



This review method
is ESG-compliant

International Quality Review

Arab Open University

Review Report
August 2024

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About this review

This is a report of an International Quality 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
- Bahrain branch campus: 15-16 May 2024
- Kingdom Saudi Arabia virtual visit: 21 May 2024
- Oman virtual visit: 22 May 2024
- Egypt branch campus: 11-12 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).

The International Quality Review (IQR) for Arab Open University was combined with International Programme Accreditation (IPA). The IQR 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 IQR requested by the team during the review has been considered.

International Quality Review 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 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
- comes 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

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 and contribute to the national development process. The university vision is consistent with the university's philosophy set by His Highness Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz to become an Arab open university striving to become a leader in teaching all to create a cultivated society.

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 Head Quarters (HQ) in Kuwait. Operating across these diverse sovereign countries in the middle east and gulf region, 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 flexibility focused on providing blended learning and 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.

AOU continues to expand rapidly and has approximately 31,700 students registered on its degrees. There have over 66,000 graduates across all age ranges, with 54% of these being females.

One of the strategic challenges for AOU is due to operating in multiple countries, each having its own regulatory framework. This means they must meet the needs of the local ministries and authorities which results in some differences between the operation of the branches.

There are plans for future expansion of AOU by creating additional campuses in some of the countries they work in and by expanding the number of Arab countries where they hold branches. AOU plans to expand the range of programmes it offers suited to key industries such as oil and gas with the plan of taking the resources to the students rather than the transitional approach of the other way around. AOU is also planning to expand its courses to meet the needs of professions requiring specialist accreditation, such as accountancy. In addition, the AOU wishes to develop programmes based on a collection of micro credentials and to incorporate artificial intelligence into its teaching and learning strategy.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which Arab Open University 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 review visit, the review team held a total of 28 meetings at the headquarters in Kuwait and in branches.

Combined with the visit to consider IQR accreditation the panel also considered accreditation at programme level (IPA), and this is reported separately. As a result, some of the meetings held for IQR were also relevant to the IPA processes. 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 and local branch (in-person visit)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bahrain branch (in-person visit)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Egypt branch (in-person visit)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jordan (virtual visit)		X		X	X	
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia branch (virtual visit)		X		X		
Lebanon branch (virtual visit)		X		X	X	
Oman Branch (virtual visit)		X		X		

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

In summary, the team found 3 examples of good practice and was able to make some 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 2 conditions that the University must satisfy to achieve QAA accreditation.

Overall, at the time of the IQR review, the team concluded that Arab Open University **meets** all the standards for International Quality Review **subject to meeting specific conditions**.

The University subsequently submitted additional evidence with reference to actions it had taken to address two conditions identified by the QAA team. The response set out in detail various actions taken to address the issues. With regards to Standard 1.8, 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. With regards to Standard 1.10, the institution now has a comprehensive record and tracking process for branch approval and accreditation activity. After considering the additional evidence, it was concluded that the Arab Open University had adequately addressed the Conditions, and therefore **meets all 10 of the European Standards and Guidelines** (2015). Further details on the response to the two conditions can be found in the relevant sections of this report (Standard 1.8 and Standard 1.10).

QAA's conclusions about Arab Open University

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

European Standards and Guidelines

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

- 1.8: Public information
- 1.10: Cyclical external quality assurance.

Conditions

The QAA review team identified the following **conditions** that needed to be fulfilled before all of 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 (ESG Standard 1.8).
- The university develops and fully implements a system of control by which it can plan, track, and follow-up on programme accreditation and approval activities (ESG Standard 1.10).

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Arab Open University.

- The process of assessment setting and the efforts to provide standardised assessment and marking involving the collaboration of teaching staff across multiple branches (ESG Standard 1.3).
- The University's work to maintain cohesive policies and processes, despite the complexities arising from variance in local regulations and other geopolitical and social factors. The flexible, hybrid approach to learning, teaching and assessment, provides access to higher education for diverse learners who may not benefit from conventional routes with a commitment to equal opportunities and widening access (ESG Standard 1.3)
- Despite being primarily a teaching university, AOU is proactively enhancing its research capabilities by introducing research chairs and allocating 3% of its turnover to support research initiatives (ESG Standard 1.5).

Recommendations

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

- Head Quarters plays a more active role in leading and sharing a centralised calendar of QA events and activities, outlining key milestones, deadlines, and responsibilities across all branches and campuses (ESG Standard 1.1).
- AOU develops and implements clear and systematic procedures to ensure the consistent involvement of students, and other external stakeholders, such as industry advisory boards, across all relevant QA activities (ESG Standard 1.1).

- AOU implements a comprehensive, data-driven approach to programme delivery and student support (ESG Standard 1.1).
- AOU adds a new section to the student guide to provide more elaboration regarding AOU credit hours in reference to student workload. This will help ensure students understand the notional learning time associated with each module and facilitate a clearer workload expectation (ESG Standard 1.2).
- The University puts in place measures to assure itself that all branches ensure applicants meet the entry requirements as outlined in the relevant approved programme documentation (ESG Standard 1.4).
- The University reviews the appropriateness of its current academic warning system to assure itself that it enables students to achieve successful outcomes (ESG Standard 1.4).
- The University considers expanding opportunities for students and members of staff to transfer (non-permanently) within and between AOU branches (ESG Standard 1.4).
- The University review its current arrangements for academic advising to ensure an equitable academic experience for all students (ESG Standard 1.6).
- The University considers expanding not only the services that they provide but the number of staff providing those services including for student counselling and careers advice (ESG Standard 1.6).
- AOU creates a system to allow deeper analyses which will identify trends and areas needing improvement within the learning resources and student support services (ESG Standard 1.7).
- AOU implements a standardised system for tracking alumni career paths across all branches (ESG Standard 1.7).
- AOU develops a comprehensive framework for action plan creation (ESG Standard 1.9).

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 is strongly dedicated to quality assurance (QA). This is clear from how thoroughly it integrates quality processes across the entire institution and its branches. By embedding quality assurance into every part of the organisation, AOU creates a culture that values high standards at all levels. This approach ensures everyone shares the responsibility for maintaining quality, which is key to providing consistent and excellent educational outcomes.

1.2 AOU's leadership structure is a significant strength, characterised by a hierarchical model with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The dedicated Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department (QAAD) signifies a focused approach to quality management, effectively coordinating initiatives, establishing clear guidelines, and ensuring consistent implementation across the university. The reporting lines between branches and central leadership promote accountability and facilitate efficient decision-making. The QAAD's proactive identification of areas needing enhancement reflects a forward-thinking approach, fostering continuous improvement and enhancing the student experience and institutional performance. While AOU operates through effective branch-level QA units, the coordination and alignment of QA initiatives across campuses would benefit from stronger central involvement. A more unified, proactive approach from HQ could ensure that QA activities are consistently structured, communicated, and planned, rather than relying on branch-level units to independently manage these efforts. To support cohesive coordination and transparency, the review team **recommends** that HQ plays a more active role in leading and sharing a centralised calendar of QA events and activities, outlining key milestones, deadlines, and responsibilities across all branches and campuses.

1.3 A structured QA framework is in place at AOU, supported by dedicated departments, QAAD and overseen by key committees such as the University Council and Faculty Councils. This framework successfully engages internal stakeholders through clearly defined roles, with the University Council focusing on framework development and Faculty Councils on programme delivery. The detailed structure of these committees and their reporting lines is clearly documented. Moreover, AOU's adherence to external frameworks, such as the Open University Validation Partnership in the UK, and National Accreditation Agencies underscores a commitment to incorporating external perspectives. While AOU does involve students and external stakeholders, such as employers, in various committees and QA activities, this involvement is not always systematic or consistent across all relevant processes. There are notable gaps in the structured engagement of students and the use of industry advisory boards. Ensuring more consistent participation from these groups would enhance the transparency and robustness of QA processes. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that AOU develops and implements clear and systematic procedures to ensure the consistent involvement of students, and other external stakeholders, such as industry advisory boards, across all relevant QA activities. By formalising these procedures, AOU can strengthen its QA framework, ensuring that it benefits from diverse perspectives and maintains a comprehensive approach to Quality Assurance across the institution.

1.4 The meetings held during the panel's visits across campuses confirmed the existence of a documented QA policy and a comprehensive QA Policy Framework that is published on all campuses' websites. This outlines measures for several key areas:

- Academic integrity: The QA policy ensures academic integrity through HQ oversight and programme coordinator communication.
- Programme validation: The market needs analysis, observed in Kuwait and Bahrain, is used to ensure programmes are relevant and cater to industry demands.
- Student feedback mechanisms: All campuses utilise student surveys and appeals processes to gather and address feedback on various aspects of programme delivery, tutorials, and the overall student experience.

1.5 AOU has demonstrated a commendable focus on aligning programmes with market demands through initiatives such as industry partnerships, programme advisory committees, and specialised course offerings in for example Artificial Intelligence and employability skills. The panel were shown examples of industry links, programme advisory committees, Artificial Intelligence courses, and the Skill-X programme in. Evidence of development activities to support learning also exists such as an expansion in library hours and the Skill-X programme. The review team identified a gap in the formalisation of knowledge transfer and inconsistencies in service delivery between branches (e.g., software limitations were identified by students in Bahrain. The panel believe there is currently not a systematic way to share best practices and data analysis results across branch campuses. This limits the ability to leverage collective learnings and potentially slows down the continuous improvement efforts. To ensure that all AOU campuses benefit from shared knowledge and continuous improvement, fostering a more unified and effective approach to programme delivery and student support, the review team **recommends** that AOU implements a comprehensive, data-driven approach to programme delivery and student support, including:

- A periodic cross-campus review focused to identify and share best practices between the branches, with clear action plans ensuring consistency in service delivery and student experience.
- The establishment of a centralised knowledge management system to facilitate the sharing of data analysis results and successful initiatives among AOU campuses to foster peer-to-peer learning and collaboration.

1.6 Assessment practices implemented by AOU are found to be robust, involving internal and external examiners for setting, marking, and moderation of assessments. Additionally, clear appeal processes exist for students.

1.7 AOU has implemented various methods to disseminate QA policy updates, including website updates and staff training, as well as the use of local QA guides at some branches. However, inconsistencies in access to QA policies across AOU branches were reported during the review meetings leading to potential variations in policy implementation. While the virtual learning environment (VLE) serves as a centralised location for QA policies and procedures, ensuring a clear and direct link between branch-specific QA practices and overarching institutional QA policies remains essential for maintaining consistent quality standards across all AOU campuses.

1.8 The use of student surveys and feedback mechanisms across all campuses is a positive step towards supporting continuous improvement. These mechanisms have led to positive changes, such as an extension to the library opening hours implemented in response to student feedback made at most AOU campuses. However, inconsistencies exist in addressing some feedback, as highlighted by the need for improved software in graphic design courses. This issue is further discussed in Standard 1.7 (Information Management).

1.9 The QA policy demonstrates flexibility by adapting to meet local ministry requirements while still following HQ guidelines. An example is the compliance with the National Center for Academic Accreditation and Education (NCAAA) in Saudi Arabia. Inconsistencies were found between branches regarding the interpretation of the balance between online and face-to-face delivery due to mandates by local regulations. This issue is further discussed in Standard 1.10 (Cyclical External Quality Assurance).

1.10 The meetings at Bahrain campus identified a gap, during programme validation, in the formal recording process for communication between the university and external regulatory bodies such as the Higher Education Council (HEC). There is a lack of clear and detailed records about interactions which reduces the university's ability to demonstrate compliance with external standards, potentially impacting the overall effectiveness of the Quality Assurance framework. Also, without a comprehensive record of interactions with external bodies, the university may not be able to identify areas for improvement, measure progress against external benchmarks, and ensure consistent adherence to regulatory requirements. This issue is further detailed in Standard 1.10 (Cyclical External Quality Assurance).

1.11 Overall, AOU has established a robust quality assurance system with a comprehensive policy framework, along with effective structures and processes for monitoring and feedback. Such robust QA system prepares AOU graduates for success in the job market, contributing to a more skilled and competitive workforce in the region. Accordingly, the review team concludes that Standard 1.1: Policy for quality assurance is **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 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) services, ensuring AOU's academic programmes meet the expectations and criteria set by the OU. The process encompasses a thorough validation and revalidation cycle every five years, alongside an annual programme appraisal, to maintain and enhance the quality and standards of academic programmes. The management of AOU's academic programmes involves a partnership between course teams, external examiners, and academic reviewers.

2.2 The processes and policies implemented by AOU for programme development and approval are effective and rigorous. The engagement with external examiners plays an important role in ensuring the quality and standards of programme delivery, assessment, and the continuous enhancement of programme quality. The structured feedback mechanism and the involvement of external advisory boards and benchmarking activities further contribute to the improvement of programmes, ensuring they remain relevant and competitive. The collaborative approach between AOU and OUVP facilitates a framework that is not only thorough in its validation processes but also flexible enough to incorporate necessary modifications or developments in a timely manner. This system ensures that AOU's academic standards are not only maintained but also aligned with international benchmarks.

2.3 AOU adopts an external benchmarking review that compares programme outcomes and structures with those of peer institutions or industry standards by gathering data from similar programmes at other institutions, industry reports, and best practices to identify areas where the programme can excel or requires improvement. Examples provided to the team showcase the scope of benchmarking activities undertaken, illustrating AOU's approach in leveraging external insights to refine its educational provision, ensuring they meet established standards and expectations.

2.4 AOU has established a commendable level of operational consistency across its eight branches concerning design and approval of programmes. This uniformity is largely attributed to the quality assurance processes mandated by the OUVP. The central oversight by the Vice President for Academic Affairs & Scientific Research (VPAA & SR) ensures that all academic matters, including programme approval and validation, adhere to the same standards across branches. The collaborative mechanism between AOU and OU, facilitated by the OUVP, ensures that curricula and assessments proposed by AOU undergo rigorous validation and approval processes. Such practices ensure that academic standards are uniformly applied in aspects of programme design, delivery and enhancement across branches. Moreover, the engagement of external examiners, appointed in consultation with VPAA & SR and respective academic programme teams, reinforces compliance with assessment standards, further ensuring consistency in academic quality and standards across all AOU branches.

2.5 Branch Self-Evaluation Documents (SEDs) provided evidence that AOU's programmes are not only aligned with international standards, through the OUVF, but also meet national and local educational standards. For instance, the programmes offered by AOU's Jordan branch follow the standards established by the Jordanian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, as well as the Higher Education Accreditation Commission. Similarly, the programmes at the Kuwait Branch adhere to the criteria set by the Private Universities Council in Kuwait, demonstrating alignment and compliance. The programmes at the Bahrain branch are registered and recognised by the Higher Education Council (HEC) of Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain. This dual alignment ensures that AOU's educational offerings are both globally competitive and locally relevant, meeting the specific educational quality standards and requirements of the countries in which they operate.

2.6 Beyond adhering to national and international standards, certain AOU programmes have achieved specialised professional accreditations, enhancing their recognition. Specifically, the IT and computing programmes at the Kuwait Branch have been accredited by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), while its business programmes have received accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). These accreditations signify the high quality and industry relevance of these programmes, aligning them with global professional standards.

2.7 Notably, AOU has also been awarded ISO 9001:2015 certification by the International Organisation for Standardisation, recognising the university's excellence in the provision of higher education services. This certification covers a broad range of services including planning, development, evaluation, administration and support. This achievement demonstrates AOU's commitment to maintaining high standards of quality and continuous improvement in its educational offerings and operational processes.

2.8 The programme specifications define the expected student workload, including a breakdown of credit hours. AOU uses a blended learning approach that combines traditional education with interactive learning. It uses 25% face-to-face sessions and 75% distance learning. Distance learning is delivered in many formats, such as recorded videos, learning materials on the Learning Management System (LMS), office hours, interactive online activities and quizzes. For instance, the BSc Graphic and Multimedia Design Technology programme delineates that 25% of the credit hours are allocated to face-to-face contact hours, with the remaining 75% dedicated to self-learning hours. Some branches provide 50% face-to-face teaching, in compliance with local regulations.

2.9 Undergraduate programmes at AOU consist of 96 credit hours of core modules (equivalent to 360 credits in the UK) and additional AOU mandatory modules, such as English and Arabic Communication Skills, along with electives. Students typically enrol on 8-21 credit hours per semester. Core modules are valued at either 4 or 8 credit hours, while AOU's mandatory or elective modules are valued at 3 credit hours each.

2.10 An 8-credit-hour module usually involves 2 hours of in-person sessions per week, which constitutes 25% of the learning time. However, an 8-credit-hour module is equivalent to 30 credits in the UK, which requires 300 notional hours. It is important to note that AOU's 25% face-to-face teaching refers to the 8 credit hours, not the 300 notional hours.

2.11 The team observed, during both in-person and online meetings with academic staff and students that there is confusion regarding the total notional hours required for students to complete each module and the total number of hours students spend, or believe they should spend, working on a module.

2.12 The team therefore **recommends** that AOU adds a new section to the student guide to provide more elaboration regarding AOU credit hours in reference to student workload.

This will help ensure students understand the notional learning time associated with each module and facilitate a clearer workload expectation. Also, AOU should ensure clear communication to new members of academic staff and students on the total study hours required to complete each module during induction.

2.13 Overall, AOU programmes are designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes. Programmes are designed by involving students and other stakeholders and benefit from external expertise and reference points. The University has a robust and formal institutional programme approval process. Consequently, the team conclude 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. Implementation of the Teaching and Learning Policy is the responsibility of the Vice President Academic Affairs and Scientific Research. 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. While the official policy may lack explicit references to student-centeredness, 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', which includes essential components such as face-to-face classes, virtual classes, digital content, asynchronous learning activities, assessment of learning outcomes.

3.3 The hybrid learning approach of AOU, which includes a minimal of 25% face-to-face sessions combined with self-directed distance learning, effectively enables students to engage with various pedagogical methods, supporting diverse learning paths and meeting a broad range of educational needs. The hybrid learning approach also encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the tutor. This is evidenced in the in-person and online meetings with students and teaching teams at multiple AOU branches.

3.4 The University regularly evaluates its teaching, learning and assessment policies through a combination of peer observation, student surveys, annual evaluation, and cyclical policy review. This ongoing commitment to quality assurance was evident in meetings with senior teams, academic staff, and support staff across multiple branches.

3.5 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 via 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 also 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, such as the BSc Data Science Programme Student Handbook, BSc Artificial Intelligence Student Handbook, MA English Literature Student Handbook, and MEd Instructional Technology Student Handbook, and during induction.

3.6 The University employs suitably qualified academic and professional services staff and has developed standing 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.

3.7 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 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.

3.8 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 well-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 of these sessions are 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 follow-up. 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.

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

3.10 Examination and Assessment Bylaws detail 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. The assessment cycle is overseen by the Faculties/Deanships of Academic Programmes and the Vice President for Academic Affairs & Scientific Research. The Final Exam Cross Branch Marking (CBM) sample report highlights that internal moderation of assessments is conducted within each Faculty to maintain consistency and quality of feedback across different branches.

3.11 The team reviewed samples of external examiners' reports and AOU responses to external examiners' reports. Additionally, the team observed final year project presentations during the review visit in Egypt. This evaluation focused on consistency of assessment and feedback quality. The team concluded that assessment at AOU is consistent, fairly applied to all students and conducted in accordance with the stated procedures and bylaws.

3.12 Students express satisfaction with the individual academic support offered by faculty members and their accessibility during their scheduled office hours. During the 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.

3.13 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 recognised as a **good practice**.

3.14 As a complex higher education provider with nine branches across diverse sovereign countries in the middle east and gulf region, the university maintains cohesive policies and processes, despite the complexities arising from variance in local regulations and other geopolitical and social factors. The university's mission is to provide high quality education for all society through a flexible educational model that transcends spatial and temporal barriers. This flexible, hybrid approach to learning, teaching and assessment, provides access to higher education for diverse learners, such as adult students and full-time workers, who may not benefit from conventional routes. The University's commitment to equal opportunities and widening access is recognised as a **good practice**.

3.15 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. These practices are broadly aligned with the requirements of Standard 1.3. Therefore, the review team concludes that 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 university has a clear institution-level admissions policy. This outlines the university's general approach to student recruitment and admission. While the university HQ provides oversight of the admissions process, principally via the Vice President Academic Affairs and Scientific Research, it is the Heads of Admission and Registration Departments at individual AOU branches who are operationally responsible for administering the admissions process.

4.2 Each AOU branch has their own local admissions policy taking into account local factors including any restrictions imposed by local in-country Ministries of Higher Education. For example, the local regulator in Lebanon imposes a restriction of 60 new postgraduate students over 2 years, per programme. The team reviewed a sample of the AOU branch-specific admissions policies and standard operating procedures, including those in place at AOU branches in Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, and found them to be in-line with AOU policy.

4.3 There is information on the AOU higher education offer online via the university's public website and via their social media channels. This includes information on programme structure and content, as well as programme-specific entry requirements. Generally, for bachelor-level programmes, the review team found that the minimum academic entry requirement was a high school certificate, whereas for its postgraduate programmes, the minimum academic entry requirement is normally a bachelor's degree in a related field. The team noted several errors and omissions in relation to public information, including information related to recruitment and admission on the university's website; these are discussed in Standard 1.8.

4.4 There are no minimum English language requirements for the university's undergraduate provision. The review team explored the rationale for this with senior staff and heard that it was a deliberate decision which, in line with its strategic mission, enabled the university to recruit students who may otherwise not pursue higher education. To support those with limited English abilities, new students undertake an English placement test and are then offered targeted language support. Further details in relation to the support offered to students, including language support, is provided in Standard 1.6.

4.5 At postgraduate level applicants are expected to demonstrate suitable levels of English language proficiency at the point of application, for example by TOEFL or IELTS certificate. During the review process, the team heard from several AOU branches that for postgraduate admission, evidence of proficiency in English language must be provided before enrolment, as it was an explicit entry requirement listed in the approved programme documentation. The only exception to this was AOU Egypt and AOU Lebanon where the review team was told that applicants can either present their IELTS/TOEFL certificates at enrolment or within the first semester of study. For AOU Lebanon, professional support staff estimated that only 50% of all new postgraduate students provided evidence of their English abilities at enrolment. The team concluded that this a significant lapse in the admissions operation at these AOU branches because there is a risk that students without sufficient English capabilities are being enrolled onto postgraduate programmes that they may never

finish. The review team **recommends** that the university puts in place measures to assure itself that all branches ensure applicants meet the entry requirements as outlined in the relevant approved programme documentation.

4.6 Students apply to AOU via a centralised online admission and registration system. Following submission, the university's multi-step verification and selection process starts including AOU branch staff and, depending on the local regulatory requirements; the in-country Ministry of Higher Education. For example, during meetings with professional support staff at AOU Bahrain, the team heard that once an application file has been prepared (including passport, high school certificate, and a medical report), it is sent to the Bahrain Higher Education Council (HEC) for verification. Once this is complete, HEC provide a student number necessary for student enrolment. Similar arrangements are in place at some other AOU branches. Successful applicants are sent an acceptance letter by email.

4.7 All new students are provided with a copy of the AOU Student Guide, OU Student Guide, and relevant programme-specific handbook. These documents are also available on the university's VLE, and some are available on the public website. There is also an induction programme for new students including workshops that are held at the beginning of each semester. Students the review team met during the review visit confirmed that they found these orientation and welcome sessions helpful.

4.8 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. Over the last 3 academic years, the university has approved a total of 1,445 requests by students to recognise prior learning: 562 in 2021-22, 587 in 2022-23, and 296 in 2023-24 (fall semester only). In considering the effectiveness of this process, the team reviewed a sample of student applications for recognition of prior learning which were processed in line with AOU policy. The team also met students and found that a small number had applied for the recognition of prior learning and reflected positively on their experience. These insights led the team to conclude the arrangements for RPL are suitable and work well.

4.9 There are processes to monitor and support student progression throughout their chosen programme of study. Chief among these is the academic advising and academic probation system, which is outlined in the AOU Academic Advising Policy. All students are assigned an academic advisor, whose role it is to be an ongoing source of advice for students about their academic goals and performance. The role of the academic advisor and operation of the academic advising system is reported in more detail in Standard 1.6. 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. Exploring this further during the review process, the team heard that students would be permitted to accrue up to 5 academic warnings, which could mean a student being on academic probation for around 1.5 years, before being withdrawn from the university. Notwithstanding the university's central mission to encourage non-traditional entrants into higher education, the review team considered allowing an enrolled student to sit in academic probation for up to 1.5 years before asking them to withdraw too lenient. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the university review the appropriateness of its current academic warning system to assure itself that it enables students to achieve successful outcomes.

4.10 Students enrolled at one AOU branch are permitted to permanently transfer to any other branch, enabling geographically mobile students to continue their studies without interruption. This is outlined in the Students' Transfer Bylaw. During the review process, the team met students enrolled at several different AOU branches many of whom expressed an interest in undertaking courses to other AOU branches. Given AOU's largely unique position

as the only large higher education provider in the Middle East with a presence in 9 countries, the review team could see opportunities for greater student mobility between branches. The review team also considered that similar opportunities could be made for teaching and professional staff to provide teaching and support provision at branches that are not their 'home branch'. The review team **recommends** therefore that the university consider expanding opportunities for students and members of staff to transfer (non-permanently) within and between AOU branches.

4.11 Towards the end of a student's programme, a recommendation by the relevant Faculty Examination Committee (FEC) and Central Examination Committee (CEC) will be made to AOU University Council, who will ultimately decide if an award is to be granted. The Bachelor's Degree Award Requirements Bylaws confirms that a bachelor's degree is only awarded to a student (1) once all courses listed in their study plan have been passed, and (2) their CGPA is not less than 2.00.

4.12 Students are provided with graduation certificates and transcripts following completion of their programme. The team reviewed a sample of graduation certificates and transcripts from several of AOU's Branches, including Kuwait, and concluded that the documentation explains the qualification gained, including the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.

4.13 Notwithstanding the recommendations in this Standard, the review team concludes that the processes for the admission of students, progression and arrangements for graduation and certification are broadly aligned with the requirements of Standard 1.4. Therefore, the review team concludes that 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 staffing resources is annually reviewed with needs identified by AOU Branches in a strategic plan maintained by the local Human Resources Department, ensuring that staffing provisions are aligned with branch-specific requirements.

5.3 AOU Branches are responsible for recruiting new staff members under the guidance of the local Human Resources Committee. However, the central University maintains involvement through the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research, and the relevant Faculty Dean.

5.4 The review panel recognised that some branches face challenges in attracting talent, often due to instability in the host country. For example, the IT and English Literature subject areas in Saudi Arabia have experienced difficulties in recruiting academic staff. 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 The university's approach to staff induction highlights a structured process aimed at ensuring academic staff are well-prepared for their roles upon recruitment. 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, 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 are required to attend induction for new programmes introduced in their branch, ensuring continuous learning and adaptation. This multifaceted induction process demonstrates the university's commitment to quality education delivery and the effective integration of staff into their academic and administrative ecosystems.

5.6 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 well-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 of these

sessions are 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 follow-up. 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.

5.7 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 for academic staff, annual appraisal and performance evaluation process. Local deans discuss staff development plans with tutors on an annual basis.

5.8 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.

5.9 Despite being primarily a teaching university, AOU is proactively enhancing its research capabilities by introducing research chairs and supporting research initiatives. This investment not only fosters a research culture among academic staff but also strengthens the connection between teaching and research, enriching the academic environment and benefiting both faculty and students. This is seen as **good practice** by the review team.

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 Branch Course Coordinator.

5.11 Good practices in teaching, learning, and assessment are shared through course committees, online workshops, collaborations with UKOU colleagues, and 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. These practices are broadly aligned with the requirements of Standard 1.5: Teaching staff, therefore, the review team conclude that the Standard 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 University operates across the Middle East with branches in Kuwait, Oman, Lebanon, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and Bahrain. For the most part, AOU branch buildings are all co-located on a single campus, however, there are exceptions to this including, for example, AOU Lebanon facilities, which are distributed throughout Lebanon.

6.2 The University has a wide range of learning and teaching resources. Classrooms, seminar rooms, and computer laboratories allow for the delivery of day-to-day in-person teaching. Specialist facilities, which the review team toured during in-person visits to the Kuwait, Bahrain and Egypt branches, support the teaching of the university's more specialised programmes. For example, in Kuwait, the review team visited the university's CISCO lab, which supports several programmes delivered by the Faculty of Computer Studies. In Egypt, the team toured the university's television studio and radio station that, when it is not being used for teaching, is available to both staff and students. The review team concluded that these specialist resources are a noteworthy asset of the university. Beyond this, the team met students and student representatives who confirmed that they are broadly pleased with the teaching and learning facilities available to them. The review team conclude therefore that the university's physical learning and teaching resources are appropriate in so far that they support and enable students to achieve both academically and professionally.

6.3 There are physical library facilities on each campus providing a focal point for students looking for textbooks, access to journal articles and other materials. AOU also subscribes to several journal databases including ProQuest and EBSCO providing their students with access to a range of online materials complementing physical resources. During the student assessment period, the panel found that the library facilities tended to concentrate on supplying more generalised support materials for students, for example, support for developing academic skills. Materials for taught programmes were primarily stored on the university's VLE. The review team toured several of the University's library facilities, including those in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Egypt. The team found the facilities open, well-provisioned, and the library staff welcoming. The rules for student borrowing varies by AOU branch. For example, in Egypt, undergraduate students can borrow up to 1 book for 2 weeks whereas, in Kuwait, they can borrow up to 2 books for 15 days. In meetings during the review process, students and student representatives reflected positively on their experience of using the library resources highlighting the university's online resources as being particularly helpful. Overall, the review team concluded that the university's library facilities, including the university's e-library resources, are high-quality and staffed appropriately.

6.4 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. The LMS is the core system that connects students to their tutors and enables the distance learning aspect. In practice, the LMS is split into two: the central LMS, and the branch LMS. The central LMS, which is maintained by AOU Kuwait, is the central repository containing university policies, procedures, and regulations in addition to approved programme documentation. By comparison, the branch LMS, which is maintained by each AOU branch, contains information relevant only to staff and students working in the branch. Beyond this, the university's student information system

(SIS) allows students to view their schedule, attendance, grades and study plan. During the review process, the team received a demonstration of the SIS and considered it a helpful resource allowing students to access information about their progress and studies. An induction to the University's IT systems is provided to students upon enrolment and students, with whom the review team met during the review process, told them that they found this helpful.

6.5 All students are assigned an academic advisor, whose role is to be an ongoing source of advice for students about their academic goals and performance. There are established processes for the recruitment of academic advisors, with training and induction provided by individual AOU branches. As outlined in Standard 1.4, academic advisors are tasked with assisting students in making decisions about their educational and career objectives. During the review process, at each AOU branch the team met academic staff undertaking the advisory role. They confirmed the review teams broad understanding of the academic advisor role and confirmed that training and support is provided on an ongoing basis.

6.6 Students failing to make adequate academic progress are placed on academic probation and referred to their academic advisor for targeted support. In 2023-24, of the AOU's total 38,597 continuing students, 2,019 were in academic probation (approximately 5%). Students on academic probation are meant to work with their academic advisor to review their course workload to ensure that their CGPA improves sufficiently that they can complete their programme. Exploring the effectiveness of the academic probation system, the review team heard various numbers and percentages of students who left academic probation. In meetings with academic staff during a virtual visit to AOU Oman, the team was told around 30% of students eventually leave academic probation. Senior staff at AOU Egypt indicated that around 50% of their students improve sufficiently enough to leave academic probation. From these conversations, and other data provided by AOU on the effectiveness of academic probation at other AOU branches, the team concluded that the academic probation system does work for some students. However, the review team would encourage AOU to maintain some degree of central oversight to assure itself that academic probation continues to be effective in the future.

6.7 During the review process, the team explored the operation of the academic advising system and found that staff employed at different AOU branches had vastly different experiences principally in terms of the number of students they were asked to academically advise. The team found huge variations both in staff:student ratios between faculties within a single AOU branch and within single faculties across multiple AOU branches. For example, in Lebanon, a full-time member of staff in the Faculty of Education is expected to academically advise up to 50 students. However, this ratio is 1:60 in the Faculty of Languages, 1:80 in the Faculty of Computing, and 1:140 in the Faculty of Business. Looking at the variation within a single faculty across multiple AOU branches, the review team found the Faculty of Computing Sciences particularly interesting. For Faculty of Computing Sciences staff in Egypt, there is a 1:25 ratio. However, in Bahrain, this is 1:80 and, in KSA, this is 1:300. The team conclude that the variability in staff:student ratios presented a risk to the student academic experience because students are likely to have very different supervisory experiences based on their programme, faculty, and AOU branch. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the university review its current arrangements for academic advising to ensure that there is an equitable academic experience for all students.

6.8 Each AOU branch has a Learning Support Center, which typically provides one-to-one academic support in addition to language learning services. With respect to language learning services, the Faculty of Language Studies in each AOU branch currently operates an English Writing Centre, which providing intensive writing support to students. There is a separate English-Speaking Centre, which aims to enhance students' English-speaking skills.

Some AOU branches, such as AOU Jordan have a bookstore on campus that offers textbooks and other supplies to students. There is some careers support and guidance provided through the Student Affairs Department; however, this is not their primary function. In collaboration with Alumni Affairs, the Student Affairs Department provides current students with a list of vacancies offered by employers in the market with pre-existing links to the local AOU Branch. Providing wrap-around care, each of the AOU Branches include an infirmary or clinic, which provides healthcare services to staff and students and is operating in agreement with the in-country Ministry of Health. As part of the Student Affairs Department, the University offers psychological counselling to students to support their social, emotional, mental and physiological well-being.

6.9 During the review process, the team had the opportunity to tour the facilities in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Egypt, and this included the branch support services. While the review team was generally impressed by the range of services available to students, the team was concerned by the relatively small number of professional support staff in core functions, for example, student counselling. Here, the review 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 an entire AOU branch. The team made similar observations in relation to careers support. While academic staff do provide some insights into what it is like to work industry and there is naturally professional skills development embedded within the AOU curriculum, some branches do not have dedicated career advisory services. Considering the applied nature of AOU's programmes, the review team **recommends** that the university considers expanding not only the services that they provide but the number of staff providing those services including for student counselling and careers advice.

6.10 The review team concludes that the university has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and that, while the staffing for the university's student support services could be expanded, there are a range of suitable services in place. Therefore, the review team concludes 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 the effective management and continuous improvement of its academic programmes.

7.2 AOU demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive data collection through its use of the Annual Programme Evaluation (APE) template. This standardised approach captures both quantitative and qualitative data on programme performance, including student demographics (gender, nationality), disability statistics, academic progression, achievements, incidents of academic misconduct, and disciplinary cases. Branch submissions showcase the effectiveness of the APE, such as the reports from Oman and Bahrain, highlighting their ability to gather essential data for continuous improvement.

7.3 The Student Information System (SIS) is a valuable asset providing a centralised and authenticated source for recording student data. This data is instrumental for programme coordinators, allowing them to analyse trends, conduct annual programme evaluations, and develop action plans for continuous improvement. This data-driven approach ensures that programme delivery is constantly evolving 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 could lead to frustration and potentially escalate student complaints.

7.4 Programme performance evaluation is further supported by feedback surveys from tutors and students, conducted online and utilising the Likert scale for measurable inferences. Several campuses provided concrete examples of how data analysis led to specific programme-level changes. For example:

- The Bahrain branch utilised student surveys to identify the need for shorter teaching sessions, leading to a direct improvement in student engagement. Additionally, analysing student comments revealed a need for stronger foundational math skills, prompting the creation of a math foundation course to address this gap.
- Kuwait branch introduced computer-based accounting following feedback from students, tutors, and external examiners. This helps to ensure programmes remain current and relevant to industry needs and student learning preferences.
- The Oman branch improved Wi-Fi bandwidth following student feedback.

7.5 Monitoring of data and information starts at the branch level, with programme coordinators required to compile comprehensive reports on programme performance at the end of each semester. These use information from the student surveys. The Quality Assurance units at each branch play a crucial role in providing statistical data from SIS for report generation. These reports are then consolidated and assessed by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Department and Headquarter for overarching programme performance evaluation and identification of areas for improvement.

7.6 The Annual Institutional Overview Report conducts a comprehensive analysis of data at the institutional strategic level. Combined with insights from surveys and programme evaluations, this analysis is critical for senior committee meetings, where key data points are

scrutinised. These discussions pave the way for the development and implementation of enhancement strategies, informing strategic decision-making across the institution.

7.7 AOU engages various stakeholders in its data-driven decision-making processes. This broadens the range of perspectives considered and ensures that programme improvements are relevant to the needs of the wider university community. This engagement is shown through these examples:

- **Advisory Boards:** Branches have advisory boards that meet periodically to discuss programme quality and relevance. Deans approach relevant individuals to join these boards as illustrated at the review team's meetings at the Bahrain branch.
- **Student Councils:** The Oman branch showed the review team action plans for improvement which are shared with student councils for feedback and to ensure student needs are addressed.

7.8 AOU demonstrates a strength in its commitment to curriculum relevance by actively incorporating stakeholder feedback into programme content across its campuses. The stakeholders might include local industry or alumni. This helps to ensure programmes cater to the specific needs of students and industry in each country served by AOU. For example, at the Lebanon branch, the inclusion of Lebanese taxation within business courses exemplifies this localisation approach. This responsive approach provides graduates with the specific knowledge and skills most relevant to their chosen field within their local job market, ultimately increasing their employability and career success.

7.9 AOU prioritises the reliability and validity of its data collection processes, as demonstrated at the Saudi Arabia branch where confidential student surveys are used across its campuses. This dedication to data integrity enables AOU to make informed decisions and continuously improves its programmes and services.

7.10 While AOU demonstrates a commitment to information management through established practices for data collection, analysis, and utilisation in programme improvement, the review team identified a lack of clarity in how AOU gathers information beyond student satisfaction-based surveys to assess the effectiveness of learning resources and student support services. Without data on student experience of these services, it's challenging to be sure students have the necessary tools and support for their studies. The review team therefore **recommends** that AOU creates a system to allow deeper analysis to identify trends and areas needing improvement within the learning resources and student support services. Creating targeted action plans to address identified issues and continuously monitoring the effectiveness of implemented changes through follow-up surveys or focus groups will help ensure students' needs are met.

7.11 AOU recognises the importance of alumni engagement as evidenced by using alumni surveys at some of its branches. These surveys provide valuable insights into graduate experiences and career paths, informing programme development and improvement. This commitment to alumni engagement demonstrates a positive approach to data collection and analysis. However, the review team identified a lack of a systematic process for tracking graduate career paths across all branches. This data is essential to understand how well AOU programmes prepare students for their chosen careers. Tracking graduate career outcomes would not only inform programme adjustments and demonstrate programme 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 alumni career paths (including job placement rates, employer satisfaction, alignment of their AOU education with their chosen fields, etc.) across all branches.

7.12 Overall, the Review Team conclude that AOU demonstrates a well-structured information management system, characterised by well-documented processes, diverse data sources, and regular evaluations. This comprehensive approach ensures high programme delivery standards and facilitates continuous improvement. Accordingly, the team concluded 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 their website and other channels, including social media. Course fees are also communicated via the university's main and branch websites. The university engages in local in-person events, such as school visits, educational exhibitions, and career days.

8.2 According to the University's Data Protection Policy and the Policy on Dissemination of Information, 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 available online on dedicated faculty pages with individual courses listed in an online course catalogue. As the main place for academic information, the team reviewed the course catalogues for all faculties across each of the AOU branches. This sampling highlighted that the consistency of information provided for each course varied significantly, by programme, faculty, and AOU branch. Specifically, the team found that some courses were missing information on necessary pre-requisites courses, others did not list how many credit hours students undertaking the course could expect to accrue. A large number of courses were missing course descriptions and objectives. Representative examples from a sample of AOU branch websites include: Research Methods (EFL502, AOU Bahrain); Average Accounting 1 and 2 (ACCT320 and ACCT322, AOU Kuwait); Graphic Design 1 and Digital Editing 1 (ELM204 and ELM205, AOU Egypt) and, International Audit Standards and Accounting for Banks and Financial Institutions (ACCT412 and ACT350, AOU KSA). A particularly egregious example of missing information was found by looking at the Faculty of Media course catalogue on the AOU Jordan website where none of the approximate 75 courses listed included any information on course hours, objectives or outcomes. Where this information was provided, the review team identified a small number of cases where the course objectives and course outcomes belonged to other entirely unrelated courses.

8.4 The review team also explored individual programme pages on different AOU branch websites to check the accuracy of information beyond the course catalogue. Here, the team found further inconsistencies. For some programmes, the approved programme documentation was uploaded and clearly sign-posted, for other programmes only the 'academic plan', which is a list of recommended courses, was uploaded. For example, the team could not find the approved course documentation for the Bachelor's in Business Studies at Kuwait or the Bachelor's in Information Technology and Computing at Egypt. For a small number of programme pages that did include the approved programme documentation, the team noted it was actually the previous specification published that was several years out of validation. For example, the BA English Language and Literature at Bahrain showed online the 2017 programme specification despite having being revalidated in 2022. While some programme pages listed the teaching and learning methods to be used, other programme pages included limited or no information.

8.5 For completeness, the review team also reviewed a sample of non-programme related pages on each AOU branch website. Here, the team generally found fewer errors. Information on student life and the university's strategy were generally of high-quality. However, the team did identify some errors in relation to the admissions requirements. For

example, on the AOU Egypt branch website, the team noticed that on the postgraduate admissions page that while the Master's in Cyber Security and Forensics had an IELTS requirement of 6.0, for the other programmes (Master's in English Literature and MBA) the IELTS requirement was 6.5. Querying this with professional support staff during the review visit to the Egypt branch, the team was told that all postgraduate programmes had the same IELTS requirement (6.0), and the website was wrong. Based on these observations, the review team concluded that the issues of inconsistency in online information extended far beyond individual programme pages and the course catalogue.

8.6 Throughout the review process, the team highlighted in meetings to staff with responsibility for the website the many issues it had identified to try and understand what quality control mechanisms were in place to ensure that the information published online was accurate and up-to date. Responding to question the university highlighted several control mechanisms. At the Kuwait HQ level, the review team were aware of a Website Committee, which includes representation from each AOU branch, and which investigates any reported issues relating to the websites. In practice, minutes of this committee only revealed operational matters being discussed, such as how faculty can update their online profiles. The team was also told that each AOU branch has a Webmasters Committee, which is responsible for dealing with more operational problems, like uploading and deleting documents from the branch website. In some AOU branches this committee is also responsible for exercising content control; however, the review team could not see clear evidence of this working. In addition, the team was told that both the HQ and AOU branch-based teams conduct regular audits of HQ and AOU branch websites. However, evidence showing this happening consistently and systematically was lacking.

8.7 During the assessment period, it became clear that while members of staff generally knew the process for adding new information to the AOU and AOU branch websites, normally via the local or HQ IT department, understanding of the policy and procedure for the ongoing checking of published materials was less well-understood. Further, where procedures were in place, they were not implemented consistently. This ultimately led the review team to identify numerous errors on the AOU main and branch websites which were not limited to any single programme, faculty or branch. These errors undermined confidence to such a degree that when highlighted in meetings during the review visit, senior staff told the review team that some branch websites were obsolete or outdated. Towards the end of the review, the team was told a new published information policy was in development. However, given that this new policy was neither approved nor implemented at the time of the review concluding, it was not possible for the review team to assess its impact.

8.8 Following the IQR 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 develops 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 submitted further evidence 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 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: On-going 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 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) process, integral to its quality monitoring and periodic review of programmes. Conducted every semester, the AMR is crucial for maintaining branch and institutional quality standards. 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 leads to actionable plans to address identified challenges.

9.2 AOU utilises a well-defined cyclical monitoring and enhancement process through the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) process. This ensures regular programme evaluation and improvement opportunities. The AMR comprehensively assesses various aspects of academic programmes and administrative functions, covering both branches and the institution.

9.3 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 document submissions included examples that showcase the application of this template in the annual monitoring process, illustrating its effectiveness in capturing essential data for continuous improvement.

9.4 The monitoring process includes an audit of teaching and learning aspects, documented through templates, questionnaires, and feedback records. The data is analysed to evaluate compliance with quality standards and the effectiveness of programme delivery.

9.5 Findings from the AMR inform a detailed action plan aligned with AOU's mission, vision, and strategic goals, ensuring adherence to quality standards. Programme Coordinators and Quality Assurance coordinators at branches play a critical role in completing analytical reports that contribute to a holistic view of quality across AOU.

9.6 The President's office, along with the Quality Assurance and Accreditation department, and the 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 OUPV.

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

9.8 AOU demonstrates a positive commitment to stakeholder engagement in its programme review processes, by involving internal stakeholders and external validation

partners, ensuring a comprehensive review process that incorporates diverse perspectives. The review team complement internal efforts through mechanisms like external examining, revalidation by the Open University Validation Partnership (OUVP), and accreditation by external bodies.

9.9 AOU's programme monitoring process leverages a data-driven approach through audits, questionnaires, and feedback mechanisms. The internal review and monitoring processes are consistent with the quality assurance framework set forth in the university strategy and policies. To enhance data utilisation and ensure effective analysis, AOU may consider implementing training programmes for faculty and staff, equipping them with the necessary skills and specific tools for data collection. This includes effectively analysing and utilising data from Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) and course reports.

9.10 AOU demonstrates a commitment to continuous programme improvement through its use of Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) to identify programme strengths and weaknesses. These AMRs serve as a valuable foundation for developing action plans to address any identified issues. However, the review team identified a lack of details on how programme weaknesses are translated into concrete and actionable steps within the action plans. Without clear guidelines for setting measurable goals and monitoring progress, it's challenging to ensure these plans effectively address identified concerns. To close this gap and ensure that action plans serve as effective tools for programme improvement, the review team **recommends** that AOU develops a comprehensive framework for action plan creation. This framework should incorporate clear guidelines for setting measurable goals and monitoring progress. For example, the framework could outline specific steps for translating programme review findings into actionable items, establish SMART goal criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound), and define clear processes for tracking progress and adjusting as needed.

9.11 Overall, the Review Team conclude that AOU documented processes and policies for on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes are appropriate, and the use of various data sources and cyclical evaluations reflects a commitment to quality assurance. Though opportunities remain for further enhancement, the review team concluded 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 Open University in the UK's agreement with AOU requires that AOU undergoes a cyclical process of institutional approval/re-approval in addition to programme validation/re-validation. This process includes a rigorous evaluation of AOU's infrastructure, administration, information systems, and student support services. AOU was most recently re-approved at the institutional level in October 2022 (which was its fifth re-approval).

10.2 AOU's involvement in QAA International Quality Review (IQR) is another example of its participation in external quality assurance. In preparation for the IQR process, the university prepared self-evaluation documentation against Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

10.3 Beyond this, the university is keen to acquire accreditation from subject-specific professional bodies. At a programme-level, AOU Kuwait has achieved professional accreditation by the UK Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET) for its CEng programmes delivered by the Faculty of Computer Studies. In meetings with senior staff at several AOU branches, the team heard of specific plans to acquire further subject-specific accreditation. For example, the AOU Oman and Bahrain branches are currently exploring the possibility of business programme accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The review team also heard plans for future potential accreditation of the university's cyber security-related programmes, however these were still at an early stage of development.

10.4 The University has secured ISO 9001:2015 certification by the International Organisation for Standardisation. AOU is currently going through the process of renewal.

10.5 AOU branches are also subject to accreditation, monitoring and oversight by the local in-country regulator. This varies between country, with some AOU branches only subject to institutional accreditation, whereas others are subject to both institutional and programme-level accreditation. Recent institutional re-accreditation events include AOU Oman (Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education), AOU Bahrain (Higher Education Council in Bahrain) and AOU Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (National Centre for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation).

10.6 The review team explored the challenges of working across multiple countries with different regulatory frameworks. In meetings with senior staff, the team was told that one of the biggest challenges the university faces is ensuring that the approval (and reapproval) of its programmes by in-country regulators aligns with the regular cycle of validation (and revalidation) of its programmes by the university's awarding partner, the UK OU. For some programmes, the review team found evidence that this harmonisation was not always working well. For example, in the Faculty of Language Studies, the review team found that two versions of the Bachelor's in English Language and Literature programme were being run at the same time. The current validated version (from 2022) is being delivered in AOU Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Oman; however, the now out-of-validation 2017 version of the programme is still being run in AOU Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. In the Faculty of Business, at least one track of the Bachelor of Business Studies programme is currently being run in each AOU branch. While most AOU branches are offering the recently revalidated 2022 version of the Bachelor of Business Studies programme, AOU Bahrain is currently offering the 2017 version of the programme.

10.7 The review team highlighted that AOU is running some of its programmes that are out of validation; in some cases, by several years. It is possible that students being taught the updated syllabus are being taught more up-to-date and current material by comparison to students being taught from the old syllabus. The review team were informed that the difference between the 2017 and 2022 versions of these undergraduate programmes was marginal. The rough estimation provided was that around a third of courses/modules changed in minor ways between the 2017 and 2022 versions of the programme. The university also made the point that student assessment tasks between the two versions of these programmes are the same. Nevertheless, the review team concluded that at least the differences to the taught component of the concerned programmes may be significant. The fact therefore that students are being taught old versions of several programmes remains a concern.

10.8 The team discovered further revalidation/approval issues in the Faculty of Computer Sciences specifically relating to the Bachelor's in Information Technology and Computing programme, which is an OU validated programme, revalidated in 2021. Despite being revalidated several years ago, the 2021 version of the Bachelor's in Information Technology and Computing is yet to be approved for delivery by the local Ministry of Higher Education in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The Ministries have been made aware of the programme changes but have not formally approved the changes. Nevertheless, the AOU Bahrain and Saudi Arabia branches are delivering the new version of the Bachelor's in Information Technology and Computing programme (which has been revalidated by the OU, but not approved by the local Ministry) rather than running the old version of the programme (which is now out of validation, but is technically approved by the Ministry for delivery). The risk of this approach is that the Ministry in Bahrain and/or Saudi Arabia could refuse to recognise the qualification of those students.

10.9 The review team is clear in its view that the university is beholden to the policies and procedures of individual Ministries, in the same way that it must follow the regulations of its awarding partner. Nevertheless, the team are also clear that the university has a responsibility to do everything it possibly can to ensure that the university's schedule of validation/revalidation does not drift away from the cycle of local approval, as appears to have been the case. The team concluded there requires to be a significant tightening up of internal processes and procedures to ensure that programmes are only offered to students once full Ministry sign-off has been obtained, and that this is appropriately and formally recorded. This will require the university to develop a more robust process by which it can track the validation and approval of programmes across all faculties and AOU branches centrally and make decisions to ensure local requirements are fully complied with.

10.10 Following the IQR visit, the review team concluded that Standard 1.10: Cyclical external quality assurance was at the time **not met** but was capable of being met on the condition that the university develops and fully implements a system of control by which it can plan, track, and follow-up on programme accreditation and approval activities.

10.11 The University subsequently submitted a response and supporting documentation which was scrutinised to determine whether the Condition set had been met. The findings are set out in paragraphs 10.12-10.15.

10.12 The condition in this Standard arose from the review team's concerns that the AOU was continuing to offer programmes that had been reviewed and changed by the OU but which had not yet been approved by the relevant approval body in the branch country in which it was offered. Furthermore, due to different practices across the countries the AOU works in, there were cases where two versions of the same programme were being offered across AOU's portfolio. The team also highlighted an example where an updated version of

a programme was being delivered by two branches prior to having the approval of the regulatory body in the relevant country.

10.13 The documentation provided to address the condition included a letter from the OU which confirmed that the AOU is permitted to continue to deliver existing versions of programmes in cases where delivery of a reviewed version has not yet been approved by the relevant ministry. The OU also confirmed that AOU provides quarterly reports on the status of the validated programmes, indicating that the AOU is maintaining appropriate data on the status of its programmes.

10.14 AOU's response to the condition stated that it had established monitoring mechanisms with a defined schedule for programme approval and accreditation and that approval and accreditation activities are tracked by the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the deans of respective programmes in the head office. This is supported by the Local Accreditation Status document provided, which covers accreditation activity institution wide and details accreditation activity and status for the branches. The document includes current accreditation status, details of the responsible accrediting body, dates of accreditation, outcomes and actions, and details of dates for the next update. This appears to be a comprehensive record of branch approval and accreditation activity.

10.15 To fully address the condition, AOU has also developed an additional mechanism for tracking programme accreditation at branch level. This sets out a staged process which includes potential intervention activity starting with follow-up with the relevant ministry, then potential further intervention from the relevant Dean, and finally from senior management at headquarters level. This tracking approach was not supported by guidance on its use and the review team was not able to consider the tracking template in implementation, however the use and impact of this document will be further considered at mid-cycle review.

10.16 Condition 2 has been addressed and the ESG Standard 1.8 is now **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, which 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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