ASU

جامعة العلوم التطبيقية
APPLIED SCIENCE UNIVERSITY

Quality Assurance (QA) Manual (An Overview)

2023/2024

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INTRODUCTION

Applied Science University (ASU) endeavours to fulfil its mission in ways that promote the well-being of its stakeholders – students, staff, and the community that it serves. Relevant to this, the University consistently ensures that its processes and procedures are based on continuous assessment and development. As such, it maintains a Quality Management System (QMS) which ensures that it is able to operate in a reliable, ethical, efficient and quality-oriented way.

ASU's QMS drives the university into becoming an academic community that is ever-mindful of incorporating quality into its daily operation, with the underlying principle of continuous quality improvement. It covers the entire range of academic services provided by the institution, including teaching, learning & assessment, research, community engagement and university support services.

In implementing its quality management system, the university identifies the processes needed for the system and their application throughout the institution; determines the sequence and interaction of these processes; determines criteria and methods required to ensure the effective operation and control of these processes; ensures the availability of resources and information necessary to support the operation and monitoring of these processes; monitors, measures and analyses these processes; and, takes action necessary to achieve planned results and continual improvement.

This manual gives an overview of the main internal and external quality assurance processes at ASU. It lays a foundation for describing the entire quality management approach of ASU and gives both internal and external stakeholders a comprehensive picture of 'quality management' at the institution. Other processes, procedures and guidelines supporting academic and non-academic structures of the University are contained either in the University Bylaws, ASU Policies, or other handbooks and manuals.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION CENTRE (QAAC)

The central focus for management of the University's quality assurance system is the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre (QAAC). QAAC is responsible for implementing the university's quality management system, identifying the processes needed for the system and their application throughout the institution; determining the sequence and interaction of these processes; determining criteria and methods required to ensure the effective operation and control of these processes; ensuring the availability of resources and information necessary to support the operation and monitoring of these processes; checking, measuring and analysing these processes; and, taking action necessary to achieve planned results and continual improvement.

2.1 QAAC's Mission

The centre aims to make the University an academic community of high quality in all its daily activities, and improve the quality of all relevant academic services provided by the University on a regular basis.

2.1 QAAC's Organizational Structure
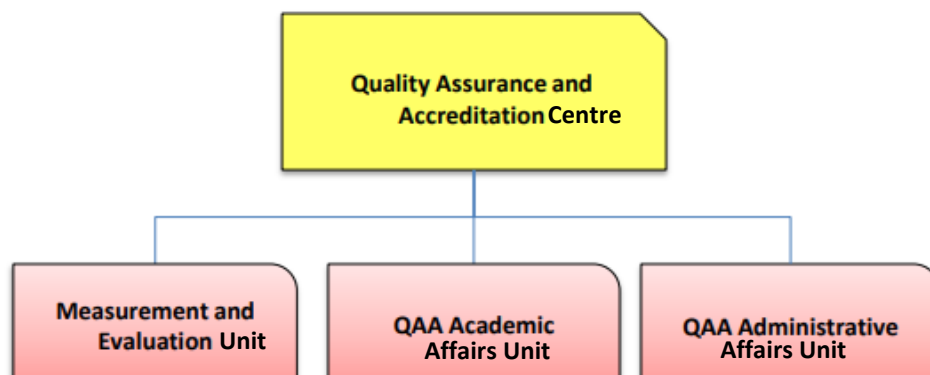
Figure 1: QAAC's Organisational Structure

2.2 QAAC Remit

The main responsibility of the QAAC is to promote quality enhancement activities and ensure the successful implementation of policies and activities proposed by the QAAC in order to improve quality of the programmes offered by the university. The following explains the remit of the centre:

1. Develop, implement, and maintain a quality management system that meets international best practice in higher education, as well as compliance with relevant legislative and professional standards and regulations of the Kingdom of Bahrain;
2. Evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of the University's quality management system and implement quality assurance improvements continuously;
3. Share international best practice with both academic and non-academic departments, and coordinate various activities that are related to quality assurance and accreditation (QAA) in both academic and non-academic services;

4. Provide advice and guidance to colleges in conducting the annual academic programme evaluation;
5. Support the colleges in external quality reviews of academic programmes, and assist them in the conduct of honest, transparent and critical self-evaluation;
6. Assist the University in maintaining compliance with the requirements of the Higher Education Council (HEC) in achieving and in maintaining accredited status for the University and its programmes;
7. Support the colleges and administrative units in achieving and maintaining recognition by international professional bodies;
8. Provide staff development to ensure awareness and support for the requirements of the university's quality management system on a regular basis, and promote professional standards in leadership and management of staff, with clear emphasis on continuous quality improvement;
9. Coordinate institutional effectiveness, assessment and reporting cycles in accordance with international quality standards, and provide assistance to both academic and administrative units in the collection, analysis and interpretation of pertinent institutional data;
10. Manage the conduct of objective, systematic, and independent internal audit of administrative units, assessing their practices, procedures, system & work processes; human resource capabilities; quality of services; opportunities for improvement; as well as documentation and records;
11. Create a culture based on high quality standards in all aspects of the University's work;
12. Collaborate with the Education and Training Quality Authority (BQA) regarding programme and institutional quality reviews, as well as the Higher Education Council (HEC) on matters pertaining to higher education regulations and accreditation; and,
13. Coordinate with local, regional and international quality assurance and accreditation bodies in order to secure ASU accreditation/recognition at institutional and programme level.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (QMS)

3.1 ASU'S QMS

ASU adopts continuous improvement as an essential component of its quality management system, which aims to improve institutional performance over time. The continuous improvement cycle has four interrelated phases, often referred to as the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle:

PLAN   : Establish the goals and actions necessary to implement the institutional plan and its related performance improvement.

DO   : Implement planned processes and allocate the appropriate resources.

CHECK : Monitor, measure and report on the effectiveness of results and processes.

ACT   : Incorporate the ideas for improvement into the next plan and maximize areas where there have been successes.
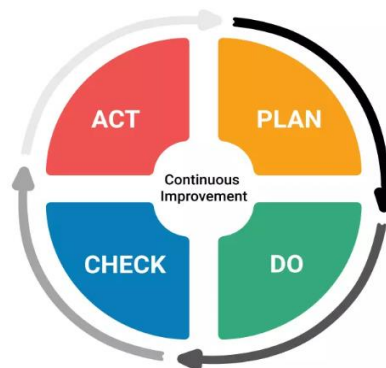
Figure 2: PDCA Cycle

The QMS process approach is shown below in the conceptual model from the ISO 9001:2015 Standard, recognizing that stakeholders play a significant role in defining requirements as inputs, and monitoring of satisfaction is necessary to evaluate and validate whether stakeholder requirements have been met.
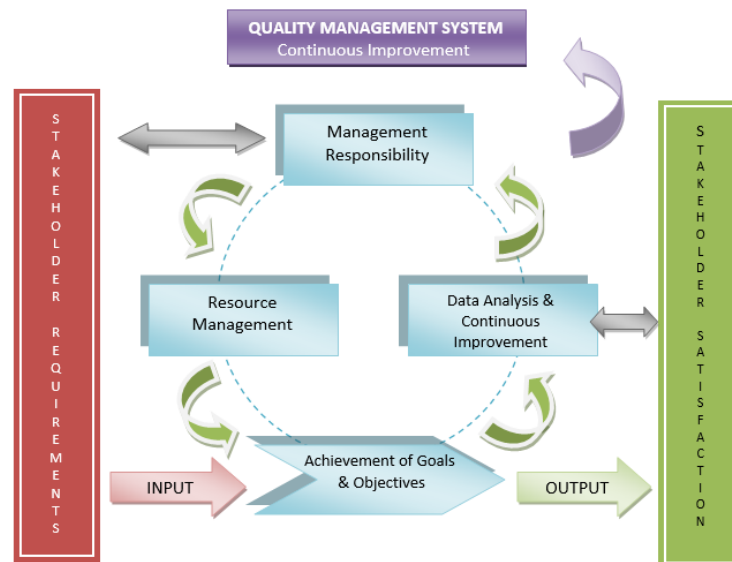
Figure 3: Quality Management System

3.2 Management Reporting Line

The Management reporting line at different levels at ASU with regards to quality matters is presented in the below figure:

Figure 4: Management Reporting Line

3.3 Quality Management Structure

The University operates a coherent quality improvement system which is applied across all areas of its operations (academic and administrative) and functions at Department, College and University levels. The following formally constituted bodies serve as the quality management structure of the university, performing different but well-coordinated tasks, towards achieving institutional goals. Each of these bodies has its own terms of reference, which are periodically reviewed and revised.
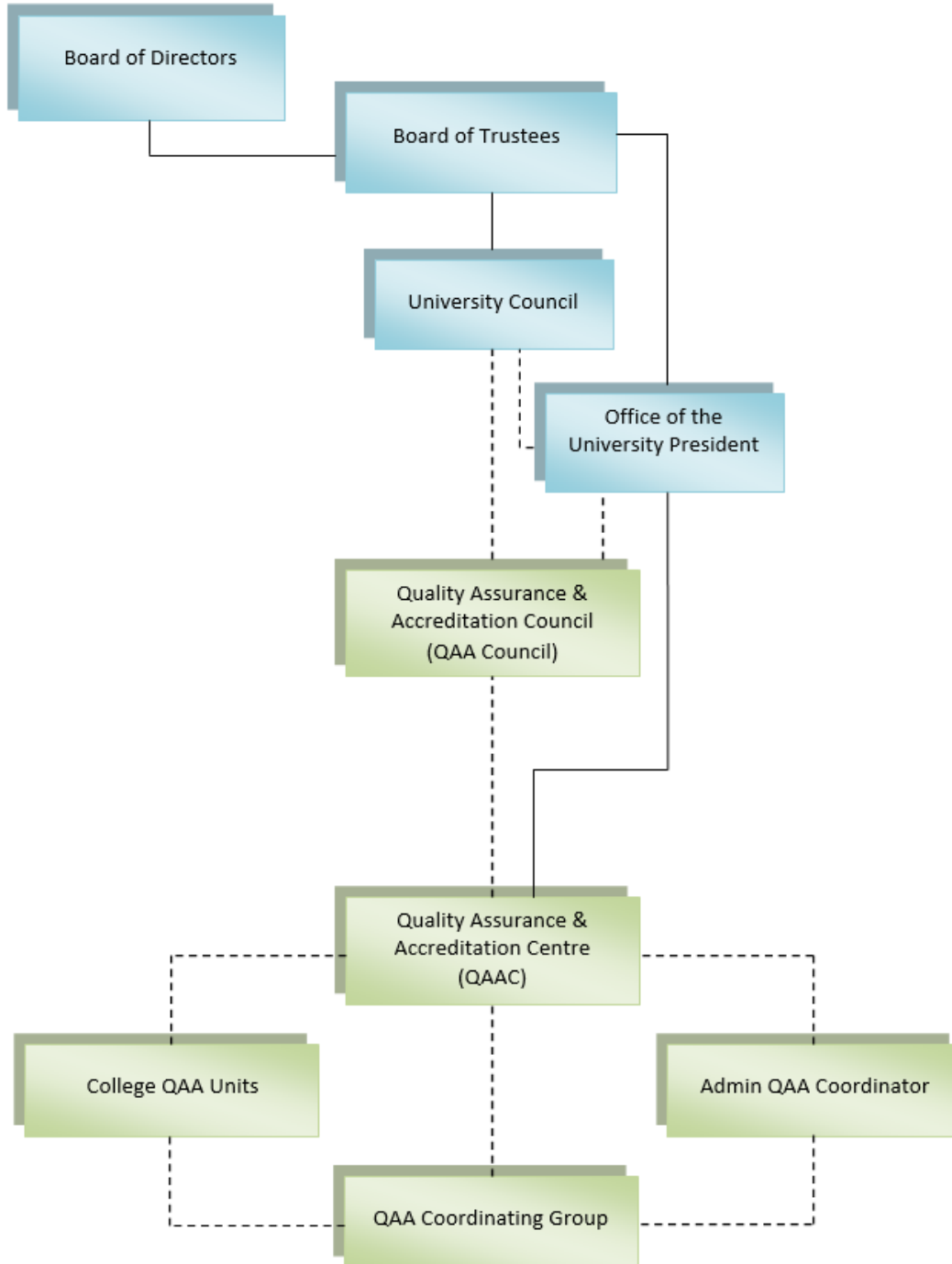
3.3.1 Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) Council

The QAA Council is a university-level committee chaired by the University President. It meets once per semester to oversee matters that pertain to institutional and programme quality reviews, both internal and external, as well as accreditation. The purpose of the QAA Council is to advise University Council on the effectiveness of quality assurance and enhancement processes and to ensure their compatibility with key external reference points.

3.3.2 Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre (QAAC)

The QAAC is the formal body, which manages the quality assurance & accreditation activities of the university, ensuring the university's preparedness for college and institution-based reviews and accreditation. The team meets at least once a week to discuss issues that pertain to the smooth implementation of the university's quality management system. It continuously promotes activities that warrant international best practices in higher education, as well as compliance with relevant legislative and professional standards and regulations. It is the responsibility of the team to monitor and promote the effectiveness of the University's quality management system and implement quality assurance requirements as needed. The team is chaired by the Director of the Centre, with all the staff as members.

3.3.3 College Quality Assurance and Accreditation Unit (CQAAU)

The general responsibility of the College QAA Unit is to operationalize quality assurance at the college level within the framework of the University's quality management system. The College QAA Unit is a formal body convened by the Dean of the College and approved by the President, which is composed as follows:
- Vice Dean as the Head of the College QAA Unit who is a full-time faculty member with expertise in the field of quality assurance; and,
- Programme Coordinators.

3.3.4 Administrative Quality Assurance and Accreditation Coordinator (Admin QAA Coordinator)

The general responsibility of the Admin QAA Coordinator is to operationalize quality assurance at the administrative office level within the framework of the University's quality management system. The officer ensures that the administrative offices consistently regard quality assurance as a core function and have developed explicit systems and procedures to ensure and enhance quality.

3.3.5 Quality Assurance and Accreditation Coordinating Group (QAACG)

The University has established and maintains a QAACG which meets every month, and has the responsibility of coordinating the QA-related activities of the Centre and the colleges/ administrative offices, ensuring that the processes needed for the university's quality management system are implemented, maintained and reviewed at the college/ administrative office level. As a coordinating group, the College QAA Unit Head and the Admin QAA Coordinator act as a liaison between the Centre and the colleges and administrative offices, respectively.

3.4 Academic Quality Responsibility

ASU's key academic structures and leaders mainly includes the University Council, College Council, Department Council, Programme Team, Programme Advisory Board. Other than these offices, the university organizes and maintains relevant permanent committees in order to ensure efficient and effective governance of policies, processes and procedures. Each of these committees has its own clear and regularly updated terms of reference. The following presents the main committees and councils responsible of the University's academic structures and leaders:

- University Council
- College Council
- Department Council
- Programme Team

The academic leadership roles in ASU are classified into different levels as the following:

- Programme Coordinator
- Course Coordinator
- Faculty Members

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

4.1 New Programme Development

The University will promote and maintain high academic standards by requiring that all programmes of study undergo a formal process of validation leading to approval. The validation process will ensure that awards granted by the University will be comparable with awards granted and conferred throughout the higher education sector with respect to academic standards adopted and demonstrable achievement of its graduates. The University recognises the importance and value of involving experienced representatives drawn from industry/the professions and the academic discipline within which the new programme is being developed. Thus, the University makes use of external participation at key stages throughout the validation, monitoring and review of programmes. This independence and objectivity is essential to provide confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate to the content and level of the award. The University is committed to the use of a programme specification and clearly articulated course specifications which provide clear learning outcomes which are tested using appropriate assessment criteria and are consistent with the NQF level at which they are assigned.

The approval of a new programme involves three stages, (i) Before the Validation Procedure is initiated for a new programme the proposal must be approved by the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Committee and University Council (Initial Approval Process). (ii) Thereafter, each course will undergo Mapping procedures to ensure alignment with the National Qualifications Framework of the Kingdom of Bahrain. (iii) Finally, Validation is the process through which the University assures itself of the quality and standards of its programme provision prior to implementation and delivery.

4.2 Programme Monitoring and Review

ASU adopts regular and systematic checks on learning and teaching provisions at an operational level, internally and externally.

4.2.1 Annual Review

To ensure the quality of ASU's provision and maintain the standards of its awards, the University placed clear policies and procedures for the programme annual review. Besides the internal review of the programme held by the programme coordinator and the programme team (APRR), the framework of the review also includes the role of the programme external examiner.

4.2.1.1 Programme External Examiner

To ensure the quality of ASU's provision and maintain the standards of its awards, the University places significant reliance on its External Examiners by requiring them to provide informed, independent and impartial judgements and advice to the University; as well as drawing upon their professional advice and expertise and giving serious and active consideration to their reports.

The purpose of programme external examination is to: (1) Assist the University in benchmarking the academic standards of its awards across the Higher Education sector in the Kingdom of Bahrain, regionally and internationally; (2) Verify that standards are appropriate for the award or courses for which the External Examiners take responsibility; (3) Ensure that the assessments themselves and the assessment process is equitable and is fairly operated in the marking, grading and classification of student performance, and that decisions are made in accordance with University Regulations; (4) Report on the standards of student achievement; and, (5) Identify, where appropriate, examples of good practice and areas for enhancement.

The role of the External Examiner is not to replicate the activities of internal moderators. The role requires a judgement of the level and appropriateness of the instruments of assessment and the learning exhibited by the students.

A detailed discussion about the roles and duties of Programme External Examiners, including other pertinent discussions, can be found in the University's External Examiner Policy.

4.2.1.2 Self-Evaluation Annual Review

At the end of each academic year the Programme Team for each programme offered by the University must provide a review report (Annual Programme Review Report - APRR). This would normally be written by the Programme Coordinator and fully discussed and considered at the Department Learning and Teaching Committee and approved at the College Learning and Teaching Committee before submitting it to the QAAC for review. The purpose of this document is to provide a self-critical review of the programme and its operation over the previous academic year. The programme team should meet before preparing the APRR and discuss the programme and statistical data supplied by the Directorate of Admission & Registration. During this meeting the programme team also discusses any changes which they would like to make to the programme for the coming academic year and ensures that these changes are properly documented. If the proposed changes are approved at the meeting these can be processed for approval. The APRR is discussed, approved and forwarded to the QAAC.

The purpose of the Annual Programme Review Report is to:
- ensure that programmes remain current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application;
- evaluate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes are being attained by students;
- evaluate the continuing effectiveness of the curriculum and of assessment in relation to the intended learning outcomes;
- track the implementation of any recommendations for action resulting from any reviews of the programme conducted in the previous year;
- ensure that appropriate actions are taken to remedy any identified shortcomings and note good practice.

4.2.2 Periodic Review

Periodic Reviews are normally conducted every five years by a Periodic Review Panel. The QAAC would inform the relevant College a year in advance of which programmes would be reviewed in the next academic year.

The purpose of the periodic review is to:
- critically examine the programmes and ensure they are still relevant and meeting their aims
- examine the content of the programmes to ensure that they are up to date and relevant
- confirm that the programmes continue to comply with the requirements of external agencies such as the Higher Education Council - HEC, Directorate of Higher Education Reviews - DHR, Quality Assurance Authority - GDQ and operate in accordance with the University Bylaws
- review and comment upon future plans for the programme.

The review will be based on a report (Programme Reflective Analysis Report – PRAR) prepared by the Programme Coordinator which provides a critical appraisal of each of the programmes being reviewed noting any strengths or weaknesses. It should also look at trends in statistical data which form part of the annual programme review reports. In addition, it will provide a commentary based on the views of at least one external examiner. The full report(s) from the external examiner should be provided as an Appendix to the Reflective Analysis. The external examiner should be a subject expert in the discipline(s) covered by the programme.

4.3 Surveys

ASU's approach to the management of quality and standards builds upon traditional quality assurance methods by emphasizing the organization and systems, focusing on processes. It recognizes both internal and external stakeholders, and it promotes the need for objective data to analyze and improve the processes. ASU maintains a Measurement and Evaluation Unit under the QAAC, whose task among others, is to coordinate institutional effectiveness assessment and reporting cycles in accordance with international quality standards, as well as to gather feedback constantly from stakeholders (faculty, students, alumni, employers of graduates, etc.) through periodic focus group discussions and surveys. The Measurement and Evaluation Unit supervises and manages the analysis of the following surveys:

1. *New Students' Experience Survey* – gathers feedback from freshmen and transfer students regarding their first semester experience in the university, in terms of their overall satisfaction with the learning environment.
2. *Course Evaluation Survey* – elicits student's feedback regarding their perceptions on teaching, assessment and feedback, student support, as well as the organization and management of the course.
3. *Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS)* – assesses the level of satisfaction that students have in relation to the university's services.
4. *Exit Survey for Graduating Students* – gathers the perceptions of the students who will be graduating by the end of each semester on several aspects of their university life, such as on advising, admission and registration, curriculum and instruction, facilities and learning resources, and their overall programme experience.
5. *Alumni Satisfaction Survey* – elicits the perceptions of the alumni on the extent to which they have been satisfied in terms of the delivery of the programme and in relation to their current work preparation.
6. *Employers' Evaluation of ASU Graduates* – assesses the degree of confidence that employers have on the alumni of the University in relation to the graduates' skills and preparation for work.
7. *Thesis Course Evaluation Survey* – elicits master student's feedback regarding their perceptions on supervising, support and feedback, organization and management of the thesis course, as well as the overall satisfaction of the course.
8. *Academic Staff Satisfaction Survey with QAAC Services* – assesses the level of satisfaction that academic staff have in relation to the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre's services.
9. *Administrative Staff Satisfaction Survey with QAAC Services* – assesses the level of satisfaction that administrative staff have in relation to the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre's services.
10. *E-Learning Student Satisfaction Survey* – assesses the level of satisfaction that students have in relation to the E-Learning services including the practices of learning, teaching and assessments in the university.
11. *E-Learning Academic Staff Satisfaction Survey* – assesses the level of satisfaction that Academic staff have in relation to the E-Learning services including the practices of learning, teaching and assessments in the university.
12. *Programme Advisory Board Satisfaction Survey* – assesses the level of satisfaction that members of the programme advisory board have in relation to the practices in the university, and their involvement in the improvement and development of programmes.

4.4 Moderation of Assessment

Moderation process involves educators in a collaborative discussion of student work based on predetermined assessment criteria. The purpose of moderation is to make consistent, valid, evidence-based decisions. It can be used within an improvement cycle: before assessment and after assessment.

4.4.1 Internal and External Pre-Moderation (Moderation of Assessment)

Prior to assessments being issued to students, the internal and external moderation processes, provide an independent review of the link between assessments and learning outcomes, and help ensure that the

assessment tools are suitable for the learning outcomes. Internal moderation at pre-assessment stage involves use of a standard form via an online internal moderation system to ensure careful scrutiny of:

- the clarity of the task(s).
- the level and difficulty of the task(s).
- relevance to and coverage of the ILOs being assessed.
- clarity and appropriateness of assessment criteria.
- appropriateness of the marking scheme and model answers to questions posed and as a means of discriminating performance and attainment.

The external moderation of assessment is done through the following:

- Course external moderators are subject specialists appointed for specific course(s) to review final assessments before use and confirm they are of a suitable standard and appropriate in terms of learning outcomes, level descriptors and marking criteria, the clarity of the task(s), the level and difficulty of the task(s), relevance to and coverage of the ILOs being assessed, clarity and appropriateness of assessment criteria, appropriateness of the marking scheme and model answers to questions posed and as a means of discriminating performance and attainment.
- Programme external examiners are experts in the discipline who take an overview of the programme and comment on various aspects of the quality of the programme including assessment practices and the moderation which is considered as an annual post moderation for the programme.

4.4.2 Internal and External Post-Moderation (Moderation of Grades)

Internal/ external moderation at post-assessment involves use of a standard form via an online moderation system to confirm:

- all marks have been calculated and recorded accurately.
- marks distribution is fair and commensurate with level of the course.
- marking criteria have been applied fairly and consistently.
- for assessment where feedback must be provided, the feedback is fit for purpose and consistent with the mark given.

4.5 Course Portfolio Management

To ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of courses, the University maintains a regularly updated portfolio for each of the courses offered under the various programmes. A Course Portfolio is the sum of artifacts from a specific course plus reflection on them. It provides an opportunity to investigate the intersection between pedagogy and learning, to determine relationships between what teachers and students do as educators and learners, respectively. A course portfolio is used to document the planning, process, and outcomes of a single course. Colleges are responsible for:

- ensuring that Course Portfolios are adequately maintained
- Peer review practices to share judgements regarding the quality of materials in Course Portfolios.
- Course Portfolios should contain (at least) the minimum sample of work provided for the Internal/External Moderation process.
- Course Portfolios should contain a 'Course Portfolio Contents Checklist' sheet that displays the minimum standard in a tick box format that should be used by the course instructor.

4.6 Course Portfolio Audit

The QAAC conducts three regular portfolio audits annually, i.e., every semester. Audits can also be conducted when needed or required for purposes like accreditation and other quality reviews. There shall be three stages of the course portfolio audit. Stage 1 is conducted by the Internal Course Portfolio Audit Committees (at the programme level), Stage 2 is conducted by the College QAA Unit (CQAAU), and Stage 3 is conducted by the QAAC.

During the semester and immediately after the receipt of the internal and external moderation reports, academic staff should write a brief response to the moderation reports. The remarks and responses of the external moderator should be discussed in the respective academic department. The reports are then inserted immediately into the portfolio which should be prepared and given to academic staff by the department secretary following the guidelines of QAAC.

4.7 Achievement of GAs, PAs and ILOs

Measuring the intended learning outcomes (ILO) has become an integral practice for higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure continuous improvement and accountability to prepare work-ready graduates. Within the context of outcome-based education, ASU developed a mechanism to measure students' achievement of learning outcomes. This is applicable for the direct assessment of the learning outcomes within the assumption that course assessment are linked to the course intended learning outcomes (CILOs). This is extended to the measurement of the programme intended learning outcomes (PILOs) as courses are mapped to PILOs. Graduate Attributes (GAs) and Programme Aims (PAs) are achieved through the achievement of the PILOS. The University also uses indirect methods to help measure the achievement of ILOs, such as questionnaires and the opinions of different stakeholders.

4.8 Programme Advisory Boards

Advisory board is a structured and collaborative method for the academic programme to engage with external advisors from a wide range of expertise and market discipline to contribute to the currency and quality of the academic programme. ASU has established a special policy for the Programme Advisory Boards due to the importance of their inputs to the academic programme delivery. All ASU programmes have a Programme Advisory Board and the roles of the advisory boards are well stated in the Programme Advisory Board policy and scheduled meeting is run accordingly.

4.9 Benchmarking

ASU believes that it has an obligation to ensure that it continues to demonstrate the high standards of performance in every aspect of teaching and learning, research and associated educational activities. The University evaluates itself against national, regional and international peers and partners, enabling it to evaluate its performance, monitor standards, compare best practices and make quality improvements. Benchmarking exercises should be conducted on a periodic basis, as part of the periodic review of programmes. It may also be conducted annually for specific aspects of a programme, as required.

4.10 Academic and Administrative Quality Audit

The University, through the QAAC conducts regular objective, systematic, independent and documented activities to verify whether the university's organizational units – their processes and procedures, the related results, and quality records comply with planned arrangements, and whether these arrangements are implemented effectively and continue to be appropriate to achieve objectives. To ensure that policies, procedures, processes, and work instruction that form the University's quality management system are constantly complied with, and that opportunities for continuous quality improvement are being identified and effected.

4.11 International Accreditation

ASU is committed to continuously improving all academic programmes by adopting the best practices in higher education on regional and international levels. International accreditation is one of the effective mechanisms for the continuous improvement of academic programmes. It offers an independent opinion and impartial judgment on the quality level of qualifications. Furthermore, it ensures leading the desired change in coordination with international professional quality experts in their subject area. Also, the well-known associations provide international accreditation with a long record of advancing educational services, linking them to the learner and marketplace needs based on market research studies and reports on a global scale.

In addition, international accreditation is a quality mark that assures the comparability of the award to other qualifications across the globe. ASU support all academic programmes in their journey towards achieving international accreditation and encourages them to seek international accreditation in coordination with QAAC.

4.12 Market Needs Analysis

Market research analysis is used as a significant tool in making decisions which are backed up by data. The Applied Science University utilizes the market research analysis in determining the currency and relevancy of the programme offerings to the labour market needs as well as ensuring that the university prospective programmes match the market labour future demands. Furthermore, ASU conducts market research analysis to have insights into the demand of the labour market and gauge whether or not the programmes are at pace with the latest trends in the market periodically through the Programme Periodic review for all the programmes as well as using other supportive tools to gathers data such as the advisory board meetings.

4.13 Development and Review of Policies and Procedures

To ensure the quality of academic programmes and the consistency of administrative work at the university, the university uses a number of academic and administrative policies. The University maintains a standard for defining, developing and reviewing policies and procedures which shall be adhered to by all respective faculty and staff of the University. Policy development is a dynamic and cyclical process requiring planning, research and collaboration. A more detailed discussion, including specific procedures for developing policy documents, as well as the key stages involved in policy development, can be found in the University's Policy for Development and Review of Policies and Procedures.

EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

ASU gives preferential regard for external quality assurance, be it an institutional accreditation carried out by the Higher Education Council (HEC) or programme accreditation by international accrediting bodies; likewise quality institutional and programme reviews conducted by the Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR), including institutional listing and qualifications mapping by the General Directorate of Qualifications (GDQ), or other similar undertakings.

ASU consistently exercises self-regulation which focuses on evaluation and the continuing improvement of educational quality – an assurance that the university meets international quality standards. ASU ensures that it or its programmes continuously upgrade their educational quality and services through self-evaluation and the judgment of peers, certifying that the university or any of its programmes meets commonly accepted standards of quality or excellence.

The colleges makes arrangements for programme accreditation, which applies to specific programmes offered by the University. In any accreditation procedure though, coordination with the QAAC is both necessary and required. The Centre must certify the readiness of the Programme before it undergoes any external accreditation.

Meanwhile, institutional accreditation is the overall responsibility of the Quality Assurance & Accreditation Centre, in close coordination with the Office of the President, and the QAA Council.

5.1 Education and Training Quality Authority (BQA)

The BQA is an independent entity that carries out a number of quality assurance activities, including setting performance standards and carrying out objective reviews of all education and training institutions licensed to operate in the Kingdom. Within the BQA, two main Directorates are set to review HEIs in the Kingdom, namely, (i) DHR, and (ii) GDQ/DFO. The DHR carries out two types of reviews for HEIs that are complementary, i.e., institutional reviews and programme reviews. The core responsibility of the DFO is to administrate and maintain the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in line with the NQF General Policies, through Institutional Listing and Qualifications Placement.

5.1.1   DHR Institutional Review

DHR's Institutional Review is a specialized exercise that focuses on the quality assurance arrangements of the institution as a whole. It is the responsibility of the Quality Assurance & Accreditation Centre, in close coordination with the QAA Council. Moreover, the task requires the direct involvement of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Development and the Vice President for Administration, Finance, & Community Engagement. The President, being the Chair of the QAA Council, may create ad hoc committees to oversee the nine standards covered by the General Framework of Higher Education Institutional Review, specifically:

- Standard 1: Governance and Management
- Standard 2: Human Resources Management
- Standard 3: Quality Assurance and Enhancement
- Standard 4: Infrastructure, Information Communication and Technology and Learning Resources
- Standard 5: Management of Academic Affairs
- Standard 6: Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Standard 7: Research and Postgraduate Studies
- Standard 8: Community Engagement
- Standard 9: Student Support Services

This framework was developed jointly by BQA and HEC, to ensure public accountability of higher education providers and enhance the quality of higher education in the Kingdom. It incorporates the Institutional Listing standards of the NQF and combines the standards and processes of the BQA's IR and the IA of the HEC into one document.

Overall, there are 25 Indicators and 156 sub-indicators. The Institutional Review process starts with the correspondence from the DHR sent to the University informing the institution of such a scheduled quality review. The QAAC then, headed by the Director, immediately initiates the process of self-evaluation and the drafting of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER).

5.1.2   DHR Academic Programme Review
Programme review is a specialized exercise that focuses on the quality assurance arrangements within existing learning programmes within a college and measures whether programmes meet international standards as well as make recommendations for improving the programmes

The 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, such standards are the following:
- The Learning Programme (8 sub-indicators)
- Efficiency of the Programme (13 sub-indicators)
- Academic Standards of the Graduates (13 sub-indicators)
- Effectiveness of Quality Management & Assurance (10 sub-indicators)

5.1.3   DFO National Qualifications Framework
Consistent with the Kingdom of Bahrain's Royal Decree No. 83 of 2012, ASU closely coordinates with the BQA to place its qualifications on the NQF. Moreover, the University consistently ensures that it complies with eligibility criteria and institutional listing standards in order to be eligible to have its qualifications placed on the NQF.

Institutional Listing
ASU ensures that it meets all Institutional Listing Standards, which are stipulated in the BQA's Directorate of National Framework Operations (DFO) Handbook, specifically:
- Access, Transfer & Progression
- Qualification Development, Approval & Review
- Assessment Design & Moderation
- Certification & Authentication
- Continuous Quality Improvement

Furthermore, the university continuously seeks improvement and ensures effective application of its internal quality assurance mechanisms as laid down in the QA Manual in order to maintain its qualification standards. On an annual basis, as part of the university's quality assurance provision, ASU communicates to the DFO any changes within its formal arrangements related to Institutional Listing Standards.

Note: The framework is now part of the General Framework of Higher Education Institutional Review developed by BQA and HEC for Institutional Reviews (Section 5.1.1).

Qualifications Placement
As laid down in the Monitoring and Review of Programmes Policy, ASU ensures that all its qualifications are fit-for-purpose, meet the needs of learners and the labour market, and eventually placed on the NQF. Furthermore, the university shall ensure that all its qualifications comply with the relevant regulatory body requirements and criteria, where applicable.

Following placement on the NQF, ASU ensures that its qualifications are subject to annual evaluation, as well as periodic review which shall be quinquennial. Where the revisions are considered major and thus could affect the NQF level or credit value of the qualification, the university shall communicate changes within its qualifications or composite units directly to the BQA though the DFO for appropriate action.

Alignment of Foreign Qualification
Foreign qualifications that are delivered by ASU are subject to Qualification Alignment by DFO to ensure that qualifications are in line with specific alignment standards to make them comparable against national qualifications. ASU ensures that the foreign qualifications at time of development are aligned to a framework in the partner institution's country making the alignment process by DFO achievable.

5.2 Other Quality Authorities

To maintain international quality level, ASU has achieved the global accreditation from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the UK. QAA is an independent quality body and a global leader in quality assurance for higher education .

The accreditation is awarded to institutions who have passed QAA's International Quality Review (IQR). The IQR was developed to provide institutions outside the UK with an independent peer review leading to accreditation by the QAA, and thus, help institutions demonstrate that their quality assurance systems conform to international standards .

The IQR uses the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) to assess institutions, specifically, ESG Part 1: Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance, which includes 10 standards. This two-year long process lead to achieving the accreditation for a period of five years, with a review report prepared by the QAA showing recommendations and good practice. ASU has prepared an action plan addressing the recommendations and has placed actions to ensure that the good practice is maintained.