



This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

# International Quality Review

Mid-Cycle Review

Applied Science University

**Review Report**

November 2024

## Contents

<b>About this mid-cycle review</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Outcome of the mid-cycle review</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Summary of IQR outcomes</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Overview of the institution .....	1
Good practice identified by the 2022 International Quality Review .....	2
Recommendations of the 2022 International Quality Review.....	2
<b>Changes since the last IQR review visit</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Findings from the mid-cycle review analysis</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Findings from the observations of facilities and learning resources</b> .....	<b>6</b>

## About this mid-cycle review

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

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Mr Alan Weale.

The full International Quality Review (IQR) in January 2022, resulted in a [published report](#). The QAA review team concluded that Applied Science University, Bahrain met all 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#). The team identified two features of good practice and made five recommendations.

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

Mid-cycle review usually takes the form of a desk-based review. In the instance of the January 2022 IQR, the review visit had to take place virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. This mid-cycle review has therefore included an onsite visit and review of learning resource provision.

## Outcome of the mid-cycle review

From the evidence provided, the review team concludes that Applied Science University, Bahrain is making **satisfactory progress** since the January 2022 International Quality Review and that the period of validity of the IQR be extended to January 2027.

## Summary of IQR outcomes

### Overview of the institution

Applied Science University (ASU) was established as a private university in the Kingdom of Bahrain and granted its licence by the Ministry of Education according to the decree issued by the Minister's Council No WD 140/2004 dated 5 July 2004. The University is currently offering a total of 22 degree programmes, 15 undergraduate programmes and 7 postgraduate programmes across 4 colleges, including 4 engineering programmes and an LLB Law and a BA (hons) Business Management in collaboration with London South Bank University. All courses are delivered at one campus located in East Ekir.

There are currently 2,072 students enrolled at ASU. There are currently 91 academic and 76 non-academic staff employed at the University. ASU has an overarching Board of Trustees, with the University leadership team overseeing all operations. The University Council, chaired by the President, is accountable to the Board of Trustees and provides oversight of strategic development and operational plans.

The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council has delegated authority from the University Council to oversee the operation of procedures for the maintenance of standards and assurance of quality for all courses. ASU maintains a comprehensive committee structure that covers academic and non-academic areas to assure the delivery of its programmes. The committee structure includes effective reporting arrangements for communication to pass from one level to another. Each committee at department level reports to an appropriate committee at college level, which in turn reports to a committee at university

level. University-level committees report to the University Council, and the University Council reports to the Board of Trustees.

ASU has a clear mission which reflects the three core functions of a higher education institution (HEI) (learning and teaching, research, and community engagement): “ASU is dedicated to offering students and staff the opportunity to contribute to the sustainable development of society and community”. The mission reflects the University's aspirations, including its vision to become: “a leading university promoting excellence in applied education and research in Bahrain and the region”. The University's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 sets out how the mission is achieved. The Strategic Plan was developed after consultation with staff, students, alumni, programme advisory boards and Board of Trustees (BOT) which granted the final approval. Work is about to begin on developing a Strategic Plan to cover the period 2025-2030.

## **Good practice identified by the 2022 International Quality Review**

The 2022 International Quality Review identified the following good practice:

- ASU has partnered with Advance HE to offer a fellowship scheme for its academic staff to recognise excellence in teaching and learning and student support. A high proportion of academic staff have achieved certifications at different levels of the fellowships (ESG Standard 1.5)
- the University's IT systems integrate databases and other sources of information allowing accessibility of data and the embedding of management information into decision-making processes at all levels of the institution (ESG Standard 1.7).

## **Recommendations of the 2022 International Quality Review**

The 2022 International Quality Review identified the following recommendations:

- make the Quality Manual, or an alternative description of the institutional quality policy publicly available, for example by posting it on the institution's website (ESG Standard 1.1)
- strengthen the process for reviewing policies and other key documents and develop an effective process to identify the implications of each policy revision on other policies and key documents to be introduced, to ensure that any asynchronicities are detected and rectified before revised policies are published (ESG Standard 1.1)
- present programme-specific entry requirements in a more consistent manner (ESG Standard 1.4)
- formalise its internal procedures for maintaining and approving public information to ensure it is accurate and up to date (ESG Standard 1.8)
- collect student voice in a more structured manner, such as explicit involvement of students in deliberative processes, or consultation with representative students as part of the periodic review and programme approval processes (ESG Standard 1.9).

## **Changes since the last IQR review visit**

Since the IQR in January 2022, a new President has taken up office at ASU. Professor Hatem Masri joined ASU in 2023 as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Development, before becoming President in March 2024.

The current Strategic Plan runs until 2025. At the time of the mid-cycle visit, work was about to begin on developing a new plan. The new strategy is likely to reflect the significant evolution of the university since 2020 and reflect the priorities of the new President.

ASU has recently purchased additional land and received the necessary authority to develop it, thereby doubling the size of the campus. The new development will include sports facilities, currently lacking, and provide additional parking.

An Industrial and Business Relations Unit has been created to strengthen the relationship between the University and its industrial and business environment, creating new collaborations and formalising existing relationships in teaching and research. Early successes of the Unit include memoranda of understanding with various companies, including an agreement that will make it possible for ASU students to receive professional accreditation with Microsoft.

A Research Centre for Interdisciplinary and Futuristic Studies has been formed. It is overseen by the Deanship of Research and Graduate Studies and aims to foster collaboration and multidisciplinary research. As well as carrying responsibility for the allocation of internal research funds, the Centre monitors research activity, receives regular reports on projects it has funded, and maintains a database of staff and student publications. Currently, all academic staff are expected to conduct research and there are research project opportunities for all levels of students.

The research centre is already benefitting students; a joint student conference has been held with Ajman University (UAE) to stimulate early engagement with research. Senior staff reported that the next joint student conference will involve other academic partners and will be open to all students, not just those that are already engaged in research activities.

Since the IQR, the University has updated its collaboration agreement with London South Bank University. Since the former agreement was signed, the emphasis has shifted to dual award programmes. Negotiations are underway to make it possible to deliver joint PhDs. Some engineering programmes have achieved accreditation by the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB). ASU students frequently attend the London South Bank University Summer School. The new agreement includes the validation of two new master's programmes but otherwise the agreement is largely the same as the one it replaces.

New agreements of collaboration have been signed with four universities, namely Ajman University (UAE), Gulf University for Science and Technology University (GUST) (Kuwait) Al-Ahliyya Amman University (Jordan) and Jadara University (Jordan). The intention of the new agreements is to develop research capacity, through exchange programmes and benchmarking activities. An institution-level benchmarking exercise has already been conducted with Ajman University, and an online International Student Conference in 2024 attracted 94 students from the two institutions who presented research papers in the administrative sciences, law, engineering, and information technology. 13 of these papers have subsequently been published in ISI-indexed journals. Under the Al-Ahliyya University agreement, a video-recording laboratory has been created as ASU, to facilitate the production of high-quality, interactive teaching material.

Four new programmes have launched. These are the Master's in Political Science and the Master's in Computer Science, and two programmes run in collaboration with London South Bank University, namely the LLB (Hons) Law and the BA (Hons) Business Management. The Master's in Law has been developed to offer two different tracks, a Public Law Track, and a Private Law Track. The addition of further tracks at both bachelor and master levels is planned for the near future. The LLB was developed in response to market demand and the Master's in Political Science is the only such programme in Bahrain and builds on the existing Bachelor's programme. All the new programmes include extensive interdisciplinarity.

## Findings from the mid-cycle review analysis

The IQR Report included five recommendations, as follows. Each of the recommendations has been addressed satisfactorily.

**1. *Make the Quality Manual, or an alternative description of the institutional quality policy publicly available, for example by posting it on the institution's website.***

The IQR Action Plan identified that, rather than publicising the full Quality Manual, an alternative description of the institutional quality policy should be prepared, for the purpose of public availability. A deadline of November 2022 was set for this description to be published on the University website. The SED reports that an overview version of the institutional Quality Assurance Manual has been produced. This document is now available on the University website. It condenses the 74 pages of the full Quality Assurance Manual into 18 pages and describes the principles underlying the institutional approach to quality assurance, in a readily accessible form.

**2. *Strengthen the process for reviewing policies and other key documents and develop an effective process to identify the implications of each policy revision on other policies and key documents be introduced, to ensure that any asynchronicities are detected and rectified before revised policies are published.***

In accordance with the IQR Action Plan, a mapping document has been prepared. It identifies the interdependencies of the various institutional policies. The mapping document has been added to the existing Policy for the Development and Review of Policies and Procedures as an additional section. The policy has been recently approved and will be implemented within the current academic year 2024-2025. The complete process took longer than anticipated because of the number of committees involved in the approval and sign-off process.

Policies, including the full Quality Assurance Manual are available on the ASU Knowledge Hub, a dedicated section of the intranet. Each policy has a designated owner, who is responsible for ensuring policy is kept up to date. According to the Policy for the Development and Review of Policies and Procedures, each policy should be reviewed at least every four years. The Quality Assurance Manual was recently revised according to this four-year cycle. Senior staff reported that the process resulted in no substantive changes. Academic staff and professional services staff were clearly aware of the Quality Assurance Manual and policies and were able to explain how they were used in their every-day work, citing examples such as benchmarking, management of Programme Advisory Boards, and maintenance of the e-Course Portfolio for each programme.

**3. *Present programme specific entry requirements in a more consistent manner.***

In order to address this recommendation, the University first identified all those documents that contain programme specific entry requirements, then standardised the format and content of the documents to ensure that the information they contained is consistent across the colleges. Example programme handbooks all follow a standard format. A Public Information Policy has developed and introduced to ensure that all such documents are updated to ensure consistent and up-to-date information. The University website provides key information about each programme, including the admission requirements. The admission requirements are also available in programme brochures that can be viewed and downloaded from the website and include detailed admission requirements. Students confirmed that they were able to access all the information they required for the application and admissions processes.

**4. Formalise its internal procedures for maintaining and approving public information to ensure it is accurate and up to date.**

The University has reviewed and updated its Public Information Policy to include procedures to approve, publish and maintain public information and to ensure information published to the public is accurate and up to date. Academic and professional services staff confirmed their awareness of the policy and the requirements it imposed upon them, including the forms that must be filled in and submitted to request the publication of any information. Examples of the application of the policy included the maintenance of the e-Course Portfolio of each programme, for which updates are tracked through Public Information Policy forms in a process that is overseen by the Quality Assurance Centre. There are similar processes for student and programme handbooks. The website is regularly audited. The Public Information Policy also covers the release of information through social media. Academic staff were clear about the distinction made between exchanges containing programme and other types of information, and those more frequent exchanges that did not require prior approval.

**5. Collect student voice in a more structured manner, such as explicit involvement of students in deliberative process, or consultation with representative students as part of the periodic review and programme approval processes.**

The University has reviewed and updated its Student Feedback Policy to ensure that the student voice is collected effectively. The revised document is now the Student Voice Policy. It acknowledges that student feedback may be collected via a wide range of channels and presents the following as a non-exhaustive list: surveys; the Students' Suggestion Box; social media; the Student Council; the Student Experience Committee; student participation in councils, committees and panels; open meetings; the Open-Door direct communications; Student Online Services (SOS); email; and the WhatsApp account of the Directorate of Student Affairs. An annual election process results in the appointments to the Student Council, the President of which is a member of the University Council. There is a Student Experience Committee and Staff-Student Liaison Committees at programme level. Student representatives are nominated by their college based on their experience, ability, and suitability for the role. There is an induction process for new student representatives. Periodic Review Panels now include a student representative, as described in the policy for monitoring and review of programmes, as do Validation Panels for the development and approval of new programmes. Students confirmed that their voice was heard by the University and were able to provide examples of ways in which their suggestions and requests had been addressed, including enhancements to the opportunities for student mobility and the introduction of summer training in the engineering programmes. Student Council members and student representatives confirmed the support they received from the University to enable them to carry out their roles effectively.

In terms of features of good practice, the IQR Report noted that ***the University had partnered with Advance HE to offer a fellowship scheme for its academic staff to recognise excellence in teaching and learning and student support.*** Since the IQR report, the partnership agreement has been renewed for another four years from May 2024. To date, the ASUrise centre has helped 172 staff to obtain Fellowship status since the IQR visit.

The IQR report also recognised that ***the University's IT systems integrate databases and other sources of information allowing accessibility of data and the embedding of management information into decision-making processes at all levels of the institution.*** This has continued and new features have been developed, including automated systems for the approval of research publication fees and Student Club enrolment. A demonstration of the University's IT systems provided evidence that the

information and database functions have continued to develop and expand into new areas. Software packages are in place to capture and maintain information, inform decision-making processes, and enhance communication. Senior management have access to institutional KPIs and targets, including a risk analysis of failure to meet those targets, a decision support tool, and dashboards covering a wide range of information, including students at risk, usage of IT systems, and student diversity statistics. Academic staff may access the student information system, the learning management system, an examination moderation package that includes internal and external moderation, the e-Library system, the e-Course Portfolios, and various tools to support their research activity. In addition to the learning management system and the e-library, students can access virtual classrooms, contact student services, create their curriculum vitae, and submit complaints, requests, suggestions, special needs etc. All Human Resources' functions are digitised, there is an alumni database, a survey construction tool and an ASU Knowledge Hub that contains all the institutional policies, procedures, the full version of Quality Manual, and other similar documents.

## **Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures**

It is clear that a culture of quality assurance underlies all activities at the University. This was evident in the meetings with senior staff, academic and professional services staff, and students. The reviewers were particularly impressed by the academic and support staff who displayed a deep familiarity with, and knowledge of, the policies and procedures relevant to their roles, including those relating to the creation and validation of programmes, regular monitoring and periodic review, publication of information and others.

The University continues to develop the digitisation of its Quality Management System and develop quality review dashboards to enhance transparency and efficiency. In the mid-cycle Review SED, the University states that it is committed to fostering an environment that supports lifelong learning and ensures equal opportunities for all students. Examples of how this commitment is expressed include the increasing number of programmes with external recognition or professional certification, embedding employability skills into the curriculum, supplementary training opportunities provided by alumni, and assisting alumni that are applying for jobs through assistance with the preparation of a curriculum vitae, and provision of references.

The reviewers heard about the University's response to the growing availability of generative artificial intelligence (GAI). The University is currently exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to provide enhanced support to at-risk students. Staff provided examples of initiatives to incorporate GAI into teaching and assessments, including an assessment that required students to use AI to solve a problem, after which, the student was required to conduct a critique on the AI-generated solution.

While acknowledging that disciplines may benefit from differing approaches to the use of AI, the reviewers suggest that the University would benefit from formalising and documenting its approach to the use of AI in teaching and assessment to provide a level of consistency across the institution and updating its academic misconduct policy to clarify this.

## **Findings from the observations of facilities and learning resources**

A guided tour of the campus and its three buildings – the Academic Building, the Administrative Building, and the Technology Building – revealed well designed, well-equipped teaching accommodation. The library provides extensive study space, including 10 rooms that can be booked for private study. A bookstore stocks the recommended texts for



each programme for purchase by the students. The reviewers also saw a moot court and a video-recording suite. There is a cafeteria and a recreation room. All accommodation is readily accessible to those with mobility issues and disabled parking spaces were provided, close to building entrances.

The Procurement and Logistics Services Department are responsible for maintenance of the campus facilities and keeps a master schedule which is updated annually. The University has a contract with an external company to provide staff and technicians who provide daily reports on maintenance activities. There is a separate contract for cleaning services. There is an online reporting system for maintenance requests that ensures issues are identified, followed up and resolved promptly.

Student opinions about the campus facilities were generally very good. They reported that the cafeteria had plenty of space, and they liked having a shop on campus. They considered the library to have sufficient study space and liked the off-campus availability of the e-library. The computing laboratories were good, and the engineering facilities had advanced testing equipment. However, the tour confirmed the students' reports that the sports and recreational facilities are severely limited, though it is understood that the provision of such facilities is a priority for the campus expansion that will be starting soon.

**QAA2875 - R14722 - Jan 25**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2025  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Email: [accreditation@gaa.ac.uk](mailto:accreditation@gaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.gaa.ac.uk](http://www.gaa.ac.uk)