



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

# Higher Education Review Unit

## Institutional Review Report

Royal University for Women

Kingdom of Bahrain

Dates Reviewed: 18-21 January 2009

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

The review of Royal University for Women, (henceforth referred to as RUW or the University) was conducted by the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU) of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in terms of its mandate to 'review the quality of the performance of education and training institutions in light of the guiding indicators developed by the Authority' (Royal Decree No32 of May 2008 amended by Royal Decree No. 6 of 2009).

This report provides a summary of the HERU institutional review process and the findings of the Expert Review Panel based on the Self-evaluation Report (SER), appendices, and supporting materials submitted by RUW, the supplementary documentation requested from the institution, and interviews and observation made during the review site visit in January 2009.

## **2. Overview of Royal University for Women**

The Royal University for Women (RUW) is a private university in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It is housed in a custom-designed campus and is equipped to cater to the needs of 1000 students. RUW aspires to become a regional leader in academic excellence in women's education, research and development.

RUW is built on 63 acres of land. There are three academic buildings that comprise classrooms, computer laboratories, design studios, and staff offices. RUW also has a Student Centre Building which houses the student council and the club offices, run by the students. Within the same building, there is a cafeteria, a salon, a boutique as well as provisions for a book shop and a number of other outlets. Additionally there is a Student Services Office, and a separate Administration, Library building, gymnasium and swimming pool.

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

In analysing the mission of RUW, the Panel was aware of the newness of the institution and its endeavours to develop an institutional identity and position within the sector. While the newness of the institution means that some structures and processes may not yet be in place, the quality review provides RUW with an opportunity for it to look carefully at its vision and

mission and ensure that its emerging structures and processes are aligned to the direction it hopes to take.

While the Panel was pleased to find a strong shared sense of the mission by all staff members, academic and administrative, and across various levels from Principal to part-time staff, there were some concerns as to whether all the practices of the institution are well aligned to the mission. The mission and vision need to be interpreted into all of the institution's activities, curricula, policies and structures.

There is a clear emphasis on higher education in the vision and mission. The Panel is of the view that the mission of cultivating "strong, well-rounded personalities" and encouraging leadership would be strengthened with the appointment of female staff in key high-level positions as these become available. Given the mission of RUW to create future leaders, there needs to be an institutional ethos that reflects this, where women occupy the most senior leadership and decision-making positions as well as those at middle-management and lecturer level. Failure to do so constitutes a risk for the institution in achieving its mission. Students need to observe women playing leadership roles and being actively involved in the decision-making in the institution.

***Recommendation 1***

*HERU recommends that RUW should actively recruit women in senior leadership and management positions in order to fulfil its mission as a university that encourages women to excel and demonstrate leadership.*

There is evidence that the mission of RUW to develop leadership in the learning experiences available to students with the expectation that students will develop a statement of intention (Art and Design), the use of 'real world' problems, fieldwork (Education) and internships (Business). The practice of inviting prominent female leaders as guest speakers and potential role models for the students is acknowledged. The institution's teaching and learning culture thus emphasizes concern for students as learners, open intellectual inquiry, scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge but it does not as yet have a rigorous system for documenting and reviewing this. The commitment to teaching and learning described in the mission was well-evidenced in the interviews with a range of staff.

The commitment to research and service, also referred to in the mission, was less well-evidenced, although examples of both were presented in both the SER and interviews. The university needs to consider how each of these two core functions can be developed through strategic focus and structures.

The establishment of a 'rewarding and challenging multi-cultural learning environment' relies not only on the quality of provision to students but also on the development of a supportive and consultative ethos for staff. This was an area of concern for the Panel. There was evidence that some academics did not have an opportunity to provide input into the core areas of RUW.

RUW's management needs to infuse the implementation of policies and practices at a micro-level so that management of such policies and practices can be delegated. Such delegation of responsibilities will be essential if RUW achieves the kind of growth in size towards which it aspires. There appears to be close communication between the Board of Trustees and the President. The communication between the Deans, Heads of Department and academic staff and their respective roles and responsibilities is not as clear or effective. This could be improved with a more transparent delegation of authority. Failure to do so constitutes a risk to the good management of the institution, which in turn will effects its sustainability and reputation.

The use of daily management meetings will not be sustainable as the university grows and these may detract from the ability of all academics to take responsibility for the implementation of the policies and practices of RUW. The Deans' Council needs to be primarily concerned about the core functions of the institution; agenda items should arise from all Deans and the President and be duly documented. The way in which the Deans' Council feeds into Senate and *vice versa* should also be reviewed.

### ***Recommendation 2***

*HERU recommends that RUW establish an executive management committee to provide leadership that would ensure the viability of the future growth and development of the University.*

Collective input into decision making is essential if the academic endeavour is to be taken seriously. An inclusive and consultative ethos needs to be valued and nurtured at RUW if its management is to be aligned to its mission and vision. The Panel was concerned to learn of some management practices that are not transparent and collegial. The Panel noted a disjuncture between the executive management and those providing academic leadership in the institution. The Panel was concerned to learn of academic staffing decisions being taken by senior administrators which should properly belong to Heads of Departments in consultation with their Deans. This constitutes an academic quality risk to the institution and needs urgent attention. Freedom of expression and active involvement in the academic endeavour form the basis of a strong academic environment is essential. All policies, structures and systems need to support this.

### ***Recommendation 3***

*HERU recommends that RUW ensure that there is clear delegation of responsibilities for implementing different aspects of the strategic plan.*

The commitment referred to by senior management in the mission and in the SER was much in evidence in the interviews with staff. Respect for staff is crucial; furthermore, the hard work and commitment of staff needs to be recognized. Empowerment of women needs to be underlined, especially through making space in the structures and processes of the University for the voice of female staff to be heard and to help steer the university in the direction it has chosen. This in turn will further develop RUW in its quest to be a place where women develop leadership skills.

The strategic plan needs to be implemented at all levels and needs to guide all key staff at the institution. In particular the link between planning, resource allocation and the strategic plan needs to be made clear. The strategic plan is at an early stage and can now be developed further and in more detail so that the institution is strategically driven towards its vision. It is important that there are detailed plans to support the strategic plan; for example, a learning and teaching plan, a research plan, an enrolment plan, all of which align to the strategic plan. In this way the mission of the university will be implemented and the vision realized.

The process of monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan needs development. It is unclear what data is collected and analyzed in order to review progress in this regard. Data from a management information system, budget review and consideration of outcomes against targets set in the revised strategic plan would all allow the university to judge its annual success in this regard.

### ***Recommendation 4***

*HERU recommends that RUW should further develop its strategic plan with particular attention to implementation strategies.*

The Board of Trustees indicated the strategic overview that they provide. The Panel commends RUW for the commitment and vision of the Board. The Board indicated that their involvement and commitment to the future of RUW did not include a micro-level involvement in terms of academic endeavors. While Article 7 of the HEC regulations simply stipulates that 'The institution's by-laws shall set out its terms of reference and its work regulations, the understanding of the delineation between the Board of Trustees' role in terms of governance of

RUW and the staff's role in terms of management of the institution is essential for the integrity of the university. The baseline development of the institution relied heavily on the high involvement of the Board but this involvement will need to be reduced such that it is clearly at a governance level only as the institution grows. The institution needs to always be able to conduct its business with autonomy, independent from the other business interests of its financial sponsors. The inclusion of business women as members of the Board of Trustees is acknowledged, such female members give valuable insights from industry.

### ***Commendation 1***

*HERU commends RUW on the presence of a strong Board of Trustees that are committed and dedicated to its growth.*

The institution provides opportunities for student participation in decision-making, as is considered in more detail in Section 7 of this report. The role of the Student Council appears to be growing and RUW should be acknowledged in this regard. This structure has representation at Senate. During interviews with the Panel the students indicated that they were able to make their views heard and had ready access to decision-makers including access to the President.

The Panel found evidence of job descriptions for most levels of posts but it was unclear whether these had all been approved. A number of staff indicated a lack of awareness of these. There is a greater clarity as to the role and function of the Heads of Departments and Deans. The full spectrum of job descriptions needs to be readily available (for example, on the proposed intranet) and considered by all staff. As the size of the institution grows the role of the Deans needs to become more strategic and the quality review of teaching, learning and assessment will need to rest increasingly with the Heads of Departments. Systems will need to be put into place to ensure that such reviews are implemented, as discussed in Section 6.

Salary scales also need to be transparent. There needs to be a consistent application of additional agreements such as the payment for teaching above the maximum of five courses. Such additional teaching should be used, and remunerated, only in exceptional circumstances because a teaching overload has a direct negative effect on teaching, learning and assessment.

The academic endeavour must drive all structures in a University, including the administrative structures. Budgetary constraints are well known at most universities and will inevitably dictate some of the decisions taken. The budgeting process at RUW is such that Deans develop budgets for their faculties and these are sent to the Director of Administration and Finance who collates these with budgets from non-academic sectors and presents the collated proposed budget to the President. This in turn is approved by the Board of Trustees. The Panel is of the

view that it is important that this process is kept transparent at all stages and that the full management team is informed of the proposed budget and the approved budget and has a good understanding of the amounts allocated to his or her ambit. There is a concern that decisions in regards spending and budget allocation may be overly centred around senior administrators with insufficient input from those responsible for the academic programmes. This constitutes a risk in terms of the academic reputation of the institution.

The allocation of finances needs to be carefully linked to the strategic plan so that amounts are allocated to items which will lead the university in the direction it has set for itself. The Panel urges RUW to develop a system which links planning and resource allocation to the academic enterprise and which includes Deans and Heads of Departments. Furthermore, all approval processes need to be made very explicit so that it is clear which decisions require Head of Department approval, which require Deans' Council approval and which require other approval.

***Recommendation 5***

*HERU recommends that RUW should develop a system which links planning and resource allocation to the academic enterprise and which includes Deans and Heads of Departments.*

While the allocation to staff development is far more than the 3% regulated by the HEC, a more strategic and comprehensive plan is needed to determine how such funds are utilized to develop the university towards its strategic goal, particularly the notion of becoming the 'regional leader in academic excellence for women'.

The use of a transparent performance measurement process for management is to be encouraged. The current process of self-review and review by manager could be further strengthened and developed. The Panel encourages the institution to set up appropriate procedures and mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the governance and management structures in relation to managing academic risk, improving quality and realizing the mission of the institution.

Standard anti-fraud processes seem to be in place in the financial arrangements of the university. Including the Deans in the Management Team, which is critical in an academic environment, would also ensure that financial decisions are taken which are underpinned by the academic endeavour.

The academic to administrative staff ratio appears to be 50:50. A number of administrative functions, such as cleaning and security, are outsourced and not taken into account in this ratio

raising a concern about the actual number of academics to administrative staff. This ratio should be closely monitored to ensure that those undertaking the core work of the institution are not outnumbered by those providing administrative support.

The university has plans to introduce an intranet and to provide all students with an RUW email address. This would assist not only in developing the RUW brand but also in strengthening internal communications. Changes at any level need to be communicated effectively throughout the institution and systems should be in place to ensure that this occurs.

Policies and procedures are readily available to staff and students, in hard copy booklet. Additional policies such as for quality assurance of programmes will need to be added. As most policies are new, few have been reviewed at this stage but processes for such review should be agreed at institutional level. Such reviews should include a consideration of their effectiveness and can include comparisons being made with those of other institutions

This is a new institution and it understandable that a number of structures are new or not yet in place. However, because it is new this is the perfect opportunity to reflect critically on its direction and future potential and to develop the necessary structures and procedures which will lead it towards the vision it has developed for itself. The university's aspirations to become a regional centre of excellence for women seem attainable and will be essential for the growth of the institution.

#### **4. Academic Standards**

The institution's programme structures and credit hours were found to accord with international norms for the amount of study required for each degree offered by the institution (Student Handbook 2008-2009, 'Academic programmes offered by RUW' booklet). RUW's qualifications are based on recognised higher education fields of study and each degree programme would seem to comprise a coherent body of knowledge. Some evidence (Course Files) was provided that RUW ensures that all programmes and subjects have clearly formulated learning outcomes which address generic skills and knowledge as well as specific skills and knowledge, and promote learning to learn and life-long learning. There was also some evidence (Course Files) that assessment of student learning is appropriate for the learning outcomes sought. However, without a programme review process it is difficult for RUW to be assured of its academic standards in this regard. A holistic approach to the quality assurance of programmes is thus recommended. In the Panel's review of a selection of student work, there appeared to be a lack of evidence in the written assignments prepared by students that they

have achieved a level of academic literacy (such as appropriate referencing and critical analysis) as expected at a higher education level. Information literacy sessions planned and delivered in conjunction with the librarian should be embedded in various programmes.

***Recommendation 6***

*HERU recommends that RUW develop rigorous internal process for approval and review of all its programmes to assist it to achieve sound academic standards.*

Issues of sustainability are to be expected in a new institution but great care is needed to ensure that student numbers rise so that areas of specialization where there are current students enrolled, such as Special Education, are not placed at risk. The increase in numbers will continue as RUW establishes a strong name for itself. The role that academics can play in ensuring such growth is through their maintenance of academic standards and their role in quality assuring the teaching, learning and assessment practices. Any pressure on academics to pass students regardless of their performance will have dire consequences for the institution as the integrity of its academic standards will inevitably come into question.

RUW has endeavoured to achieve academic standards comparable to those of recognised universities internationally by using institutions such as McGill and Middlesex in the establishment of some programmes. Ongoing benchmarking of quality of programmes will only be possible if programmes are reviewed in a systematic and ongoing way. One benchmarking technique, external examining, occurs in the Edexcel programme and was also found to occur through the use of an assessment Panel in Art and Design, which sometimes includes members of industry. RUW could consider broadening this practice so that all exit level assessments benefit from the input of external examiners or moderators from neighbouring institutions. There was evidence of good internal moderation of assessment processes.

The relationships between RUW and McGill and Middlesex respectively have been terminated. The Panel found that all staff and students were clear that the relationships had been useful but were no longer in place. The SER was however less clear in this regard; there were regular references in the SER to the way in which these two universities assisted in the development of the initial programmes and the appointment of initial staff but no overt statement that such relationships are not ongoing. There is also slight ambiguity on the RUW website despite page 20 of the SER indicating that "The nature of the relationship RUW had with McGill University and Middlesex University is clearly stated in the SH and on the RUW website"

The idea of twinning departments and programmes at RUW with counterparts at other institutions is to be acknowledged as this will assist in ensuring international benchmarking. Achievement of academic standards comparable to those of recognised universities internationally is regarded as an important responsibility and RUW needs to consider how it can demonstrate this in an ongoing way (for example through benchmarking and/or external examination).

It was reported to the Panel that RUW has processes to ensure that admission criteria are met in all cases and the use of foundation studies enables a number of students to meet its admission criteria. However, the use of a hard-copy student information system constitutes a risk to the academic standards of RUW. The Panel affirms the planned introduction of a secure management information system for student data.

***Affirmation 1***

*HERU affirms the plans of RUW to implement a new Management Information System for student data to replace the current manual system.*

The HEC requirement (Article 14, B.4) that institutions must “provide at least three teaching staff holding doctorate degrees in the discipline” requires clarification. It is not clear whether ‘discipline’ refers to broad knowledge areas and subject classifications or whether each specialization must have three PhDs. It would be difficult for a small university to comply if the requirement is for each specialization. In some specializations in a small university, such as RUW, there will only be one or two staff members, furthermore there are areas where there are very few PhDs available, even at an international level, such as in Arts and Design.

The greatest threat to the academic standards at RUW comes from the high turnover of staff. While this report raises a number of issues in this regard, it is important that RUW critically reflects on why this is the case and takes the necessary steps to attract and retain good staff.

The Panel noted that there is an overly structured environment for academic staff. The Panel is of the view that as a university, RUW should provide an enabling intellectual environment for staff as well as students. This means that academic staff should be able to manage their own time, have opportunities to engage in research, forge links with industry as well as have time to reflect critically on their teaching. The Panel encourages RUW to give attention to the conditions of service of its academic staff.

***Recommendation 7***

*HERU recommends that RUW revisit the rules around academic campus hours to ensure that they complement the mission of the university, and are aligned to international expectations for higher education.*

While academic authority and the concomitant upkeep of academic standards are vested in Senate, it was not clear to the Panel that Senate is exercising its authority in this regard. The Panel is of the impression that there are conceptual and operational aspects about the role, function and authority of Senate which require clarification. The Panel heard with concern that there is little room for open debate, making the nature and purpose of Senate ambiguous. The Panel encourages RUW to ensure that there is intellectual space for Senate to fulfil its role of the custodian of academic integrity as well as providing academic leadership. Consideration could be given to expanding Senate to allow input from a wider academic base. The current size of RUW makes it possible for it to consider including all academics in Senate.

***Recommendation 8***

*HERU recommends that RUW ensure that there is intellectual space for Senate to fulfil its role of the custodian of academic integrity as well as providing academic leadership.*

The issue of plagiarism was not particularly well understood by either students or staff in that the development of academic literacy, in particular the academic practice of referencing and citation, was not emphasized in interviews and an analysis of student work provided little evidence of extended pieces of writing with due reference to relevant texts. Regular opportunities need to be given to students to undertake extended pieces of writing within one or other of the academic genres, all of which rely on the use of citation. This development of academic and information literacy would demand close liaison between the academic teaching staff and the academic library staff. Careful and detailed feedback on student writing would then scaffold students' acquisition of this particular academic standard.

***Recommendation 9***

*HERU recommends that RUW ensure that their policy on plagiarism is communicated clearly to staff and students and consistently applied.*

## 5. Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The Panel affirms RUW's development of the Quality Assurance Unit in September 2007 with an approved function in June 2008 by the Board of Trustees. RUW gives this unit support by providing it with direct contact with the President. However, the mandate of this unit as overseeing systematic RUW management of quality was not well-evidenced. The SER indicates that the QAU will be the repository of all policies and monitor the review process thereof, it was less clear in the SER and in interviews how the QAU, or some other body, will develop and monitor systematic reviews of quality in the core RUW processes of teaching, research and community engagement. RUW needs to consider the way in which quality assurance can be embedded into all of its practices and the role of the QAU in this regard.

Quality assurance needs to be understood as the process whereby the core functions of the university, teaching, research and community engagement, are reviewed. The focus on quality assuring administrative processes is undertaken insofar as such processes are meant to underpin and support the university's core functions. It is vital that quality assurance is understood as everyone's responsibility and that the person or people guiding and supporting such processes should have representation at levels such as the Deans' Council, Teaching and Learning Committee and Senate. Issues of quality and the implementation of a systematic approach to quality assurance need to be standing items on a number of agendas. The reporting by the Quality Assurance Unit into these various structures needs to be clarified.

While quality assurance needs to be everybody's responsibility, an overview analysis at institutional level of quality data should be undertaken by a body such as the QAU. Interviews with various staff indicate that the current, limited implementation of quality assurance is understood as a developmental process. This understanding should continue as quality assurance grows and becomes more systematic so that it allows for, and encourages, a critical reflection on the teaching, learning and assessment process and does not become an inspectoral process tied to punitive measures. Quality assurance needs to be understood as a mechanism for strengthening the academic endeavour.

RUW perceived themselves in many aspects to meet international standards or state their aim to meet such standards in the future and interviews with staff. However, without a systematic quality assurance process of all core activities it is hard for RUW to readily provide support for such claims or monitor progress towards such aims. The system of documentation of its practices needs a more sophisticated process and consideration should be given as to what documents are required and for what quality processes.

***Recommendation 10***

*HERU recommends that RUW develop a holistic approach to quality assurance, which is centred on continuous quality improvement rather than compliance and correction. Quality Assurance processes should be integrated to all aspects of the University including governance, administration and the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.*

The use of performance management of and by staff in line with key performance indicators was demonstrated to be inconsistently applied and not fully utilized. Such systems can feed into quality assurance and enhancement processes. This would require that Human Resources, or whatever body takes overall responsibility for performance management and the QAU, or whatever body takes overall responsibility for quality monitoring, will need to have a clearly specified relationship.

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

The staff indicated a strong commitment to student learning. They were readily accessible to students and responsive to student learning needs. Heads of Department maintained an 'open door policy' for students. Students confirmed that they have ready access to teaching staff and to the Heads of Department. The consultation times of academic staff are indicated on their office doors. Students also indicated that they had access to the President if they had more serious concerns.

***Commendation 2***

*HERU commends RUW for its strong commitment to student learning and the development of students as future women leaders.*

The academic staff indicated strong support for the mission of the university and recognized the unique and potential positive contribution of the university to the empowerment of women. This high level of commitment and pride in RUW amongst staff at all levels, described in the institutional mission was well-evidenced in interviews. However, the Panel heard of a number of issues of quality management and staff dissatisfaction that need to be addressed in order to maintain this.

The use of anonymous evaluations from students is acknowledged. The interviews provided evidence of the use of such evaluations in a fairly consistent way and the Panel saw evidence of

how these are analysed and provided to the relevant staff member for reflection and improvement of personal practice. All courses are evaluated from a student perspective through anonymous surveys. The results of the surveys are collated by the Registrar's office and forwarded to the Dean and then to the Head of Department. The Head of Department then discusses the results with the relevant staff member and they agree on a plan of action to improve the teaching as required. From discussion with Head of Department, staff members, students and written documentation there was clear evidence that this student evaluation and follow-up was in place and was an effective means of improving the quality of teaching.

The Panel urges the institution to give attention to student evaluation data and ensure it is collated and analysed at an institutional and faculty level as this provides a useful quality indicator for ongoing self-reflection. It should be acknowledged that such student evaluations do appear to be utilized at the level of individual staff members and that such feedback should remain as a developmental and not punitive tool. The problematic issue of validity of student evaluation requires that such data is never used in isolation but is considered alongside data from staff evaluations and other sources.

Systematic review of programmes needs to be undertaken in a developmental mode where critical reflection and engagement by all stakeholders is encouraged. There is no embedded system of annual programme/course review. While there are annual Faculty reports, these are not at the level of detail to assure the quality of the teaching programmes. Apart from the student feedback of teaching there is little data regarding the quality of teaching and learning. There is the need to collate and monitor data about student demand for programmes (viability), student progression and attrition and student feedback (quality) and graduate employment (relevance). At present student evaluation data is only focused on individual staff members and is not collated and compared across programmes. Qualitative data (such as peer review, self review, review of teaching materials and texts, student evaluations and review of assessments) combined with quantitative data (such as pass rates, retention rates, registration rates) should all feed into an ongoing and systematic process. Aspects of this process, such as student evaluations, were evidenced at RUW, but a holistic approach to programme review was not yet in place.

It is essential that when such a holistic system is put in place it should be rigorous and transparent and acknowledge the complexities and nuances of such a review. Any reductionist understanding of quality from a single perspective such as student pass rates is to be avoided. Academics need to know that their decisions in regards student passes and fails are supported by RUW, having gone through a careful moderation process.

**Recommendation 11**

*HERU recommends that RUW develop and implement systematic review of annual course/programme reviews.*

Plans for a major review of programmes after graduation of the first cohort, and with input from Tamkeen, Women's Higher Council and other stakeholders, are to be acknowledged. However, the review of quality in RUW programmes needs to be understood in a more systematic and ongoing way. Student and staff voices need to be regularly collected and taken into consideration during the academic year. Annual reports by the Deans are very useful in documenting the quality of teaching and learning, but the data collated and analysed for such reports should be specified and supported throughout the year.

External examination occurs in the Edexcel programme and was also found to occur through the use of an assessment Panel in Art and Design which sometimes includes a range of academic staff members and members of industry which provides an internal validation of student learning outcomes. RUW could consider broadening this practice so that all exit level assessments benefit from the input of external examiners or moderators from neighbouring institutions.

Staff development appeared to be understood in a fairly *ad hoc* manner, largely at the level of conference attendance. The development of excellent teaching, learning and assessment practices requires a more integral, broad and ongoing focus on these issues. The matter of who is to be responsible for developing, collating or overseeing such academic development offerings also needs clarity. There is no formal programme, either internal or external to the University, to induct staff into their teaching role, there is no requirement for staff to have teaching qualifications specific to the higher education sector, there is no ongoing programme of professional development related to teaching and there is no evidence of an institutional focus on teaching scholarship. For an institution whose primary focus is teaching this is a serious quality concern.

**Recommendation 12**

*HERU recommends that RUW develop and implement comprehensive staff professional development programmes.*

The use of a wide range of teaching approaches from lecturing to tutorials to studio work is to be acknowledged. The evidence of real-life based projects as a major assessment form is further evidence of the preparation of RUW students for the workplace through the development of an authentic understanding of the world. A systematic quality assurance process of programme or

course review will allow the institution to document and reflect on its own practices and ensure that there is a balance of theory and practice and that good practices are shared among faculty.

The role of the Teaching and Learning Committee in terms of decision-making about teaching, learning and assessment practices needs to be clarified, as will its relationship to the systematic quality review processes the Panel has recommended. The relationship between the Quality Assurance Unit and the Teaching and Learning Committee will need to be taken into consideration when such review systems are put in place.

The physical facilities are excellent with accommodation for university-wide events and celebrations, large classrooms and small tutorial spaces. This was found to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The technology to support teaching and learning has recently improved with the appointment of a new IT Director. The Panel supports the stated plans to implement a new student data system, improve the intranet and internal communications, adopt a student learning management system and monitor the currency of the university website. The current manual system of documenting student records was labour intensive, inefficient and posed a data integrity risk for the institution. Both students and staff indicated that the lack of an intranet hindered effective communication within RUW.

## **7. Student Support**

RUW provides their students with many support services in areas such counselling, health and welfare, housing, internships, and assistance for students with disabilities. Students know about these services through notice boards, print-outs, catalogue, website and ordinary mail. There is overwhelming evidence of a student focused culture at RUW. All staff, both academic and administrative demonstrated a commitment to student learning and well-being. The students assured the Panel that staff are readily accessible to students and responsive to their needs. The students also confirmed the Panel that all students, including international student, are treated with equal respect and consideration.

In interviews, staff reported that they are very committed to their students and make themselves readily available both in class and thereafter. These claims were strongly supported by the students who indicated that, with few exceptions, staff were indeed available to them and supportive of them. Students reported being able to take their issues to all levels of the institution, including the President's office and feeling that their views would be heard. This student-focused ethos was evident in other aspects of RUW's activities through the provision of excellent recreational facilities, residences and student activities.

### ***Commendation 3***

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

The Student Council is also still establishing itself within the institution and will provide an important link for management to student support and quality issues. The Panel noted that there is student representation in the University Senate; the Panel acknowledged RUW decision to include the Student Council President on Senate.

The Panel also noted during interviews with students from the student council that there is no allocated budget to support student activities. The Panel encourages RUW to consider allocating a budget to support the students to conduct their activities.

### ***Recommendation 13***

*HERU recommends that RUW allocate a specific budget to support student activities and the student council.*

The commitment to small group teaching is noted as characteristic of the University's approach to teaching. The Review Panel found evidence of a commitment to this mode of teaching by staff and students across Colleges. The Panel notes that this commitment may become more difficult to maintain as the University grows without a concomitant growth in academic staff numbers.

The Panel was told about the future establishment of an intranet and of RUW email addresses for students and this is also mentioned in the ITC plan for 2008-2009. This will assist in improving internal communication with students and will further develop the RUW identity.

Scholarships are available to students with good grades on the basis of a satisfactory interview and evidence of financial need. A number of students were currently receiving partial scholarships and six students were currently receiving a full scholarship although a decision had recently been made to offer only partial (50%) scholarships.

The student attendance requirements and monitoring may be in contradiction to the stated mission to develop leadership and does not seem an appropriate practice for a higher education institution. There was the perception by some staff that the attendance requirements and examination attendance are waived at the discretion of senior staff. For example, students who missed classes during Ramadan were excused and a student who arrived late for an examination was granted permission to sit the examination following an appeal by her father.

While these decisions appear reasonable, there could be the perception of inequity and reluctance on behalf of staff members to enforce the attendance regulations if they can be readily overturned. Given this, it may be timely to reconsider some of these 'rules' and provide a more flexible learning environment for the students that is more closely aligned with the mission of the institution.

## **8. Human Resources**

The Panel was concerned about the high turnover of staff. There are numerous reasons for this, some of which are out of the hands of the institution. All recruitment processes, including the advertising of posts, checking of references and interviewing of candidates must be as transparent as possible and include the input of the relevant sectors of the university. Appointments need to be entirely transparent and the selection of academic staff needs to have the clear input of those involved in the teaching and learning.

All support promised by Human Resources in terms of staff, such as assistance in obtaining housing and work permits, needs to be provided to ensure a better retention of staff. The renewal of two year contracts needs to take place as early as possible in the second year to ensure that staff are confident about their ongoing employment and do not begin the search for work elsewhere.

The Panel was provided evidence of a staff orientation process which occurred through a tour of the campus and the use of a staff orientation booklet. As the institution grows the orientation process will need to be developed further and formalized.

There does not appear to be a strategic plan for recruitment and retention of high quality staff. There was no systematic collection of data about staffing levels, workload and turnover. The high turnover of academic staff is concerning and some of the current conditions of work are not conducive to an effective working and learning environment for staff. For example, most staff are given the maximum teaching load (as indicated by the HEC) as a standard expectation with no reduction in load for research productivity and/or management responsibilities. The requirement for staff to attend the campus from 8am to 4pm five days per week is not in line with international practice and is more likely to reduce productivity than enhance it. The use of staff from across faculties to offer service courses and specializations is to be encouraged particularly as RUW grows and faculties may be inclined to become more territorial with their staff.

***Recommendation 14***

*HERU recommends that RUW develop and implement a strategic human resources plan for the recruitment and retention of high quality staff.*

While the HR officer claimed that there were position descriptions for all RUW roles, Deans and Heads of Department were not clear about their respective roles and responsibilities. The Panel noted that some job descriptions had not been approved. Furthermore, while most staff members appeared to be aware of their own job descriptions, many expressed uncertainty about the role and functions of other levels of staff, for examples Deans and Heads of Departments. All job descriptions need to be readily available. Salary scales and benefits need also to be accessible to all. The perceived inequities in pay scales between Bahraini nationals and others is perceived as an example of racism and is a contributing to staff dissatisfaction.

As the size of the institution grows the role of the Deans needs to become more strategic and the quality review of teaching, learning and assessment will need to rest with the Heads of Departments. Systems will need to be put into place to ensure that such reviews are implemented. The process for performance planning and review for Deans is not in place and is not transparent. In a small institution there is a real opportunity for the academic staff to be part of a community of scholars and have the opportunity to make a real contribution to the development of the university. This opportunity is lost with too much authority vested in the Dean's Council.

***Recommendation 15***

*HERU recommends that RUW implement a systematic performance management and promotion programme for all staff.*

The lack of senior women employed at RUW seriously undermines the stated mission of the university. It is not clear that the 'voice' of female staff is valued and encouraged at RUW. This is apparent to students and will compromise their learning and development of women leaders.

There is no regular anonymous survey of staff satisfaction in place and no plan to improve the working and learning environment for staff on the basis of evidence. While staff are positive about the physical facilities of the working environment, there is little evidence that senior management has actively supported the development of a supportive community of scholars amongst the staff.

***Recommendation 16***

*HERU recommends that RUW develop and implement a survey for staff satisfaction to improve the working and learning environment.*

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

The RUW campus was completed in 2006, and was occupied and operational for semester 1 of the academic year 2006-2007. The campus has a working capacity for over 1000 students. The campus buildings and facilities including: three academic buildings, student centre, administration and library building, student residence, and services buildings.

The resources available to students are to be commended. The gym, recreation hall, swimming pool, clinic and other student areas all serve to provide an environment which is enticing for the young women who study at RUW.

RUW has full time members responsible for IT support services. During the site visit, the Panel had the opportunity to interview its staff and to see the facilities available to students in the different departments. The Panel heard in the interviews from staff and students that the facilities and equipment, including IT support services seem to be inadequate to support the institution academic programme offerings.

The Panel noted the recent improvement to the availability of technology in the classrooms and affirmed the plans to implement a new student data system, improve intranet and internal communications, adopt a student learning management system and monitor the currency of the university website.

***Affirmation 2***

*HERU affirms RUW for the recent improvement to the availability of technology in the classrooms.*

Currently the Library's function is in a temporary set up as the number of students and collection is small. According to SER, the library will move in the near future to purpose built facilities arranged in accordance with international standards. The library's current services include: loan services, overnight issues, reprographic services, newspaper clipping services, archiving and documentation, and on-line search services.

The University provides all new students general information about the library rules and regulations. During the first week of study, students are given further training and

demonstration in the library on the print and electronic collection, system of indexing, library software and information retrieval.

The library collection is relatively under-resourced given the relative standard of the rest of the infrastructure. As the hub of an academic institution, the library needs to be far larger. The size of the library is not only a physical issue, the Panel was informed that purpose-built space is available; the main issue is the size of the collections. The collection of books and online resources is very limited. While the minimum standards set by the HEC may be met, the library collection is not evidence of a quality higher education institution. There is only one professionally qualified librarian but even her skills are not effectively deployed. She does not have a specific budget and the opportunity to develop a strategic acquisitions plan. An annual budget needs to be allocated for library acquisitions and the university librarian needs to develop a strategic acquisitions plan in consultation with the Deans. The librarian has no formal role in any relevant academic or administrative committees. She has an ex officio role on key academic and administrative committees. The library needs to offer access to good electronic journal databases as well as to hard copy texts. It would be useful for RUW to reconsider the termination of its subscription to the EBSCO or similar database. As part of a structured process of staff development, academics can be inducted into how to forge closer links with the library as part of their teaching and learning approach.

***Recommendation 17***

*HERU recommends that RUW continue to improve its resources, including library resources, to cater for the current and projected growth in numbers.*

The sale of textbooks is a purely administrative task and should not be confused with the academic role played by a university library. The time of the library staff is misused by the expectation that they will manage and sell textbooks.

The office space provided for academics seems to be of a high standard. Access to a telephone, possibly with regulations as to usage, and to an RUW email address should also form part of the infrastructure provided to all academics.

## **10. Research**

The Mission of RUW states that the University is *committed to research and service through the activities of all Members of the University community*. In the SER the University confirmed that phase two of the strategic plan includes increasing offerings to include postgraduate study and

identifying strategic research relating to the needs of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Phase 3 of the Strategic Plan includes a review of the plan and the growth of an international partnership. In this regard, RUW should not wait to develop the role of the graduate and research committee.

On the basis of the documentation provided and the interviews conducted, the Panel found that a graduate and research committee was developed at the beginning of the 2007 but started to be active only a few months prior to the review site visit and still needs to develop a stronger sense of its role in developing and supporting research at RUW. The main activity in this domain is to facilitate participation at a maximum of one conference per year for every academic faculty member. The financial report does not allocate a special budget to research; it only allocates a budget to participate in conferences. The understanding of research development and support should be broadened to encompass more than conference attendance. There was also some conflation in the understanding of general staff development and research development, both of which were reductively understood as being conference attendance.

***Recommendation 18***

*HERU recommends that RUW should develop and prioritize research-related plan, policy and processes, including processes in respect of research ethics.*

The strategic identification and growth of a few key areas in which RUW develops its research identity could relate to the role of businesswomen in Bahrain and the broader region and the area of scholarship of teaching and learning at University level. While the securing of staff with the appropriate research backgrounds and the reduction of workloads for active researchers are both financially demanding processes, RUW should also look carefully at ways in which research can provide alternative income streams through acquiring research grants and industry funding.

At present research development is understood only at the level of conference attendance. As RUW identifies and grows strategic research niche areas, this understanding will need to develop to incorporate support for academics learning how to undertake research and publish such research. The provision of such support and the use of research funds should be made as transparent as possible.

As RUW begins to develop post-graduate courses and develop a research niche area or areas, it may wish to consider strengthening its relationship with the Strathclyde MBA. There may be also be other opportunities for shared projects and research endeavors.

## 11. Community Engagement

While the Panel heard a number of examples of community engagement in terms of *ad hoc* workshops and industry visits, they were less assured that there was an understanding of community engagement as a curriculated process, despite the reference to commitment to service in RUW's mission.

The planned internship of students prior to graduation allows for a connection between the academic environment and that of industry. Such internships should be carefully managed by RUW to ensure that these are well-structured learning opportunities for the students.

The offering of scholarships is also acknowledged – both as a means of securing top students and as a means of community engagement through the inclusion of women whose financial circumstances may otherwise preclude their attendance at RUW.

It is stated in the mission and indicator 21 that RUW has defined the way in which it will serve and engage with local national and regional communities. However, the Panel did not find a shared understanding of community engagement or policy that would assure management of the quality of these activities.

The Panel noted the organization of community events that interested the public at RUW. These included organized fashion shows, exhibitions, the opening of its gymnasium to the parents of the students, the development of some play therapy programmes for nearby schools and the offering of a workshop for special education. However according to the evidence presented in the interview conducted with academic staff and students, there is a need for a more embedded and developed understanding of community service. Clarity is needed as to the extent to which RUW intends to focus on this aspect of its work. There needs to be a shared understanding of who comprises RUW's 'community' and what form of engagement with this community will take place. In particular, RUW will need to consider the curriculum implications of its community engagement approaches. RUW should develop a conceptual framework, coordinating structures, policies and resource allocation so that individual efforts become part of an institutional plan.

### ***Recommendation 19***

*HERU recommends that RUW should develop a conceptual framework, coordinating structures, policies and resource allocation for community engagement so that individual efforts become part of an institutional plan, that is implemented, monitored and reviewed.*

## 12. Conclusion

RUW as a new institution has yet to establish its academic identity and reputation within the Bahraini higher education sector and has a significant opportunity to do this. The main challenge for the institution is to establish an empowering ethos for women and an academic culture of transparency, collegiality and debate. This includes making appointments at all levels of highly qualified women leaders. This would provide the necessary leadership that will nurture the academic endeavour of the institution and strengthen significantly the quality of academic provision. If it does so, RUW will be geared to achieve its mission in a way that gives substance to its strategic intent to be a university that empowers women to have 'strong well-rounded personalities and encourages leadership'.