 8 semesters each of 15 weeks. 18 Liberal Arts credits are compulsory and 36 credits must be achieved in courses which constitute the major the student has elected to undertake. This is clearly indicated in the documentation provided and amplified in the Policy document provided to students which additionally provides information on pre-requisites. There is also evidence of external moderation of the curriculum (by McGill University). The curriculum contains the standard content which one would expect to find in any undergraduate programme focused on the disciplines offered.
- 2.3 Learning Outcomes were provided at programme and course level and a mapping of learning outcomes from courses was also given. The Panel considered that the course teams need to give more consideration to ensuring that the development of critical thinking skills are appropriately covered in the course level learning outcomes and that a more careful differentiation is made between learning outcomes related to knowledge and understanding and those related to the development of subject specific skills.
- 2.4 The Panel noted the importance of the development of skills relevant to employability and personal development in order to demonstrate that the programme achieved its overall aim and prepared students for their chosen career. The internship course and the Senior Project course were identified by the course team as being important to achieving these skills. The Panel were reassured that the course team makes strenuous efforts to ensure that the internship course (which is an elective) is undertaken by all students.
- 2.5 An extract from HEC regulations was provided as supporting material in the Self Evaluation Report. Policies and procedures appear to be comprehensive and to

ensure compliance. However, an explicit mapping of policies and procedures to the HEC regulations would provide a more robust assurance of compliance.

- 2.6 The syllabus (curricular content) of courses is accurately documented in course outlines as was evidenced in samples of those provided. These make reference to appropriate scholarly publications to support course delivery. More explicit reference to publications giving recent research findings and/or discussion of professional issues would enhance this.
- 2.7 The fact that academic progression was achieved was evident from the design of the programme. This is structured to ensure that introductory or foundation courses and the majority of the liberal arts courses are taken in the first year and business core courses in the second year. During the third and fourth years the students undertake business core courses and the fourth year is devoted to developing students' knowledge and understanding of the core areas of skills and knowledge which relate to the selected major. In addition, from meetings with students the Panel heard of the increasing level of intellectual demands placed upon them year-on-year and in the careful use of pre-requisites which are prescribed for certain courses.
- 2.8 The range of teaching and learning approaches which are adopted clearly support the learning outcomes for the majority of courses. However, meetings with students confirmed that there is a need to expand the range of teaching methods and in particular provide more exposure to practice and to develop greater experiential learning. This was confirmed when the Review Panel met with recent graduates who clearly saw the need for application of theory to practice and recommended that this be more prominent in the curriculum.
- 2.9 Similarly the assessment methods which are used should be more grounded in practice in order to better prepare students for employment after graduation. The Review Panel considered that course teams should explore how they can use assessment strategies across different years of the curriculum. Assessments need to assist students to develop autonomous learning skills and demonstrate their application of a higher level of critical thinking and communication skills in the later years of the programme.
- 2.10 In its consideration of the level of achievement of students, the Review Panel examined sample coursework, the grades achieved by students for their work, and the comments provided by the examiners on the students' performance. The work was considered to be of a good standard. However, the Review Panel noted that with respect to the work which was sampled, there was little evidence of the use of refereed journal articles and an over reliance on web based publications.
- 2.11 In addition to examining the sample coursework the Review Panel considered that the distribution of grades within a course need to be more clearly differentiated and the grade awards which were given needed to reflect accurately comments made by

the examiner on the student's performance. The Review Panel was pleased to note that the University Teaching and Learning Committee is currently discussing the need to develop and implement grading criteria and provision of model answers. This will assist in ensuring that there is clarity on the rationale for a particular mark being awarded for any assessed element on the programme.

2.12 In coming to its conclusions regarding the curriculum, the External Review Panel noted, with appreciation, the following:

- The development of programmes which are consistent with the Vision and Mission of the RUW
- The incorporation of liberal arts courses across the first two years of the programme
- The development of syllabi for the different majors which is consistent with similar degree programmes in the respective areas of specialism offered on other subject specialism
- Plans to develop grading criteria and require staff to provide model answers for assessments.

2.13 In terms of improvement, the External Review Panel **recommends** that the Faculty should:

- Give consideration to the provision of staff development to assist staff in fully understanding the structure, development and differentiation of learning outcomes and how these relate to the curriculum
- Providing more opportunity for students to engage in learning which is based around current professional practice and to demonstrate this knowledge using appropriate assessment instruments
- Ensure that students are aware of, and can use, the library bibliographic database to identify and use refereed journal articles when preparing for their assignments
- Expand the range of teaching and assessment methods used, in particular with respect to developing students' experiential learning and encouraging them to become autonomous learners
- Carefully consider mechanisms to improve internal moderation of assessments.

2.14 **Judgement**

On balance, the Review Panel concluded that the programme **satisfies the indicator on curriculum.**

3. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme

The programme is efficient in terms of the use of available resources, the admitted students and the ratio of admitted students to successful graduates

- 3.1 Students enrolling on the programme are required to satisfy the minimum entry requirements of High School Certification. The majority of students admitted to the program have eighty or more percentage and have competency in high school level mathematics. For those who do not possess the minimum English language requirement (IELTS 5.5 or equivalent) admission may be gained on successfully passing an English language test administered by RUW. If a student fails to pass that examination they will be advised to undertake an appropriate, 6 credit rated, pre-session course. Two such courses are offered and the student is advised of which course they should undertake depending on their performance in the English Language admissions test. It is also possible to gain advanced entry to the programme. In permitting this consideration is made of the student's performance on their previous degree (all grades having to be at C level or above). Transferred credits for advanced entry may not exceed 60. An induction (orientation) programme is provided for all new students and the Dean inducts direct entry students. The Review Panel considered that arrangements for induction of direct entry students should be more formalized particularly if this entry route grows in significance.
- 3.2 At a meeting with the teaching staff it was reported that class contact with students was on average approximately 15 hours per week and from the figures presented on student numbers the staff: student ratio was calculated to be approximately 1 to 27. The Review Panel considered that the staff: student ratio and the teaching contact time with students was relatively high, particularly as staff need to be provided with time to develop their research. The Review Panel were also concerned about the high turnover of staff and it was explained that this was largely due to the University seeking to comply with the HEC directive regarding the need to ensure that teaching staff had doctoral level qualifications.
- 3.3 There was clear evidence from the staff CVs that there was a level of research activity and relevant teaching/educational development experience. The Review Panel was of the opinion that staff require additional support and encouragement in order to foster and encourage research.
- 3.4 RUW is located in a purpose-built campus which stands in 64 acres of land. There are a total of 8 buildings of which 6 are currently in use. The six buildings include classrooms, computer laboratories, design studios, administrative and staff offices, including a student affairs building. There is onsite accommodation for students, a sports centre, cafeteria, a salon, and more recently a book shop which provides copying facilities and handles sale of recommended texts to students (a task which was previously undertaken in the library).

- 3.5 Teaching accommodation is fit for purpose in terms of capacity and facilities provided.
- 3.6 A new library is currently being constructed. The Review Panel considered that the existing library was inadequate in terms of stock but noted that there is provision for access to electronic journals through provision of a bibliographic database with access to online journal articles. The Review Panel suggest that this should be supplemented by providing access to electronic databases which provide data on company performance etc., particularly to support more advanced work by students undertaking the Banking and Finance major.
- 3.7 IT facilities were fit for purpose although the Review Panel suggest that a virtual learning environment platform should be provided to support communication and interaction between staff and students.
- 3.8 The Review Panel noted that at the time of the site visit there was no electronic records management system in place but was informed that there were plans to adopt one. The lack of an electronics records management system clearly makes the work of registry in admitting students, tracking students and providing appropriate statistical management data much more onerous and time consuming. Problems and delays at registration were reported in a meeting the Review Panel held with students. A management information system needs to be implemented with immediate effect.
- 3.9 From an examination of the statistical data provided the Review Panel were satisfied that there were no significant issues relating to student progression. The Dean confirmed that reasons for withdrawal were largely attributable to changes in the personal circumstances of the students rather than to academic failure.
- 3.10 The Review Panel also considered failure and repeat policies, length of study and ratio of admitted students to graduating students as satisfactory. As the programme has only recently graduated its first cohort (8 students) it is not possible to give a full account of first destination statistics.
- 3.11 In coming to its conclusions regarding the efficiency of the programme, the External Review Panel noted, with appreciation, the following:
- The quality of the campus physical infrastructure
 - The provision of adequate study space and social space for students.
- 3.12 In terms of improvement, the External Review Panel **recommends** that the Faculty should:
- Provide a formal induction programme for direct entry students

- Encourage staff research and scholarship by providing staff with more flexibility both in terms of time in which to engage in research and the location in which they can undertake non teaching duties
- Expand the range of print resources available in the library
- Consider provision of electronic datasets to support research by both staff and students in the area of banking and finance
- Implement an electronic records management system.

3.13 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concluded that the programme **satisfies the indicator on efficiency of the programme.**

4. Indicator 3: Academic standards of the graduates

The graduates of the programme meet acceptable academic standards in comparison with equivalent programmes in Bahrain and worldwide.

- 4.1 The Review Panel noted that the Department Head has overall responsibility for monitoring academic standards. The Review Panel was pleased to note that there were plans to appoint an additional Head of Department within the Faculty.
- 4.2 The Review Panel noted that there are no published subject benchmarking standards in the Kingdom of Bahrain but recognized that RUW had engaged in a consultation exercise with international external providers Middlesex (UK) and McGill University (Canada) when developing their curriculum. It further noted that the latter institution had also been invited subsequently to comment on the implementation of the curriculum and had provided very positive commentary, not only on the curriculum as originally established but on positive developments on the courses offered. The Review Panel also noted that the Dean had facilitated some *ad hoc* external review of particular courses involving faculty from the University of Bahrain and from McGill University. It suggests that this be established on a more formal and regular basis.
- 4.3 External support and affirmation of standards were evidenced in letters confirming that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education of Kuwait recognized the RUW.
- 4.4 In terms of internal reference points it was noted that the teaching team met regularly (weekly) and this provided a forum for discussion, *inter alia*, of the course content and performance of the students. It was further noted that with the exception of the Senior Project course, the teaching staff confirmed to the Review Panel that there was no internal moderation of assessments which undermines the validity of the course. Employer feedback is taken into account in the assessment of students' performance on the Internship course. The Panel considers that more extensive input by employers into the curriculum would be beneficial.
- 4.5 Appropriate administrative procedures are in place to enable the Faculty Council and other staff meetings to monitor student performance and achievement in terms of overall grades achieved across courses taken.
- 4.6 In meetings with staff the Panel learned that plans are in place to involve employers more directly by inviting representatives from relevant professions to sit on Faculty Council. Plans are also being formulated for greater involvement by parents as stakeholders in providing external comment on the programme content and academic standards.
- 4.7 In June 2009 the first cohort of 8 students graduated with all of them having majored in Banking and Finance. There is, as yet, no first destination statistics.

- 4.8 The Review Panel met with recent graduates (one of whom is currently in employment) and 2 employers (1 who had employed a graduate from the programme). The recent graduates clearly valued the Internship programme but noted problems in the organization of work placements. They also noted that guest speakers from industry had contributed to the course and that they had been given exposure to presentation skills and group working both of which they found valuable. The students also commented that the University should provide better support for careers advice and support in finding employment. The students were aware of the existence of an alumni association but had no knowledge of how to become involved with it or its activities.
- 4.9 The need for better organization of the internship was echoed by the employers who also recommended that consideration be given to the length of the internship as it was difficult to train and prepare students to make a useful contribution to the company within the space of six weeks. The employers were supportive of the programme and expressed a willingness to become more involved with its development and in delivery of elements of the programme. The employers also commented favourably on the skills and knowledge of the graduates of the programme.
- 4.10 The Review Panel confirmed that in terms of level of achievement the assessed work sampled is comparable with that of similar programmes worldwide.
- 4.11 In coming to its conclusions regarding the academic standards of the graduates, the External Review Panel noted, with appreciation, the following:
- The personal initiatives of the Dean in seeking external review of course content but noted that this should be done in a more formal and systematized manner
 - The plans which have been put forward to provide greater involvement of all stakeholders in the assurance of standards
 - The demonstrated ability of the staff to identify areas for improvement and to suggest how to which demonstrates a mature approach to the maintenance of academic standards.
- 4.12 In terms of improvement, the External Review Panel **recommends** that the Faculty should:
- Develop a more structured and formal mechanism to provide periodic external and internal review of course content
 - Develop a formal approach to gaining first destination statistics of graduate employment
 - Ensure that the internship course is effectively managed in terms of early identification and organization of suitable internships. This is particularly

important in the context of dealing with increasing numbers of students for whom they will have to find suitable internships

- Ensure better support and engagement in the Alumni Association.

4.13 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concluded that the programme **satisfies the indicator on academic standards of the graduates.**

5. Indicator 4: Effectiveness of quality management and assurance

The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance, give confidence in the programme.

- 5.1 University policies are clearly defined and are widely communicated both to academic staff and students.
- 5.2 There is a clearly defined committee structure to support implementation of policies, which includes the Board of Trustees (with an Executive Committee), the Senate, the Deans' Council, and the Faculty Council. Issues relating to teaching and learning are dealt with by a Teaching and Learning Committee and any decisions taken there are communicated to the Faculty Council. Staff are clearly conversant with the structure and the procedures which have to be adopted to make suggestions and gain approval for course changes or to request resources. Policy was thus seen to be clearly disseminated down to staff from the higher level committees and staff had opportunity to feed upwards to higher committees on policy matters.
- 5.3 There is no systematic annual review of the programmes which collates all of the relevant data and provides an analysis of the key performance indicators to allow regular appraisal of the programmes. It was, however, noted that there is ongoing review of some of the performance indicators; this is conducted during minuted meetings of the teaching staff and Faculty Meetings. There is also an element of review and reporting of significant issues in the Faculty's Annual Report.
- 5.4 Whilst the Review Panel considered that the arrangements currently in place for review of student progression are effective it also notes that these are *ad hoc* and to remain effective systematic procedures need to be adopted in the light of increasing numbers of students enrolled on the programme.
- 5.5 Arrangements are in place to provide students with the opportunity to participate in anonymous evaluation of the courses. Systems for feeding back to the students on subsequent action arising from their evaluation were not evident but it was apparent from comment in meetings with students that their suggestions or concerns are acted upon.
- 5.6 The Review Panel is pleased to note the involvement of a representative from the student body on the Faculty Council.
- 5.7 Staff are employed on the basis of their academic qualifications (PhD is required), teaching experience, and specific subject expertise in the courses on which they will be required to teach. Some concerns were expressed at the delays in the appointment of new staff. The Panel suggests that a more systematic approach be adopted to early identification of staff requirements and a more streamlined approach to the approval

process in order to ensure that there is a full complement of teaching staff in post for the start of the academic year.

- 5.8 The Review Panel concluded that staff development support and appraisal needs to be improved. Staff appraisal is based on use of self-appraisal, which is reviewed by the Dean and any necessary action taken. However the system does not appear to allow much scope for staff to make comment not only on their performance but on their personal staff development needs. Emphasis needs to move from control to development in which the staff feel they are in partnership with the University to support their individual career aspirations and self-development.
- 5.9 Newly appointed staff reported to the Review Panel that they had received adequate induction. Staff confirmed that they had been given access to all relevant information about the courses they would be teaching and the recommended textbooks. All previous material was made available to them in a Course Folder. (The library maintains a collection of these for use by staff only). The Dean also confirmed that new staff are appraised in all aspects of the procedures adopted by RUW and the culture in which it operates.
- 5.10 Improvement planning, mechanisms and examples are clearly documented in the Self-Evaluation Report.
- 5.11 The Review Panel is pleased to note the close involvement of the Head of RUW Quality Assurance Unit in the Programme Review process for the Faculty.
- 5.12 In coming to its conclusions regarding the effectiveness of quality management and assurance, the External Review Panel noted, with appreciation, the following:
- The willingness of staff of the Faculty and the Head of the Quality Assurance Unit to engage in informed discussion of issues related to quality assurance and enhancement
 - The clear statement and communication of policies
 - Arrangements for staff induction.
- 5.13 In terms of improvement, the External Review Panel **recommends** that the Faculty should:
- A more formal programme development and review plan be integrated into a procedure which regularly (annually) addresses holistic appraisal of the programme the context and constraints under which it operates, and sets out clearly the improvements which the teaching team propose to implement prior to the next appraisal of the programme being conducted
 - Development of an approach to staff appraisal which places more evidence on identification of, and response, to the needs of the staff and provides support for

career development in all areas of teaching, research and administrative activity in which they are engaged.

5.14 Judgement

On balance, the Review Panel concluded that the programme **satisfies the indicator on effectiveness of quality management and assurance.**

6. Conclusion

Taking into account the institution's own Self-Evaluation Report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the site visit, the Review Panel drew the following conclusion in accordance with the HERU/QAAET *Programme Review Handbook 2009*;

There is confidence in the Bachelor of Business programme offered by the Royal University for Women.