International Quality Review of American University of Ras Al Khaimah

September 2021

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an International Quality Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at American University of Ras Al Khaimah. The review took place from 27 to 29 September 2021 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- David Dowland
- Mark Davies
- Harry Williams (student reviewer).

International Quality Review (IQR) offers institutions outside the UK the opportunity to have a review by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The review benchmarks the institution's quality assurance processes against international quality assurance standards set out in Part 1 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).[1]

In International Quality Review, the QAA review team:

- makes conclusion against each of the 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the ESG
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- came to an overall conclusion as to whether the institution meets the standards for International Quality Review.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.[2] A dedicated section explains the method for International Quality Review[3] and has links to other informative documents. For an explanation of terms, see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] www.enqa.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/en/training-and-services/iqr

Key findings

Executive summary

The American University of Ras Al Khaimah (AURAK) is a public, non-profit, independent coeducational university. Located in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the campus is undergoing a significant redevelopment which started in 2015 and is due to be completed in 2025. It offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes through its three schools - Arts and Sciences, Business and Engineering. AURAK had 1039 student enrolments at the time of the review.

AURAK has been licensed by the UAE Ministry of Education since August 2009 to award qualifications in higher education. Operating within the UAE regulatory framework, its academic programmes are accredited by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) and mapped against the Quality Framework Emirates (QFE).

Since 2018, AURAK has been accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award bachelor and master's degrees. A number of its engineering awards are accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) and the School of Business is pursuing accreditation with the Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

AURAK's Strategy was most recently revised in 2019 and sets out its mission -

…to be a leading institution in the Gulf Region, the American University of Ras Al Khaimah:

- *Provides a transformational, student-centered learning experience based on the North American model of higher education enriched by attention to the culture of the region.*

- *Engages students, faculty, and staff in innovative undergraduate and graduate programs that generate high-impact research.*

- *Prepares future leaders and entrepreneurs through community outreach and creative initiatives involving local, regional, and global partners.*

The Mission underpins the AURAK Strategic Plan 2019-2024 – the strategic goals of which are to:

- ***Strategic Goal 1*** *- Implement exemplary governance and organizational processes that ensure student excellence.*

- ***Strategic Goal 2*** *- Attract talented students from around the world through a student-centered culture of success.*

- ***Strategic Goal 3*** *- Offer leading-edge academic programs and community engagement initiatives that meet local, regional, and international needs and generate high-impact research.*

- ***Strategic Goal 4*** *- Enhance faculty and staff excellence through improved recruitment, retention, and professional development.*

- ***Strategic Goal 5*** *- Provide stellar support services that contribute to the institution's excellence and maximize benefits to university stakeholders.*

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which AURAK meets the 10 ESG standards, the review team followed the handbook for International Quality Review (June 2021). The review process is evidence-based, and the review team was provided with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence by AURAK. During the two-day online review visit, which took place 27-29 September 2021, a total of 10 meetings were held, comprising the President, his senior management team, teaching faculty, support services staff, students, alumni and external stakeholders.

The review team came to the overall conclusion that the American University of Ras Al Khaimah meets the 10 ESG standards and has identified one area of good practice and 12 recommendations.

QAA's conclusions about the American University of Ras Al Khaimah

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at the American University of Ras Al Khaimah.

European Standards and Guidelines

The American University of Ras Al Khaimah meets all of the 10 ESG Standards and Guidelines.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at the American University of Ras Al Khaimah.

- The developmental, discussive, reflective and non-punitive (for students and faculty) steps taken by the University to tackle grade inflation through the use of grading guidelines (Standard 1.3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the American University of Ras Al Khaimah.

- Consider the introduction of a programme of training and development for students and employees to reflect on and celebrate the full range of principles and aspects of equality and diversity (Standard 1.1).

- Make programme specifications publicly available (Standard 1.2).

- Develop a coordinated approach that sets out the University's direction in relation to student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, and establishes and implements means by which success will be measured (Standard 1.3).

- Develop procedures for moderation and second marking to achieve consistency in marking practice across the University (Standard 1.3).

- Develop and implement a scheme to ensure that decisions in relation to suspected academic integrity violations are made consistently (Standard 1.3).

- Establish systems to properly record and analyse student appeals, infringements and complaints, with appropriate reporting and actions (Standard 1.3).

- Develop and implement a plan to capture and share the good practice in learning, teaching and assessment that arises organically and through the University's various initiatives to secure standards and enhance quality (Standard 1.3).

- Review and strengthen the University's oversight of the admissions process, including the important role of the deliberative committee structure (Standard 1.4).

- Clearly outline the process for ensuring that any outstanding admissions documentation has been received in the relevant policy documentation (Standard 1.4).

- Develop and implement a scheme that facilitates the development of new faculty in learning, teaching and assessing in higher education (Standard 1.5).

- Revise the University's approach to the development of its teaching staff in learning and teaching and, where necessary, its management, to ensure that staff have ongoing access to a broad range of developmental opportunities commensurate with contemporary higher education and its pedagogy (Standard 1.5).

- Review and enhance the arrangements for professional support staff to enable them to develop their competencies (Standard 1.6).

Explanation of the findings about American University of Ras Al Khaimah

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

Standard 1.1   Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

Findings

1.1   The University works under the oversight of government and external regulatory authorities, including the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) and the Ministry of Education. All accredited programmes have to align to the appropriate level of the UAE Qualifications Framework (*QF Emirates).*

1.2   External accreditation is another significant focus of quality assurance policy and regulation. AURAK is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award baccalaureate and master's degrees (Level III). The School of Business has attained membership of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and is pursuing accreditation, having had its first progress report accepted; the School of Engineering (SoE) maintains Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accreditation for eligible engineering programmes. The School of Arts and Sciences is seeking ABET accreditation for the Biotechnology programme and its concentrations.

1.3   The institutional quality assurance policies and procedures are centred on an overarching Quality and Excellence Policy, linked to the priorities in the institutional Strategic Plan. The policies and procedures are published in the Quality Assurance Manual.

1.4   The Office of Institutional Strategy and Excellence (OISE) is responsible for quality assurance and data reports, reporting to the President and working closely to the Provost. OISE is responsible for coordinating the operational planning process through an in-house electronic platform and monitors the fulfilment of actions from year to year.

1.5   The Board of Trustees is responsible for the approval of policies. Policies are considered by OISE before going to the President's Cabinet and ultimately to the Board of Trustees, with various committees and interest groups involved in the preliminary consultation - including Academic Council, Provost's Council, the Research Committee and the President's Cabinet - enabling the wider engagement of faculty and staff.

1.6   The AURAK framework links quality assurance, planning, and management and resources through a planning model.

1.7   There is student representation on the Academic Review Board, Academic Council and the Academic Calendar Committee, and there are various other consultation meetings including opportunities for students to talk directly to the President and the Provost.

1.8   There is some external input from employers and industrial contacts through industrial advisory panels and other links, with an impact on programme development and delivery.

1.9   The review team examined documentary evidence, including internal and external reports and committee papers, as well as meeting faculty, staff, students, alumni and employers.

1.10   Earlier, in 2019, there was reflection within the University on challenges to faculty and staff engagement arising from a lack of involvement in the revision of policies and

procedures, especially with regard to benefits and professional development opportunities. The review team was told of examples of improvements achieved since 2019, including increased staff consultation through surveys, the sharing of policies, and professional development opportunities.

1.11   The review team heard that the Quality Enhancement Plan remains subject to development, although the process of creating a plan began in 2019. The review team was not, therefore, able to view evidence of systematic evaluation of progress at this stage. The University is engaged in some evaluation of student success related initiatives including, for example, the collection and analysis of student progression data through the period of the introduction of enhanced Maths and English support and an integrated Academic Support Centre for students. The review team, however, saw no significant evidence that the University was engaged in driven, systematic monitoring of student success linked to overall assessment of student support services or innovations. The University is encouraged to ensure such evaluation is put into place to enable it to realise its articulated aspirations to become established as a student-centred institution.

1.12   Students who spoke to the review team, had limited awareness of the institutional representation systems although they commented positively on responsiveness to their feedback at programme level. There is variable student involvement in programme and school committees and the University is reviewing arrangements and whether students could be included in bodies such as advisory councils and programme development teams. The University is launching a 'You Spoke We Listened' initiative to show students action taken in response to their feedback.

1.13   The *Student Handbook 2020-2021* commits the University to 'Diversity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Authenticity: To facilitate, through respectful dialogue, social and multicultural understanding that contributes to the success of all.'

1.14   The student, faculty and staff populations are nationally and ethnically diverse and the University has student recruitment agents to expand the diversity of the student population. The review team, however, did not see evidence of any systematic provision to promote principles of equality and diversity across the institutional community. Senior management told the review panel that there was scope for such provision to be introduced.

1.15   It would be **desirable** for the University to introduce a programme of training and development for students and employees to reflect on and celebrate the full range of principles and aspects of equality and diversity.

1.16   The Academic Integrity Policy is included in the Student Handbook and available on the extranet. AURAK takes various actions to inform students and staff of the Academic Integrity Policy and its significance, including a communication campaign involving students.

1.17   There is a comprehensive quality assurance framework, subject to an ongoing programme of external review and the level of risk is low. Therefore, the review team concludes that Standard 1.1 is **met.**

Standard 1.2   Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Findings

2.1   The University's principles relating to the design and approval of programmes are located in its Program and Curriculum Approval and Revision Policy. The University desires to ensure that all new programmes are 'fit for purpose', determined in part by a feasibility study completed to a standard format. Programmes must demonstrate alignment with the job market and there must be sufficient interest from potential students. The mapping of learning outcomes to the appropriate level of the UAE Qualifications Framework - *QF Emirates* - is an integral part of programme development. As a requirement in the UAE, all programmes must be accredited by the CAA before they can operate.

2.2   The principles are operationalised by following the New Program Development Procedure. The relevant school presents a *prima facie* case to the Provost who, in conjunction with the relevant School Dean, establishes a programme development team comprised of three faculty members. This team has a defined role and remit, and is charged with: preparing the feasibility study, including a market and competitor analysis; presenting the feasibility study for approval to Academic Council; preparing a self-study report, including an action plan to secure efficient programme development during its first four years; developing the programme specification; and creating a submission document, including a marketing plan, for approval by the University Curriculum Committee. The Procedure document includes a timeline to ensure that the process is kept on-track, illustrating approvals at various points from, in sequence, Academic Council, the Board of Trustees, School Curriculum Committee, Academic Council, CAA, University Curriculum Committee, and Academic Council. During the process the OISE provides advice and feedback. The procedure culminates in the production of a programme specification, which essentially defines the programme.

2.3   To facilitate the production of a self-study report, the OISE has created a template, prepopulated with university-level information and other information common to all programmes. The template is structured around the CAA's standards for institutional licensure and programme accreditation since those are the criteria against which the programme is assessed both internally and externally. To allow programme development teams to populate proposed courses with appropriate teachers, the OISE prepares a 'fact sheet' detailing the expertise and experience of full-time and part-time teachers, thus identifying gaps to be filled, and space is allowed on the fact sheet for staff who have yet to be recruited.

2.4   Programme development teams conduct benchmarking exercises with regional and global providers on a range of indicators including programme structure, curriculum, admissions and class size, and work in cooperation with professional services units to create the self-study report.

2.5   In some cases in the recent past, the University had outsourced to external consultants part of the feasibility study - for example, in the creation of employment opportunity reports. However, in an accreditation report the CAA was critical of an

outsourced study, suggesting it was not specific enough to the programme under scrutiny. As a result, the University, through the OISE, has moved to generate all feasibility studies in-house.

2.6   Proposed new programmes are outlined at the meetings of Advisory Councils, where external members input suggestions and advice - for example, on curriculum design, skills development and market need - bearing in mind accreditation body requirements. Where deemed necessary - for instance, where internal expertise is insufficient - the University may employ external subject experts to assist with the design of new programmes.

2.7   The involvement of students in programme development is generally confined to their membership of some of the bodies that scrutinise proposals, including Academic Council, though in some cases they are canvassed by questionnaire on the desirability of new programmes. Alumni are also asked for suggestions of new programmes in the exit survey. However, in part through preparation for this International Quality Review, the University has recognised that enhancement here is possible and may consider including students in both Advisory Councils and programme development teams. Debate on this, as part of a wider enhancement of student representation, has already commenced at Academic Council.

2.8   The review team considered that the framework for the development of new programmes was robust, transparent, and involved appropriate internal and external stakeholders.

2.9   The review team tested the effectiveness of the above processes through interviews with key personnel involved in the design and development of new programmes, and through a scrutiny of documents that were created by following the procedures, including those documents that showed how the University managed the processes.

2.10   The New Program Development Procedure was introduced in June 2021 and so examples of its full implementation were not available at the time of the virtual visit. The preceding procedure was introduced in September 2020, and though it may lack some of the additional checks in the current procedure, is fit-for-purpose.

2.11   In demonstrating compliance with its procedures, the University provided a variety of documents relating to the approval of two new programmes, including the Provost's report to the Board of Trustees. These documents demonstrated that not all process documents and sequences of activity were consistent across the two programmes but that a rigorous examination was applied in each case, with approvals given at various pertinent levels and points including by School and University Curriculum Committees, Academic Council, the University President, and the Board of Trustees. Minutes revealed that in general there was robust academic and market-related debate on new proposals The revised procedures should provide a more consistent operation.

2.12   The University supplied two examples of recent in-house feasibility studies. The review team found these to be comprehensive, detailed and informative, in part because they largely followed the required format.

2.13   The review team examined a small sample of programme specifications and found them to be fit-for-purpose, containing all the information needed to define a programme, including admission requirements, brief course descriptors, assessments, relationship to the *QF Emirates*, mapping of course learning outcomes to programme learning outcomes, and the required and optional general education courses. However, the programme specifications are available internally only and the review team **recommends** that programme specifications are made publicly available.

2.14   The University considers that the robustness of its programme design and approval process is reflected inversely in the number of recommendations arising from CAA and SACSCOC accreditations. Recently, the University reflected on its position and identified that training was required in some aspects of programme development - specifically the creation of self-study reports and measurable learning outcomes. That training was delivered to appropriate faculty members in 2021, and useful guidance was issued by the OISE. Additionally, the programme review process revealed the need for a tightening of the course approval process and tracking of amendments, particularly ones suggested by CAA review teams. In response, the University created a syllabus database to manage version control. These examples serve to illustrate that the University monitors its performance in programme approval and is prepared to take steps to identify any deficiencies identified.

2.15   Programme development teams are provided with the necessary procedural documents in relation to programme design, but are supplied with little guidance or training on how to discharge their responsibilities - for example, faculty members claimed awareness of the OISE's 'fact sheet', but were confused as to its content, and this contributes to the **recommendation** concerning the development of teaching staff in Standard 1.5.

2.16   The criteria the University uses in designing programmes are those of the CAA and of SACSCOC. Since there is some scope for the University in designing programmes that reflect its mission and vision, in particular through subject-specific curricula and the general education courses, the University **might wish to** consider supplementing the external criteria with its own criteria that allow it to systematically develop its distinctive nature through its programme and curriculum offer.

2.17   The University has clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the development and approval of programmes. It has identified some areas of weakness in its processes and has sought to address these through process modifications and internal training, though there is a lack of training for programme development team members. Despite this, overall the review team concludes that the risk to Standard 1.2 is low and therefore the standard is **met**.

Standard 1.3   Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Findings

3.1   The strategic significance of learning and teaching is indicated in the University's vision, through 'inspired teaching'; and its mission, through 'a transformational, student-centered learning experience'. Further, goals of the Strategic Plan refer to 'a student-centered culture', 'the use of high-impact educational practices', and 'innovative academic programs'. Nonetheless, the University acknowledges that delivering against these aspirational aspects has become challenging because of the tension between performance in teaching and performance in research - when institutional rankings, largely based on the latter, have prominence.

3.2   'The recent impacts of the CoViD-19 pandemic saw a rapid transition to online learning, which presented immediate challenges for faculty, staff and students. This has, however, ultimately led to an opportunity with a decision to look at offering at least one online program of study, the planning of which is currently underway'. The Office of Student Success created sessions to help students with the transition.

3.3   Students are encouraged to be reflective and independent learners through their mandatory study of a course - 'University Freshman Transition.' The course involves developing study, decision-making, and planning skills. Comprehensive information about each course is issued to students in a course syllabus document.

3.4   Alongside discipline-specific courses, students must take a general education programme designed to develop soft skills and skills ancillary to the discipline, such as languages. The programme's content varies by discipline; programme teams are able to select general education courses that best contribute to the achievement of the programme learning outcomes.

3.5   Individual faculty members are encouraged to identify improvements to their teaching practice through reflective narratives in annual reports on performance, but a means of sharing any good practice identified was not in evidence and this contributes to the more general **recommendation** in Standard 1.3 below concerning dissemination of good practice.

3.6   The University has a Quality Enhancement Plan that focuses on a single project to develop reflective, entrepreneurial, articulate and motivated students. This Plan is under development and the project incorporates elements of student-centred learning.

3.7   The Student Coursework Assessment Policy details for teaching staff the University's expectations concerning assessment and the marking of student work, including examinations. It also gives a general statement on assessment, indicating that assessment promotes feedback to students and to teachers on their performance. It specifies that assessment diets, including dates and times of examinations, must be issued to students in the first week of each semester. The Policy notes that the University will implement methods for the moderation of student work, but does not explain what those methods are or how and when they should be applied.

3.8   Each School has a Curriculum and Assessment Committee that oversees all assessments, ensuring that they are valid, reliable, fair and comply with the University's requirements.

3.9   As per the Student Assessment and Moderation Procedure, the Department Chair examines grading distributions of all relevant faculty members for adherence to the University's grading guidelines (the Dean of School would examine the Chair's distributions). These grading guidelines are contained in a memo of 2019 from the Provost to the President and were developed in part to combat grade inflation, commensurate with a revision of the grading scale. They are communicated in the professional development week for faculty members (see Standard 1.5). The guidelines indicate the proportions of grades in broad classes that are acceptable, though exceptions can be made, if justified - for example, for small class sizes. Where there is non-adherence the Chair makes an investigation, including second marking by another faculty member if appropriate. In cases of non-adherence, developmental objectives relating to this should be included as part of the Faculty Annual Report system (see Standard 1.5). The guidelines make plain that simply adjusting marks to fit the scale is not an acceptable remedy, rather this should come through adjusting assessment tools and how assessments are marked. Following the introduction of the guidelines there is evidence that the proportion of medium and low grades has increased at the expense of high grades, particularly in the School of Business. The review team acknowledges the developmental, discussive, reflective and non-punitive (for students and faculty) steps taken by the University to tackle grade inflation through the use of grading guidelines and considers this a **feature of good practice**.

3.10   Feedback from students on their experiences of being taught and assessed are collected by surveys on courses, instructors, internships, and on general satisfaction, including an exit survey. Students may also voice opinion as members of deliberative bodies, including Academic Council, and collectively through the Student Government Association. The Written Submission noted that students are listened to.

3.11   Academic integrity is introduced in the University Freshman Transition course through debating plagiarism, and this is welcomed by students. The Student Academic Integrity Policy and Procedure makes clear statements about what is and what is not acceptable academic practice, including providing an extended definition of plagiarism. Faculty members have considerable discretion in applying penalties to first-offenders, up to and including course failure. Repeat or serious offences, such as theft of an examination paper, are referred to the Office of the Provost which, via the Academic Review Board, can apply higher penalties.

3.12   The University has a complaints policy, termed Student Grievance Policy, which clearly states that students may complain where they are dissatisfied or disagree with any decision or action that affects them. The procedure to be followed is clearly specified in the Student Academic Grievance Procedure document, which also covers non-academic grievances. The procedures are communicated to students in the University Catalog and Student Handbook.

3.13   Students may appeal against their grades using the principles in the Student Appeals Policy. The processes are simple: a student has the right to appeal to the relevant faculty member; if that is unsuccessful s/he may further appeal to the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, whose decision is final. However, the University Catalog indicates two intermediate steps: appeals to the Department Chair and to the Dean of School. The University **will want to** align its policy, information issued to students, and current practice in respect of the appeals process.

3.14   The systems the University has in place allow this Standard to be met, but the lack of formal documentation that applies a strategic plan to student-centred aspirations is an omission, as outlined below.

3.15   In testing the operational effectiveness of the University's approach to student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, the review team held wide-ranging discussions with staff at all levels and with students that focused on curricula delivery methods and their management. The Team also examined much documentary evidence including course files, minutes of deliberative bodies, and internal reports.

3.16   The SED made various claims about how the University meets this Standard, including through curriculum design, academic advising, the student orientation programme, classroom observation policy, evaluation of faculty members, various academic support services, and the University's mission and vision. However, in most cases specific evidence to support the claims was lacking and while some of the documents and processes offered expressed student-centric ideals, these were not supported by the presented evidence. The review team does not challenge the effectiveness of these services and functions but was unable to clearly understand how they contributed to a philosophy of student-centredness. Nonetheless, the goal of student-centeredness is communicated to faculty members - for example, in the professional development week (see standard 1.5).

3.17   The review team noted the strong aspirational sentiment concerning student-centredness stemming from the University's mission, and some good notions of what that means in practice to teachers charged with the delivery of a student-centred experience. However, between the two there is little to expand on the aspiration and provide direction for the teachers. Thus a coordinated response to the laudable aspirations in the vision, mission and strategic plan is hampered because there is no overall strategy or operational document guiding learning and teaching development, such as a teaching and learning plan. Managers and teachers were strongly supportive of the University's student-centred overall strategic approach to learning and teaching, though the review team was unable to identify any definition of student-centredness other than it was connected to the notion of student success, or responding to feedback from students and other stakeholders. Faculty and management staff met by the review team were able to supply examples of student-centeredness, which mostly involved students as participants in the learning process, and the University has a strong focus on quality, coordinated through the OISE; but the developmental aspects of learning and teaching practice are contained within a number of initiatives, without overall consolidation to drive progress in a single and coordinated direction.

3.18   The Business Plan (2021-2024) of the Division of Academic Affairs and Student Success indicates how university units, including the Provost's Office and the University's schools, will meet the institutional goals and objectives. Assessment measures in relation to 'use of high-impact educational practices' refer to reductions in violations of academic integrity, production of uniform grading distributions, reduction in failing grades, increase in high grades, and hiring more faculty and other staff. Assessment measures in relation to 'new, innovative academic programs' refer to increasing the number of new programmes, but not how they will be innovative; in relation to promoting 'a student-centered culture of success' measures concern for student retention, number of co-curricular or extracurricular programs, and number of webinars held. Thus, in general there is a focus on outputs, rather than promoting practices that will enhance the outputs. The focus on outputs is valid, but should be accompanied by the developmental means through enhancement to student-centred learning and teaching practices to achieve them. The University has identified that progress in achieving goals has not been uniform across the institution, and this may stem from a lack of coordination to enable how good student-centred practice can be shared. The review team heard that dissemination is informal, by word-of-mouth, or via the week-long staff development events, though it found it difficult to identify any item scheduled in relation to this. The team considered that there was a lack of a formal channel for the identification and sharing of good practice in relation to learning, teaching and assessment and **recommends** that the University develops and implements a plan to capture and share

the good practice in learning, teaching and assessment that arises organically and through the University's various initiatives to secure standards and enhance quality (see Standard 1.3 above, and Standard 1.5).

3.19   The review team identified a potential risk to maintaining a student-centred focus to learning, teaching and assessment because of a lack of overall strategic direction in this regard, with appropriate indicators that measure student-centredness. Accordingly, the review team **recommends** that the University refocus its efforts in relation to learning and teaching with a coordinated approach that sets out the University's direction in relation to student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, and establishes and implements means by which success will be measured. Part of this coordination may address the sharing of good practice.

3.20   The review team examined a small sample of course syllabus documents (essentially course handbooks) and found them to be comprehensive, informative and usefully succinct. However, the equivalent document at programme level was not extant and the review team considered that the University **may wish to** develop one for each programme to inform students how their various courses, including general education courses, combine into a coherent programme.

3.21   The University's general principles on assessment are both rigorous and fair. The review team scrutinised a sample of minutes of School Curriculum and Assessment Committees which revealed them to be rigorous in their scrutiny of assessment tools, including the provision of sound advice on regulatory issues. Students reported to the review team that course assessment tasks and schedules were issued to them at the earliest opportunity; that assessment criteria (as assessment 'rubrics') were routinely used; and that feedback on assessed work was both timely and in general of good quality.

3.22   Given the lack of instructional information for faculty members and course teams in the Student Coursework Assessment Policy and associated procedure, the review team asked for any information that stipulates when moderation or second marking of student work should be done, but was referred back to the policy and procedure. On further investigation the team discerned that moderation only takes place where there is non-adherence to the University's grading guidelines. The Team concludes that there is insufficient regulation and guidance to achieve any moderation or second marking and **recommends** that the University develop procedures for moderation and second marking to achieve consistency in marking practice across the University. These procedures should operate to secure the standards of all awards, not only where grade profiles are not in compliance with the University's guidelines. This may involve extending moderation to combat grade inflation to more general moderation of a fixed sample of student work.

3.23   In spring 2020, the University mandated, in line with Ministry of Education (MoE) requirements in response to the pandemic, that assessments be marked as pass/fail, and communicated this to students. Later that year the decision was reversed and grade-based marking was resumed. Although students were informed of this decision reversal as part of an email on a range of matters by the Provost, many approached their assessments understanding they would be marked as pass/fail. The students raised a petition in protest at this and other matters and the Student Government Association raised the matter with the University. The email from the Provost noted that 'the University must comply with … MoE directives', but the reversal was encouraged rather than mandated by the MoE. The review team asked for information showing the University's response to the complaint by students, but nothing pertinent was supplied, although the University considers that its communication with students could have been clearer.

3.24   Students confirmed that their work is, where possible, checked electronically for plagiarism. The software generates a 'similarity score' and students were under the impression that so long as the score is below a certain value - as much as 25% - their work will not be in violation of the University's policy. Both senior managers and faculty members explained that the score was not used in this way, rather each item of submitted work was considered using qualitative means based on the professionalism of the teachers. The University may therefore **want to** dispel the erroneous understandings of students since they may lead to unintended academic integrity violations. The review team considered that the Student Academic Integrity Policy was generally well-formulated but also that there was the potential for similar violations to merit different penalties since the penalty in many cases is determined by the faculty member who detected the breach, notwithstanding a student's right to appeal to the Academic Review Board. Further, it is possible that different faculty members may have different views on where the line between practice and malpractice lies. Accordingly, the review team **recommends** that the University develops and implements a scheme to ensure that decisions in relation to suspected academic integrity violations are made consistently. Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy should be reported by faculty members to the Office of Student Success, and there has been a successful drive in recent years to increase the rate of reporting, but the potential remains for faculty to apply a penalty but not to report it centrally. For example, in one period in 2020, 34 infringements were reported, but 33 of these came from five faculty members in two departments in the same school. This suggests under-identification, under-reporting, or both. Without a central complete record, it is difficult to establish the extent and type of infringements and also the means to be adopted to reduce them. It is also difficult to establish the existence of multiple violations by a single student, although the University has worked on creating appropriate penalties in these cases.

3.25   The review team asked to view the University's record of student complaints - those generated through the Student Grievance Policy. However, the University's response referred to collecting information from students by surveys, and how some of that information might appear in course files, and omitted reference to any record keeping of complaints. Although complaints procedures are communicated to students, some students met by the review team were unaware of any system for dealing with complaints; the review team must therefore conclude that either no complaints are ever made - though the University did not specifically state this - or no records are kept.

3.26   The University receives a significant number of appeals by students against their grade, most of which are not upheld. Some students met by the review team were unaware of an appeals system.

3.27   Although the University keeps records of appeals and partial records of infringements of academic integrity, it could supply no evidence to indicate how it systematically analysed appeals, infringements and complaints to detect trends or other patterns that could be used through learning to reduce future instances - for example, through the issuance of additional guidance to students - though there is some occasional reporting of aspects of infringements to Faculty Senate. The review team **recommends** that the University establish systems to properly record and analyse student appeals, infringements and complaints, with appropriate reporting and actions.

3.28   Students met by the review team reported satisfaction with the quality of teaching and spoke positively about the transition to online teaching during the pandemic. General student satisfaction levels concerning the quality of education received were high between 2015-16 and 2018-19, with 92% to 96% of students giving a rating of good or excellent. However, this value fell significantly in 2020, as did ratings for the quality of instructors, and almost all other measures. The review team noted favourably the previously high levels of

satisfaction and considers the relative dissatisfaction to be pandemic-related and a global phenomenon.

3.29   While both students and teachers were able to cite examples of where teachers were using new technologies in their practice, there was much less certainty about the teachers' use of a variety of modern pedagogical methods, and this contributes to the **recommendation** concerning the development of teaching staff in Standard 1.5.

3.30   An examination of programme learning outcomes revealed that these were appropriate to each programme and set at the correct levels for achievement at bachelor's level. Course learning outcomes were similarly appropriate and course syllabuses showed explicit linkage between both content and course learning outcomes, and programme learning outcomes. However, despite the strong emphasis placed on learning outcomes, they are not threshold concepts such that there is not a requirement for all learning outcomes associated with a course or programme to be met before students can pass the course or programme. Rather, learning outcomes are more akin to a syllabus and are deemed to be met overall if a variable proportion (for example, 70% or 80%) of students are judged to have met them. This itself is not problematic in relation to the European Standards and Guidelines, but does not align with standard European practice. Further, some students and faculty members were unsure of the nature of learning outcomes and their requirement to be met or otherwise. Indeed, when asked about how they knew the level to teach at, some faculty referred to tacit knowledge, rather than referring to an absolute standard, as expressed, for example, by learning outcomes. Moreover, some faculty members were unable to cite any definitive reference points that governed the academic standard to which they taught, instead relying on their understanding of students' and student cohorts' academic experience and building on that. Consequently, the University **will wish to ensure** that how it uses learning outcomes is clearly communicated to all relevant employees and to students.

3.31   The review team considered carefully that, on balance, while there are a number of recommendations under this Standard, these do not relate to issues that, individually or collectively, present any serious risks to the management of this standard, and accordingly Standard 1.3 is **met**.

Standard 1.4   Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Findings

4.1   There is information on the University's higher education offer on the University's website and in their Catalog, which provides more comprehensive information relating to programme structure and content, programme educational objectives and learning outcomes, as well as programme-specific entry requirements.

4.2   The University's Department of Admissions and Office of Marketing are jointly responsible for administering the admissions process, with oversight provided by the Academic Registrar and Provost. The policies covering the admission of new students include the Undergraduate Admissions Policy, Transfer Undergraduate Student Admissions Policy, and Graduate Admissions Policy. These are approved by the Board of Trustees and aligned to the requirements of the CAA and Ministry of Education.

4.3   The University does not currently award credits for prior experiential learning at undergraduate level; however, it does allow students enrolled elsewhere to transfer up to 50% of their awarded credits. In meetings during the online visit, the review team heard from undergraduate students with experience of transferring from other institutions and heard that they found the process simple and easy to navigate. Graduate students may apply to transfer up to 6-credit hours, subject to approval by the University.

4.4   There are processes to monitor and support student progression throughout their chosen programme of study. Chief among these is the academic probation system, which is outlined in the University's Academic Progress Policy. Undergraduate students must maintain a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 2.0 or higher, whereas graduate students must maintain a CGPA of 3.0 to avoid being placed on academic probation. Students failing to maintain these standards are referred to the Office of Academic Recovery Support and Counselling for support (see Standard 1.6). Analysis and monitoring undertaken by the University suggests that the academic probation system and student support mechanisms in place do allow students to return to full-time study and ultimately complete their programme.

4.5   Student records, including admissions records, are maintained by the Academic Registrar, as per the University's Institutional Policy on Student Records. Students nearing the completion of their degree must submit a graduation request, which is then audited by the Academic Registrar. The final Graduation List is approved by the Academic Council and Board of Trustees. Graduates are issued with a degree certificate and transcript, which includes the qualification obtained, course level, indicative content, and grades achieved.

4.6   During the course of the review, the review team identified several examples of students being approved for graduation by the Academic Council and Board of Trustees, despite not having fulfilled their admissions requirements. This was principally due to the students not submitting a certificate confirming the equivalency of their high school education. Exploring this with the University, the review team was told that the requirement for students to confirm the equivalency of their high school education was imposed by the CAA in 2018 and that the students identified by the review team had enrolled before this date. Nevertheless, the University took the decision in 2018 to apply the CAA rules to all students, irrespective of when they enrolled. Given that one of the identified students had enrolled back in 2015-16, the review team considered this a significant breakdown in

oversight. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University reviews and strengthens its oversight of the admissions process, including the important role of the deliberative committee structure.

4.7   In exploring this issue with the University, the review team clarified the normal process for following-up with newly-enrolled students' missing documentary evidence and were told that students are normally given one semester but, in extreme circumstances, can sometimes be given two semesters to fulfil their conditions of admission. However, a review of the relevant policies and procedure documents found no detail on the process outlined by the University. The review team, therefore, **recommends** that the University clearly outlines the process for ensuring that any outstanding admissions documentation have been received in the relevant policy documentation.

4.8   In analysing the documentary evidence provided by the University and reflecting upon the discussions between the review team and staff, students and employers, the review team concluded that, ultimately, the policies relating to student admission, progression, recognition, and certification align with the requirements outlined in Standard 1.4. The review team considers that while there are two recommendations under this Standard, they do not individually or collectively present any serious risks to the management of student admissions, progression, recognition and certification. Therefore, the review team concludes that Standard 1.4 is **met**.

Standard 1.5   Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

Findings

5.1   One of the University's strategic goals is to 'Enhance faculty and staff excellence through improved recruitment, retention, and professional development.'

5.2   Through the IDAP Faculty Credentials Module, faculty members submit their qualifications, skills and experience for any course they consider themselves competent to teach. The relevant Department Chair assigns teaching responsibilities according to the credentials and these are checked by the relevant Dean and then the Provost. The OISE provides a quality check on the completeness of faculty credentials, in particular regarding the adherence to accrediting body requirements. To teach undergraduate degrees, faculty members must have a relevant master's degree plus professional or teaching experience. For graduate programmes, a terminal degree is required plus either research or professional experience. Exceptions are possible and must be notified to the CAA. These requirements are set out along with general principles in the Faculty Hiring Policy.

5.3   Hiring recommendations are made to the Dean and Provost by school-level recruitment committees which take careful note of applicants' teaching experience and their match to the courses at the University. New faculty members must undergo an orientation programme that covers all aspects of academic life, and introduces the specific policies, procedures and expectations of the University.

5.4   The OISE provides and coordinates training for faculty and staff. Attendance at staff development sessions had waned, in part owing to the scheduling of these sessions during term-time. The University responded to this by mandating week-long development sessions before the start of each semester. Updates on university processes are given along with some developmental sessions designed to improve performance in teaching, research and service. As the pandemic bit, the Center for Teaching, Learning and Instructional Technology offered sessions on moving to online learning. The staff development offer also incorporates a small number of activities outside the week-long development sessions. Workshops are delivered by the Center for Teaching, Learning and Instructional Technology on, for example, developing teaching narratives, which serve as both evidence for promotion and a means of promoting reflection. Staff development sessions are evaluated by the participants.

5.5   Classroom observation is considered a method of promoting teaching effectiveness. New faculty members are observed in the first two semesters, and every other year thereafter, by a trained person with a higher rank or more experience. A reporting form is used, and passed to the Department Chair if there are recommendations for improvement.

5.6   The performance of faculty members is appraised using a Faculty Annual Report system, which asks faculty members to self-evaluate on a broad range of areas of academic activity including teaching, academic advising, research, scholarship or creative activity, discipline-related activity, and campus and community activity. Action planning is included, as is reporting on last year's plan. Supporting evidence, including student evaluations and class observation, is appended. The report concludes with evaluations by the Department Chair, Dean and Provost, meaning that the Provost is aware of the performance of each faculty member. The faculty member is given the opportunity to agree with the evaluation or

to disagree, in which case an explanation for the disagreement is required, to which the Provost's Office responds.

5.7 The University introduced a new promotions system in 2019 that explicitly considers teaching as a criterion at each level. Candidates should show positive records in teaching, research and service, but promotion will be denied unless three external reviews of the candidate's research are each positive. At the same time, a similar contract renewal policy was introduced that also required satisfactory teaching performance.

5.8 To incentivise good teaching a President's Award for Excellence in Teaching was introduced in 2018, replacing a President's Award for Outstanding Teaching. It is presented annually to a person who, *inter alia*, has a documented history of high-impact educational practices, is reflective, and uses multiple feedback sources to improve delivery and thus student learning. Candidates submit a narrative identifying how they meet the criteria that is similar to that used in applying for promotion and in the Faculty Annual Report system. The awardee receives a commemorative plaque and monetary prize.

5.9 The University showcased a range of new technologies used by teaching staff. Some were deployed by single staff only, whereas some had been rolled-out university-wide. Some staff groups and individuals had enhanced their use of digital technologies to maintain effective teaching during the pandemic. However, the University marshalled this information specifically for this International Quality Review and was seemingly hitherto unaware of the range of technologies used. Accordingly, the University is missing the opportunity here in disseminating good practice in relation to use of technologies across the University, and this contributes to the more general **recommendation** in Standard 1.3 concerning dissemination of good practice.

5.10 In their Written Submission, students reported positively on the expertise, professionalism and friendliness of faculty members.

5.11 In testing the institutional arrangements relating to this Standard, the review team interviewed faculty members, managers and students and read a wide range of documents, including those used in employment, appraisal, promotion and reward of faculty members.

5.12 The review team examined a sample faculty contract and found it to be comprehensive and fit-for-purpose, specifying the rules of probation and duties, including teaching load.

5.13 The review team scrutinised an example of the Faculty Annual Report documentation and found it to be comprehensive and developmental for the faculty member concerned. Faculty members were generally supportive of the process.

5.14 The review team considered the promotions policy and procedure to be well-articulated, rigorous and transparent, focusing on the needs of the University.

5.15 The review team regarded the faculty orientation programme as comprehensive in introducing faculty to the administrative aspects of their role.

5.16 As an incentive to promote good teaching practice, the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching, or its equivalent, has been awarded four times since 2014-15. While recognising the value of this award, the review team **wondered whether** a parallel prospective, rather than retrospective, award might also be of value as a means to encourage the delivery of student-centred learning processes.

5.17 The classroom observation procedure seems focused on the observee learning from the more experienced observer, and does not acknowledge that in some cases the

observer may learn more from the process, in part since observation is a means of disseminating practice. The review team considered that the University **may wish to** revise its classroom observation scheme so that it is more collegiate and recognises that all can learn from the process, including in dissemination of good practice, and this contributes to the more general **recommendation** in Standard 1.3 concerning dissemination of good practice.

5.18   Agendas for the consolidated staff development events that take place prior to each semester, revealed the transmission of a broad range of useful information pertinent to an academic role. However, conspicuous by its limited coverage was advanced pedagogy. In any case it would be difficult to train fledgling academics in how to teach in higher education in such a short period. The review team could find no evidence that new faculty are required to undergo any training in learning, teaching and assessing as they develop their academic practice, and the University noted that more could be done here; indeed, one School has instigated its own developmental sessions to address this issue. Accordingly, the team **recommends** that the University develops and implements a scheme that facilitates the development of new faculty in learning, teaching and assessing in higher education.

5.19   The overall staff development offer relating to learning and teaching, including the week-long development events and supplementary activities, is not strong in breadth or depth and does not provide a credible basis for the development of faculty members in contemporary teaching practices. Further, faculty members met by the review team had not received training in assessment at the University. Accordingly, the review team **recommends** that the University revises its approach to the development of its teaching staff in learning and teaching and, where necessary, its management, to ensure that staff have ongoing access to a broad range of developmental opportunities commensurate with contemporary higher education and its pedagogy.

5.20   In its SED, under the banner of 'Innovative Teaching' the University cited as an example the 'US-UAE Higher Education Collaboration Initiative' project with a US University. This project brings the University and its US partner closer in many ways, and there may be benefits in exchanging information about learning and teaching, but the review team could not discern any specific actions or goals that would promote innovative teaching.

5.21   There is much encouragement for research and scholarly activity - not least through the Faculty Annual Report system, the academic promotions system and the contract renewals system - and there is opportunity here for faculty members to illustrate and reflect on how their research has informed their teaching, though only a minority have done so. Although a considerable number of graduate students have been included as authors of research outputs and have been involved in research colloquiums, except for the work of one faculty member the SED was silent on how research and scholarly activity explicitly support teaching and learning processes, and acknowledges that more work is needed to encourage faculty members 'to be more intentional in using their research and scholarship to enrich their teaching'. While the review team supports this conclusion, it also noted that both students and teachers were able to cite convincing examples of where the teachers' research was used directly in teaching.

5.22   Although the review team identified training and development of new and continuing faculty members as an area to be addressed, it concluded that this does not present any serious risk and therefore Standard 1.5 is **met**.

Standard 1.6   Learning resources and student support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Findings

6.1   The University has invested in a wide range of learning and teaching resources that support and enable students to achieve both academically and professionally. Classrooms allow for the delivery of in-person teaching; however, there are also extensive specialist teaching facilities to support the teaching of the University's specialised programmes in the School of Arts, School of Business, and School of Engineering.

6.2   The University's Saqr Library is a central resource for students looking for reference textbooks, access to journal articles and other material. However, at the time of the review visit, the University was in the process of commissioning its new library building which will provide additional space for workshops, training and conferences. The review team took a virtual tour of the new library building and considered that it was a positive addition to the University's learning resources.

6.3   The University's virtual learning environment (VLE) allows students to review course content, submit assessments, and participate in discussions. The VLE also allows teaching staff to record and deliver sessions with students in remote attendance. The University's in-house student information system - EUMS-SIS - allows students to view their class schedule, attendance, grades and study plan. A full induction to the University's IT systems is provided to students upon enrolment.

6.4   During the review visit, the team met with students and student representatives who found the University's induction activities helpful, the learning resources available to them excellent, and that overall, the University was responsive to their views. The review team also heard that the rapid move from in-person teaching to remote delivery by the University, as a result of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, had led to some issues around accessing online resources but, once reported, they were fixed immediately and therefore had no complaints.

6.5   All students are allocated an Academic Advisor within one month of enrolment. The Academic Advisor provides support and signposting to other services, where necessary. Students failing to make adequate academic progress are placed on Academic Probation and referred to the Office of Academic Recovery Support and Counselling for support. Counselling staff then work with students on probation to develop a personalised Academic Recovery Plan. The plan is then used by the student to track their own progress and it is also used as a discussion guide at the students' regular meetings with their assigned Academic Recovery Counsellor. Analysis by the University on its Academic Probation programme in 2020-21 demonstrated that, on average, 70% of students improved their CGPA, demonstrating its effectiveness.

6.6   The Centre for Learning Support Services provides a central hub for students to access further academic support, including the services of the AURAK Writing Centre, Mathematics and Science Centre, and the Peer Tutoring Centre. Whereas support provided by the AURAK Writing Centre, and the Mathematics and Science Centre is delivered by staff members, the Peer Tutoring Centre matches students with a CGPA of 3.5 and above with peers achieving the lower grades of either D, F or W. The review team found that there are established guidelines for the operation of the peer tutoring system and that training and ongoing supervision is provided by the Director of Learning Support Services. In meetings with students and student representatives, the review team heard several examples of the

peer tutoring system supporting students to improve their academic performance, especially during the disruption caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

6.7	There is careers support and guidance provided through the Office of Institutional Advancement, which houses the Office of Career Development, Internships and Job Placements. Together, these services support students in finding both jobs after their studies but also internships and placements during their programmes of study by providing careers advice, workshops and employer engagement events. Students and student representatives that met with the review team during the online visit commended the provision of careers and placement support at the University and noted that, even after they finish their programmes and leave, graduates are encouraged to keep in touch with the University. Information on the breadth and depth of academic and pastoral support available to students is provided during induction and also in the University Catalog and Student Handbook.

6.8	Professional support staff are based mostly within the Office of Student Success, which includes the Department of Student Life and the Centre for Learning Support. Staff responsible for the University Library are based within their own team, headed by the Director of the Library. Staff in these areas are suitably qualified; however, the review team found that the opportunities for professional support staff to develop their competencies were limited. Therefore, the review **recommends** that the University reviews and enhances the arrangements for professional support staff to develop their competencies.

6.9	The Student Government Association, which is composed of student representatives, is one of the mechanisms by which students can provide feedback to the University. The Student Government Association President currently serves on the Academic Council, ensuring that the student voice is heard at the top of the University. There is an extensive range of extracurricular activities, which is organised by the Department of Student Life. These opportunities allow students to develop transferable skills in addition to the skills developed during their academic programmes. Alumni are able to access some university facilities, including the Saqr Library after graduation and are encouraged to continue their relationship with the University through the AURAK Alumni Club.

6.10	The review team concluded that the University provides appropriate learning and student support services underpinned by a suitable level of funding. Consequently the risk to Standard 1.6 is low and the standard is **met**.

Standard 1.7   Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Findings

7.1   The Office of Institutional Strategy and Excellence (OISE) has the central role in the deployment of data for the running and enhancement of the University, with other departments also having defined responsibilities. A wide range of data sets is used to inform decision-making, including student enrolment and student progression, graduate outcomes, research, HR, finance and overall institutional effectiveness. The data analysis activities are linked to the strategic priorities of the University. The data sets are used in reports to government agencies, including the Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics (CHEDS).

7.2   Student enrolment data are published in the AURAK Fact Book supplemented by dynamic data through a dashboard supplied by the OISE. Trend analysis informs the management of admissions and marketing, and changes to the programme portfolio.

7.3   The Direct Assessment of Student Performance and Analysis (DASPA) system is the source of data for monitoring student progression and achievement, informing course and programme reviews and the annual performance review of instructors. Course evaluations, including student feedback, are administered through an in-house system.

7.4   The University runs a semesterly Graduate Destination Survey with the Ministry of Education and has almost invariably met the target response rate of 70%. The Ministry of Education is launching a Longitudinal Graduate Destination Survey to be applied in 2021-22. AURAK runs a Career Opportunity Survey distributed by the Ministry of Education to schools across the UAE.

7.5   The Office of Research and Community Service monitors the research activity of faculty enabling the use of research output to inform teaching. The Ranking Committee oversees the use of external data for league tables and to inform employer engagement.

7.6   The Office of Human Resources tracks data on the efficacy of faculty and staff recruitment process, and reasons for employee departures. The Provost monitors the faculty student ratio and the faculty workload to ensure that they remain within the levels required by the University and its accreditors.

7.7   The review team examined a range of sources of evidence including data and other review reports produced internally and externally, and committee papers, as well as meeting faculty staff and external personnel.

7.8   Senior managers pointed to some examples of good practice in the use of data to inform programme approval and review - for example, in Engineering. The University may wish to consider how to promote the sharing of good practice in the use of programme and course data across all schools.

7.9   The University is taking ongoing action to streamline the DASPA system enhancing data reporting capacity and safeguarding data integrity to meet the changing needs of the Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics. There were already improvements in the DASPA system following discussions with the Faculty Senate in 2019-20, leading to improvements in services to faculty. There are various checks on the quality and accuracy of

data, although the University may wish to consider the introduction of written protocols on data integrity and accuracy.

7.10   Student retention, progression and achievement are also monitored and reported through CHEDS to the Ministry of Education and published externally (https://aurak.ac.ae/en/student/office-of-enrollment-management/student-achievement). The overall success of the student probation scheme is not, however, currently monitored and the University may wish to consider how to evaluate the efficacy of that scheme.

7.11   The CAA identified through external review that some course files had not been updated for a few years. OISE is, however, developing a revised and automated Course File module in the university intranet to maintain accurate information.

7.12   OISE coordinates the operational planning process, through the in-house Annual Operational Planning platform within the Integrated Digitization and Automation Process monitoring the progress of departmental action plans from year to year.

7.13   There is extensive use of surveys of students, faculty, staff and employers to inform quality assurance. There are examples of improvements in services achieved through data analysis and surveys, including action to address student feedback about residential services and action to support students with Maths and English, with the creation of a Science and Maths Centre. Students told the panel of changes made at programme level in response to their feedback. The University recognises, however, that it should take more action to feed back to students on the action taken in response to surveys and a 'You Spoke We Listened' initiative is being launched to show students the action taken in response to their feedback.

7.14   Overall, the University makes extensive use of data through a series of defined systems and responsibilities, subject to external audit and review. The review team concludes that the risk to Standard 1.7 is low and that the standard is **met.**

Standard 1.8   Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

Findings

8.1   The University publishes information on its governance, management, and curriculum on their website and on printed marketing materials . Course fees and the circumstances in which they will be refunded are also communicated via the University's website. This information for the public and prospective students was found to be clear, accurate and readily accessible.

8.2   The Office of Marketing and Public Relations is responsible for overseeing all communication activities, which includes coordinating all print and digital publications that advertise the University as well as maintaining the University's social media presence.

8.3   The University Catalog provides more comprehensive information about the University, including an overview of its structure and organisation, the cost of attendance (tuition fees), as well as information on admissions requirements. While the University Catalog is available publically via the University website, the review team found the definitive record of each programme - the programme specification - was not available to prospective students without first contacting the University. The review team identified a recommendation on this in Standard 1.2.

8.4   After enrolment, new students are provided with the University's Student Handbook - a comprehensive guide outlining the rights and responsibilities of AURAK students, student clubs and associations, the provision of student services and academic support, and the use of the University library. The Student Handbook also includes several key policies relevant to students, including the student code of conduct, code of research integrity, and disciplinary policies.

8.5   There are processes by which public information is published and reviewed, with oversight provided by the University senior leadership team and the Marketing and Branding Committee. Revisions to important documents, such as the University Catalog, which is required by the CAA and Ministry of Education, and the Student Handbook are ultimately signed-off by either the President or Provost.

8.6   The University provides information about its activities, programmes and overall direction to both prospective students and the public that is clear, objective and readily accessible. There are processes in place to ensure that published information is reviewed to ensure currency and accuracy. The review team therefore concludes that the risk to Standard 1.8 is low and that the standard is **met**.

Standard 1.9   Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

Findings

9.1   Periodic review is driven largely by external, regulatory and accreditation requirements, with the University having internal processes for its own assurance.

9.2   Programme assessment and review are guided by the *Program and Curriculum Approval and Review Policy* and implemented through procedures for programme assessment and course development and approval. Each programme is subject to 'Annual Assessment'. The review is part of the DASPA process (Direct Assessment of Student Performance and Analysis), completed each year and including Comprehensive Instructor Reviews. The programme assessment committee (or departmental meeting for Engineering) leads the annual programme review progress.

9.3   The annual report from the committee is submitted through OISE to the School Curriculum and Assessment Committee for approval. Any proposed programme changes are submitted to the University Curriculum Committee and Academic Council. The programme specification is then altered accordingly with other actions and modifications taking place under oversight from the committees. The Provost maintains strategic overview across programmes, with committees to support the programme review process, including the Provost's Council, the General Education Committee, as well as the University Curriculum Committee and Academic Council. The Provost's Council is an additional forum for discussion about programme revisions and their university-wide implications. The General Education Committee oversees the General Education provision across the University.

9.4   The review team was pleased to observe that AURAK carries out a more detailed review of each programme in preparation for the renewal of accreditation for the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), usually every three to five years. The review involves consideration of a Self-Study Report. AURAK previously used consultancy firms to undertake feasibility studies for new programmes or review the existing programmes but the process is now driven by OISE.

9.5   AURAK also conducts an annual assessment of all programmes offered by the institution as part of the annual operational planning process. OISE is responsible for working with the Provost and schools on annual and periodic programme assessments, and for ensuring that the operational planning process closes the loop on actions. The operational planning process was revised in 2019-20 to streamline the numbers of units. The operating plans are captured within an IT system. The University cites examples of action taken through the operational planning process. For example, the School of Engineering introduced a 'common first year' across all undergraduate engineering programmes for 2019-20.

9.6   Annual and periodic review are informed by a wide range of data sets, including programme-specific data from OISE on student progression, assessment outcomes, achievement and graduate destinations, as well as other sources, course files, student retention and progression, trends in industry and survey data. such as the Senior Exit Survey. The Program Assessment Committees also monitor the data and information

provided by faculty through the Instructor Reviews of Courses. They review the instructors' recommendations for improvements using the DASPA system for revision to programmes based on the data obtained from assessments that have been chosen to assess particular programme learning outcomes. The Commission for Academic Accreditation Standards and SACSCOC use data to make comparisons with other programmes externally.

9.7   There are examples of industrial input to programme review through Advisory Councils.

9.8   There is student evaluation of programmes through course, senior exit and faculty satisfaction surveys, and the schools compare student views of achievement against student achievement data, feeding into the Annual Operating Plan. There is also some alumni feedback. The review team examined a range of sources of evidence including data and other review reports produced internally and externally and committee papers, as well as meeting faculty staff and external personnel.

9.9   The University recognises that there are variable opportunities for students to have direct input to programme review. The University is engaged in consultation about provision for increased engagement in programme review and opportunities for participation in school committees, and the panel would encourage opportunities for such participation.

9.10   There are some support systems for faculty and staff involved in programme review. There is a semesterly professional development week, including coverage of how to conduct effective review and how to link learning outcomes and assessment. There are also other sessions focusing on issues such as grading policy or course design and delivery. Each school has an Institutional Effectiveness Coordinator to facilitate improvement although the review team did not see evidence that the role was an embedded part of the review process supported by systematic training for the coordinators.

9.11   Periodic review is largely determined by government requirements and other external quality assurance mechanisms. The University is licensed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry of Education until 2023 with all programmes accredited through the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) of the Ministry of Education (MoE). All programmes accredited by the CAA must align to the appropriate level of the UAE Qualifications Framework - *QF Emirates*. The University has been underdoing the relicensure process and has been informed by CAA that following appraisal of five dimensions of risk (Strategic, Operational, Legal and Financial, Academic and International), the University has been evaluated as a 'Medium Confidence Institution' and that will lead to a normal cycle of reviews with a five-year review cycle for institutional licensure (letter supplied to QAA 6 July 2021).

9.12   AURAK is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award baccalaureate and master's degrees (Level III). Preparations for relicensure is being completed in advanced of the scheduled renewal date in 2023. The University is also continuing to widen its programme-level international accreditations. Accreditation bodies, such as SACSCOC, review substantial programme changes.

9.13   The review team concludes that the risk to Standard 1.9 is low and that the standard is **met.**

Standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

Findings

10.1   The University is under the oversight of the Government, licensed by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) - an entity within the UAE Ministry of Education (MOE). All AURAK programmes are accredited by the CAA which enables students to gain attestation of their degrees by the UAE Ministry of Education. CAA accreditation of all academic programmes is a requirement of the University's licensure by the MOE and provides the University with a review of all programmes by external reviewers appointed internationally. The University is applying for relicensure; the relicensure visit took place in April 2021. The University has been informed by CAA that following appraisal of five dimensions of risk (Strategic, Operational, Legal and Financial, Academic and International), the University has been evaluated as a 'Medium Confidence Institution' and that will lead to a normal cycle of reviews with a five-year review cycle for institutional licensure. AURAK is also subject to Ministry of Education periodic reviews of institutions within the UAE, and such reviews supplement and complement the CAA reviews (letter supplied to QAA 6 July 2021). AURAK was first evaluated by the MOE in 2018 and then again in 2020 against revised standards.

10.2   The results of CAA and Ministry reviews are followed up and improvements introduced in response. A CAA review raised a question about the specificity and measurability of course learning outcomes. OISE has published guidance and school curriculum chairs charged with checking course learning outcomes and other aspects of the course syllabus through the syllabus database flow chart, with the University Curriculum Committee monitoring action. The University will no doubt monitor the completion of action.

10.3   AURAK is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). AURAK achieved initial accreditation in January 2018 to ensure compliance.

10.4   AURAK's involvement in QAA International Quality Review is the most recent example of its participation in external quality assurance.

10.5   The Division of Operational Excellence and Financial Management successfully underwent a review by the British Standards Institute (BSI) against the ISO 9001:2015 standards. The Division of Operational Excellence and Financial Management also passed an interim review in April 2021.

10.6   The review team examined a range of sources of evidence including data and other review reports, produced internally and externally, committee papers and correspondence, as well as meeting faculty staff and external personnel.

10.7   The University uses internal and external audits as a means of scrutiny and to review policies and procedures. Several engineering programmes have accreditation from the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). The School of Engineering works with the accrediting body to ensure programmes under the Engineering Accreditation Commission and Computing Accreditation Commission meet international expectations. The School of Engineering is in the process of applying for review for ABET accredited programmes. AURAK is pursuing accreditation with the Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Responding to feedback from AACSB, the School has already consolidated its Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) and

removed individual Accounting, Finance, Marketing and Human Resource programmes to become majors within the BSBA. The Department of Architecture is preparing a submission to the National Architectural Accreditation Board expected in 2021.

10.8   The University is extensively committed to cyclical external quality assurance, with positive outcomes to reviews and evidence of attempts to increase the engagement of faculty and staff. Communication plans have been introduced to accompany impending reviews, including those for SACSCOC, QAA and CAA relicensure, to engage the wider AURAK community with the process.

10.9   The review team concludes that the risk to Standard 1.10 is low and that the standard is **met.**

Glossary

Action plan
A plan developed by the institution after the QAA review report has been published, which is signed off by the head of the institution. It responds to the recommendations in the report and gives any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice.

Annual monitoring
Checking a process or activity every year to see whether it meets expectations for standards and quality. Annual reports normally include information about student achievements and may comment on the evaluation of courses and modules.

Collaborative arrangement
A formal arrangement between a degree-awarding body and another higher education provider. These may be degree-awarding bodies with which the institution collaborates to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies.

Alternatively, they may be other delivery organisations who deliver part or all of a

proportion of the institution's higher education programmes.

Degree-awarding body
Institutions that have authority - for example, from a national agency - to issue their own awards. Institutions applying to IQR may be degree-awarding bodies themselves, or may collaborate to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of degree-awarding bodies.

Desk-based analysis
An analysis by the review team of evidence, submitted by the institution, that enables the review team to identify its initial findings and subsequently supports the review team as it develops its review findings.

Enhancement
See **quality enhancement**

European Standards and Guidelines
For details, including the full text on each standard, see www.enqa.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area

Examples of practice
A list of policies and practices that a review team may use when considering the extent to which an institution meets the standards for review. The examples should be considered as a guide only, in acknowledgment that not all of them will be appropriate for all institutions.

Facilitator
The member of staff identified by the institution to act as the principal point of contact for the QAA officer and who will be available during the review visit, to assist with any questions or requests for additional documentation.

Good practice
A feature of good practice is a process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to the institution's higher education provision.

Lead student representative
An optional voluntary role that is designed to allow students at the institution applying for IQR to play a central part in the organisation of the review.

Oversight
Objective scrutiny, monitoring and quality assurance of educational provision.

Peer reviewers
Members of the review team who make the decisions in relation to the review of the institution. Peer reviewers have experience of managing quality and academic standards in higher education or have recent experience of being a student in higher education.

Periodic review
An internal review of one or more programmes of study, undertaken by institutions periodically (typically once every five years), using nationally-agreed reference points, to confirm that the programmes are of an appropriate academic standard and quality. The process typically involves experts from other higher education providers. It covers areas such as the continuing relevance of the programme, the currency of the curriculum and reference materials, the employability of graduates and the overall performance of students. Periodic review is one of the main processes whereby institutions can continue to assure themselves about the academic quality and standards of their awards.

Programme of study
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification. UK higher education programmes must be approved and validated by UK degree-awarding bodies.

Quality enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported.

QAA officer
The person appointed by QAA to manage the review programme and to act as the liaison between the review team and the institution.

Quality assurance
The systematic monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, and the processes that support them, to make sure that the standards of academic awards meet the necessary standards, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.

Recognition of prior learning
Assessing previous learning that has occurred in any of a range of contexts including school, college and university, and/or through life and work experiences.

Recommendation
Review teams make recommendations where they agree that an institution should consider developing or changing a process or a procedure in order to improve the institution's higher education provision.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Self-evaluation document
A self-evaluation report by an institution. The submission should include information about the institution as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of its quality systems.

Student submission
A document representing student views that describes what it is like to be a student at the

institution, and how students' views are considered in the institution's decision-making and quality assurance processes.

Validation

The process by which an institution ensures that its academic programmes meet expected academic standards and that students will be provided with appropriate learning opportunities. It may also be applied to circumstances where a degree-awarding institution gives approval for its awards to be offered by a partner institution or organisation.

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