



This review method
is ESG-compliant

International Programme Accreditation

Arab Open University

BSc Graphic and Multimedia Design Technology

External Quality Assurance Agency

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK

Date of Accreditation Visit: September 2024

Review Report
September 2024

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About this review

This is a report of an International Programme Review conducted by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Arab Open University in 2024. The report provides an accurate account of the findings identified by the review team in 2024: further information has been added to this report since 2024 to reflect the actions and enhancements made by the institution following the review.

The review visited the headquarters of Arab Open University and some of its branch campuses. Meetings were held at:

- Kuwait headquarters and branch: 9-12 May 2024
- Egypt branch campus: 13 June 2024
- Jordan branch virtual visit: 2 July 2024
- Lebanon virtual visit: 3 July 2024

and were conducted by a team of 3 reviewers:

- Professor Minhua Eunice Ma
- Professor Nazih A. Khaddaj Mallat
- Dr Harry M. Williams (student reviewer).

This International Programme Accreditation (IPA) review was combined with International Quality Review (IQR). The IPA review had its own Self-Evaluation Document (SED) and accompanying evidence. Some of the meetings held during visits to the branch campuses covered topics of interest to both the IQR and IPA review. Additional evidence relevant to the IPA requested by the team during the review has been considered.

International Programme Accreditation offers institutions outside the UK the opportunity to have a review by the UK's The 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 Programme Accreditation, 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
- comes to an overall conclusion as to whether the institution meets the standards for International Programme Accreditation.

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 Programme Accreditation](#) 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

The Arab Open University (AOU) is a non-profit higher education institution established by Royal Decree by His Royal Highness Prince Talal bin Abdul-Aziz under the umbrella of the Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND). The AOU was initiated in 1996 and in 2002 started to offer validated degrees with The Open University in the UK. AOU aims to provide educational, training as well as research services to meet the requirements and needs of society to contribute to the national development process.

The head office of AOU is based in Kuwait. It has branch campuses that deliver teaching and assessment in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon and Oman. There is a branch in Sudan that is currently suspended and is managed by the Branch Rector and other staff working from Egypt under close supervision from the Head Quarters (HQ) in Kuwait. Operating across these countries in the Middle East, each country has its own accreditation requirements and market dynamics. AOU aims to capitalise on two key strengths in these local markets: its open learning being focused on providing blended learning supported by its partnership with The Open University in the UK.

The university's mission is to provide high quality education for all society through a flexible educational model that transcends spatial and temporal barriers. The aim is to develop a well-educated society through a stimulating environment for scientific research and innovation. AOU enables higher education opportunities for people working or unable to attend traditional university. It strongly supports women and people with disabilities through its flexible delivery model of blended learning. It also encourages its staff to be engaged in research.

The Faculty of Computer Studies (FCS), at the headquarters of the AOU, offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes delivered in branch campuses. The faculty offers a BSc in Information Technology and Computing (ITC) with eight track pathways, BSc of Science in Graphic and Multimedia Design Technology (GMDT), and an MSc in Computing (Cyber Security and Forensics). The ITC programme and the MSc programme are in partnership with The Open University in the UK. They are validated programmes of study and they provide students with opportunities to obtain a degree certificate from the AOU and the UK.

The GMDT programme is being considered for IPA and has three pathways (tracks); Graphic and Multimedia Design Technology, Media & Arts Design, and Animation & Game Design. It is offered in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Bahrain. The Egypt and Bahrain branches offer the Animation & Game Design pathway, Jordan offers the Graphic and Multimedia Design Technology pathway, while Lebanon offers the Media & Arts Design pathway. Students have graduated from the GMDT programme in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, while Bahrain started the programme recently. The GMDT degree has been redesigned and is aiming to start in the spring semester of the academic year 2024-2025, once the required local permissions have been obtained. The new course design is also in the process of being validated by the UK's The Open University. There are approximately 31,700 registered students, with over 60,000 graduates across all AOU programmes, with 405 students enrolled on the GMDT course in the academic year 2022-23. Over 200 of these are based in Egypt. The total number of academic staff who support this programme are 14 in Egypt, 4 in Jordan and 7 in Lebanon.

One of the strategic challenges for AOU is managing the operation in multiple countries where each has its own regulatory framework. This means the AOU must meet the needs of the local ministries and authorities which results in some differences between the operation of the branches.

As well as the new version of the GMDT programme there are plans for AOU to create additional campuses in some of the countries they work in and to expand the number of Arab countries where they hold branches. As part of this expansion the GMDT programme will be added to more branches.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which Arab Open University meets the 10 ESG Standards for IPA, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the handbook for International Programme Accreditation (November 2023). The University provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During the review visit the team held a total of 16 meetings at the headquarters in Kuwait and in branches. The team also were considering institutional accreditation at programme level (IQR), with some of the meetings combined. Some branches were visited in-person and others virtually as listed in the table below.

	Head of Institution	Senior Team	Students	Academic Staff	Support Team	Alumni and External Stakeholders
Kuwait headquarters (in-person visit) and virtual meeting with senior staff for GMDT (held virtually)	X	X		X	X	
Egypt branch (in-person visit)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jordan (virtual visit)		X		X	X	
Lebanon branch (virtual visit)		X		X	X	

The review team had the opportunity to observe the University's facilities and learning resources at Kuwait and Egypt branches.

In summary, the team was able to make some recommendations for improvement and 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.

Following the review, overall, the team concluded that Arab Open University **meets** all the standards for International Programme Accreditation **subject to meeting one specific condition**.

The University subsequently submitted additional documentation with reference to actions it had taken to address the condition identified by the QAA team. The response set out in detail various actions taken to address the issues. Initial inconsistencies in public information were identified and subsequently addressed. Opportunities have since been taken to strengthen and formalise governance mechanisms including new website policies, periodic reviews of website content, regular audits of the accuracy and validity of documentation, staff training and the clarification of responsibilities and accountability for information oversight, including a

new role of Quality Information Officer at each branch. After considering the additional evidence, it was concluded that the Arab Open University had adequately addressed the Condition and therefore meets all 10 of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015). Further details of this can be found in the relevant section of this report (1.8).

QAA's conclusions about Arab Open University

The QAA team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at the Arab Open University.

European Standards and Guidelines

Arab Open University meets all 10 ESG Standards and Guidelines. The standard originally not met by Arab Open University in 2024 was:

- 1.8: Public information.

Conditions

The QAA review team identified the following **condition** that needed to be fulfilled before all the European Standards and Guidelines were deemed met at Arab Open University:

- The university develops and fully implements policies and procedures which ensure that the information it publishes online is accurate and up to date.

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Arab Open University.

- The AOU implements a comprehensive, data-driven approach to the GMDT programme delivery and student support (ESG Standard 1.1).
- The programme team integrates the QAA Computing subject benchmark into the curriculum (ESG Standard 1.2).
- AOU adds information to its programme specification and student handbooks to reference the notional study hours for its modules and references the conversion from AOU's credit points to UK credits and ECTS Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) (ESG Standard 1.2).
- AOU reviews the appropriateness of its current academic warning system to assure itself that it enables students to achieve successful outcomes (ESG Standard 1.4).
- AOU maintains an appropriate student/staff ratio when the programme grows to ensure the quality of education (ESG Standard 1.5).
- AOU ensures that the specialist equipment required to deliver years 2 and 3 of the GMDT programme are in place for when students reach that level of study (ESG Standard 1.6).
- AOU reviews its current arrangements for academic advising to ensure an equitable experience for all students (ESG Standard 1.6).
- AOU considers expanding the professional support, ensuring that services are properly and fully staffed (ESG Standard 1.6).
- AOU enhances its GMDT data analysis practices gaining deeper student insights to assist in improving retention rates (ESG Standard 1.7).
- AOU implements a standardised system for tracking GMDT alumni career paths across all branches (ESG Standard 1.7).

Explanation of the findings about Arab Open University

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 AOU demonstrates a strong commitment to embedding quality assurance processes across all its branches. As a partner of The Open University in the UK, AOU is required to fully adhere to The Open University's quality assurance processes while also complying with the local regulatory environments of the countries in which it operates.

1.2 AOU is governed by a senior leadership structure headed by the President, supported by two Vice Presidents, one for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research and the other for Planning and Development. The University's Board of Trustees is responsible for appointing individuals to these senior positions.

1.3 Each AOU Branch is led by a Branch Rector, previously known as a Branch Director, who reports directly to the University President. The university's academic structure is organised into four faculties, each headed by a Faculty Dean who reports to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research. At the branch level, academic programmes are overseen by Programme Coordinators or local Deans, who report to both the Branch Rector and the Faculty Dean at the institutional level. The B.Sc. in Graphic and Multimedia Design (GMDT) programme is housed within the Faculty of Computer Studies (FCS).

1.4 The central Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department (QAAD) is responsible for implementing quality processes and managing external accreditation, and actively identifies areas requiring improvement to enhance quality across the institution.

1.5 AOU has established a comprehensive policy for quality assurance that is publicly accessible and integrated into the institution's strategic management. This policy is supported by the organisational structure.

1.6 The review team considers the integration of the quality assurance policy into the university's strategic management to be highly effective, ensuring that quality assurance is fully embedded as a core component of the institution's overall strategy, rather than being treated as a separate function.

1.7 While an overview of the university's general decision-making framework was provided, the review team requested additional documentation to demonstrate a clear link between these documents and the specific quality assurance processes of the GMDT programme. However, the university did not provide a response to this request. During the visit, the team asked again how this framework specifically applies to the GMDT programme's quality assurance processes and was informed that the policy applies to all academic programmes.

1.8 Reports on the monitoring and feedback mechanisms within the GMDT programme were provided to the review team. These reports highlight how feedback from students, tutors, and peers is systematically collected and analysed to ensure continuous improvement. Samples of reports generated from tutor monitoring sessions were also shared with the team. The use of detailed monitoring and feedback mechanisms ensures that the GMDT

programme is consistently evaluated and improvements considered based on stakeholder input.

1.9 The review team confirmed that AOU's quality assurance system is well-organised, with clear processes. Documents provide a general overview of AOU's QA processes, including curriculum reviews, student and tutor surveys, peer reviews, and annual appraisals.

1.10 The use of comprehensive feedback mechanisms, such as student and tutor surveys, ensures continuous monitoring and improvement of the programme. The systematic implementation of these surveys across campuses allows for consistency in the quality assurance process.

1.11 GMDT programme level QA plans, minutes of meetings from QA committees, reports from peer reviews and programme reviews were shared with the team. These documents demonstrate the programme's compliance with AOU's quality assurance structures and provide detailed accounts of the processes implemented specifically for the GMDT programme.

1.12 Generic templates and forms were not specifically designed for the GMDT programme, but examples of how these templates are used by the GMDT programme were provided.

1.13 The GMDT programme demonstrates a strong commitment to involving both internal and external stakeholders in its quality assurance processes. This involvement is evident through curriculum reviews, student and tutor surveys, peer reviews, and institutional appraisals. The feedback system for the GMDT programme, implemented through the Learning Management System (LMS), provides a structured approach to collecting student and tutor feedback each semester. Data from these surveys shows how the student experience is monitored. Also tutor questionnaires are used to evaluate and improve module delivery.

1.14 AOU's QA policies include provisions for safeguarding academic integrity and freedom, with vigilance against academic fraud. These policies are consistently applied at all branches, offering the GMDT programme. AOU has also established mechanisms to guard against intolerance and discrimination, further ensuring a supportive environment for both staff and students. AOU's commitment to academic integrity and freedom, coupled with robust mechanisms to prevent fraud and discrimination, is a strong foundation for maintaining the quality and credibility of the GMDT programme.

1.15 AOU has shown a strong commitment to aligning the GMDT programme with market demands through initiatives such as industry partnerships, programme advisory committees, and specialised course offerings that incorporate the latest related technologies. The review team heard during the visits that the HQ in Kuwait and Deanship is responsible for sharing best practices and data analysis results across the branches offering the GMDT programme. The team saw that the Deanship provides coordination but thought that the process was generally a passive one and more could be done to provide proactive and active steps to share best practice across branches. To ensure that all AOU branches benefit from shared knowledge and continuous improvement, fostering a more unified and effective approach to the GMDT programme delivery and student support, the review team **recommends** that AOU implements a comprehensive, proactive data-driven approach to the GMDT programme delivery and student support, by conducting periodic cross-campus reviews to identify and share best practices, ensuring consistency in service delivery and student experience across all campuses offering the GMDT programme.

1.16 Overall, AOU has established a robust quality assurance system with a comprehensive policy framework, along with effective structures and processes for

monitoring and feedback. The QA system prepares GMDT graduates for success in the ever-evolving job market, contributing to a skilled and competitive workforce in the region. Accordingly, the review team concludes that Standard 1.1: Policy for quality assurance is therefore **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 AOU's mission centres on developing and disseminating knowledge, widening access to education, and building a knowledge-based society. They offer a portfolio of technology services and resources that support excellence in blended and open learning. AOU's philosophy is to design and provide academic programmes that widen access to higher education, particularly for groups who have traditionally had limited opportunities to pursue studies at the higher education level.

2.2 The Graphic and Multimedia Design Technology (GMDT) programme is developed by the Faculty of Computer Studies and delivered across multiple branches. The GMDT programme is currently undergoing the approval process to obtain validation from The Open University UK. The programme has obtained local accreditation from the Ministries of Higher Education at Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon branches, demonstrating adherence to national quality requirements.

2.3 The programme specification demonstrates alignment with QAA subject benchmarks, specifically referencing the Art and Design (2019) and Mathematics, Statistics, and Operational Research (2019) subject benchmark statements. However, there are some discrepancies as the benchmark statements include Art and Design (2019) and History of Art, Architecture and Design (2019) which differ from those listed in the programme specification. The Computing subject benchmark statement (2022) is not considered in the programme specification despite its relevance. To ensure comprehensive and relevant benchmark alignment, the team **recommends** the incorporation of the Computing subject benchmark into the GMDT curriculum.

2.4 The teaching approaches section of the SED states that all modules in the GMDT programme are delivered with a 50/50 split between face-to-face and self-learning hours. However, the GMDT programme specification document states that 25% of the credit hours are allocated to face-to-face contact hours, with the remaining 75% dedicated to self-learning hours. During the senior management meeting in Kuwait, it was confirmed that the 25%-75% is adopted on most of the AOU programmes, but the GMDT adopt a 50%-50% blended due to the nature of the programme requiring more face-to-face teaching.

2.5 The review panel also noted that there is an absence of reference to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), except for in the SED, which provides a conversion from AOU's credit points to UK credits and ECTS. The panel **recommends** adding this information in the programme specification and student handbooks and that AOU defines and articulates how AOU credit hours relate to the UK and ECTS credits, and the notional study hours in relevant policies and documentation. This will ensure clear communication to students regarding the total study hours required to complete each module.

2.6 AOU adheres to a structured process for the development and approval of academic programmes, in alignment with The Open University UK's quality assurance standards. This

collaboration is facilitated through the Open University Validation Partnership (OUVP) who ensure the AOU's academic programmes meet the expectations and criteria expected. There is an initial validation for each programme and a revalidation cycle every five years. This is complemented by an annual programme appraisal to maintain and enhance the quality and standards of academic programmes.

2.7 The GMDT programme's development drew from market analysis, feedback from domain experts, advice from the industrial advisory board, benchmark analysis of similar programmes offered by other prestigious universities, job market trends, and graduate student feedback. Although the expert feedback presented predominantly consists of binary agree/disagree responses for each module and appears superficial, the programme team and students provided specific examples of how student feedback contributed to shaping the GMDT programme. This was further supported by the submission of additional documentation, including the minutes of a meeting with students and graduates in December 2022, where new pathways for the GMDT programme were discussed.

2.8 Overall, AOU has a robust process for the design and approval of their programmes. The GMDT programme is designed so that it meets the objectives set including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from the programme is clearly specified and communicated and refers to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education, as well as the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The programme's design process involves students and other stakeholders, benefiting from external expertise and established reference points. The team concluded that 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 University has a Learning and Teaching Policy that reflects a clear commitment to providing high quality educational opportunities to its students. Although it does not explicitly reference student-centredness in its SED, the University implements a comprehensive approach to student-centred teaching, learning, and assessment, underpinned by a robust support system aimed at enhancing student academic experience and success. Key components of this system include personalised academic advising on course selection and academic trajectory, induction workshops for new students, weekly tutorials and office hours for providing individual academic support, student counselling, career advising, and a variety of social activities. These initiatives, supported by an array of services such as disability support, healthcare, social engagement opportunities, and financial support, collectively foster a nurturing and inclusive academic environment conducive to learning, personal growth, and career readiness. The practical implementation and the breadth of support services clearly demonstrate a commitment to the principles of student-centred education.

3.2 The Learning and Teaching Policy is supported by the University's 'Teaching and Learning Model', includes essential components such as face-to-face classes, virtual classes, digital content, asynchronous learning activities and assessment learning outcomes.

3.3 The programme specification defines the expected student workload, including a breakdown of credit hours. It also states that 25% of the credit hours are allocated to face-to-face contact hours, with the remaining 75% dedicated to self-learning hours. During the senior management meeting in Kuwait, it was confirmed that the 25%-75% is adopted on most of the AOU programmes, but the GMDT adopt a 50%-50% blended due to the nature of the programme requiring more face-to-face teaching, hence the programme specification needs to be updated. The Senior Management Team clarified that students on GMDT programme typically receive 2 hours of weekly in-person teaching per module, with the remaining study hours consisting of self-directed independent learning, supported through LMS materials and office hours.

3.4 The hybrid learning approach of AOU effectively enables students to engage with various pedagogical methods, supporting diverse learning paths and meeting a broad range of educational needs. It also encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the tutor. This was evidenced in the in-person and online meetings with students and teaching teams at AOU branches.

3.5 The University regularly evaluates its teaching, learning and assessment policies through a combination of peer observation, student surveys, annual evaluation, and cyclical policy review. Its Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department (QAAD) identifies areas for improvement and coordinates actions, such as policy updates, monitors branch implementation and elicits reports on compliance. This ongoing commitment to quality assurance was evident in AOU IPA documentation, meetings with senior teams, academic staff, and support staff across multiple branches.

3.6 Meetings with academic staff at the branches that provide the GMDT programme demonstrated that the University's teaching and learning policies are thoroughly embedded and implemented within branches and teaching teams.

3.7 The University has appropriate policies and procedures for dealing with student complaints and academic appeals (i.e. student challenges to awarded marks or grades). Students can submit complaints or appeals online using the Student Information System (SIS), where they are received, acknowledged, and followed up by the Student Affairs Department. The Branch Examinations Committee reviews academic appeals, and students are notified of the decision within one week. For those who prefer not to use the online system, complaints/appeals can be filed in person, with the same committee reviewing and responding within the same timeframe. These procedures are clearly communicated to students through programme handbooks.

3.8 The University employs suitably qualified academic and professional services staff and has developed operating procedures covering the appointment, induction and ongoing support of new staff members. During the review meetings with academic staff across multiple branches, the team explored the appointment and induction experiences of newly appointed members of staff. Their responses indicated that they are effectively inducted to become familiar with the University's teaching and assessment methods and receive ongoing support to develop their skills in these areas.

3.9 Staff are encouraged to engage in research activities alongside their teaching workload and there are several examples of AOU academic staff publishing in international peer-reviewed journals and research collaboration between academic staff across branches. To further support research endeavours, the University is introducing research chairs and allocates 3% of its turnover to fund staff research initiatives. Each academic staff member is required to attend at least one conference or workshop and publish at least one paper annually, with progress monitored during the annual performance review. Staff can apply for funding to attend conferences, with applications approved by the Head of Research.

3.10 The university has implemented a structured peer observation system for teaching that contributes to the professional development of its academic staff. This system includes tutorial observations conducted by the Branch Course Coordinator (BCC), who attends physical and/or online tutorials to assess them against defined criteria. Following the observation, detailed feedback is provided in a one-to-one meeting with the tutor, focusing on preparation, content, tutorial conduct, and overall progress. The observations and feedback are documented using a tutorial monitoring form and the outcomes encapsulated in an end of semester report. This report highlights the tutor's strengths and areas for improvement and is forwarded to the quality assurance department for monitoring and subsequent action. Through this peer observation process, the university fosters a culture of continuous improvement and sharing best practices among its teaching staff.

3.11 Staff also share best practice within and across AOU branches through the shared Learning Management System (LMS) and faculty-wide workshops organised by the Dean for all teaching staff.

3.12 Examination and Assessment Bylaws details for teaching staff (and students) the University's expectations concerning assessment and the marking of student work, including examinations. Assessments and examinations at AOU are standardised across branches and centrally managed. For each module, assessments consist of a combination of continuous assessments. These are a Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) weighted at 30%, a Mid-Term Assessment (MTA) weighted 20%, and final examination weighted 50%. The University has developed a generic marking guide which outlines its approach to assessment grading and moderation. The guide provides a rubric split between content and form and invites tutors to complete the missing sections.

3.13 The assessment cycle is overseen by the Faculties/Deanships of Academic Programmes and the Vice President for Academic Affairs & Scientific Research. The Final

Examination Cross Branch Marking (CBM) sample report shows the internal moderation of assessments conducted within each Faculty which is used to maintain consistency and quality of feedback across the branches.

3.14 The process of assessment setting and the efforts to provide standardised assessment and marking involve the collaboration of teaching staff across multiple branches. For example, moderation meetings are rotated between branches. This practice, coordinated effectively by the Programme Coordinator (also known as the Local Dean or Head of Department), is commendable.

3.15 The team reviewed the GMDT external examiners' reports from 2021 to 2023 and its current and forward-look plans. Additionally, the team observed final year project presentations during the review visit in Egypt. The Panel concluded that assessment at AOU is consistent, fairly applied to all students, has good feedback mechanisms and is conducted in accordance with the stated procedures and bylaws.

3.16 All full and part-time tutors hold two weekly office hours with their students support and to answer questions. Students can communicate with tutors via the VLE or by email. Students' expressed satisfaction with the individual academic support offered by faculty members and their accessibility during their scheduled office hours. During the team's visit to Kuwait headquarters and the branches, it was evident that academic staff adhere to their office hours and prominently display their office hours and timetables on their doors.

3.17 The review team concludes that the University delivers academic programmes in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process, with assessments reflecting this student-centred approach to learning, teaching and assessment. The review team concludes that this 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 Admission to the GMDT programme follows the process described in the university's institutional admissions policy. The branch admission policy's highlights the local requirements. At the institutional level, the admissions process is overseen by the Vice President Academic Affairs and Scientific Research. Locally, the Head of Admission and Registration Department at each branch is responsible for ensuring procedures are implemented in-line with policy.

4.2 Students apply to AOU via an online admission and registration system. Entry requirements for an applicant include a valid high school certificate. There are no minimum English language requirements for the university's undergraduate provision, and this includes the GMDT programme. During the review the team confirmed that there was no requirement to submit a portfolio of work or engage in any other selection activity. Following submission of an application, the university's multi-step verification and selection process starts and includes branch staff to conform with local regulatory requirements of the Ministry of Higher Education. Successful applicants are sent an acceptance letter by email. Rejected applicants are promptly contacted.

4.3 Students are expected to complete the GMDT programme in between 3.5 years (full-time) to 12 years (part-time/modular). Most students enrol on the programme at the Egypt branch (2022: approximately 240 students whereas other campuses typically have between 40-80 students). The team noted the apparent popularity of the GMDT programme and registration figures have increased substantially since 2016-17, when there were 112 enrolments, to 405 enrolments in 2022-23.

4.4 All new students are provided with a copy of the AOU Student Guide, and GMDT programme specification. These documents are also available on the university's VLE. There is an induction programme for new students including workshops that are held at the beginning of each semester. Students with whom the team met during the review process confirmed that they found the orientation and welcome sessions helpful.

4.5 The university awards credit for recognised prior learning (RPL), however, the extent to which credits can be awarded is dependent on limitations imposed by the in-country Ministry of Higher Education. Students have the right to appeal decisions using the University's Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedures. During the review the team met with students, a small number of which had applied for the recognition of prior learning and reflected positively on their experience.

4.6 There are processes to monitor and support student progression throughout the GMDT programme including academic advising and the academic probation system, both of which are outlined in the university's Academic Advising Policy. All students are assigned an academic advisor, whose role it is to be an ongoing source of support as they progress through their chosen programme of study. Undergraduate students must maintain a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 2.0 or higher, while graduate students must maintain a CGPA of 2.67 to avoid being placed on academic probation. Students failing to maintain these standards are provided with further support by, for example, their academic advisor.

4.7 Exploring the academic probation system further, the team heard that students could in theory be permitted to accrue up to 5 academic warnings before being withdrawn from the university. This could mean that a student is on academic probation for up to 1.5 years. The review team appreciate the university's central mission is to encourage non-traditional entrants into higher education, but concluded that allowing a student to remain on academic probation for such a long period of time before asking them to withdraw was too lenient. The review team **recommends** that the university reviews the appropriateness of its current academic warning system to assure itself that it enables students to achieve successful outcomes.

4.8 The university is in a relatively unique position as the only large higher education provider in the Middle East with a physical presence in 8 countries. Currently, students enrolled at one AOU branch are permitted to transfer to another AOU branch. During the review process, the team met with students enrolled at several branches, many of whom expressed an interest in undertaking modules at other branches. The review team agreed that this could be a positive educational experience and **recommends** that the university considers expanding opportunities for students and members of staff to transfer within and between AOU branches.

4.9 At the end of a student's programme of study, a recommendation to award a qualification is made by the Faculty of Computer Studies (FCS) Examination Committee to the Central Examination Committee (CEC). Ultimately, the final decision as to whether to award a degree falls to the University Council provided that the requirements outlined in the university bylaws are met. These bylaws require that all modules listed in the student's study plan have been passed (for GMDT this corresponds to 360 credit points), and that their CGPA is not less than 2.00.

4.10 The team reviewed a sample of graduation certificates and transcripts of students who had completed the GMDT programme including those from Egypt and Jordan and concluded that the documentation explained the qualification gained, including the context, level, content and status of the studies completed.

4.11 The review team concludes that the processes for the admission of students, progression and arrangements for graduation and certification for Standard 1.4: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification 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 The University has institutional policies and procedures covering the recruitment, induction, and ongoing support of academic staff across all branches. Staff recruitment is underpinned by the Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy, ensuring a fair and inclusive hiring process.

5.2 Staffing allocations, determined collaboratively between the University Headquarters and individual AOU branches, are tailored to meet the specific needs of each branch. These allocations are integrated into the annual budgeting process for each fiscal year, demonstrating a strategic approach to resource management and organisational planning. The budgeting for staff resources is annually reviewed with needs identified by branches in a strategic plan maintained by the local Human Resources Department.

5.3 AOU branches are responsible for recruiting new staff members under the aegis of the local Human Resources Committee. However, the central University remains involved via the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research and the relevant Faculty Dean.

5.4 The team recognised that some branches face challenges in attracting new staff, often due to instability in the host country. The University strives to meet the staff/student ratios required by the local government. When necessary, branches utilise part-time staff to fill gaps, with additional support available from staff in other branches.

5.5 In the Egypt branch, there are 608 students on the GMDT programme, taught by 3 full-time academics and a number of full time and part time Teaching Assistants, amounting to approximately 8 FTEs. This results in the current Student/Staff Ratio being 76:1, significantly above the government requirement of 25:1. The senior management team confirmed that 4 additional full-time academic staff will be recruited for the next academic year and the vacancy request has already been approved. The review panel **recommends** maintaining an appropriate student/staff ratio when the programme grows to ensure the quality of education.

5.6 The university's approach to staff induction, as described in the SED, highlights a structured process aimed at ensuring new academic staff are well-prepared for their roles. The induction process is supported by both the Headquarters and the Faculty Deans, providing a blend of general and role-specific orientation. New academic staff receive a generic induction that covers essential aspects of the semester, including the blended learning approach, assessment and grading systems, and relevant policies. Additionally, the induction extends to both faculty and administrative positions, covering detailed information on programme delivery, quality assurance, IT provisions, and the use of key educational technologies such as Student Information Systems (SIS) and Learning Management Systems (LMS). Staff are also introduced to the university's appraisal and performance monitoring processes. Notably, even experienced academic staff attend induction programmes for new programmes introduced in their branch, ensuring continuous learning and adaptation.

5.7 The university has implemented a structured peer observation system for teaching that contributes to the professional development of its academic staff. This system includes tutorial observations conducted by the Branch Course Coordinator (BCC), who attends physical and/or online tutorials to assess staff against clearly defined criteria. Following the

observation, detailed feedback is provided in a one-to-one meeting with the staff member, focusing on preparation, content, tutorial conduct, and overall progress. The observations and feedback are documented using a tutorial monitoring form and the outcomes of these sessions are encapsulated in an End of Semester report. This report highlights strengths and areas for improvement and is forwarded to the quality assurance department for monitoring and action. Through this peer observation process, the university fosters a culture of continuous improvement and sharing best practices among its teaching staff, ensuring the delivery of high-quality education.

5.8 Staff development opportunities are organised at both institutional and branch level. The University identifies staff development and training needs through various means, including peer observation, end-of-semester reports, the annual appraisal, and a performance evaluation process. Local deans discuss staff development plans with tutors on an annual basis.

5.9 Staff are encouraged to engage in research activities alongside their teaching responsibilities and there are several examples of AOU academic staff publishing in international peer-reviewed journals and research collaboration across branches. To further support research endeavours, the University is introducing 5 research chairs and allocating 3% of its turnover to fund staff research initiatives. Each academic staff member is required to attend at least one conference or workshop and publish at least one paper annually, with progress monitored during the annual performance review. Staff can apply for funding to attend conferences, with applications approved by the Head of Research. During the 2022-23 academic year, the Faculty of Computer Studies funded staff attendance at 14 conferences.

5.10 Academic staff have opportunities to contribute to the day-to-day management and development of AOU branches. For example, there are opportunities for academic staff to take on leadership roles such as the Branch Course Coordinator.

5.11 Good practices in teaching, learning, and assessment are shared through course committees, online workshops, collaborations with UK OU colleagues at both programme level and at/across branches.

5.12 The review team concludes that the University employs competent teaching staff and provides a supportive environment that enables them to carry out their duties effectively. The University also applies fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of staff. Therefore, the review team concludes that 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 GMDT programme is currently taught at four AOU branches: Lebanon, Egypt, Bahrain, and Jordan. At each AOU branch, classrooms allow for the delivery of in-person teaching; however, there are also specialist facilities to support the teaching of technical content. For example, the AOU Jordan branch hosts a photography and film studios equipped with industry-standard equipment.

6.2 The team explored the teaching and learning resources in-place specifically for the GMDT programme. The university has invested in workstations, Wacom tablets, relevant hardware and software in game design & animation laboratories and programming laboratories. The team concluded that the teaching and learning resources, particularly the technical resources, needed to successfully deliver year 1 of the latest version of the GMDT programme were largely in place. The panel noted that whereas the specialist equipment and software for the graphic and multimedia design pathway are sufficient, certain gaming peripherals and software required for the game design pathway, such as game controllers, mocap facilities, and Unreal/Unity3D game engines needed for later years of the programme were not yet purchased.

6.3 Exploring this during the review, the university said this was because it did not yet have students at year 2 or year 3 of the GMDT programme. Nevertheless, the programme team and IT department have already planned for these resources. In meetings with the panel, the university indicated that it would ensure the specialist equipment and software for years 2 and 3 would be in-place by the time students reached that level (2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years, respectively). While the panel accepts the university's assurance, it nevertheless **recommends** that the university ensure that the specialist equipment required to deliver years 2 and 3 of the GMDT programme are available for when students reach that level.

6.4 Students have access to physical library facilities, typically referred to as Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) at each branch. These provide a focal point for students looking for reference textbooks, access to journal articles and other materials. In addition to textbooks, and printed journals, the university also subscribes to several journal databases including ProQuest and EBSCO. The team visited several of the university's library facilities, including those located in Kuwait, Egypt, and Bahrain. The team found the facilities open, well-provisioned, and the library staff welcoming.

6.5 The university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), locally referred to as the Learning Management System (LMS), allows students to review course content, submit assessments, and participate in discussions. Separately, the university's student information system (SIS) allows students to view their schedule, attendance, grades and study plan. During the assessment period, the review panel was given a guided tour of the university's key systems, including demonstrations of the LMS and SIS and considers them to be a helpful resource. An induction to the university's IT systems is provided to students upon enrolment.

6.6 All students on the GMDT programme are assigned an academic advisor, whose role is to be an ongoing source of advice for students about their academic goals and performance. Academic advisors are also tasked with helping students make decisions about

their educational and career objectives. All students failing to make adequate academic progress are placed on Academic Probation and referred to their academic advisor for further support. The student will then work with their academic advisor to review their course workload to ensure that their CGPA improves sufficiently that they can complete their programme.

6.7 During the review the team found significant variation in staff:student ratios in the Faculty of Computer Studies (FCS) branches. For example, for FCS staff in Egypt, there is an expectation that each full-time faculty member will advise up to 25 students. However, in Bahrain, each full-time staff member advises up to 80 students. The team considered that this presented a risk to the student academic experience because it is likely that students could have very different advisory experiences depending on their branch. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the university reviews its current arrangements for academic advising to ensure an equitable experience for all students.

6.8 All AOU branches at which the GMDT programme is delivered have a dedicated Learning Support Center (LSC), which provides one-to-one student support. This includes English language support, tutoring for which is typically provided by staff employed in the Faculty of Language Studies. There is some careers support provided through the Student Affairs Department which includes running workshops on writing a CV, cover letter writing, job interview skills, and career decision making. Each AOU branch also provides healthcare services to staff and students, operating in agreement with the in-country Ministry of Health. The university also offers psychological counselling to students to support their social, emotional, mental, and physiological well-being.

6.9 There are professional support staff based at each AOU branch delivering the GMDT programme. During the assessment period, the team confirmed that each branch provided a range of support to their students, however, they noted that several services were staffed minimally considering the number of students at the branch. For example, the team heard examples of one or two members of full-time academic staff, with a full teaching and administrative load, being the only student counsellors for the branch. Considering the student profile the university is targeting, the panel considered the current arrangement is underdeveloped. The review team **recommends** that the university considers expanding the professional support ensuring that services are properly and fully staffed.

6.10 Notwithstanding the recommendations in this Standard, the review team concluded that the university has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and that there are suitable support services in place. Therefore, the review team concluded that Standard 1.6: 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 AOU employs a comprehensive system for collecting and managing relevant data and information related to its programmes ensuring effective management and encouraging continuous improvement of its academic provision.

7.2 AOU uses the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) with a programme-specific evaluation template to gather data. This captures student demographics, progression, achievements, and disciplinary cases. The data collection appears comprehensive, encompassing various aspects of student performance.

7.3 The utilisation of the Annual Programme Evaluation (APE), is a central aspect of the data collection process. The APE template is designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data on programme performance, such as student demographics, disability statistics, academic progression, achievements, incidents of academic misconduct and disciplinary cases. Branch submissions included examples that showed the application of this template in the annual monitoring process. While the APE captures valuable data, the review team identifies a gap in how this data is currently used. The review team was unable to prove whether AOU comprehensively analyse student demographic data to fully understand the student body profile, or does it effectively use student progress and dropout rate data to identify at-risk students and implement targeted interventions aimed at improving retention rates. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that AOU enhances its data analysis practices gaining deeper student insights to assist in improving retention rates. By analysing student demographic data (exploring socioeconomic backgrounds, prior educational experiences, and preferred learning styles), identifying at-risk students and conducting a more comprehensive analysis of student progress and dropout rate data, targeted support services and programme adjustments to better cater to diverse student needs can be identified.

7.4 The GMDT programme uses key performance indicators to manage student outcomes effectively. Student performance is assessed through a combination of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA), Midterm Assessments (MTA), and Final Examinations, with specific weightings assigned to each one. The Graduation Project, with distinct evaluation criteria, further assesses students' ability to achieve programme learning outcomes.

7.5 AOU employs multiple methods for data analysis, including programme-specific templates, surveys, and committee discussions. The Annual Institutional Overview Report provides a comprehensive analysis of data at the institutional strategic level. Combined with insights from surveys and programme evaluations, this analysis assists senior committee meetings, where key data points are scrutinised. Discussions assist with development and implementation of enhancement strategies, informing strategic decision-making across the institution.

7.6 Programme coordinators analyse data using an evaluation template and online surveys utilising the Likert scale. Branch quality assurance units generate analytical reports using verified Student Information System (SIS) data and senior committee meetings discuss data for improvement.

7.7 GMDT programme data is used to systematically monitor student progression, success, and drop-out rates using data from the Student Information System (SIS). The SIS serves as the official source for student data, which is analysed by programme coordinators to inform annual evaluations and develop action plans for enhancing programme delivery. At each branch, programme coordinators compile detailed reports on programme performance at the end of each semester. These reports, informed by statistical data provided by the branch's quality assurance units, are reviewed and consolidated by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department at the headquarters. This process ensures a comprehensive evaluation of programme performance and identifies areas for improvement. This data-driven approach ensures that the GMDT programme delivery evolves to meet student needs. However, during the on-site visits, the review team identified an opportunity to further optimise the SIS. For instance, some stakeholders mentioned encountering technical issues or expressed a need for enhanced training. Inconsistencies in the SIS can lead to frustration and potentially escalate student complaints.

7.8 The effectiveness of the GMDT learning resources and student support services is monitored through the Annual Program Monitoring Report. For example, the Learning Resources Centre (LRC) in the Jordan Branch is shown to provide essential support through its library services, technology resources and study spaces. This is replicated in other branches, ensuring consistent support for GMDT students.

7.9 AOU recognises the importance of alumni engagement and creates alumni surveys. These surveys provide valuable insights into graduates' experiences and career paths, which inform programme development and support continuous improvement. This commitment to alumni engagement reflects a positive approach to data collection and analysis. However, the team identified a gap in the systematic tracking of graduate career paths across all branches offering the GMDT programme. This data is crucial for understanding how well the GMDT programme prepares students for their professional fields. Tracking graduate career outcomes would not only inform programme adjustments and demonstrate the GMDT programme's effectiveness, but also strengthen alumni relations and engagement efforts. To address this gap and gain a more comprehensive picture of graduate success, the review team **recommends** that AOU implements a standardised system for tracking GMDT alumni career paths (including job placement rates, employer satisfaction, alignment of their AOU education with their chosen fields, etc.) across all branches.

7.10 Overall, the review team concludes that AOU demonstrates a well-structured information management system, characterised by well-documented processes, diverse data sources, and regular evaluations. This comprehensive approach is structured and methodical, aimed at maintaining high standards of programme delivery and fosters an environment of continuous improvement. Accordingly, the team concludes that the 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 The university publishes information on its governance, management, and curriculum on its website and other channels, including social media. This is the first port-of-call for prospective students and other key stakeholders, such as members of the public.

8.2 The AOU President is responsible for overseeing all communication activities with the Department of Public Relations and Marketing coordinating all print and digital publications that advertise the university.

8.3 There is information on each of the university's programmes, including the GMDT programme, available online via the main university website and the websites of each AOU branch delivering the programme. During the assessment period, the team explored the university's websites and noticed significant pieces of missing information. For example, when exploring the course catalogue for the GMDT programme on the Egypt branch website, the team noted that every listed course was missing module objectives. This information was however provided for modules making up the GMDT programme delivered at other branches. The team also noticed that for some modules, for example, Digital Media Design for Mobile Devices (6VC015), the listed learning outcomes were wrong and presumably copy-pasted from another module in error. Separately, the team identified a small number of modules, including Creative Industries and Opportunities (6AD001), which was listed in the university's course catalogue for the GMDT programme but was not then listed in the attached PDF programme specification suggesting it was not an approved module but, for some reason. Considering these findings, the panel concluded that there were significant issues with respect to the consistency of course and curriculum-specific information relating to the GMDT programme provided online.

8.4 The team also explored the specific GMDT programme page at several branches to check the accuracy of information beyond the course catalogue. Here, the team found further inconsistencies in relation to whether approved programme documentation was provided. For example, looking at the GMDT programme page on the Jordan website, users are provided only with an 'academic plan', which is a list of recommended modules. By comparison, looking at the same page on the Bahrain branch website, users are provided with a programme specification, although here individual module briefs and specifications are not provided. This is not the case looking at the Egypt branch website, where a full programme specification including the course-level information is provided. Furthermore, while some branch GMDT programme pages listed the teaching and learning methods to be used (for example: Egypt), other programme pages included limited-to-no information (for example: Jordan). The team concluded that consistency issues relating to the AOU online presence was not limited to either the course catalogue or programme-specific pages.

8.5 Exploring this further, the team also reviewed a sample of non-programme related pages for each of the branches delivering the GMDT programme. Generally, the panel found fewer errors in these areas. Information on the university's approach to higher education, student life, and some of the professional services available to students was found to be generally of high-quality and reflected what the panel had heard from staff and students and observed during the review.

8.6 Having identified several errors of fact and a lack of consistency with respect to course-specific information on the GMDT programme, the team discussed with senior and professional support staff the current quality control mechanisms for public information. In response, the university made several points. First, at the Kuwait HQ level, a Website Committee, which includes representation from each branch, was responsible for overseeing the development of the main university website and for investigating any issues relating to the university's online presence. Secondly, the panel was told that each branch also has a Website or Webmaster Committee (the name varies by branch), which is responsible for looking after and overseeing the development of the relevant branch website. Thirdly, the team was told that both the HQ in Kuwait and branches conduct regular and systematic audits of the university's online presence to ensure that the information published online is accurate and up to date. The team found limited evidence of either the HQ or branch-level Website or Webmaster Committees exercising their functions fully. At the HQ level, minutes from the Website Committee reflect discussion on largely operational matters, such as how to update a faculty members profile on the main website, rather than the discussion of website audit results or efforts to harmonise information across the university's multiple online presences. Further, the team found limited evidence showing website audits happening in a systematic and consistent manner. The team concluded that the university's quality control mechanisms for its published public information were insufficiently executed with limited detailed oversight from senior management at both HQ and branch level.

8.7 Throughout the assessment period, the team noted in meetings with senior and professional support staff that while staff were usually clear on the process for publishing new information (e.g., an article on the main website), there was far less understanding about the processes in place to check the ongoing accuracy and validity of published information. This ultimately led the team to identify many errors in the GMDT programme course catalogue and further errors on the programme-specific webpages. These errors undermined confidence the panel had in the university's main method of communicating with the public and other key stakeholders, i.e., their main and branch-level websites. Towards the end of the review, the team was informed that a new published information policy was in development. However, it was not possible for the review team to assess its impact.

8.8 Following the IPA visit, the review team concluded that Standard 1.8: Public information was **not met** but was capable of being met on the **condition** that the university develop and fully implement policies and procedures which ensure that the information it publishes online is accurate and up to date.

8.9 The University subsequently developed an action plan in response to the condition, and submitted documentation which was scrutinised by a review team to determine whether the Condition set had been met. The findings are set out in paragraphs 8.10-8.13 below.

8.10 The University developed an action plan in response to the condition and submitted documentation to demonstrate the actions it had taken to address the QAA team's concerns relating to Standard 1.8. The response set out in detail various actions taken to address the issues identified by the team. This included periodic reviews of branch campus website content and alignment with the headquarters website, regular checkpoints on accuracy and validity of documentation, clarification of responsibilities and accountability for oversight of information, a schedule for regular audits of course information, reinforcement of existing policies, and staff training. The remits of headquarters and branch website committees have also been revised and each branch has a new role of Quality Information Officer who has responsibilities for application of content review procedures. The response also included a detailed explanation of actions taken to respond to specific issues raised by the review team both generally and in relation to issues identified with particular web pages. This included updating of web pages across branches, an institution wide audit of course catalogues, and centralisation of key documentation including course descriptors.

8.11 To further support the actions identified the University also developed two policy documents designed to support improvements to its processes for ensuring that documents are accurate and up to date. The Website Audit Process is designed to support regular audits of the accuracy and currency of information. It includes timelines and staff responsibilities for implementation, as well as specifying the documents that are required to be considered in audit. One of the stated key purposes of the Website Policy is to ensure that webpages are regularly updated and that they provide accurate and current content. The document details roles and responsibilities and in addition to accuracy and currency of content it also includes a range of issues such as presentation, optimisation and technical aspects of the website to ensure the positive image of the institution.

8.12 The team concluded that, if implemented effectively and consistently, the use of the documents produced, and the continuing application of the actions summarised in paragraph 8.10, support an effective process for ensuring the accuracy of published information across the institution. The University has already started to apply these mechanisms to improve the quality of public information, and the mid-cycle review will be an opportunity to assess their impact and effectiveness longer term.

8.13 The condition has been addressed and the ESG Standard 1.8 is now **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 AOU employs a robust framework for the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of its academic programmes, including the GMDT programme. This framework focuses on two main types of periodic review: Internal Review through the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and External Review through partnerships with The Open University UK (UKOU) and local accreditation bodies in each operating country of the GMDT (Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt).

9.2 The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) is a cornerstone of AOU's internal review process. Conducted yearly, the AMR involves a comprehensive evaluation of academic and administrative operations across all branches. The AMR facilitates a broad evaluation of academic performance, encompassing assessment designs, student performance metrics, teaching effectiveness, identification of best practices and challenges, and external and internal feedback. This process, leading to actionable plans to address identified challenges, includes:

- Data Collection: Gathering data on course design, student success, teaching methodologies, and external feedback.
- Evaluation: Systematic analysis of this data to identify areas of excellence and areas requiring improvement.
- Reporting: Compiling findings into the AMR, which is overseen by the AOU Headquarters (HQ) in Kuwait, ensuring consistency and rigor across all branches.

9.3 The External Review process includes evaluations by multiple external bodies:

- The UK Open University Validation Partnership influences the quality assurance processes of the GMDT programme. Although the GMDT course is not currently validated by the UK OU, this partnership helps ensure that the programme remains aligned with international standards and integrates global best practices.
- Each AOU branch operates under the scrutiny of local accreditation and licensing authorities. These bodies provide additional layers of oversight, ensuring that the programme is not only compliant with national regulations but also aligned with the specific educational needs of each country.
- Submitted every semester, External Examiner reports offer detailed feedback on each module delivered, highlighting strengths and identifying areas for enhancement.

9.4 The Annual Programme Evaluation template, is a central part of the AMR process. The template is designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data on programme performance, such as student demographics, disability statistics, academic progression, achievements, incidents of academic misconduct, and disciplinary cases. Branch submissions include examples that showcase the application of this template in the annual monitoring process, illustrating its effectiveness in capturing essential data for continuous improvement.

9.5 Student workload, progression, and completion data are systematically collected and analysed through the AMR process. This analysis drives programme adjustments aimed at improving student outcomes.

9.6 The President's office, along with the Quality Assurance and Accreditation department, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research (VPAA & SR) office, provide strategic oversight for ongoing monitoring and review processes. These entities ensure that academic standards are maintained through regular committee meetings and close coordination with the OUVF.

9.7 GMDT Programme Coordinators and Quality Assurance coordinators at branch levels play a critical role in completing analytical reports that contribute to a holistic view of quality across AOU.

9.8 AOU's internal review and monitoring align with its quality assurance framework, assessing all aspects of academic provision. External inputs, including external examining, revalidation and approval, professional accreditations, and accreditation and licensing by local authorities in the AOU countries, complement internal measures to maintain high-quality and standards.

9.9 AOU's programme monitoring process leverages a data-driven approach through audit of teaching and learning aspects, the design and use of templates, questionnaires, and feedback records. The data is analysed to evaluate compliance with quality standards and the effectiveness of programme delivery. This strong foundation provides valuable insights for programme analysis. However, to enhance data utilisation and ensure effective analysis, the AOU may wish to consider implementing additional training programmes for faculty and staff, equipping them further with skills and tools for analysing and utilising data from Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) and course reports.

9.10 The team was able to confirm that stakeholders are informed about GMDT programme revisions and their implications. It is crucial to ensure that updated programme specifications are readily available following programme reviews so that students are aware of the updated curriculum. To address this, it is important that AOU publishes updated GMDT programme specifications.

9.11 AOU demonstrates a commitment to continuous programme improvement through its use of Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) to identify GMDT programme strengths and weaknesses. These AMRs serve as a valuable foundation for developing action plans to address any identified issues. The team identified a lack of details on how programme weaknesses are translated into concrete and actionable steps within the action plans. The AOU may wish to consider developing a comprehensive framework for action plan creation, setting measurable goals and monitoring progress. For example, the framework could outline specific steps for translating programme review findings into actionable items, establishing Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) objectives and define clear processes for tracking progress and adjusting as needed.

9.12 Overall, the team concluded that AOU has implemented a robust system for the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of its GMDT programme. The processes are consistently applied across all campuses, ensuring that the programme remains current, relevant, and responsive to the needs of students and society. The evidence gathered from documents, interviews, and external reviews confirms that the GMDT programme is continuously being reviewed for improvements. Accordingly, the review 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 The AOU is subject to monitoring and oversight from several bodies within Kuwait and the other countries that have AOU campuses including the Private Universities Council (PUC) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). PUC is responsible for the licensure and ongoing review of all private universities in Kuwait and, in this role, they approve the delivery of all new programmes, and review changes to existing programmes. The university has regular contact with PUC and other regulatory bodies, including MoHE.

10.2 Individual branches are also subject to accreditation, monitoring and oversight by the relevant local in-country regulator. This varies between country with some branches only subject to institutional accreditation whereas others are subject to both institutional and programme-level accreditation. The Bahrain branch was recently been re-accredited by the in-country regulatory authority.

10.3 GMDT is situated within the Faculty of Computer Studies. Unlike other programmes within the Faculty of Computer Studies, at the time of the review, the programme was not validated by The Open University UK (UKOU) and does not therefore lead to the award of a dual degree. However, the university indicated that validation by UK-OU was in progress and likely to be completed by the 2024-25 academic year. Should the GMDT programme become validated this would add another layer of cyclical external quality assurance.

10.4 While the GMDT programme does not yet have external subject-specific accreditation, several other programmes within FCS are accredited by external bodies including the university's CEng programmes, which are accredited by the UK Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET). The review team heard from senior staff that the university is keen to acquire further accreditation from subject-specific bodies. For example, the team was informed of plans to find an international accrediting body for its cyber security-related programmes, however, these plans were still at a relatively early stage. Nevertheless, the team was content that the university was committed to finding suitable accreditation for the GMDT programme.

10.5 Beyond subject-specific or academic external accreditation, the university has also secured ISO 9001:2015 certification by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). AOU is currently going through the process of renewal of its ISO certification demonstrating a solid commitment by the university to continually enhance its quality management systems.

10.6 AOU's involvement in QAA International Quality Review (IQR) and International Programme Accreditation (IPA) are further examples of its participation in external quality assurance. In preparation for the IQR and IPA assessments, the university prepared self-evaluations against Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and collated a body of evidence to demonstrate compliance with these standards.

10.7 The review team concludes that the university is committed to and engaged in a programme of cyclical external quality assurance at the institutional-level and programme-level and that 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 programme, 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 programme 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.

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