

ASSURING QUALITY OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AMONG HEIS IN THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

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ABSTRACT: *The Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR) is part of the National Authority of Qualification and Quality Assurance for Education and Training (QQA) that was officially established in the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2008. Its primary objective is to enhance the quality of higher education in the Kingdom by conducting reviews into the quality assurance arrangements of higher education institutions (HEIs) and identifying areas in need of improvement. Other than institutional reviews, DHR conducts programme reviews which are a specialized exercise that focuses on the quality assurance arrangements within existing learning programmes within a college, and evaluates whether such programmes meet international standards as well as make recommendations for improving them. Cycle 1 of DHR programme reviews started in 2009 where programmes were reviewed one after another. In 2012, Programmes-within-College Reviews was introduced which has since been referred to as Cycle 2. Under this cycle, all programmes offered within a college are reviewed simultaneously. Reviews are carried out using four Indicators each of which has a number of sub-indicators and which are in line with international good practice. The Review Reports, developed as a result of the reviews, contain judgements about whether or not each of the programmes meets the requirements of each indicator as well as make recommendations for the enhancement of the programmes. This paper looks into the performance of HEIs in terms of their academic programmes vis-à-vis the review reports: foremost, by looking into the number of programmes which have received satisfactory judgement by DHR; secondly, by analyzing the HEIs' performance in terms of review judgments ('Confidence', 'Limited Confidence', or 'No Confidence') against the number of reviewed programmes as well as the number of programme offerings; and finally, by looking into their capacity-building requirements, offering a thorough analysis of their quality assurance needs. Based on DHR Programmes-within-College Review reports, to date there are 40 academic programmes among the 11 HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain which have been given 'Confidence' judgment. It is significant to note that such figure translates to only 69.44% performance on the part of the HEIs considering the total number of programmes which have been reviewed so far. It is likewise interesting to note that the 40 'Confidence' programmes constitute 37.36% only of the total number of programmes offered by the institutions. Furthermore, looking more closely into the review reports, it could be concluded that the HEIs need to pay closer attention to Indicators 2 and 3, which are Efficiency of the Programme and Academic Standards of the Graduates, respectively; though careful consideration should be given to the two other indicators as well, particularly The Learning Programme and Effectiveness of Quality Management & Assurance, inasmuch as the HEIs have neither demonstrated excellent performance at these criteria.*

KEYWORDS: Confidence, Limited Confidence, No Confidence, the Learning Programme, Efficiency of the Programme, Academic Standards of the Graduates, and Effectiveness of Quality Management & Assurance

INTRODUCTION

To meet the need to have a robust external quality assurance system in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR) has developed and is implementing two external quality review processes, namely: Institutional Reviews and Programmes Reviews which together give confidence in Bahrain's higher education system nationally, regionally and internationally.

DHR started assuring the quality of the Kingdom's academic programmes when it introduced Cycle 1 Programme Reviews among its HEIs in 2009. Then in 2012, Programmes-within-College Reviews was introduced, referred to as Cycle 2. Programmes-within-College Reviews are specialized exercises that focus on the academic standards of each programme in a particular major disciplinary area within a college, as well as the delivery and the quality assurance arrangements within such learning programmes.

Programmes-within-College Reviews have three main objectives: (1) to provide decision-makers with evidence-based judgements on the quality of learning programmes; (2) to support the development of internal quality assurance processes with information on emerging good practices and challenges, evaluative comments and continuing improvement; and (3) to enhance the reputation of Bahrain's higher education regionally and internationally (DHR Programme Review Handbook, 2009).

The four indicators that are used to measure whether or not a programme meets international standards are as follows: (1) The Learning Programme, (2) Efficiency of the Programme, (3) Academic Standards of the Graduates, and (4) Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance.

The Review Panel states in the Review Report whether the programme satisfies each Indicator. If the programme satisfies all four Indicators, the concluding statement will state that there is '*Confidence*' in the programme. If two or three Indicators are satisfied, including Indicator 1, the programme will receive a '*Limited Confidence*' judgement. If one or no Indicator is satisfied, or Indicator 1 is not satisfied, the judgement will be '*No Confidence*'.

After analyzing the performance of HEIs in terms of their academic programmes vis-à-vis the review reports, and in view of today's more internationalized sector, it would be a good idea to draft Bahrain's University Ranking as a measure of the institutions' global competitiveness. With students and academics facing greater options and opportunities, such ranking would necessitate HEIs to pay closer attention to policy decisions. Education has become a top priority in emerging economies and many are looking to form partnerships with world leading universities (Angerilli, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

This paper attempts to evaluate the performance of the HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain in terms of the quality of their academic programmes in relation to the review reports published by DHR. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the national ranking of the HEIs based on their performance in Programmes-within-College Reviews measured in terms of the number of programmes with '*Confidence*' judgement?

2. What is the national ranking of the HEIs based on their review performance against the number of programme reviews conducted by DHR, the number of reviewed programmes, as well as against the total number of the institutions' programme offerings?
3. How did the HEIs perform in the Programmes-within-College Reviews across the four quality indicators?
4. Which programmes and disciplinary areas constitute most of the programmes with 'Confidence' judgement that are being offered by the HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain?

Limitation of the Study

There were 14 HEIs operating in the Kingdom of Bahrain during the period covered in this study. This research, however, included only 11 of which because three of these institutions had shut down before completing the second cycle of programme reviews. XYZ University and YZA University (not their real names) had undergone Cycle 1 programme reviews, but both HEIs had decided to cease operation before the introduction of Programmes-within-College Reviews (Cycle 2) in 2009; as such both have been excluded in this study. XYX University stopped its operation in 2008, while YZA voluntarily shut down the following year. Moreover, KLM University (not its real name), has been likewise excluded because it ceased operation in 2013 when its license was revoked by the Higher Education Council following a closure order by the courts.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are operationally defined in light of the DHR Programme Review guidelines:

Academic Standards of the Graduates refers to Indicator 3 which expects that "The programme demonstrates fitness for purpose in terms of mission, relevance, curriculum, pedagogy, intended learning outcomes and assessment."

'Confidence' refers to the judgement given by a review panel if the programme satisfies all four Indicators, specifically: (1) The Learning Programme, (2) Efficiency of the Programme, (3) Academic Standards of the Graduates, and (4) Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance.

Effectiveness of Quality Management & Assurance refers to Indicator 4 which expects that "The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance, give confidence in the programme."

Efficiency of the Programme refers to Indicator 2 which expects that "The programme is efficient in terms of the admitted students, the use of available resources - staffing, infrastructure and student support."

'Limited Confidence' refers to the judgement given by a review panel if the programme satisfies two or three Indicators, including Indicator 1.

'No Confidence' refers to the judgement given by a review panel if the programme satisfies only one or no Indicator at all, or if Indicator 1 is not satisfied.

The Learning Programme refers to Indicator 1 which expects that "The programme demonstrates fitness for purpose in terms of mission, relevance, curriculum, pedagogy, intended learning outcomes and assessment."

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data used in this study were based on DHR Programmes-within-College Review Reports, which have been published in the QAA website starting 2011. In analyzing the performance of the HEIs, and for purposes of interpreting data, each HEI has been allotted one (1) point for every programme with 'Confidence' judgment; half a point (.5) for every programme with 'Limited Confidence' judgment; and no point (0) for each programme which got 'No Confidence' judgment.

A total of 89 DHR Review Reports have been included in this study which are available online via <http://www.qqa.gov.bh/En/Reports/Pages/default.aspx>. These reports relate to 65 programmes which have been reviewed as of this writing, most of which are under Cycle 2.

There were two evaluation judgments considered in each review report: first is the overall judgment which says that a programme has 'Confidence', 'Limited Confidence', or 'No Confidence' considering the four indicators; and second, is the judgment given based on each indicator which says that the programme either "satisfies" or "doesn't satisfy" a particular indicator.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1. Ranking of HEIs Based on Number of Programmes with 'Confidence' Judgment (Cycle 2)

Name of HEI	Number of Programmes with 'Confidence' Judgment	Rank
1. ABC University	0	9 th
2. CDE University	3	6 th
3. EFG University	6	3 rd
4. GHI University	10	1 st
5. IJK University	2	8 th
6. MNO University	0	-
7. OPQ University	4	4 th
8. QRS University	4	4 th
9. STU University	3	6 th
10. UVW University	0	9 th
11. WXY University	8	2 nd

*Names of HEIs withheld to protect their privacy and interest

The above table shows that GHI University is ranked first among 11 HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain under Cycle 2 of DHR Programme Reviews. The said university is a private institution which started operating in 2002. Among its 10 'Confidence' programmes include two master's degrees: one in Information Technology & Computer Science, and the other in Business Administration. The other eight programmes are undergraduate degrees in Physiotherapy; Information Technology; Distributed Systems & Multimedia; Accounting and Finance; Banking and Finance; Economics and Finance; Management and Marketing; and Management Information Systems.

Next in rank is the state-run WXY University with eight programmes that have 'Confidence' judgment by DHR. Such programmes include a master's degree (MBA), and seven undergraduate degrees, specifically: Computer Engineering; Computer Science; Infrastructure Systems; Accounting; Banking & Finance; Business Management; and Marketing.

It is alarming to note that three universities have no programme at all that has 'Confidence' judgment as of this writing, namely, ABC University, MNO University, and UVW University. It should be noted, however, that MNO University has not undergone any programme review yet under Cycle 2; as such it has not been assigned a rank.

This situation presents a dilemma as far as higher education opportunity in Bahrain is concerned. If students, under normal circumstances, should register in a programme that has passed DHR quality review, then Bahraini students have limited choices for quality programmes among the HEIs in the kingdom.

The following table reveals the performance of the HEIs against the number of quality reviews conducted by DHR, both under cycle 1 and cycle 2.

Table 2. Ranking of HEIs Based on Review Performance against Number of Quality Reviews Conducted (Cycles 1 & 2)

Name of HEI	Number of Quality Reviews	Judgment Received			% of Performance	Rank
		*C	*LC	*NC		
1. ABC University	11	0	1	10	4.55%	11 th
2. CDE University	5	4	1	0	90%	4 th
3. EFG University	14	8	6	0	78.57%	6 th
4. GHI University	13	13	0	0	100%	1 st
5. IJK University	2	2	0	0	100%	1 st
6. MNO University	7	0	1	6	7.14%	10 th
7. OPQ University	8	5	2	1	75%	7 th
8. QRS University	5	4	0	1	80%	5 th
9. STU University	6	4	0	2	66.67%	8 th
10. UVW University	7	1	4	2	42.86%	9 th
11. WXY University	11	11	0	0	100%	1 st
TOTAL	89	59.5 pts			66.85%	

NOTE:

- *C – ‘*Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned one (1) point for purposes of % computation)
*LC – ‘*Limited Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned half (.5) point for purposes of % computation)
*NC – ‘*No Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned (0) point for purposes of % computation)

A total of 89 programme reviews has been conducted so far, among the 11 HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Collectively, the HEIs have not performed well enough as suggested by the 66.85% performance. However, taken individually, three universities have performed excellently, getting ‘*Confidence*’ judgement in all their academic programmes that have been reviewed, namely, GHI University, IJK University, and WXY University. Both GHI and IKJ are private institutions, while WXY is government-owned.

On the other hand, three universities performed very poorly, either getting through with only one programme or none among their programmes reviewed by DHR. Both ABC University (4.55% performance) and MNO University (7.14% performance) have not got any single programme awarded full ‘*Confidence*’. UVW University (42.86% performance) has one programme with ‘*Confidence*’ judgment though, but such was under Cycle 1.

Relatively, the next table shows the performance of the HEIs against the number of reviewed programmes.

Table 3. Ranking of HEIs Based on Review Performance against Number of Reviewed Programmes (Cycles 1 & 2)

Name of HEI	Number of Reviewed Programmes	Judgment Received			% of Performance	Rank
		*C	*LC	*NC		
1. ABC University	5	0	1	4	10%	10 th
2. CDE University	4	4	0	0	100%	1 st
3. EFG University	9	6	3	0	83.33%	6 th
4. GHI University	10	10	0	0	100%	1 st
5. IJK University	2	2	0	0	100%	1 st
6. MNO University	6	0	0	6	0%	11 th
7. OPQ University	4	4	0	0	100%	1 st
8. QRS University	5	4	0	1	80%	7 th
9. STU University	6	4	0	2	66.67%	8 th
10. UVW University	4	1	2	1	50%	9 th
11. WXY University	10	10	0	0	100%	1 st
TOTAL	65	48 pts			73.85%	

NOTE:

- *C – ‘*Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned one (1) point for purposes of % computation)
*LC – ‘*Limited Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned half (.5) point for purposes of % computation)
*NC – ‘*No Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned (0) point for purposes of % computation)

Looking into the performance of the HEIs with regards to the total number of reviewed programmes, it could be seen in the above table that the institutions have performed considerably better (73.85% performance) in comparison with their performance when the number of reviews conducted is considered, which is 66.85%.

So far, a total of 65 programmes have been reviewed by DHR. Table 2 mentions 89 reviews; this suggests that some programmes have been reviewed more than once which could be under Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, or both under Cycle 2.

Taken individually, five universities could be considered excellent, with all their reviewed programmes getting '*Confidence*' judgement. These five HEIs include CDE, GHI, IJK, OPQ, and WXY universities. On the other hand, two HEIs have performed very poorly with no single programme successfully getting through DHR review. These are MNO University and ABC University, which are both private institutions.

Meanwhile, Table 4 in the next page reveals the performance of the HEIs against the number of their programme offerings.

Table 4. Ranking of HEIs Based on Performance in Programme Reviews vis-a-vis Number of Programme Offerings (Cycles 2)

Name of HEI	Number of Programme Offering	Judgment Received			% of Performance	Rank
		*C	*LC	*NC		
1. ABC University	7	0	1	4	7.14%	10 th
2. CDE University	5	4	0	0	80%	1 st
3. EFG University	12	6	3	0	62.5%	2 nd
4. GHI University	15	10	0	0	66.67%	2 nd
5. IJK University	6	2	0	0	33.33%	8 th
6. MNO University	10	0	0	6	0%	11 th
7. OPQ University	7	4	0	0	57.14%	4 th
8. QRS University	8	4	0	1	50%	5 th
9. STU University	14	4	0	2	28.57%	9 th
10. UVW University	5	1	2	1	40%	6 th
11. WXY University	28	10	0	0	35.71%	7 th
TOTAL	117	48 pts			41.02%	

NOTE:

*C – '*Confidence*' (arbitrarily assigned one (1) point for purposes of % computation)

*LC – '*Limited Confidence*' (arbitrarily assigned half (.5) point for purposes of % computation)

*NC – '*No Confidence*' (arbitrarily assigned (0) point for purposes of % computation)

As discussed previously, the HEIs garnered 73.85% performance with reference to the total number of reviewed programmes (Table 3) and 66.85% performance considering the number of reviews conducted (Table 2). Both percentages are way above the median, which could

probably be good enough for universities that have just started operating at the beginning of the 21st century.

However, looking into the number of programme offerings across the 11 HEIs, and with the 40 '*Confidence*' programmes and six '*Limited Confidence*' programmes as per DHR review, this translates to only 41.02% performance on the part of the universities. This finding reveals a bleak academic pathway for the students currently enrolled in the majority of 77 programmes. This presents a serious concern in the Kingdom's higher education sector. The finding further implies that incoming students have very limited choices for academic programmes, given the assumption that they should take a degree which has passed quality review.

Nevertheless, this cannot be taken entirely against the HEIs. Of the 77 programmes as mentioned earlier, six (6) have '*Limited Confidence*', 14 have '*No Confidence*', but the majority of 57 have never been subjected yet to review by DHR as of this writing. It should be noted that quality reviews in the Kingdom of Bahrain are compulsory, not voluntary. As such, the decision to have a programme reviewed by DHR lies not in the hands of the HEIs; it depends on the planned review calendar of the quality agency.

Moreover, the next table (Table 5) puts into view the performance of the HEIs across the four Quality Indicators used in DHR Programme Reviews.

Table 5. HEIs' Performance against the Four Quality Indicators used in Programme Reviews

Name of HEI	Percentage of Performance					Overall %	Rank
	No. of Reviewed Programmes	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4		
1. ABC University	5	2 = 40%	0%	1 = 20%	0%	15%	10 th
2. CDE University	4	4 = 100%	4 = 100%	4 = 100%	4 = 100%	100%	1 st
3. EFG University	9	9 = 100%	9 = 100%	6 = 66.6%	9 = 100%	91.66 %	7 th
4. GHI University	10	10 = 100%	10 = 100%	10 = 100%	10 = 100%	100%	1 st
5. IJK University	2	2 = 100%	2 = 100%	2 = 100%	2 = 100%	100%	1 st
6. MNO University	6	1 = 16.6%	0%	0%	2 = 33.3%	12.5%	11 th
7. OPQ University	4	4 = 100%	4 = 100%	4 = 100%	4 = 100%	100%	1 st
8. QRS University	5	4 = 80%	4 = 80%	4 = 80%	4 = 80%	80%	8 th
9. STU University	6	6 = 100%	5 = 83.3%	6 = 100%	6 = 100%	95.83 %	6 th
10. UVW University	4	3 = 75%	2 = 50%	2 = 50%	1 = 25%	50%	9 th

11. WXY University	10	10 = 100%	10 = 100%	10 = 100%	10 = 100%	100%	1 st
TOTAL	65	55 = 84%	50 = 76%	49 = 75%	52 = 80%	78.81%	

NOTE:

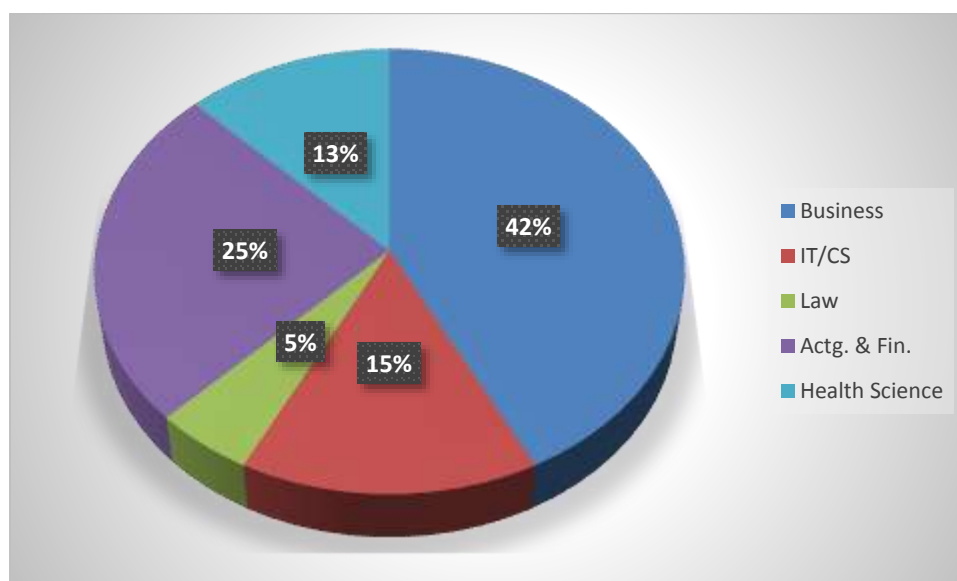
- *C – ‘*Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned one (1) point for purposes of % computation)
- *LC – ‘*Limited Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned half (.5) point for purposes of % computation)
- *NC – ‘*No Confidence*’ (arbitrarily assigned (0) point for purposes of % computation)

As discussed in Table 3, the performance of the HEIs vis-a-vis the total number of reviewed programmes is calculated at 73.85%. Such performance apparently increases to 78.81% when the review judgements are disaggregated into the four quality indicators, namely: The Learning Programme (Indicator 1), Efficiency of the Programme (Indicator 2), Academic Standards of the Graduates (Indicator 3), and Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance (Indicator 1). This can be explained by the fact that other than the overall judgement given by the review panel, which could be either ‘*Confidence*’, ‘*Limited Confidence*’, or ‘*No Confidence*’, there are specific judgements per Indicator. The review panel states in the report whether the programme satisfies each Indicator. If the programme satisfies all four Indicators, the concluding statement will confirm that there is ‘*Confidence*’ in the programme. If two or three Indicators are satisfied the programme will receive a ‘*Limited Confidence*’ judgement. If one or no indicator is satisfied, the judgement will be ‘*No Confidence*’ (DHR Programme Review Handbook, 2009).

It could be deduced from the above table that the HEIs need to pay closer attention to Indicator 2 (76% performance) and Indicator 3 (75% performance), which are *Efficiency of the Programme* and *Academic Standards of the Graduates*, respectively. It should be noted, though, that careful consideration should be given to the two other indicators as well, particularly *The Learning Programme* and *Effectiveness of Quality Management & Assurance*, inasmuch as the HEIs have neither demonstrated excellent performance at these criteria.

Finally, the following chart reveals the disciplinary areas which constitute most of the programmes with ‘*Confidence*’ judgement that are being offered by HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Figure 1. Pie Chart showing the Programmes with ‘Confidence’ Judgement across HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain (clustered per Discipline)



Overall enrolment in Bahrain's HEIs rose by nearly 20% between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, according to the country's Ministry of Education (MoE). While these higher enrolment numbers represent a positive trend for the kingdom, educators are now placing increased emphasis on how tertiary students are being trained for the workplace as the local job market becomes more competitive. Not only is the quality of education and training at issue. Bahrain's labour needs are shifting; according to data provided by the MoE in 2012, demand for labour is expected to be particularly high in a number of sectors over the coming years: hospitality and tourism, health care, engineering and architecture, and education are all predicted to need more staff.

But with such results of previous programme reviews where, to date, only 40 academic programmes so far among the 11 HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain have been given '*Confidence*' judgment, what else is there for students to take? As noted earlier, the 40 '*Confidence*' programmes only constitute 37.36% of the 117 total number of programmes offered by the HEIs. Majority of these programmes (42%) are in the broad field of Business, followed by Accounting & Finance, which constitutes 25%. In effect, due to limited choices students are 'forced' to either enrol in a programme that is not in line with their aptitude and interest, as long as such programme has '*Confidence*' judgment by DHR, or register in a programme which they feel they are inclined towards, even if it has '*Limited*' or '*No Confidence*' judgment.

The pie chart clearly shows that students have got no options for arts and humanities, natural sciences, hospitality and tourism, including engineering with the exception of a single computer engineering programme that has been classified under IT/ CS.

CONCLUSION

Quality of higher education is essential in both the public and private sectors. In recent years there has been a rapid growth in knowledge, which has created multiple new specialisations,

new skill sets, and shifted global trends in human capital requirements. To be successful in the new knowledge economy, Bahrainis must have access to higher education. But access is not enough; government, employers, parents and students need to be assured of the quality of higher education and to be confident that graduates have gained the right level of skills and knowledge to participate successfully in the national and international marketplace. It is only then that they can contribute to the fulfilment of Economic Vision 2030 which requires that 'the nation has a first-rate education system that enables all Bahrainis to fulfil their ambitions'.

Programme reviews were initiated in 2008 to review programmes at bachelor and masters levels. It was expected that the institutions themselves thereafter would adopt the method and conduct quinquennial reviews in line with good international practice. The DHR would then quality assure the process through its institutional reviews. However, as seen in the findings discussed in the previous section, while there were generally good results in the programme reviews of some universities, only 40 academic programmes among the 11 HEIs in the Kingdom of Bahrain have been given '*Confidence*' judgment by the review panels. It is significant to note that such figure translates to only 69.44% performance on the part of the HEIs considering the 57 programmes which have been reviewed so far. It is likewise interesting to note that the 40 '*Confidence*' programmes only constitute 37.36% of the 117 total number of programmes offered by the institutions.

In its 2014 Annual Report, QQA comprehensively remarked that when the findings of the programme reviews are considered together, some broad issues emerge that are common to most of the HEIs. These are to do with: (a) academic leadership of the programmes and/or colleges, (b) workload of academic staff, (c) benchmarking, and (d) academic standards, in particular with the level of examinations.

QQA further emphasized that academic leadership of the programmes and/ or colleges is an essential component of ensuring quality programme offerings and a vibrant learning experience for the students. In many reviews, concern was expressed by panels about weak leadership. This is not necessarily due to the quality of the programme leader or dean of college but is often due to the many administrative responsibilities assigned to academic leaders who may even have a reduced teaching load but still do not have the time to mentor, support and guide the academics in the programmes for which they are responsible.

Moreover, the kingdom's quality authority expressed dissatisfaction over academic staff workload which remains at consistently too high levels. This acts as a barrier to successful teaching in a number of ways. Academics do not have the time to develop different teaching methods that would enhance the student learning experience through requiring deeper thought and analysis on the part of the students. Professional development programmes have a large role to play in this regard. A high teaching workload also means that there is little time for reflective teaching and even less time is available for research. Both of these types of scholarship need to be undertaken for programme offerings to be at the cutting edge of their disciplines so that students on graduating have not only a well-rounded education but have well-developed employability skills.

Likewise, benchmarking remains a strong area that the HEIs have to look into. In the past this activity was carried out informally through, for example, collaboration between academics in different institutions comparing their courses or their students' work and implementing improvements based on such comparisons, or through their work within professional bodies.

In recent years there have been growing requirements that benchmarking should be formalised and that the outcomes should be used to inform management decisions in continuous improvement. However, in general in Bahrain, there is little understanding of how to carry out formal benchmarking exercises and the usefulness that such activities, if undertaken well, can play in informing decisions about the management of the quality of education provision in all areas of a higher education institution. If institutions establish relationships with institutions that have similar profiles but are better performing and agree to benchmark their activities in key areas of teaching and learning, then this would provide a basis upon which to make improvements within their own institutions (QQA 2014 Annual Report).

Finally, in considering academic standards of the graduates, the level of examinations are typically of a consistent concern of the panels carrying out the reviews. QQA lamented that in far too many cases, the examinations are not at an appropriate level for the degree that is being awarded. Memorisation and recall are more commonly required than analytical skills, problem solving and synthesis. This not only devalues the degree award but also means that students do not have the skills and competencies required to be successfully employed at the level of their award. Employers then have to commit financial and other resources into developing their new employees to carry out tasks for which their degree should have prepared them. In many cases, this can result in employers employing expatriate staff or Bahrainis who have obtained their degrees outside of Bahrain; all of which goes against the goals of Economic Vision 2030. These issues need to be addressed if Bahrainis are to have confidence in the quality of their academic programmes and the awards they receive as they set out to compete in the global marketplace.

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