هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب
Education & Training Quality Authority
KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN مـمـلـكـة الـبـحـريـن

Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
Programme Review Report

Arab Open University
Faculty of Language Studies
BA (Hon) English Language and Literature
Kingdom of Bahrain

Site Visit Date: 18 –20 March 2024
HA124-C3-R124

Table of Contents

Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMR	Annual Monitoring Report
APR	Academic Programme Review
AOU	Arab Open University
ARD	Admission, Registration & Examinations Department
BAEEL	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) English Language and Literature
BCC	Branch Course Coordinator
BQA	Education & Training Quality Authority
CAC	Course Assessment Committee
CAT	Computer Assisted Translation
CBM	Cross-Branch Marking
CEC	Central Examinations Committee
CILO	Course Intended Learning Outcome
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
EE	External Examiner
FLS	Faculty of Language Sciences
GCC	General Course Coordinator
HEC	Higher Education Council
HQ	Headquarter
IAB	Industry Advisory Board
IT	Information Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
LRC	Learning Resources Centre
MTA	Mid-Term Assessment
NQF	National Qualifications Framework

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024
    3

OU-UK	Open University in the United Kingdom
OUVP	Open University Validation Partnerships Unit
PILO	Programme Intended Learning Outcome
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA UK	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, United Kingdom
QAAD	Quality Assurance & Accreditation Department
SAG	Student Affairs and Graduate Department
SCU	Student Counselling Unit
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SIS	Student Information System
TMA	Tutor Marked Assessment

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024 *4*

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

Criteria	Judgement
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 **Standard 1** is not satisfied	

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *5*

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.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024

6

II. The Programme's Profile

Institution Name*	Arab Open University
College/ Department*	Faculty of Language Studies
Programme/ Qualification Title*	BA (Hons) English Language and Literature
Qualification Approval Number	-
NQF Level	-
Validity Period on NQF	-
Number of Units*	26 courses
NQF Credit	-
Programme Aims*	- Provide students with high quality instruction and training in English Language and Literature. - Offer a programme of blended learning that addresses the academic and vocational needs of students in language communication and literary appreciation. - Develop creative and critical thinking in students as well as appropriate communication skills in writing and speaking. - Prepare students for further and more advanced study. - Prepare and qualify students for employment. - Develop in the students a range of specific and transferable skills including English literacy and communication skills. - Relate and integrate both English language and literature material they studied across the range of genres, time, and place. - Provide a critical evaluation of both English language and literature texts.
Programme Intended Learning Outcomes*	**A: On completion of the programme, learners will have knowledge and understanding of:**

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *7*

A1. A substantial number of authors and texts written in English or translated into English including some texts written outside the United Kingdom.

A2. The character and conventions of the principal literary genres – poetry, fiction and drama – and of other kinds of writing and communication.

A3. The history of English, its contemporary diversity, its role as a global language, and its use in a range of contexts in different parts of the world.

A4. Debates surrounding the historical and contemporary position of English in relation to other languages and language varieties.

A5. The nature of linguistic evidence and different methods used in the collection and analysis of language data.

A6. How literature and language both reflect and impact upon cultural change and difference; and of the way texts are written and received within literary, cultural and socio-historical contexts.

A7. How language and literature may be described and analysed.

A8. The different theoretical approaches to the study of literature, language and literacy.

B. Cognitive skills

B1. Develop critical skills in the close reading and analysis of diverse texts.

B2. Acquire information of diverse kinds from a variety of sources (such as academic libraries, the Internet, CD-ROMs, and corpora).

B3. Learn and use appropriate linguistic and critical terminology to describe and analyse texts.

B4. Synthesise information and ideas drawn from varied sources, and critically evaluate alternative explanations and arguments.

B5. Engage with different interpretations of texts and relate abstract concepts and theories to specific texts.

C. Practical and professional skills

C1. Use and present English material in written and spoken form in a clear and effective manner.

C2. Edit general and specialised English texts.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *8*

	C3. Demonstrate accurate and effective note-taking and summarising skills.
	C4. Use reference material successfully, including bilingual and monolingual dictionaries.
	C5. Use communication tools, such as recordings, telephone conferencing and ICT-based tools.
	D. Key/transferable skills
	D1. Communicate effectively in English in everyday situations and semi-specialised contexts.
	D2. Identify relevant material from a variety of sources, including multimedia material.
	D3. Read, synthesise and evaluate the significance of substantial quantities of material.
	D4. Present sustained and persuasive arguments cogently and coherently.
	D5. Reference sources in an appropriate way.
	D6. Work independently, schedule tasks and manage time effectively.
	D7. Identify and use sources of support.
	D8. Make use of feedback from your tutor to improve performance.
	D9. Use information technology skills to access, store, manage and present data effectively.
	D10. Use the relevant computational tools and software packages, where appropriate, for the analysis of data

* Mandatory fields

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024　　　　*9*

III. Judgement Summary

<div style="text-align:center; font-weight:bold; font-size:larger;">

The Programme's Judgement: Confidence

</div>

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

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *10*

Indicator 3.5	Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation Component	Not Applicable
Indicator 3.6	Achievements of the Graduates	Addressed
Standard 4	**Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance**	**Satisfied**
Indicator 4.1	Quality Assurance Management	Addressed
Indicator 4.2	Programme Management and Leadership	Partially 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	Addressed

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   11

IV. Standards and Indicators

<div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #e0e5d0; padding: 1em;">

Standard 1

The Learning Programme

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

</div>

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: *Partially Addressed*

- The BA (Hons) programme in English Language and Literature (BAELL) is offered by the Faculty of Language Sciences (FLS) at the Arab Open University (AOU)-Bahrain and complies with the Higher Education Council's (HEC) regulations in Bahrain. The Programme leads to a qualification awarded by the Open University in the United Kingdom (OU-UK), with the requirements of UK Quality Codes (SM004; SM005; SM006). The programme was re-validated by the Open University Validation Partnerships unit (OUVP) in 2017 and has been evaluated positively in the annual review processes required by OU-UK since then. Although the BAELL programme draws on a similar programme offered by OU-UK, the Panel was able to confirm that it also takes the Bahraini context into account. The FLS established an Industry Advisory Board (IAB) in 2019, which contributes to reviews of the programme to ensure that it is relevant to the needs of industry in Bahrain and the region.

- The BAELL programme is offered by a multi-national, multi-campus institution and there are risks associated with this. These risks were acknowledged by staff members occupying a number of different roles. The FLS headquarters has developed a comprehensive Risk Policy and a Risk Register. Risk management is then cascaded down to campus level into the preparation of a local risk register aligned with that developed at faculty level. Staff at various levels on the Bahraini campus confirmed that they were aware of the risk register and had contributed to its development. The main risks associated with the programme are identified as related to a lack of engagement on the part of students with the programme and AOU-Bahrain has taken action to mitigate this risk by introducing new activities in the Writing Centre and the Speaking Centre. A Business Continuity Plan has been developed at institutional level, while the one for the Bahraini campus is currently

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *12*

being developed. Evidence of engagement with the need to manage risks is also found in the identification of the diversification of programme offerings on the Bahraini campus as a strategy to address insufficient financing.

- The BAELL programme complies with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and its Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) have been benchmarked against Subject Benchmark Statements in the UK Quality Code.

- The curriculum focuses on advancing proficiency in the mechanics of the language through the provision of skills courses and on developing students' ability to engage with and critique literature written in English Courses on literary theory have been included to guide the development of the appreciation of literature. The programme also includes courses in linguistics. The Panel, therefore, finds that title of the programme concise and indicative of the qualification's type and content. The title and details of the BAELL programme are accurately documented in the Programme Specifications, which can also be downloaded from the AOU-Bahrain website. Details of the programme also appear on the certificate awarded to graduates.

- Programme aims are clear and are aligned with the mission and vision of AOU-Bahrain. The agreement with OU-UK means that the programme is subject to regular review as part of five-yearly revalidation processes. A review of the aims of the programme forms part of the revalidation process. The last revalidation applies to all students admitted to the programme from September 2022 and is valid for five years. The Panel confirmed the involvement of stakeholders in the review process. During the site visit interviews, the Panel could confirm that the programme aims contribute to the achievement of the AOU-Bahrain vision and mission. The programme aims also contribute to the production of scientific research and staff members confirmed their efforts and achievements in pursuit of research outputs. The Panel also learned that support for research was available from AOU-Bahrain.

- An agreement with OU-UK allowing AOU to offer the BAELL programme expired at the end of 2023. During the site visit, the Panel was informed that the agreement with OU-UK was about to be finalised in March 2024. The Panel understands that a new agreement has been signed but has not had sight of the document. AOU will now submit an application to the HEC to continue to offer the programme on its Bahraini campus. The recent signing of the agreement means that it has been reviewed to the satisfaction of both parties. OU-UK subject AOU-Bahrain's delivery of the programme to a process of revalidation every five years. The last revalidation review was concluded in 2022 to the satisfaction of OU-UK.

- The agreement that expired at the end of 2023 clearly stated the nature and mode of delivery of the BAELL programme as well as programme elements to be taught and

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024 13

examined. However, since the Panel has not had sight of the renewed agreement. The Panel also could not verify whether the renewed agreement specifies the title of the degree, roles and responsibilities of the institutions providing the degree, rules and policies that will be applied in terms of academic planning, teaching and learning, assessment, student admission, support, staffing, etc. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AOU-Bahrain, in cooperation with OU-UK, should expedite the finalization of the new agreement and ensure it satisfies the BQA requirements for cross-border programmes.

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: *Partially Addressed*

- Graduate attributes exist but only in draft form as they have not yet been formally approved by relevant institutional authorities either in Bahrain or in AOU Headquarter in Kuwait. In interviews, the Panel learned that programme leaders first became aware of the need for graduate attributes as a result of the current BQA review and that a committee had been formed to develop them. Despite this, faculty members confirmed that they were aware of the drafted attributes. The Panel received evidence of mapping the PILOs against the draft graduate attributes, however, as they had not been approved yet, this process was incomplete. The Panel, therefore, recommends that AOU-Bahrain should expedite the approval of its graduate attributes, and then perform the process of mapping PILOs against them.

- The BAELL PILOs are written clearly in the Programme Specification, measurable and appropriate for the programme type and level. They have been benchmarked against the subject benchmark statements in the UK's Quality Code, however, there is no evidence of benchmarking them with those of similar programmes (see recommendation under Indicator 4.4). The PILOs are aligned with programme aims.

- Each course (module) of the BAELL programme has clear Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs) stated in the relevant Module Specification document. The CILOs of the courses are appropriate for the level of the courses and aligned with the content. The CILOs were mapped against the PILOs in preparation for the re-validation process conducted by OUVP in 2022 by the FLS Deanship. Faculty members from AOU-Bahrain were involved in this process. However, the Panel noted that the CILOs for the Internship course are not mapped to the PILOs (see recommendation under Indicator 3.4)

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024 14

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*

- A Study Plan developed in 2017 is currently in use. The 2017 plan was revised in 2022 but is still awaiting approval from the HEC. The Study Plan details progression course by course and pre-requisites are shown clearly. Pre-requisites are also stated in the Module Specification document of each course. The Study Plan details the credit hours required to complete the BAELL programme and classifies them into university, faculty, and specialisation requirements including mandatory and elective courses.

- The programme is re-validated every five years in accordance with the agreement with OU-UK. Validation takes place against QAA UK benchmark statements, during which the curriculum is updated. The curriculum contributes to the development of knowledge in a number of areas as well as to skills, including higher order cognitive skills, relative to the programme. The programme also includes eight weeks of training spent in industry in order to better prepare graduates for employment. Students indicated their satisfaction with the balance of knowledge and skills in the curriculum and with the period of industrial training. The Panel finds an appropriate balance between theory and practice, and between knowledge and skills in the curriculum.

- The Panel finds that course contents address all elements of the programme in terms of breadth and depth. Course descriptions (Module Specifications) are detailed and are disseminated to students and faculty members *via* a course calendar sent by General Course Coordinators (GCCs) to the Branch Course Coordinator (BCC) in Bahrain at the beginning of each semester. As mentioned earlier, although the programme was developed by OU-UK, it has been adapted for the Bahraini context.

- Textbooks are available in electronic format. Course materials provide references to academic work relevant to the area of study. Faculty members confirmed that they directed students' attention to relevant academic work (including that resulting from their own research) in teaching.

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*

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *15*

- AOU-Bahrain has a Teaching and Learning Policy referring to a range of teaching methods and strategies applied in the BAELL programme. Faculty members confirmed that they drew on a range of teaching methods in their courses, and this was corroborated by students. The Teaching and Learning Policy identifies the need for students to be active learners, to develop an appreciation of lifelong learning and for the need for theory to be linked to practice. Students and graduates of the programme confirmed that they had developed an appreciation for lifelong learning.

- A range of teaching and assessment methods are described in the Programme and Module Specifications and these are aligned with the philosophy expressed in the institutional Teaching and Learning Policy. All programme documentation in respect of teaching and learning methods indicates awareness of current thinking on teaching and learning in higher education. Staff indicated that their choice of teaching methods was directed at the attainment of learning outcomes. Students also indicated their satisfaction with the teaching they had received.

- AOU-Bahrain uses Moodle as its Learning Management System (LMS). It is used for online programme delivery, and the Panel was provided with a demonstration of the LMS as part of the virtual site visit. During this demonstration, the Panel was able to see that the design of the LMS was appropriate to the programme and supported the attainment of PILOs and CILOs. However, the Panel did not receive evidence on a formal document detailing e-learning (e.g., policy/guidelines), nor find relevant information in the Teaching and Learning Policy. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AOU-Bahrain develops and implements e-learning formal arrangements that are in line with the Teaching and Learning Policy and support the attainment of learning outcomes.

- As appropriate to a programme focused on language and literature, research capacity building focuses on the development of students' ability to read texts closely and use them to support claims they make about them based on their understanding of literary theory. Research capacity is developed through the use of Tutor Marked Assessments (TMA) that require accurate referencing to texts being read.

- Learning on the programme is supported by extra curricula activities offered by the Student Affairs and Graduate Department and by the Continuous Education and Community Centre. AOU-Bahrain has established a Writing Centre and a Speaking Centre, and both of these entities offer a range of innovative activities to engage students in learning including a 'Writing Contest'. Students affirmed the value of these informal learning activities offered by both centres.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *16*

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: *Addressed*

- AOU has an institutional level assessment framework in the form of the Bachelor Award Assessment and Examination Bylaws. The Bylaws provide details of procedures in relation to assessment that need to be used across all branches. The Bylaws are consistent with HEC regulations. Faculty members referred to the way their assessment was informed by the Bylaws. External Examiners (EEs) indicated their satisfaction with the way assessment procedures were implemented indicating that they complied with regulations and with international norms.

- Information about assessment at AOU is provided to students on the Orientation Day and the Student Guide also provides details of assessment. More specific information related to the assessment of learning in specific courses appears on the LMS. Assessment also appears in the induction programme provided for new staff and assessment training programmes were noted by faculty members as opportunities for professional development that had been provided to them. The AOU Bachelor Award Examination and Assessment Bylaws are uploaded onto AOU's SharePoint for faculty members. EEs confirmed that they were provided with details of the assessment procedures in each course.

- The distinction between formative and summative assessment is clearly delineated in the SER. Formative assessment includes a range of activities including quizzes and other informal activities as well as TMAs. Summative assessment encompasses final examinations which constitute 50% of the marks. As they design assessment tasks, GCCs are required to indicate the CILOs assessed in each question or task. There is therefore evidence that assessment criteria are aligned with PILOs and CILOs since CILOs are mapped against PILOs. EEs are also required to ensure that assessment tasks measure achievement against CILOs and indicated that they were satisfied with the rigour with which this was done. Students indicated that they had received feedback on their work promptly and that the feedback had been useful in developing their learning. Evidence was also provided of the provision of constructive feedback on assignments.

- AOU-Bahrain has a policy and set of regulations related to plagiarism and students indicated that they were aware of what constituted plagiarism and how to avoid it. AOU uses the 'Ouriginal' text matching software, which replaced an earlier use of Turnitin to allow tutors to identify plagiarism.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *17*

- As already indicated, there is evidence of the alignment of assessment criteria with CILOs and EEs are also required to check their alignment. Moderation procedures require EEs to compare the performance of students at AOU-Bahrain with the performance of students at other branches. Internal moderation includes group marking and double marking with all final examinations subject to group marking and Cross Branch Marking (CBM). The Panel appreciates the efforts taken at AOU-Bahrain to ensure the rigour of assessment through the use of internal and external moderation.

- Academic misconduct is guided by the Students' Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures Bylaw. A number of committees exist to deal with cases of academic misconduct: the Investigation Committee, the Primary Disciplinary Council and the Supreme Disciplinary Council. Appeals and Re-appeals are handled at faculty level and are governed by the Bachelor Award Examination and Assessment Bylaws. Students indicated that they were aware of the Bylaw for Academic Misconduct and the appeals processes associated with it.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *18*

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: *Partially Addressed*

- AOU has a clear Admission Policy that outlines the admission requirements for the BAELL programme. These requirements include a high school diploma, a language proficiency test; TOEFL 477 paper-based, 153 computer-based, 53 web-based, or an IELTS score of 4.5. Students who have not taken any language proficiency tests are required to sit for an English Language Placement Test at AOU. Students who score 80 or above out of 120 in the admission test are exempted from the orientation course. However, there is no evidence of benchmarking the placement test. In addition, during the interviews, the Panel noted that the passing score in the placement test is not officially specified. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AOU should benchmark its placement test and publish the passing score clearly.

- The Admission Policy is disseminated to stakeholders through the University website and the Student Guide. In the academic year 2022-2023, 130 students were enrolled in the programme with the majority being females (91/130). Students with special needs may be admitted in line with the Special Needs' Procedure. The Admission, Registration and Examination Department (ARD) consistently implements the admission policy in line with the HEC guidelines as evidenced by the samples of admission applications provided to the Panel.

- Induction is held at the beginning of every semester. An English Orientation Module (EL099) is offered to students who score below 80 in the admission test. Two additional English courses (EL111; EL112) have been integrated into the programme to further strengthen students' English proficiency. Further support is provided through the Writing and Speaking Skills Centres.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   19

- AOU has appropriate arrangements in place for student access, progression, credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning, which are clearly stated in the Course Equivalency Bylaw and the Students Transfer Bylaw. Students can transfer across programmes and branches. The procedure for transfer and prior learning is disseminated to the students through the Student Guide and LMS. The Panel was provided with an example of a course equivalency request and finds the procedure appropriate.

- AOU last revised its admission policy and procedures between November 2020 and December 2021 and adopted a two-year revision cycle for the future. The Admission Policy is currently being reviewed and benchmarked once again. The SER states that the admission requirements are benchmarked against QAA UK standards. However, they have not been benchmarked against other local or regional universities. The Panel recommends that the AOU should expedite the review and benchmarking of the BAELL programme's admission requirements.

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: *Addressed*

- AOU has appropriate policies and procedures for the recruitment, induction, appraisal, and promotion of academic staff which are in line with HEC requirements. Sample recruitment files seen by the Panel confirmed that this process was consistently implemented in a transparent manner. Furthermore, a Human Resource Management System (MenaME) is used to manage staff records.

- New faculty members are inducted through workshops in line with the New Staff Induction Procedure. During induction, checklists are filled out by new faculty members showing the required areas of training and ensure comprehensive coverage. Additional information is disseminated to faculty members through the AOU-Tutor Handbook. Upon completion of the induction, staff members complete a checklist with the undertaken training, however, the Panel did not receive evidence on gathering and utilizing feedback on the quality of the induction procedure. Therefore, the Panel suggests that AOU-Bahrain monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of induction procedures for new staff to ensure that they are appropriate and useful.

- Performance evaluation is governed by the Employee Performance Appraisal Procedures. Performance evaluation outcomes are used as basis for staff rewards, annual allowances, contract renewals, and promotions. Moreover, AOU-Bahrain has the Regulations of

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024 20

Promotion of Faculty Members. There have been no promotions in the programme in the last five years, but the Panel learned during the interviews that one faculty member has just applied for promotion.

- The Scientific Research Council was established recently at AOU-Bahrain to encourage and support research. The Panel learned from the interviews with senior management and the evidence provided that research groups have been recently formed to encourage research. The Panel examined the list of faculty research publications over the past four years and found a lack of contribution by some faculty who have not published any research during this period.

- The Internal Regulations Governing Academic Faculty Members at AOU detail the staff workload, which is distributed between teaching and non-teaching activities. The Panel examined faculty members' workload and found that they teach up to 19 hours per week. The Panel also explored faculty members' academic advising responsibilities and noticed that some faculty had more than 100 advisees. In addition, the current student to faculty ratio in the BAELL programme is 56:1. The Panel found that the faculty workload is excessive. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AOU-Bahrain should review the overall faculty workload to ensure that there is an appropriate and realistic balance of expectations related to teaching, research, academic advising and other tasks assigned to faculty members.

- A total of eight full-time faculty members serve the programme: one professor, five assistant professors, one lecturer, and one tutor. The Panel was provided with the curriculum vitae of all the faculty teaching on the programme and found that they have appropriate educational qualifications, specialisations, and professional experience.

- AOU-Bahrain has a Training, Continuous Education and Community Service Centre which organizes different professional development workshops for faculty members. During interviews, faculty members explained that every year, they respond to a survey from the Centre specifying their training needs and provided some examples of workshops they attended. Furthermore, interviews with senior management revealed that professional development needs are also determined through close observation of faculty members' performance.

- Staff turnover in the FLS is monitored and the data show a stable and low turnover rate. Over the past four academic years, at most, one faculty member has left the FLS per year. In some years, no faculty members resigned. Exit surveys are deployed to collect data about reasons for leaving and to develop retention strategies if needed.

Indicator 2.3: Physical and Material Resources

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *21*

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: *Partially Addressed*

- AOU-Bahrain campus includes sufficient classes and laboratories to support the delivery of the BAELL programme. There are 22 classrooms equipped with projectors and smart screens; a Writing Centre, two language laboratories, two computer laboratories; and an auditorium. There are also 80 academic and administrative staff offices (seven of which are allocated to BAELL faculty members), a library and an e-library. Students have access to a Wi-Fi network and a range of applications and systems, including the Student Information System (SIS), the LMS, in addition to other specific applications serving the programme.

- The Learning Resources Centre (LRC) at AOU-Bahrain is the main library which provides access to print and electronic resources required by BAELL students, which has a quiet zone for individual work. It has capacity to seat 74 students with 10 computers. There is also an e-library which provides access to many online databases such as EBSCO, EduSearch, SAGE, and ProQuest. The Panel observed from the campus tour and the evidence provided that the library holds a limited number of books covering wide areas of language, linguistics, literature, and translation. The Panel, therefore, recommends that AOU-Bahrain should increase the number of books in hard copy serving the BAELL programme. The Panel learned from the campus tour and the interviews that the library is staffed with only one staff member who works from 8am – 3pm on working days. This means that there is no one to assist students in the late afternoon and on Saturdays, during which students might attend. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AOU-Bahrain should hire more staff in the library. Usage of the LRC and e-library are monitored, and a policy exists (LRC's Collection Development Policy) to ensure the selection of quality material.

- Maintenance of AOU-Bahrain's facilities is outsourced and the Operation and Maintenance Department is responsible for monitoring the process. The IT Department implements a Disaster Recovery Plan to ensure the continuity of IT services. The adequacy of the library and Information Technology (IT) resources is evaluated through student and tutor surveys.

- AOU-Bahrain has Health and Safety Policy and measures and has formed a Health and Safety Committee. The University complies with civil defence requirements, evacuation drills are practiced, and an emergency evacuation plan has been drafted. The campus is equipped with a fire monitoring system. First aid boxes are distributed across the campus, and a nurse is available on campus providing students and staff with access to first aid and primary care. The Panel noted from the campus tour that access to the campus is not

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   22

restricted to holders of access cards. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AOU-Bahrain should restrict access to the campus to ensure the safety of staff and students.

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*

- The SIS used at AOU-Bahrain is comprehensive and covers all necessary processes from admission to graduation, including course registration, grade entering, fees payment, academic advising, and appeals. The system also generates a range of different reports which facilitate decision-making, prepares Quality Assurance & Accreditation Department (QAAD) reports and generates data for the annual programme evaluations. In addition to the SIS, the LMS is used to provide students with access to course materials, the e-library and learning support. Examples of generated reports are IT assets, attendance at online lectures and the use of language laboratories. The Panel learned from interviews that this data is used to inform decision-making such as selecting LRC resources to be acquired.

- AOU-Bahrain has a Data Protection Policy which includes a Code of Practice. In addition, the Policy on Dissemination of Information ensures that information is disseminated only to those individuals who are entitled to access it. All AOU's learner records and assessment results are stored securely on the SIS which can only be accessed by users with privileges. It was explained during interviews that regular data back-ups are made, and disaster recovery arrangements have been developed. Examination security is managed in accordance with the Security of Examination Materials Process and Procedures. Overall, AOU-Bahrain has appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure the security of its data and records.

- The Panel was provided with samples of the certificates and transcripts awarded to students. Since the BAELL programme is a cross-border programme, students receive a certificate from AOU and OU-UK which accurately describes the level of learning achieved by students. The Panel learned from interviews that certificates are usually issued within 1-2 months of graduation.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024 23

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*

- The BAELL programme offers a range of support services that help students develop their academic skills as well as access to social and professional opportunities. These services include workshops and counselling provided by the Student Affairs and Graduate (SAG) Department, the Student Counselling Unit (SCU), the LRC, the IT Department, the Writing Centre, the Translation Centre and the Speaking Skills Centre. Feedback collected through student surveys shows that these services are readily available and generally well-received. During the interviews, students commended the support they receive through the Writing and Speaking centres. The Panel appreciates the provision provided by the Writing and Speaking Centres which supports the achievement of programme outcomes.

- Career-relevant activities are provided to students on the programme by the FLS, SCU, and SAG. These activities include communication skills courses, the internship, and Career Talks. Recently, a special course on entrepreneurship skills has been integrated into the programme. A Careers Day is also organised every year to link students with prospective employers. The Panel learned from interviews with alumni that some had taken part in Career Talks and shared their experience with their colleagues.

- The SAG conducts a formal student induction at the beginning of every academic semester for all students, including transfer students. This is done in liaison with other units and departments, such as the LRC and the IT Department, to ensure students are informed about all the support services available to them. A detailed review of the student induction programme appears in annual programme evaluations.

- AOU has an Academic Advising Policy and Procedures. All faculty are assigned students to advise, and the entire process is managed by the SCU. Students are expected to meet their academic advisors at least once every academic semester and the outcomes of the meetings are recorded using academic advising logs. The SCU prepares an Annual Academic Advising Activity Report which tracks and monitors students who receive academic advising. The data in this report and the list of advisees assigned to every BAELL faculty member show that half the faculty members had more than 100 advisees in the first semester 2023-2024. In the opinion of the Panel, the number of advisees per faculty member is too high (see recommendation under 2.2).

- AOU's Equal Opportunity and Respect for Diversity Policy contains provisions which ensure equal opportunities for both genders. The Special Needs Committee and the SCU

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   24

provide this support to students in co-ordination with faculties, following the Special Needs Procedures. Students are given access to appropriate IT resources, library support, and physical facilities such as access ramps and disabled toilets. Faculty are informed about special needs students and the students are flagged on the SIS so that they are easily identifiable. The AMRs include a section on students with special needs.

- The students at-risk of academic failure are identified using the SIS, and their performance and progress are monitored and tracked. The FLS, in collaboration with the SCU holds meetings with at-risk students and their parents. In addition, academic advisors meet with at-risk students and agree on an Intervention Academic Action Plan. Currently there are 83 at-risk students on the BAELL programme. It was clarified during interviews that these students are given additional academic advising, in addition to being referred to the SCU for counselling and the Writing Centre for academic support.

- Student support services are regularly assessed using student surveys, and the results are reported in the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *25*

<div style="border: 2px solid black; background-color: #dce0c8; padding: 20px;">

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.

</div>

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: *Partially Addressed*

- The SER refers to formative and summative methods of assessment for measuring student learning. These assessments are carried out in accordance with AOU's assessment policies as well as QAA-UK standards. Summative assessments include TMAs and Mid-Term Assessment (MTA), both of which constitute 50% of the total mark, and the Final Examination, which carries the remaining 50% of the total mark. The SER states that TMAs are included in particular courses. The Panel confirmed that the validity and reliability of these assessments are assured by detailed robust pre-assessment moderation process. Also, the Panel noted that quizzes and projects are used as assessment tools in some courses, in addition to TMAs and MTAs.

- The Module Specifications includes the alignment of assessment with the CILOs of each course, which is mapped to the PILOs. As mentioned earlier in this report, at the beginning of 2023, AOU established a committee, chaired by the FLS Dean to develop a set of graduate attributes at the institution level. However, since the approval of the graduate attributes was not granted yet (at the time of the site visit), the Panel could not confirm the validity of the drafted mapping of the BAELL PILOs to the graduate attributes, and hence the contribution of the assessment to the graduate attributes. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the FLS should revise the mapping of the assessment to the learning outcomes in the light of the final version of the approved graduate attributes.

- AOU-Bahrain has developed a mechanism to measure the attainment of the CILOs. The Panel, however, noticed that there is an identified attainment threshold of 50%, that could be altered by individual instructors as desired. Moreover, the Panel did not receive sufficient samples to ensure the implementation of the mechanism of measuring the attainment of the CILOs, and hence the PILOs. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the FLS should ensure that the mechanism used to measure the attainment of CILOs and PILOs is consistently implemented.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *26*

- The FLS utilises a pool of experienced EEs from the OU-UK who provide constructive feedback on various aspects of the assessment process. The EEs also submit review reports which comment on various key aspects of the assessments they moderate The End of Semester Assessments and Exams Reports prepared by the QAAD Administrator and reviewed by the QAAD Head, represent another mechanism whereby various assessment tasks and some aspects of examinations are reviewed and recommendations for improvement are made.

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 FLS has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures dealing with all aspects of academic integrity related to both staff and students. The Panel was informed that these policies and procedures are disseminated to target audiences *via* emails and induction sessions. They are also uploaded on the official website and the LMS for accessibility by both students and tutors. Moreover, the LRC conducts some sessions with students to familiarise them with these policies and train them on how to avoid plagiarism. During the interviews, staff also confirmed that induction sessions are conducted for students before final examination to inform them about the rules and regulations and conduct in examinations.

- AOU utilises specialised plagiarism detection software (Ouriginal). All students' TMAs should be submitted online through the university's LMS before the marking and grading process.

- The End of Semester Assessments Reports include a section dedicated to documenting cases of plagiarism and cheating and the actions that have been taken in addressing them. Moreover, the Plagiarism Recording Sheet, together with the Template for Recording Cases of Plagiarism and Cheating, serve as additional mechanisms for documenting the details of any plagiarism cases detected by tutors. The Panel examined samples of these reports and finds that there had been a decrease in the number of cases reported over the last three academic years. This was also confirmed during interviews.

- The Panel notes that the BAELL programme team have not yet considered the challenges of academic integrity raised as a result of new advances in text generation applications and software associated with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Computer Assisted Translation (CAT). During interviews, although the Panel learned that staff were aware of

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *27*

these challenges and are making efforts to use applications in the provision of the programme, such breaches and improper use of AI tools by students are not yet covered by the university policies and regulations. The Panel acknowledges efforts on the part of the FLS to maintain academic integrity in the BAELL programme. Nevertheless, the Panel suggests incorporating issues associated with AI and CAT in the relevant policies and regulations.

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: *Addressed*

- There are clear internal and external moderation processes that include pre- and post-assessment moderation, and there is evidence that both processes are conducted fairly and consistently. Internal pre-assessment is carried out by a list of approved moderators appointed by the FLS Deanship. The appointment of internal moderators is done in accordance with the procedure laid out in the Internal Moderation document whereas external moderation is the role of EEs experienced academics appointed with the help of OU-UK.

- The internal pre-assessment moderation, which is carried out on both MTAs and final examinations before sending them to EEs responsible for specific courses, covers various aspects, such as language, layout, and alignment with CILOs. The same aspects are double checked and verified by the EEs as part of pre-assessment external moderation process. A set of forms has been developed for pre-assessment moderation purposes. The internal post-assessment process includes pre-marking, double marking and branch level random sampling. Moreover, Cross-Branch Marking (CBM) is conducted across AOU branches.

- The pre-marking of sample assessments contributes to ensuring fair and consistent marking conduct across multiple markers and compliance with the marking guidelines across all branches. The Panel found evidence of double marking of MTA and final examination scripts, where selected samples of these scripts are marked before the actual marking process starts in order to allow the team to ensure fairness and consistency in the entire marking process. Marking and moderation are monitored by the FLS Deanship. The SER states that this review process also includes checking the quality of feedback given to the student on performance in the respective assessment. The effectiveness of arrangements was verified during the site visit interviews with the academic staff who confirmed the positive impact of the practices noted above. The Panel appreciates double marking as an example of good practice in assuring the quality of the assessment process.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024 28

- The EEs, who are all appointed by the OU-UK for a tenure of a maximum of four years, provide comprehensive reports on the samples of assessment they moderate and the GCCs respond to these reports. EEs provide feedback on marking, grading and students' performance to the relevant examination committee, based on their reviews of selected sample of TMAs, MTAs and the final examination scripts that are provided to them every semester. EE's reports are submitted initially to OU-UK, and copies are sent to the FLS Deanship and are discussed by the respective Course Assessment Committee (CAC). The Panel found evidence that these efforts in general have contributed to the improvement of the equity, quality, and effectiveness of the assessment process and practices.

- The well-managed integration between internal and external moderation processes and procedures, which is also governed and regulated by a set of regulatory documents for the monitoring of these processes ensures its effectiveness. This assumption is further supported by the involvement of the senior management and committees (e.g. the Examination Board, the Academic Board, the CAC, the Faculty Examination Committee, and the Branch Examination Committee in managing and minoring these processes.

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: *Partially Addressed*

- AOU-Bahrain has an Industrial Training Policy and Procedures document which ensures an equivalent internship experience for all students on the BAELL programme. This document provides clear and comprehensive guidance to students, academic supervisors, and industrial supervisors in managing the practicum experience which is a one-credit course (INT300) involving 200 hours of practical training in a students' final semester of study. Students can apply the knowledge and skills learned on the BAELL programme in an authentic workplace environment, offered by a number of industrial training partners from diverse industries.

- The Internship Unit is responsible for overseeing student internships together with academic departments and this was confirmed during the interviews. The roles and responsibilities of the industrial supervisors, academic supervisors and students are clearly set out in the Industrial Training Policy and Procedures.

- The 'Internship' course (INT300) has defined CILOs for students to achieve. However, the CILOs of the internship course have not yet been mapped to BAELL PILOs. Hence, the

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024 29

Panel recommends that the AOU-Bahrain should expedite the process of mapping the CILOs of the internship course to the PILOs.

- The assessment schedule for the internship consists of the academic supervisor feedback report (20%), the industrial supervisor feedback report (30%), and a final report prepared by the student (50%). Currently, students are given a pass or fail mark for the course, which is worth one credit hour. The Panel requested samples of the different industrial training assessments and received samples of academic and industrial supervisors' feedback reports but did not receive samples of marked students' final reports. In addition, no course file is kept for the course. The Panel, therefore, recommends that AOU-Bahrain should ensure that a course file for the Internship Course (INT300) is produced containing all related documents to enable tracking consistent implementation of the internship.

- Upon completion of the internship, students are required to complete a Student's Internship Feedback form to evaluate their experience. This information, along with feedback from employers, is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the internship arrangements. However, the Department does not produce reports that analyse data from these forms. Hence, the Panel suggests that data from Student and Employer Internship Feedback forms are analysed in order to ensure that the course contributes to the achievement of the PILOs, and programme aims.

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: *Not Applicable*

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: *Addressed*

- The Panel viewed samples of students' work in the course files and found them to be appropriate. However, some variations in students' English Language proficiency were noted. This can be attributed to the loose admission requirements and the lack of benchmarking of the admission requirements (see recommendation under 2.1).

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *30*

- The Cohort Analysis Report shows that approximately 50% of BAELL students graduate in each cohort. The data also shows that, on average, students take more than four years to complete the programme. The Panel finds this consonant with other 'open access' programmes at other institutions. Student retention and progression data is monitored and reported in AMRs and the Panel notes that, in recent years, the number of student withdrawals has decreased.

- Progression and graduate destinations data are tracked and monitored, with a view to using these as mechanisms for assuring academic standards. The progression data is reported and analysed in AMRs, while alumni surveys provide a useful insight into the employment status of graduates. The Panel notes that the employment rate of BAELL alumni is low and has not improved over the last five years. In addition, the Panel learned from interviews with alumni and the evidence provided that only one graduate proceeded to postgraduate study. The Panel is of the view that more efforts need to be done by AOU-Bahrain to help students prepare for work and postgraduate study. The Panel, therefore, recommends that AOU-Bahrain should develop initiatives to enhance the employment prospects of graduates and better prepare those who choose to proceed to postgraduate level study.

- Employer Satisfaction Surveys indicate general satisfaction with BAELL graduates' profiles. Interviews with external stakeholders confirmed this view.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   31

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*

- AOU maintains a three-layer system of policies and procedures. The first level represents those developed and issued by the institution' Headquarter (HQ), which apply to all AOU branches. The second is a branch-level layer, which includes all policies and procedures developed by the individual branch and are aligned with policies at HQ level. The third layer refers to the forms and templates that are used for implementing the policies and procedures captured in the two previous layers. The AOU Quality Assurance (QA) Manual is a one-stop guide to the structure of university's QA system, monitoring procedures, and other aspects of the university operations such as governance, assessment systems, student support, and research planning and development. Policies, procedures and associated forms and templates are subject to regular reviews in collaboration with the QA Team at OU-UK.

- All QA related forms are accessible on SharePoint, which is controlled by the QAAD. Training workshops are organised for both academic and administrative staff to familiarise them with the university's policies, procedures, and new practices. From the interviews, the Panel concluded that both academics and support staff had a satisfactory level of understanding of the QA system and requirements at AOU-Bahrain.

- There are internal QA mechanisms for assessing and assuring the quality of academic programmes, support services, research, and community engagement activities. During the interviews, the Panel learned that the QA team at the OU-UK takes the lead in external QA and enhancement activities at AOU-Bahrain. The Panel was also informed that regular communication takes place between this OU-UK team and various entities at AOU-Bahrain, including the FLS Deanship and concerned staff regarding various issues related to the quality of the BAELL programme. The aim of these interactions is to ensure that the programme adheres to the quality standards of the OU-UK as one of the awarding bodies of dual degree.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   32

- The QA structure comprises the following four entities: the Central Quality Assurance Committee, QAAD, the Branch Quality Assurance Committee, and the Branch QA Unit. Each entity has clear mandate and responsibilities. Monitoring the management of the QA system and assuring its effectiveness at AOU-Bahrain is the responsibility of the QAAD. The QAAD oversees key QA-related processes including the preparation of the AMR; the administration and analysis of student, tutor, employer, and alumni surveys; the coordination of revalidation activities; and ensuring compliance with the university's regulations, policies, and procedures.

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: *Partially Addressed*

- In accordance with the AOU Statute, a Deanship exists for the BAELL programme at the HQ. The Deanship comprises the Programme Dean, two faculty members from the HQ, and one faculty member from each branch offering the programme. However, the AOU-Bahrain organisational structure does not refer to this Deanship. Moreover, although the Internal Regulations document and the QA Manual refer to Branch Programme Coordinators who are responsible for managing programmes at branch level in consultation with the Programme Deanship at the HQ, this position does not appear in the organisational structure. During interviews, the Panel sought clarification of this issue and was informed that the term 'Branch Programme Coordinator' is an old term that is no longer used. The Panel recommends that AOU-Bahrain should revise its organisational structure to clearly show all the relevant entities and positions; and update the QA Manual and all relevant documents to reflect the changes in the organisational structure and QA practices.

- At branch level, the positions of GCC and BCC exist. Both positions have clearly defined roles and responsibilities in relation to programme management. The GCC's main responsibilities include the coordination of course material and assessment tasks. The GCCs represent their respective courses at CAC's meetings at the end of each semester. The GCCs also coordinate matters related to course delivery and student performance with course tutors at relevant branches. The BCCs are the main contact between course tutors and the GCCs. The main roles of the BCCs are detailed in the Tutor Handbook.

- The SER states that there are two entities involved in programme management. The first is the Branch Council, which is responsible for some tasks at AOU-Bahrain level. These tasks include branch performance evaluation, the branch annual budget plan, and the end-of-the-year balance discussion. The second entity is the Branch Examination Committee,

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024 33

that is tasked with overseeing all matters related to examinations at branch level in terms of administration, marking, the pre- and post-moderation of assessment, the review of results, and their endorsement by the ARD in the HQ. Moreover, the Panel was provided with evidence showing four committees, namely: the FLS-Bahrain Faculty Council; the Appeal Committee, the Re-Appeal Committee and the Equivalency Committee with clear terms of reference.

- During interviews, the Panel learned that the Local Dean serves as the link between the faculty members at AOU-Bahrain and President of the AOU-Bahrain branch regarding all academic affairs of the Programme, as also stated in the SER. This, however, contradicts another statement in the same section which notes, 'for academic issues, the tutor communicates with the BCC, who in turn can communicate with the GCC'. In the Panel's view, this contradiction reflects a lack of clarity with regard to who is accountable and responsible for the academic standards of the programme. The site visit interviews also revealed that the most common programme management practices involve informal and routine interactions between the different layers of programme management, with a lack of strategic branch-based leadership. Hence, the Panel recommends that AOU should review relevant documents to ensure that lines of responsibility related to the custodianship of the BAELL programme documents are clear and consistent.

- The 'equivalent quality of education' is the responsibility of AOU-Bahrain and OU-UK both of which are awarding institutions. This is achieved by means of programme revalidation processes conducted by OU-UK every five years and annual programme evaluations conducted by AOU-Bahrain.

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*

- The Quality Manual describes the annual programme evaluation process. The BAELL programme is annually reviewed at two levels; the course level (at the end of every semester) and the programme level (at the end of the academic year). Annual internal programme evaluations take the form of an AMR document submitted by AOU-Bahrain to the HQ. This document is then forwarded to OU-UK by the programme Deanship along with programme statistics detailing progression and retention rates. OU-UK reviews AMRs submitted by all branches and develops a report highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the programme offered at each branch, taking into consideration

the results of all the conducted surveys and IAB feedback. The Programme Deanship at HQ is responsible for taking action with regard to weaknesses identified at any branch.

- The BAELL programme is reviewed as part of the comprehensive institutional five-year review, a requirement stipulated in AOU's validation agreement with the OU-UK. This five-year institutional review cycle covers all aspects of the institution and its academic programmes, and involves administrative audits of the university's infrastructure, administration, student services and support. It also involves a site visit to the AOU by a panel from OU-UK. Necessary corrective actions in response to OU-UK reviews are taken by the HQ in collaboration with the branches.

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*

- AOU-Bahrain has a Benchmarking Policy. A Benchmarking Form has been developed and all Faculties are encouraged to ensure consistency. However, the Panel did not receive evidence of benchmarking the BAELL programme with other similar programmes. The only evidence available on FLS benchmarking activities relates to the mapping of the Subject Benchmark Statement for English against the QAA-UK quality code for teaching and learning provision and student support. The Subject Benchmark Statement and associated guidelines are utilised for developing new courses and programmes. The Panel also received two samples of benchmarking in the form of simple handwritten forms completed by one staff member informally benchmarking the admission of special-needs students. Therefore, the Panel recommends that AOU should ensure that benchmarking is regularly conducted and used to determine and verify the comparability of the academic standards with other similar programmes in Bahrain, regionally or internationally.

- The FLS conducts a number of surveys for measuring the satisfaction of its stakeholders with various aspects of the programme and other support services. Examples include the Student Survey, the Tutor Survey, the Employer Survey, the Student Exit Survey, and the Alumni Survey. Responses to these surveys are analysed and the results are consolidated into a single analysis report by the Programme Deanship at HQ. During the interviews, it was confirmed that some actions have been taken in response to these survey results.

- The Panel noted that some surveys are duplicated, i.e., have similar items, but with different titles (such as the FLS Labour Market Survey, and the Employer Survey - see Indicator 4.5), which affects the accuracy and effectiveness of the data collected and

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *35*

hinders proper feedback from relevant stakeholders to improve the programme. According to the SER, AOU-Bahrain is working with OU-UK on addressing such duplications by fine-tuning and merging some of the items. Nevertheless, the Panel recommends that AOU-Bahrain should expedite the revision of all survey instruments to ensure that the collected data is fit for purpose and is relevant to the targeted stakeholders.

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: *Addressed*

- The FLS has an IAB established in 2019 and specified its composition and terms of reference. During the interviews, the Panel confirmed the contribution of IAB to the development of various aspects of the BAELL programme. The IAB has contributed to surveying the labour market in Bahrain to determine the readiness of FLS graduates for meeting its needs and requirements. Moreover, the IAB participated in informing the FLS's decisions regarding the employability skills and competencies of its graduates. The IAB also recommended offering a "translation track" within the existing BAELL programme, which was taken into consideration and on its way to be offered. The IAB's input was also elicited when the FLS was developing the AOU-Bahrain graduate attributes.

- The AOU-Bahrain referred to a document titled 'FLS Labour Market Survey', which the Panel examined and found that it is a generic survey for improving the quality of the AOU graduates. The AOU-Bahrain also referred to the Employer Satisfaction Survey, which collects data regarding the quality of the programme graduates. The Panel examined the survey and concluded that it does not elicit in-depth data that enables thorough scoping of the labour market needs and the competencies needed by graduates. Hence, the Panel recommends that AOU-Bahrain should revise the mechanism of scoping the market and conduct regular and comprehensive market studies to ensure that the programme is relevant and up-to-date.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *36*

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 BA (Hon) English Language and Literature programme offered by the Faculty of Language Studies of Arab Open University.**

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

1. The efforts taken at AOU-Bahrain to ensure the rigour of assessment through the use of internal and external moderation.

2. The provision provided by the Writing and Speaking Centres which supports the achievement of programme outcomes.

3. Double marking as an example of good practice in assuring the quality of the assessment process.

In terms of improvement, the Panel recommends that Arab Open University/ the Faculty of Language Studies should:

1. In cooperation with OU-UK, expedite the finalization of the new agreement and ensure it satisfies the BQA requirements for cross-border programmes.

2. Expedite the approval of its graduate attributes, and then perform the process of mapping PILOs against them.

3. Develop and implement e-learning formal arrangements that are in line with the Teaching and Learning Policy and support the attainment of learning outcomes.

4. Benchmark the placement test and publish the passing score clearly.

5. Expedite the review and benchmarking of the BAELL programme's admission requirements.

6. Review the overall faculty workload to ensure that there is an appropriate and realistic balance of expectations related to teaching, research, academic advising and other tasks assigned to faculty members.

7. Increase the number of books in hard copy serving the BAELL programme.

8. Hire more staff in the library.

9. Restrict access to the campus to ensure the safety of staff and students.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *37*

10. Revise the mapping of the assessment to the learning outcomes in the light of the final version of the approved graduate attributes.

11. Ensure that the mechanism used to measure the attainment of CILOs and PILOs is consistently implemented.

12. Expedite the process of mapping the CILOs of the Internship Course (INT300) to the PILOs.

13. Ensure that a course file for the Internship Course (INT300) is produced containing all related documents to enable tracking consistent implementation of the internship.

14. Develop initiatives to enhance the employment prospects of graduates and better prepare those who choose to proceed to postgraduate level study.

15. Revise the organisational structure to clearly show all the relevant entities and positions; and update the QA Manual and all relevant documents to reflect the changes in the organisational structure and QA practices.

16. Review Institution's documents to ensure that lines of responsibility related to the custodianship of the BAELL programme documents are clear and consistent.

17. Ensure that benchmarking is regularly conducted and used to determine and verify the comparability of the academic standards with other similar programmes in Bahrain, regionally or internationally.

18. Expedite the revision of all survey instruments to ensure that the collected data is fit for purpose and is relevant to the targeted stakeholders.

19. Revise the mechanism of scoping the market and conduct regular and comprehensive market studies to ensure that the programme is relevant and up to date.

BQA

Academic Programme Reviews– Arab Open University – Faculty of Language Studies – BA (Hon) English Language and Literature – 18 – 20 March 2024   *38*