QAA GLOBAL

This review method is ESG-compliant

International Quality Review

University College of Bahrain

Review Report

June 2025

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an International Quality Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at University College of Bahrain. The review took place from 15th to 17th April 2024 and was conducted by a team of 3 reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Youhansen Eid
- Dr John Byrom
- Ms Chrystalle Margallo (student reviewer)

The QAA Officer for this review was Dr Andrew Thomas.

The three-day IQR of University College of Bahrain (UCB) directly preceded a one-day International Programme Accreditation (IPA) for UCB's MBA programme. UCB chose to submit one Self-Evaluation report to cover both IQR and IPA parts and evidence submitted to support the Self-Evaluation report was a mix of both institutional and programme review aspects. Additional evidence relevant to the MBA requested by the team on the day of the review has been added to the Evidence list at the end of this report in addition to additional evidence requested during the IQR phase.

International Quality Review (IQR) offers institutions outside the UK the opportunity to have a review by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The review benchmarks the institutions' quality assurance processes against international quality assurance standards set out in Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

In International Quality Review, the QAA review team:

- makes conclusion against each of the 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the ESG
- makes conditions (if relevant)
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- came to an overall conclusion as to whether the institution meets the standards for International Quality Review

A summary of the findings can be found in the section: Key findings. The section Explanations of the findings provides the detailed commentary.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission. A dedicated section explains the method for International Quality Review and has links to other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the Glossary at the end of this report.

Key findings

Executive summary

University College of Bahrain (UCB) was founded in 2002. The University is a non-profit private higher education institution licensed by the Kingdom of Bahrain's Ministry of Education. Its campus is located in Saar, Bahrain. The undergraduate degree programmes of UCB were originally developed around a Canadian model through a formal relationship with McMaster University. However, UCB now has its own degree awarding powers.

UCB's mission is to 'provide academic programmes of high quality, delivered through excellent teaching, informed by research and scholarship, that transform lives, and equip graduates with the skills, knowledge, and competencies, to enable them to have fulfilling careers and meet the needs of society, government, business, and the economy.'

Its vision is to be 'the leading private University of choice in the Kingdom of Bahrain for students, and other stakeholders, providing a quality assurance driven, and market-focused, education in the fields of the liberal arts and sciences.'

UCB is currently licensed to award degrees in the following four programmes:

1. Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (NQF Level 8) – Delivered since 2002
2. Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (NQF Level 8) – Delivered since 2002
3. Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Multimedia (NQF Level 8) – Delivered since 2004
4. Master of Business Administration (NQF Level 9) – Delivered since 2005

UCB's strategic planning aligns with Bahrain's Higher Education Council's Higher Education, and Research Strategies which reflect government themes of (a) entrepreneurship and innovation and (b) community engagement and graduate skills.

UCB is a small university with 163 undergraduate students in Academic Year 2023/24, supported by 13 full-time and 6 part-time staff across undergraduate and MBA programmes. For undergraduate programmes, AY 2023/4 student numbers are; BSc in Business Administration (46), BA in Communication and Multimedia (80), and BSc in Information Technology (37). For AY 2023/ 24, 285 full-time students are enrolled in the MBA.

Challenges identified by the college include raising student enrolments and moving away from dependence on Ministry of Higher Education for streaming students into the programmes. These have been mitigated by reinforcing UCBs communications with secondary education providers in Bahrain, and by a recent major change by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that now recognises HEIs in Bahrain for admission of Saudi students and a consequent rapid increase in student numbers, especially into UCB's MBA programme.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which University College of Bahrain meets the 10 ESG Standards, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the handbook for International Quality Review (October 2023). The University provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During the IQR review visit, which took place from 15th to 17th April 2024, the review team held a total of 8 meetings with UCB president, senior management team, students, academic teaching staff, professional support staff, alumni, and quality assurance team. The review team also had the opportunity to observe the University's facilities and learning resources at the UCB campus in Saar, Bahrain.

In summary, the team found three examples of good practice and was able to make seven recommendations for improvement / enhancement. The recommendations are of a desirable rather than essential nature and are proposed to enable the University to build on existing

practice which is operating satisfactorily but which could be improved or enhanced. The team identified one condition that the University must satisfy to achieve QAA accreditation.

Overall, the team concluded that University College of Bahrain **meets** all the standards for International Quality Review **subject to meeting specific conditions.**

In May 2025, University College of Bahrain submitted additional evidence with reference to actions to address the Condition. A review team was appointed, and after considering the additional evidence, the review team concludes that University College of Bahrain has addressed the Condition and therefore it **meets** all 10 of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015).

QAA's conclusions about University College of Bahrain

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at University College of Bahrain.

European Standards and Guidelines

University College of Bahrain meets 9 of the 10 ESG Standards and Guidelines. The standard **not met** by University College of Bahrain is:

- Standard 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance

Conditions

The QAA review team identified the following **condition** that must be fulfilled before all of the European Standards and Guidelines can be deemed met at University College of Bahrain. The condition must be addressed within 12 months:

- UCB review the newly developed Quality Assurance Policy to ensure its fitness for purpose in guiding the institution forward and that the policy be clearly integrated into strategic and operational planning and functions to further a systemic approach to quality assurance and enhancement and foster a culture of quality (ESG Standard 1.1. para 1.31)

Following the submission of additional evidence by University College of Bahrain in May 2025, the review team concludes that the Condition above has been fulfilled in so far as a Quality Assurance Policy has been enhanced, and evidence has been provided as to how the Quality Assurance Policy is linked to Strategic and Operational Planning and anchors a more systemic approach to quality assurance and enhancement.

The review team was pleased to note that UCB had also begun the process of addressing the review team's Recommendations as set out below, but feels that comment on the progress on these is best addressed at the mid-cycle review when appropriate embedding, data analysis and improvement activity has taken place.

In summary, the review team concludes the Condition placed on UCB above relevant to ESG Standard 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance has been fulfilled and consequently all ESG Standards are **Met** for the IQR

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at University College of Bahrain.

- Demonstrable engagement of employers via the operations of its Industry Advisory Boards and through the provision of placement opportunities (ESG Standard 1.2 para 2.7)
- Actively building connections with civil society (ESG Standard 1.2, para 2.8)
- Efforts to nurture student progression through the maintenance of a culture of student and teacher partnership (Standard 1.3 para 3.5)

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following 7 **recommendations** to University College of Bahrain.

- UCB develops a more comprehensive and effective dissemination plan to engage more participation in a wider range of formats, for example webinars, brown-bag lunches, and FAQ sites. (Standard 1.1. para 1.16).

- UCB establishes a log of all informal and formal complaints (including those that are pending and resolved) so that any issues can be adequately captured centrally and subsequently acted upon. (Standard 1.3 para 3.6).

- Consider how UCB can encourage further pedagogical innovation through the adoption of a suitable documented and embedded approach. (Standard 1.5 para 5.10).

- UCB develops a comprehensive policy and procedure to cover student health and wellbeing, including systems for identifying and addressing challenges that go beyond academic risks (Standard 1.6 para 6.15).

- UCB establishes a website management policy to support the maintenance of the website (Standard 1.8 para 8.5).

- UCB develops stronger commitment and follow through on the action plans resulting from external quality reviews to ensure rigour in the assurance of sustainable programme improvement (Standard 1.10 para 10.12).

- UCB reaches a strategic decision on the degree of external recognition that is aligned with their strategic objectives, to reduce the challenges posed by accreditation fatigue (Standard 1.10 para 10.13).

Explanation of the findings about University College of Bahrain

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

Standard 1.1   Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

Findings

1.1   The commitment of UCB to the quality assurance of its programmes is evident in its Strategic Plan for 2018-2024 which sets out its first strategic goal as: 'Quality assurance, accreditation, and review'.   For this goal, UCB has developed the following objectives:

- Ensure that all programmes are aligned with Bahrain's Higher Education Council (HEC), and Education and Training Quality Authority (BQA) accreditation and review standards,
- Develop further recognition by local and international statutory bodies,
- Expand partnership with international universities.

1.2   This commitment is further reflected in the academic framework and is emphasized through all the activities of the University, including its student centred approach and faculty training. Measuring the success of these objectives can be seen in the achievement of KPIs, the recent accreditation by Bahrain's Higher Education Council HEC, and the Council of the Accreditation and Quality Commission for Higher Education in Jordan (AQACHEI), as well as inclusion by Saudi authorities for students to study on UCB programmes.

1.3   To guarantee effective delivery of its programmes, UCB developed a quality assurance management system (QMS). This system is administered by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Office (QAAO) which is responsible for the overall management and oversight of the quality system at UCB. It is headed by the Director of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation and is supported by the quality assurance and accreditation manager.

1.4   The team noted the development of a new Quality Assurance Policy, that was approved on 10th January 2024. This policy defines the quality assurance approach based on the following five principles: continuous improvement; stakeholder involvement; compliance; academic integrity; and protection against intolerance and discrimination. The policy acknowledges the quality assurance model - Plan, Do, Check, Act - and identifies both external and internal quality assurance as the main pillars of quality assurance in the institution. External quality assurance is identified within the activities of external review and benchmarking.

1.5   The Quality Assurance Policy outlines the internal quality assurance system to consist of academic programme evaluation, administrative evaluation processes, and subcontracted activities, yet the practice of internal quality assurance within UCB is focused on the academic programmes with very little evidence seen to demonstrate the continuous review of the administrative processes, nor the overall administration of any other process within UCB.

1.6   UCB has had a Quality Manual since 2019 (updated 2023) to express its comprehensive approach to quality as part of its academic ethos of excellence. This manual serves to ensure a shared comprehension of quality standards and outlines the approach to Quality Management System (QMS). The manual defines the University's approach to QMS through the integration of core concepts of leadership, information, contextualization, data management, support process and central monitoring and review.

1.7   The Quality Manual further describes the quality framework at UCB, consisting of four stages, namely: Planning; Implementation; Monitoring and Evaluation; and Enhancement. During the Planning Stage, UCB focuses on aligning its values, goals, objectives, plans, policies, and processes. This involves allocating and utilizing resources in accordance with UCB's strategic and operational plans and policies. Additionally, it entails engaging internal and external stakeholders, fostering their commitment to UCB's vision, mission, values, and goals.

1.8   UCB guarantees adequacy of the monitoring and implementation stage by the following review; plan review, programme review, course review, process review, annual performance appraisal, surveys, and benchmarking.

1.9   The plan review is administered at the department level where each department prepares an annual operational plan which is aligned with the strategic plan. It was evident from the submitted documents and during the meetings that each department/unit develops its own operational plan and sets out to accomplish the set targets using the appropriate resources. Each department assesses its KPIs and what has been achieved in the prior year. Department operational plans are set with their own goals, KPIs and timeline.

1.10   However, the team saw no evidence of a comprehensive University-wide operational plan. During the meetings and from the analysis of the provided evidence there was little evidence to support the process review. Consequently, the team **recommends** UCB develop an operational plan that is guided by both the Quality Assurance Policy and aligned with the strategic plan, with annual targets and tasks, identifying the parties responsible for carrying out these tasks, the due dates, and conducting periodic evaluation and assessment for its processes.

1.11   The manual identifies the graduate attributes of the University to which all programmes will align their PILOS. It is the responsibility of the programmes to align their Course outcomes with the PILOS. Benchmarking and International accreditation and/or acknowledgement are the processes by which programmes update and enhance their development.

1.12   Academic programmes are reviewed internally every year, and externally every 4 years. Courses are reviewed at the end of each semester, as a regular activity of each department. This p*rocess* is described in the Quality Manual.

1.13   Evidence suggests there is a robust moderation process that is conducted by internal and external evaluators as per the Assessment and Moderation Policy. Each department is continuously checked through pre/ post moderation. Any issues are discussed in department council meeting and can be escalated to the QA office.

1.14   For the comprehensive implementation and management of Quality, UCB developed a mechanism that involves all faculty members. In principle, QA is the responsibility of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Office (QAAO) that is supported by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee. Oversight of implementing and maintaining QA is the responsibility of the President and the VP for academic affairs and quality. While at the programme level, QA is the responsibility of the relevant department council and the HoD is the liaison between the programme and the QAAO and reports directly to the VPAA.

1.15   The management of quality in UCB is managed by a set of committees that ensures the precise execution of their mandate, and that work is carried out in coordination with QAAO. One such committee that supports the work of the QAAO is the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (QAAC). In the composition of all committees, there are representatives from staff and student bodies as appropriate**,** though the students who attended the meetings were not aware of the existence of student representation on

committees, nor were they aware of the results (only one student did acknowledge the QA committee without really reflecting on that).

1.16 The team was informed the University ensures the dissemination of the QAA practices and regulations throughout the institution through the right channels, sharing them on the UCB portal. Further dissemination occurs through faculty and student manuals, student orientation, conducting orientation sessions and workshops, and induction to all new faculty members. The QAAO keeps everyone informed of any changes or updates by communicating through emails. Members who attended the meetings could recall a training session on Bahrain's National Qualification Framework (NQF) and attested that during induction all new members are informed of the quality assurance procedures. However, the team found that the evidence provided was for presentations of two workshops and the attendance sheet for the NQF workshop showed only eight attendees. The team **recommends** that UCB develop a more comprehensive and effective dissemination plan to engage more participation in a wider range of formats, for example webinars, brown-bag lunches, and FAQ sites.

1.17 UCB deploys surveys to guarantee the involvement of faculty members, students, and external stakeholders such as employers, alumni. Although this is standard practice, the team noted that some surveys did not meet the participation ratio targeted and is also of the opinion there is insufficient involvement particularly of the external stakeholders. The provided evidence was of the results and final analyses and reflected a high degree of satisfaction with low marginal differences. However, some of the submitted evidence included statements from student surveys in the employers' survey; thus, questioning the integrity, validity, and reliability of these reports.

1.18 Student engagement in quality assurance processes occurs through various ways. Apart from questionnaires and surveys, soliciting feedback on teaching staff, facilities, support services, and overall experiences, students can voice their opinions and raise concerns during the committees they are represented in and by discussing with faculty and tutors. Faculty members assured that the voice of the students is heard through the annual monitoring reports and that UCB responds to their needs. For example, students asked for more electronic resources and the University provided JSTOR and links to other institutional libraries. Students also noted that they were provided with extra food outlets. For faculty, the University has responded to requests as for example, the planned introduction of Moodle.

1.19 Although there seems to be evidence that there are documents in place to allow the standard to be met in principle, the team wanted to test the effectiveness of the policies and procedures and the efficacy of the quality assurance cycle that UCB claims to deploy.

1.20 In testing the operational effectiveness of the policy for quality assurance, the review team held extensive discussions with staff at all levels and with students. These meetings were focused on the application of the quality assurance procedures, how well they were understood and whether there was a robust quality assurance system and a culture of quality that guaranteed continuous improvement. The team also scrutinized the documents, and the evidence supplied from UCB.

1.21 The University listed academic integrity, and combatting intolerance, and discrimination as principles it aspires to achieve. The team found UCB treats all its students equally and is committed to its students, for example, the library was moved to a lower floor to address the needs of disabled students. However, there is room for improvement, for example an elevator to assist students with disabilities. Further, there was no clear evidence of how anti-intolerance or anti-discrimination measures are reflected in the policies towards faculty members or administration staff. Academic integrity monitoring is only administered through Plagiarism check (Turnitin).

1.22 In testing the effectiveness of the quality cycle that UCB deploys, the team heard - with regard to programme and course reviews - the same limited range of references from stakeholders i.e. JSTOR implementation for the library and opening the library hours on Saturday for the MBA students. There was little evidence of the impact on the academic programmes and the student experience.

1.23 In addition, it was observed that course reports are not reflective and simply document maintenance of the status quo via checklists. There are no clear explanations to the exam results in some of the courses evidenced (for example in one course, the results were reported to be normal distribution where clearly it was skewed 73.4% A, A-). This is also apparent in the internship and moderation reports provided where the nature of the query is simply to verify that the papers and the procedures are in order rather than a true reflection of the essence of the audit itself. The library audit is simply a check list of the available books for the courses.

1.24 The team found no evidence that the results and recommendations of the surveys are incorporated into the revisions and improvement of courses. For example, although the QAA Office disseminates the results to all departments, urging them to integrate essential skills and employer's recommendation into the curriculum, no tangible evidence that this advice was incorporated in the plans was found. Faculty members were aware of students' surveys and feedback but did not acknowledge nor mention any of the stakeholders' feedback.

1.25 Employers who attended the stakeholder meeting attested to the quality of UCB graduates. However, they voiced concerns about the level of practical skills and competencies that the programmes equip them with. At the same time, they reflected that they were never asked to submit their opinion on the satisfaction with the programmes, and their role on the IAB was limited to questions about the content of the courses and programmes. This is one of the challenges that was stated during the meetings and the team heard that that QAAO is addressing this by developing an alumni office and securing more external stakeholder connections. The team finds that there is limited feedback that is gathered from the stakeholders and **recommends** that UCB designs a more robust tool for stakeholder feedback that would have an impact on the academic development of the programme.

1.26 QAAO conducted several training and information sessions and workshops to prepare faculty and staff for the accreditation visits that the institution underwent. There were mock interviews and workshops for each of the visits.

1.27 The team believed there was a lack of a clear strategic objectives regarding the strategic direction of future accreditation procedures (particularly pertaining to the AQACHEI) related to QA. This can be explained by the lack of university-wide operational plans and the absence of an institution-wide quality culture, and practices guided by a comprehensive Quality Assurance Policy and linked to strategic planning. Furthermore, UCB mentioned they wanted accreditation to help their visibility and student recruitment, rather than to assure that they are performing a good job.

1.28 The Quality Assurance Policy outlines the internal quality assurance system to consist of academic programme evaluation, administrative evaluation processes, and subcontracted activities but had only been approved in January 2024. Prior to that, a Quality Manual had been in place since 2019 (updated in 2023).

1.29 The team found that the practice of internal quality assurance within the University is focused on the academic programmes with little evidence submitted to prove the continuous review of the administrative processes, nor the overall administration of any other process within UCB. In meetings with administrative staff, no evidence was provided to reach a different conclusion; only a few attendees indicated that they conduct surveys at the end of some events, and but no real systematic internal review. This was attributed to the fact that

the new Quality Assurance Policy has only been in effect since January 2024. Although this is the case, the team concluded that the newly approved Quality Assurance Policy was not sufficiently detailed to guide the University in developing consistent decision-making processes and improvement steps that would build towards a culture of quality over one of compliance.

1.30   In summary, UCB had created policies and procedures around quality assurance but there was significant weakness in demonstrating that these policies and QA measures had a real impact on the enhancement of the educational experience. The team concluded that the lack of an adequate Quality Assurance Policy had impacted UCB's ability to formulate and operate a cohesive and coherent quality assurance system. As a result, the quality culture of UCB remained one of compliance rather than evaluation and continuous improvement. Though the team acknowledged the approval of a Quality Assurance Policy in January 2024, it had not seen evidence of how such a policy informed Strategic Planning. Though it was further acknowledged that a new Strategic plan was then under development, it was concluded that UCB being able to evidence the link between policy and planning would give greater confidence that a systemic approach to QA was being implemented.

1.31   The team set the following **condition to meet Standard 1.1:** that UCB review the newly developed Quality Assurance Policy to ensure its fitness for purpose in guiding the institution forward and that the policy be clearly integrated into strategic and operational planning and functions to further a systemic approach to quality assurance and enhancement and foster a culture of quality.

1.32   The team concluded at the time that Standard 1.1 Policy for Quality assurance was **not met.**

1.33   In May 2025, UCB submitted further evidence which was scrutinised by a review team to determine whether the Condition set had been met. The team's findings follow:

1.34   UCB have created a new Quality Assurance Policy that covers key principles i.e. Continuous Improvement, Stakeholder Involvement, Compliance, Academic Integrity, and Intolerance and Discrimination. These are implemented through a stated Plan, Do, Check, Act, approach using policy, procedure, audit, reporting and improvement stages. The Policy is updated to include clear sections on both Academic and Administrative Quality Assurance. Appendices to the policy provide evidence of documents that tie the policy into the structure of UCB such as Committee oversight with clear Terms of Reference, mapping of Committee actions, and end of year Checklists for academic and non-academic departments. A new Strategic Plan was approved by the BoT in April 2025, complete with a system of oversight and tracking progress, and Operational Plans have also been put in place with annual targets and tasks, identifying the parties responsible for carrying out these tasks, the due dates, and indicative supporting documents required, alongside Risk Registers. These measures suggest that the Quality Policy and the quality assurance cycle align in intent.

1.35   The review team understands University College Bharain has a commitment to quality improvement but the processes supporting this were not always apparent, particularly in respect of translating quality systems into practice in a coherent way that sustainably tied together key elements such as Strategic and Operational Planning, Goals, and improvement. The further submission in May 2025 demonstrates that these deficiencies have been rectified and, if put into practice effectively will serve the UCB's quality assurance systems well going forward.

1.36   The review team therefore concludes that the condition has been addressed and Standard 1.1: Policy for quality assurance is now **Met**.

Standard 1.2   Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Findings

2.1   UCB Strategic Plan's articulates a wish to strengthen the programmes it offers in line with Bahrain's national higher education strategy. As an institution within the Bahraini national system, UCB possesses a licence to offer undergraduate programmes at the National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 8, and the MBA degree at NQF Level 9. The team reviewed a range of evidence which explained how UCB approaches the design and approval of new programmes. The Quality Manual articulates the hierarchical relationships between Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs), Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs), University College Intended Learning Outcomes (UILOs), and Student General Attributes (GAs). Although it is a little difficult to navigate, the manual does affirm that the institution is cognisant of the inter-relationships between intended learning objectives at different levels, including how assessment features as part of an ongoing assessment cycle.

2.2   The Qualification Design Approval and Review Policy sets out the formal arrangements at UCB for the design of new programmes, including their position within the broader National Qualification Framework. The policy establishes the importance of need when designing a new programme and sets out how the head of department formulates a programme development team to progress a new offering. The policy affirms that new programmes need to be structured in such a way to ensure that academic progression takes place year-on-year through a series of courses. This provided evidence UCB are aware of the importance of designing new programmes that enable smooth student progression.

2.3   The self-evaluation document acknowledges that workloads for students are set 'on a semester credit hour system in the USA/Canadian liberal arts tradition', reflecting UCB's origins which involved a close working relationship with McMaster University, Canada. The team therefore sought to understand the operation of this further via scrutiny of the MBA programme specification, which had been revised in November 2022. This establishes that 36 credit hours are required for the completion of the degree, with the study plan setting out the number of credits for each core or concentration course (3 credit hours), followed by the thesis/business project (6 credit hours). The programme specification states clearly that the programme is offered at Level 9 of the NQF Credit framework. The team therefore concluded that the expected student workload had been appropriately defined, albeit one that does not refer to the ECTS framework utilised in Europe.

2.4   The team reviewed the participation of students in the design and approval of new programmes. It was apparent from the Qualification Design Approval and Review Policy that the role of students as stakeholders is recognised as being important by UCB. This was apparent in the description of the initial consultation process, which involves students and other stakeholders, and through the work of the programme development team. During the visit, the team considered how students had been involved in this process and were informed that focus groups had been held with a selection of students from different levels during the development of a new concentration in the Communication and Multimedia department. This demonstrated that UCB ensured that the provisions of the policy as it

relates to student involvement in the design and approval of new programmes had been adhered to.

2.5   The Qualification Design Approval and Review Policy also sets out the significant role of externality in new provision (this latter aspect is also dealt with in the External Reviewer's/Moderator's Policy, which outlines the points at which external moderation must be applied and is further considered in assessment terms in Standard 1.3, below). The policy sets out how an external reviewer is appointed to scrutinise the proposed definitive documentation (i.e. programme and course specifications) and to review of a range of aspects including learning outcomes, teaching, assessment methods, and learning resources. The policy sets out the subsequent steps following external review, noting that the University College Council (UCC) is responsible for final approval internally, prior to the relevant documentation being submitted to Bahrain's Higher Education Council (HEC). Initial approval by HEC will then lead to the new programme being implemented.

2.6   Turning to the involvement of other stakeholders in the design and approval of new programmes, UCB operates three Industry Advisory Boards (IAB) which align with the three academic departments: Business Administration, Information Technology, and Communication and Multimedia. The IABs include a range of relevant employer representatives and which, amongst other things, serve as a vehicle through which proposed new provision may be 'sense-checked', via meetings with the programme development team. To establish the operations of the IABs, the team reviewed the IAB terms of reference, expectations matrix, and induction document and formed the view that UCB appropriately managed the on-boarding of new members. Review of other IAB documentation, including a sample of meeting minutes also demonstrated that employers (as external stakeholders) are involved in the development of curricula and the team formed the view that the involvement of employers as key external stakeholders is managed effectively.

2.7   Placement opportunities are highly relevant to UCB, given the concentration on vocational subjects such as business administration, information technology, and communication and media. On undergraduate programmes, every UCB student must do a placement and the team heard evidence via oral testimony relating to the operation of this process. Students also receive other relevant exposure to real-life business, as shown through the programme of guest lectures. The team therefore formed the view that UCB's demonstrable engagement of employers via the operations of its IABs and through the provision of placement opportunities was evidence of **good practice**.

2.8   The operations of UCB's Community Engagement Unit (CEU), were also considered, given that this enables the University to facilitate further interactions with key external stakeholders. Evidence relating to the CEU's activities was examined and demonstrated a range of activity undertaken across the course of the year. The CEU looks to provide a range of relevant activities which benefit the community, and which involve student participation. Examples cited during the visit included student involvement in beach cleaning and tree-planting. The team were impressed with the range and scale of activity undertaken by this function of UCB, which also provided a mechanism through which some students were able to secure a work placement. The team identified UCB's work in actively building connections with civil society to be an example of **good practice**.

2.9   In summary, the team confirms that UCB have suitable processes for the design and approval of their programmes. Programmes are designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme is clearly specified and communicated and refers to the correct level of the national qualifications framework. Therefore, Standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes is **met**.

Standard 1.3   Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Findings

3.1   The team considered how the University respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths. A review of the Learning, Teaching, and Enhancement (LTE) Policy revealed UCB's aspirations in respect of recognising how high-quality teaching is to be enacted. It was further evident that a range of different teaching methods were offered at UCB, including lectures, debates, field trips, and guest lectures. A tour of the campus demonstrated a range of practical facilities to support the delivery of different teaching methods. These included computer labs, design studios, and art facilities, which were suited to the range of disciplines offered by UCB. The team were also reassured that suitable systems were in place to enable students to take a break in study.

3.2   The visit also revealed further detail relating to the use of Microsoft Teams within UCB. The University is actively planning to introduce Moodle in the coming months, but at present, Teams functions as the learning management system (LMS). The team received a demonstration of the platform which reassured them that its full functionality was utilised. For example, it learned how teaching materials were posted, how assessments were set, and feedback was returned, as well as how communication between teaching staff and students was facilitated. The meeting with students further reinforced the view that the platform was being utilised appropriately.

3.3   To establish whether the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods are regularly evaluated and adjusted, the team considered the process of annual review adopted at the University. Through annual review forms, with associated programme improvement plans for example the IT Department, the team was able to understand the process utilised to make changes to the delivery of curricula. It was apparent how the Information Technology Department had sought to introduce entrepreneurial skills into the curriculum (new course); as well as how they were seeking to recruit part-time employees with industry experience to teach on the undergraduate programme. It was evident this process had involved input from the department's Industrial Advisory Board, and that the decisions had been communicated back to students at the programme level, by departmental committees (which include a student representative) as well as via social media, Teams and in class. This example demonstrated that the processes of annual review utilised by UCB enabled changes to be made to curricula.

3.4   The team were keen to understand how UCB encourage the further development of students, including how they actively support them in their learning. This was apparent through UCB's approach to academic advising. UCB's Academic Advising and At-Risk Student Policy sets out the scope of academic advising, including in relation to course selection at the commencement of semesters, as well as pastoral considerations. All members of faculty act as academic advisors and during the visit, the team gained further insights into how the Student Information System (SIS) was utilised to support this activity.

3.5   Students also explained how they use this specific system in support of their learning. It was noted that UCB teaching staff operate daily office hours for students, which may take place in-person or online. The meeting with students further confirmed that they felt well-supported and that they are active participants in their learning, demonstrating that there was mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship. The team recognised UCB's

efforts to nurture student progression through the maintenance of a culture of student and teacher partnership as an example of **good practice**.

3.6   The team considered UCB's policy and procedures in relation to complaints. The Student Grievance and Appeal Policy which deals with academic and non-academic complaints was reviewed, as well as the associated Student Complaint Form. The process utilised by UCB is clear and easy-to-follow with a three-stage process leading potentially to consideration by the University Appeal Committee. The meeting with staff from academic support teams demonstrated there was awareness surrounding the process. However, evidence for the operation of the policy in practice was difficult to discern, due to few formal complaints being raised or logged. As UCB is a relatively small institution, in which students are more likely to feel able to readily bring to the surface any issues of concern with teaching staff or other relevant staff, this is not surprising. Nevertheless, the team **recommends** that UCB establish a log of all informal and formal complaints (including those that are pending and resolved) so that any issues can be adequately captured centrally and subsequently acted upon.

3.7   Turning to assessment, the team reviewed UCB's Assessment and Moderation Policy, which provides an overview of how these activities are to be enacted within UCB. Key definitions are outlined, and the document is indicative of an approach which recognises the importance of how these two fundamental aspects of higher education are to be delivered. The policy establishes that a lecturer develops a course specification containing key information pertaining to the learning outcomes and assessment which is then subject to further review internally. The policy also mandates that a split in the assessment of 40% (coursework), 20% (mid-term exam) and 40% (final exam) should be put in place.

3.8   The Assessment and Moderation Policy establishes that a range of internal and external moderation activity takes place, both prior to assessments being to students, as well as once work has been assessed. The policy sets out how the moderation of all assessment items is operationalised, and the policy establishes that internal moderation takes place across all courses in a given semester, meaning that more than one examiner is involved in the assessment of student work.

3.9   External moderation is carried out on a quarter of all courses that are offered at UCB in a given semester. Further detail regarding the process is also evident in the External Reviewer's/ Moderator's Policy. This sets out expectations for external oversight, and because this applies to all programmes, as well as the occasions on which this takes place (new programme approval, periodic review, pre-moderation, post-moderation), the range of such activity is suitably comprehensive.

3.10 The team reviewed a completed undergraduate external moderation form which evidences a range of areas upon which the external reviewer has been invited to comment upon the launch of a new concentration. During the visit, teaching staff were able to clearly articulate how moderation processes were enacted at UCB. The team also scrutinised evidence of internal and external moderation of assessment prior to it being issued to students and formed the view that UCB's approach to moderation was robust.

3.11 The team also considered how University staff familiarise themselves with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field. During the visit, it was noted that when joining UCB, new appointees are supported in terms of assessment and moderation as part of induction and that departmental meetings act as suitable fora for the discussion of approaches to assessment. As considered below in relation to Standard 1.5, suitable systems are in place in relation to professional development of staff, but there is scope for UCB to further support the development of their staff in relation to the enhancement of pedagogy.

3.12 Samples of course specifications were examined which provide detail on the key aspects of a specific module of study and demonstrate the type of assessment alongside the learning outcomes that are to be addressed. UCB utilises a range of assessment types, which included different question types on final and mid-term exams, as well as suitable assessments pertaining to 'real life' which formed part of the coursework assignments that students completed. A sample of specific assignment briefs were reviewed. A standard approach to these is apparent in the form of a coursework template which academic staff fill out with details of the task. The basis on which the individual task would be marked was also evident in the samples reviewed. Students were also able to articulate that the cover pages on assignments enabled them to establish how to perform well. This helped demonstrate that students would be able to demonstrate how they met the intended learning outcomes and would be aware of the basis on which their work was to be assessed prior to submission.

3.13 Samples of feedback issued to students were considered, including feedback on formative and summative coursework tasks carried out by students. These indicated the presence of marginal comments detailing how work had been assessed, although evidence for feedforward was lacking on the samples reviewed. During the visit, the team were also apprised of how UCB's approach to feedback was enacted. Students affirmed that they were able to receive feedback through a range of channels, both formal and informal. Given the close relationships apparent between staff and students, the team were therefore reassured that communication regarding performance on assessments, including areas for improvement, was likely to take place on an ongoing basis.

3.14 The team explored how UCB approaches the management of mitigating circumstances students may have when undertaking assessment, as the Assessment and Moderation Policy does not cover mitigating circumstances. Although it was evident from oral testimony that individual students had been appropriately supported, the team were unable to establish which documented policy and procedures were utilised when students felt unable to complete an assessment within the stated timeframes (notwithstanding the existence of a process for those that missed exams, as set out in the Procedures for Appeals for Missing Exams. The team therefore **recommends** that UCB develop a Mitigating Circumstances Policy which covers all instances where students completion of assessment may be impacted.

3.15 In summary, the team formed the view that UCB has implemented a student-centred approach to the implementation of learning and teaching. UCB's approach to assessment is well-developed, with appropriate policies, procedures and systems in place which are consistent and fairly applied. A formal procedure for student appeals is in place. Standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment is **met**.

Standard 1.4   Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition, and certification.

Findings

4.1   The team learned that UCB maintains distinct Admission Requirements for Prospective Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students. The admission requirements of the programmes were benchmarked with local and international universities, and the admission benchmark report shows that the admission requirements at UCB are on a par with the benchmarked universities.

4.2   Prospective students gain access to admission information and course specification through open days and visits to the UCB. Students who cannot visit on site are redirected to the website. The admission information page of the website lacks the course specification; instead, the module list information is housed within the department page. (https://www.ucb.edu.bh/)

4.3   The team explored the credit system used by UCB and found that students with recognised credits are considered and supported through UCB's Undergraduate Bylaws. The University provides information relating to accreditation of prior credits through the Undergraduate Bylaw allowing for the consistent admission of students. However, to aid in this process, pertinent information regarding the University's course offerings, including programme structure, content, educational objectives, learning outcomes, and specific admission requirements, is not readily available on UCB's website (https://www.ucb.edu.bh/admissions/undergraduate). In line with government policy, there is currently no policy for addressing students with prior experiential learning.

4.4   UCB promotes gender equality by upholding various policies, including the Student Admission Policy and the Approval Admissions Policy, aimed at fostering an inclusive and diverse admission process. The University ensures that all applicants, regardless of age, gender, race, colour, religion, nationality, or ethnic origin, are admitted based on their demonstrated knowledge and competencies required for entry into specific disciplines. During the visit, it was highlighted that bursaries and scholarships are available for students. UCB adheres to the Council of Higher Education in terms of regulations through ensuring their admission policies addressing the student life cycle is in line with regulations.

4.5   The admission process is maintained by the Admission and Registration Unit and reviewed regularly. UCB has a clear understanding of the student life cycle points through figure 4.1 shown in the SED. Research was conducted to evaluate the usefulness of the admission policy. UCB also upholds a clear policy that supports students with special needs.

4.6   It was found that all the information related to admission criteria such as required forms and documents is available in Student Handbook. It was further learned that processes are in place to enable smooth admission into academic programmes offered at UCB. This includes the Student Support Policy, the Special Needs Student Policy, and Admission Policy which provides a guide for UCB staff on admission procedures and informs applicants of the admission processes. The Programme Specifications, and Admission Brochure provide a standard set of admissions' requirements and detail of the admissions' process. International students are also able to request support in various ways such as communicating with the Student Office. A Student Catalogue is stored on the website.

4.7   In exploring student induction processes, the team found that UCB maintains a comprehensive formal induction programme through Student Orientation and formal induction is provided to current and new students at the beginning of each semester. Students are informed about the range of support services available to them through the Orientation/ Induction Day, the Student Handbook and UCB website (for example Teams, Turnitin, and other electronic resources). Each team within the students' affairs and alumni office ensures students are well informed on services and resources, for example emails about new textbooks, IT assistance to students, UCB Students Portal Guide, and orientations to the Portal during induction. The Student Affairs and Alumni Office evaluate the student experience through collecting the feedback during the induction session and utilises feedback for future planning. Students at UCB are asked to complete a feedback survey during induction and the feedback is utilised to improve the student induction experience.

4.8   The team found evidence that student progression is supported holistically through policy, support, and extracurricular activities. The Student Affairs and Alumni Office is dedicated to support and guide current and new students. During the visit the Community Engagement, and Student Affairs and Alumni teams prepare a range of activities and field trips to enhance the student experience. The Student Affairs and Alumni team also maintains a close working system with the Community Engagement team to align opportunities with engagement of students.

4.9   The Student Affairs Operation Plan enables UCB to effectively support student progression and holistic development. UCB provides resources to aid students in adapting to university life, along with community engagement activities to enhance the overall student experience. Oversight of the Community Engagement Unit falls under the purview of the Student Affairs and Alumni Office.

4.10   The team found that UCB upholds a Naming Qualification Design and Issuance Policy to ensure that all certificates accurately reflect the qualifications obtained, achieved learning outcomes, and comply with the standards set by Bharain's Education and Training Quality Authority (BQA), National Qualifications Framework, and Higher Education Council as well as other pertinent external bodies.

4.11   Upon completion of their course, students receive a Student Certificate, and copies of all documents pertaining to their graduation are issued based on the graduation semester and academic year. The Student Affairs and Alumni Office runs a Graduate Destination Survey, a survey that aims to collect employability data from UCB working alumni.

4.12   UCB maintains a course feedback mechanism to evaluate courses facilitating enhancement opportunities for courses and a few teams such as the library, and IT services.

4.13   Student feedback on individual services is covered in an overall Student Satisfaction Survey and further data can be extracted from the course evaluation survey.

4.14   The team concludes that admission processes, progression, recognising prior learning, and arrangements for graduation align with Standard 1.4. The team therefore concludes that Standard 1.4 is **met.**

Standard 1.5   Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

Findings

5.1   UCB's approach to staff recruitment and conditions of employment is evident in their Human Resources Policy and Procedures and Faculty Guidebook. Together, the documents capture the University's approach to various aspects of HR, including staff recruitment and the ongoing conditions of employment including leave. The Faculty Guidebook also provides a range of relevant information to staff on the institution, including its mission and vision, governance, faculty benefits, and other aspects.

5.2   The team reviewed UCB's Policy and Procedures relating to recruitment and noted that this part of the document foregrounds ethical principles including those relating to anti-discrimination practices. The remainder of this document clearly articulates how the provider approaches the HR function and logically outlines other relevant processes underpinning the appointment of new staff, relating to application, shortlisting, and interview. Those shortlisted for academic positions also undertake a teaching demonstration which enables a more rounded evaluation of applicants' suitability for lecturing to be determined.

5.3   For the University's approach to staff induction activities, material delivered as part of the induction process was reviewed. This included expectations for newly-appointed staff, consideration of different elements of the role (i.e. teaching, research and service – the breakdown of which is also detailed in the self-evaluation document, the nature of moderation and other aspects. Further evidence relating to staff induction was sought in interviews. This revealed that induction contains elements delivered at the institutional and departmental level and that a range of relevant activities are covered, including the culture of UCB, quality assurance processes and how new staff should approach the design and evaluation of assessments. It was also affirmed that staff receive support from their head of department and through mentoring arrangements, as appropriate.

5.4   Academic staff to student ratios within UCB were examined. Whilst the presence of part-time staff meant that it was difficult to accurately determine these, at the institutional level it was noted that there were currently 163 undergraduate students supported by 13 full-time and 6 part-time staff, indicating that staff to student ratios were likely around 1 staff member to c. 15 students and that this pattern was evident across the four academic departments of UCB. The team concluded that staff to student ratios were relatively high, and that this was likely to encourage the development of stronger bonds and working relationships between the two groups.

5.5   Faculty workloads were also scrutinised. The team reviewed the Faculty Guidebook which details aspects of academic load, noting that those at professorial level undertake less teaching. The team considered this in further detail and reviewed the workloads of nine staff employed in the Departments of Business Administration and Communication and Multimedia. The team concluded that the number of courses delivered by staff for the periods covered is reasonable. To ascertain the suitability of staff currently employed at the University, CVs from twenty faculty (including adjunct staff) working across different departments were reviewed. These were suitably detailed and provided evidence of appropriate teaching experience, scholarly activity, and research across the staff base.

5.6   Turning to research and scholarly activity: it was noted that research typically forms 20% of staff workloads. Annual research reports are produced, and further examination of these reveals that some journal articles have been published in Scopus-indexed

publications. Details on a range of different conferences attended and other research activities undertaken was also apparent in the sample Departmental Research Plan.

5.7   The team explored in further detail how UCB supports research financially and was informed during the visit that there was a specific allocation for research in the budget. It was further noted in the self-evaluation document that in line with HEC regulations, a minimum of 2% of the net profit is allocated to research. A range of individual staff members' budget requests from 2020 were examined, which demonstrated to the team that the institution actively supports staff in the furtherance of their research endeavours.

5.8   In terms of staff development, the University has a dedicated policy relating to this, although it is not explicitly referred to in the Faculty Guidebook. The policy establishes that professional development is an ongoing activity and provides explicit links to the development of individual Professional Development Plans. The team therefore examined the Professional Development Plans of three faculty members, and found evidence that these were used to identify suitable opportunities on an annual basis. Related to this, the team also considered UCB's approach to the annual review of faculty. The Faculty Performance Appraisal Policy indicates that faculty members agree annual goals in consultation with their head of department. The policy outlines the points-based approach that should be followed, in which various activities undertaken throughout the year (for example, student advising and counselling, teaching, research and scholarship, co-curricular activities) are weighted and can each attract a score. The resultant total 'performance rating', which can be a maximum of 100, can then be used to determine whether a monetary reward is made to the staff member concerned (at the discretion of UCB management). Although somewhat complex, the team noted that UCB offered staff orientation relating to the policy via a dedicated workshop.

5.9   Further evidence relating to staff development was provided via oral testimony during the visit for example, the senior management team explained how the process was enacted, including in relation to budgetary approval. The meeting with teaching staff revealed a range of examples of how the professional development of staff was enacted at UCB, including support for higher research degree study and to enable attendance at conferences.

5.10 How UCB supports innovation in teaching and the adoption of new technologies was also examined. It was noted that workshops had been offered to staff, including on subjects such as research informed teaching and on project/thesis supervision. During meetings, examples from staff members in the Communication and Multimedia Department of utilising appropriate technology were cited, as well as from those in the Information Technology Department in terms of a range of programming languages. From the tour of the campus, it was evident that teaching spaces were well equipped for the range of disciplines offered at UCB. This demonstrated that appropriate technology was in place which would help students in their learning. The team formed the view, however, that there was scope to do more to encourage innovation in teaching methods, such as further emphasis on authentic assessment and on the adoption of appropriate technology in the classroom. The team therefore **recommends** that UCB considers how it can encourage further pedagogical innovation through the adoption of a suitable documented and embedded approach.

5.11 In summary, the review team confirms that UCB has established clear, transparent, and fair processes for staff recruitment and conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching and that it offers suitable opportunities for the professional development of teaching staff. Scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research is also apparent. Therefore, Standard 1.5 Teaching staff is **met**.

Standard 1.6   Learning resources and student support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Findings

6.1   The team learned that students are offered a wide range of student support covering all aspects of the student journey; managed by the Student Affairs and Alumni Office (SAAO). Each team under the SAAO focuses on student wellbeing, academic support, providing opportunities for extracurricular activities and supporting students with additional needs. Students are also provided training around the tools to support their learning such as software and learning environment literacy at induction.

6.2   UCB adheres to the regulations set forth by the Higher Education Council (HEC) concerning the sufficiency of its physical infrastructure and occupational health and safety as stated in the Occupational Health and Safety Policy. The team also heard that HEC officers conduct regular on-the-spot inspections to verify compliance with cleanliness, adequacy, and suitability standards for the University's facilities and physical infrastructure, as detailed in the HEC inspection report. Furthermore, the HEC mandates comprehensive evidence of plans and actions regarding both academic and administrative resources within UCB.

6.3   The University has further expanded its amenities by entering into agreements with external entities. A contract with the Malaeb Club grants students access to sporting facilities. Additionally, an agreement with American Mission Hospital (AMH) has been established to ensure access to a first aid room. Additionally, UCB has signed an agreement with a permanent nurse to enhance healthcare services on campus.

6.4   UCB has two separate surveys for students, a Student Course Evaluation Survey covering course organisation, course content, course instructor and teaching, and a Student Satisfaction Survey covering dissemination of information, counselling/advising, support services, student complaints and grievances. The team noted that student feedback is gathered through the course evaluation survey. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Office (QAAC), with support from the IT Department, administers the Student Course Evaluation Survey for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The team saw evidence that this survey gathers feedback on various aspects, including overall satisfaction with the course quality, organisation, learning opportunities, and the availability of ICT resources. UCB gives importance to the maintenance of its resources and the overall responsibility lies on the Director of HR and Administration. During the students meeting, students showed awareness and use of all the diverse ways of providing feedback.

6.5   UCB provides comprehensive student support throughout the student life cycle with clear mechanisms in place. A part-time student counsellor addresses psychological, social, personal, and academic issues and prepares a Counsellor Contract. The team learned that instructors refer students as per the Student Referral Form to support at-risk students. Individual counselling sessions are arranged, and outcomes documented confidentially. The University also has a policy for identifying students with special needs via the Special Needs Student Policy, with counsellor recommendations shared by the Admission and Registration Unit (ARU) with relevant directors or heads of departments. At risk students are identified through the use of the Academic Advising and At-Risk Policy Academic Advising and At-Risk Policy, and later a personalised intervention strategy is implemented by academics.

6.6   In accordance with the Student Support Policy, students can lodge a formal complaint by completing and submitting a designated complaint form Student Complaint Form.

6.7   UCB integrates a sense of belonging and community into its objectives and student experience. Throughout the academic year, students are offered a diverse array of events to ensure a well-rounded student experience. Social Clubs are fundamental components of the student body and provide a variety of educational, recreational, and cultural programmes that enhance students' knowledge and overall experience.

6.8   The University has established pertinent policies to guide the planning, development, and review of learning resources. These include policies for managing physical facilities - Physical Facilities Management Policy and ICT resources - ICT Learning Resources Policy.

6.9   Students at UCB are equipped with essential learning resources and technologies, including access to the Learning Management System, as outlined in the ICT Learning Resources Policy. Additionally, individual study spaces are provided to support students' success in their courses. During the site visit, the team saw that within the Janabiya Building and the Saar Building, various areas are designated for private study, ensuring students have ample opportunities for focused academic endeavours. UCB maintains an annual budget to ensure resources are allocated to specific areas of student needs.

6.10 UCB laboratories are accessible from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday to Friday, allowing students to make use of them beyond their scheduled classes. This enables students to work on in-course projects and devise solutions for their graduation projects at their convenience.

6.11 Students are provided with training to fully use tools offered to support learning. These tools include software and learning software literacy. Students receive personalised support for assessment feedback and topic discourses through 1:1 sessions with lecturers.

6.12 During the student meeting, students informed the team that they were able to request help in using online resources such as the Student Portal, Teams or Library through an online helpdesk or though staff. The management of learning resources falls under the quality team. Students Survey feedback has a separate set of questions on Support Services, and this indicates a high level of satisfaction with online learning resources and support.

6.13 Students are provided with opportunities to gain knowledge and understand requirements from employers through 'Business Days', when over 20 companies attend to build student confidence and acquire recruits. Another career event is 'Career Day' which offers further interaction with students. The team noted that UCB is keen to have guest lectures from different sectors deliver to the staff and students. In the students' final projects – related to their field – there is further input from industry representatives.

6.14 The team considers that UCB offers excellent, responsive, and personalised support to its students. A variety of activities and resources are available to aid students' academic and professional development, including workshops on soft skills, extracurricular events, and programmes for graduates that enhance employability and career progression. The dedication of the staff to providing personalised support is commendable.

6.15 However, there is a lack of policy and procedure addressing student health and wellbeing in the current policy framework. To address this, the team **recommends** that the UCB develop a comprehensive policy and procedures to cover student health and wellbeing, including systems for identifying and addressing challenges that go beyond academic risks.

6.16 Despite this recommendation, the review team concludes that Standard 1.6, which relates to learning resources and student support, is **met.**

Standard 1.7   Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Findings

7.1   UCB has established a clear approach to gathering and managing information, aiming to improve its performance and support strategic decision-making. This data aids in identifying trends, allocating resources such as faculty recruitment, monitoring academic performance, and providing evidence to maintain compliance with accreditation standards.

7.2   UCB manages this system rigorously through an advanced system that includes Microsoft OneDrive portal and Student information system (LOGSIS).

7.3   The OneDrive portal is where all the reports and policies are gathered and there are different levels of access granted. The portal is managed by the IT department and includes information on:

- BoT
- Strategic Planning
- Academic Departments
- Administrative Departments
- Quality Assurance and Accreditation Office (QAAO)
- UCB committees and policies
- Surveys
- Handbooks
- Training
- Staff CVs

7.4   Each department, or unit can access its concerned folder to manage information related to it. Some data and folders can be accessed by all members of staff while other data is restricted. At the end of each year the President prepares an Annual Report based on the data driven from the different reports. The system enables the President to see where improvements can be made.

7.5   Academic departments manage their information, and it is organized annually to include the following information:

- Academic planning framework,
- Programme Specifications folder (with programme evaluation report),
- Course Files specification folder (for every course there is Course specification, CILOs Sheet, Internal and external Moderations, NQF allocation sheet, Course evaluation report, etc.),
- Faculty workload, schedules for courses and exams,
- Industrial Academic Board (IAB),
- Scientific Research Council (SRC)

7.6   The IT unit offers orientation and training on how to use the portal. In addition, all faculty members, staff, and students mentioned that they can access additional support from the IT department. New faculty are informed of the system during induction and via a demonstration session. The IT department offers support through email, and all problems are addressed.

7.7   Other activities include access to Study Plans and posting grades. Grades are posted by the admissions, and they are approved by the HoD. There is a systematic way to ensure that all student's results and grades are accurately recorded, approved, and reported in a secure, and timely manner. Instructors record their results using a unique username and password under the grading section of the portal.

7.8   The system operates on an allotted period for entering the results, then locks the results in when the instructor presses the 'Accept' button. The instructor is unable to access and amend submitted grades. The system accepts marks; the Letter Grade is automated by the system. Also, the GPA is calculated automatically.

7.9   To guarantee the security of the gathered information, access is classified. For example, advisors can access only the files of the students assigned to them. A HoD can access information related to course files and only they can give access to whomever they deem necessary. During the meetings the IT manager stated that there were no cases of breach.In addition, there is backup for the critical data on local servers and there is iCloud backup which is all encrypted and data can be retrieved in case of loss or breaches.

7.10   UCB enforces a high level of academic integrity and does not tolerate misconduct. One of the mechanisms that it adopts is the use of Turnitin and examples were viewed of student work submitted to Turnitin. UCB also has a plagiarism policy, and students are made aware of the policy at the beginning of each class and the policy is enforced.

7.11   Microsoft Teams is used for the learning management system (LMS). The Review Team asked for a live demonstration and UCB accommodated this request and were given the chance to view diverse types of operations both on Teams and on the Portal. Based on the request and suggestion of the faculty members, UCB is in the process of finalizing Moodle connection which will be deployed next Academic Year.

7.12   During the demonstration it was possible to see how student data is entered by admission. Students are required to submit all their documents as hard copies. Advisors are added on the system so that they can follow up with the students. Student Study Plans are also administered on the portal. This was followed by a demonstration of the Microsoft Teams site, where all LMS is administered for example, course files, assignments, formal assessment, course work and grades.

7.13   There is a systematic way for handling surveys to gather quantitative data. UCB has a list of surveys which are set up using Google Forms. QAAO oversees the schedule, dissemination, and follow-up of the surveys.

7.14   UCB gathers all types of information such as the results of surveys, but no evidence was seen to support how this information is tabulated and analysed. There were no trend analyses nor forecasts. During meetings, the team probed the faculty and staff to elaborate on how they were using the system in their decision making, yet there were no clear or consistent answers beyond a general affirmation that this was done. Moreover, there was not enough evidence to support the institution in understanding its trends, refining its recruitment strategies or other strategic decision. The Review Team **recommends** that UCB develop a periodic systematic reporting policy to be able to utilize this data systematically in decision making processes

7.15   Based on the evidence provided the Review Team concludes that Standard 1.7 Information Management is **met.**

Standard 1.8   Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

Findings

8.1   UCB offers a range of information on the institutional website (https://www.ucb.edu.bh/). However, it was noted that there are policies which are not published online such as the Admissions Policy, and that the site is difficult to navigate and error pages occur. Further, some University activities are posted on the UCB website, but others are not. The team notes that there is an absence of a website policy or for example a website maintenance checklist to ensure the website is functional, maintained and up to date.

8.2   In addition to the public information on the UCB website, students are provided a Student Handbook which provides more sufficient information to prospective and current students about UCB programmes. At orientation, students are shown where and how to access various types of information and platforms, policies, and procedures during their studies and in meetings with the students it was clear they were aware of these. Students also described an understanding of where to access information and support even if the website did not contain the policies and procedures.

8.3   Although, UCB does not have a Personal Data Protection Policy which acts to protect personal data and informs students of how UCB handles personal data, the college uses social media to effectively communicate with prospective and current students. During the meeting with students, appreciation for the UCB social media accounts was expressed, noting the publishing of up-to-date information, activities, and the timely communication with students.

8.4   The Student Handbook provides clear, accurate, objective, up-to date, and readily accessible information to prospective and current students, as well as other stakeholders. However, the UCB website (https://www.ucb.edu.bh/admission) does not contain up to date information. Therefore, the review team **recommends** UCB establish a website management policy to support the maintenance of the website.

8.5   The information provided demonstrates a transparent and accurate picture of UCB as a higher education provider, its programmes, policies, and procedures. The team therefore concludes that Standard 1.8 Public information is **met.**

Standard 1.9   Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

Findings

9.1   UBC has an appropriate mechanism for the continuous revision and monitoring of its programmes. This ensures content is updated regularly according to market needs and the needs of the students. This is achieved through an internal review of the programmes conducted annually and an external review conducted every four years, benchmarking activities, and stakeholder feedback.

9.2   The QAAO oversees the annual review process, which is outlined in the Quality Manual. It aligns with HEC's annual review standards and emphasizes the evaluation and improvement of quality. The annual review draws from various sources including end-of-semester course reviews, student attendance and progression rates, student input, alumni and employer surveys, internal and external moderation reports, IQA Audits, as well as discussions in IAB and Academic Department meetings.

9.3   The detailed internal and external quality assurance processes start with identifying national and international standards together with the strategic plan. These help the departments to set their operational plans and revisit their improvement plan. The Internal QA system/process is set and monitored by the QAAO as described in the Manual, and the Department is responsible for the implementation. The Self- evaluation report will be drafted and reviewed by the internal and external reviewers. Then the department will set on an enhancement plan based on the comments of the reviewers.

9.4   The University provides rigorous programme review, and auditing procedures that are conducted and analysed by the QAAO and suggestions are sent to the departments for deployment. These reports, as indicated by the faculty members during all the meetings, are discussed in the faculty meetings. The CMM review was conducted first at department level and a review plan was drafted with all aspects captured in the Annual Monitoring and Review Report which goes to higher level for discussion.

9.5   The reports are discussed at the Learning Teaching Assessment and Research Committee (LTARC) where all the improvement actions identified after verifying the source documents are listed. It is the HoD's responsibility to monitor the implementation of these actions. To facilitate the reporting procedure, the Annual Programme Monitoring and Review report template was amended to allow the HoDs to record the accomplishments of the identified improvement actions in the same template.

9.6   However, the evidence provided in the Minutes of Meetings (MoMs) in which the results were discussed reflected no apparent impact on the development of the teaching and learning strategies. This finding reflects what has been stated in Standard 1.1 earlier. Consequently, the team **recommends** that UCB develops operational plans to respond to these suggestions, together with a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that will assist the QAAO and UCB leadership in follow that is not related to the audit practices.

9.7   To ensure the relevance to market and that the programmes are up to date, each programme has an Industrial Advisory Board (IAB) with Terms of Reference. The IAB meets

every June, or whenever it is needed. The IAB is an important mechanism by which the programmes are updated and are kept abreast with the market needs.

9.8   IABs discuss the programmes, and changes are made. For example, a review was prompted after consulting with the IAB which suggested exploring the latest trends in the media and entertainment industry, particularly focusing on digital media trends. This recommendation is documented in the Annual Programme Monitoring Report.

9.9   Another method for monitoring and review of programmes deployed at UCB is benchmarking as outlined in the Benchmarking Policy. During the meetings with leadership and faculty, benchmarking was underlined as being of high importance and the University conducts it at every level - local, national, and international. The team was informed a formal benchmarking agreement with a Jordanian University would be finalised in the near future. Locally, an arrangement has been made with Al Ahlia University, and discussions are underway with institutions in Hong Kong. Other informal benchmarking is conducted with University of Bahrain, as well as universities in UK and the USA.

9.10 The SED described the benchmarking process for Digital Media programme which was conducted in 21-22 as an example for the process that UCB implements in its programmes. The benchmarking and review process of the media programme resulted in a name change to "Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Digital Media" (pending approval by the HEC). Additionally, PILOS were revised and amended in alignment with benchmarks. Furthermore, the number of credits was decreased in the MBA programme because of benchmarking.

9.11 Internal review is conducted every year. Courses are reviewed every semester, 25% of courses sent for external review every year. A programme is reviewed every four years and reviews must consider market needs and have both Bahraini and international review perspectives.

9.12 External review is conducted periodically through national and international agencies. UCB has been accredited by HEC and the AQACHEI. Yet there is no strategic consensus regarding the latter and whether reaccreditation will be pursued.

9.13 During the meetings with faculty members, it was clear that faculty were aware of the annual and periodic reviews, and several had been present in the last review. Alumni attested to the fact that they were informed of all the changes to the programme.

9.14 The QAAO is planning to implement the same benchmarking procedure conducted in CMM to all other programmes, especially that benchmarking has become obligatory by HEC. For existing programmes, benchmarking is carried out every four years in line with BQA requirements. Any changes to the programme need to be benchmarked as set out in the Programme Design and Approval Policy. Periodic review is mostly through external means.

9.15 UCB ensures the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures by assigning an external expert to overlook QA processes. This is backed up internally through faculty and staff surveys and feedback. It was also heard that several members of UCB staff are themselves reviewers and so they become subject matter experts and enhance the process from within. However, there are no substantive outcomes from this process, and the team heard that a more robust process for better monitoring and evaluation needs to be developed.

9.16 Despite all the efforts and work that is conducted in the periodic review process, it was found that most of the amendments to the programmes are minor with no evidence of tangible impact on the enhancement of the quality of the learning process. Most of the changes were in the title, or the reduction of the number of credit hours, or some admission criteria.

9.17 In summary, the team found sufficient evidence that the University has established the necessary tools and mechanisms for the periodic review of its programmes.

9.18 Despite the recommendation stated above, the team concludes that standard 1.9 On-going Monitoring and periodic review of programmes is **met**.

Standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

Findings

10.1 UCB demonstrates commitment to the quality of its educational programmes and international accreditation by adhering and aligning with local and international standards. This commitment is achieved through applying to local, regional, and international accreditation and recognition agencies. This commitment stems out from the conviction that international recognition and accreditation will make them one of the leading Bahraini institutions.

10.2 For this reason, the University has subjected itself to several reviews and visits by external Agencies such as on the local level (Education and Training Quality Authority – BQA), on the regional level the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission of Higher Education Institutions in Jordan (AQACHIE) and internationally the current submission for International Quality Review and International Programme Accreditation from the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

10.3 In 2019, UCB was inspected by the Higher Education Council in Bahrain (HEC) for institutional accreditation. The HEC team reviewed 33 indicators, and the following breakdown was concluded: 14 indicators fully met, 8 Substantially met, 1 partially met.

10.4 UCB was also reviewed by BQA in 2019 and the result was that 15 indicators from the 33 indicators were not met as defined by BQA. As a result, UCB prepared an improvement plan and worked on implementing corrective actions. Subsequently, the review visit of BQA dated 22-23 February 2022 indicated that UCB had made 'sufficient progress'. As a result, the University was granted accreditation by HEC.

10.5 To further engage in external review, UCB submitted a request to the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission of Higher Education Institutions in Jordan (AQACHEI) for a full review. The Commission conducted a visit to UCB in 2022 and the University was granted Jordanian QA certification for 3 years.

10.6 In addition to the above, UCB has recently acquired the recognition status of recommended universities in Bahrain by Saudi Arabia, as well as EURASHE Membership, the International Association for Media and Communication Research, and the International Telecommunication Union.

10.7 The University adheres to a cyclical review process that starts with the internal quality assurance framework that is aligned with the required standards. This then results in the self-evaluation report that is then submitted to external review. Once the external review reports and recommendations is received, the University puts forward its enhancement and improvement plans that will in turn inform the internal quality framework.

10.8 The recurrence of the external review is evident from the commitment to BQA and HEC which is mandatory in Bahrain. The Team saw evidence of this across programmes i.e. for Communication and Multimedia programmes, Information Technology for 2022 and currently and for Business and Administration.

10.9 UCB submitted its MBA programme for accreditation by AQACHEI (Jordan) and was granted Jordan QA certification in April 2024, for a period of two years. In addition, the Programme is preparing its improvement plan to address the BQA requirements and prepare for the next submission.

10.10 UCB demonstrated compliance with some of the recommendations and feedback from the external evaluations. For example, AQACHEI emphasized greater community engagement, which was represented in the actions taken thereafter. Every time there is a review UCB responds with an improvement plan. In preparation for the QAA IQR visit, UCB developed its Quality Assurance Policy and started addressing the ESG Standard 1.8 - Public Information which did not form part of any of the other accreditation requirements undertaken.

10.11 The conviction of faculty members and staff and the students is that regional and international accreditation is a great asset for the visibility of the University and student recruitment. Graduate students indicated that they benefited greatly from the programmes and that accreditation was also an asset for them in the work field.

10.12 The above commitment in addition to the current submission provides ample evidence that the University is committed to undergoing cyclical external quality assurance reviews. However, the outcome of some of these visits might not always be positive. The status from the BQA is a case in point. Yet the examination of the reports and improvement plans that were submitted reveals that UCB is working on the development of improvement plans. The team **recommends** UCB develops stronger commitment and follow through on the action plans resulting from external quality reviews to ensure rigour in the assurance of sustainable programme improvement.

10.13 The team also questioned the diversity of the selected accreditation agencies and whether UCB had any strategic plans regarding the pursuit of further accreditation. It was specifically concerned with the degree of accreditation fatigue and challenges that UCB was facing. Since the University is in the process of developing its next strategic plan, this is particularly relevant for future practice and as indicated earlier, there is no strategic consensus as to whether there is an intention to pursue other regional accreditation. The review team **recommends** that UCB reaches a strategic decision on the degree of external recognition that is aligned with their strategic objectives and reduces the challenges posed by accreditation fatigue.

10.14 Based on the evidence provided, the team concludes that UCB is subject to a of range of external cyclical review and consequently Standard 1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance is **met**.

Glossary

Action plan
A plan developed by the institution after the QAA review report has been published, which is signed off by the head of the institution. It responds to the recommendations in the report and gives any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice.

Annual monitoring
Checking a process or activity every year to see whether it meets expectations for standards and quality. Annual reports normally include information about student achievements and may comment on the evaluation of courses and modules.

Collaborative arrangement
A formal arrangement between a degree-awarding body and another higher education provider. These may be degree-awarding bodies with which the institution collaborates to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies. Alternatively, they may be other delivery organisations who deliver part or all of a proportion of the institution's higher education programmes.

Condition
Conditions set out action that is required. Conditions are only used with unsatisfactory judgements where the quality cannot be approved. Conditions may be used where quality or standards are at risk/continuing risk if action is not taken or if a required standard is not met and action is needed for it to be met.

Degree-awarding body
Institutions that have authority, for example from a national agency, to issue their own awards. Institutions applying to IQR may be degree-awarding bodies themselves or may collaborate to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of degree-awarding bodies.

Desk-based analysis
An analysis by the review team of evidence, submitted by the institution, that enables the review team to identify its initial findings and subsequently supports the review team as it develops its review findings.

Enhancement
See **quality enhancement**.

European Standards and Guidelines
For details, including the full text on each standard, see www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg.

Examples of practice
A list of policies and practices that a review team may use when considering the extent to which an institution meets the standards for review. The examples should be considered as a guide only, in acknowledgment that not all of them will be appropriate for all institutions.

Externality
The use of experts from outside a higher education provider, such as external examiners or external advisers, to assist in quality assurance procedures.

Facilitator
The member of staff identified by the institution to act as the principal point of contact for the QAA officer and who will be available during the review visit, to assist with any questions or requests for additional documentation.

Good practice
A feature of good practice is a process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to the institution's higher education provision.

Lead student representative
An optional voluntary role that is designed to allow students at the institution applying for IQR to play a central part in the organisation of the review.

Oversight
Objective scrutiny, monitoring and quality assurance of educational provision.

Peer reviewers
Members of the review team who make the decisions in relation to the review of the institution. Peer reviewers have experience of managing quality and academic standards in higher education or have recent experience of being a student in higher education.

Periodic review
An internal review of one or more programmes of study, undertaken by institutions periodically (typically once every five years), using nationally agreed reference points, to confirm that the programmes are of an appropriate academic standard and quality. The process typically involves experts from other higher education providers. It covers areas such as the continuing relevance of the programmeme, the currency of the curriculum and reference materials, the employability of graduates and the overall performance of students. Periodic review is one of the main processes whereby institutions can continue to assure themselves about the academic quality and standards of their awards.

Programme of study
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification. UK higher education programmes must be approved and validated by UK degree-awarding bodies.

Quality enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported.

QAA officer
The person appointed by QAA to manage the review programmeme and to act as the liaison between the review team and the institution.

Quality assurance
The systematic monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, and the processes that support them, to make sure that the standards of academic awards meet the necessary standards, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.

Recognition of prior learning
Assessing previous learning that has occurred in any of a range of contexts including school, college, and University, and/or through life and work experiences.

Recommendation
Review teams make recommendations where they agree that an institution should consider developing or changing a process or a procedure in order to improve the institution's higher education provision.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Self-evaluation document
A self-evaluation report by an institution. The submission should include information about the institution as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of its quality systems.

Student submission
A document representing student views that describes what it is like to be a student at the institution, and how students' views are considered in the institution's decision-making and quality assurance processes.

Validation
The process by which an institution ensures that its academic programmes meet expected academic standards and that students will be provided with appropriate learning opportunities. It may also be applied to circumstances where a degree-awarding institution gives approval for its awards to be offered by a partner institution or organisation.