

الهيئة الوطنية
للمؤهلات وضمان جودة التعليم والتدريب
National Authority for Qualifications &
Quality Assurance of Education & Training



Higher Education Review Unit

Institutional Follow-Up Review Report

Bahrain Polytechnic
Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 25 March 2013

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1. Overview of the Institutional Follow-up Process

The institutional follow-up site visit by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) is part of a cycle of continuing quality assurance, review, reporting and improvement by the National Authority for Qualifications & Quality Assurance of Education & Training (NAQQAET) in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

At least one year after publication of its Institutional Review Report the institution submits to HERU a report which clearly shows how the institution has maintained and/or enhanced the commendations of the review report and specifies how the institution has met its affirmations and recommendations. The institution substantiates its claims with supporting documents, in the form of Appendixes. Details of how the institution is monitoring and evaluating the improvement activities should also be provided.

This follow-up review process applies to all higher education institutions that have had institutional reviews undertaken by HERU.

The Bahrain Polytechnic (BP) submitted an Improvement Plan to HERU in the required time set out in the Handbook for Institutional Reviews. In this Plan, actions were identified to tackle the 18 Recommendations contained in the Institutional Review Report. In January 2013, BP submitted its One Year Report, which contained a narrative and documentary evidence about the progress the institution has made thus far in implementing quality improvements.

The Panel responsible for the Follow-up comprised the Executive Director of HERU and three Senior Directors, one of whom was the Director responsible for co-ordinating this site visit. The evidence base included: the Institutional Improvement Plan and the appendices submitted in January 2013 and the Institutional Review Report. The Institution also submitted supporting evidence on 24 March 2013, and during the site visit. Interviews were also held during the site visit with a range of senior managers, academics, administrative staff, students, employers and alumni. These interviews allowed the Panel to triangulate the evidence.

The Follow-up visit took place on 25 March 2013, the purpose of which is (i) to assess the progress made in quality enhancement of the BP since the institutional review in January 2011, for which the review report was published in October 2011; and (ii) develop a report which outlines the progress made about the extent to which the Recommendations have been addressed.

This Institutional Follow-up Review Report sets out the findings with regard to the Recommendations contained in the published Review Report. For ease of reading the Recommendations made in the 2011 published Review Report are clustered together

(in italics) at the beginning of each sub-section where a different theme is considered. The text that follows reflects the findings of the Panel during its visit in March 2013.

2. Brief Overview of Bahrain Polytechnic

Bahrain Polytechnic was created as one of the key education reform initiatives taking place in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It was established by Royal Decree No. 65 on 6 July, 2008 and opened its doors to 235 students in September, 2008. BP is situated in Isa Town and operates from the University of Bahrain's campus. The Institution is organized into three Faculties: Business, Engineering, Design and ICT, and Humanities and offers a number of undergraduate programmes. BP has grown from 235 students and 35 staff in 2008 to 2017 active students and 343 staff at the end of Semester 1, Academic Year 2012-2013 (January 2013). Of the 2017 registered students, 270 are enrolled in the Foundation programme (13.4%). Of the 1747 students enrolled in Bachelor's degrees, 875 or 50% are studying for the Bachelor of Business degree, 292 or 17% are studying for the Bachelor of International Logistics Management degree and 245 or 14% are studying for the Bachelor of Information and Communications Technology degree and 335 are studying for the Bachelor of Engineering Technology degree. 99% of the student enrolment is Bahraini.

3. Findings of the Follow-up Review by Theme

In the following sub-sections, the progress made in addressing the recommendations under each theme is considered. The recommendations from the Institutional Review Report are clustered together in italics.

3.1 Mission, Planning and Governance

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

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

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

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

The Polytechnic has revised its vision and mission statements which were approved by the Board of Trustees at its meeting of 28 January 2013. The vision of the Polytechnic is now: 'to be a world class provider of applied higher education'. This is reflective of its institutional type.

The mission statement is as follows:

'Bahrain Polytechnic produces professional and enterprising graduates with the 21st century skills necessary for the needs of the community locally, regionally and nationally.'

While this clearly expresses the type of graduates that the institution wants to produce through its teaching and learning programmes, it does not take into account the other two core functions of a higher education institution. The Panel was told in interviews with senior management that applied research and community engagement are implicitly encapsulated in the values: 'excellence', 'learning', and 'innovation'. (See sections 3.8 and 3.9 of this report for more details about these functions.)

The institution established a task team which subsequently held a number of workshops to discuss what it means to be a polytechnic as opposed to a university. Stakeholder feedback was also sought. These were followed by a Board of Trustees workshop on 23 December 2012 in which the following definition was reached:

'A Polytechnic is a higher education institution that offers career focused programmes, to produce PROFESSIONAL and ENTERPRISING work-ready, graduates' (PR: 10).

The statement was approved at the Board of Trustees meeting on 28 January, 2013.

The institution has provided training for students who are going to be representatives on committees. To date students have served on the Engineering Design and ICT (EDICT) Faculty Board as well as some programme committees. The institution has a plan to expand student representation into the Academic Board but first will undertake further training in order to allow representatives to have a more meaningful experience within committee meetings and so make a stronger contribution.

BP is now under the auspices of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) in terms of its organizational structure, recruitment and conditions of service. As yet there has been very limited progress in filling major vacant posts. However, a large number of interviews of potential staff have been undertaken, and many are awaiting CSB approval. In the past two months a Head of School of EDICT has been appointed and is now in post. Part-time contracts are being issued to University of Bahrain (UoB) staff in order to keep the courses functioning. This is not an optimal arrangement since the two institutions have very different pedagogical approaches and are

different institutional types. The Panel suggests that BP find ways to expedite the recruitment process of faculty so that it can deliver the programme offerings in its chosen pedagogy.

The institution is also awaiting CSB approval of its organizational structure.

3.2 Academic Standards

No recommendation was given under this theme

3.3 Quality Assurance and Enhancement

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

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

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

Bahrain Polytechnic developed a *Quality Manual: Towards Excellence* that describes how the institution can assure the quality of its main activities, including teaching and learning, research, and support services. This manual was approved by the Board of Trustees on 19 September, 2012 and consequently distributed to the administrative and teaching staff at BP. The Panel learned from interviews with members of the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) that the Quality Manual was developed in light of BP's vision and quality philosophy, and that two main committees were involved in the development process, namely the Quality Assurance & Audit Committee and Academic Quality Assurance Committee. During different interviews, it was evident to the Panel that the BP staff have participated in the development of this manual and were provided with ample opportunities to provide feedback at various stages of its development. The Panel recommends that BP monitors the implementation of its quality assurance policies and procedures and regularly reviews them as required.

BP has developed a draft 'Internal Audit and Review Plan' to enable BP to fulfil the internal and external review requirements such as the NAQQAET programme and institutional reviews, Education Criteria for Performance Excellence (Baldrige Framework), Bahrain Centre for Excellence as well as BP Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). During interviews with staff from the QAU, the Panel learned that BP conducted a mapping exercise of all the review/audit criteria in order to devise a comprehensive system and propose a model that enables BP to respond to all the above-mentioned indicators.

BP communicates the results of the reviews and audits via a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) which is available on-line and can be accessed by all staff members. The Panel was informed that 11 reports have already been prepared by the QAU and communicated to the Senior Management Team (SMT). However, there are not yet any mechanisms to communicate the results of these reviews to the students. The Panel encourages BP to devise a formal mechanism for the dissemination of quality reviews and audit results to the students.

The Student Services Unit at BP conducted a 'Mentoring Review' to assess the effectiveness of the 'Student Mentoring Programme'. Two surveys were undertaken for both the mentors and mentees; however, the results of these surveys have not yet been analysed and no final report has yet been produced. Academic staff interviewed by the Panel indicated student mentoring is included in the new contracts and that faculty members are required to mentor approximately 14-16 students. Some staff members informed the Panel that they find the number of mentees to be too many, particularly that they had advisory obligations as well. The Panel was also informed that 'Mentoring Guidelines' and appropriate training is made available to all faculty members. Students expressed their satisfaction with the mentoring programme, indicating that their mentors always make the time to see them and to give them the feedback they require. The Panel encourages BP to progress its plan in analyzing the results of mentoring surveys and to communicate formally the results of the analysis with all stakeholders.

BP has not been successful in recruiting a 'Mentoring Coordinator' to facilitate the training of student mentors. The Panel heard consistently in different interviews about the problems encountered by BP in the recruitment of new staff members due to the implementation of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) regulations. The Panel encourages BP to explore alternative means of assigning responsibility for the coordination of the student mentoring programme in order to ensure accountability and sustainability of this programme.

3.4 Quality of Teaching and Learning

- 3.4.1** *HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic ensure that its teaching workload policy is consistently implemented across all departments and all teaching staff.*
- 3.4.2** *HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic actively engage all its teaching staff with the principles of Problem-Based Learning with a view of ensuring a common understanding of it as a teaching methodology.*
- 3.4.3** *HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic develop and implement an integrated system to monitor student progress and satisfaction.*
- 3.4.4** *HERU recommends that Bahrain Polytechnic ensure that there is an appropriate match between teaching staff qualifications and/or industry experience and their assigned teaching duties.*

BP does not have a formal workload policy. Whilst each faculty through its programme managers develops its own workload for staff teaching on the courses, these are done within generally agreed parameters (15 to 16 hours per week). Variations apply depending on courses offered each semester, and staffing. Individual tutors receive a Staff Usage Form that outlines their responsibilities for a particular semester. The tutor signs his/her agreement and the Dean gives final approval. Perusal of Staff Usage Forms in the degree programmes by the Panel shows that there is generally equivalence of teaching load. However, the Panel heard during interviews with members of one faculty of continued inequitable teaching loads. This needs to be addressed. Any need for teaching out of load is handled through a separate contract by Human Resources.

To meet its objective of producing 'work ready graduates and to ensure a skilled Bahraini labour force to support economic growth and diversification', the institution decided that its pedagogy of choice would be problem-based learning. The aim being to have problem-based learning implemented across all programmes and courses by September 2013. The Panel learned during interviews with various levels of management of the challenges in attaining full implementation. This is due to constraints with regard to budget, equipment and facilities, and human resources.

During interviews with faculty members the Panel heard of varying ideas about how problem-based learning can be implemented. The specialist post in this area is also vacant. The Panel encourages the institution to fill this vacant post.

Whilst the institution has provided faculty with opportunities to engage with each other so that a common understanding of problem-based learning can be reached, the Panel found during interviews with staff of varying notions of 'problem-based learning' in particular with respect to implementation. The Panel encourages the institution to provide faculty members with further forums and workshops to discuss the different forms that this pedagogy can take within different disciplines. Nevertheless, the institution is implementing problem-based learning in many courses and programmes of which the Panel saw good examples. Students interviewed were enthusiastic about this method of learning and praised their committed lecturers.

BP has developed and implemented an Institutional Quality Survey Framework that records and monitors student satisfaction consistent with KPIs and targets. During the site visit, the Panel saw evidence of the following surveys: student experience survey, student services survey, teaching survey, course survey, and curriculum advisory committee survey. These surveys were distributed and analysed by the Measurement and Analysis Unit. Students interviewed by the Panel were aware of these surveys and satisfied with the support provided by their academic advisors. The Panel acknowledges the development of this framework and suggests to the institution that it develop and implement a mechanism to monitor its effectiveness.

The institution has developed tables of staff qualifications and experience as well as the courses in which they teach. These show that there is a match between teaching staff qualifications and/or industry experience and their assigned teaching duties.

3.5 Student Support

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

The institution has developed and recently implemented policies and procedures to identify and support academically weak students. These policies are aligned with Strategic Objective Six (BP Strategic Plan 2008-2014), which states that student services will provide a range of student-centred support systems which will enable learning success. They are also designed to enhance students' academic success and progress, maximize student retention, facilitate the transition from school to study, enhance student engagement and the student experience, and recognize that difficulties have many facets that impact on student education achievement. Academic support is provided to students from the Library and Learning Centre, the Manager of Student Support and Welfare, the Mentoring Programme, the Career and Employment Centre, the Scholarships Coordinator, the Health and Wellness Centre, and the counsellor. During the site visit the Panel found that the post of counsellor is still vacant. The Panel urges the institution to recruit a full-time counsellor.

The Panel heard in different interviews that BP supports student achievement through the early identification of, and response to, issues which have the potential to affect student educational achievement.

The Panel acknowledges the development of these policies and procedures and suggests to the institution that it develop and implement a mechanism to monitor its effectiveness.

3.6 Human Resources

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

The institution has developed a discussion paper entitled 'Bahrainisation Targets and Strategies' to increase the number of Bahraini staff at all levels in the institution. This paper provides the context and background to the current staffing situation at the institution and recommends a Bahrainisation policy statement, targets and proposed strategies to the Board of Trustees on the assumption that the mission, vision and goals of the BP are to be preserved. The institution recruited several Bahraini staff in management and allied positions, and currently is waiting for the CSB to approve the employment of further allied staff and faculty members. The Panel also learned from interviews with management that the institution is keen to

maintain a healthy diversity of expatriate staff and the CSB has recently renewed the contract of many existing expatriate faculty members.

The Panel saw evidence of a revised organizational chart which is still pending the approval of the CSB. The Panel heard during interviews with senior management that the approval of the organization chart remains the key to achieve the Bahrainisation plan.

The institution has developed a Professional Development Planning Guide to assist and prioritize professional development needs. During the site visit the Panel learned that the institution is seeking partnership opportunities with Bahrain Institute of Public Administration (BIPA) and other training institutes in Bahrain to provide a qualification in leadership to build further the capacity of Bahraini staff. BP recently met with the UK Higher Academy in order to develop a professional development framework for academics.

A business plan has been developed for the Bahrain Polytechnic Coaching Centre that focuses on support and growth of Bahrain staff. The Centre will offer coaching programmes to enhance the satisfaction, motivation and performance of all staff. The Panel supports this initiative and suggests to the institution that it develop and implement a mechanism to monitor its effectiveness.

3.7 Infrastructure, Physical and Other Resources

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

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

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

The learning facilities in particularly the laboratories were discussed during interviews and were visited by the Panel during the site visit. The ICT laboratories are found to be appropriate and well equipped for the programmes offered. The engineering laboratories belonging to BP are well equipped some of which are brand new, well designed, and utilized by students and faculty members. However, BP's senior engineering faculty members expressed difficulties in using the laboratories shared with UoB. These difficulties include: the state of equipment, the laboratory design and layout, the schedule, and supervision of the laboratories by UoB staff. The Panel heard during interviews that the equipment in these laboratories are out of date and mostly not in use by the industry anymore. The laboratories layout and arrangement of equipment does not support PBL methodology as practiced by BP engineering faculty; there are constraints in time sharing the laboratories with UoB

classes UoB has the priority to use them; and laboratories are supervised by UoB employees and their working hours are not under BP control to suit their schedules and there were cases in which the laboratories were closed because their supervisors were not permitted overtime.

The Panel notes that BP has a campus redevelopment plan which was halted due to financial constraints, however, it urges BP senior management to find ways to overcome such obstacles hindering practical learning. This can be done by urgently agreeing on suitable arrangements with UoB to use effectively the shared laboratories and overcome all obstacles, and take necessary action to upgrade these laboratories in the near future.

According to faculty members and students other learning facilities such as classrooms and library are appropriate, however during interviews faculty members expressed dissatisfaction with their common premises that accommodate large number of faculty members and lack privacy when meeting students. The Panel strongly encourages BP to find a solution to this matter as an urgency.

During interviews, students expressed satisfaction with the recreational facilities available to them including sporting facilities, prayer rooms, cafeterias, and clubs. These were also discussed during interviews with faculty members and other staff. The sporting facilities have been scheduled so that female students have separate days than male students with mixed students on some other days. In addition to the campus masjid there are specialized prayer rooms for male and female students and staff. A new cafeteria has been opened and another is currently being constructed adding to the two main cafeterias currently in use. The Panel learned that all cafeterias are regularly inspected by BP for health and safety matters. The students have a club room and students elections are currently being prepared to be conducted during this semester. Due to lack of staffing, extra-curricular activities have fallen below expectations, but the establishment of the new student council is expected to improve the situation as students are expected to manage activities with the support of the students' services manager.

The Panel was informed by IT administrators that BP is currently finalizing a policy for backup and restoration of all its electronic data, and is in the process of issuing a tender for a suitable off-campus backup handling and provision from an external service provider. Backup is currently being stored in a separate location, but on campus. The Panel urges BP to expedite its efforts to develop and implement suitable procedures which ensure that data are safely and regularly backed-up and sufficient copies are safely stored off-campus.

3.8 Research

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

BP has developed a strategic research plan with two main strategic goals. The first, to contribute to Bahrain's economic, social, culture and environmental well-being and global impact, and the second to achieve international research collaborations in a selected research area. Each of these goals has specific objectives with due dates, KPIs, and responsibilities clearly allocated. The plan is based on the institution's applied nature, existing academic expertise and research culture, and its research strength and opportunities. This plan has been approved by the Academic Board and is pending BoT's approval. The implementation of the plan is in its early stages and is overseen by the Research Committee reporting to BP's Academic Board. However during interviews with faculty members most seemed unaware of the plan indicating that they were not involved at any level in its development. The Panel recommends BP appropriately disseminate its research plan between its faculty members to ensure its effective implementation.

3.9 Community Engagement

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

BP has developed a strategic community engagement plan identifying four key communities it will benefit. These are, industry and government; students, parents, and alumni; general local public; and international community. With a main strategic goal applied to the four different communities the plan sets for each a set of specific objectives with due dates, KPIs, and responsibilities clearly allocated. The plan is based on the institution's applied nature and its requirement to establish strong work and research relationships with local, regional and international industries; existing activities with the local community including but not limited to students and alumni; and to establish itself as an international education destination for learners and student exchange programmes. The implementation of the plan is in its early stages and is overseen by the Industry Engagement Committee reporting to the SMT. However, during interviews with faculty members most seemed unaware of the plan indicating that they were not involved at any level in its development. The Panel recommends BP appropriately disseminate its community engagement plan between its faculty members to ensure that there is a common understanding and purpose, which in turn, will contribute to its effective implementation.