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Education & Training Quality Authority
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Directorate of Higher Education Reviews

Programmes-within-College Reviews Report

Master in Mass Communication

College of Arts

University of Bahrain

Kingdom of Bahrain

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Acronyms

| | |
|-------|--|
| BQA | Education and Training Quality Authority |
| CGPA | Cumulative Grade Point Average |
| CILOs | Course Intended Learning Outcomes |
| DHR | Directorate of Higher Education Reviews |
| HEC | Higher Education Council |
| HoD | Head of Department |
| ILOs | Intended Learning Outcomes |
| ITC | Information Technology Centre |
| MIS | Management Information System |
| NQF | National Qualification Framework |
| PILOs | Programme Intended Learning Outcomes |
| QAAC | Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre |
| QAO | Quality Assurance Office |
| SER | Self-Evaluation Report |
| UoB | University of Bahrain |

The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process

A. The Programmes-within-College Reviews Framework

To meet the need to have a robust external quality assurance system in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR) of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA) has developed and is implementing two external quality review processes, namely: Institutional Reviews and Programmes-within-College Reviews which together will give confidence in Bahrain's higher education system nationally, regionally and internationally.

Programmes-within-College Reviews have three main objectives:

- to provide decision-makers (in the higher education institutions, the BQA, the Higher Education Council (HEC), students and their families, prospective employers of graduates and other stakeholders) with evidence-based judgements on the quality of learning programmes
- to support the development of internal quality assurance processes with information on emerging good practices and challenges, evaluative comments and continuing improvement
- to enhance the reputation of Bahrain's higher education regionally and internationally.

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

Indicator 1: The Learning Programme

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

Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme

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

Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates

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

Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

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

The Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Panel’) states in the Review Report whether the programme satisfies each Indicator. If the programme satisfies all four Indicators, the concluding statement will say that there is ‘confidence’ in the programme.

If two or three Indicators are satisfied, including Indicator 1, the programme will receive a ‘limited confidence’ judgement. If one or no Indicator is satisfied, or Indicator 1 is not satisfied, the judgement will be ‘no confidence’, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Criteria for Judgements

| Criteria | Judgement |
|--|--------------------|
| All four Indicators satisfied | Confidence |
| Two or three Indicators satisfied, including Indicator 1 | Limited Confidence |
| One or no Indicator satisfied | No Confidence |
| All cases where Indicator 1 is not satisfied | |

B. The Programmes-within-College Reviews Process at the University of Bahrain

A Programmes-within-College review of the University of Bahrain (UoB) was conducted by the DHR of the BQA in terms of its mandate to review the quality of higher education in Bahrain. The site visit took place on 5-9 November 2017 for the academic programmes offered by the College of Arts, these are: Bachelor in Mass Communication, Bachelor in Tourism, Master in Mass Communication, Bachelor in Sociology, Bachelor in History, Master in Psychological Counselling and Master in Measurement and Evaluation.

This Report provides an account of the review process and the findings of the Panel for the Master in Mass Communication programme based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and appendices submitted by UoB and the supplementary documentation made available during the site visit, as well as interviews and observations made during the review site visit.

UoB was notified by the DHR/BQA on 6 March 2017 that it would be subject to a Programmes-within-College review of its College of Arts with the site visit taking place in November 2017. In preparation for the review, UoB conducted its college self-evaluation of all its programmes and submitted the SERs with appendices on the agreed date on 8 June 2017.

The DHR constituted three panels consisting of experts in the academic fields of the programmes and higher education who have experience of external programme quality reviews. The Panels comprised 12 external reviewers.

This Report provides an account of the review process and the findings of the Panel for the Master in Mass Communication programme based on:

- (i) analysis of the Self-Evaluation Report and supporting materials submitted by the institution prior to the external peer-review visit
- (ii) analysis derived from discussions with various stakeholders (faculty members, students, graduates and employers)
- (iii) analysis based on additional documentation requested and presented to the Panel during the site visit.

It is expected that the UoB will use the findings presented in this Report to strengthen its Master in Mass Communication. The DHR recognizes that quality assurance is the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. Hence, it is the right of UoB to decide how it will address the recommendations contained in the Review Report. Nevertheless, three months after the publication of this Report, UoB is required to submit to the DHR an improvement plan in response to the recommendations.

The DHR would like to extend its thanks to UoB for the co-operative manner in which it has participated in the Programmes-within-College review process. It also wishes to express its appreciation for the open discussions held in the course of the review and the professional conduct of the faculty and administrative staff of the Master in Mass Communication.

C. Overview of the College of Arts

The College of Arts was originally established as a part of the University College of Arts, Science, and Education, which was founded by the Amiri Decree number 11 in 1978. In 1986, the Amiri Decree No. (12) was issued to establish the UoB by merging the Gulf Polytechnic and the University College of Arts, Science and Education. The UoB included at this time: the College of Arts and Science, College of Education, College of Business Administration, and College of Engineering. In 1990, the Board of Trustees of UoB issued a decision to divide the College of Arts & Science into two separate colleges: the College of Arts and the College of Science. Currently, the UoB includes ten colleges. The College of Arts includes five departments, which are: the Department of Arabic languages and Islamic Studies, Department of English Language and Literature, Department of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Department of Mass Communication, Tourism and Fine Arts. The College offers Bachelor degree programmes across its five departments alongside postgraduate programmes at the master level. The mission of the College is focused on preparing

intellectual and enlightened leaders equipped with mental and critical competences that strengthen their Arab and Islamic identity, the climate of freedom, cultural pluralism and respect for citizenship, and help in building knowledge, technology, culture and practical skills, as well as, supporting scientific research and community services. At the time of the site visit, the College was employing (128) full-time faculty members, (69) part-time members, supported by (29) administrative staff. The total number of enrolled students was (5719) students.

D. Overview of the Master in Mass Communication Programme

The Master of Mass Communication was first offered in 1997-1998, in UoB through the Department of General Studies. In the academic year 1998-1999, the Department of Mass Communication, Tourism and Fine Arts was established, to offer two programmes: Bachelor in Mass Communication and Public Relations, and Bachelor in Tourism and Hotels, in addition to a number of elective courses in arts. In the first semester of the academic year 2011-2012, the first version of the study plan for the Master of Mass Communication programme was offered. In the academic year 2015, the study plan was revised and currently it offers a number of tracks, namely: Journalism, Radio & TV, digital media, Advertising, Strategic Communication, International Communication and Public Diplomacy. The programme of Master in Mass Communication aims to provide competent professionals to support building a knowledge base useful in constructing policies, rules and regulations, and making decisions in the field of communication and information. At the time of the site visit, the total number of enrolled students in the programme was (82), and the total number of graduates since the commencement of the programme and until the date of the site visit is (17). Currently, there are (10) full-time academic members contributing to the delivery of the programme, supported by (7) administrative staff.

E. Summary of Review Judgements

Table 2: Summary of Review Judgements for the Master in Mass Communication Programme

| Indicator | Judgement |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1: The Learning Programme | Satisfies |
| 2: Efficiency of the Programme | Satisfies |
| 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates | Does not satisfy |
| 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance | Satisfies |
| Overall Judgement | Limited Confidence |

1. Indicator 1: The Learning Programme

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

- 1.1 The Master in Mass Communication programme has a clear academic planning framework, which is based on the university strategic plan, and includes procedures to enhance the quality of the academic programmes. The objectives of the programme are aligned with its level and type, and include: producing local systematic knowledge in information and communication sciences, preparing generations of researchers, supporting political reform and women's empowerment programmes, improving production efficiency and services of communication institutions in the community, and linking the global knowledge heritage with the local purposes. Moreover, the programme objectives are relevant to the strategic goals of the University, which focus on excellence in education, research and social engagement. These objectives are also in line with the mission of the College of Arts, which emphasizes on the need to provide students with the tools of knowledge, scientific and professional skills, to enable them to engage in the labour market and development. The Department mission seeks to 'prepare professional specialized calibers in information and communication, who will have a distinctive scientific status in the education and research field, to meet the needs of the institutions in the Arab labour market in the fields of media, culture, tourism, and economics'. Thus, the Panel appreciates that there is a clear academic planning framework for the programme, and its objectives are related to the university and the college missions.
- 1.2 The Master in Mass Communication programme has a study plan consisting of (36) credit hours distributed over (4) semesters, and divided into (9 credit hours) for compulsory courses, (6 credit hours) for elective courses, (12 credit hours) for specialized courses, and (9 credit hours) for the Master Thesis. Furthermore, there are (3) preparatory courses for students who are not specialized in the mass communication field and want to join the programme. With regard to the specialized courses, 'at the end of the first semester, the student chooses one specialization out of (6) disciplines, where each discipline includes (4) courses, these disciplines are: Journalism, Radio & TV, Digital Media, Advertising, Strategic Communication, International Communication and Public Diplomacy. There is an appropriate selection of pre-requisites to be taken as the student progress in his/her study. It was revealed through studying the provided evidence, that the programme is divided into theoretical and practical hours for each course, except for some theoretical courses that do not require practical hours such as the courses of 'Advanced Communication Theories' (COM501), 'Information Society' (COM506) and 'Communication Semiology (COM507). The practical component covers about (40%) of the total hours of student attendance in the programme, which is equivalent to (20) out of (32) courses offered

within the different disciplines. These courses include ‘Seminar in Quantitative Information Research’ (COM504) and ‘Seminar in Qualitative Information Research’ (COM505), in addition to courses of Journalism, Radio & TV, Digital Information, and Advertising, and some courses of international communication, public diplomacy and strategic communication. The binary of practical and theoretical teaching has been used within different teaching methods. The Panel learned during interviews with students that the academic workload is appropriate and they are satisfied with it. The Panel appreciates that the programme has a curriculum with appropriate workload for the students, and there is a balance between knowledge and skills, as well as theory and practice.

- 1.3 The Panel reviewed a sample of course files and noted that most of them are well-designed, and include detailed information about: the course specification, the Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs), a table to link the CILOs with the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs), distribution of course marks among different assessment types, distribution of the course’ content over the semester divided in weeks and its mapping to the CILOs, the teaching methodology, the assessment methods, in addition to textbooks, references, and other resources that the students can use to support them. By examining the course files, the Panel found that the content of the courses meets the discipline's requirements and the level of courses is aligned with their specifications and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), and they are well documented in terms of breadth and depth. Hence, the Panel appreciates that the content of courses is aligned with their levels, and meets the discipline's requirements and criteria. However, the Panel noted the lack of evidence indicating the use of research outcomes, modern and recent professional practices when teaching the courses. The Panel also found that some textbooks and references used in the courses are out of date (e.g. the courses of ‘Technology, Culture, and Power: an International Perspective’ (COM500) and ‘Advanced Communication Theories’ (COM501)). Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should review and update textbooks and references that are used in the courses.
- 1.4 As per the specifications form of the academic programme prepared by the Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Center (QAAC) at the University, the PILOs are grouped properly into four categories: A. Knowledge and Understanding, B. Subject-Specific Skills, C. Critical Thinking Skills, and D. General, Transferable and Measurable Skills. The programme specification and the course specification documents outline these PILOs, which include: the provision of a knowledge base of the status of information and communication in the Kingdom of Bahrain, planning and managing the knowledge development programme, preparing a generation of researchers, and developing the capabilities of media professionals, and the knowledge and skills of Bahraini diplomats. The Panel is of the view that the PILOs are compatible with the mission and objectives of the programme, and appropriate to

the study goals and strategies, as well as the level of the degree. It was revealed during the site visit that the programme meets the needs of the targeted sectors and groups mentioned in its ILOs, and the faculty members are aware of these PILOs. However, by studying these outcomes, the Panel noted that they are written in a way of being objectives rather than outcomes, and some of them are non-measurable, which has been confirmed by the internal audit report. Therefore, Panel recommends that the College should review the PILOs to ensure that they are well-written and measurable.

- 1.5 The SER states that every course in the programme has clear and identified CILOs. The Panel reviewed a sample of courses and noted that the CILOs are suitable for their level and content, as well as, the programme level and objectives, and the specification of each course includes well-defined CILOs. The Panel learned during interviews that the Department of Mass Communication, Tourism, and Fine Arts relies on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to ensure the alignment of the CILOs with the course level and content. The interviewed students, alumni, and department instructors informed the Panel during the site visit that they are aware of CILOs, as the course instructor distributes the course specification to the students at the beginning of each semester. Therefore, the Panel appreciates the alignment of the CILOs with the courses level and content, and that the faculty members and students are aware of these outcomes. By examining the provided evidence, the Panel found that although the CILOs have been mapped to the PILOs, the mapping process is not always accurate, as some of the CILOs are not mapped properly. For example, ILO (6) of the 'Advanced Communication Theories' (COM501) course ('produce and build a coherent research with clear structure'), and the CILO of 'Seminar of the Quantitative Information Researches (proposal)' (COM504) course ('write a research project holistically'), are not mapped with the two outcomes of the programme (D) and (E) which are related to research. Moreover, in the course of 'Communication Semiology' (COM507), only one ILO out of five has been mapped to the PILOs, which is ILO (1) that is mapped to PILOs (F). Consequently, the Panel recommends that the College should review the alignment of the CILOs with the PILOs and ensure the reliability and accuracy of the mapping.
- 1.6 As per the SER, the programme relies on multiple approaches of teaching and learning including: theoretical lectures, peer-tutoring, encouraging individual responsibility for learning and research, e-learning (Blackboard - Schoology), boosting and stimulating survey study, using specialized software and facilities related to the discipline, using the library, group projects, field trips, quantitative and qualitative research, the seminar, and the master thesis. During interviews, students and graduates expressed their satisfaction with the utilized teaching methods and principles, which are based on self-learning in most courses. The Panel reviewed a sample of the course files and noted that it includes a table for distributing the course content over the weeks of the semester in addition to mapping it to the CILOs, teaching

approaches and assessment methods. The Panel also noted the linkage between the utilized teaching methods with the programme objectives and learning outcomes. The Panel appreciates the alignment of the teaching and learning methods of the programme with the teaching and learning policy of the University in general, in addition to the various teaching and learning methods, which are used in a number of courses to suit the nature of the programme. Furthermore, students are encouraged to be involved in the learning process, and develop self-learning skills, particularly that the University provides physical resources that help to diversify the teaching methods, learning by doing and independent learning. However, utilizing the outcomes of current research in teaching the courses is still unclear (see paragraph: 1.3). In addition, the teaching of some courses through theoretical lectures only, such as 'Technology, Culture, Power: the International Perspective' (COM500), and 'Advanced Communication Theories' (COM501), should be addressed by the College. Furthermore, the Panel found that although e-learning is defined in the UoB's strategy of teaching and learning, it is not applied effectively in the programme, as it is used in a limited number of courses, and it is often used as a way to store study materials. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the College should implement procedures that contribute to the use of e-learning in a proper manner, in accordance with the teaching and learning strategy of the University, and measure its effectiveness in achieving the PILOs.

- 1.7 As per the SER, the programme of Master in Mass Communication follows the regulation of the Study and Examination System of UoB, which stipulates the mapping of assessment to the CILOs, and to implement the assessment fairly and properly by incorporating the components of formative and summative assessments. As per the UoB's regulations and the System of Postgraduate Studies of the University, which includes the assessment procedures for postgraduate studies courses and thesis, the student must have a (B) grade at least to pass the course successfully, and with a minimum of Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of (3.0). According to the regulations, the objective questions must not exceed (50%) of the total grade of the examination paper and (40%) of the course marks are allocated to the final examination or project, while the remaining marks are distributed on the coursework and classroom tests, depending on the nature of course. Students also should be provided with feedback in three weeks time from the date of the assessment; and the students have the right to submit an appeal regarding their results. Moreover, the plagiarism policy includes arrangements to avoid academic plagiarism and cheating in examinations, and how to deal with these cases. During interviews, the Panel confirmed that the students and faculty members are aware of the policies and procedures of assessment, which are available on the university's website, the student guidebook and the course specification. The Panel appreciates that there are clear and suitable policies to assess student achievements in the Master in Mass Communication programme; and these policies are well-known to students and faculty members. It is

worth noting, however, that the Panel was informed that students are not satisfied with the received feedback in general, which is very limited due to the lack of written feedback in some cases or its ambiguity most of the times. Moreover, the Panel did not find any evidence on verifying academic plagiarism in the theses. Therefore, the Panel urges the College to ensure the implementation of UoB's policies and procedures related to feedback, and to verify the plagiarism in the programme properly to ensure achieving its objectives (see recommendation in paragraph: 3.3)

1.8 In coming to its conclusion regarding The Learning Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- The programme has a clear academic planning framework and its objectives are related to the missions of the College and the University.
- The curriculum of the programme provides a suitable workload for students, and there is a balance between knowledge and skills, as well as theory and practice.
- The content of the courses is aligned to their level, and meets the discipline's requirements and criteria.
- The course intended learning outcomes are suitable for the course levels and content, and there is an awareness of these outcomes by faculty and students.
- The teaching and learning methods of the programme are aligned with the teaching and learning policy of the University; and various teaching and learning methods are used in a number of courses to suit the nature of the programme.
- There are clear and suitable policies to assess student achievements in the Master in Mass Communication programme; and these policies are well-known to students and faculty members.

1.9 In terms of improvement the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- review and update the textbooks and references used in courses
- revise the programme intended learning outcomes to ensure that they are well written and measurable
- review the alignment of the course intended learning outcomes with the programme intended learning outcomes to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the mapping
- implement procedures that contribute to the use of e-learning in a proper manner, in accordance with the teaching and learning strategy of the University, and measure its effectiveness in achieving the programme intended learning outcomes.

1.10 Judgement

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **The Learning Programme**.

2. Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme

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

- 2.1 The admission policy of postgraduate programmes at UoB states that ‘the student must have a bachelor degree from UoB or from other universities recognized by the concerned bodies, in a specialization that qualifies him/her to study in the desired programme with a minimum CGPA (2.67) out of (4.0), or its equivalent in other assessment systems’. Moreover, the programme allows high diploma holders to be admitted only if their CGPA is not less than (3.0). Furthermore, the admission policy of the College clarifies that the applicant must have at least (500) in the TOEFL exam, or its equivalent in any English proficiency tests and individuals who have scientific certificates from academic institutions teaching in English are exempted from this condition. During the site visit, the Panel found that stakeholders of the programme are aware of the policies and admission requirements of the programme, which are available on the university’s website, and posted across the College to be seen by students. From interviews with faculty members and the provided evidence, it was revealed that there are special examinations for the admission to the Master programme, including written examination in Arabic and English, and an oral examination in front of a specialized committee. The Panel appreciates that the admission system of the Master in Mass Communication programme is appropriate to the programme type and level, and communicated to its stakeholders. However, the Panel found that there is no systematic mechanisms to revise the admission requirements, benchmark them, or evaluate their benefit to pinpoint areas of success in the programme. Hence, the Panel advises the College to develop – in coordination with the University - a proper mechanism to revise and evaluate the effectiveness of the admission criteria and its appropriateness for the programme.
- 2.2 The Panel found, during the site visit, that the admission requirements stated in the university system of postgraduate studies are in place, as the applicants are subject to an aptitude test and an interview conducted by the University. Faculty members indicated that the best applicants are selected after taking two tests of general information in Arabic and English, as well as, an oral test about research approaches in front of a committee consisting of faculty members specialized in information and communication sciences. The same requirements are applied to candidates wishing to join the programme, and have not graduated from mass communication specialization, as there are three orientation courses added to their study plan but are not counted within the total number of credit hours. These courses are: ‘Mass Communication Theories’ (MCM201), ‘Communication Research Approaches’ (MCM202), and ‘Media Topics and Application in English III’ (MCM460). The Panel acknowledges that the admission policy and its requirements are applied consistently

to ensure the alignment of student profile with the programme goals. However, the College is advised to adopt mechanisms to track the academic progress of students in the light of available data about the profile of the admitted student and their academic progress, particularly that the number of the study years exceeds the number of years identified by the study plan of the programme (see paragraph: 3.9).

- 2.3 There is a clear and documented organizational structure of the College consisting of Dean who heads the organizational hierarchy, the College Council, committees of the College of Arts, then the Head of the Department (HoD), the Department Council, and finally the department committees, which include the Postgraduate Studies Committee. Furthermore, there is an appropriate organizational, administrative, and academic structure, in addition to a Deanship of Postgraduate Studies at the university level, which oversees the organization and coordination of postgraduate studies at the university and college levels. On the department level, the Postgraduate Studies Committee raises its recommendations to the Department Council to approve the thesis title and identify the academic supervisor assigned to it, and the department's recommendations are raised to the College Council. As per article (60) of the Postgraduate Studies System of UoB, 'the degrees of high diploma, master, and Ph.D. are granted by a decision of the University Council, based on the recommendation of the Postgraduate Studies Council'. During interviews with faculty members, the Panel found that the HoD has significant responsibilities, as he is responsible for the programme management and taking administrative decisions including: inviting the Department Council to meet, and distributing tasks to academic and administrative staff. It was also revealed to the Panel that the academic decisions for managing the programme are taken by the Department Council and raised to the College Council upon request. Thus, the Panel appreciates that there is a clear organizational structure, which is appropriate to the programme management. However, the Panel noted the lack of clear assigned responsibilities to the coordinators of the programmes offered by the Department, as the responsibility of managing and coordinating all programmes including the programme of Master in Mass Communication is assigned to the HoD. Thus, the Panel recommends that the College should activate the role of the programme coordinator and identify clear responsibilities for this position.
- 2.4 As per the SER, there are (9) full-time faculty members holding Ph.D degrees, including (1) Professor, (3) Associate Professors, and the remaining are Assistant Professors. The number of students in the programme is (82), and the ratio of students to faculty members is about 9:1. Moreover, according to the provided evidence the number of faculty members increased to (10) at the time of the site visit, while they contribute to offering other courses in the College. Through CVs, interviewing faculty members and provided evidence, the Panel found that faculty members have qualifications and academic specializations that are suitable for the programme delivery and, some of them have recently published research papers along with

appropriate professional experience. However, there is a shortage in faculty with high academic ranks, who are qualified for supervising or teaching in the postgraduate studies. In addition to a lack and an imbalance among the number of faculty members in some disciplines, as there are (5) members in the discipline of journalism, and only one member in each of the following disciplines: public relations, radio & TV, digital media, and advertising. Furthermore, the Panel found that the responsibilities of the faculty members involve teaching in all programmes of the Department including the Master in Mass Communication, participating in academic advising, scientific research, committees, and community engagement. Therefore, the Panel noted that the academic workload of some faculty members exceeds the maximum workload identified by the University, as sometimes it may reach to (21) credit hours weekly per semester, teaching master and bachelor courses, in addition to (9) credit hours for supervising the master thesis. The Panel also noted a rise in the number of years needed by the student to complete the graduation requirements of the programme, which was justified by the faculty members, during interviews, by the lack of faculty members who are qualified to supervise the master thesis. They also explained that the University addresses this matter by raising the supervising workload of instructors, which the Panel considers to be of negative impact on the level of graduates, as it is hard for the instructor to be responsible for supervising and monitoring a large number of students, especially with the heavy workload assigned to him/her. Although it was revealed during interviews that the University encourages faculty members and support them financially to accomplish and publish their research, the University does not have policies to mitigate the academic workload to enable the accomplishment of research. The Panel did not also find any evidence on encouraging the academics by the University to be involved in community engagement. The Panel recognizes that faculty members have various qualifications and specializations that are consistent with the programme's objectives. It is recommended, however, that the College should adopt a clear plan to increase the number of faculty members, particularly in tracks of advertising, and radio & TV, with the consideration of selecting higher academic ranks to decrease the academic workload and achieve the institution's goals regarding research and community engagement.

- 2.5 Based on the provided evidence, UoB has transparent and published procedures for recruitment, in accordance with the university regulation for the faculty members, the policies, and laws of the Civil Service Bureau in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Faculty members confirmed during interviews that the recruitment procedures are implemented in a consistent and transparent manner. In addition, there is a clear appraisal system, as course evaluations are regularly filled online by students and the HoD evaluates faculty members on several aspects that include the academic activity, teaching performance, and their relations with their colleagues, as well as the extent of their cooperation with the HoD, research and scientific activity, and the university

and community services. The Panel noted through the provided documents and interviews with faculty members that there are, in general, many instructors who have been recruited for more than (18) years. The Panel appreciates that there are clear and transparent procedures for the academic staff recruitment, as well as, the evidence on a high retention rate in the programme. During interviews, the Panel noted that the University has the Academic Promotion System for promoting academic staff, including the criteria for establishing the committees of academic promotion at the department, college, and university levels, alongside the mechanisms of these committees as well as the requirements and standards of academic promotion. However, the Panel noted that the promotion of faculty members is generally delayed as only one academic member has been promoted during the last five years, and there are professors who continued on the same academic rank despite the length of more than 18 years of their service at the University. During interviews, faculty members justified that by the heavy academic and administrative workload. Thus, the Panel recommends that the College should implement a clear plan to support academic members in applying for promotion. With regard to introducing the new academics to the University, its system, services, and resources, the Panel was informed during interviews with faculty members that this activity is implemented informally at the department level. The Panel recommends that the College should organize a formal induction programme for new academics on the department, college, and university levels to introduce them to the university's policies, regulations, resources, and various services, and evaluate the effectiveness of the induction programme.

- 2.6 The SER states that UoB has a system to manage various information of all colleges, including online registration system, academic advising, students' timetable, human resources, and quality assurance. During the site visit, it was clear to the Panel that the University provides academic and administrative staff with online access - *via* its website - to information regarding salary slips, attendance reports, overtime hours of administrative staff, and other needs of the administrative and academic staff. Students also can register their courses, and pay tuition fees through this system. Moreover, there is an available access to the records of the enrolled students in the programme, their timetables, and the names of their academic advisors at the beginning of each semester. In addition, interviews with the faculty revealed the availability of recording absence and entering the grades online. In addition, the E-learning Center provides reports on the benefit of its services for the academic departments; and the library provides reports about the available resources for the College and its use. Despite the availability of a Management Information System (MIS), and its alignment to the nature of the programme and its objectives, as well as its use on a limited basis in the management of the programme, students and various resources, the Panel found no evidence on using the MIS holistically and strategically to enhance the decision making process. Although the Panel appreciates that, there is an adequate MIS that is suitable for the programme objectives and needs; yet the Panel

is of the view that it can be more useful by developing it. Therefore, the Panel advises the College to expand the utilization of the MIS in order to enhance decision-making process at the strategic level of the Programme.

- 2.7 UoB has clear policies and procedures to ensure the security of learners' records and accuracy of results, and recover it through central data keeping. The Information Technology Centre (ITC) at the University implements strict procedures to ensure confidentiality of student data, and records of instructors through various levels of authorization, which require user's ID and changing password every (120 days). In regard to the process of entering grades, it is assigned only to the course instructor, approved by the HoD, and changed formally - if necessary - after the approval of the HoD and the Dean. During the site visit tour, the Panel was informed that the programme management keeps answer papers of the student final examinations and projects for two semesters in a locked room with restricted and secured access; whereas a copy of each thesis is kept in the Department as a reference. Furthermore, the Panel learned that there is a risk management procedure that is implemented by the ITC in case of disasters or emergency events, including, for example, making an electronic backup for all the data on a regular basis. Moreover, there are servers for data backups that are kept safe on and off campus. The Panel appreciates that there is a rigorous system for risk management, maintaining the security of records and the accuracy and integrity of information for learners and staff, and the accuracy of the results of the programme.
- 2.8 During the site visit tour of the College and the University, the Panel noted that the College provides the essential resources to fulfill the learning needs of its students. There are (17) classrooms equipped with projectors and accommodating (42-97) students, big halls accommodating a large number of students, (8) computer laboratories (Windows & Mac), multi-media laboratory, a hall for press editing, photography laboratory, and a music room. Furthermore, Bahrain Credit Media Centre provides Radio and TV studios along with a theatre. Moreover, the University provides various places on campus to enable students to conduct different activities such as the club of arts and music, theater, chess, media, the cinema of arts, gymnasium, health center and offices for the students' councils. Moreover, Wi-Fi is available across the College and its laboratories along with emails to students and faculty members. Furthermore, there are sufficient individual offices for the academic members, equipped with computers and are adequate for work and meeting students. There are also online systems (Blackboard & Moodle) provided by Zain E-learning Centre to enable academic staff members to upload some parts of their courses electronically. During interviews, the students and staff expressed their satisfaction with the available facilities and services that support the programme. The Panel appreciates that the available resources of the programme are adequate for the needs of both students and faculty members. During the tour of the library, it was revealed

that it includes numerous online resources as there are more than (100 thousand) e-books, and over (27 thousand) electronic journals. The library has subscription in databases such as (Business Source Thompson, Reuters, EBSCO, etc.), which are linked to (47) international databases. There are also copies of master theses of the programme along with theses of Proquest database, and Al-manhal database. However, the availability of some of the mass media books and resources in both Arabic and Foreign languages are either limited or out of date as mentioned in the SER of the programme in (2012), stating that 'it is necessary to update the main library in Sakhair with some specialized journals specifically after offering the master programme recently.' Furthermore, there are computers in the library for students to be used when searching the library catalogue. There are also spaces for studying and reading references and journals. It was confirmed during interviews, that the students are satisfied with their utilization for the library and its resources, specifically services related to printing and photocopying. Overall, the Panel advises the College to update and provide more resources and textbooks both in Arabic and foreign languages as per the programme needs and the current global development in the field.

- 2.9 UoB has a tracking system to track the use of its different resources; the Panel observed that the timetables for the use of classrooms and laboratories are generated by the Deanship of Admission and Registration and posted on the doors, and any request to change these tables is implemented by the Deanship. Furthermore, the ITC of the University provides the technical support for the laboratories and the staff; and the requests for technical support are received and tracked by the E-help Desk System. Moreover, Zain E-learning Centre provides a platform for E-learning courses, where the system collects data about the use of its resources and generates several reports on the frequency and forms of use. In addition, the library has a rigorous system to monitor and track the implementation of its processes. The Panel acknowledges that there are tracking systems to evaluate the utilization of different resources, but no evidence was provided on using them by the programme management to inform decision making regularly and periodically. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should further utilize the tracking reports; and the updated data of the tracking systems in enhancing decision making that contributes to improving the educational process.
- 2.10 From the site visit and the provided evidence, the Panel was informed that there is an appropriate support system for students including support in the library, laboratories and e-learning through either the infrastructure or available computer applications, and through laboratory technicians and specialists in the library. Regarding academic advising, there is a system to help students in choosing the appropriate subjects for them, and each academic advisor must present an annual electronic report to the HoD. In addition to several supports are provided for students with special needs such as helping them in registering the courses, providing them with equipped car, and

support services by volunteer students, as well as providing them with a handbook for students with special needs. The library also provides special services for them by providing a special computer for those who are visually impaired. The Career Guidance Office of the Vice President for Community and Graduate Services prepares the students for the challenges of the labour market by providing them with several services such as the 'Career Day', CV submission and applying to work on campus. Moreover, the Department of Advice and Guidance of the Deanship of Student Affairs provides guidance and advice to students through social workers. Interviewed students expressed their satisfaction with the different support services provided to them. The Panel reviewed the satisfaction surveys of the expected graduates and noted the lack of evidence on the use of these surveys in improving different services provided to students to support them. The Panel appreciates the various support services provided by the University to students, and suggests that the University expand the distribution of the satisfaction surveys to include all undergraduate students, as well as to make use of the results in improving the available support in the programme in a periodic and regular manner.

- 2.11 According to the SER, the Department of Advice and Guidance of the Deanship of Student Affairs in coordination with the colleges of the University organize the Induction Day programme. It is an orientation activity for the newly admitted students, during which the students are introduced to the location of colleges, facilities, the available services at the University, programmes offered, policies and regulations of the University, in addition to some other services offered by the Deanship of Students Affairs. Moreover, there are handbooks distributed to them including the Study Regulations for Postgraduate Students and Thesis Writing Manual. At the level of the College of Arts, students are introduced to different departments and programmes, in addition to explaining the study system of each programme separately by the Quality Assurance Office (QAO). Interviews with the faculty indicated that all information related to introducing the programme is available on the website for those students who could not attend the induction programme. Interviewed students expressed their satisfaction with the role of the Student Council in introducing the new students who could not attend the Induction Day to different services and activities in the University. From interviews, the Panel learned that they are generally satisfied. It is worth noting that the interviewed students were never given any surveys to evaluate their satisfaction towards the induction day. The Panel appreciates the arrangements that are taken by the university management to introduce the newly admitted student to the programme; and the provided services, however, the Panel advises the College to evaluate students' satisfaction with the induction day in a systematic manner and utilize the results in enhancing the induction programme.

- 2.12 During the site visit, it was indicated that UoB has an academic advising system for undergraduate and postgraduate students, who are distributed to their academic advisors at the beginning of the academic year and the office hours allocated to meet with students are scheduled and posted. As per chapter (9) of the Study Regulations for Postgraduate Students, the student receives an academic warning if he/she did not get a minimum CGPA of (3.0) out of (4.0). The student will be dismissed from the University, if he/she did not reach the minimum required CGPA in the two subsequent semesters to receiving the academic warning. The advising system traces students who are at-risk of academic failure and received academic warning. At-risk student should meet his/her academic advisor to help and give him/her the appropriate advices to raise his/her CGPA. The Panel acknowledges that there is a suitable academic advising system along with clear procedures to identify students, who are at-risk of academic failure. The Panel also noted that there is an academic support available for the students who are poor in the English language *via* the National Geographic Centre, which has been recently opened at the University. Furthermore, from interviews, the Panel noted the high number of students allocated for each academic advisor, the academic advising for postgraduate students is very limited, and that tracking students at-risk of academic failure is absent. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that the College should track the progress of at-risk students, investigate the reasons of their delayed graduation and find solutions to alleviate this issue.
- 2.13 As stated in the SER, students of the programme have several opportunities to expand their knowledge and experience through the support activities including participation in student activities in cooperation with associations and clubs of the College, and student exhibitions to display their work within the different tracks of the programme. In addition, there are field visits conducted to institutions inside and outside the Kingdom of Bahrain, such as the visit arranged by the Department in 2017 to some UN institutions in Switzerland and the European Union. During interviews and the site visit, it became clear to the Panel that students are allowed to participate in a wide range of informal learning activities organized by different entities at the University such as cultural and social activities, sports events, seminars, various workshops, the Career Day, and peer-tutoring. Moreover, the organizational professional skills of students are enhanced through accomplishing the Master thesis, and bringing external examiners for the *viva*. During interview sessions, students expressed their satisfaction towards the opportunities offered by the University, College, and Bahrain Credit Media Centre to expand their learning experience. The Panel appreciates that there is a learning environment in the College contributing to expanding the knowledge and learning experience of students, which supports informal learning activities.

2.14 In coming to its *conclusion* regarding the Efficiency of the Programme, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- The admission system in the Master in Mass Communication programme is appropriate to the programme type and level, and is communicated to its stakeholders.
- There is a clear organizational structure that is appropriate for the programme management.
- There are clear and transparent procedures for the academic staff recruitment, as well as evidence on a high retention rate in the programme.
- The Management Information System is adequate and suitable for the programme objectives and needs.
- There is a rigorous system for risk management, maintaining the security of records and the accuracy and integrity of information for learners and staff, and the accuracy of the results of the programme.
- The available resources of the programme are adequate for the needs of both students and the faculty members.
- The University provides various support services for the students.
- There are arrangements in place to introduce newly admitted students to the programme, and the provided services by the University.
- There is a learning environment in the College contributing to expanding the knowledge and learning experience of students, which supports informal learning activities.

2.15 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- activate the role of the programme coordinator, and identify clear responsibilities for this position
- adopt a clear plan to increase the number of faculty members, particularly in tracks of advertising, and radio & TV, with the consideration of selecting higher academic ranks to decrease the academic workload and achieve the institution's goals regarding research and community engagement
- implement a clear plan to support faculty members in applying for promotion.
- organize a formal induction programme for the new academics on the department, college, and university levels to introduce them to the university's policies, regulations, resources, and its various services, and evaluate the effectiveness of this programme
- further utilize the tracking reports and the updated data of the tracking systems in enhancing decision-making that contributes to improving the educational process
- track the progress of at-risk students in the programme, investigate the reasons for their retention/delayed graduation and find solutions to alleviate this issue.

2.16 Judgement

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **Efficiency of the Programme**.

3. Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates

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

- 3.1 UoB has developed intended learning outcomes at the university level including: communication skills, skills of information technology, the skills of analytical and critical thinking, professional and moral responsibility, and learning and continuous self-learning. The programme of Master in Mass Communication - in general - aims to build the academic and professional personality of the student to gain the trust of the labour market. As per the SER, the programme has clear graduate attributes that are outlined within its educational objectives. Graduate attributes are verified through the course outcome assessment form, where the CILOs are mapped to the assessment tools to verify whether the CILOs are achieved through the assessment processes or not, in addition to the mapping between PILOs and CILOs. However, the Panel found, as stated earlier in (paragraph: 1.4), that the PILOs are written in a non-measurable form; as a result, the programme includes the graduate attributes as aims rather than outcomes. Moreover, the Panel did not find any evidence on the use of the assessment form for evaluating the CILOs or the PILOs on a regular basis, nor on making use of its results to ensure the achievement of these attributes in the programme. Therefore, the Panel urges the College to rewrite the intended learning outcomes of the Master programme in Mass Communication in a measurable form, and advises to measure them periodically to utilize the results in improving the programme and attaining the graduate attributes (see recommendation in paragraph: 1.4).
- 3.2 The University has a formal policy for benchmarking along with its procedures, activities and its scope of implementation; and it was approved by the University Council in 2015. From interviews conducted during the site visit, the Panel learned that the benchmarking process whether internal or external is implemented informally as per the university's general framework of QAAC and NQF. By examining the evidence, the Panel found that external benchmarking of the programme was done when developing the study plan in 2011, and revising it in 2015. It was at the level of the study plan only, and did not include syllabi, admission systems, and the supervision and registration of theses; and it was not conducted with any regional universities. As per the SER, the programme benefited from the study plans of similar programmes offered at three international universities in the USA, selected according to their SMBG-EDUNIVERSA rank. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should activate the benchmarking policy of the University, implement a formal external benchmarking for all aspects of the programme against similar programmes in regional and international universities, and utilize the results in improving the programme.

- 3.3 The department adopts various assessment tools as per the university's policy (as indicated previously in the paragraph: 1.8). The students confirmed during interviews that they are aware of the updated methods of assessment through the form of course specification that is distributed to them by the course instructor. The form is discussed at the beginning of every academic semester; and it includes a description of assessment tools and methods used. The faculty members before the final examination post the assessment results of students' course work. The Panel observed that assessment methods include the participation of an external examiner in evaluating theses, as the programme is keen to involve examiners from various regional universities to achieve diversity of intellectual and scientific backgrounds. During interviews, the Panel learned that the QAAC and the QAO have internally moderated the course files periodically, and developed recommendations for improvement, but the Panel did not find any evidence on implementing those recommendations. Moreover, the Panel observed the absence of the internal pre-moderation before the assessment, the absence of external moderation of examinations, the lack of revisions and modifications of the assessment policies, and the lack of adequate feedback on the theses, and checking the absence of academic plagiarism (see paragraph: 3.10). Through interviews and available evidence, the Panel noted that the assessment tools are generally implemented, but in some courses, the assessment of analytical, deductive, and problem-solving skills is not applied adequately to reflect the master degree level. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the College should implement rigorous mechanisms to verify the implementation of all the university's policies and procedures related to the evaluation of students' work, such as providing them with feedback and detecting academic plagiarism, and to review the assessment policies in order to ensure that the graduates meet the academic standards of the programme.
- 3.4 As stated in the SER, the Department implements certain mechanisms to ensure the alignment between assessment and the learning outcomes, where the academic member evaluates the CILOs through the CILO assessment form, and links them with the student achievements to measure the CILOs attainment. The outcomes assessment form is used to measure the achievement of PILOs within the courses, as the Panel found from the course files that the assessment tools should be identified for each outcome in the course assessment form. Through interviews and available evidence, the Panel confirmed that these mechanisms have been implemented recently to ensure that the assessment process is aligned with the CILOs whether in the diversity of assessment tools or in the questions of examinations that measure the intended learning outcomes. The Panel appreciates the efforts of the programme team to ensure the alignment between the assessment and the CILOs.
- 3.5 The UoB has a moderation system for examinations and students' assessment including the pre- and post-moderation for examinations, which focuses on moderating the grades of the courses. As per the SER, multi-section courses are

assigned to one coordinator who conducts coordination meetings to set a standard final examination according to University's bylaws. The QAO at the College reviews the course files, which must include the model answers of the examinations in order to ensure the consistency between the level of the examination questions and the learning outcomes. However, the programme has a limited number of students, which means that the majority of its courses are offered through one section. It was also revealed that most of the course files do not contain model answers for the utilized assessment tools. Furthermore, the Panel confirmed during interviews with the academic staff that the internal moderation process is implemented after the assessment process only and not before it, and there is no internal moderation for examinations or research apart from the moderation conducted by the QAO. The Panel is concerned that the moderation process is not implemented by specialized instructors, which makes it harder, especially with the absence of model answers of the examinations in a number of the course files, except in the seminar held for the *viva*, where all professors in the Department meet to exchange opinions about the thesis topic and raise suggestions. The Panel recommends that the College should activate the University's procedures related to the internal moderation of assessment tools at the programme level, assess its effectiveness, and conduct the internal moderation process by specialized professors.

- 3.6 The UoB has a moderation policy for examinations and students' assessment, which was approved by the University Council in 2015, and it includes the requirements of the internal and external moderations and mechanisms of pre- and -post moderation for examinations. The Panel found from interviews and the SER that the programme is being reviewed by the QAAC at the University, in addition to reviewing the CILOs by the faculty members at the Department to ensure that these CILOs are aligned with the NQF along with the involvement of an external examiner in evaluating the theses. However, the article (9) of the university regulation for examinations, moderation and students' assessment states that external moderation for examinations and evaluation of student performance in the academic programmes whether undergraduate or postgraduate levels should be implemented. The Panel confirmed through the provided evidence and interviews with the faculty members that there are no formal procedures of external moderation for the assessment. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should implement formal procedures that are suitable for the external moderation of the assessment, where feedback from external moderation contributes to the programme development and course improvements.
- 3.7 The Panel studied the course files across different levels including course specifications, samples of examination papers, marking schemes, and samples of students work with different types of assessment tools along with theses. The Panel noted the variety of examination questions, which measure the achievement of CILOs through measuring skills of memorizing, analysing and critical thinking. By reviewing

samples of student projects and theses, the Panel observed that they serve the requirements of the public and private sectors, and that students work is in line with learning objectives and PILOs; and its level is verified *via* the seminars, which are attended by instructors to give their comments and suggestions. The Panel found also evidence on the accuracy of the assessment of theses, which was conducted by both internal and external examiners. The Panel appreciates that examinations in most courses have an appropriate level of difficulty; and clearly measure the required skills of the programme. Nevertheless, the Panel observed that grades distribution is not compatible with the level of examination questions; and that there is a clear grades inflation, which makes students' success rates very high. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should review the distribution of grades within different courses, in order to reflect the actual level of the student.

- 3.8 As per the SER, the programme evaluates the alignment of graduate achievements with the programme objectives and outcomes through analysing the feedback of the advisory councils of graduates and employers, in addition to the success rates of graduates in examinations and projects. The SER indicates that the high rates of success reflect the level of graduates' satisfaction and assure the link between the programme objectives and its educational outcomes, which was confirmed by the faculty members during interviews. However, the advisory councils of the Master programme in Mass Communication has been recently activated; and the Panel was not provided with any evidence on regular distribution of surveys for employers regarding the level of Master degree graduates. Although the Panel observed that the programme has benefited from the assessment course forms; yet this benefit is still limited due to the inaccuracy of the PILOs and the CILOs/PILOs mapping (see paragraph: 1.4 and 1.5). The Panel also noted from the course files and interviews with faculty members, the lack of documented mechanisms of internal moderation for graduate achievements; and the procedures for detecting plagiarism are not applied, which limit the ability of the College to verify that the graduate achievements are fulfilling the programme objectives and outcomes. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the College should implement rigorous mechanisms and procedures to ensure that graduates' achievements meet the programme's aims and its outcomes.
- 3.9 The Department presented a report on tracking student cohorts of the programme, which was conducted as a part of its self-evaluation process. The report gives a cumulative picture about the student numbers across different study phases of the programme in the academic years 2014-2015 to 2016-2017, but this report does not contain analysis of cohorts according to admitted students over the years. As per the SER, (100) students have been accepted since the programme was first offered in 2011 until the time of writing the SER, (16) of them withdrew from the programme, and (22) graduated. Statistics indicate that the enrolment in the programme was about (17) students per year, and then decreased to (7) students in the academic year 2015-2016,

the Panel notes that the department did not conduct a study or research to investigate the reasons behind this decrease. The statistics refer to low rates of student withdrawal from the programme, two students per year. However, the Panel found a rise in the number of years that students need to complete the graduation requirements, as statistics indicate that only one graduate stayed four years to complete the programme, while most students stayed from five to six years until graduation. With regard to failure rates, the Panel considers them reasonable. From alumni and employers' interviews, it was evident that the graduates of the programme have appropriate jobs, and work in the strategic planning positions at the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Interior, and the HEC. Notwithstanding the above, the Panel noted the lack of evidence on approved and documented statistics of cohort analysis, including the admission to graduation ratio, in addition to the lack of clear detailed data about the retention rates, year-by-year progress and the length of the study, as well as, the lack of evidence about the first destination of graduates. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that the College should conduct a study on student cohorts, analyse it, track their year-by-year academic progress; and create channels of communication with the graduates to track their first destination.

- 3.10 The study plan of the programme includes the Master thesis/the practical project course (COM598), with nine credit hours, and the student can register in it after completing all compulsory and elective courses alongside the discipline courses. Moreover, there are policies and procedures for supervising the Master thesis that stipulate the responsibilities and duties of both the student and the supervisor. As indicated in the SER, the programme follows - in this regard - the procedures and instructions of the University, which are in place, and incorporated in the Graduate Studies System of UoB, the Manual for Writing Theses, and the Procedures of Allocating the Supervisor, the *Viva* Committee and Granting the Degree. The Panel noted that all these policies and procedures are available on the website of the Graduate Studies Deanship. Interviewed students and faculty members confirmed their awareness of all these policies as they follow them when registering their theses, and establishing the *viva* committee. Considering all the above mentioned, the Panel appreciates that there are clear policies and procedures to supervise the Master thesis clarifying the responsibilities and duties of the student and the supervisor. The Panel reviewed a number of Master theses and noted the accuracy of the internal and external examiners evaluations to the theses and the use of global databases and recent media theories by the students. During interviews with the external examiners, the Panel noted their general satisfaction towards the theses, which they participated in their *viva*. Interviewed students expressed their satisfaction with the procedures of registering the theses, but they highlighted the lack of faculty members who supervise the theses in some disciplines such as public relations and digital media, which leads to the use of supervisors from other disciplines. The Panel noted from the provided

evidence that some supervisors are not specialized in the theses topic, which leads to selecting theories that do not match with the topic, and wouldn't be applied or used. Interviewed faculty members justified that by the limited number of instructors who are qualified to supervise the theses. Furthermore, the Panel also noted the imbalance between different specializations of faculty members in the programme, as mentioned in (paragraph: 2.4). It is worth noting that the Panel did not find any evidence of feedback on those theses or amending the theses after the *viva*, and there is no evidence on detecting academic plagiarism in those theses, as confirmed during the Panel's interviews with the students and the alumni. The Panel urges the College to ensure the implementation of the university's policies and procedures, which are related to presenting the feedback and investigating the academic plagiarism in the master thesis course properly to ensure the achievement of the programme's objectives (see paragraph: 3.3).

- 3.11 As indicated by the quality manual of the QAAC at UoB, the academic programmes should have advisory councils to support them. The tasks of these councils are clearly documented in the quality guidebook including the submission of feedback about the professional needs, and the labour market needs. As per the SER, the Department formed two advisory councils for the Department; one for employers, and another one for graduates. The Advisory Council of Employers was formed in April 2017 and met once on 18 April 2017; whereas the Advisory Council of Alumni met on 25 May 2017. The structure of the two councils covers different media specializations and consists of members from the public and the private sectors. The Panel found the structure of the two councils is appropriate to the programme needs. By reviewing minutes of meetings of the two councils of the Department, the Panel noted the lack of discussing any topic related to the Master programme in Mass Communication. As a result, the recommendations of the employers' council were not utilized in taking any decisions relevant to the programme, and that is - in general - due to the recent formation of the Councils. Therefore, the Panel advises the College to enhance the role of the advisory councils as per the university policy to utilize their suggestions and recommendations in the decision-making process of the programme.
- 3.12 The quality manual of the QAAC at UoB clarifies that the academic programmes should distribute periodical surveys as a means to measure the satisfaction of graduates and employers about the attributes and the level of the programme's graduates. In addition to measuring the satisfaction with the level and attributes of the graduates through the meetings of the Advisory Council of Employers. However, the Panel found no evidence referring to establishing two councils for students and employers on the level of the programme as mentioned in the previous paragraph. During interviews, employers and alumni expressed their general satisfaction toward the level of graduates, although employers were concerned with students' skills in Arabic and English languages. Moreover, the Panel was informed during alumni

interviews that the programme contributes to meeting the labour market needs by providing local professionals, and they emphasized their satisfaction towards the role they play when working with ministries, authorities and entities. Thus, the Panel acknowledges that the alumni and the employers are satisfied with the graduate attributes that cater for the labour market needs. However, the Panel noted that surveys need to be more precise in order to measure the satisfaction rate of alumni and employers concerning the graduates' level and the educational objectives of the programme. The Panel also noted that surveys are not utilized periodically and regularly. The Panel urges the College to take effective and periodic actions to measure the degree of satisfaction of employers and alumni towards the level programme's graduates in order to meet the educational objectives of the programme (see the recommendation in paragraph: 4.8).

3.13 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Academic Standards of the Graduates, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- The efforts of the programme team to ensure the alignment between the assessment and the course intended learning outcomes.
- The examinations in most courses have an appropriate level of difficulty; and clearly measure the required skills of the programme.
- Clear policies and procedures are in place to supervise the Master thesis clarifying the responsibilities and duties of the student and the supervisor.

3.14 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- activate the benchmarking policy of the University, implement a formal external benchmarking for all aspects of the programme against similar programmes in regional and international universities, and utilize the results in improving the programme
- implement rigorous mechanisms to verify the implementation of all the university's policies and procedures related to the evaluation of students' work, such as providing them with feedback and detecting academic plagiarism, and to review the assessment policies in order to ensure that the graduates meet the academic standards of the programme
- activate the university's procedures related to the internal moderation of assessment tools on the programme level, assess its effectiveness, and conduct the internal moderation process by specialized professors
- implement formal procedures that are suitable for the external moderation of the assessment, where feedback from external moderation contributes to programme development and course improvements
- review the distribution of grades in different courses to reflect the actual level of the student

- implement rigorous mechanisms and procedures to ensure that graduates achievements meet the programme's aims and its outcomes
- conduct a study of student cohorts, analyse it, track their year- by-year academic progress; and create channels of communication with the graduates to track their first destination.

3.15 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **does not satisfy** the Indicator on **Academic Standards of the Graduates**.

4 Indicator 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance

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

- 4.1 UoB has policies and institutional systems covering different academic and administrative aspects, including: examinations, students, scientific research, continuous learning, community engagement, graduates, administrative affairs, information technology, security, safety, health, faculty members, the academic promotion system, the academic advising system, scholarships, and the programme of Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice, and the programme of continuous development for faculty members. In addition, there are regulations for the postgraduate programmes such as the System of Postgraduate Studies of UoB and its appendices, the UoB Theses Writing Manual, and the Procedures of Appointing Academic Supervisor, and the Formation of the *Viva* Committee and Granting the Degree. There are also policies related to quality such as the University Policy for Quality Assurance, the Quality Assurance Enhancement Policy of Programmes, the Benchmarking Policy, and the System of Offering the Academic Programmes and Courses, etc. The Panel is of the view that these policies and systems meet the programme needs. They are available on the official website of the University for all academic members, who indicated during interviews that they are aware of these policies *via* different channels including newsletters of the university management. Moreover, faculty members express their views about those policies through the official councils. UoB ensures implementation of these policies and systems through the following structure: QAAC at the university level, quality assurance offices at the college level, alongside the quality assurance committee consisting of some faculty members of the College of Arts. The college deans, as well as the department heads, participate in applying these policies and systems at the programme level. Furthermore, senior management stated that these policies are subject to periodical review every five years, and some faculty members participate in this review, as well as quality assurance officials at the university, colleges and departments levels as per the System of Suggestion, Review and Development of Policies. With respect to reviewing the policies and regulations of postgraduate programmes, the Panel learned that it is done through the postgraduate studies committee at the department level, which raises its suggestion of modification to the Department Council, then to the College Council, and finally to the University Council. Consequently, the Panel appreciates that the documented policies and institutional systems are in place to meet the programme's needs, and faculty members are well informed about these policies. However, the Panel observed that the implementation of some policies is not achieved as required, such as the policy of teaching workload, moderation, plagiarism,

benchmarking, communication with alumni, advisory councils, and others (as mentioned in some paragraphs of this Report). The Panel urges the College to ensure the consistent implementation of the university's policies at the programme level, as indicated in different paragraphs of this Report.

- 4.2 The decree of establishing and organizing the UoB regulates the management of the academic programmes at the University. Based on the SER and the organizational structure of UoB, the HoD is responsible for the programme management, in cooperation with three coordinators from the three programmes of the Department, in addition to a number of committees including Postgraduate Studies Committee headed by a coordinator and a number of faculty members. This committee approves the thesis title and allocates the academic supervisor. According to the interviews, faculty members participate in making decisions through the Department Council, which reports its decisions to the College Council, and then to the University Council for final approval. The College management is the responsibility of the Dean who is the head of its council, and there is a number of academic departments that are incorporated under the deanship, in addition to the Postgraduate Studies Office and QAO. The members of the College Council include the heads of the departments, a senior academic member from each department, in addition to three external members. In addition, the Deanship of Postgraduate Studies at the University is responsible for tracking and implementing the postgraduate studies systems and regulations. According to the interviews conducted by the Panel, the academic members participate in decisions making through the Department Council, which raises its decisions to the College Council, and then to the University Council, and there are clear lines of responsibilities. Consequently, the Panel acknowledges that there is a responsible leadership for the management of the programme.
- 4.3 There are clear policies and procedures of quality assurance at the university, college, and department levels. The QAAC of the University tracks the work of the quality assurance units of the colleges, and the QAO of the College - related directly to the Dean of the College - monitors the quality system in the programmes, in addition to the quality assurance committee at the department level that includes the programme coordinators. The Panel considers that this committee is adequate to meet the needs of the quality system in the programme. Hence, the Panel appreciates that there are formal policies and procedures that are appropriate to the quality assurance practices at the university and college levels. The programme's faculty mentioned during interviews that they participate in the quality assurance activities organized by the QAO of the College, such as: workshops, supervising the course files, and the manner in which the course assessment forms are filled. Moreover, they indicated that they introduced some improvement in the programme, for example: generating the internal audit report of the College, putting the course assessment form into practice, and enhancing the professional advising. A committee consisting of the QAAC of the

University in collaboration with the QAO of the College of Arts has monitored the quality system of the programme through a visit; this visit was conducted in June 2016, to implement an audit process for the academic programmes of the College. However, the provided evidence refers to the inconsistency in applying policies and quality assurance mechanisms in the programme and in spite of using the course assessment forms in most courses, there are files that do not include these forms. This in addition to, the comments made by the Panel in different parts of this Report about benchmarking and moderation, alongside what was mentioned in the report of the academic audit generated by the College in June 2016. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should improve the used approaches to monitor and assess the management system of quality assurance in the programme and measure their effectiveness.

- 4.4 In the context of spreading the culture of quality among faculty members, the QAO of the College in collaboration with the University QAAC organizes workshops to build capabilities and enhance the understanding of academic and administrative staff of the quality assurance system. These include a workshop on how to write the ILOs, a training course about the assessment of objectives and outcomes, and others about the NQF, in addition to organizing workshops about how to write the SER and prepare the course files. There are also other specialised workshops about the quality assurance requirements for the faculty members of the Department and the usage of the Excel programme. The Panel was provided with evidence on attendance of faculty members for those workshops, which they perceive as informative and helpful in writing the SER and ILOs. The Panel noted, during interviews with the faculty members, that they are aware of their role in the quality assurance system in a general manner. However, the Panel also noted that they are not fully aware of their roles in some quality assurance aspects such as writing the ILOs for the Master in Mass Communication programme, in addition to the other highlighted issues in the college internal audit of 2016. The Panel appreciates that the academic and administrative staff have a general understanding of quality assurance aspects and its requirements; and there are several efforts at the programme level to disseminate the culture of quality amongst them. The Panel also advises the College to measure the effectiveness of workshops offered in the quality field.
- 4.5 UoB has the System of Offering and Developing Academic Programmes and Courses, which was approved in 2013, and is available on its website. The system includes a description of how to offer and develop the academic programmes and courses, and how to stop or suspend them; there are also forms for all the functions of this system. The Panel reviewed this system and found, after a precise examination, that developing a new programme or improving a running programme must be through an analytical current study of scoping the labour market requirements, the future perspectives, and the strategic plans. In addition, the views of concerned stakeholders,

particularly, the official bodies such as ministries, institutions, government organizations, and professional associations must be surveyed, alongside the views of the beneficiaries such as students and others. The decision-making mechanism ranges according to this system across the Department Council, then the College Council, and finally the university level. During interviews, the Panel found that the Department applied some of the procedures of offering new programmes to offer the Master in Mass Communication in 2011 before the system of Offering and Developing New Programmes was developed. However, it was unclear to the Panel whether the College has conducted a study to scope the short- or long-term labour market needs before developing and approving the Master in Mass Communication. Overall, the Panel is satisfied that the University has a documented policy that is suitable for developing and offering new academic programmes.

- 4.6 The UoB has policies and procedures to ensure and enhance the quality of the programmes, clarifying that an SER is submitted annually to the QAAC, including the assessment of the student achievements, the educational objectives of the programme, surveying and analysing the views of the concerned stakeholders and preparing an improvement plan and tracking its implementation. The Panel noted that there is no evidence on conducting an annual assessment of the programme regularly. However, the Panel learned that each department has to conduct an annual self-evaluation for each programme and submit a brief SER that includes suggested recommendations to improve the programme to the QAAC and the QAO of the College. Then both offices have to verify what is written in the SER by meeting students along with other suitable procedures. According to the SER, there were arrangements for reviewing the study plan of the programme in the academic year 2015. In June 2016, the programme was reviewed by QAAC and the QAO, and it was highlighted that the programme team need to revise the content of the courses and specifically the thesis course. Therefore, academic staff members prepared an improvement plan and actions taken are to be submitted in December 2017. The Panel noted that there are no evidence that show that the programme was reviewed regularly and annually along with the limited evidence referring to the availability of annual improvement plans for the programme. The Panel acknowledges that the arrangements for the annual internal evaluation for the programme requires preparing an annual internal evaluation for the programme's quality assurance. The Panel advises the College to take the necessary arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of the improvement plans.
- 4.7 According to UoB's Programme Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy, a periodical review for the academic programmes should be implemented to ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes, the effectiveness of the curriculum, and the utilization of the stakeholders' feedback in the review process. The Panel observed that the implementation of this policy does not cover all the programme aspects, in addition to the lack of evidence referring to internal and external arrangements for the

periodic review of the programme, alongside generating the review reports. It was revealed during interviews that the internal audit conducted by the QAAC of the University and the QAO of the College contributes to the periodic review of the programme, in addition to the internal review of the programme plan by the Department in 2015, which was followed by preparing an improvement plan in October 2016. The Panel reviewed the report and found that it covers several aspects of the programme, especially department functions related to educational resources, facilities, laboratories, and the curriculum as examples. However, the Panel noted that the report does not cover some aspects such as the academic advising system, teaching and learning methods, assessment methods, in addition to other aspects that are implemented at the university level including: admission and registration, the induction day, the role of the programme in the community service and others. The Panel found that the review process was informed by the opinions of full-time students, and the Advisory Council of Employers, while surveying the opinions of the external stakeholders of the programme was limited and irregular. Furthermore, the Panel observed that the mechanisms of applying recommendations for improvement are inadequate and need to be tracked urgently. Although the Panel acknowledges that there is a policy for the internal review of the programme, which leads to producing mechanisms for improvement; yet the Panel recommends that the College should adopt arrangements for a comprehensive periodic review of the programme; and develop mechanisms for tracking and monitoring the implementation of improvement plans.

- 4.8 As stated in (paragraph: 4.6), the Policy of Quality Assurance and Enhancement of the Programmes in UoB stipulates that there are clear actions to periodically collect, and analyse opinions about the academic programmes, and the QAAC of the University utilizes a number of surveys for this purpose. There are also available and effective mechanisms that are applied periodically to collect student opinions about the courses through the e-questionnaire form filled for each course by the students at the end of the semester, which is analysed and the results are provided to the faculty members and the HoD, to assist them in improving their performance. Moreover, the QAAC surveys the opinions of the expected graduates, and analyses the survey results to measure the degree of satisfaction towards the whole educational process. However, it was noted the lack of evidence indicating the regular use of results in improving the programme, as stated in (paragraph 2.10). During interviews, the Panel learned that the mechanism used to collect opinions of the programme's stakeholders, namely alumni and employers, is through the Advisory Council of the Employers and the feedback of alumni. However, the Panel noted from minutes of the council meetings that there is no mention of topics related to the Master in Mass Communication programme. It was also illustrated during interviews with faculty members that the Council is not active. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should continue to develop its mechanisms to survey the stakeholders' opinions - especially

external ones - through a representative sample, analyse the data regularly, and inform the internal and external stakeholders about the results.

- 4.9 The Evaluation System of the Academic Staff states that the academic staff member has to submit an annual report of his/her achievements to be evaluated by the HoD. The appraisal is based on the achievements outlined in the report and his/her evaluation by the students, and accordingly, the HoD develops a plan for developing and improving the performance of the academic staff member on a regular manner. The criteria of the annual appraisal include teaching, supervising the students, research and publishing, and university and community engagement. As per the SER, the University has also established the Unit of Excellence in Teaching and Leadership Skills to develop the academic staff professionally. Moreover, the University offers several training courses, short workshops, lectures, specialized scientific seminars, and conferences to develop the faculty members academically and professionally, in addition to providing technical advices for colleges and departments to help them in developing their faculties academically and professionally. During interviews, faculty members expressed their satisfaction towards these activities and that their feedback is sought after each activity. As indicated in the SER, the QAO of the College in collaboration with the QAAC organize a number of workshops, and training courses for the faculty members, alongside workshops that are offered by other media, government and academic bodies outside the University. It was revealed during interviews with faculty members that the QAAC communicates with the colleges and departments to scope the needs of the academic staff. It was also revealed that the University supports faculty members to attend conferences if they present research papers, in addition to devoting rewards for publishing research in scientific journals. The Panel appreciates the efforts of UoB in providing several opportunities including the establishment of Unit of Excellence in Teaching and Leadership Skills to develop teaching and professional practices of the new and senior faculty members. Nevertheless, the Panel observed that identifying the current needs of professional development of the faculty has not been implemented systematically or officially through the University. Consequently, the Panel advises the College to identify the needs of professional development for the faculty members according to the results of the appraisal, and implement a mechanism to evaluate its impact on the performance of academic staff members.
- 4.10 The Panel found through interviews that the programme depends on the feedback from its stakeholders to scope the needs of the labour market, and the Department utilizes the feedback of the two advisory councils including employers and alumni for that purpose. However, as indicated previously (paragraph: 3.12), the two advisory councils are not operating at the level of the Master in Mass Communication programme; and there are no forms distributed to survey the opinions of employers and alumni with respect to the needs of the labour market to ensure its link to the

programme. Furthermore, the Panel did not find evidence on conducting holistic periodical studies to scope the labour market, in spite of their importance in improving the academic programmes and introducing new ones. Consequently, it is hard to identify the needs of the labour market or develop the programme according to its needs. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should conduct rigorous holistic studies to identify the short- and long-term needs of the labour market and utilize these studies to develop the programme.

4.11 In coming to its conclusion regarding the Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance, the Panel notes, *with appreciation*, the following:

- Documented policies and institutional systems are in place to meet the programme needs, and faculty members are well informed about these policies.
- There are formal policies and procedures that are appropriate to the quality assurance at the University and College levels.
- The academic and administrative staff have a general understanding of quality assurance aspects and its requirements; and there are several efforts at the programme level to disseminate the culture of quality amongst them.
- The University provides several opportunities including the establishment of the Unit of Excellence in Teaching and Leadership Skills to develop teaching and professional practices of the new and senior faculty members.

4.12 In terms of improvement, the Panel **recommends** that the College should:

- improve the used approaches to monitor and assess the management system of quality assurance in the programme and measure their effectiveness
- implement arrangements a the comprehensive periodic review of the programme; and develop mechanisms for tracking and monitoring the implementation of improvement plans
- continue to develop its mechanisms to survey the stakeholders' opinions - especially external stakeholders - through a representative sample, analyse the data regularly, and inform the internal and external stakeholders about the results
- conduct rigorous holistic studies to identify the short- and long-term needs of the labour market and utilize these studies to develop the programme.

4.13 **Judgement**

On balance, the Panel concludes that the programme **satisfies** the Indicator on **Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance**.

5. 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 Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the *DHR/BQA Programmes-within-College Reviews Handbook, 2014*:

There is limited confidence in the Master in Mass Communication Programme offered by the University of Bahrain.