



International Quality Review Mid-Cycle Review of Ajman University

October 2022

Contents

About this mid-cycle review	1
Outcome of the mid-cycle review	1
Summary of IQR outcomes.....	1
Overview of the institution.....	1
Good practice identified by the 2020 International Quality Review	2
Recommendations of the 2020 International Quality Review	2
Changes since the last IQR review visit.....	2
Findings from the mid-cycle review analysis	4
Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures	6

About this mid-cycle review

This is a report of a Mid-Cycle Quality Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Ajman University. The mid-cycle review is desk-based and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Dr Yue Song

The full International Quality Review (IQR) in February 2020, resulted in a [published report](#). The QAA review team concluded that Ajman University met all 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#). The team identified three features of good practice and made three recommendations.

This mid-cycle review evaluates progress against the key actions since the IQR and considers any significant changes that may impact on the ability of Ajman University to continue to meet the ESG standards.

Outcome of the mid-cycle review

1 From the evidence provided the review team concludes that Ajman University is making **satisfactory progress** since the February 2020 International Quality Review and that the period of validity of the IQR should be extended to March 2025.

Summary of IQR outcomes

Overview of the institution

2 Ajman University (AU) is a private institution situated in the Emirate of Ajman. It was founded in 1988 and obtained its licence from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in 1994 under its previous name of Ajman University of Science and Technology. In October 2016, the University's name was changed to Ajman University to reflect its education provision. AU is operating as a single campus which is based in Ajman.

3 There are currently over 6,000 students studying at the University. AU is made up of nine degree-conferring colleges offering 22 undergraduate and 14 postgraduate programmes, all of which are aligned with the National Qualifications Framework of the Emirates (QFEmirates) and are accredited by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), Ministry of Education, United Arab Emirates. In addition, 14 programmes have been accredited by international professional bodies.

4 The University's head is the Chancellor who reports to the Board of Trustees (BOT) and has a senior management team of four who lead key functions within the University. The mission of the University is that of 'a multicultural academic institution that offers a broad range of high quality and relevant undergraduate and graduate academic programmes. The University strives to fulfil the needs of students, alumni, employers, and society through a learner-centric development journey, quality education, hands-on experience, research as well as community engagement. AU develops well-rounded, career-ready graduates who are professionally competent, socially responsible, innovative and active contributors to the sustainable development of the UAE and beyond'. Its Strategic Plan 2017-2022, which was updated in January 2019, sets out six strategic goals:

- Ensuring excellence in teaching and learning

- Enhancing the quality, relevance and impact of research and intellectual contribution
- Recruiting, supporting and fostering the development of a bright and diverse student body
- Enhancing the visibility and the positioning of the University
- Building impactful and long-lasting ties with the external communities
- Promoting cutting-edge and innovative support services.

Good practice identified by the 2020 International Quality Review

- 5 The QAA review team identified the following features of good practice at AU.
- The extensive suite of student support services, available to both students and alumni, which enables their academic and professional development (Standard 1.6).
 - The effective framework to engage and respond to students in a timely way (Standard 1.7).
 - The effective approach to professional engagement, clearly-structured relationships and interactions, and a healthy reflectiveness on curriculum development and the student experience generally (Standard 1.10).

Recommendations of the 2020 International Quality Review

- 6 The QAA review team made the following recommendations to AU.
- The institution should provide sufficient oversight to assure itself that the combination of pedagogic approaches employed across each programme is appropriate to the learning outcomes (Standard 1.3).
 - The institution should introduce, and monitor compliance with, appropriate expectations for the maximum turnaround time for all assessment marking and providing feedback to students (Standard 1.3).
 - The institution should extend the use of double marking and moderation to include all summative assessments (Standard 1.3).

Changes since the last IQR review visit

7 Since the IQR of 2020, a few changes in offices and reporting structure have been made to realign AU's priorities and to be more adaptive to the challenging and unprecedented times brought by the global pandemic and in moving forward post-pandemic. These changes, which aim to further streamline AU's operations and optimise its available resources, were approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2022, including setting up a new Office of Strategic Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment under the Vice-Chancellor for Communication and Community Affairs, creating a new Office of Development managed by the Office of Development and Alumni Affairs, and splitting the Office of Admissions and Registration into two offices to optimise the process of student recruitment and enrolment.

8 AU's BOT also revised its Bylaws in September 2021 in order to ensure full compliance with the Standards of UAE's Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) as well as the governance policies and Standards of WSCUC - the US-based international accreditation body for which AU is seeking institution-level accreditation. Accordingly, four new Board committees were formed as follows:

- Committee for Academic Affairs

- Committee for Financial Sustainability
- Committee for Financial Audit
- Committee for Community Engagement.

9 Several strategic developments in learning and teaching have been introduced since the IQR review, including:

- **The development of e-learning:** These developments include organising workshops for staff and students on the use of various virtual learning environments, scheduling and delivering online course materials and conducting online assessments, developing E-learning Policy and relevant policies/procedures to ensure online academic integrity; developing an operational plan and a student manual to provide the guidelines for staff and students during the pandemic, and developing a variety of review reports and associated action plans to continuously assess and improve the quality of online learning and teaching.
- **The development of the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC):** The Teaching and Learning Centre was established at the time of the review and has made significant progress thereafter, by introducing several new learning support services and learning tools, and staff training programmes and workshops.
- **Increasing international accreditations:** At the time of the IQR review, only five programmes were internationally accredited. Now, 14 programmes have been accredited by international professional bodies.
- **Programme reviews:** A number of degree programmes have been reviewed to align with reform requirements by the local accreditation authority - CAA of the Ministry of Education - for colleges of Engineering and Information Technology, Medicine, Business Administration, Pharmacy and Health Sciences, and Dentistry. The reforms are related to the enhancement of admission requirements, adding new courses in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), data analytics and advanced technologies, increasing the total number of programme credit hours, increasing the duration of the internship and clinical training, and achieving a balance between theoretical and applied courses and so on.

10 Development of research initiatives has continued, comprising the establishment of six new research centres to further promote the quality and impact of research. These centres are:

- Artificial Intelligence Research Centre
- Digital Transformation Research Centre
- Nonlinear Dynamics Research Centre
- Humanities and Social Sciences Research Centre
- Healthy and Sustainable Buildings Research Centre
- Medical and Bio-Allied Health Sciences Research Centre.

11 A number of laboratories have been renovated and developed to support research development. In addition, AU has made significant progress in digitalisation, including developing a three-year strategic plan for digital transformation and introducing new online systems to manage institutional research data online and support student recruitment. AU also developed an institutional research document entitled *Institutional Research Findings and Recommendations* to provide the University Cabinet, Deans and Directors with recommendations for improvement.

12 The most important strategic development since the review is the preparation of AU's 2022-2027 strategic plan which was approved by the Board in its meeting held on 10

May 2022. This strategic plan became effective on 1 September 2022. In addition to new strategic goals and objectives, the vision and the mission of the institution were slightly updated. In the previous mission stated in the 2017-2022 strategic plan, the focus was on developing well-rounded graduates who are professionally competent, socially responsible, innovative and active contributors to the sustainable development of the UAE and beyond. While this focus continues, the new mission also emphasises that AU students will be career-ready by the time of their graduation.

Findings from the mid-cycle review analysis

13 Following the IQR in 2020, an action plan to address its recommendations and develop the good practice further was prepared by AU. The mid-cycle review submission describes the progress made with the recommendations and good practice. The mid-cycle review is a desk-based process and, as such, the team considered various documents submitted by AU alongside their Mid-Cycle Review Report. The review team has been able to conclude from this analysis that AU is continuing, indeed further developing, its good practice and clear progress has been made in response to the three recommendations, such that each has been fully addressed with effective oversight.

14 The IQR report identified three examples of good practice. The first commended the extensive suite of student support services, available to both students and alumni, which enables their academic and professional development. In order to develop this good practice further, a committee comprising members of the Deanship of Student Services and Office of Development and Alumni Affairs was established to review the current suite of support services and identify areas of further development in consultation with the Student Council, Alumni Council, and other stakeholders. The two main objectives of the committee were to improve the existing support services provided to students and alumni, and to identify and develop new support services for the academic and professional development of both students and alumni.

15 The committee met several times before submitting its report to Cabinet in November 2020. The report has 13 recommendations for enhancing the existing services and creating new services; they were all approved by the Cabinet. The recommendations include a new peer-to-peer programme, skills-focused webinars and workshops, online registration for sports tournaments and competitions, awareness sessions, virtual and online activities, tele-mental counselling, and a range of activities for students and alumni. Evidence of the implementation of the recommendation is provided.

16 Another area of good practice identified was the effective framework to engage and respond to students in a timely way. Since the IQR, a joint team from the Office of Marketing and Communication and Office of IT undertook a study to recommend methodologies to enhance the effectiveness of the institution's unified customer service system, in terms of a timely response to students, presenting data summaries in graphical form, and disaggregating student complaints from other feedback, such as suggestions and queries, in order to assist appropriate decision-making by management.

17 The task force generated a report that was considered by Cabinet in November 2020. The three proposed enhancement actions were approved. These were: to categorise student requests into complaints, enquiries and suggestions; adjust the service level agreement for complaints and other requests, and present the data visually on the AU website.

18 Evidence of implementation of the three recommendations is provided by website screenshots, together with a summary of the raw data from 1 September 2020 to 11 February 2022.

19 The effective approach to professional engagement, clearly structured relationships and interactions, and a healthy reflectiveness on curriculum development and the student experience was commended as the third area of good practice. As with the other two, this has been developed further since the IQR in 2020. In order to improve the gathering, analysis and implementation of feedback from students, faculty, alumni, employers and industry advisory boards, a task force comprising a representative from each College conducted a study on how to strengthen this good practice and make further improvements.

20 The task force reported to the Council for Academic Affairs (CfAA) in November 2020. The recommendations that were approved at that time included new strategies for improving students' course evaluation surveys, improvements to alumni and employer surveys, and changes to the Academic Advisory Boards.

21 The approved report was provided to all Deans to implement across all programmes offered by the colleges. Evidence of the implementation of the recommendations was provided through survey reports, annual effectiveness reports, and minutes of meetings.

22 The IQR report made three recommendations. One recommendation concerned institutional oversight of the appropriate use of pedagogic approaches employed across each programme in order to ensure that the Learning Outcomes are adequately covered. The action plan to address this recommendation required the establishment of a committee in each College to review the suitability of the teaching techniques and methodologies with respect to the learning outcomes for each programme. This is coordinated by the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE), to ensure a systematic consideration of the appropriateness of the range and balance of teaching and learning practice across entire programmes.

23 While COVID-19 reduced the opportunities for the use of varied pedagogic approaches, nevertheless, committees were created and the work was carried out.

24 An oversight committee of nine members, representing each of the constituent colleges of AU was created. It developed a template matrix for mapping courses to programme learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessments that were constructed and supplied to the Colleges. Each College then submitted a report containing a completed matrix for each of the programmes delivered by its staff.

25 The College reports show an appropriately wide and diverse range of pedagogic approaches are in use.

26 In approving the report, the Council for Academic Affairs (CfAA) endorsed its recommendations to implement training sessions and workshops for all faculty and instructors to be familiar with the different teaching methods, to include in the AU assessment tools and survey forms all the necessary information related to the assessment of the teaching methods, to add the teaching methods to the relevant and aligned course syllabus and, for each assessment method, to create a rubric that will be used to assess students' work related to the method of teaching.

27 The second recommendation was that AU should extend the use of double marking and moderation to include all summative assessments. The action plan to address this recommendation required the establishment of a task force, under the supervision of CfAA, to conduct a study in collaboration with all Colleges to extend the use of double marking and moderation to include all summative assessments.

28 The task force was established and conducted its business. It reported to CfAA in November 2020. The CfAA approved report includes a new policy that either double marking

or moderation, or both, should be applied as appropriate for all summative assessments or their components. Programme coordinators, in consultation with the Heads of Departments of the concerned programme, are required to determine which assessments are appropriate for double marking, and which for moderation. The Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring consistent implementation of the policy.

29 Examples of compliance were provided in documents that clearly included forms recording double marking for a project examination and an examination in pre-clinical orthodontics, and sample moderation.

30 The final recommendation required the institution to introduce, and monitor compliance with, appropriate expectations for the maximum turnaround time for all assessment marking and providing feedback to students. The action plan described the establishment of a task force, under the supervision of CfAA, to carry out a study regarding appropriate expectations for the maximum turnaround time for all assessment marking and providing feedback to students.

31 The task force carried out its work and reported to CfAA in November 2020. CfAA approved the report's recommendation that the maximum turnaround time for marking and providing feedback on all assessed work should be 15 working days from the date of assessment or deadline for submission, and that this should apply to both formative and summative forms of assessment. Each Head of Department is responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy for all taught programmes delivered by their department.

32 The instructor responsible for each course is required to submit a compliance report before the official beginning of the mid-term examination and again before the official beginning of the final examination. Any exception with acceptable reasons as agreed with the Head of Department should also be included in the report.

Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures

33 In its Mid-Cycle Review Report, AU describes a number of initiatives designed to develop its quality assurance and enhancement processes. These are described below. In combination, they reveal an institution that is not complacent, but one that is constantly striving to improve the effectiveness of its quality processes.

34 For the 2022-23 academic year, the OIPE will increase the number of workshops and seminars on quality assurance procedures, with the intention of increasing the number of faculty members with a good understanding of these matters. A list of planned workshops and seminars shows 10 sessions, covering a range of quality assurance topics. The coverage of quality assurance will be emphasised in the training of new faculty members.

35 AU has recently (2022) joined a group of five local universities to develop a set of benchmarking indicators. The project, supported by the Explorance company, is intended to strengthen the use of external benchmarking.

36 Since the review, the OIPE has developed or revised over 50 of its policies in order to ensure their alignment with the requirements of the regulatory environment, to enhance The Times Higher Education (THE) and QS World University ranking indicators, and to improve the operations and support the strategic initiatives of AU. A list of the revised policies was provided. The OIPE has determined that 97% of policies are compliant with CAA requirements. A target of 100% compliance by the end of the 2022-23 academic year has been agreed upon.

37 The Accreditation and Ranking Unit introduced a template for the initial accreditation of new programmes and a template for the reaccreditation of existing programmes in the 2021-22 academic year. These templates have been provided to all colleges for their utilisation; feedback is being sought for their further development.

38 There are plans to increase the number of academic programmes with international accreditation from the 14 already accredited. Within the next two years, it is hoped to achieve accreditation from the Australian Dental Council for the Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme. Following that, accreditation will be sought for programmes in Computer Engineering, Information Technology, Civil Engineering and Mechanical Engineering from the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET).

39 AU responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by organising workshops on the use of various online learning platforms, and on scheduling and delivering course material and conducting online student assessments. The effectiveness of the switch to online teaching was monitored through student surveys and the feedback was used to generate action plans for the Office of IT and the TLC. Following this, an E-learning Policy has been created and other policies and procedures have been adjusted to ensure that online academic integrity and public conduct violations are addressed effectively. A Steering Committee for Online Learning has been established and tasked with identifying programmes that can be converted from traditional face-to-face learning to blended or online learning in the post-Covid era.

40 The Student Success Centre has launched a Peer Tutor Program in which high-performing students are nominated by their colleges' faculty liaisons to be trained to provide one-to-one tutorial sessions to students in need of additional support. The tutorial sessions have well-defined goals, as agreed upon by the tutor and the tutee. After the tutorials, the peer tutor reports to the Student Success Centre by completing and submitting a 'Tutorial Goals and Outcomes Form'. The form records whether the goal of the tutorials was achieved and, if not, proposes further action. Example forms were provided. Further development of this scheme for academically at-risk students is planned. A task force has been assembled to pilot the scheme, to be known as the Academic Twinning Programme, in two of the University's colleges.

41 In a Cabinet meeting in August 2022, it was decided that a high-level Council, chaired by the Chancellor, would be formed to focus on student employability - a key theme of the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan. This Council, with its representatives from each college, will address the three objectives of Strategic Goal 1 - namely, to advance teaching and learning excellence, to align academic programmes to market needs, and to expand lifelong learning programmes and opportunities.

42 In addition to these planned or current initiatives, it is anticipated that further developments will arise from the current consultation on the strategic goals, objectives and KPIs of the new 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, which became effective on 1 September 2022.

43 The current institutional licensure of AU from the CAA is valid up to 31 May 2023. Work is currently underway to generate the self-study report for renewal of the licensure, which will be submitted in October 2022.

QAA2735 - R13419 - Feb 23

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2023
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Email: accreditation@qaa.ac.uk
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk