Annual Report
2010

Working in partnership to reflect the highest quality standards
Mandate

Statement of His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al Khalifa
Chairman of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training

Statement of Dr. Jawaher Al Mudhahki
Chief Executive of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training

Board of Directors

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As part of the wider Education Reform project, which is an initiative of the Crown Prince, a decision was taken to ensure that there is quality of education at all levels within the Kingdom of Bahrain. The Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training was established by Royal Decree No. 32 of 2008 and amendments were published in Royal Decree No. 6 of 2009. In terms of Article (4) of the Decree, its mandate is to ‘review the quality of the performance of education and training institutions in light of the guiding indicators developed by the Authority’. The Authority is also required to publish Review Reports as well as to report annually on the status of education within the Kingdom; this includes findings as well as improvements that have occurred as a result of the work of the Authority.

The values that we embrace in our work are:

- Professionalism
- Fairness
- Transparency
- Consistency
- Integrity
- Credibility
- Commitment to international good practice.

To be partners in developing a world-class education system in Bahrain.

As an independent entity, we assure the quality of education and training in Bahrain by:

- Reviewing public and private schools, vocational training and higher education institutions, both for accountability and improvement purposes
- Developing and implementing a national examination system for schools
- Publishing reports of findings
- Advancing Bahrain’s reputation as a leader in quality assurance in education regionally and internationally.
In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

This historical occasion of a year passing since the publication of the first QAAET report is so important that it needs to be commemorated. It requires us to review and reflect on our work within the framework of national responsibility and transparency to which the Kingdom of Bahrain sincerely adheres. This implies that we present both the goals that we have thus far achieved and the goals that we are striving to fulfill in the coming year. We always find hope and inspiration for the future in the wonderful accomplishments we have already realized and in the important milestones of success and improvement, which we have set for ourselves.

In the year 2009 the first seeds of success were sown with the launch of the QAAET. In 2010 the first results were reaped. This would not have been possible without the hard work and diligence of all the QAAET staff. With the help of God, the support of our encouraging government, and the cooperation of all our partner institutions, our hard work and dedication will undoubtedly enable us to take further steps forward on this long path in order to embrace international education and training standards. The commitment to best international practices in this field is one of the most important values of the QAAET.

Last year, we witnessed various positive developments: one being that many of our expectations were met and even exceeded. The status of Bahrain’s education and training sectors is becoming clearer for the QAAET, since it has already concluded the review processes of almost 90% of the Kingdom’s public schools, in addition to the implementation of the National Examinations up to Grade 9. Approximately 66% of training providers regulated by the Ministry of Labour and 33% licensed by the Ministry of Education have been reviewed. Furthermore, a considerable number of reports regarding Bahrain’s universities and colleges have been published. Such efforts have provided the QAAET with vital data, which are of the highest accuracy and professionalism. The data allow us to see Bahrain’s education and training situation with an unprecedented degree of clarity for the first time in the history of our country. This constitutes a momentous development, which will open up new avenues of consideration for policy and decision-makers, who will have a better understanding of the current education and training situation. Consequently, this will help them to plan more precisely for the people of Bahrain’s prosperous future.

The highlight of the year 2010 is the perceptible increase in awareness concerning the culture of quality assurance in the Kingdom’s schools. This came at the same time as the launch of the School Development Project, which helped assure the cooperation of all relevant parties regarding commitment to quality requirements and their application in such a manner that ensures consistent adherence to them. Quality assurance offices are being established in private universities and colleges, which indicates their awareness of the importance of the developmental process and their commitment to quality improvement. In fact, we are pleased to note the responsiveness of these institutions and their honest desire to cooperate and make investments to strengthen their quality assurance arrangements. This, together with the excellent national response, has made us very proud of our achievements and confident about the well-being of our society as a whole.

Nevertheless, the year 2011 will present us with new responsibilities in which we will continue to advance the efforts we have started. We will extend the review processes to private schools while also setting a general framework for reviews that will begin in March 2011. Grade 12 students will be taking the pilot national examinations for the first time in April 2011, and Grades 3, 6, and 9 will be sitting for the examinations in May 2011. At the same time, cooperation will continue as planned with the universities, colleges, schools and other partners, in order to promote this invaluable national endeavour. Lastly, we will be preparing for an international conference focusing on issues of quality assurance and its mechanisms as well as the future impact on the workplace.

I would like to end this statement by extending the sincerest thanks and appreciation, on my behalf and on the behalf of the whole QAAET staff, to our great leader, His Majesty King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, may God protect him, and to His Royal Highness Prince Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, the Prime Minister, and to His Royal Highness Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, and Chairman of the Economic Development Board, for their invaluable support for the QAAET and their belief in the role it plays in the growth and prosperity of the Kingdom.

I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Education and Training Reform Committee, for his vigorous oversight and great care, which facilitated a lot of our work towards fulfilling our mission. Thanks are also due to the members of the Board of Directors for their continuous efforts in supporting and developing the QAAET.

I would not consider ending my statement without conveying another deserved expression of thanks to the Authority’s Chief Executive, Dr. Jawaher Al Muthahhahi, and her impressive team, for all the efforts they have exerted to realise today’s achievements.

Khalid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa
THE STATEMENT OF DR. JAWAHER SHAHEEN AL MUDHAHKI, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUTHORITY FOR EDUCATION & TRAINING (QAAET)

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

The year 2010 has proven to be a very eventful and productive second year for us at the Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training. In the statement, I would like to present a general overview of our most significant achievements, and leave the details to the report. Since its establishment, the QAAET has continuously progressed towards achieving the objectives set for it by its Board of Directors. These objectives aim at improving education and training in Bahrain and creating a national workforce which has the knowledge and skills to compete in both the Bahraini and global marketplace.

The National Examinations, which were held for the second time for students in Grades 3 and 6 in every public school in Bahrain, have provided us with richer experiences, deeper knowledge and a clearer picture of the performance levels of students in those grades. Additionally, the National Examinations were held for Grade 9 students for the first time this year. These have provided good information regarding the performance levels of more than 32,000 students from 169 public schools from the Kingdom’s various governorates. This process will be completed when the National Examinations are held for Grade 12 students (Tawjihi).

For the 2009-2010 academic year, the QAAET published 155 new reports including the performance review results of 112 public schools, 32 vocational training institutions and twelve higher education institutions. This has constituted a significant qualitative and quantitative step in our work for 2010, since a substantial portion of these reports are considered an improvement upon the achievements of the previous year. This provides us with the ability to recognize the hallmarks of development and progress within the education and training institutions.

It is significant to note that - as a result of our work - the general atmosphere has been increasingly positive, with a noticeable optimism and innovation in all of our partner education and training institutions. This was evident when the majority of them decided to observe the requirements of quality assurance, albeit in various degrees. The National Examinations were held for Grade 9 students for the first time this year. These have provided good information regarding the performance levels of more than 32,000 students from 169 public schools from the Kingdom’s various governorates. This process will be completed when the National Examinations are held for Grade 12 students (Tawjihi).

The National Examinations have revealed many positive indicators of improvement in the students’ levels between 2009 and 2010. At the same time, the universities and colleges have taken major steps to establish quality assurance units. The extensive communication between all sides has clearly indicated that these values and principles are deeply rooted in the educational process. A number of qualitative improvements have been accomplished in various schools around the Kingdom, where the culture of quality assurance has become one of the pillars of everyday work. These schools are working hard to sustain their achievements, while also tackling their shortcomings, which encourages us to look forward to further accomplishments in this vital national project. Our successes ensure that the future of the education institutions of Bahrain will positively contribute to the realization of our good governance aspirations, so that we may confidently fulfill the 2030 Vision of having a highly educated and qualified work force. The QAAET has taken the responsibility of providing all of its education institution partners with extensive opportunities and support to help them understand the role of quality assurance in their core functions, encouraging them to adopt its culture by reorienting their roles and responsibilities. The QAAET has worked closely with the education institutions to familiarize them with highly developed models from around the world. Many experts have been invited to present their successful experiences and examples to explain how the culture of quality assurance has affected their work and contributed to the success of their institutions at all levels.

We take pride in ourselves for the progress we have realized in our work and in our successful education collaborations. However, our main source of pride is having prepared highly experienced and responsible teams of professionals in Bahrain. Our talented cadre is now fully capable of tackling the various aspects of the review process and the National Examinations. This was made possible through the valuable skills they acquired by closely working with renowned international institutions with years of experience in the field of quality assurance. Thus, it is no wonder that within a few years, Bahrain has become a hub of knowledge and experience in the field of quality assurance in education and training.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend the most sincere thanks and gratitude, on my behalf and on behalf of all those who have assisted in realizing this progress, in particular to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain, for all of the support he has given us. We also express our deep gratitude to His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Prime Minister, for his most valued and beneficial directions to all of the institutions, for them to become our dedicated partners in this national endeavor. I also sincerely express my thanks and gratitude to His Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Chairman of the Economic Development Board, for his great ambition to see the people of Bahrain become as knowledgeable and skilled as their counterparts in developed countries.

Our thanks are also extended to His Highness Shaikh Mohammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Education and Training Reform Committee, who has always been a source of valued opinions and guidance, as his wide range of impressive experiences has helped the Authority in its progress. We also extend our thanks to His Excellency Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Authority’s Board of Directors, who sets the general framework of our activities with the other respected directors. In addition, I would like to extend my sincerest and most heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all of the members of the Board of Directors for their continuous support to the Authority during the past two years.

Finally, I am deeply thankful and grateful to all of my colleagues in the Authority, for their dedication, devotion and hard work, since such attitudes are indispensable for achieving the vision of our leadership and realizing the goals that we set for ourselves.

Jawaher Shaheen Al Mudhahki
H.E. SHAIKH KHALID BIN ABDULLAH AL KHALIFA
Deputy Prime Minister, Chairman of the Board of Directors of
The Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training

H.E. MR. AHMED ABDUL LATIF AL-BAHAR
Vice Chairman

H.E. DR. DHAFER AHMED AL OM Ran
Director, Bilateral Relations Directorate,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

H.E. DR. HASHIM HASSAN AL BASH
Ambassador, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

H.E. DR. MOHAMMED ALI HASSAN
General Director,
Central Municipal Council

H.E. DR. BAHIA JAWAD AL JISHI
Member, Shura Council

H.E. DR. AYSHA SALEEM MUBARAK
Member, Shura Council

H.E. MR. KAMAL AHMED MOHAMMED
Chief Operating Officer,
Economic Development Board

H.E. DR. SHAKIR ABDUL HUSSAIN KHAMDAN
Head of Environmental Monitoring, Public Commission for
the Protection of Marine Resources, Environment and Wildlife
EXE CUTIVE 
TEAM S

SCHOOLS REVIEW UNIT
(from left to right)
Hala Al Jawder, Ahmed Al Badri, Asma Al Mehza,
Adel Hasan, Nibal Al Dweiri - Acting Executive Director,
Dr. Hasan Al Hammadi, Raja Al Mahmood,
Abdulhakeem Al Shaer, Dr. Fawzi Al Balooshi,
Fayza Al Mannai

NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS UNIT
(from left to right)
Stephen Stocker, Sylke Scheiner - Executive Director,
Abdulridha Al Aradi, Wafa Al Yaqobi

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT
(from left to right)
Professor Dolina Dowling, Kevin Corrigan,
Dr. Jawaher Al Mudhahki - Chief Executive,
Khalid Al Mannai, Sylke Scheiner, Nibal Al Dweiri

VOCATIONAL REVIEW UNIT
(from left to right)
Estmat Jaffar, Kareema Abbas, Maitham Al Orabi
Kevin Corrigan - Executive Director,
Jamal Dahneem, Ebrahim Al A’Ali

HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW UNIT
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Dr. Basma Al Bahama, Dr. Tanqi Al Sindi,
Professor Dolina Dowling - Executive Director,
Dr. Wafa Al Mansoori

The Schools Review Unit (SRU) has now completed the reviews of almost all public schools. This report is therefore able to provide an overall performance of the 112 schools reviewed during the year 2009-2010, and also report on the overall findings of all of the 184 schools reviewed to date. Since a higher proportion of the more challenging secondary schools were reviewed over 2009-2010, the overall assessment on overall school performance is to depress the overall results.

In terms of overall effectiveness, 79% of public schools in the Kingdom achieved 'good' or 'excellent', and almost 33% being 'good' or 'excellent'. In 2009-2010, however, 25% of schools reviewed were 'inadequate', and the majority of these were boys' schools, particularly at secondary level.

When considering both the review outcomes of 2009-2010 and the overall outcomes over the two years from 2008-2010, in 9% of schools the quality of leadership and management was judged to be less than 'good'. Overall, this was 4% for the review of 2009-2010, while 16% of schools were 'inadequate' in the overall review, and 20.5% of them were schools the quality of leadership and management was judged to be less than 'good'.

In 2009-2010, 16% of schools reviewed were 'inadequate', and the majority of these were boys' schools, particularly at secondary level.

In Grades 3 and 6, there is a slight improvement in student performance in most subjects from 2009 to 2010. In Grade 3, students performed better in Science, with 57.3% (Grade 6) and 51.5% (Grade 9) achieving at least the national baseline. In Grade 6, English saw the biggest improvement from 2009 to 2010, with 54.1% performing well over half the students. This is a consequence of a high-stakes testing. Students are often impeded in this as a consequence of high-stakes testing. A lack of reliability in the testing, the frequent changes in the School and the Principal leadership team do little to support sustained and continuous improvement.

It should be noted that there is a clear correlation between overall school effectiveness and the quality of the leadership and management. However, in several schools the leadership and management grades were higher than the overall effectiveness grades. This reflects the review teams' confidence in good school leadership having the capacity to bring about improvements in these schools. Over the two years (2008-2010), the review teams reported the effectiveness of teaching and learning was only 'good' or better in one third of schools, with the teaching and learning being 'inadequate' in more than one in five schools. No significant changes were made in the higher proportion of schools where the teaching was 'inadequate'.

During the National Examination Unit's (NEU) second year of operation, national examinations for Grades 3 and 6 were conducted, and national examinations for Grades 3 and 6 were extended to Grade 9. This ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2009-2010 REPORTS ON THE FINDINGS AND RESULTS OF THE FOUR UNITS WITHIN THE QAAET, NAMELY: THE THREE REVIEW UNITS; SCHOOLS, VOCATIONAL, AND HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THE NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS UNIT.
When the Recommendations are aggregated across all twelve private higher education institutions, the areas in need of improvement are fairly consistent. These include: governance and management; strategic planning; the lack of linking planning, budgeting and resource allocation to ensure that programmes are sufficiently resourced; and finally to ensure that academic standards are being met: benchmarking, external examination, programme reviews, research to underpin teaching and learning, and academic professional development opportunities.

With respect to programme reviews, the first programme to be reviewed nationally to ascertain whether or not minimum standards are being met was in the field of Bachelor of Business Administration. The reviews of this programme have been completed, twelve in all. Six were carried out in the 2008-2009 academic year and six in 2009-2010. Of the six programme reviews carried out in the 2009-2010 academic year, two received ‘confidence’ judgements, two ‘limited confidence’, and two ‘no confidence’. When all twelve programme reviews are considered together, there was an even distribution in the judgements reached by the Expert Panels with four receiving ‘confidence’, four ‘limited confidence’, and four ‘no confidence’.
INTRODUCTION

The Schools Review Unit (SRU) has completed the reviews of all but 18 of the public schools in the Kingdom. This report provides the opportunity not only to provide information on the performance of the schools that were reviewed during 2009-2010, but also to give an overview of the school standards and quality in the public schools over the first two full years of school reviews. Having completed the review of almost all public schools, there is now more evidence to confirm the emerging issues identified in the first annual report of the QAET.

During the school year 2009-2010, the SRU carried out reviews in 112 schools in line with the practice established in the first year of school reviews. Teams, typically, of between five and eight reviewers spent three days in school observing lessons, analysing student performance, meeting with key school leaders, parents and students and scrutinising students’ written work. The review framework evaluates school effectiveness in terms of learning outcomes:
- students’ academic achievements and their progress in personal development
- the quality of the school’s provision in terms of teaching and learning
- curriculum delivery and enrichment
- the quality of support and guidance
- the quality of the school leadership and management.

Schools are awarded an overall grade for overall effectiveness and a further grade on their capacity to improve: Review grades are awarded on a four point scale:

Outstanding ................................................. 1
Good .......................................................... 2
Satisfactory ............................................... 3
Inadequate ................................................ 4

Schools, which have been judged to be ‘outstanding’, are encouraged to share their best practice amongst other schools. Those, which receive an overall grade of ‘inadequate’, are subject to a monitoring procedure by the SRU, i.e. where their progress towards meeting the Recommendations in the Review Report is assessed by a monitoring team within six months to a year after the review. Over the course of the last year the SRU has been conducting monitoring visits in 23 schools that had been judged as ‘inadequate’. 3 schools were considered to have made sufficient improvement to be included once more in the regular cycle of school reviews. The remaining 20 are all subject to regular monitoring visits. The main focus for improvement for the schools that have been judged as ‘inadequate’ is on the quality of teaching and on the quality of their self-evaluation and development planning.

OVERALL SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

Out of the 112 schools reviewed in 2009-2010, almost one third were ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and a quarter were ‘inadequate’ (see Figure 1). In general, girls’ schools are performing much better than boys’ schools (Figures 2 and 3). In 2009-2010, almost six out of ten of the girls’ schools were ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and only two schools were found to be ‘inadequate’. In the same period, more than 40% of boys’ schools were ‘inadequate’ and less than 10% were ‘good’. Over the two years of school reviews, 13% of boys schools were ‘good’ or better, whilst 36% were ‘inadequate’. By contrast more than half of the girls’ schools were ‘good’ or better with almost 6% judged as ‘inadequate’.

All the review evidence points towards the overall picture in primary schools being more positive than in the intermediate and secondary schools (see Figures 4, 5, 6). For example, when considering the cumulative findings of reviews in the period 2009-2010, the only ‘outstanding’ schools have been found at primary level. Almost half of the secondary schools were judged as being ‘inadequate’, the majority of these inadequate schools being boys’ schools.

Most boys’ primary schools were ‘satisfactory’, having reviewed 20 out of 34 schools; whilst most girls’ primary schools were ‘good’ having reviewed 20 out of 31 schools. In the good schools, the strongest features were good leadership and management, which promoted positive attitudes and behaviour as well as high standards. In the weakest schools, poorly focused leadership coupled with students’ poor behaviour were the major factors leading to low standards of achievement.

CAPACITY TO IMPROVE

The judgement concerning a school’s capacity to improve is important. It is based on the signs of future improvement, such as strategic planning, systems for monitoring the quality of provision and achievements of performance targets, and clear leadership. More than 51% of schools have a good or better capacity to improve but close to 19% do not have the capacity to improve without significant support from the ministry (see Figure 7). In those schools with a weak capacity to improve, there is an underdeveloped sense of common purpose and the key short comings in teaching, learning and student behaviour are not being systematically addressed.
One of the most important and significant areas of variance is in the schools’ belief in their capacity to improve. Although almost all reviewed schools felt that this capacity was ‘satisfactory’ or better, the SRU reviewers found that more than one school in six had an ‘inadequate’ capacity to improve. This situation is likely to improve over time as schools learn to calibrate their expectations in line with the results from the reviews of the student teams.

STUDENTS’ ACHIEVEMENT IN THEIR ACADEMIC WORK

When evaluating the standards achieved by students, review teams take into consideration a wide range of evidence. This includes the students’ performance in Ministry of Education and schools tests and the achievement and the progress they make in the lessons observed by the review teams; there is not always a close relationship between the results achieved in the tests and the standards seen in the classroom. In many cases, review teams see standards evident in the classroom that are not as high as would be indicated by the test results. In all of the SRU Review Reports there is a close correlation between a school’s overall effectiveness and the students’ achievement.

The cumulative findings over the past two years reveal that at primary level (see Figure B) 71% of girls’ schools are reaching levels of achievement which are ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and 29% of schools are ‘inadequate’. In 20% of schools, achievement is ‘satisfactory’, and in 20% it is ‘inadequate’. Students’ achievement at secondary level (see Figure 8) 71% of girls’ schools are reaching levels of achievement which are ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and 29% of schools are ‘inadequate’. In 20% of schools, achievement is ‘satisfactory’, and in 20% it is ‘inadequate’.

STUDENTS’ PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

This aspect of the review is concerned not only with students’ attendance, punctuality and their attitude to school, but also their attitude to learning.

Reviewers evaluate students’ ability to work together, think analytically and act with self-confidence and independence. The review team also assesses whether students feel safe and secure at school.

Of the schools reviewed in 2009-2010, 16% were judged as being ‘inadequate’, with almost half being ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. Amongst the successful schools the most common strengths are students’ attendance and punctuality, their capacity to work together effectively and their feeling safe and secure at school. The most common weaknesses in the schools reviewed during 2009-2010 is the inability of students to think analytically, with more than one third of schools being judged ‘inadequate’ in this respect and only about 13% of schools promoting this feature to a ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ degree.

In the weakest schools, students’ poor attendance and the attendant poor motivation towards schooling are the most significant areas to be addressed. The situation is particularly critical in those intermediate and secondary schools that were judged to be overall ‘inadequate’. In these schools, a high rate of absenteeism, coupled in some cases with a lack of parental support, means that schools have to struggle to create the basic conditions under which learning can take place. In many schools that fail to provide an adequate quality of education, students’ safety and security are at risk through physical intimidation and verbal threats. Under these conditions, students’ self-confidence is undermined and they are unable to take any responsibility for their own learning. Students show a careless attitude towards the school environment; for instance, they casually drop litter and deface school property.

By contrast in ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools, students’ attendance is good and students’ self-confidence makes a major contribution to their capacity to operate with some degree of independence from their teachers. Relationships are based upon mutual respect and this, in turn, enables students to work effectively and productively both on their own and in groups. Students in these schools are eager to assume positions of responsibility and make positive contributions towards the life of the school as an inclusive learning community.

EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

In this aspect of the review process, the SRU reviewers assess teachers’ capacity to engage, motivate and inspire learners; how they match their lessons to meet the learning needs of students of differing abilities; teachers’ subject knowledge; pedagogy that is appropriate for different types of learning and varying student abilities; teachers’ ability to plan effectively and to use a range of resources for learning; evidence of consolidation of learning for some students whilst extending the opportunities for others. Lastly, the reviewers assess the extent to which teachers’ work is underpinned by an effective use of assessment in order to provide student feedback on their strengths and areas for development.

Of all the aspects of the school’s provision upon which review teams focus, teaching and learning are the areas that raise the most concern. In 2009-2010, teaching and learning was judged to be ‘inadequate’ in 28 schools (25%) and only three were rated ‘outstanding’ (see Figure 10). Overall, when considering all the schools reviewed in the two years since 2008, in only a tiny proportion – 2% – was the teaching judged ‘outstanding’ whereas a significant proportion of schools were rated ‘inadequate’ (21%) for their teaching.

The most significant shortcoming as reported in the previous annual report remains in teachers not matching their lessons to the needs of all the students. In too many lessons teachers plan with a single set of expectations about how the lesson will be conducted; they plan with the average learner in mind and they do not provide sufficient challenge for the higher attaining students, and support for those who need more assistance with their learning. Students are too often required to sit passively listening to teachers and, whereas they are doing practice activities, these are frequently based upon short and restricted exercises from a textbook. Independent learning skills are not promoted and students are seldom required to solve problems that require them to apply their knowledge and so demonstrate their understanding. Exercises are often mechanical, repetitive and unstimulating. In ‘inadequate’ schools, teachers do not use assessment to provide constructive feedback to students on their strengths and their areas for development.

Reviewers concentrate their lesson observations upon the four core subject areas of Arabic, English, Mathematics and Science for older students, whereas for younger students they look at whole class, general teaching. Typically, teaching is at its best in the first three years of primary school. The quality and suitability of teaching declines as students get older and they move into secondary schools. The quality of teaching and learning is at its poorest in the last three years of education at secondary level where lessons are ‘inadequate’ in almost one third of schools. Of all the subjects, the teaching of English raises the most concern, since in 41% of lessons teaching was judged to be ‘inadequate’ and only 17% were rated ‘good’. The main problem is teachers’ poor command of standard spoken English and, consequently, their inability to model the language authentically for the students who are learning English as their second language. Equally in their written work, students are not expected
to write in an extended fashion in order to improve their vocabulary and capacity to develop fluency and style. The quality of teaching and learning in the other core subject areas remains an area for concern, with more than 20% of lessons judged as ‘inadequate’ in Arabic, Mathematics, and Science.

CURRICULUM DELIVERY AND ENRICHMENT

In this aspect of the school review, reviewers evaluate the ways in which schools implement the Ministry of Education curriculum. Primarily, review teams look at how the curriculum is enriched and how, for example, links are made between different subjects and how relevance is reinforced by extra-curricular activities, such as educational trips. Curriculum implementation is also a means by which the school promotes amongst young people their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The curriculum delivery is judged by how effectively it promotes basic skills, such as numeracy, literacy, and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Amongst the schools that were reviewed during 2009-2010, the curriculum implementation was found to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ in 47% of schools (see Figure 11). In these schools, an imaginative approach is used to make the curriculum more interesting and relevant to the students. In these successful schools, the curriculum is enriched by extra-curricular activities that enable students to build on what they have learned in lessons. By improving the relevance of the curriculum and aligning it with the outside world, students in the best schools develop an improved understanding of their rights and responsibilities. In this way good curriculum implementation prepares students for their next stage of education and the world of work.

A notable strength amongst nearly all the schools reviewed during 2009-2010 is in their capacity to provide effective induction programmes to introduce new students to school life. More than two thirds of schools were rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and the reviewers judged that in only two schools were the arrangements ‘inadequate’. In 14 schools during 2009-2010, the arrangements were ‘outstanding’.

Taking into account all the schools visited during the review period from 2008-2010 as a whole, the inadequate schools shared common weaknesses in their curriculum implementation. 15% of schools failed to enrich the curriculum. They did not make links between subjects and students’ basic skills were under-developed. In this scenario, basic skills are not embedded and developed, and often skills decline through a lack of meaningful application.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

This aspect is concerned with the quality of support and guidance that a school provides. It includes consideration of how well students are inducted into the school and how well their personal needs are assessed; consideration is also given to the quality of guidance they receive about academic and developmental matters, and how well parents are informed about the progress of their children.

Schools have at least one dedicated member of staff designated as the social worker whose main responsibility is to provide a link with the families and to support and guide students in their life at school. Of all the aspects of a school’s work, which reviewers evaluate, this is amongst the strongest.

Overall, as shown in Figure 12, in 2009-2010, almost 44% of schools were graded as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ in this aspect. Almost 20% were ‘inadequate’. The most common weakness in schools’ capacity to assess and provide support, which is sensitively and appropriately shared with the students, additionally these weaker schools do not provide good career and educational guidance.

In those schools where curriculum enrichment is well-developed, the greatest strengths are in having a school environment that stimulates learning, having a good range of extra-curricular activities and good links between subjects. For example, ICT is used to promote learning in Mathematics, Science and Languages; also in ‘good’ schools strong links exist, for example, between Mathematics, Science and Technology, which enable basic skills to be applied and extended.

A common finding across all the schools reviewed over the past two years is that the strength of the support and the general awareness of students’ needs were not evident in the classrooms. The student records relating to their personal and social needs are not well-integrated with their academic progress records; teachers are often insufficiently aware of students’ wider social and developmental issues and how these may impact on their classroom behaviour.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

This aspect concentrates on how effective school leaders are in inspiring and motivating their staff and the extent to which they have a clear vision of success and long-term school improvement through detailed development planning.

In a small number of cases, the leadership and management grade is higher than that for overall school effectiveness. This is usually due to the review team evaluating the quality of a new Principal and leadership team who had only been at the school for a short time where their presence, plans and policies had yet to have an impact on the life of the school. During 2009-2010 in 57% of schools, the leadership was judged as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ with 23% ‘satisfactory’ and 20% ‘inadequate’. Taking into account all schools reviewed since the beginning of the live school reviews in 2008, the SRU found that in more than one school in every six, leadership and management are ‘inadequate’. The biggest difficulty which schools face in maintaining quality and continuous improvement is in the regularity with which Principals are moved from school to school.

It is an accepted principle, amongst the international community of school improvement specialists that it takes between three and five years for a new leadership team to bring about significant improvement and transformation in schools which are struggling. In a great many of the schools reviewed, the teams found Principals who had only been at the school for a relatively short period of time. Good school leadership, however, does not just rely upon the skills of the Principal alone; to be effective the leadership needs to be implemented strongly and, in those schools where the Principals were relatively new, the SRU evaluated the strength of the team as a whole in coming to a judgement about a school’s capacity to improve.

Good school leadership teams’ main strength is in their capacity to inspire, motivate and support staff effectively. In less than two thirds of schools this feature was ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. Other important strengths evident in successful schools and leadership teams are the clarity of their vision and purpose and their responsiveness to the views of stakeholders; about 60% of successful teams were ‘good or outstanding’. Effective self-evaluation that is rigorously used to assess quality should be the basis of all meaningful strategic planning, to ensure that it is firmly focused on improvement. The most interesting finding is that in about 55% of schools, both self-evaluation and the improvement planning are ‘good or outstanding’, whereas in almost 20% of schools self-evaluation and improvement planning are ‘inadequate’. This latter group includes many of those Principals who have been at the school for only a short period of time and where the self-evaluation and improvement planning strategies are at an early stage of development.

AFTER THE REVIEW

After the review, schools are asked to complete an action plan to address the areas for improvement identified in the review report. Schools have six weeks after the publication of the review report to formulate an action plan and submit it to the Ministry of Education for scrutiny; the Ministry, in turn, forwards the action plan to the SRU for comment. Comments on the action plan are returned to the Ministry in the form of written feedback. When the action plan has been approved, it is returned to the school for implementation. In the case of schools where there is an overall grade of ‘inadequate’ the SRU undertakes monitoring visits within six months to a year to assess schools’ progress towards addressing those areas which were identified as being in need of improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School improvement is a process that should involve all key stakeholders. Whilst the quality of leadership of the Principal is probably the most single important factor underlying school improvement, the Principal cannot succeed without a strong team. It is the strength of the Principal and the...
extended leadership team that serves to embed sustained school improvement. Additionally this report has identified several other specific areas for improvement as follows:

- Schools should adopt a more realistic approach to self-evaluation based upon firm evidence and honest reflection. For example, where a self-evaluation form (SEF) grades the provision as ‘good’, the evidence to support that assertion should be clearly stated.

- The assessment of students’ achievement needs to be more accurate. Repeatedly, school reviews find that the standards witnessed in the classrooms do not correspond to the standards in the reported Ministry of Education and school assessments. The school-based element of the overall assessment grade should be substantiated with accurate and timely evidence of student performance to go alongside the Ministry of Education and school test results.

- The quality of teaching and learning should be improved in order to provide appropriate levels of challenge for students of all abilities in lessons. Additionally, teachers need to make better use of assessments to inform students of their strengths and areas for improvement.

- In the best schools, the curriculum is implemented in an imaginative way, with a wide range of extra-curricular activities to make the curriculum interesting and relevant with opportunities for the students to make links between subjects. However, in too many schools the curriculum is delivered in an unchallenging way directly from textbooks. There needs to be a greater sharing of best practice amongst schools with regard to curriculum implementation and enrichment.

- Schools should adopt a strategy for improvement and development planning that involves the whole staff. The realisation of improvement plans should be a shared responsibility and include duties and responsibilities for named individuals together with evidential success criteria and realistic timelines.
National Examinations Unit

Reveal true performance...
The performance of a test is most pronounced in Mathematics for Grades 6 and 9 where the mean marks are just 21% and 17% of the total respectively. This lower than can be attributed simply to an unfamiliar style of examining, and might indicate a more deep-seated mismatch between the demand of the examinations and the abilities of the students being examined. In principle, this could be due to:

- the demands inherent in the National Curriculum not being realistic for the education system to achieve
- the National Curriculum not being taught or not being taught well
- students not being motivated to give their best, as national examinations do not court towards the students' grades or in deciding their promotion to the next grade.

**PERFORMANCE OF THE STUDENTS**

Performance of students is measured and reported by two scores: a normalised percentage score and a performance score.

The normalised percentage score is a norm-referenced score, which compares students’, classes’ and schools’ performance within the year group, it is a relative measure. The national average is set at 70% every year. The cumulative normalised percentage scores for 2009 and 2010 are shown in Tables 2 and 3. Light gold highlights the national average. The data in the two tables are not comparable as they show relative standing within the year but are presented to show the differences in the distribution of marks in 2009 and 2010.

**THE PERFORMANCE SCORE**

The Performance Score is an absolute score that is based on an absolute ability scale derived from a Rasch model within item response theory. It is an absolute measure of student’s ability against the skills and topics in the test specifications. The national average performance score was defined as 4.0 in the first year of assessment (2009 for Grades 3 and 6 and 2010 for Grade 9) as the baseline against which to measure future years’ performance. Test equating enables the comparison of the performance of the subsequent years against the baseline years’ performance.

**TEST EQUATING**

For security purposes, QAAET constructs a different test every year while ensuring that content and statistical specifications are similar to tests used in previous years. Despite such efforts to ensure similarity, assessments from year to year may differ somewhat in their difficulty. To account for this, QAAET uses a process called equating, which adjusts for differences in difficulty among the tests from year to year (Kolen & Brennan, 2004).1 Equating ensures that students in one year are not given an unfair advantage over students in another year and that reported changes in achievement levels are due to differences in student performance, and not to differences in test difficulty. Equating is used to adjust for differences in difficulty among tests that are similar in content and statistical specifications (ibid). The following sections describe the equating design, and calibration procedures used to equate the Grade 3 and 6 2010 assessments to the 2009 assessments and consequently derive students’ performance scores.

**EQUATING DESIGN**

The common-item non-equivalent group design is used to equate QAAET tests over different years. Common items are sets of items that are identical in content and are used to create a common scale for all the items in the tests. QAAET uses matrix sampling that enables items to be embedded in the live assessments. Embedded items do not contribute to the students’ marks and are not released to the public. They are calibrated and their parameters are known. Some of the embedded items became part of the live assessment in the subsequent year, whereas other items that were embedded in the 2009 assessments became part of the live assessment. This is items that are common in the two adjacent years that create the link that is important in equating tests.

The following are the procedures that were implemented in equating the 2010 tests to the 2009 tests:

1. Live test item parameters in 2009 were calibrated.
2. The items embedded in 2009 were then calibrated together with the live items. In this calibration, the 2009 live items were fixed at their parameters obtained in step 1.
3. Some of the items that were embedded in the 2009 assessments became part of the live items in the 2010 assessments. (New items were embedded in the 2010 live assessments.)
4. In 2010, the live items were calibrated. During the calibration, those live items that were previously embedded in the 2009 assessments were anchored at their known parameters; those that were obtained in step 2. This put the 2010 assessments onto the 2009 assessments scale.

---

The performance score results that are reported here for the 2010 assessments are from the equating process and therefore comparable to the 2009 results.

The mean performance scores are presented in Table 4 while the cumulative percentages of performance scores are presented in Tables 5, 6 and 7 below. Again, light gold highlights the national baseline. The mean performance scores indicate that for Grades 3 and 6 overall, students performed better in 2010 than in 2009. There is a general improvement in all examinations except for Grade 6 Arabic. The Grade 9 mean performance scores shown here are the baseline scores.

The mean performance scores are presented in Table 4

The performance score is calculated from students’ abilities on a Rasch ability scale. The national average was defined as 4.0 in the first year of testing, and change year on year. If the performance of students improves from one year to the next, then the national average performance score will go up. Thus, we can see whether any progress has been made from one year to the next. The general comments below are also based solely on data taken from a 10% random sample of all students in the cohort. The discussions represent an exploratory investigation.

The data are for subjects examined at Grades 3, 6 and 9, and refer specifically to the Topics within subjects (for example, Listening, Reading, and Writing in the case of languages), and to the Skills within Topics (for example, Understanding implicit meaning, Structure and grammar, Main points of argument, in the case of English). The performance score, reported on a scale of 0.0 to 8.0, is given for each Topic and Skill in each of the subject figures below.1 Note: The whole subject performance score is not an average of the Topics or Skills performance scores. The whole subject performance score is calculated from whole cohort data, including absentees, while the Topic and Skills performance scores are calculated from a 10% random sample of students in the cohort.

The general comments below are also based solely on data taken from a 10% random sample of all students in the cohort. The discussions represent an exploratory scrutiny of the data, and may be used as the basis for further investigation.

The results indicate that for Grade 3 and 6 there is a slight improvement in performance in all Grade 3 and 6 examinations except for Grade 3 Mathematics, which shows a marked increase, and Grade 6 Arabic that shows a slight improvement in performance in all Grade 3 and 6 examinations except for Grade 6 Arabic.

The Grade 9 mean performance scores shown here are the baseline scores (4.0).

The results indicate that for Grade 6 Arabic should be considered with other information to help in making evidence-based decisions for students, schools, districts and the Kingdom as a whole. Similarly, the results for Grade 3 Mathematics should be considered in the relevant context to see whether any information useful for other subjects might be extrapolated. The mean performance scores for Grade 9 are the baseline scores (4.0).

The Grade 3 and 6 2009 and 2010 cumulative performance scores are shown in Tables 5 and 6. These score distributions are comparable. They indicate the percentage of students at each performance score across the two years. Those for Grade 9 are shown in Table 7.

### Table 4: 2009 AND 2010 GRADE 3 CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGES OF PERFORMANCE SCORES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>2009</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
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<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.05</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>-</td>
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### Table 5: 2009 AND 2010 GRADE 6 CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGES OF PERFORMANCE SCORES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Score</th>
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<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
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<td>0.5</td>
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</table>

### Table 6: 2009 AND 2010 GRADE 6 CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGES OF PERFORMANCE SCORES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Score</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
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</thead>
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<td>9.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7: 2010 GRADE 9 CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGES OF PERFORMANCE SCORES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Score</th>
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<th>2010</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>93.0</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>72.6</td>
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<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.4</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1 The performance score is calculated from students’ abilities on a Rasch ability scale. The national average was defined as 4.0 in the first year of testing, and subsequent years’ examinations will be securely anchored to the scale that was set in the first year. The national average performance score will normally change year on year. If the performance of students improves from one year to the next, then the national average performance score will go up. Thus, we obtain an absolute measurement of performance over time.
Performance by the national cohort at Grade 6

Arabic

- Across Topic areas (Reading, Writing, and Listening) there are notable differences, with students performing particularly well on Reading compared to Writing and Listening. However, there was a decrease in performance in Listening in 2010 compared to 2009.
- As in Grade 3, Writing appears to present more of a challenge in both years.
- There are notable differences in performance across the broad range of skills in 2010 compared with 2009. The most notable areas include: Summarise, Identify the general idea, and Identify the main points.
- The strongest skills demonstrated include: Identify sequence, Identify the main points, and Presentation and handwriting.
- The weaker areas identified are: Writer’s purpose and viewpoint, Comment on writers’ words and Punctuation and vocalisation.
- Some skills are based on very few marks, which can cause significant fluctuation in year-on-year performance.

Mathematics

- Performance across the Topics (Geometry and measurement, Number and algebra, Statistics and probability) is very similar to each other but shows an increase in 2010 over 2009.
- Again, performance in the Skill areas: Mathematical knowledge, and Applying Mathematics, are very similar to each other but show an increase in 2010 over 2009.
Mathematics

- There is a wide range of performance across Topics (Measurement, Number, Statistics, and Geometry) with Geometry showing a decrease in 2010 and Statistics showing a marked increase in 2010.
- Student performance in 2010 is strongest in Statistics and notably weaker in Measurement.
- Student performance is very broadly similar across skills that address Using and applying mathematics and Mathematical knowledge.

Science

- Students perform equally well in Earth and space science, Life science and environment, and Natural science.
- There was an increase in 2010 performance over 2009 in almost all areas.
- Performance in the skill areas of Enquiry skills and analysis, Applications and implications, Recall and understanding, is very similar across both years. There was an increase in 2010 performance over 2009 in almost all areas.

English

- In both years students are significantly weak in Writing, though performing equally well in Listening and Reading.
- Students are strongest in the skill areas of Identifying detail (dialogue), Understanding short dialogues, Understanding detail and gist, Skimming and scanning, Understanding signs or notices, and Use of language in context.
- In both years, students are particularly weak in Brief guided writing and Story writing from pictures.
The strongest Skills demonstrated include: Identify the main points, Understand exact content, Give opinion objectively, and Express relevant ideas.

The weaker areas identified are: Identify detail, Comment on grammar, Summarise main points, and Create a simple plan.

There is a wide range of performance across Topics (Number and operations, Algebra, Geometry and Data analysis and statistics) with students performing strongest in Data analysis and statistics and notably weaker in Algebra.

Student performance differs across Skills, which address Using and applying Mathematics and Mathematical knowledge with students performing better in Mathematical knowledge.

The stronger Skills demonstrated include: Use lexis/grammar in context, General comprehension, and Recall and understanding.

They are weaker in Listening/writing information, Skimming and scanning.

There is a wide range of performance across Topics (Earth, space and astronomy, Biology and Environmental science).

Students performed equally well in Earth, space and astronomy, Biology and Environmental science and Natural Science.

Performance in the skill areas of Enquiry skills and analysis, Applications and implications, Recall and understanding, is very similar.

Girls outperformed boys in the National Examinations by a large margin at all grades and in every subject. The differences in performance for 2009 and 2010 can be seen in the data presented in table 8 and in Figures 34 to 37 below. Both the table and figures show that the mean performance for girls is higher than the mean performance for boys. A close observation of Figure 34 indicates that overall the gender gap decreased in 2010. This could be due to a number of reasons, such as male students starting to take the test seriously or the teachers in the male students' schools taking the tests seriously and preparing their students.
The 2010 performance of boys and girls on individual items has been examined from graphs of facility for girls against facility for boys. These show that the better performance of girls cannot be attributed to particular groups of questions. Girls outperformed boys on all questions in Grade 3 Arabic and Mathematics. Similarly, in Grade 6, girls outperformed boys in Arabic, Mathematics, Science and English. In Grade 9, girls outperformed boys on all questions in Arabic and Mathematics. However in Science and English, boys and girls outperformed each other on some questions and also both boys and girls found some questions to be equally difficult. In general, girls have performed better across all subjects. The differences are not, in other words, caused by a subset of questions in each examination that favour girls over boys.

The reasons for these substantial differences in performance cannot be determined from examination data alone. There is a need for further investigation and research in this area. However, possible reasons could include differences in:

- resources (including class sizes, space, and materials such as books);
- pedagogy;
- classroom discipline;
- the qualifications or competence of teachers;
- culture between male and female attitudes to learning; or
- motivation during the administration of the examination.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Compared to 2009, the 2010 National Examinations showed a slight improvement in performance by Grade 3 and 6 students with the exception of Grade 6 Arabic. The performance by Grade 9 students provides a benchmark from which future trends in performance can be compared. Nevertheless, a small number of issues can already be identified:

- The examinations show good levels of reliability at both Grades and in all subjects.
- Students found the examinations challenging and their raw marks are low as a proportion of the total available marks. This is particularly pronounced in Grade 6 and 9 Mathematics and Grade 9 English, where it seems at this stage that the National Curriculum is either mismatched to the abilities of the students or is different from what is taught in schools. This is worthy of discussion and investigation.
- There is a difference between the performance of boys and girls, with girls outperforming boys by a very large margin. However, for Grade 3 and 6, the gap between boys and girls in 2010 is smaller than the gap between boys and girls in 2009. And while boys increased their performance in all Grade 3 and 6 subjects from 2009 to 2010, girls increased their performance in almost all subjects, but not in Arabic in either Grade 3 or 6. For Grade 9, girls outperformed boys in all subjects with the largest difference in Arabic.

- The general comments on the performance scores in relation to Topics and Skills represent an exploratory scrutiny of the data, and may be used as the basis for further investigation.
The size of providers licensed by the two ministries varies from those with just a handful of learners each year to those with several thousand enrolled annually. The vast majority of learners attending courses and training programmes offered by MoL providers are from the private sector, having been sponsored by their employers. Providers licensed by the MoE offer mainly tutorial or revision classes to learners in full-time education or language classes, usually in English.

As Figures 38a and 38b show both MoL and MoE providers vary in size with the majority of vocational training providers deemed to be 'small' having less than 500 annual enrolments.

Providers licensed or regulated by the MoL cover a range of vocational areas as shown in Figure 39, the most popular being management, health and safety and finance and related areas. The 20 providers reviewed in 2008-2009 covered ten areas of learning. Those reviewed in 2009-2010 showed a wider range of vocational areas with the 21 MoL providers reviewed covering 13 areas of learning.

The outcomes of the five main questions and the two summary judgements are graded according to the following five point scale:

- Outstanding .......................................................... 1
- Good ................................................................. 2
- Satisfactory ......................................................... 3
- Below Satisfactory ............................................... 4
- Very Weak ........................................................ 5

Of the twelve providers reviewed, two, one licensed by the MoL and one by the MoE, have been judged 'outstanding' for overall effectiveness. Two, one licensed by the MoL and one by the MoE, have been judged 'very weak'. However, the picture shown in Figure 40 indicates that 2009-2010 saw an improvement in this summary judgement compared to the previous year for these providers with just over a quarter deemed inadequate, compared to just under a half in the first year, and a slight but positive increase in the number judged to be 'good' from two to three. One of the reasons for this improvement could be an increasing awareness among providers of the quality assurance process and review procedures.

VOCATIONAL REVIEW UNIT

INTRODUCTION

The Vocational Review Unit (VRU) conducted phases three and four of its first cycle of reviews between September 2009 and June 2010, reviewing a total of 33 training providers. Of these, 21 were licensed or regulated by the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and twelve by the Ministry of Education (MoE). The VRU had previously completed reviews of 20 providers, all of whom were licensed by the MoL, beginning in September 2008. The results of these first reviews were reported in the first annual report. By the end of the 2009-2010 academic year, the VRU had completed reviews of a total of 53 providers, 41 licensed or regulated by the MoL, and twelve by the MoE. In addition to the above, the VRU conducted reviews of four technical schools jointly with the Schools Review Unit (SRU). The outcomes of these schools are that three were judged to be 'below satisfactory' for overall effectiveness and one 'satisfactory'. The results of the reviews of the training providers conducted in 2009-2010, and a summary of the total number of reviews conducted so far in this first cycle, are detailed below.

Reviews are based on the VRU’s Review Framework and are carried out on providers’ premises by teams of carefully selected and trained reviewers. In making judgements about the quality of an institution’s provision, reviewers examine a wide range of review evidence. This includes an analysis of the provider’s self-evaluation documents and other relevant management information, data on learners’ achievement, observations of training sessions and interviews with staff, learners, employers and parents who use the training provider.

The review team judges the effectiveness of particular aspects of an organisation’s provision in the following five areas: learners’ achievement, the effectiveness of teaching and training, the range of programmes offered, the quality of support and guidance for learners, and the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the organisation. The review team also makes two summary judgements; one on the provider’s overall effectiveness and the other on its capacity to improve.

The outcomes of the five main questions and the two summary judgements are graded according to the following five point scale:

- Outstanding .......................................................... 1
- Good ................................................................. 2
- Satisfactory ......................................................... 3
- Below Satisfactory ............................................... 4
- Very Weak ........................................................ 5

Providers licensed or regulated by the MoL cover a range of vocational areas as shown in Figure 39, the most popular being management, health and safety and finance and related areas. The 20 providers reviewed in 2008-2009 covered ten areas of learning. Those reviewed in 2009-2010 showed a wider range of vocational areas with the 21 MoL providers reviewed covering 13 areas of learning.

The most important review judgement is that of providers’ overall effectiveness, which summarises the quality of each institution’s provision. The review team use the judgements made for the five main questions as the basis for this overall judgement. They focus on how these specific outcomes impact on each other, in particular how leadership and management of the institution plans, organises and evaluates the quality of its teaching and training, its programmes, and the care and support it offers learners in order to promote their achievement.

Approximately two thirds of MoL providers reviewed between 2008-2010 have been judged to have ‘satisfactory’ or better overall effectiveness; the remainder were judged to be inadequate (either ‘below satisfactory’ or ‘very weak’) as can be seen from Figure 41. So far, no provider has been awarded an ‘outstanding’ for overall effectiveness. Two, one licensed by the MoL and one by the MoE, have been judged ‘very weak’. However, the picture shown in Figure 40 indicates that 2009-2010 saw an improvement in this summary judgement compared to the previous year for these providers with just over a quarter deemed inadequate, compared to just under a half in the first year, and a slight but positive increase in the number judged to be ‘good’ from two to three. One of the reasons for this improvement could be an increasing awareness among providers of the quality assurance process and review procedures.

Of the twelve providers licensed by the MoL reviewed in 2009-2010, one was judged to have ‘good’ overall effectiveness and five ‘satisfactory’ with the remaining six deemed inadequate (Figure 42). Providers judged to be ‘good’ overall tend to have a management team which knows the institution’s strengths and weaknesses well; some procedures in place for evaluating the quality
of teaching, programmes which meet the needs of employers, and an effective range of learner support mechanisms in place. They are also likely to offer a mixture of externally and internally accredited courses as well as having some systems in place for recording and measuring learner achievement.

**PROVIDERS’ CAPACITY TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THEIR TRAINING**

This is the second overall judgement made at the end of a review. It focuses on the impact of a provider’s strategic planning and the history of improvements in its quality provision. There is a particular emphasis in making this judgement on how effective the institution has been in raising learners’ achievement and improving course retention rates and whether they have the resources and appropriate planning in place to continue to do so.

In the 2009-2010 reviews, nearly half (nine) MoI providers were judged to have ‘good’ capacity to improve with just four judged ‘inadequate’ for this main question (Figure 43). Overall in this cycle, approximately three quarters of these providers have at least satisfactory capacity to improve (Figure 44) compared with 50% (six out of twelve) of the first group of MoI licensed providers judged to be at least satisfactory for this outcome (Figure 45).

Those providers who had good capacity to improve invariably knew their strengths and weaknesses well and had undertaken appropriate self-analysis to determine where best to focus their efforts and resources. Strategic planning documents are clear, appropriately focused on learner achievement and have relevant milestones, accountabilities and resource allocations identified in them. Where capacity to improve was judged to be less than satisfactory, a common theme was that providers simply did not have comprehensive or robust measures in place to analyse learner achievement or course outcomes to make appropriate improvements based on this analysis.
these courses are developing useful vocational skills that they can implement in the workplace. There continues to be evidence that learners benefit from courses through promotion at work. Measuring the impact of tutorial and revision courses run by MoE providers for young learners in promotion at work. Measuring the impact of tutorial and revision courses run by MoE providers for young learners in promotion at work.

Figures 52, 53 and 54, the majority of providers licensed by both the MoL and MoE provide at least a 'satisfactory' range of programmes. The most effective MoL providers undertake appropriate market research to design and deliver bespoke employer-specific programmes, which tackle particular skills gaps or enhance employee productivity. One MoL provider was assessed as providing an 'outstanding' range of employment courses in 2009-2010 (Figure 52). These were assessed as being vocationally relevant to learners and internationally recognised as appropriate industry-specific programmes which enhance employees' continuing professional development.

Reviewers also consider the extent to which providers offer opportunities for learners to engage in enrichment activities and work experience outside their main programme of study. Providers judged to be 'good' for this main question include how well programmes offered by providers match both employers' and learners' needs. Providers are expected to have undertaken an analysis of labour market needs, including where specific skills gaps exist in the Bahraini workforce, and that this information has then been used to inform provision. As can be seen from Figures 52, 53 and 54, the majority of providers licensed by both the MoL and MoE provide at least a 'satisfactory' range of programmes. The most effective MoL providers undertake appropriate market research to design and deliver bespoke employer-specific programmes, which tackle particular skills gaps or enhance employee productivity. One MoL provider was assessed as providing an 'outstanding' range of programmes in 2009-2010 (Figure 52). These were assessed as being vocationally relevant to learners and internationally recognised as appropriate industry-specific programmes which enhance employees' continuing professional development.

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research has been undertaken) and do not provide relevant progression routes for learners. Nonetheless, as can be seen from the figures below, providers scored relatively well overall on this particular judgement across the five main review questions.

**FIGURE 52:** ANALYSIS OF GRADES AWARDED FOR QUALITY OF PROGRAMMES – MoL 2009-2010

![Graph showing quality of programmes](#)

**LEARNERS’ SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE:**

**MAIN QUESTION 4**

The fourth main question focuses on the effectiveness of support and guidance offered to learners to help them make progress with their learning and achieve well. Reviewers make judgements about the quality of advice and guidance provided for learners on the programmes offered by institutions and, where relevant, on opportunities for career progression and further professional development. Where support and guidance is of a good quality, providers are aware of individual learners’ needs and provide relevant, individualised advice that promotes learners’ confidence and ultimately their success on the programmes offered.

As noted from Figures 55 and 56 below, the vast majority of MoL providers continue to offer at least satisfactory support and guidance for learners. Support and guidance offered by the twelve MoL providers is more variable (Figure 57), with some providers offering little additional support outside the main tutorial sessions. However, review teams noted that all providers inevitably had some approachable and committed members of staff who were prepared to provide some form of individualised support and encouragement to learners when requested. The very best practice was observed in the larger MoL institutions where learning environments were usually pleasant, fit for purpose, and equipped with appropriate resources such as computer laboratories, well-stocked resource centres, and facilities for workplace simulations.

One significant aspect of this main question that review teams consider is whether institutions provide a safe and healthy environment to ensure the well-being of learners. This remains a significant issue for the majority of providers, hence the relatively few institutions, just ten out of a total of 52 judgements, that have been graded ‘good’ since the beginning of the review process in 2008. Issues raised by the review teams have included a lack of formal risk assessment procedures, evacuation plans not being in place or practiced and evaluated, a lack of awareness of health and safety issues among staff and learners, and equipment inadequately stored and infrequently checked.

**FIGURE 53:** CUMULATIVE ANALYSIS OF GRADES AWARDED FOR QUALITY OF PROGRAMMES – MoL 2009-2010

![Graph showing cumulative analysis](#)

**FIGURE 54:** ANALYSIS OF GRADES AWARDED FOR QUALITY OF PROGRAMMES – MoL 2009-2010

![Graph showing analysis of grades](#)

**FIGURE 55:** ANALYSIS OF GRADES AWARDED FOR LEARNERS’ SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE – MoL 2009-2010

![Graph showing learners’ support and guidance](#)

**FIGURE 56:** CUMULATIVE ANALYSIS OF GRADES AWARDED FOR LEARNERS’ SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE – MoL 2009-2010

![Graph showing cumulative analysis of grades](#)

**FIGURE 57:** ANALYSIS OF GRADES AWARDED FOR LEARNERS’ SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE – MoL 2009-2010

![Graph showing analysis of grades](#)

**EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND SUPPORTING ALL LEARNERS:**

**MAIN QUESTION 5**

The quality of leadership and management in planning, organising, delivering and reviewing teaching, programmes and learner support, the key inputs which impact on learner achievement, provides the focus for this main question. In particular, review teams consider the clarity and relevance of a provider’s vision and mission statements and whether these show a clear commitment to improvements in its provision and that it is appropriately focused on learner achievement. Providers are expected to record, monitor and analyse learner achievement in a systematic and rigorous way on all their courses. Whilst the most effective providers generally do this for externally accredited courses, where assessment systems and learner outcomes are well-documented, there is little evidence of providers doing this for internally accredited, unmoderated courses.

About two thirds of MoL providers reviewed in 2009-2010 were judged to be at least ‘satisfactory’ for leadership and management (Figure 58), unsurprisingly, a similar profile for capacity to improve. However, only one third (four out of twelve) of the MoL providers reviewed were judged ‘satisfactory’ or better for this outcome (Figure 60). It cannot be stressed enough that the key to improvements in providers’ overall effectiveness, in particular the major contribution that the ‘achievement’ judgement makes to this outcome, lies in improvements in the quality and impact of leadership and management. This was clearly evident in the improvements seen in the four providers who were subject to a repeat review during this second year (see below).
the reviewed provision. Those providers who are judged to be 'below satisfactory' or 'very weak' overall are subject to at least two monitoring visits by the VRU to assess how effectively they are implementing the agreed action plan. In addition, these providers are subject to a repeat review, normally between twelve and eighteen months after the original review, of which four were completed in this second year of the cycle. It is pleasing to note that all of these four providers were deemed to have improved sufficiently to have their overall effectiveness judged as 'satisfactory' with none of the five main questions judged 'inadequate'. Three of the four providers were awarded 'good' for capacity to improve, with a clear focus on implementing the recommendations detailed in their action plan. The reasons for these improvements include:

- changes or improvements in the quality of leadership and management at the institutions, particularly in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning and their assessment of learner progress
- providers having a clear, systematic and relevant focus on the areas for development detailed in their Review Report and highlighted in the agreed action plan
- a better understanding of the review process and the criteria on which providers are assessed.

The remaining providers judged to be 'inadequate' overall will be reviewed during 2010-2011 and reported upon in the next annual report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the review process continues and more providers are reviewed, the evidence base continues to expand and a clearer picture is emerging of the strengths and areas for development in vocational education and training in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Whilst familiarity with the review process and the requirements of the review framework is a key component of a successful review, it must be emphasised that there is nothing in the framework that does not represent or reflect best practice from either a business or education and training perspective. For example, highly effective organisations will have a continuing focus on improving provision and practices based on an accurate and systematic evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. The providers judged to be 'good' overall have some form of evaluation process that aspires to this and are to be congratulated. However, there continues to be a mismatch among all providers between their evaluation of the seven questions which form the basis of the review process and that of review teams, with providers being far too generous in their judgements when completing their SEF.

The following is a list of areas for development and associated recommendations based on the evidence of the reviews conducted in 2009-2010 and, where relevant, which remain areas for improvement also identified in last year's report:

- As noted in the last report, all providers have something to celebrate and the majority are able to identify what appears to be relative strengths in their provision, for example in having suitably experienced and qualified teachers and trainers. However, all providers tend to over-estimate their judgements about the quality of their provision and learner outcomes. Identifying the areas of development through a critical self-evaluation process is crucial if improvements in the quality of vocational education and training are to be secured.
- Initial assessment of learners, the consequent monitoring of their progress and the measurement and analysis of learner achievement remain key areas of development for the majority of providers, particularly small or medium sized MoL providers and those licensed by the MoE. This is, of course, a more difficult process for those learners on short courses or non-accredited, internally assessed programmes. Nonetheless, this remains an important management function if institutions are to evaluate the impact of all their provision on learners’ achievement and the successful completion of intended course outcomes.
- Monitoring the quality of learning in the classroom or workshop is the most important criterion when judging the impact of teaching or training. Providers generally do not have systems that are robust, systematic or sufficiently focused enough on this aspect, or in several cases, providers simply have no monitoring systems in place at all. This is particularly important because the majority of providers utilise the services of part-time trainers or teachers who often work on an hourly basis and are not adequately involved in the provider’s self-evaluation and planning for quality improvement. In addition, planning for the different needs of learners, where these have been identified through an appropriate initial assessment process, also remains a key area for improving the quality of learning.
- Most, but not all, providers conduct some form of market analysis to ensure the courses, qualifications and programmes they offer are meeting the needs of the labour market, in particular identifying where skills’ gaps exist. This also is integral to improving the quality and skills of the Bahraini workforce. The most effective providers work closely with employers to ensure they are meeting their needs and offer a range of bespoke or customised courses as well as industry-relevant programmes and qualifications. This example of good practice should be the norm among all providers.
- Some providers do not pay sufficient attention to health and safety issues, particularly in having regular, systematic and appropriately reviewed emergency evacuation drills as well as having comprehensive,...
institution-wide risk assessment procedures. Providers often fail to inform learners of the appropriate safety measures, for example as part of a formal induction programme.

• For MoE licensed providers, who offer mainly tutorial, revision or language classes, most of the above analysis also applies. However, there are particular issues that apply to these providers. These include: having a more systematic and robust process for measuring the specific impact their classes have on learner progress and achievement; using a wider range of resources and delivery methods in classes; and making greater use of IT to support learners.

• Internally accredited and assessed courses will always have a role to play in the development of Bahrain’s workforce, particularly in developing management and personal or ‘soft’ skills and in the use of IT. However, significant improvements in the skills and knowledge of the Kingdom’s workforce can only be achieved through a greater proportion of courses being externally accredited and assessed where international comparisons and appropriate benchmarking of learner performance can be utilised.
Perceive their potential...
higher education review unit

Introduction
In the 2009-2010 academic year, the Higher Education Review Unit (HERU), continued with its first cycle of institutional reviews, completed the reviews of the programmes in the field of Bachelor of Business Administration and started with the reviews of the Bachelor of Law programmes, which are being offered by higher education institutions in Bahrain, and continued with its programme of building institutional capacity across the higher education sector.

Institutional Reviews
In addition to the seven institutional reviews that took place during the 2009-2010 academic year, another five were conducted during 2009-2010. This means that all twelve private higher education institutions operating in the Kingdom have been reviewed. Of the five that were conducted in 2009-2010, five reports have been approved and published, and during this period one report from the previous academic year was approved and published. Hence to date, twelve institutional Review Reports have been published. The first cycle will end during the 2011 academic year with the reviews of the publicly funded institutions.

Analysis of Findings of Institutional Reviews 2009-2010
Of the six published institutional Review Reports in 2009-2010, one institution received a Commendation for the commitment and accessibility of academic staff members (Ahlia University, Applied Science University, University College of Bahrain, Kingdom University and Gulf University). One received a second Commendation for providing effective academic advisory service for students (Kingdom University). Another (University College of Bahrain) received a second Commendation for its commitment to its community, by providing bursaries and so providing access to higher education as well as providing scholarships for meritorious students. Ahlia University received nine commendations that included such strategies as planning, teaching and assessment and high level Information Technology Services. An Affirmation is given in the Review Report where the institution has identified an area in need of attention and can provide the Panel of international and regional experts with evidence that this area has already begun to be addressed. One institution received seven. These were given in areas that included: benchmarking consultation with employers and alumni on programmes meeting labour market needs; the development of Intended Learning Outcomes; the development of a staff performance management system; and the expansion of its information system. In another institution, four Affirmations were received, which included improvements being made in implementing an effective management information system; the appointment of more highly qualified staff and increasing the number of support staff; the implementation of professional development programmes; and the development of an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plan, policies and procedures. Another institution received two Affirmations. These centered on increasing the number of academics holding doctoral degrees and its efforts in forming collaborations with international universities. Yet another institution received three Affirmations, which were to do with plans being developed and in the early stages of implementation of the redesign of an English language test and a management information system. The third was concerned with the support provided for researchers to participate in conferences. One institution did not receive any Affirmations. This means that neither during carrying out its normal operations nor during its self-evaluation process, was it able to reflect critically on its governance and management practices or its academic provision and identify gaps or areas of weaknesses in need of improvement.

A Recommendation is given where important areas are identified as in need of improvement. When it comes to reporting on the Recommendations received, the first point that needs to be noted is that the number of Recommendations given in a Review Report cannot be seen as a straightforward matter of quantification with regards to the quality of the institution. Some Recommendations are more serious in nature than others. Nevertheless, the Recommendations made in the five of the six institutions under consideration are in the 34 to 47 range, which is in the upper percentile of the range and more importantly, a considerable number are fundamental in nature. They are distributed throughout all nine Themes and 25 Indicators against which they were measured. Thus all five institutions have serious issues concerning governance and management as well as the quality of provision. A considerable amount of development work needs to take place in order to bring about substantial improvement in the quality of these institutions. Specifically of the six institutions, as shown in Table 9 below, one institution did not receive any Recommendations or Affirmations but received 47 Recommendations. Another two institutions each received one Commendation with one receiving three Affirmations and 36 Recommendations whilst the other received four Affirmations and 40 Recommendations. Two institutions received two Commendations, with one receiving seven Affirmations and 34 Recommendations whilst the other received two and 41 respectively. One institution received nine Commendations, twelve Affirmations, and 24 Recommendations.

As in last year’s Annual Report on the findings of institutional reviews, issues that were typically found to be in need of improvement can be clustered into five broad areas: (i) mission, planning and governance; (ii) quality management and academic standards; (iii) teaching and learning; (iv) research; and (v) community engagement. (Figure 61 shows the nine themes from which the clusters emerge.) Given that all twelve institutions reviewed are private providers and that there are broadly similar areas found in need for improvement, it is appropriate to discuss the twelve reports as a block for the two academic years, namely, 2008-2010.

Cumulative Findings of the Two Years of Conducting Institutional Reviews 2008-2010
If the Recommendations are aggregated across all twelve institutions in terms of the clusters identified above, and as represented in Figure 61 below on nine themes, it can be seen that institutions face a number of challenges in establishing their mission, planning and governance structures and activities to be in line with international good practice. A total of 82 Recommendations were made in this regard with only seven Commendations in this broad area. In many cases there is a disjuncture between the institution’s vision and mission and its ethos and education provision. Governance and management structures are generally not clearly delineated; indeed some institutions do not have functioning Boards of Trustees. This flies in the face of good corporate governance. Executive management decision-making tends to exclude Deans. Who, despite being responsible for the quality of programme delivery, are not empowered to make budget and resource allocation decisions with respect to the programmes for which they are responsible. This constitutes an academic risk. Strategic planning is another area that was found to be in need of urgent attention. Whilst most institutions had drafted such plans, they were typically incomplete and did not provide information on key performance indicators; allocation of financial, physical and human resources; nor did they allocate responsibility for the achievement of the goals set. A lack of understanding of the use of appropriate external benchmarking is another issue that needs to be addressed. Within the exercise an institution cannot easily determine the quality of its activities in the three core functions or of its performance as a whole. This would have a strong negative impact on the academic quality of the institution.

With respect to (ii) quality management and academic standards, a total of 111 Recommendations were made and only eight Commendations. Institutions are aware of the need to have in place appropriate quality assurance...
Community engagement is a term that can be broadly defined; and many institutions have yet to define it for themselves meaning in the light of their vision and mission statements. Institutions have also not developed a framework for community engagement and provided adequate human and financial resources for this function. Any activities that take place tend to be ad hoc.

In nine of the twelve reviewed institutions, there was a serious lack of campus infrastructure and facilities, which has a deleterious effect on the quality of their educational provision. However, one institution has recently moved into a purpose built campus with good infrastructure and thereby has laid the ground to provide students with a quality teaching and learning experience. Most of the other institutions have indicated their plans to build new campuses but these are in the early stages of development and at various stages to conclude: while no formal summative judgements have been made in this first cycle of institutional reviews since the focus was on development and establishing a baseline of quality across all institutions against the nine themes, some tentative conclusions can be reached.

When the results shown in Figure 61 are disaggregated for each institution, they can be placed into one of three broad categories; the first being that an adequate level of achievement in Core regulative, management and teaching and learning has been reached thus far. Three institutions fit into this category; Ahsa University, Royal College of Surgeons - Medical University of Bahrain, Arab Open University-Bahrain. Three institutions can be placed in the second category; Royal University of Women, Birla Institute of Technology, and Applied Science University. This means that they are on the right pathway; they have some good structures in place to support the quality of their provision but need more time to establish and embed their quality assurance arrangements across most of their functions.

A significant number of institutions (six) fall into the third and last category. These are: Gulf University, AMA International University, Kingdon University, Delmon University, New York Institute of Technology and University College of Bahrain. These have major fundamental shortcomings in all nine themes and when these are taken together, the institutions are very poor in terms of the quality of education provision. In order to become viable providers of quality higher education, each would need to make enormous efforts to effect a turnaround strategy as well as develop and implement interventions that would ensure the quality of their education provision.

INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Institutional Reviews are about accountability and are developmental in nature. The former is satisfied through the review process and the publication of Reports so that government, parents, students and other stakeholders know about the status of the quality of institutional arrangements for ensuring good higher education provision. With respect to the developmental aspect, the preparation of a critical self-evaluation portfolio forms part of an institution's self-development. In addition, in accordance with the Institutional Review Handbook three months after publication of the Review Reports, institutions are required to submit to the HERU an Improvement Plan which states how the institution will use the findings of the Review Report to improve and enhance the quality of its activities, both at institutional level and in the core functions of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.

To date, the HERU has received Improvement Plans from eight institutions. These reports have been analysed within the HERU and constructive follow-up meetings have taken place with the President and senior members of each of the institutions. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that the plans are viable and to clarify any queries that the institution may have on particular aspects of the Report with respect to their plans.

ONE YEAR FOLLOW-UP REPORT

One year after publication of its Review Report, an institution will submit to the HERU a progress report, which outlines how it has met the goals of its Improvement Plan. This includes showing how the institution has maintained or enhanced any Commissions that it received as well as the actions undertaken and progress made towards addressing the received Affirmations and Recommendations. The institution's report will be analysed by the HERU after which a site visit will be undertaken by senior members of the HERU to verify the claims made by the institution. A report will then be written and after going through the various QAET quality procedures, it will be presented to the Board for approval (Institutional Handbook 1-4). By the end of September 2010, the HERU has received two progress reports from institutions.

PROGRAMME REVIEWS

The first programme to be reviewed nationally to ascertain whether or not minimum standards are being met was in the field of Bachelor of Business Administration. Expert Panels were constituted to review the programmes. Twelve reviews of this programme were completed. Six were carried out in the 2008-2009 academic year and six in 2009-2010.

It is worth noting that all four indicators have to be satisfied in order to receive a ‘confidence’ judgement. If two or three Indicators are satisfied, the judgement would be ‘limited confidence’. If none or one are satisfied, a ‘no confidence’ judgement is made.

The Indicators are:

- Indicator 1 - Curriculum. The programme complies with existing regulations in terms of the curriculum, the teaching and assessment of students’ achievement, the curriculum demonstrates fitness for purpose.
- Indicator 2 - Efficiency of the programme. The programme is efficient in terms of the use of available resources, the admitted students and the ratio of admitted students to the successful graduates.
- Indicator 3 - Academic standards of the graduates. The graduates of the programme meet acceptable standards in comparison with equivalent programmes in Bahrain and worldwide.
- Indicator 4 - Effectiveness of quality management and assurance. The arrangements in place for managing the programme including quality assurance, give confidence in the programme.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS OF PROGRAMME REVIEWS IN THE FIELD OF BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION 2009-2010

Of the six programme reviews carried out in the 2009-2010 academic year, as can be seen in Figure 62 below, two received ‘confidence’ judgements, two ‘limited confidence’, and two ‘no confidence’.

Of the two programmes which received ‘limited confidence’, one satisfied three of the four Indicators with Indicator 3 being unsatisfactory. The other satisfied two, with Indicators 1 and 4 being unsatisfactory. In the two programmes that received a ‘no confidence’ judgement, each only satisfied Indicator 2.

FIGURE 62: 2009-2010 FINDINGS OF SIX PROGRAMME REVIEWS IN THE FIELD OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AT BACHELOR LEVEL

1 See HERU Programme Review Handbook Section 1.8 which sets out in greater detail the requirements of each indicator.
When all twelve programme reviews are considered together as shown in Figure 65 there was an even distribution in the judgements reached by the Expert Panels with four receiving ‘confidence’, four ‘limited confidence’, and four ‘no confidence’. When the programmes and Indicators are disaggregated, four satisfied all four Indicators, hence the ‘confidence’ judgement. Of the four programmes that received ‘limited confidence’, two satisfied three Indicators with both not satisfying Indicator 3 (i.e. Academic Standards of the Graduates), and two satisfied two Indicators with one not satisfying Indicators 1 and 4, and the other not satisfying 3 and 4. Of the four that received a ‘no confidence’ judgement, all but one satisfied Indicator 2.

As can be seen in Figure 66, seven programmes satisfied Indicator 1, eleven satisfied Indicator 2, and six satisfied Indicators 3 and 4. In other words, five programmes did not satisfy Indicator 1 on the Curriculum; one did not satisfy Indicator 2 on Efficiency of the Programme; six did not satisfy Indicator 3 on Academic Standards of the Graduates; and six did not satisfy Indicator 4 on Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance. The main areas in need of improvement are: the development of Intended Learning Outcomes; assessment methods that are varied and appropriate; pedagogy that develops critical thinking and skills relevant to the 21st century workplace; benchmarking and external examining to assure that academic standards are being achieved; and the development and implementation of quality assurance mechanisms in the programmes.

Like institutional reviews, an Improvement Plan needs to be developed for the programme under review, which addresses the Recommendations made in the Review Report. This Plan should be submitted to the HERU three months after publication of the Review Report. To date, six Improvement Plans have been submitted and analysed by the HERU. Follow-up visits to the institution to discuss the plans with the programme teams are undertaken by senior HERU staff. These plans are now in various stages of implementation by the faculty of the programme in each institution. Follow-up visits will be conducted one year after publication of the Review Report by the HERU to evaluate the institution’s progress in implementing these plans.
Conclusion
In this concluding section of the Annual Report, the QAAET reports on its capacity building initiatives, making some preliminary observations about how the findings of the different review units and national examinations compare with similar findings in the international arena; provides an overview of the QAAET’s activities during the 2010-2011 academic year. Lastly, it makes some concluding remarks.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The QAAET mandate is to conduct reviews and follow up on the consequent development and improvement initiatives of the concerned institutions. In addition, it seeks to promote the awareness of quality and the empowerment of a quality culture in education and training institutions along with the stakeholders in a number of ways. In the academic year 2009-2010, the Authority undertook a number of capacity building initiatives across all the QAAET’s four units in particular, and the education and training sector in general. The following sections report upon the most important external capacity building initiatives.

Since the establishment of the QAAET the Schools Review Unit has established itself as a major player in the promotion and development of quality education in public schools both through conducting reviews and through capacity building activities. The latter has been done in a number of ways. First, by training Ministry of Education teachers seconded to the unit for a period of one to three years during which they are trained to become review specialists and conduct reviews. Secondly, the SRU trains the schools principals on how to complete the self-evaluation form. This is one of the most important pre-evaluation steps. It gives schools the opportunity to question their readiness for quality review and receive formative feedback from the SRU in the form of a pre-review briefing. They will also be able to compare their performance indicators with those specified in the unit’s review framework. Thirdly, the SRU holds consultation meetings with the schools principals to seek formative feedback on completed reviews bridging the gap between the SRU and the schools, ensuring adherence to the code of conduct and to make necessary improvements if appropriate. Finally, workshops and meetings are held with principals whose schools have been judged ‘inadequate’ to explain this judgment and help them prepare for the monitoring visits.

During the 2009-2010 academic year the National Examinations Unit carried out a number of capacity building initiatives for both the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) under the title ‘Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment’ was held for NEU and Ministry of Education staff. Several workshops were held for primary, primary intermediate and intermediate secondary schools to familiarise schools with the way the national examination results are published and can be broken down on the one hand, and to disseminate the new intermediate test specifications and specimen question papers to intermediate secondary schools. In 2009, a design team for the new grade 9 examinations on the other hand. The NEU also undertook a lengthy public consultation exercise with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labor, higher education institutions and schools to establish stakeholder opinion and requirements for the Grade 12 pilot examinations. In addition, the NEU is undertaking a first qualitative impact study of the national examinations, initially in collaboration with OfSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Training and Apprenticeships) and the SRU, with a joint paper on the first phase of this impact study at the 2010 International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) Conference to critical acclaim.

The NEU also carried out around 650 principal examiner, team leaders and markers for the 2010 examinations; training was undertaken for standardisation of markers, marking, supervision of marking and report writing of qualitative reports on student performance for schools. Furthermore, around 100 new item writers were trained, jointly with CIE, to write valid, fit-for-purpose, unbiased and reliable questions for all subjects and grades of the national examinations. Both markers and item-writers will take back into their classrooms the principles of what they have learned and observed during these training sessions and during the marking and write-up activities. They will use these assessment principles in the classroom, and thus capacity building is spread across all core subjects and into all schools.

Since the start of the programme of reviewing training providers in Bahrain, the Vocational Review Unit has undertaken a number of capacity building initiatives to assist providers with the review process and ultimately, with improving their provision. All providers are invited to a training workshop prior to the review period to assist them with the self-evaluation process and the completion of their self-evaluation form (SEF). The full and accurate completion of the SEF is a vital first step for providers in identifying their strengths and areas for development and, importantly for the review process, having a clear focus on the questions upon which the review team will be making judgements. Providers are also given guidance at these workshops on how to complete the Learners’ Performance Data (LPD) workbook, which is used to record and analyse learners’ achievements, a key criteria for judging learners’ progress on the courses, qualifications offered, and/or the set learning goals and ultimately on the overall effectiveness of the provider.

In addition to this, the review team holds highly effective planning meetings prior to the on-site review to prepare the provider by going through the review materials, highlighting the questions on which the review team will be making judgements, what evidence they will be looking at to make those judgements, and to address any concerns they may have. This is often supplemented with additional one-to-one meetings with the provider’s nominee, particularly to discuss issues highlighted by the provider’s SEF.

The VRU also held two seminars and workshops during the past year, one in December 2009 held five workshops; one of which was conducted in January 2010 to prepare institutions to develop their Self-Evaluation portfolio for institutional review. Five higher education institutions, all of which are publicly funded, participated. These are University of Bahrain, Bahrain Polytechnic, Police Academy, College of Health Sciences, and Arabian Gulf University. Three workshops were held to assist departments to prepare their self-evaluation for the programme reviews. The Bachelor of Law workshop was held in February 2010 and all five institutions offering this programme all attended. In October 2010, two preparation workshops for the Masters of Business Administration programme was held and twelve institutions participated; eleven private and one public. The HERU also facilitated a workshop in May 2010 on ‘Improving Learning Outcomes’ which, as an example of the conference to critical acclaim.

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The Higher Education Review Unit continued with its capacity building activities across the higher education sector during the first full cycle of school reviews need only be a national concern if there was no targeted intervention to support these schools. Often, with well-targeted leadership and management interventions it is the failing schools that make more progress than others.

One of the most striking findings of the schools reviews is the difference in the achievement and the overall effectiveness between girls’ and boys’ schools, particularly at secondary level. The significant variation between boys and girls performance is an international phenomenon, from the USA to Europe and from Australia to Asia. Most GCC countries are faced with similar challenges of girls doing better than boys at school and university. This triggered the need for education reforms worldwide and in particular in the GCC countries.

The SRU has its part to play in Bahrain’s Education Reform Project by highlighting the strengths and areas for development in all the schools in the Kingdom, and by assessing the quality of the action plans which the schools produce in response to the review findings. The SRU conducts monitoring visits to schools which have been judged as inadequate within six months to one year of the original review.

One of the most noticeable outcomes of the Bahrain National Examinations is the huge difference in performance between girls and boys: girls outperform boys by a large margin in every subject and at every grade. A similar picture can be found in international comparison studies like TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS, where girls achieve better results than boys. It is worth noting, however, that the nature of these international tests is quite different from the Bahrain National Examinations, in as much as they are curriculum independent and are taken under controlled conditions. So a direct comparison should not be made. Bahrain has taken part in TIMSS since 2003, and is the best performing country in the Gulf region. In general terms, the gender-related performance difference in TIMSS is greatest in GCC countries.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

It is difficult to make precise comparisons between different nations and school systems, since the regimes for monitoring school effectiveness vary from country to country. However, a large-scale comparative study of six countries which scored high results in international tests (Canada, England, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Sweden) has found that common features of their success were: 1) regular school evaluations and 2) centrally determined tests for schools.

In the initial stages of new evaluation regimes it is frequently the case that a high proportion of weak schools or those failing to produce an appropriate quality of education are identified. For example, in England, in the early stages of the first full cycle of school reviews need only be a national concern if there was no targeted intervention to support these schools. Often, with well-targeted leadership and management interventions it is the failing schools that make more progress than others.

In this concluding section of the Annual Report, the QAAET reports on its capacity building initiatives, making some preliminary observations about how the findings of the different review units and national examinations compare with similar findings in the international arena; provides an overview of the QAAET’s activities during the 2010-2011 academic year. Lastly, it makes some concluding remarks.
Data from past English national curriculum tests, and from GCSE and A-level broad tests, it takes students and teachers around two to three years to get used to new test formats. Following that, results improve markedly during the first few years of an examination, after which performance will usually plateau and only change slightly.

The criteria in the VRU’s review framework are built on international best practice, e.g. in the UK, the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) inspects schools, colleges, training providers and other educational institutions. It is interesting then to note some of the key findings and issues identified by a mature quality assurance process when looking at the outcomes for similar institutions in the Kingdom of Bahrain. For example, the OfSTED published report 2008-2009 identified the importance of providers working with employers to make programmes more relevant and therefore more motivating and productive for learners. This aspect has been clearly described in the VRU report for 2009-2010 as a feature of the more effective training providers in Bahrain.

A key area for development for providers of vocational education and training in Bahrain is in the area of measuring learners’ progress which is similar to what other countries experienced when they started their first review - assessing individual learners’ starting points and then measuring the impact of an institution’s provision on their progression, is a crucial step in assessing more accurately how effective providers actually are. There is now clearly both a challenge and an opportunity for providers of vocational education and training in Bahrain to improve.

Whilst it is still too early to make judgements about the impact of the reviews in higher education in the Kingdom of Bahrain in improving and enhancing quality, some early comparisons about Bahrain’s institutional review findings can be made with those of some other countries, such as South Africa. Like Bahrain, private higher education institutions in South Africa that are reviewed (audited) are done so on the same themes and criteria as the publicly funded institutions. In South Africa, eleven private institutions have been audited and ten reports published to date. Private higher education institutions in South Africa, like those in Bahrain, began operating in the absence of a regulatory framework. There are similarities both in size and complexity of these institutions with those operating in the private sector within Bahrain, although naturally there are also many differences.

Nevertheless despite the disparities in the numbers of institutions and sizes of populations, the issues arising from South African Audit Reports resonate with those found in Bahrain; in particular the need for:

- governance and management practices that are reflective of good practice in higher education
- vision and mission statements that are realistic and from which flow the development and implementation of strategic plans that contain key performance indicators and accompanying objectives
- the development of management information systems that use institutional data for planning and management decision-making and for tracking student progression, so that interventions can be made at an early stage to support students at risk of failure
- adequate infrastructure and academic support resources
- a Teaching and Learning strategy, which includes robust and varied assessment processes
- an understanding of what ‘quality’ means, and the development of a Quality Framework, which leads to the implementation of an appropriate operational quality management system
- an understanding of benchmarking and the undertaking of regular formal benchmarking, which is used to inform institutional practices and activities in the core academic functions
- appropriate staff development and employment conditions, including workload, remuneration and tenure.

All of these issues have been identified by the HERU Panels, which reviewed the private institutions in Bahrain.

Lastly, two points are worth making about the meta-findings of the quality assurance agencies in the Nordic countries, which are relevant for Bahrain. First, that the implementation and general acceptance of systematic quality work in higher education takes a long time.8 Secondly, for quality reviews to have a positive impact: i.e. that they lead to meaningful improvement, the ‘role of management is crucial to the acceptance and success of institutional quality assurance’ (ibid). This involves developing and implementing mechanisms, including communication strategies as well as staff development activities, to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the advantages of external reviews in strengthening the quality of the institutions and thereby producing excellent graduates and high impact research.

OUTLOOK 2010-2011

In October 2010, the SRU began a pilot programme to carry out reviews on the 69 private schools and 124 kindergartens in Bahrain. The pilot will conclude at the end of 2010. After the findings from the pilot, which are planned to be assessed in March 2011, a common framework will be implemented to cover all public and private schools. Over a four to five year cycle, all the private schools will be reviewed and the public schools will be re-reviewed. Over this cycle all education stakeholders in Bahrain will be kept informed of the progress that schools are making. A key component of this information sharing is the QAAET annual report, but the SRU will continue to disseminate, through seminars and workshops, the best of professional practice and share the lessons learned throughout all sectors of education, as it has been doing up to now with the public schools.

During the academic year 2010-2011 the National Examinations Unit as in its approved plan will conduct examinations in the core subjects of Arabic, Mathematics, English and Science as in the previous years for all Grade 3, 6 and 9 students in public schools. In addition to this, the NEU will also conduct pilot examinations for all Grade 12 students in public schools. These examinations will be in Arabic, English and Problem Solving (Applied Mathematics). Test specifications and specimen assessment materials will be developed for Grade 12 subjects and distributed to all secondary schools, and briefing meetings will be held for all secondary schools.

In 2010-2011, the VRU will complete the reviews of all eligible training providers in Bahrain. Those regulated by the Ministry of Labour will be completed by January 2011 and those regulated by the Ministry of Education by June 2011. This completion of cycle one will then provide evidence for a comprehensive and effective baseline for measuring and then assessing improvements in vocational education and training in the Kingdom. This period will also include all the repeat reviews for those providers with a judgement of ‘inadequate’ in 2009-2010.

As part of the QAAET, the VRU will continue to play its part in helping to improve the vocational education and training provision in Bahrain by providing Review Reports that are accurate, accurate and consistent across all providers. It will continue to work closely with its main partners, the Ministries of Labor and Education, the Economic Development Board and the Labour Fund (Tamkeen) to achieve this objective. It is through these reports that improvements can be celebrated and good practice shared and, especially, that the main areas of development are identified to ensure the continuing improvements in vocational education and training in Bahrain.

In the 2010-2011 academic year, the HERU will complete the first cycle of institutional reviews in Bahrain. Once these reports have been finalised and approved, the HERU will have established a baseline on the quality of higher education provision in the Kingdom of Bahrain. An analysis of this will provide the HERU with the information to make a decision regarding the institutional review framework in the second cycle. The framework will then be revised and when approved by the QAAET Board, the second cycle will begin. At the same time, the analysis of institutions’ improvement Plans as well as the Follow-up processes will continue, as will the HERU’s capacity building programme.

With respect to programme reviews, the HERU will continue with its schedule to ensure that each college or faculty within an institution has undergone a programme review which should result in the good practice demonstrated by the HERU reviews becoming embedded in all higher education programmes offered in the Kingdom. A second framework and methodology will be developed for cycle two of programme reviews and will follow the same process outlined above for the second cycle of institutional reviews.

CONCLUSION

The QAAET will continue to make its contribution to the realisation of the Economic Vision 2030 in a number of ways that are concerned with raising the quality of education and training for all learners and students in the Kingdom; providing learners and students with opportunities to fulfil their aspirations and potential; and ensuring that labour market needs are met in an increasingly diversifying economy, which in turn, leads to increased socio-economic prosperity in the Kingdom of Bahrain.
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<td>Tariq Bin ziyad Intermediate Boys School</td>
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VOCAfIoNAl REVIEW PUbLISHED RePoRTS

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<td>6</td>
<td>Golden Touch for Management &amp; Commercial Training &amp; Consultancy</td>
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No. | Name of the Provider | Judgements |
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**VOCATIONAL REPEAT REVIEW PUBLISHED REPORTS**

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<td>2</td>
<td>New Vision Training Institute</td>
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**QUALITY ASSURANCE AUTHORITY FOR EDUCATION & TRAINING**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2010**

**APPENDIX**
Working in partnership to reflect the highest quality standards