



**هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب**  
**Education & Training Quality Authority**  
KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN مملكة البحرين

# **Directorate of Higher Education Reviews Programme Review Report**

**University of Bahrain  
College of Arts  
Master in Applied English Studies  
Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Site Visit Date: 4 – 6 March 2024**

**HA123-C3-R123**

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## Acronyms

BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CILO	Course Intended Learning Outcome
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DELL	Department of English Language and Literature
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
ELC	English Language Center
HEC	Higher Education Council
HoD	Head of Department
IT	Information Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
MAES	Mater in Applied English Studies
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PAC	Programme Advisory Committee
PCAP	Post-Graduate Certificate for Academic Practice
PEO	Programme Educational Objective
PILO	Programme Intended Learning Outcome
QA	Quality Assurance
QAAC	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Center
SAC	Student Advisory Committee
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SIS	Student Information System
UoB	University of Bahrain
UILO	University Intended Learning Outcomes

## I. Introduction

In keeping with its mandate, the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), through the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR), carries out two types of reviews that are complementary. These are: Institutional Reviews, where the whole institution is assessed; and the Academic Programme Reviews (APRs), where the quality of teaching, learning and academic standards are assessed in academic programmes within various colleges according to specific standards and indicators as reflected in its Framework.

Following the revision of the APR Framework at the end of Cycle 1 in accordance with the BQA procedure, the revised APR Framework (Cycle 2) was endorsed as per the Council of Ministers' Resolution No.17 of 2019. Thereof, in the academic year (2019-2020), the DHR commenced its second cycle of programme reviews.

The Cycle 2 APR Review Framework is based on four main Standards and 21 Indicators, which forms the basis of the APR Reports of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

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

*Standard 1: The Learning Programme*

*Standard 2: Efficiency of the Programme*

*Standard 3: Academic Standards of Students and Graduates*

*Standard 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance*

The Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as 'the Panel') decides whether each indicator, within a standard, is 'addressed', 'partially addressed' or 'not addressed'. From these judgements on the indicators, the Panel additionally determines whether each of the four standards is 'Satisfied' or 'Not Satisfied', thus leading to the programme's overall judgement, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Criteria for Judgements**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
All four Standards are satisfied	Confidence
Two or three Standards are satisfied, including Standard 1	Limited Confidence
One or no Standard is satisfied	No Confidence
All cases where <b>Standard 1</b> is not satisfied	

The APR Review Report begins with providing the profile of the programme under review, followed by a brief outline of the judgement received for each indicator, standard, and the overall judgement.

The main section of the report is an analysis of the status of the programme, at the time of its actual review, in relation to the review standards, indicators and their underlying expectations.

The report ends with a Conclusion and a list of Appreciations and Recommendations.

## II. The Programme's Profile

Institution Name*	University of Bahrain
College/ Department*	College of Arts
Programme/ Qualification Title*	Master in Applied English Studies
Qualification Approval Number	-
NQF Level	-
Validity Period on NQF	-
Number of Units*	9 Taught Courses and a Dissertation
NQF Credit	-
Programme Aims*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enable students to critically review theories and research in applied English language studies demonstrating specialized knowledge and understanding of advanced concepts and principles.</li> <li>2. Enable students to conduct research applying standard methods in applied English language-related fields, using IT skills, and displaying academic responsibility and integrity.</li> <li>3. Empower students with life-long learning strategies to carry out investigations autonomously in various English language-related areas to improve personal, academic and professional skills.</li> </ol>
Programme Intended Learning Outcomes*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Produce written critical reviews demonstrating knowledge and understanding of key theories, principles, concepts and methods in various language, linguistics, literature, and other related fields.</li> <li>2. Apply specialized research methods to investigate viable and feasible research topics.</li> <li>3. Apply knowledge of key theories, principles, concepts and methods in the fields of language, linguistics and literature.</li> <li>4. Communicate effectively in speaking while engaging in academic discussions, debates, and oral presentations.</li> </ol>

	5. Develop and conduct authentic academic research that demonstrate adequate learning autonomy, academic integrity, and Information and Communication Technology skills
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\* Mandatory fields

### III. Judgement Summary

## The Programme's Judgement: Confidence

Standard/ Indicator	Title	Judgement
<b>Standard 1</b>	<b>The Learning Programme</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>
Indicator 1.1	The Academic Planning Framework	Addressed
Indicator 1.2	Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes	Addressed
Indicator 1.3	The Curriculum Content	Addressed
Indicator 1.4	Teaching and Learning	Addressed
Indicator 1.5	Assessment Arrangements	Partially Addressed
<b>Standard 2</b>	<b>Efficiency of the Programme</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>
Indicator 2.1	Admitted Students	Addressed
Indicator 2.2	Academic Staff	Partially Addressed
Indicator 2.3	Physical and Material Resources	Addressed
Indicator 2.4	Management Information Systems	Addressed
Indicator 2.5	Student Support	Addressed
<b>Standard 3</b>	<b>Academic Standards of Students and Graduates</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>
Indicator 3.1	Efficiency of the Assessment	Addressed
Indicator 3.2	Academic Integrity	Addressed
Indicator 3.3	Internal and External Moderation of Assessment	Partially Addressed
Indicator 3.4	Work-based Learning	N/A

Indicator 3.5	Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component	Addressed
Indicator 3.6	Achievements of the Graduates	Partially Addressed
<b>Standard 4</b>	<b>Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>
Indicator 4.1	Quality Assurance Management	Addressed
Indicator 4.2	Programme Management and Leadership	Addressed
Indicator 4.3	Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme	Addressed
Indicator 4.4	Benchmarking and Surveys	Partially Addressed
Indicator 4.5	Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs	Partially Addressed

## IV. Standards and Indicators

### Standard 1

#### The Learning Programme

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

#### Indicator 1.1: The Academic Planning Framework

*There is a clear academic planning framework for the programme, reflected in clear aims which relate to the mission and strategic goals of the institution and the college.*

##### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The Master in Applied English Studies programme (MAES) is offered by the Department of English Language and Literature (DELL) of the College of Arts at the University of Bahrain (UoB). The programme follows a clear, top-down planning process for designing and evaluating academic programmes in line with Academic Bylaws, Regulations for Offering and Developing Academic Programmes and Courses, Quality Manual, Assurance of Learning, and IDEAS document. As per the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), the MAES programme was established to address the pressing need for postgraduate training in Applied English Language Studies for university researchers, teaching assistants, experts in language-related issues, as well as teachers in the Ministry of Education.
- Potential risks related to the quality, delivery, and academic standards of the programme are identified and managed at the department level. These risks are regularly identified as explicated in the Risk Management Register and managed as per the Risk Management Process. The Panel examined DELL's Risk Management Register, and the actions taken to mitigate risks and is satisfied with the current arrangements.
- The MAES programme has not been placed yet on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), however, the SER states that the processes are currently underway to meet the NQF qualification design requirements and to place the programme at NQF Level 9. During interviews, the Panel discussed the NQF application process and is satisfied that progress is being made.

- The programme title is ‘Master in Applied English Studies’ as documented on Graduates’ Certificates and the UoB website. The title is concise and reflects the type and the content of the programme.
- The aims of the programme are clearly and appropriately stated in the form of Programme Educational Objectives (PEOs), which are aligned with the university’s mission and strategic goals. The Panel confirmed that the PEOs are regularly reviewed and updated based on feedback from internal and external stakeholders.

## **Indicator 1.2: Graduate Attributes & Intended Learning Outcomes**

*Graduate attributes are clearly stated in terms of intended learning outcomes for the programme and for each course and these are appropriate for the level of the degree and meet the NQF requirements.*

### **Judgement: Addressed**

- UoB has defined generic graduate attributes at the institutional level. These attributes are derived from the University's six Intended Learning Outcomes (UILOs): Communication, Technological Competence, Critical Thinking and Analysis, Knowledge and Skills, Information Literacy, Responsibility and Integrity, and Life-Long Learning. Graduate attributes are captured in the PEOs and the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs), focusing on providing the graduates with skills to tackle real-world language challenges, apply their expertise in professional contexts, and contribute innovative ideas through rigorous research.
- The Programme Specification Form clearly illustrates that the PILOs are well-defined and appropriately mapped to the PEOs. The PILOs are written using clear and measurable action verbs that are appropriately challenging for the level of study and aligned with the NQF level descriptors. Evidence was also provided on a recent revision of the PILOs based on benchmarking with six international programmes and faculty feedback to enhance their measurability and alignment with the NQF level descriptors.
- The Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs), including the ‘Dissertation’ course (ENGL550), are linked to the course content and appropriately mapped to the PILOs. This alignment extends to teaching methods, learning activities, and assessments. Course specifications include CILOs, their mapping to PILOs, and assessment tools. During interviews, the Panel learned that CILOs are regularly updated based on various inputs, including feedback received from different stakeholders.

### **Indicator 1.3: The Curriculum Content**

*The curriculum is organised to provide academic progression of learning complexity guided by the NQF levels and credits, and it illustrates a balance between knowledge and skills, as well as theory and practice, and meets the norms and standards of the particular academic discipline.*

#### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The MAES Study Plan is well-organized and meets NQF requirements in terms of course levels and credits. It consists of nine taught courses (27 credit hours) that students are expected to complete in a one-and-a-half-year (three-semester), followed by one additional semester dedicated to completing the dissertation (9 credit hours). The Panel is of the view that the total student workload is appropriate. The Study Plan is also in line with international norms in terms of the required credit hours for graduation and the average study duration.
- The curriculum was recently revised and updated based on benchmarking and the feedback of internal and external stakeholders. The Panel notes that there is a satisfactory balance between theory and practice and depth and breadth in the curriculum, which covers a variety of topics in the fields of Language Acquisition, Language Learning, Linguistics, Literature and Translation. The balance between theory and practice is reflected in the MAES PILOs and ensured through the mappings of the CILOs to the PILOs and to the NQF level descriptors, as well as the regular revision of the programme and course specification forms by the Curriculum Committee. This Committee also ensures the appropriateness of course materials and textbooks.

### **Indicator 1.4: Teaching and Learning**

*The principles and methods used for teaching in the programme support the attainment of programme aims and intended learning outcomes.*

#### **Judgement: Addressed**

- UoB has a dedicated Teaching and Learning Policy which highlights the key domains that encourage students to be active members in their learning. These are: designing of interactive learning materials and assessment, integration of technology enhanced learning, incorporating life-long learning skills, supporting research informed teaching and learning. The SER also refers to the Higher Studies Regulations at UoB, and the Study and Examination Regulations. These policies support the use of a range of appropriate teaching methods, which encourage students' participation in learning, exposure to professional practice, and the development of independent learning.

- The Panel notes that the teaching and learning methods stated in the programme and course specification forms are in line with the institution’s teaching philosophy and enable the attainment of the intended learning outcomes. The Panel also notes that DELL effectively integrates e-learning into its educational approach by utilizing the Blackboard platform, which grants students access to course materials, assessments, learning activities, and discussion forums. During the site visit interviews, the Panel was informed that continuous training on virtual learning is provided to students and academic and non-academic staff *via* the online dissemination of teaching materials, guidelines as well as workshops.
- At the university level, the E-learning Centre has implemented a reward system to acknowledge the efforts of highly active and efficient academic staff members. In the academic year 2022-2023, three academic staff from the Department received certificates of honour from the University President in recognition of their outstanding utilization of e-learning resources. The Panel was informed during the site visit interviews with senior management that 36 staff members of the College have been awarded excellence in using technology-enhanced teaching and learning approaches in their respective courses. The Panel appreciates the efforts exerted by the College to encourage academic staff to utilize technology-enhanced teaching and learning approaches in their respective courses.
- During interviews with the senior management, creative and innovative aspects of students’ learning were discussed. The Panel was also informed that the MAES teaching approaches are informed by current research, where appropriate, hence promoting the nexus between teaching and research. The teaching approaches are also continuously reviewed and developed. Furthermore, the Panel notes that reflective (self and dialogic) and innovative teaching practices supported by pedagogy are encouraged and recognized by DELL. The Panel also notes that there is a strong emphasis on research ethics, with academic staff actively encouraging students to uphold principles of honesty and integrity. In the ‘Dissertation’ (ENGL550), course instructors provide students with comprehensive information on the ethical conduct of research, including guidelines on research ethics and academic integrity.

### **Indicator 1.5: Assessment Arrangements**

*Suitable assessment arrangements, which include policies and procedures for assessing students’ achievements, are in place and are known to all relevant stakeholders.*

#### **Judgement: Partially Addressed**

- UoB has a comprehensive assessment framework with appropriate provisions for internal and external moderation of assessments. The assessment framework includes policies, procedures, regulations, manuals and handbooks such as the Regulations of Study and

Examination, UoB Moderation of Assessment Regulation, Avoiding Plagiarism Policy, Quality Manual, and Teaching and Learning Policy, which are accessible *via* UoB's website, and are disseminated to stakeholders through Blackboard, Students Package, and New Students' Orientation documents.

- The Panel notes that the MAES programme implements a mix of formative and summative assessments. The course specification forms include various assessment methods, such as practical projects, examinations, essays, and presentations. However, the Panel noticed that the rubric used for grading assignments is not specifically developed for each assignment. The rubric gives 25% to language and writing techniques and less than 5% to content even though content is what shows students' ability to analyze and think critically which is expected to be evaluated and allotted a substantial part of the grade. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should develop suitable grading rubrics that evaluate language, writing techniques, and content for each assignment.
- The MAES programme has implemented various measures to ensure fair and consistent grading. These measures include grading rubrics and moderation of assessments. There is also a process for students to appeal against their final examination grades appeals are reviewed by two appointed faculty members, who may recommend a new grade. However, the Panel reviewed a sample of assignments and noticed that one essay received an A- despite the fact that it has only one citation and one reference source, while another essay received a lower grade despite the fact that the student used a good number of sources. Therefore, the Panel urges the College to enhance the mechanisms used to ensure consistent and fair grading (see Indicator 3.3)
- During the interviews with students and alumni, it was suggested that feedback on assessment be given immediately to enhance the learning experience. Furthermore, during the interviews with academic staff, the Panel noted a lack of adherence to a clear timeline for marking and providing feedback. The Panel also noted that almost all samples of examinations, assignments, and semester term projects that were examined by the Panel have either no feedback at all or minimal feedback. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should establish a structured and consistent approach to ensure that sufficient feedback is provided to students in a timely manner.
- In line with the university's regulations and policies, DELL has implemented measures to prevent and detect plagiarism, including the use of the plagiarism detection software 'SafeAssign' for all assignments and projects. DELL has also collaborated with UoB's E-learning Centre to promote academic integrity through various workshops. Cases of academic misconduct, such as cheating or plagiarism, are referred to the Department Student Misconduct Committee, which determines appropriate actions based on UoB regulations. Penalties for cheating may include test failure, registration cancellation, or deprivation from future registration.

## Standard 2

### Efficiency of the Programme

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

#### Indicator 2.1: Admitted Students

*There are clear admission requirements, which are appropriate for the level and type of the programme, ensuring equal opportunities for both genders, and the profile of admitted students matches the programme aims and available resources.*

#### Judgement: *Addressed*

- The MAES programme implements UoB's general admission requirements outlined in the Higher Studies Regulations, in addition to other criteria required for the MAES programme. Both UoB and MAES admission requirements are clear and available on the university's website. The interviews with different stakeholders confirm that the admission requirements are consistently implemented and ensure that appropriate students are accepted on an equal basis between females and males in the MAES programme.
- While the minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) for admission is typically 2.67, candidates with GPAs in the range of 2.33-2.67 can still apply provided that they complete linguistics courses including (ENGL440, ENGL444 and ENGL445), which are offered by DELL. In the Panel's view, this approach expands accessibility without compromising academic standards, as it follows clear admission criteria.
- UoB supports access, progression, credit transfer, and Recognition of Prior Learning. The Regulations of Study and Examination outline the transfer process between UoB programmes and from other universities to UoB. Credits earned from previous coursework can be transferred if the content matches the required courses and a grade of B or higher was achieved.
- The UoB's general admission requirements outlined in the Higher Studies Regulations were last revised 13 October 2022. However, the Panel was not provided with evidence of approving the MAES admission requirements. Furthermore, the benchmarking report, which includes benchmarking the MAES admission criteria to those of other similar programmes is undated, though it was mentioned in the SER that it has been conducted

in March 2023. Therefore, the Panel couldn't reach a conclusion of the frequency and the regularity of revising the MAES admission requirements. Thus, recommends that the College should ensure that the revision of the programme's admission criteria is regularly conducted and formally approved.

## **Indicator 2.2: Academic Staff**

*There are clear procedures for the recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion, and professional development of academic staff, which ensure that staff members are fit-for-purpose and that help in staff retention.*

### **Judgement: *Partially Addressed***

- As per the SER, UoB has adequate policies and regulations for the recruitment, induction, appraisal, and promotion of academic staff, which are consistently implemented in a transparent manner. Newly appointed academic staff participate in induction workshops at the university and college levels to be familiarised with university procedures and their responsibilities, also, they are provided with the Faculty Guide document.
- The Panel notes that DELL has mechanisms in place that ensure the quality of scientific research carried out by academic staff, and its alignment with the research plan of the College and the University. DELL also promotes gender equality taking into consideration the needs of women and academic staff with special needs. Various policies are in place to support academic staff, including maternity and paternity leave, remote working, pay-scale equity, and grievance procedures.
- The Panel examined the submitted standardized faculty Curriculum Vitae and is pleased with the diverse qualifications and expertise. The MAES programme is taught by one Professor, five Associate Professors, and five Assistant Professors. Given that the number of students is 61, the ratio of faculty to student is 1:5. Academic staff are expected to work a maximum of 40 hours per week, with teaching responsibilities ranging from 12 to 18 credit hours based on their rank. The remaining time is allocated for research, committee participation, and community engagement.
- The workload balance for academic staff at UoB is a concern due to various factors. Academic staff are tasked with teaching two programmes offered at the DELL simultaneously, in addition to other responsibilities such as thesis supervision, academic advising, and committee work, resulting in a heavy workload. The Panel also noticed with concern that only one faculty member has applied for a promotion in the past three years. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should encourage staff to apply for promotion and develop a mechanism to reduce the faculty teaching load.

- UoB has policies and arrangements in place to support the professional development needs of its academic staff. DELL actively encourages academic staff to attend workshops and organizes activities tailored to their specific needs. Evidence was provided on active participation of academic staff in various professional development activities, and on regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of these activities. DELL has developed a well-defined Annual Professional Development Plan based on various inputs including the analysis of the annual evaluation of faculty by the Head of Department (HoD). In addition, UoB offers professional development programmes specifically designed to enhance the capacity of academic staff in supervising research theses. These programmes are intended to equip educators with the necessary knowledge, techniques, and skills to effectively support students in producing high-quality academic research.
- The University offers continuing professional development services, including an internationally accredited certificate in teaching in higher education. DELL academic staff have obtained Post-Graduate Certificate for Academic Practice (PCAP) certificates. Moreover, research assistants receive support to pursue higher qualifications. The Panel appreciates that DELL academic staff have successfully obtained teaching certificates from the programmes offered by the Unit of Teaching Excellence and Leadership in collaboration with the Higher Education Academy.
- UoB has robust measures in place to monitor staff turnover and prioritize retaining highly qualified academic staff members. These measures encompass a range of effective strategies, including performance evaluations, faculty satisfaction surveys, mentorship programmes, and professional development opportunities. During the site visit, the Panel observed firsthand the commitments made by DELL in fostering a supportive work environment that encourages collaboration and respect, thereby demonstrating its dedication to retaining its academic staff.

### **Indicator 2.3: Physical and Material Resources**

*Physical and material resources are adequate in number, space, style and equipment; these include classrooms, teaching halls, laboratories and other study spaces; Information Technology facilities, library and learning resources.*

#### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The Panel visited the Department during its relocation from the S17 building to the main building of the College of Art, which houses classrooms equipped with data projectors, white screens, whiteboards, and internet-connected computers. DELL also utilizes the E-Learning Centre and the Central Library resources to enhance the learning experience of its students. The Reading Laboratory has been renovated by collaborating with Pearson Publishing House, providing physical and digital reading materials. Specialized facilities

such as the Visio-Braille Laboratory, Self-Access Laboratory, and Interpreting Laboratory further cater to the needs of visually impaired students and independent learning. Based on the physical and virtual tour, the Panel is satisfied with the appropriateness and adequate equipment of the classes and laboratories.

- UoB's Information Technology (IT) facilities support students' learning, including computer laboratories, Wi-Fi access, and email services. Policies promote IT utilization in teaching and learning, backed by the University Teaching and Learning Policy. UoB assesses student satisfaction with IT facilities through surveys. As per the Senior Exit Survey 2020-2021, 86.3% of students expressed satisfaction with the facilities and instructional resources.
- The UoB Digital Library Website provides access to a wide range of digital resources. During interviews with students, it was confirmed that they could request any electronic resources that are currently unavailable in the library. The library promptly provides these resources, making the research process more convenient and ensuring easy access to necessary materials. Researchers, both staff and students, can also benefit from inter-library loan services. The Panel confirmed during the site tour and interviews that the library employs effective communication methods to provide updates and enhance its resources. The Panel also confirmed the appropriateness of the library facilities at UoB in terms of study spaces and accessibility for all students and staff with special accommodation spaces for individuals with special needs.
- UoB has a formal mechanism to ensure the maintenance and adequacy of its resources, including facilities, equipment, technology, and infrastructure. This mechanism involves regular audits and assessments to identify areas in need of repair or improvement. Continuous evaluations and feedback from faculty and students contribute to ongoing improvement efforts.
- During the site visit tour, the Panel noted that the UoB campus is equipped with clear health and safety instructions for all its academic and operational functions. Exit signs, various types of fire extinguishers, and prominently displayed usage instructions are found throughout the campus. These displays also provide important information about service dates, upcoming checks, and contact details for maintenance vendors.

## **Indicator 2.4: Management Information Systems**

*There are functioning management information and tracking systems that support the decision-making processes and evaluate the utilisation of laboratories, e-learning and e-resources, along with policies and procedures that ensure security of learners' records and accuracy of results.*

**Judgement: Addressed**

- UoB effectively utilizes management information systems to handle critical data for its operations, enabling informed decision-making. These systems include the Student Information System (SIS) and Learning Management System (LMS). SIS facilities include timetabling, admissions, registration, advising, and grade management. During the site visit, the Panel was provided with a demonstration of the SIS system, which showcased its ability to facilitate informed decision-making and streamline operations. Further evidence was also provided on utilizing generated reports from SIS and LMS in decision making at the department level.
- UoB has implemented policies and procedures to ensure the security and accuracy of learners' records. Secure databases and limited access to authorized personnel are in place to protect sensitive information. UoB also has comprehensive data protection and social media policies. Information regarding the issuance of graduation certificates can be found on the university's website, ensuring transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders. During the virtual site visit, the Panel confirmed that the awarded certificates and transcripts are accurate and issued in a timely manner.

## **Indicator 2.5: Student Support**

*There is appropriate student support available in terms of guidance, and care for students including students with special needs, newly admitted and transferred students, and students at risk of academic failure.*

### **Judgement: Addressed**

- UoB provides comprehensive support to students in various areas, including the library, laboratories, e-learning, and counselling services. The library offers adequate support to students through services such as the reserve collection, information literacy training, and library instruction programmes. Robust technical support for the LMS is also provided to students and faculty. The academic staff affirmed that the University provides comprehensive guidance and assistance to ensure the effective utilization of the LMS in addition to the support offered by the E-learning Center and the IT Center in providing seamless access to online platforms and assistance with IT resources.
- UoB offers a comprehensive range of career support accessible through the Tawasul portal, including workshops, counseling, job fairs, and internships. The goal is to empower students in making informed career choices and achieving success in the workforce. Career fairs are organized to facilitate student engagement with companies and institutions. In interviews with alumnus, the Panel noticed that students were well-prepared for their chosen careers.

- As per the SER, arrangements are in place for inducting MAES students. The arrangements include two separate induction sessions, one is a general induction session organized at the institution level by the Deanship of Research and Postgraduate Studies, and the other is specifically designed for newly admitted students in the programme organized by the DELL.
- Academic advising is provided to all students, with each student being assigned an academic advisor. The SIS facilitates efficient communication between advisors and students. During interviews with students, they expressed high levels of satisfaction with the support provided by their academic advisors. This was also reflected in the 2022-2023 Senior Exit Survey results.
- DELL monitors and provides support to at-risk students through an online Academic Advising System. UoB also implements measures to support students with special needs and address the specific needs of women. The Disability Division, within the Students' Services and Development Department, offers services to support students with physical and psychological disabilities, including accommodation, counselling, and additional support.
- UoB consistently evaluates and enhances its support services to cater to the evolving needs of students, gathering feedback through surveys. The Senior Exit Survey Report reveals that graduates expressed high satisfaction with various aspects of their experience. The Students Service Center is acknowledged for its responsiveness, while the Career Counseling Office offers valuable guidance.

## Standard 3

### Academic Standards of Students and Graduates

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

#### Indicator 3.1: Efficiency of the Assessment

*The assessment is effective and aligned with learning outcomes, to ensure attainment of the graduate attributes and academic standards of the programme.*

##### **Judgement: Addressed**

- Evidence that a variety of assessment methods are used and uniformly applied across the programmes in the Department and that the assessments meet the academic standards of each programme was provided and confirmed during the interviews. The Panel acknowledges that there are valid and reliable assessment methods that are in line with current good practices and meet the academic standards of the MAES programme. In terms of the level of assessments' complexity, the Panel noticed that midterm and final examination questions in some courses (e.g. ENGL540, ENGL541, ENGL545, ENGL548 and ENGL549) did not require advanced cognitive abilities such as analytical and critical skills. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should ensure that the assessments of all MAES courses require advanced cognitive abilities such as analytical and critical skills.
- The Panel confirmed during interviews that mechanisms are in place to ensure the alignment of assessments with CILOs. These are reflected *via* various processes, such as statistical analysis (using percentages and averages) which is conducted by DELL through CILO-PILO Assessment Excel Sheets. Samples of assessment methods are also subjected to internal moderation to ensure that instructors design assessments in line with the course CILOs, that the assessment tasks are clear and appropriate, and that marking is consistent with the same standards.
- The Panel finds sufficient evidence on mechanisms followed for monitoring the implementation and improvement of the assessment process including the moderation and the Quality Assurance (QA) audit processes. However, the Panel is of the view that these mechanisms need to be enhanced since the level of assessments' complexity in some courses is in need of improvement.

### **Indicator 3.2: Academic Integrity**

*Academic integrity is ensured through the consistent implementation of relevant policies and procedures that deter plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct (e.g. cheating, forging of results, and commissioning others to do the work).*

#### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The Panel finds that policies and procedures relating to academic integrity, ethics, and research are well-disseminated and known by students and staff. These include Anti-Plagiarism Policy, Regulations of the Misconduct bylaw, Regulations of Professional Conduct Violations, Study and Examination Regulations. The Panel recognizes UoB's efforts to compel its students to adhere to Anti-Plagiarism policies and regulations, and principles of integrity and ethical research practices.
- SafeAssign application is compulsory to all courses including the 'Dissertation' course (ENGL550). The Panel examined samples of SafeAssign originality reports and noticed that similarity percentage in these samples range between 4% to 26%. Cases of plagiarism are referred to the Department Student Misconduct Committee. During interviews with faculty and students, the Panel learned that the acceptable percentage of similarity within 'Safe Assign' is up to 25%, exceeding the international norms. Both students and faculty highlighted that students could resubmit their work in case of a high similarity level, but there was no clear number of re-submissions permitted. Hence, the Panel recommends that the College should set a maximum number of allowed submissions permitted through the plagiarism detection software (Safe Assign or similar) and align the acceptable percentage of similarity within SafeAssign with international norms.

### **Indicator 3.3: Internal and External Moderation of Assessment**

There are mechanisms in place to measure the effectiveness of the programme's internal and external moderation systems for setting assessment instruments and grading students' achievements.

#### **Judgement: Partially Addressed**

- DELL has been moderating assessments based on course rolling plans since 2018 in line with the university's Assessment Moderation Policy, which governs the process of internal and external moderations. As for the selection of internal and external moderators, this is done in line with UoB Moderation of Assessment Regulation, which outlines details on the selection process and criteria for selecting moderators. The evidence that was made available to the Panel includes some pre- and post-moderation forms with the course coordinators' response in addition to samples of external moderation forms.

The Panel noticed that moderators provided comments when deemed necessary and these comments were compiled and analyzed by the Moderation Committee, which develops an assessment improvement plan to be submitted to the DELL.

- The SER affirms that since the academic year 2021-2022, the internal moderation has been improved to cover two major assessment tasks in each course including the final examination, and to ensure that all courses are internally moderated every semester. However, the Panel reviewed the Course Portfolios and noticed that only four courses (namely ENGL540, ENGL541, ENGL542 and ENGL549) were internally moderated in the academic year 2022-2023. The Panel examined the moderation reports of the academic years 2019-2020, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 and noticed that these include data on all courses moderated for the two programmes offered by the DELL, however, few MAES courses were subject to internal and external moderations. Only two courses (ENGL540; ENGL549) were externally moderated as per the Moderation Report of 2019-2020; one course (ENGL542) was externally moderated as per Moderation Report of 2021-2022; and one course (ENGL543) was externally moderated as per Moderation Report of 2022-2023. This was further verified through interviews; hence, the Panel recommends that the College should ensure that all courses are internally and externally moderated based on clear internal and external moderation plans and devise an annual separate moderation report for each programme offered by the Department.
- From the interviews and supporting evidence, the Panel notes that evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme's internal and external moderation is sought through the Moderation Survey that is conducted at the end of each academic year as per the SER.

### **Indicator 3.4: Work-based Learning**

*Where assessed work-based learning takes place, there is a policy and procedures to manage the process and its assessment, to assure that the learning experience is appropriate in terms of content and level for meeting the intended learning outcomes.*

**Judgement:** *Not Applicable*

### **Indicator 3.5: Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component**

*Where there is a capstone project or thesis/dissertation component, there are clear policies and procedures for supervision and evaluation which state the responsibilities and duties of both the supervisor and students, and there is a mechanism to monitor the related implementations and improvements.*

**Judgement:** *Addressed*

- As per the Course Specification Form of the 'Dissertation' (ENGL550), the dissertation course carries nine credit hours out of the MAES programme's total 36 credit hours, (i.e., one fourth of the programme's credit hours), reflecting the student's knowledge and skills acquired from the nine courses studied across three semesters. The student's achievement of the 'Dissertation' course (ENGL550) CILOs, is indicative of their attainment of the UILOs, PEOs and PILOs.
- Every MAES student is allocated a supervisor based on clearly defined procedures. Most academic staff supervise between three to nine students every semester as per faculty's academic title, which was confirmed in interviews. The supervision arrangements for the thesis are detailed in the UoB's Higher Studies Regulations (October 2022) and the Thesis Writing Guide Handbook. While the Thesis Writing Guide Handbook mentions the supervisor's responsibility for thesis accuracy and his overseeing his advisee's abidance by the already mutually agreed upon thesis submission date, the UoB's Higher Studies Regulations does not mention any of the supervisor's roles. Both documents include provisions relevant to thesis supervision in general terms. The Panel is of the view that the programme would benefit from a more detailed document that explain the supervisor's various roles of supporting student's topic choice, providing guidance during the research phase, following up the student closely during the writing process, conducting discussion sessions to foresee the students' comprehension of their research process results. Thus, the Panel suggests that the DELL creates and implements a well-structured and detailed document stating clearly supervisor's roles and responsibilities towards their supervisees.
- Students' progress monitoring process is entrusted with their supervisors in the first place. These supervisors monitor their students *via* regular Follow-Up Reports to be shared with the Department Graduate Studies Committee which forwards them to the Graduate Studies Deanship. Moreover, the 'end of semester' grading of the work progress is utilized to inform decision making with regard to challenges or concerns that students might encounter while writing their theses. Though the SER does not mention any indication of students' satisfaction with the supervision process and the resources available to carry out their research, the Panel found that students' satisfaction with supervisory and resources has been evaluated *via* the Senior Exit Surveys.
- The Panel notes that the MAES Students Progression document displays that six students from the 2018-2019 cohort and one student from the 2019-2020 cohort were still awaiting their viva-voce examinations. As to 2022-2021 18 students' cohort, 100% of the students are in the process of preparing/completing their dissertation while all the 2022-2023 15 students' cohort has accomplished half of the credit hours required up to now. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the College should evaluate the effectiveness of the thesis-related arrangements and make improvements in the assessment process.

### **Indicator 3.6: Achievements of the Graduates**

*The achievements of the graduates are consonant with those achieved on equivalent programmes as expressed in their assessed work, rates of progression and first destinations.*

#### **Judgement: *Partially Addressed***

- The expected level of students' achievements is verified through the alignment of CILOs to PILOs and PEOs. Examining samples of students' submissions, e-portfolios, moderation of assessment reports, CILOs, and PILOs reports convinced the Panel that the level of students' achievements is appropriate based on scrutiny of students' assessed work. However, as indicated in 3.1, the level of assessments' complexity in some courses should be enhanced.
- The evidence that was made available to the Panel reveals that, only 49% of the admitted students from 2018-2021 cohorts have graduated so far, while 21% are still awaiting for their viva-voce examinations and 30% are in the writing process. According to data provided, eight out of 15 admitted students from 2018-2019 cohort, six out of seven admitted students from 2019-2020 cohort and one out of 11 admitted students from 2020-2021 cohort have graduated. The SER does not clarify how far are these numbers in consonance with those on equivalent programmes. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should investigate the reasons behind the long time the students take to graduate and ensure that year-on-year progression, retention, and length of study are consonant with those on equivalent programmes.
- DELL tracks the MAES graduates' first destination through the Senior Exit Survey, which shows that graduate's destination is mainly in the education sector. This was also confirmed during interviews with students. The Survey shows that eight out of 11 respondents are employed. However, no further evidence was provided on tracking employment of graduates or keeping their records to inform DELL about the extent of realization of the MAES academic standards. The Panel was not provided with sufficient evidence on the employer's satisfaction, however, the Panel found during employers and alumni interviews that they were both in consensus as to the graduates' lack of exposure to real work contexts. The Panel, therefore, recommends that the College should enhance the mechanisms used to gather data from graduates and their prospective workplaces and ensure that these data are used to confirm that academic standards are met.

## Standard 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.*

#### Indicator 4.1: Quality Assurance Management

*There is a clear quality assurance management system, in relation to the programme that ensures the institution's policies, procedures and regulations are applied effectively and consistently.*

##### **Judgement: Addressed**

- At the institutional level, policies and regulations are in place such as admission and registration policies, Quality Assurance Policy, the Quality Assurance Enhancement Policy, and the UoB Teaching and Learning Policy. The Panel acknowledges that there are institutional mechanisms at the university, college and department levels to review the QA policies. Also, there are portals for communicating these policies to all stakeholders (e.g., Quality Assurance and Accreditation Center (QAAC) webpage) and several printed documents in which the policies are published.
- The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre (QAAC) oversees the QA system at the University. At the college level, there is a Quality Assurance Office and a QA Committee. The Heads of these entities report to the Dean, who communicates with the Department. At the department level, there is also a QA Committee that reports to the HoD and oversees all QA activities ranging from monitoring courses, teaching and learning, assessment, and surveying stakeholders.
- To manage the programme's QA processes and guarantee that they comply with university requirements, the College maintains a QA policy. The implementation of this policy is monitored by the Quality Assurance Office at the college level, which also oversees the evaluation and advancement of various programmes. An annual QA report is produced for each programme by the responsible QA committee. It was confirmed by the Panel during the interviews that the QA system is being applied consistently.
- The QA Committee organizes workshops for faculty to assist in the understanding of QA processes. However, since these workshops are not mandatory, it is not clear how many academic staff participate in these to benefit from the training offered in them. Thus, the Panel advises investigating ways to ensure that QA training workshops are attended by most academic and administrative staff. The Panel was satisfied to see that staff are

participating in various committees, and this proves their awareness of QA processes within the programme. During interviews, faculty and staff showed an understanding of QA and their role in ensuring effectiveness of provision. Interviews also confirmed the active monitoring, periodic evaluation, and updates of the QA management system in the College. The Panel, thus, holds the view that the programme has provided enough evidence that shows that it has a quality management system that is monitored, evaluated, and improved periodically.

## **Indicator 4.2: Programme Management and Leadership**

*The programme is managed in a way that demonstrates effective and responsible leadership and there are clear lines of accountability.*

### **Judgement: Addressed**

- The College has a suitable organizational chart for managing the programme, with distinct reporting lines to facilitate interdepartmental communication and decision-making. The HoD oversees the two programmes offered at DELL. The responsibilities at every level are clearly defined and closely watched. The academic and administrative responsibilities are distributed among various committees that report to the HoD. It was clear from the interviews with academic staff and the senior management that the programme is managed adequately and that the current organization is suitable.
- The existing reporting lines connect the Department and its committees to the College Council. The management of the programme is supported at the college level by committees such as the QA Committee, the Academic Programme Committee, the Promotion Committee, and the Scientific Research Committee. Emails and the Content Management System are the primary means of communication. The Panel received sufficient evidence during the interviews that confirms that there are channels of effective communication and decision-making in the programme.
- All posts and committees have clear Terms of Reference (ToR), and evidence was provided on their function in accordance with their clearly specified ToRs. However, the Panel noticed that the ToRs for all committees are the same, with no specialization for each committee. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should review and revise Terms of Reference for all committees to ensure that the specific role of each committee is distinguished and clarified.
- The responsibility and custodianship of maintaining the academic standards of the programme are clearly stated at various levels, as per the Quality Manual and the 'Faculty Task Allocation & Reports' document. This helps identify where different academic and administrative responsibilities lie, and who exactly is responsible for the custodianship of

the academic standards of the programme at the various levels: department, college, and university. This was confirmed to the Panel from interviews with college administrative and academic staff.

- The Panel was provided with evidence that shows that the programme management is supported by administrative staff at the programme level and the college level. Based on the interviews, the evidence, and SER, the Panel is confident that there are defined lines of accountability, and that the programme's current management is exhibiting effective leadership. Committees, councils, operational plans, reports, satisfaction surveys, and quality manuals are all evidenced.

### **Indicator 4.3: Annual and Periodic Review of the Programme**

*There are arrangements for annual internal evaluation and periodic reviews of the programme that incorporate both internal and external feedback and mechanisms are in place to implement recommendations for improvement.*

#### **Judgement: Addressed**

- At UoB, there is an annual and periodic programme review policy that outlines the purpose, scope, principles of reviews and details each type of programme evaluation. The annual SERs of the programme are prepared by the QA Committee at the department level based on a range of different data sources, such as: course details; results of course evaluations conducted by the QAAC every semester; feedback from the department committees, Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) and Student Advisory Committee (SAC) feedback; and survey results. The Panel examined the annual SERs of the last four years (2019-2020 to 2021-2022) and noticed that they include intensive analysis of various sources and end with an improvement plan. Evidence was also provided on decisions taken at the Department to implement the latest improvement plan. The SER details the recently implemented modifications on the MAES programme as a result of the annual SER, which included revising the assessment of some courses and updating all course specification forms.
- The UoB Quality Manual serves as a comprehensive reference guide for periodic reviews of programmes. During the interviews, the Panel was informed that the periodic review takes place every five years. Based on the recommendations the programme received during the BQA review in 2017, major changes were made to the programme including initiating a new study plan in 2020, revising PILOs and CILOs and map them together, and revising the admission policy in 2020. The SER does not mention any other comprehensive review.

## **Indicator 4.4: Benchmarking and Surveys**

*Benchmarking studies and the structured comments collected from stakeholders' surveys are analysed and the outcomes are used to inform decisions on programmes and are made available to the stakeholders.*

### **Judgement: *Partially Addressed***

- The Benchmarking policy of UoB provides the framework for different entities of the University to undertake benchmarking. In accordance with the university regulations in effect at the time, the MAES programme went through a benchmarking exercise in March 2023 with six universities at the international level. The benchmarking exercise covered several aspects including admission criteria, PILOs, and study plan. Nonetheless, the benchmarking report made no conclusive statements regarding the outcome of the benchmarking exercise. Furthermore, considering the benchmarking exercise was conducted in March 2023, the precise manner in which it benefited the programme remains ambiguous. No evidence was provided on conducting benchmarking exercise before March 2023. The Panel thus recommends that the College should conduct a comprehensive benchmarking study, covering all aspects of the programme, and utilize the results of this study as an input in the next periodic review to improve the programme.
- The MAES programme uses formal mechanisms to collect structured comments from internal and external stakeholders by means of surveys and PAC and SAC meetings. The SER states that the results of Course Evaluation Surveys, Senior Exit Surveys, and Employer Surveys are analysed and deployed to improve the programme. The Panel found that the evidence submitted on MAES Employer Survey Results for 2022 was for another programme not the MAES. During the site visit, the Panel was provided with an employer survey report dated 24 February 2024, where the respondents were only five. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should introduce mechanisms to improve response rates to surveys, ensuring that their results are analyzed and utilized to inform decisions making.
- The SER does not explain how changes to the programme are communicated to external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders, faculty and staff, confirmed during interviews that they receive updates either from the HoD or through meeting minutes. In addition, SAC and PAC members are informed of changes during their meetings. However, other stakeholders were not aware of the extent to which their suggestions have been considered, as revealed during the interviews. Alumni have expressed during interviews that they would like more opportunities to stay connected. This led the Panel to conclude that changes, updates, and/or improvements to the programme should be better publicized and announced to all stakeholders. The Panel hence recommends that the College should put in place an effective feedback mechanism to communicate to external

stakeholders the modifications, improvements, or decisions made based on their feedback and to set in place a process to evaluate the effectiveness of this mechanism.

#### **Indicator 4.5: Relevance to Labour market and Societal Needs**

*The programme has a functioning advisory board and there is continuous scoping of the labour market and the national and societal needs, where appropriate for the programme type, to ensure the relevancy and currency of the programme.*

#### **Judgement: Partially Addressed**

- The MAES programme has a functioning Advisory Board that consists of PAC and SAC. The PAC has members from the governmental and private sectors of the local community. The SER mentions that PAC meets once a year. However, during the interviews, the Panel was informed that a decision has been taken that PAC should meet twice a year. As for SAC, it is also a fully functioning committee that meets periodically. The SER states that feedback from SAC and PAC is utilized to improve the curriculum and study plan. The Panel noticed that feedback from PAC and SAC is included in the annual SERs and is utilized in the decision-making process. Evidence was also provided on submitting the annual SERs to SAC and PAC for approval. However, the Panel noticed that the ToRs of both PAC and SAC lack sufficient details and clarity on the purpose and objectives of each committee; the requisite skills and expertise sought by committee members, the processes by which members are selected, and the roles and responsibilities entrusted to them. Thus, the Panel recommends that the College should ensure that the terms of reference for both the Programme Advisory Committee and the Student Advisory Committee are updated and refined.
- The mechanisms that are in place to collect data about the quality of the programme and whether graduates meet labour market needs are mainly satisfaction surveys. The Panel examined a document titled 'Market Study', but it was related to another programme, other than the MAES programme. The Panel was not provided with a market survey, other than the employer survey report of February 2024, or any comprehensive analysis of labour market demands and societal or community needs related to the MAES programme. The Panel is of the view that, to investigate the ever-changing competitive landscape with the new technology demands, evolving trends, and community needs, thorough market research should be conducted as part of the periodic review of the programme. Adequate research tools need to be developed for this purpose. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the College should conduct a formal study with targeted data that enables the scoping of the labour market and the national and societal needs, to ensure that the programme is relevant and up-to-date.

## V. Conclusion

**Taking into account the institution's own self-evaluation report, the evidence gathered from the interviews and documentation made available during the virtual site visit, the Panel draws the following conclusion in accordance with the DHR/BQA *Academic Programme Reviews (Cycle 2) Handbook, 2020*:**

**There is "Confidence" in the Master in Applied English Studies of College of Arts offered by the University of Bahrain.**

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

1. The efforts exerted by the College to encourage academic staff to utilize technology-enhanced teaching and learning approaches in their respective courses.
2. Department of English Language and Literature academic staff have successfully obtained teaching certificates from the programmes offered by the Unit of Teaching Excellence and Leadership in collaboration with the Higher Education Academy.

**In terms of improvement, the Panel recommends that the University of Bahrain and the College of Arts should:**

1. Develop suitable grading rubrics that evaluate language, writing techniques, and content for each assignment.
2. Establish a structured and consistent approach to ensure that sufficient feedback is provided to students in a timely manner.
3. Ensure that the revision of the programme's admission criteria is regularly conducted and formally approved.
4. Encourage staff to apply for promotion and develop a mechanism to reduce the faculty teaching load.
5. Ensure that the assessments of all MAES courses require advanced cognitive abilities such as analytical and critical skills.
6. Set a maximum number of allowed submissions permitted through the plagiarism detection software (Safe Assign or similar) and align the acceptable percentage of similarity within SafeAssign with international norms.
7. Ensure that all courses are internally and externally moderated based on clear internal and external moderation plans and devise an annual separate moderation report for each programme offered by the Department.

8. Evaluate the effectiveness of the thesis-related arrangements and make improvements in the assessment process.
9. Investigate the reasons behind the long time the students take to graduate and ensure that year-on-year progression, retention, and length of study are consonant with those on equivalent programmes.
10. Enhance the mechanisms used to gather data from graduates and their prospective workplaces and ensure that these data are used to confirm that academic standards are met.
11. Review and revise Terms of Reference for all committees to ensure that the specific role of each committee is distinguished and clarified.
12. Conduct a comprehensive benchmarking study, covering all aspects of the programme, and utilize the results of this study as an input in the next periodic review to improve the programme.
13. Introduce mechanisms to improve response rates to surveys, ensuring that their results are analyzed and utilized to inform decisions making.
14. Put in place an effective feedback mechanism to communicate to external stakeholders the modifications, improvements, or decisions made based on their feedback and to set in place a process to evaluate the effectiveness of this mechanism.
15. Ensure that the terms of reference for both the Programme Advisory Committee and the Student Advisory Committee are updated and refined.
16. Conduct a formal study with targeted data that enables the scoping of the labour market and the national and societal needs, to ensure that the programme is relevant and up-to-date.