

**United Nations Development Programme
Regional Bureau for Arab States**

**Quality Assessment of Education Programmes
in Arab Universities**

Regional Overview Report

**Based on detailed internal and external reviews of Education
programmes in a group 23 of Arab universities**

December 2006

**UNDP / RBAS Higher Education Project
Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional planning in
Arab Universities**

FOREWORD BY THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR, UNDP REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ARAB STATES

The Arab Human Development Series has identified knowledge as a cornerstone of human development: a means of expanding people's capabilities and a tool for overcoming human poverty. In today's global economy, knowledge is not only a prerequisite for designing and producing competitive goods and services that are the key marker of a competitive economy, but has become, thanks to scientific and technological developments, an integral component of such goods and services. The RBAS Knowledge Programme is intended to contribute to the creation of the needed infrastructure that facilitates this acquisition, dissemination and generation of knowledge within Arab societies.

Currently, UNDP/RBAS through its Higher Education Project for the Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning in Arab Universities is the only international organization actively engaged in promoting international instruments of quality assurance at the regional level through the evaluation of programmes, the assessment of student performance, and the establishment of comparable statistical databases of participating universities.

Since its inception in 2002, the higher education Project has reviewed 54 university programmes in 13 Arab countries. This latest Report reviewing Education programmes in Arab universities is the third in a series, following a dual report on the state of Computer Science and Business Administration programmes published in 2005. Extending the uniquely tailored methodology of academic subject reviews to the field of Education, this Report examines the current state of Education programmes in 23 universities,¹ in 13 Arab countries.² Highlighting good practice, while shedding light on significant weaknesses that have been revealed by the Project-conducted reviews, the Report clearly identifies strategically needed areas of reform that require consultation and collaboration at the regional level.

Like its two predecessors, this Report is based on up-to-date field-based evidence gathered and analysed by independent, professional Arab and international reviewers alike. It reflects the outcomes of sustained efforts by the representative academics of the reviewed programmes, reinforced by intensive training and advisory support from the Project.

University representatives have been fully involved in every stage of the review process, where their role has been critical to its successful implementation. This engagement started with self-evaluations of their respective programmes and the preparation of the required detailed documents, and ended with the final external review of, and reporting on, each programme by a team of Arab and UK reviewers. Each representative participated in three intensive training and planning workshops, playing a leading role in the hosting of the review mission to his/her university.

Out of the 48 Arab representatives of the reviewed programmes, 31 were selected to act as members of peer review missions to universities in countries,

¹ The original number of participating universities in the Education review cycle was 24. However, the peer-review mission for the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) could not take place, due to restrictions by the occupying army. This was all the more unfortunate, since the academic representatives from IUG were fully prepared to receive the review mission. They had, by then, participated fully in all three of the training/planning workshops of the review cycle and prepared all the required self-evaluation documents.

² The names of the universities and countries are listed elsewhere in the report.

other than their own.³ This raised the total cohort of fully trained and experienced quality assurance academics in the region from 39 (the total after the second cycle) to 70. This is in line with one of the Project's perennial objectives, namely that investment in regional capacity-building increase, not only as a desired by-product of the Project, but a necessary means for implementing quality assessments.

In parallel with the flagship evaluation programmes, the Project also invested in developing two other instruments of quality assurance. One is concerned with evaluating the performance of the graduating students of reviewed programmes using international tests. The other develops statistical databases for participating universities that cover the programmes, students, staff and finances of each university, all in accordance with common data definitions and specifications. The Project thus addresses the quality issues in each university at the levels of programmes, students and central university planning.

The impact of the Project on participating universities was evaluated by RBAS in the summer of 2004, upon completion of the Project's first phase. The feedback received from the field through this evaluation showed a very strong demand by the academics of the universities for the continuation and institutionalisation of the regional services that have been provided by the Project. This generated the impetus for extending the Project into its present phase, which started in June 2005, for a period of three and a half years.

This third overview report represents a substantial intellectual endeavour towards this end by the region's higher education community. I am deeply thankful to all those who participated in its preparation, review and editing, and to the Higher Education team operating from Oxford, UK and Amman, Jordan. I am especially grateful to Dr. Isam Naqib, Regional Coordinator for the Higher Education Project, whose commitment and resourceful involvement at all stages, has been an asset to this regional programme. Finally I am indebted to our co-sponsors and counterparts, the German GTZ and the Government of Finland, for their keen interest and steady support for the promotion of regional quality assurance standards and criteria, paving the path toward Arab knowledge societies and economies.

Amat Al Alim Alsoswa
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³ Interestingly, of the 31 external Arab reviewers that 'graduated' from the Education review process, 42% were women, a proportion that is significantly higher than the proportion of women in Arab faculties, which is about 20%.

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Explanatory Notes

Isam Naqib (Project Manager)

As was the case for the previous two review cycles that were organised by the Project in partnership with Arab universities, this cycle of academic reviews of Education programmes started with the self-evaluation of each programme by its own academic providers. A four-day workshop attended by two academic representatives from each of the 24 participating programmes was held in Amman in July 2005. The underlying concepts and practical aspects of the Academic Subject Review method were presented to and discussed in detail by the participants. The Project's Handbook, updated into its third edition in the light of past cycle experiences, provided reference guidelines for all stages of the review cycle: training, self evaluation, external evaluation and reporting.

This first workshop effectively launched the process of self-evaluation and preparation of self-evaluation documents by the academic staff of each programme, with the support of their colleagues in the home departments. Continuous technical advisory support and feedback on drafted documents by the Project's training consultants was provided electronically to all representatives. A second two-day workshop was held in Tunis four months later to review progress and address common and university specific issues through open discussions and bilateral tutorials, respectively. This was soon followed by a final four-day workshop where intensive training on external (peer) reviewing of academic programmes was provided. This involved highly interactive modes of training that included case studies, practical simulations and role-playing.

On completion of the final workshop, 31 representatives were qualified from among the 48 representatives to partake as members of external review missions to universities other than their own. This enabled the Project team to draw up a detailed schedule of 24 external review missions, one to each of the participating programmes. Each mission team consisted of two UK QAA- registered reviewers, including the mission coordinator, and two from the cohort of 31 selected academics. Between February 11 and May 5 of 2006 all missions were conducted as scheduled with the representatives of each programme playing the leading role in hosting the mission to their university.⁴

By August 2006 all 23 review reports were edited and finalized, and by early October were dispatched in confidence by the RBAS Regional Director to the presidents and programme providers of the participating universities. This report was finalized and made ready for printing and distribution in December 2006.

Although the Project Team approached the Education cycle with the confidence gained from the successful completion of the previous two cycles, the new cycle did present its own challenges to the review process. For example, the programmes that were presented by the universities for evaluation were evenly divided, in terms of their level, between undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study, and in terms of focus, between programmes that produce qualified teachers and those that produce Education specialists. This is not surprising given the wide range of demand for graduates of Education in the Arab region where about 18% of all university students are enrolled in Education studies. Another feature of the cycle is that, unlike Computer Science or Business Administration,

⁴ With the exception of the mission to the Islamic university of Gaza, where security restrictions imposed by the occupying army made it impossible for the mission team to enter Gaza.

Education is a highly culturally sensitive field, which further contributed to challenges of the evaluation missions.

These challenges were, however, well accommodated by the nature of the Academic Subject Review method which adopts a "mission sensitive" approach to evaluation: programmes are judged by their own declared aims and intended outcomes, and with reference to current international benchmarks and not by externally imposed aims, or outcomes. Furthermore, by the nature of their discipline and the wealth of their professional experience, the university representatives were especially prepared to deal with the conceptual and practical challenges of evaluation methodologies. Workshop sessions were always imbued with stimulating discussions and enriched with contributions from the participants.

The number of participating universities in this cycle represents an increase of 50% over that of previous cycles, which was deliberately kept at about 16 universities. This was in part enabled by the growing experience of the Project Team in managing the complex logistics and organisation involved in the implementation of each cycle. Furthermore, the training tutors of each workshop in this cycle were provided with the support of three assistant tutors, who were chosen by the Project team, from among the experienced "graduates" of the previous two cycles.

With the completion of this cycle, the number of these "graduates", namely, the academics who successfully participated in all stages of a cycle (training, self-evaluation, hosting of a review mission), and also took part in at least one review mission to a university in an Arab country other than their own, increased from 39 to 72. This cohort of experienced regional quality assurors that is steadily increasing in size with each cycle, and proving to be of immense value to their respective universities, and to the Project, represents, perhaps, the major achievement in terms of capacity development of this Project, to date.

I wish to thank all university representatives who, with valuable organizational and moral support from their presidents and coordinators, have made invaluable contributions to each stage of the cycle. Their commitment to carry out the intensive tasks required, alongside their many other academic and personal commitments, cannot be overvalued. Through focusing their efforts, each on their own programme, but all in accordance with commonly agreed concepts and criteria, they were able to set new standards for maintaining and assuring the quality of academic programmes across the region.

Since its inception, this Project has been indebted to the generous advisory and technical support from the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency on whose recommendation the Project was able to recruit an excellent group of advisors, training consultants, review specialists and review coordinators. I wish to thank all UK participants in the Project for the high standards of their contributions and their demonstrated ability to view the Project in its full developmental and dynamic context.

The personnel and financial requirements for organising this cycle's workshops, review missions and short-term consultancies were almost invariably complex and intensive. I wish to thank the Project Portfolio Manager at UNOPS, Ms Melissa Esteva, and her able team, for their expert and highly efficient management and processing of all needed transactions and the Resident Representatives and staff of all UNDP country offices for their generous and pro-active assistance in implementing these transactions.

I especially wish to express my gratitude to my colleagues in the Project Management Team for their remarkable dedication to the goals and professional standards of the Project and its activities delivered throughout the cycle. Their commitment to the Project's tasks and responsibilities has always exceeded normal expectations.

Finally, I wish to express my deep thanks and appreciation to Ms Amat Al-Alim Alsoswa, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director, for her continued oversight and unequivocal support to the goals and requirements of this Project, which is part of the Regional Bureau for Arab State's fast growing Knowledge Programme. I wish also to thank the RBAS senior team, at headquarters, New York, Ms Nada Al-Nashif, Dr Azza Karam and Ms Ghia Osseiran, for their excellent overall coordination and advice, and their invaluable back-up support in all matters that relate to this Project.

REPORT SUMMARY

Purpose

This report presents a regional overview of the quality of Education programmes in 13 Arab countries: Algeria; Bahrain; Egypt; Jordan; Lebanon; Morocco; Oman; Palestine; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Sudan; Syria; and Yemen (a list of the names of the universities and their representatives is given in Appendix 1). It is based on the outcomes of a complete cycle of reviews addressing programmes of Education that was organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Higher Education Project, over the academic year (2005 – 2006), in partnership with 23 public and private universities in the named countries.

As with previous review cycles⁵ organised by the Project, the process yielded a detailed review report on each Education programme, which was sent in confidence by the UNDP / RBAS Regional Director to the president and programme providers of the participating university. Each report presented the reviewers' evidence-based analyses and judgments, and identified areas of strength and weakness with respect to each main aspect of the programme under review.

This overview report includes a compact synopsis of the individual review reports that were produced by the Education review cycle. It provides an up-to-date overview of information and informed judgement on the quality of the reviewed programmes and the arrangements made by the universities for monitoring and improving the quality of their provisions. It also identifies common issues and patterns of strength and weakness, as well as lines of needed reform revealed by the process across the region. While the report identifies some significant good practice, it also draws attention to issues that may hinder the further development of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the field of Education, if not addressed by the concerned departments and faculties at the Universities and at a regional level.

This summary section of the overview report highlights its main findings and recommendations under five sub-sections: The Main Outcomes of the Reviews; Common Regional Issues; Key Indicators; Emerging Good Practice; and Recommended Priorities for Strategic Reform. The nine steps of reform proposed under the last heading require collaborative approaches among universities and departments on the one hand, and among universities and ministries, on the other. This report reiterates the main conclusion of the previous overview reports on Business Administration and Computer Science,

⁵ This Education cycle of reviews builds on the experiences and tested methodologies of two previous cycles that were organised by the Project in partnership with Arab universities. In the first cycle (2002-2003) Computer Science programmes were evaluated in 15 universities, and in the second cycle (2003-2004), Business Administration programmes were evaluated in 16 universities. In addition to individual reports that were sent to each university, a dual overview report on the state of education in each of the two fields was also published and distributed regionally. See the UNDP / RBAS report: "Quality Assessment of Computer Science and Business Administration Education in Arab Universities", January 2005; ISBN 92-1-104621-1

namely that a regional initiative to adopt and implement the nine steps should continue to be a shared priority for Arab policymakers in higher education.

Summary of the Main Outcomes of the Reviews

- The participating universities are making a strong contribution in the region to the education and training of graduates and postgraduates in **Education**. Students are being successfully trained to become schoolteachers or to meet specific requirements in school-based education, in the various Arab states. The majority are well regarded by the schools and other employing bodies, including various Ministries of Education. Some graduates of these programmes successfully proceed to further studies.
- The development of an outcome-based approach to quality assurance, and in particular the use of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), is still a matter of contention in some universities. There is plenty of evidence of significant efforts to develop ILOs for programmes already being delivered. However, their use as a key element in coherent curriculum design to appropriate alignment between programmes, courses/modules and their assessment is still by no means fully embedded. Currently, ILOs are being used reactively as an aid to evaluation, rather than proactively as an aid to curriculum development. The implementation of more effective processes for annual monitoring and periodic review should encourage their more constructive use in the future.
- Overall academic standards were judged to be good in five of the participating universities, satisfactory in 16 and unsatisfactory in two see Fig 2a, Summary of Main Judgements. Wide-ranging and relevant curricula were generally a strength, as was student achievement at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. However, assessment continues to be a weakness, particularly in three respects. First, too much emphasis is placed on the memory recall of descriptive knowledge. Second, not enough is done to test higher-level cognitive skills. Third, there is virtually no moderation either internal or external to ensure the fairness and transparency of marking. Informal student support is stronger than institutional systems, while targeted support for students with various special needs is patchy.
- The quality of learning opportunities varies among the participating universities. Teaching and Learning is generally strong: judged to be good in 16 universities and satisfactory in seven (Fig 2a). The reviewers observed a wide range of occasionally innovative teaching methods, though there was often an over-reliance on set lectures. While learning resources (including space accommodation, libraries, Information and Communication Technology, and media facilities) are found on the whole to be good in 11 universities, in others they were not fitted to purpose, especially in respect of ICT equipment, the number of personal computers (PCs) available for student use, and access to inter- and intranet facilities.
- Quality assurance and enhancement continue to be the weakest aspect of provision. However, there are signs of improvement since the Project's first report, in Computer Sciences. For Education, four universities were judged to be good, and six to be unsatisfactory (Fig 2a). Fully articulated university systems are still in the minority, though a start has been, or rather is being made, in eight universities – one of which was commended for good practice. More self-evaluation is conducted at faculty or programme level, but there is little uniformity of practice. A quality culture

in which annual feedback, evaluation and monitored action plans are the norm has not yet developed.

Common Regional Issues

a. In some instances, progress is being made in the development of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and programme specifications. However, almost universally, these have been applied in retrospect, as part of the review process initiated by the UNDP / RBAS project, to already functioning programmes and courses. As would be expected they are not yet fully embedded to the extent of being used to underpin curriculum development and to ensure that provision is coherently designed so that content (including theory and practice), delivery, assessment, achievement, student support and resources are in line with aims and ILOs. For example, guidance would be helpful for universities and faculties on specifying course intended outcomes and related methods of teaching, learning and assessment.

b. Benchmarking is variable and where used, frequently dependent on the personal experience of individual members of staff in other universities around the world – particularly in the USA and the UK – and Arab universities in the region. Quite often, the benchmarks are out of date. The UK Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) benchmark statements are only mentioned four times and the Major Field Test (MFT) is often rejected as inappropriate or irrelevant to highly focussed, vocational programmes. Thus more could be done to ensure that curricula match internationally accepted practice.

c. Ministry and university regulations on programme design are invariably applied but examples where this takes the form of constraints are frequently cited. Sometimes these exert a negative influence, unnecessarily restricting course design. However, there are other examples where Ministry of Education requirements, based on the current needs of schools, exert a more positive influence.

d. Although no curricula were judged unsatisfactory (Fig 2a), the quality is variable. Some are up to date and some lack currency. Many are highly rated, both by students and employers, especially for training effective teachers or for delivering effective professional development to experienced teachers. Others, however, are criticised by employers for being out of touch with the needs of schools. With the exception of the three Masters degree programmes, curricula in general need to be more challenging. Few programmes provide opportunities for students to develop the higher-level skills of analytical, critical and synoptic thinking. Opportunities for the development of autonomous learning are similarly variable, particularly in undergraduate programmes.

e. Considerable use is made of books, journals and articles in the English language. This approach is consistent with the prevailing sources of recent and current publications of good practice. Support for English in order to enable students to refer to these texts could be improved.

f. There are weaknesses in both the delivery and the assessment of higher-level skills. In general, the arrangements for the assessment of students' attainments are a major obstacle to the further improvement of academic standards. Assessment regimes are heavily over-reliant on testing the regurgitation of subject knowledge, frequently via multiple-choice questionnaires and setting small, often trivial, assignment tasks. Multiple-choice examination is to some extent forced upon institutions because of unrealistic Ministry requirements to publish

the examination results of large cohorts of students in a very short space of time.

g. Effective mechanisms are rarely in place to ensure that methods, practices and criteria for student assessment are clear and consistent across programmes. Internal and external moderation of marks is virtually non-existent outside the Master's degrees and even there is provided only for dissertations and theses. The use of external moderators or examiners would make a significant contribution to the fairness and transparency of assessment procedures across the provision.

h. The final achievement of students varies from excellent to mediocre and in some programmes the level of student achievement does not reflect the high quality of intake. In programmes other than the Master's degrees and a few of the postgraduate diplomas, students fail to demonstrate the achievement of higher-level skills. Some programmes do not produce students who are ready to enter the teaching profession with confidence. Data collection in respect of student achievement and feedback from employers is poor, hindering effective corrective action.

i. Although, as might be expected in education provision, there are many examples of good teaching and learning at the course/module level, coherent teaching strategies across departments and programmes are rare. The use of ICT to support teaching and learning is generally weak and more use could be made of student feedback, peer observation and formal systems of communication between staff in order to share best practice.

j. Student support is frequently based on informal arrangements. Written guidance, particularly for admission and induction, could be improved, as could the early identification of and support for students with special needs.

k. The collection of statistical data to track student progress is a serious weakness across the provision. Similarly, little effort is made to follow up on students after their graduation. As a result opportunities relating to identifying and addressing problems in a timely manner, collecting information to maintain the currency of course content and contributing to planning and development in general are lost.

l. The effectiveness of overall resource strategies, where they exist, is variable. Provision for staff development based on the identification of needs could be improved. In most universities, the provision of learning resources in Arabic is satisfactory or better. However, there are still some examples of dingy and dilapidated teaching accommodation: out of date book and journal stock in libraries and limited access to library resources, especially for part-time students due to restricted opening hours. Similarly, and more frequently, student learning experiences are negatively affected by out of date, inadequate ICT equipment, poor access to IT laboratories, limited access to inter- and intranet facilities, and inadequate numbers of PCs for students.

m. Very few universities have coherent systems at any level for annual monitoring and periodic review. There are few examples of a clear designation of accountability for quality assurance and enhancement to either an individual or a specifically focussed committee.

n. Effective data collection of any kind is the exception rather than the rule. There is little evidence of effective student tracking to monitor either achievement or progression. There are few formal mechanisms for gaining feedback from present or past students or from schools and other employers. Thus, key information on which to base timely corrective action, to monitor the successful achievement of ILOs, to maintain currency and to underpin new developments is not available for the purposes of either course management or course design.

- o. A culture of awareness and commitment to quality assurance and enhancement, planning, follow-up and corrective action is not yet embedded in all the universities.

Summaries of Main Judgments and Key Indicators

- References are made in this report to the following tabular and graphic representations of the main judgments and special indicators, as yielded by the review process. These are shown at the end of the report. Figures 2a and 2b show a table and a graphic summary of the main graded judgments, respectively. Fig 2c shows comparison of overall judgment on academic standards between postgraduate and undergraduate programmes.
- Figures 3a and 3b show a tabular and graphic summary of the Special Indicators that relate to specific academic aspects of reviewed programmes.
- Figures 4a and 4b show a tabular and graphic summary of the Special Indicators that relate to specific aspects of the resources of reviewed programmes.
- Figures 5a and 5b show a tabular and graphic summary of the Special Indicators that relate to specific aspects of quality assurance and enhancement of the reviewed programmes. Fig 5c, gives a comparative summary of judgements on quality assurance & enhancement for postgraduate and undergraduate programmes.

The data on each of the above mentioned aspects is presented in the figures for individual universities, and for the whole group of universities to enable each university to compare its performance with others, and with the overall profile.

The increased emphasis on in-depth reporting, as set out in Annex D of the **Handbook**, has facilitated the extraction of Key Indicators. Both Academic Standards and Resource Indicators pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in the provision that are not immediately apparent from the main judgements. For instance, although Academic Standards were judged as unsatisfactory in only two universities (Fig 2a), Moderation (i.e. effective mechanisms to ensure the consistency of marking) was unsatisfactory in 15 (Fig 3a). Similarly, in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, the improved Self-Evaluation Documents (SEDs) offset continued weaknesses in Institutional Systems and Continuous Improvement.

Emerging good practice

The importance of **Education** to the civic, economic and social development of the Arab region is reflected in the aims of many of the programmes reviewed. These aims are being achieved with a considerable degree of success. Other, less tangible, aims to support Arab culture in the education system are more difficult to measure, but nonetheless, make an important contribution to undergraduate programmes in particular. For the most part, both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes effectively produce confident and competent new (beginner) teachers, or enhance the expertise of experienced members of the profession. In general, both students and employers speak highly of the qualifications on offer. The provision has many strengths to celebrate, which include:

- A willingness on the part of the universities to take up the challenge of evaluating and improving their programmes, not least through their active involvement in, and important contributions to, all stages of the Project. The group of trained academic reviewers from the participating universities represents a valuable potential resource for the whole region.
- Effective efforts to comply with essential requirements and needs of local Ministries of Education.
- Emerging examples of clear and generally successful efforts to develop ILOs and curricula fitted to qualification aims.
- In the most successful programmes across the provision there is good balance between theory and practice. In many universities the practicum is well designed and supervised.
- A wide range of appropriate assessment methods is used across the provision and in many programmes. Formative assessment is effectively used to enhance student learning. Independent learning is encouraged, particularly in postgraduate programmes.
- Much of the student achievement is high. Employers appreciate the successful contributions made by both graduates and postgraduates to education in their communities.
- The enthusiasm and dedication of academic staff is praised by students and the good quality of much of their research, scholarship and consultancy work makes a strong contribution to the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- Overall academic support to students is satisfactory in most universities, and there are many examples of good resources for learning in the region.
- There is evidence of a willingness and desire on the part of many individual members of staff, and an increasing number of universities, to commit to quality assurance and enhancement at both programme and institutional levels.

Recommended priorities for strategic reform

Nine key steps are identified for improving the quality of **Education** programmes across the region. They have significance for the region, for national ministries of education and higher education, and for the universities and their stakeholders. These are:

- 1) Academic programmes and curricula: Although progress is being made in matching ILOs to programme aims and specifications, this is still a retrospective process, especially since, until recently, much of the provision did not have well-formulated ILOs and descriptors at the course level. Despite the enthusiasm of many members of staff, there are some departments in which the concept of ILOs is still a controversial issue. As programmes come up for review, course teams could adopt, with advantage, a more proactive strategic approach to curriculum design in which aims and ILOs are the starting point from which content, methods of delivery, assessment and evaluation are developed. Universities will benefit from additional guidance on the development of outcome-related approaches to quality assurance.
- 2) Academic freedom and control: Some controls on admissions, curriculum content and assessment are imposed centrally, either by university policy or ministries of education and/or higher education. Although it is entirely reasonable for education authorities to target areas of perceived weakness in the school system, some of these

constraints are exercising negative effects on academic freedom to develop programmes that are relevant to the two most urgent needs namely, the admission of high calibre students, and providing opportunities for students to develop a full range of skills to meet the needs of the education system of the country.

- 3) *External reference points and inputs:* Benchmarking and the effective use of external inputs are not a strength of the provision. There are examples of inputs based on individual staff contacts with overseas and Arab university departments. However, these are mostly informal and not always up to date. There is little evidence of the routine collection of comprehensive data from employers in the sector and from past students. Except for Master's degrees, external examiners or moderators are not used. Regular cooperation, exchange of ideas and sharing of best practice should be regarded as a positive contribution to programme development. Similarly to ensure that **Education** programmes in the region meet international standards, more use should be made of international benchmarks such as those developed by the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency – UK) or equivalent international bodies. The special indicators (shown in figures 3a and 3b) on the overlap between the curricula of reviewed programmes, and the topics of the Major Field Test in Education (of the Educational Testing Services in the USA) represent an attempt by the Project to explore the possibility of using the topics of that test as a potential external benchmark.⁶
- 4) *Cognitive skills development:* The development of higher-level skills such as the ability to evaluate, critically analyse and synthesise a range of ideas is a weakness across the provision, apart from the three Masters degrees. These skills frequently appear in ILOs, but rarely feature in teaching, and certainly not in assessment methods (with the exception of theses, projects and dissertations - where they are part of the curriculum).
- 5) *Teaching, learning and assessment:* A more proactive approach to staff training and development for teaching, learning and assessment, especially with regard to undergraduate provision, would be beneficial. Considerable effort needs to be made to ensure that assessment methods are linked to ILOs, particularly those concerned with the acquisition of higher-level skills. In this respect, more flexibility in centrally imposed assessment and examination rules needs to be negotiated at either, or both, the university and ministry levels. Effective methods of internal and external moderation and double marking need to be implemented across the provision in order to

⁶ A similar methodology was used in the review of Computer Science and Business Administration. However, further analysis by the Project and the universities of the topics of the MFT Education identified considerable cultural bias in the present form of the test. This is mainly due to the fact that, unlike Computer Science and Business Administration, Education, by its nature, is a culturally sensitive field. The significance of the curricula overlap with the MFT Education topics, as shown in figures 3a and 3b should therefore be viewed with caution. Work is currently under way, in collaboration with ETS, to develop a modified version of the MFT Education test that is free of cultural bias and hence, suited to the needs of the Arab region.

ensure fairness, transparency and compatibility with accepted international standards.

- 6) Student support: In general, academic support is satisfactory or better. However, in many universities support for vulnerable students with special needs is weak. There is also great scope for improvement in the collection of tracking data for students, so that problems can be identified early and dealt with where possible.

- 7) Learning resources: Learning resources are variable across the provision, with little evidence of fully articulated resource strategies enabling ILOs to be met or to underpin curriculum development. There are examples of opportunities for student learning experiences limited by out of date books and journal stocks, and more particularly by out of date IT equipment and limited access to PCs and inter- and intranet facilities. Staff qualifications were generally satisfactory or good, but there have been examples of inadequate research and scholarly activity, usually due to staff shortages, mainly in undergraduate programmes with large cohorts of students.

- 8) Quality assurance and enhancement: There is evidence of sharp self-evaluation at programme and course levels, where the quality of Self-Evaluation Documents (SEDs) has improved. However, although several universities are putting quality assurance systems in place, the majority are still without formal systems at the institutional level. This results in ill-organised and incoherent efforts on the part of small groups of staff. There is little evidence of the collection of data to inform management decisions. This has seriously negative effects on the quality of a whole range of activities, including: monitoring and evaluation; student tracking; student progression; feedback from stakeholders' and the identification of problems and the need for corrective action. A culture in which quality is closely monitored and continuously improved through annual monitoring and periodic reviews needs to be embedded as the norm.

- 9) Language: As the language of teaching is almost entirely Arabic, few issues are raised concerning the language of teaching. However, in two-thirds of the universities, library resources are either merely "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory;" while they are "Good" in only eight universities. This reinforces the conclusions of previous review cycles, namely that much more needs to be done, especially at the national and regional level, to improve Arabic resources for teaching and learning. Furthermore, many programmes, particularly at the postgraduate level, make considerable reference to up-to-date texts in the English language. However, in a number of instances, students 'English language skills are weak, and they receive little support from their respective universities to strengthen these skills in order to enable students' access to these resources. This needs to be addressed at both the level of departments and faculties.

I. INTRODUCTION

I. 1 UNDP/RBAS Higher Education Project*

The Project, "Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning at Arab Universities" is sponsored and funded by the Regional Bureau of Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme. The project's development objective is the introduction in Arab universities of independent systems of quality assessment of programmes, with reference to internationally accepted criteria, procedures and benchmarks.

The programme of reviews in 2005-2006 addresses selected academic programmes in the field of Education and follows two successful cycles of reviews organised by the Project in partnership with Arab universities: Computer Science programmes in 2002-03 and Business Administration programmes in 2003-04. In all, 24 universities in 13 Arab countries participated in the 2005-06 cycle. Of these, 23 were successfully completed; the site visit to Gaza University was cancelled, however, due to security restrictions imposed by the occupying army in Gaza. In addition to an individual review report on each university's provision, the reviews also contribute to this overview report that highlights areas of regional strength, weakness and needed reform for the higher education sector in the Arab region.

The method used for review is a modified version of the *Academic Subject Review* as developed for implementation in 2000 by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA) in the United Kingdom. This method is itself a direct development of the earlier Subject Review method used to review academic disciplines at UK universities over the period 1992 to 2001. Full details of the process of subject review can be found in the Project's *Handbook for Academic Subject Review*. A summary follows. The Project included workshops for representatives of participating universities and reviewers recruited from the representatives of the participating universities, and the UK.

Academic subject review takes place according to the published *Handbook*. It places responsibility on the university to evaluate and report on the academic standards of its programmes of study and the quality of learning opportunities. This evaluation takes place within the agreed framework for review. This framework, described in the *Handbook*, includes the use of external reference points to establish and improve the academic standards. In most Arab countries, the academic standards are prescribed and/or accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education or an equivalent central body. In the UK the QAA has published a wide range of materials designed to provide a background against which the reviews can take place, for example subject benchmark statements, a framework for higher education qualifications and a code of practice.

With regard to the reviews carried out in the context of this project, each university was asked to identify its external subject reference points so that its academic standing may be judged. Participating universities were also invited to determine the extent of overlap between their curricula and the published topics of the Major Field Test in Education which is developed and managed worldwide by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) based in the USA. To this end, each

* UNDP / RBAS acknowledges with appreciation significant funding contributions to this project from both the Government of Finland and the German Federal Ministry of International Development (BMZ).

university carried a detailed cross matching analysis between the topics of the MFT and the curriculum of the reviewed programme.

I. 2 The Academic Subject Review Process

I. 2. 1 Overview

Subject review is a peer review process. It starts when institutions evaluate their provision in a subject in a self-evaluation document and prepare a programme specification for the selected award-bearing programme. The self-evaluation and the programme specification are submitted to the Project for use by a team of reviewers. The reviewers are academics and practitioners trained and experienced in external scrutiny and review processes, drawn partly from the UK and partly from Project-trained university representatives (see the following paragraph). They read the documents and visit the university to gather evidence to enable them to report their judgements on the academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and the ability of the university to assure and enhance academic standards and quality. Review activities include meeting staff and students, scrutinising students' assessed work, reading relevant documents, and examining learning resources. The team gives an oral summary report to the university at the end of the review visit and prepares the written report.

The Project is designed to enable the appointed academic representatives (see Appendix 1: List of Coordinators and Participants in Education) of the participating universities to play the leading role in implementing every stage of the review cycle. Through a series of three training / planning workshops and continuous advisory support, the representatives of each university are enabled to self-evaluate their programme, prepare the necessary self evaluation documents and host external peer review missions at their department and university. In addition, all representatives are provided with intensive training in external reviewing which results in the selection of a group of qualified Arab reviewers each of whom then participates in at least one and mostly two review missions to universities outside his / her country.

A programme may be judged **Good** where it demonstrates a substantial number of good features outweighing any matters that deserve to be addressed, **Satisfactory** where on balance it passes the minimum threshold with some good features but, nevertheless, has some significant weaknesses, or **Unsatisfactory** where on balance it demonstrates the need to address many issues and make substantial improvements before it passes the quality threshold.

I. 2. 2 Academic Standards

Reviewers make one of the following judgements on academic standards:

- **Good**
- **Satisfactory**
- **Unsatisfactory**

To reach this judgment, reviewers evaluate:

- intended learning outcomes
- the curriculum

- student assessment and
- student achievement

An explicit judgment is made on each of the last three of the above four elements but no judgment is made on the Intended Learning Outcomes aspect. If the arrangements are judged to be inadequate in any one of the last three elements that comprise the section of academic standards, the overall threshold judgement on academic standards is Unsatisfactory.

I. 2. 3 Quality of Learning Opportunities

Reviewers make one of the following judgments for each of three aspects of learning opportunities:

- **Good**
- **Satisfactory**
- **Unsatisfactory**

The three aspects of quality of learning opportunities are:

- teaching and learning
- student progression and
- learning resources

I. 2. 4 Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Reviewers also report the degree of confidence they have in the institution's ability to assure and enhance quality and academic standards in the subject under review. They make one of the following judgments:

- **Good**
- **Satisfactory**
- **Unsatisfactory.**

I. 2. 5 Special Indicators

In line with the Project's additional requirements of amplified reporting, as outlined in Annex D of the *Handbook*, reviewers are expected to make explicit assessment and judgments not just on the main aspects of the reviewed provision but on the those underlying special aspects that need to be assessed before a major judgment is arrived at. This enables the derivation from each report of an expanded list of semi-quantified judgments (Good, Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory) that cover, in addition to the main aspects of review (Academic standards, Learning Opportunities, Quality Assurance and Enhancement) a number of special indicators of which some are related to academic aspects and others learning resources aspects.

I. 3 Participating Universities

Education programmes in 24 universities in 13 Arab countries were reviewed in 2005 – 06. However the external review of the Education program at the Islamic University of Gaza was not carried out although all pre-requisite preparations for the mission (complete self-evaluation documents, trained hosts, visit preparations

by host) were and are still in place. This report is therefore based on the review outcomes for 23 universities and the 23 individual review reports. The purposes of this overview report are to present the main findings, highlight the common areas of regional strength and report areas of weakness and issues needing to be addressed as part of the reform programme for the higher education sector.

The Project provided the participating universities with an opportunity to undertake a comprehensive review of their Education programmes, receive a site visit from external reviewers together with an oral feedback report and at a later stage, a written review report.

Feedback, obtained through questionnaires on this and the previous two cycles, from the participating universities and from the external reviewers indicates that all parties regarded the review process as a positive experience. The qualitative and quantitative information contained in this overview report in conjunction with the individual review reports is expected to inform the continuing development and enhancement of the quality of the reviewed programmes. Although the application of these findings in other institutions and disciplines areas needs to be carried out with some caution, readers may well find evaluations arising from this Education review of some relevance and value in considering the wider issues of improving academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities more generally in other disciplines and across the region.

I. 4 Subject Provision

Education programmes worldwide are designed to meet a wide variety of needs in a variety of education services including initial teacher education and training, postgraduate continuous personal development, administration, educational technology, and counselling and psychology. This diversity is reflected in the range of qualifications covered in this review cycle. Eleven of the reviews were of undergraduate and 12 of postgraduate programmes. Four of the undergraduate programmes were for the training of general elementary school classroom teachers, six for specific subject teachers (five secondary and one elementary) and one a qualification for school counsellors. The postgraduate programmes, six of which were Postgraduate Diplomas and three Masters degrees, covered a range of specialities including Educational Technology, Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Education Administration, Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Teaching Gifted and Talented Children. These programmes are categorised as 'Classroom Teaching', 'Subject Teaching', and 'Special Fields'. Their distribution across the provision can be seen at a glance in **Figures 1a and 1b: Categories of Reviewed Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes**.

Neither undergraduate nor postgraduate programmes follow one uniform curricular design or system of education. Some universities use semesters as the minimum periods of study and assessment, while others use years. Some curricula consist of offerings of courses that are pre-determined for all students while others are based on credit hours and have, at least in principle, built-in flexibilities of choice. Throughout this Overview Report, 'programme' is used to refer to the whole qualification awarded, and 'module' or 'course' is used to refer to **elements** within a programme. In the majority of instances, the language of teaching is Arabic. There is more flexibility of choice in postgraduate than undergraduate programmes via different elective routes through programmes; however, such options are rare. At undergraduate level, flexibility is constrained as most programmes consist of a mixture of university, faculty and specialist sets of courses. In principle each of these sets should offer optional as well as compulsory offerings of courses, but in practice choice is limited. Similarly, because of Ministry requirements, attendance modes are generally limited to full

time. However, the flexible use of credit hours and opportunities to recoup failure blur the distinction between full and part-time modes. This presents difficulties for student tracking.

II. THE EVALUATION REPORT

II. 1 Academic Standards

Review Outcome: Overall, reviewers concluded that **Academic Standards** were Good in five universities, Satisfactory in 16 and Unsatisfactory in two. **Achievement**, with 12 grades of Good and only one of Unsatisfactory, was the strongest aspect, followed by **Curricula**, with six Good and no Unsatisfactory grades. **Assessment**, where only two grades of Good were given, was clearly the weakest aspect, (Figs 2a and 2b)

II. 1. 1 Intended Learning Outcomes

Intended Learning Outcomes were not graded in these reviews

1. The reviews indicate that progress in the use of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) is being made. All the programmes have ILOs, the majority of which are clearly written and appropriately related to aims. Some undergraduate programmes have philosophical, cultural and social aims that can make an important contribution to the realisation of aspirations to support the Arab culture in the education system. However, they need to be made easier to measure and suitable for conversion into more explicit ILOs. Reviewers frequently report that ILOs have been specifically written for this review for the first time. These also included the writing of appropriate ILOs and descriptors at individual module/course level. Many ILOs are either mapped or in the process of being mapped across programme specifications and courses within each programme, and where relevant they are clearly related to professional requirements. However, the experience of writing programme ILOs is new to almost all the providers. Many of the ILOs are derived from existing or newly developed course documentation. In some programmes offering core studies with optional routes leading to various outcomes, the programme ILOs do not clearly differentiate between the routes through the programme.
2. The development of ILOs, in itself an important achievement, has not yet reached the point of being used alongside aims as the starting point for curriculum design, content, and the development of assessment tools and assessment criteria. Nor are they being used as part of evaluation and for programme development, although there are a few examples of course teams using their mapping to reconsider ILOs to improve the match of courses to programme intentions. Also, although many staff members fully understand, and are enthusiastic, about ILOs, not all are supportive of the concept. Thus, while ILOs are making a positive contribution to the achievement of curricula content and to student learning and achievement, they are not yet fully embedded in the processes of programme development. Overall, the review reports suggest that all universities would benefit from having additional guidance on both the development of outcomes-related approaches to quality assurance and the part that clearly expressed ILOs at programme and course levels can play.
3. Another general characteristic of Education programmes is the relationship between theory and practice. Reviewers comment favourably on the way

in which ILOs, for practical elements, have been thoroughly thought through in most courses and clearly expressed and communicated to students. However, there are frequent criticisms of the poor links within programmes between the practicum, educational theory, specialist subject and vocational ILOs.

4. In general, at course level, ILOs, in whatever form they are written, are communicated to members of staff and students through course handbooks and published documentation about course structure, content and assessment. However, the quality of communication varies. In six institutions there was inadequate communication to students and, in two, to members of staff. In the three relevant programmes, communication to external examiners was satisfactory. Students commented that clear information was greatly appreciated and very helpful to their understanding of course requirements.
5. The use of benchmarking was variable. The UK Quality Assurance Agency was mentioned four times and various other external reference points, including British, American, European, other Arab universities and professional bodies much more frequently. Often, these were the result of the previous overseas experience of individual members of staff. Unfortunately, some of the information, particularly from other universities, was out of date. Consideration of the published topics of the ETS Major Field Test (MFT) as a possible benchmark for the core Education curriculum was frequently mentioned. In four examples, there was a good match between the MFT topics and the university curriculum. In seven examples it had been used as an external reference point and there was a good match. As for the rest, it had either not been used because it was deemed irrelevant to the vocationally focussed ILOs of the course or the match was indifferent, mainly because of weak coverage of socio-cultural topics.
6. Easily, the most important influence on course design and development across the provision derives from government pressure. This may take the extreme form, as in one university, of dictating the total design content and assessment methods of the programme. More frequently there are various requirements to meet perceived national needs in respect of content, admission, assessment and length of study. In undergraduate programmes there are sometimes requirements for social, ethical and/or cultural elements, which may or may not be relevant to programme aims and ILOs, but which inevitably place some constraints on design.

With regard to the Intended Learning Outcomes, the reviewers recommend that the universities consider the following:

- The progress made in developing ILOs and Programme Specifications should be maintained and all universities would benefit from having additional guidance.
- At the same time, as programmes are reviewed, a more radical approach to curriculum design should be adopted in which aims and ILOs are the starting point for development and from which such aspects as: content; structure; delivery; assessment; learning resources and student support can follow.
- Efforts to develop appropriate ILOs at the level of individual courses and to ensure their alignment with the development of programme ILOs needs to be continued and consolidated.
- More attention needs to be given to the links within a programme between ILOs for theory and practice in both Education and other

professional subjects.

- Benchmarking should be more systematic and consistent, and care should be taken to ensure that chosen benchmarks reflect the best current practice internationally, are modified to suit local needs and are not out of date.
- More proactive use of the ETS Major Field Test could be made.
- Steps should be taken to mitigate central government constraints on programme design to ensure that they do not stifle appropriate innovation.

II. 1. 2 Curricula

Curricula were judged to be Good in six universities and Satisfactory in 17. No Unsatisfactory judgements were made (see Figs 2a and 2b)

7. The range of topics and subjects covered in 11 undergraduate programmes include: Education; Pedagogy; Educational Technology; Psychology; Maths; Science; Science for Elementary Schools; Biology; School Organisation and Counselling. Nine Postgraduate Diploma programmes include: General Classroom Teaching (following a first subject degree); Psychology; Educational Technology; Administration; Teaching the Gifted and Talented; and Special Education and Counselling. Three Masters degrees covered: Education; Linguistics, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language; and Guidance and Counselling. All but one of the programmes contained a practicum element, even where students were postgraduates with teaching experience.
8. Curricula generally lead to the satisfactory attainment of aims and ILOs, enable student progression in both one or two-year postgraduate and four-year undergraduate programmes, and are appropriate to the level of study. Development of knowledge, understanding and subject skills are strong features of the reviewed curricula. Most reports make positive mention of the acquisition of cognitive, transferable, practical and professional skills. The reviewers, however, frequently make reservations about the lack of intellectual challenge offered by many courses across all levels of curricula. There is significant overlap of content between subject and education content, particularly in the programmes where the Education element is either run alongside or following a specialist subject. Thus, there is room for improvement even though there are no overall unsatisfactory grades. Opportunities for the development of autonomous learning are mostly satisfactory or better – particularly in respect of postgraduate dissertations, various forms of undergraduate project work and generally in reflection on the practicum in schools and other forms of relevant professional experience in Counselling and Psychology. Several reports comment that genuinely reflective practitioners are being trained. Independent learning is reported as unsatisfactory in only one postgraduate and two undergraduate programmes. Lack of encouragement to become involved in the investigation of problems, inadequate support for and formative feedback on fieldwork owing to staff shortages and unimaginative use of ICT are cited as reasons.
9. Links between theory and practice are variable. Over 50 per cent of the reviews comment favourably on the good balance and links between theory and practice, and how the practicum can play an important part in

achieving the balance between theory and practice. However, there are six negative comments. It is interesting to note that four of these relate to specialist subject degrees, in which the education elements of the programmes are poorly integrated with the rest and dominated by subject rather than pedagogic content. In general, practical elements are reported as strength. Overall, reviewers grade 10 practicum (Placement for Practice, Fig 3a and 3b) elements Good, seven Satisfactory and six Unsatisfactory. Two Unsatisfactory grades are in undergraduate and three in postgraduate programmes. Reviewers consider that the practicum in two universities, namely Jordan University and Qatar, is particularly well arranged and assessed. The *Student Handbook* of Qatar University is excellent. These examples of good practice could usefully be shared with other universities.

10. The currency of curricula, together with means of maintaining it, is variable across the range of reviewed programmes. Reports show that over fifty per cent of the providers have some form of committee structure, at programme and/or course levels, in which the currency of programmes is discussed. The majority are kept up to date by current staff research and consultancy, contact with external (often Ministry) sources, schools and continued professional development. Even so, there are 13 examples of weaknesses in respect of out of date subject content and of the Education and Pedagogic content not matching current school needs. Although there are strong, frequently compulsory, contacts with various government agencies, feedback from former students is rare.
11. Almost all of the programmes are taught in Arabic, so few language problems are reported. However, particularly in the postgraduate programmes, much of the current literature is in English and there were several comments to the effect that poor English skills hinder access to curriculum material and additional sources of information, which are frequently published in English.

With regard to curricula, the reviewers recommend that the universities consider the following:

- Ensuring, in those programmes criticised, that the intellectual challenge of curricula content is strengthened to reflect the level of the award.
- Attention to the achievement of higher-level skills across curricula.
- Where criticised, more consideration is given in the design, content and organisation of the curricula to positively support independent learning.
- Attention is given to removing the overlap between education and subject specialist elements, especially in undergraduate programmes.
- Attention is given to the links and balance between educational theory and practice across curricula.
- Measures should be taken to ensure that curricula content, especially in respect of education, pedagogy and other professional elements is relevant to the current needs of schools.
- Where relevant, students should be provided with sufficient English language training to access up to date curriculum material.

II. 1. 3 Assessment of Students

Assessment was judged to be Good in two universities, Satisfactory in 19 and Unsatisfactory in two.

12. The principal aim of assessment should be to judge in a fair and transparent manner the extent to which the students demonstrate achievement of ILOs. A sufficient and appropriate variety of opportunities must be provided to enable students to demonstrate the knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to their current level. Furthermore, assessment should, wherever possible, support constructive feedback on peer performance.

13. In all but two of the universities there is an acceptable match between assessment and ILOs. There is also a good range of assessment methods within the region as a whole, but not always within each individual programme. These assessment tools include: formal examination; written coursework assignments; assessed presentations; projects; dissertations; and assessed teaching or professional practice. The balance between formal examination and coursework varies, generally between 60 per cent and 40 per cent, though there is one example of 100 per cent coursework and several examples where the examination element is over 60 per cent. For the most part, these methods enable curricula content such as knowledge, understanding, intellectual, and subject and practical/professional skills to be adequately tested in an acceptably fair and transparent manner.

14. There is considerable variation in the effectiveness of other aspects of assessment. Assessment regimes are frequently heavily influenced by university regulations and sometimes by external Ministry regulations, requiring the examination results of large cohorts of students to be published very quickly. This pressure for rapid turnover seriously limits the assessment of higher-level skills. Reviewers are concerned about the frequency with which inappropriate multiple-choice questions are used for final examinations. These may be easy to mark quickly but with the current bank of tests in use, this makes it very difficult to assess higher-level skills as distinct from the regurgitation of subject knowledge. In fact, there is a general tendency in all types of examination to place too much emphasis on testing knowledge acquisition via examination and/or many short, unchallenging tasks. This criticism is made in 14 of the review reports.

15. As might be expected in the field of Education, there are positive examples of assessment designed and delivered to aid students' learning experiences. Assessment for learning is positively reported in 17 universities and criticised in six. Inconsistent practice within departments is frequently mentioned. This may take the form of inconsistent marking standards, over-marking, inconsistent feedback to students or lack of adequate calibration for the grading of student work. Clear mechanisms and systems to set out agreed assessment methods, collect assessment data and monitor effectiveness are rarely reported. In 13 programmes there are no clear criteria for assessment grades and in two universities, assessment was considered to be neither transparent not fair and challenged by many of the students in meetings with reviewers.

16. Easily, the weakest aspect of assessment is moderation, or the means to ensure that the grades awarded are consistent and in line with the ILOs. Effective internal moderation is reported in only seven of the 23 universities. Systems for external examination, verification or moderation are virtually non-existent. Only three are reported, all at postgraduate level and then only for a project or dissertation. Furthermore, in over fifty per cent of programmes there is no double marking of any description or alternative

means of sampling the accuracy and consistency of marking, especially among individual professors in the same courses.

17. In a few examples a Dean or senior academic may deal with student complaints, but in general there are no processes for the redress of student grievances. In several instances reviewers consider such practices as not transparent and actually unfair. Figs 3a and 3b show that overall, 65 per cent of the grades for moderation were Unsatisfactory (undergraduate, 91 per cent and postgraduate, 42 per cent, which is by far the highest percentage of weakness in all the Special Indicators for Academic Standards.) This presents a serious problem for assuring Academic Standards, calling for the development of rigorous systems together with a more collegial attitude to the design and conduct of assessment. Questions set and marking criteria should be appropriate to ILOs. The marking should be transparent, properly recorded and consistent. Individual professional judgements should be justified by double marking and moderation. An effective Examination Committee or Board should validate the whole process.

With regard to assessment of students, the reviewers recommend that the universities consider the following:

- Attention should be given to the excessive assessment of subject knowledge.
- Effective methods of assessing the acquisition of higher-level skills should be put in place.
- Ministry requirements for the rapid publication of final examination results are, in some instances limiting the effectiveness of assessment and should be re-negotiated.
- Measures should be taken at both faculty and institutional levels to set clear mechanisms in place to ensure that assessment methods and practices are consistent across programmes and between individual professors.
- Clear criteria for assessment grades should be published and available to students as well as staff.
- Methods and mechanisms of ensuring moderation of marking, such as internal moderation, double marking and the use of external moderators should be universally established.

II. 1. 4 Student achievement

Student achievement was graded as Good in 12 universities, Satisfactory in ten and Unsatisfactory in one.

18. Demand for these (reviewed) programmes is variable. Large numbers of students are recruited to some of the undergraduate programmes, frequently because Government Ministries of Education or Higher Education sets high quotas. In some of the Arab States these quotas are high in order to meet the country's economic needs or educational aspirations. This does not mean that there are large numbers of high calibre students. Sometimes, potential students do not generally hold teaching in high esteem as a career. Therefore, even where admission is based on performance in school examinations, the more able students do not choose teaching if they can opt for what to them appears a more attractive profession.

19. In general the calibre of students following postgraduate programmes is higher than those following undergraduate programmes. Admissions to postgraduate programmes are different in that most of these programmes are designed for in-service teachers, many of whom have been nominated by their education authorities on the basis of their interests and expertise and the needs of the local education system.

20. Only in one university does achievement fall below the expected levels of the award, as evidenced by the generally satisfactory level of student work seen by reviewers. Several reports comment on the creditable, often high, final grades achieved by undergraduate students with modest entry qualifications. This is also true of postgraduates, where final scores of 80 per cent or higher are mentioned. Thesis, dissertation and project work for both Masters and PhD level students are particularly praised. There is evidence across all programmes, of the successful achievement of many of the ILOs, including: good specialist knowledge, teaching and professional skills, and personal development. There is also evidence, though more frequently in postgraduate programmes, of higher-level and critical-thinking skills. For the most part, students are able either to progress to teaching or further study or to return to the teaching profession with enhanced capabilities.

21. In contrast, reviewers consider that in three universities, the final results of undergraduates do not reflect the high quality of intake. There were also a few criticisms at both undergraduate and postgraduate level of the poor achievement of higher-level and critical-thinking skills, inadequate achievement of English language skills in order to access specialist literature and lack of confidence in or mastery of classroom teaching and/or professional skills. In one of the Masters degrees students acquire no quantitative research techniques.

22. The majority of reports indicate that students across the programmes value their achievements highly. Their qualifications are also highly valued by most employers; undergraduates gain teaching positions and postgraduates are generally regarded as having improved their performance. However, there are a few instances of employers stating that students have been inadequately prepared for classroom or counselling situations. One employer claimed that the university was producing 'unemployable graduates'.

23. The most frequent criticism across the provision is that at both the institutional and programme level, data collection of student achievement and student destinations in respect of either employment or further studies, is ineffective. In the one example where there were good university registry statistics, the data were, however, presented in a format that was of little help to the programme providers. There is little evidence of the use of statistical data to secure early identification of student problems or to underpin programme development.

With regard to student achievement, the reviewers recommend that universities consider the following:

- Where criticised, universities should take steps to ensure that the final achievement of students match the high quality of intake.
- Where criticised, universities should take steps to improve the achievement of higher-level skills.
- Where criticised, universities should take steps to ensure that the acquisition of teaching and/or professional skills is sufficient to allow students to enter employment with confidence.
- Where criticised, universities should investigate and address the reasons

for employers' dissatisfaction with students' performance in the workplace.

- The urgent need across the region for the implementation of systematic, effective collection of data in respect of employer satisfaction and the scale and type of employment, or further study of graduates.

II. 1. 5 Overall Academic Standards

Overall Academic Standards were graded as Good in five, Satisfactory in 16 and Unsatisfactory in two universities.

24. On the whole, Academic Standards are slightly better than Satisfactory, even though the review reports reveal considerable variations among individual universities. The outcomes for postgraduate programmes are somewhat better than those for undergraduate programmes. This is also shown by the judgements on the three elements of academic standards, namely: curriculum, achievement and assessment (Fig 2a), where a total of 15 grades of Good were given to postgraduate programmes, compared to five to undergraduate programmes. In addition, the outcomes for academic-related Special Indicators (Fig 3a) show that there are 23 grades of Unsatisfactory in undergraduate programmes, compared to 10 in postgraduate programmes. The largest discrepancy is in the Internal/External moderation aspect, which evaluates the steps, taken to assure and account for consistency of grades in line with the ILOs. Here, ten out of the eleven undergraduate programmes reviewed were judged to be Unsatisfactory, compared to 5 out of the 12 of postgraduate programmes.

II. 2 Quality of Learning Opportunities

II. 2. 1 Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning was judged to be Good in 16 and Satisfactory in seven universities.

25. Reviewers do not report the effective use of well-articulated teaching and learning strategies either at the undergraduate or postgraduate level. However, there is evidence that, in practice, teaching and learning relate well to content, aims and ILOs across the provision. In all but three universities, staff research, scholarly activity and consultancy are effectively drawn upon to enhance student learning. A wide range of appropriate and sometimes innovative teaching methods is reported, including, lectures, tutorials, presentations, workshops, simulations, laboratory work, microteaching and the use of ICT. However, there are several statements to the effect that, even where there are innovative methods in evidence, there is still too much reliance on the set lecture as the main vehicle of delivery – particularly to large cohorts of undergraduate students. In two universities, reviewers consider that teaching materials were either out of date or unsuited to the ILOs. Similarly, in more than 50 per cent of the programmes the use of ICT is either ineffective or could be improved.

26. Subject knowledge and subject skills are effectively taught across the provision. The development of transferable and practical skills is favourably reported. Students enjoy good learning experiences in well-supervised teaching or professional practice. In 14 reports (five postgraduate and nine undergraduate) students state that they rate their practical teaching highly as a learning experience. However, in one university, there is not enough active supervision of student work in mental health clinics, and in another, no opportunity to practice counselling in a school setting. Academic staff make effective use of the past experience of students – particularly of postgraduates. As reported in paragraph 13, reviewers indicate that development of independent learning is positively encouraged in 17 universities via appropriate activities in group work, projects, dissertations and other reflective activities. Although few language problems are mentioned, as the main language of teaching is Arabic, in one Masters and two undergraduate degrees, too much reliance on academic resources in English creates learning difficulties for some students.

27. Student engagement and participation are high and, in general, there is evidence from meetings with students that they value the quality of their learning experiences at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The enthusiasm and dedication of teaching staff is specifically mentioned in some 50 per cent of programmes.

28. Nevertheless, there is little evidence of collegiate strategies to underpin and improve the quality of teaching. Variability across the teaching staff is mentioned in nine reports. Staff development for teaching is positively mentioned in twelve universities, but is reported as weak, poorly planned or unavailable in nine. There are a few examples of student feedback on the quality of their teaching and learning experiences; however, this is not yet a common practice. Induction for new staff and peer observation and review of teaching for the purposes of sharing good practice and improving the quality of teaching and learning are each mentioned in only five universities. In two undergraduate programmes, there is ineffective co-ordination between staff teaching on different routes through the degree. Thus, although no university was judged unsatisfactory in this category, there is considerable scope for improvement especially in mechanisms designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

With regard to teaching and learning, the reviewers recommend that the universities consider the following:

- The need to develop more coherent teaching and learning strategies.
- Where criticised, the need to address over reliance on the set lecture as the main method of delivery.
- The frequently ineffective use of ICT as a support to effective teaching and learning.
- Where criticised, the quality of supervision of teaching and professional practice.
- The need to address variability in the quality of teaching and learning through such processes as student feedback, peer observation and better, more formally organised communication and coordination of work between members of academic subject staff.

II. 2. 2 Student Progression

Student Progression was judged to be Good in eleven universities, Satisfactory in nine and Unsatisfactory in three.

29. Recruitment to undergraduate programmes is strong. Recruitment to postgraduate programmes is healthy, though in some instances, as in Masters Degrees, numbers are quite small. The majority of universities (17) have clearly articulated overall strategies for student support and five have not.

30. Admissions procedures, some of which are centrally controlled, and student induction are effective in all but one university. These processes are underpinned by clear, appropriate written guidance in 16 universities, but there are weaknesses in seven. Procedures vary, but in general they are well understood by both teaching staff and applicants. Some undergraduate programmes admit students in line with Ministry quotas; others have selective entry based on competitive performance in school examinations. In some states quotas are very high because of the need to raise general levels of education for economic reasons. This leads to the admission of many poor calibre students. In others, the quality of intake is weak because teaching is not a popular career choice. There is selective entry for postgraduate programmes based on a variety of criteria including: Ministry nomination; prior experience in school or other professional situations; interviews; and language ability in Arabic or English. In general, the quality of intake to postgraduate programmes is high. Two universities are criticised for unclear admissions criteria and information and one for admitting students potentially unfitted for teaching.

31. Academic support at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels is a strength in most universities. Good relationships between students and staff are repeatedly mentioned and high levels of support and guidance are reported in all but two universities and evidenced by favourable student comments. Good support for student projects, postgraduate dissertations and theses and fieldwork is frequently reported. Written guidance is more variable and five programmes are criticised for inadequate handbooks and/or written information about course content, structure or teaching methods.

32. Effective pastoral support is specifically mentioned several times. One university has an effective central service to deal with personal problems. In another, the students' union offers support for practical and cultural needs; however, informal systems are more frequently mentioned. Effective identification of, and support for special needs, is reported in 14 universities, but criticised in nine. In three universities, vulnerable students are not identified early nor given timely academic or pastoral support. Careers advice is variable. While one university is commended for its exemplary careers service provided by a central University Careers Centre and supplemented by an informative Student Handbook, several are criticised for offering no careers advice, especially for postgraduate students. As Arabic is the main language of teaching, there are relatively few comments about foreign language support. Lack of support for students with language problems or experiencing difficulties in accessing specialist literature in the English language is reported in two undergraduate and four postgraduate programmes.

33. By far the most frequently criticised aspect of support systems is ineffective student tracking. Data collection in respect of both present and past students is weak in 19 universities, and is so weak in two that the proportion of students progressing to completion is not known. In many, vague figures are given, such as 'less than 45 per cent' or 'about 65 per cent'. Overall, the stated rates vary between 36 per cent and 100 per cent, with the

majority being over 75 per cent. In view of the calibre of intake, several undergraduate programmes show understandably poor levels of retention and completion. In contrast, retention and completion are high in postgraduate programmes. Reviewers frequently comment that the absence of adequate data creates problems in identifying needs for student support during their programmes. They also comment that lack of data from, and continuing engagement with, past students is a missed opportunity for programme development and improvement.

With regard to Student Progression, the reviewers recommend that the universities consider the following:

- Where criticised, they address the need to improve written communication to students and potential students in respect of admission and induction, and guidance systems in general.
- Where criticised, the need to investigate and address the reasons for the admission and subsequent poor progression of too many low calibre students.
- Where criticised, the need to improve the early identification of, and support for, vulnerable students with special needs.
- Address the urgent need across the provision for improved student tracking so that student progress and graduates' subsequent careers can be effectively monitored and used to inform developments.

II. 2. 3 Learning Resources

Learning Resources were judged to be Good in 11 universities, Satisfactory in five and Unsatisfactory in seven.

34. Overall strategies for the planning and deployment of resources are reported in 17 universities, though they are of variable effectiveness. In all universities the collective expertise of academic staff is either Good (9) or Satisfactory (13) (see Figures 4a and 4b Resources, Special Indicators). All staff possess appropriate academic and/or professional qualifications. The majority of staff, especially in postgraduate programmes have Masters or Doctoral qualifications and many are actively engaged in research or consultancy. Staff numbers are generally adequate to deliver programmes; however, there were several comments that staff workload is too high, having a detrimental effect on either research and scholarship, or effective supervision of practical teaching or fieldwork. Similarly, the quality of support staff is Satisfactory or better. There are several references to the high calibre of specialist and technical support, where good co-operation among staff is enabling the provision of a good range of learning opportunities. Overall, the enthusiasm, dedication and quality of staff are clear strengths of the provision – as attested by student comments. Opportunities for staff development are variable. In some fifty per cent of the provision, there is little evidence of the provision of staff development based on the identification of needs. However, there are examples of institutional support for in-house training, further study, overseas visits and attendance of relevant conferences.

35. Library provision is more variable. It was considered Good in ten universities, Satisfactory in six and Unsatisfactory in seven (see Figures 4a and 4b Resources' Special Indicators). Where the provision is Good, there is ample provision of up to date books, journals and e-journals. However, out of date book and journal stock is reported in four undergraduate and three postgraduate programmes. Opening times are limited in several university

libraries, which is particularly limiting in respect of access for part-time students. Good library practice is reported in Bahrain University, where the 'superbly proactive' librarian has built up and continues to maintain an excellent library, despite limited resources.

36. ICT resources are similarly variable across the provision, eleven universities being considered good, four satisfactory and eight unsatisfactory (see Figures 4a and 4b, Resources' Special Indicators). Where the ICT provision is Good, universities are commended for the high quality of facilities including: IT laboratories; media laboratories; effective intranet systems; access to the Internet; and access to generous provision of up to date personal computers. Other specialist subject laboratory facilities, including a microteaching and a counselling laboratory, are favourably reported in three universities. Good practice is reported at the reviewed programme of the University of Cairo, where reviewers regard not only the IT facilities but also their management and monitoring as excellent. However, such good features are counterbalanced by some strong criticisms. Inadequate ICT facilities are mentioned in nine universities, including: out of date equipment; poor and/or disparate campus facilities; poor access to inter- and intranet services; and access to IT resources in general. Limited opening hours are specifically mentioned several times and the provision of personal computers is unsatisfactory in eight universities. In one, Teaching and Learning Centre facilities are considered basic and out of date and staff poorly qualified. In another, there is urgent need to improve access to both the Internet and the university intranet.

37. Most teaching accommodation is appropriate or better and housed on pleasant campuses with a good range of social and leisure facilities. There are several references to campuses providing positive learning environments in both post- and undergraduate programmes. Some examples of poor accommodation having a negative effect on student learning experiences are reported, such as dingy, dilapidated and run down classrooms and inadequate facilities for part-time students. Opportunities for individual tutorials are limited in two universities, where there are no separate rooms for staff.

38. The weakest aspects of resource provision, overall (see Figs 4a and 4b: Resources' Special Indicators), are Library, ICT and PC provision. Some students commented that poor resources and limited access to library and ICT provision limited their achievement potential.

With regard to Learning Resources, the reviewers recommend that the universities consider the following:

- Greater provision of staff development opportunities based on the identification of needs.
- Where criticised, the review of out of date book and journal stocks and opening hours to provide more user-friendly access.
- Similarly, but more generally, a review of inadequate and out of date ICT equipment, poor access to facilities, particularly inter- and intranet facilities and inadequate provision of PCs for students.
- The improvement, where relevant, of dingy and dilapidated teaching accommodation.

II. 3 Quality assurance and enhancement

Quality assurance and enhancement were judged to be good in four universities, satisfactory in 13 and unsatisfactory in six.

39. Most universities display some elements of quality assurance in the reviewed programmes, but only three of the reviewed programmes operate within a fully integrated university system. Nine have partially operative systems and of these six have either only just been or are about to be set up. In the remaining eleven there are no overarching procedures in place. This, however, does not mean that quality assurance activity is non-existent. Some form of committee procedure, though of variable effectiveness, is common and is reported in 18 universities. Since lesson evaluation is standard practice in teacher-training, evaluation, at least at course level, might be expected in education programmes. In most universities, this is taking place at either or both faculty and programme/course level. Reviewers frequently comment that the lack of some clearly designated person or group with specific responsibility for quality assurance limits its effective implementation. Good practice is commended at An Najah University for its well-structured overall system and at King Abul Aziz University for the effectiveness of its Programme Committee, particularly in respect of the commitment to continuous improvement.

40. In general, Self Evaluation Documents (SEDs) are clearly written and comprehensive, at least in the description of provision – only three were judged unsatisfactory. There are also some examples of sharp self-evaluation. The University of Damascus is commended for good practice in this respect. In one university, however, in contrast to its constructively self-critical SED, its quality assurance processes are weak and ineffectual. This is a good example of the willingness and capability of individuals and groups of staff to be self-evaluative but lacking a quality infrastructure to implement effective action.

41. A range of largely uncoordinated activities takes place at faculty, programme and course level. Reviewers note that some members of staff are more committed to the concept of quality assurance than others. Thus there are examples of lively, informal cooperation and communication between individual staff who are working hard to establish effective processes for improvement. In one university, reviewers report that they were obliged to encourage staff to make effective use of university systems already in place. Similarly, in another university, a rigorous review of provision was carried out at programme level, making a number of constructive suggestions for improvement; nothing was ever done.

42. About a third of reports mention fairly regular programme review and evaluation, but an equal number do not. Annual review is rarely mentioned and in three university course reports are of variable quality and without feedback to staff. In one university, divisional meetings are regarded as a good forum for discussion. However, there is considerable variability in the quality of review procedures, even when they are in place. Effective use of feedback from various stakeholders (internal and external, such as Ministries of Education) is reported only nine times. Most frequently mentioned is the collection and use of student feedback. In two universities this is reported as being used for the purposes of staff appraisal, but in one of them it is only for the purposes of awarding performance-related pay. In two of the three Master's degree programmes student feedback is reported as a positive strength. The presence of student representatives at an annual professional conference is cited as good practice at the University of Helwan. However, several programmes are criticised for not informing students of actions taken in response to their feedback. In one university there is regular, rigorous

external review by relevant agencies. On the other hand, in almost half the universities, student and stakeholder feedback either does not take place or is ineffectively used. Two universities are praised for good data collection to underpin evaluations, but many more are criticised for the inadequacy of their data and data collection systems. One programme team does not make use of the good quality data that is already available from the University Registry. The concept of data-driven action plans, based on evaluation, monitored and followed up to ensure that plans have been effectively implemented and quality loops closed, is not embedded in any of the universities and is mentioned in only four reports.

43. The level of commitment to continuous improvement is Unsatisfactory in over 40 per cent of the provision. There are some examples of positive activity, for the most part in respect of appraisal and professional staff development. However, weaknesses such as ineffective communication between staff groups, no peer observation, and no systems for sharing best practice are frequently reported.

44. Overall, this aspect of the provision has the weakest profile. Nearly 90 per cent of the SEDs, almost all of which were prepared for the first time for the purposes of this project, were Satisfactory or Good in contrast to Institutional Systems and Continuous Improvement, where 30 per cent and 43 per cent respectively were judged Unsatisfactory (Figs 5a and 5b, Quality Assurance Special Indicators). There is still scope for considerable improvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement. In particular, the processes need to address the sustainability of efforts to self-evaluate and manage improvement plans.

With regard to Quality Assurance and Enhancement, the reviewers recommend that the universities consider the following:

- The need to establish coherent systems at university, faculty, programme and course levels involving annual evaluation to monitor provision, deal with problems and enhance quality, together with regular programme review to maintain currency.
- The need to ensure that specifically designated persons or committees are clearly accountable for quality assurance and enhancement.
- The establishment of processes and procedures ensuring the timely identification of problems, the construction of action plans and follow-up and the closure of quality loops.
- More extensive use of feedback from all stakeholders, including: students, staff; schools, professional bodies, and Ministry officials where relevant.
- Setting up more effective systems for the identification of staff need and sharing best practice for continuous improvement.
- The need to develop a culture in which awareness of and commitment to quality assurance and enhancement is the norm.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aims, in the context of the review process, set out in broad terms what the programme-providing institution intends to do. They are normally derived from the institution's mission statement and, in turn, inform the **intended learning outcomes** of the programme.

Assessment refers to the evaluation of students' academic achievement. They can be formal written examinations during and at the end of a course or programme. There is also continuous assessment based on regular course assignments, presentations, projects and dissertations. Attendance of, and/or contributions to, seminars are part of the assessment process along with practical work such as teaching practice and counselling. Assessment is supposed to be fair, transparent and appropriate to the relevant Intended Learning Outcomes. It can either be formative – i.e. given during study for a qualification and intended to inform students of their progress, or summative – i.e. given at the end of a qualification leading to students' success or failure (see **feedback**).

Assessment criteria are an effective means of ensuring fairness and transparency of assessment, as agreed on by the course/programme team. Such criteria include carefully planned approaches to measuring, and judging the achievement of an Intended Learning Outcome, while concurrently giving an appropriate weight to the various aspects of this judgement. These criteria should be well publicised to enable students develop a clear idea of what is expected of them.

Assessment for learning refers to what is currently considered as a best assessment practice providing students with full and clear indications (preferably written) of what they actually need in order to enhance their progress and to successfully complete the programme (see **autonomous learning and feedback**).

Annual monitoring is a routine process by which the quality of all aspects of the delivery of a programme is evaluated, at a course and programme level. It usually takes place at the end of each academic year.

Autonomous (independent) learning is one of the key aims of education from primary school level onwards. It seeks to assist individuals in acquiring, developing and managing their own learning skills and capabilities. Autonomous learning is particularly important for higher education students whose dependence on instructors is significantly reduced as they start identifying their own learning goals and take responsibility for their own learning.

Benchmarking involves identifying the best relevant provision and designing new programmes, or modifying existing ones, to bring them into line with officially acknowledged and competent practices. Education programmes, like other academic programs, do not exist in a vacuum and are delivered in many institutions worldwide. There are many external reference points to help with assessing and measuring Education provisions. For instance, there are *QAA Subject Benchmark Statements (UK)*, and statements issued by professional societies in the various fields of study, e.g., ABET, ASCE, etc.. In the UNDP Higher Education Project, the use of topics of the Major Field Test (MFT) of the Educational Testing Services (ETS), USA, as a possible benchmark of their curricula has been used by the universities.

Calibration is the process by which grades are endorsed, standardised and made internally consistent for a group of markers or assessors.

Cognitive skills are abilities acquired through mental processes pertaining to use of reasoning, critical and analytical thinking, perception and judgement.

Collegiate refers to organisational ethos of respecting academics' different opinions, and allowing discussions, actions and decisions to take place in a transparent and cooperative manner. Academics prefer 'collegiate' to 'managerial' methods of decision-making.

Continuous improvement (See **quality assurance** and **enhancement** and **quality loop**)

Corrective action refers to measures and course of action taken to rectify weaknesses, mistakes etc. identified in the delivery of programmes through complaints or routine monitoring and evaluation. A properly documented corrective action will close a quality loop (see quality loop).

Course is a discrete, complete in itself, compulsory or optional, part of a programme.

Credit refers to an assessed element, or a unit of study for determining the relative weight of an assessed element of study, such as a course. It can be counted towards the awarding of a qualification. For example, a first degree in an Arab university may be worth 120 credit units, or more.

Credit hour is generally equivalent to, at a minimum, one hour of classroom study or recitation, or two or more hours of laboratory work, per week over the period of time that the course is taught. However, the exact credit hours for the completion of a certain course, or program or academic level are considerably determined by the awarding institution.

Curriculum is the complete set of courses, syllabi and other taught elements comprising a programme or part of a programme. The 'overt' curriculum is what students usually receive through a prospectus or programme handbook. The 'hidden' curriculum is what students pick up from imponderable, but nonetheless dynamic factors, such as 'ambiance', 'ethos', 'quality of the environment', the 'prejudices' and 'preconceptions' of tutors, and others.

Double marking (see **moderation**).

External reference point (see **benchmarking**).

Feedback in this report is of three types. Stakeholder feedback, generally regarded as an essential part of course development, is information gained about provision through routine monitoring and evaluation including questionnaires, or more direct contact with committees, advisory groups, employers, etc.. Feedback from students, generally regarded as an essential part of self-evaluation, is information gained about provision either through questionnaires, or direct formal contacts with course/programme committees etc.. and informal contacts (student-tutor interactions). Feedback on students through reporting by tutors on their progress is a normal part of course delivery.

Grade is a level of achievement assessed according to clearly stated criteria. Academic grades may be categorical (e.g. First Class, Distinction, Merit, Pass, Fail, etc.), or alpha-numeric (e.g. A, B,C, D, etc.), or percentage (e.g. 10%, 20%, 30% and so on). Some academic institutions adopt both categories concurrently to assess the same achievement. For example, in this report, grades are categorical (**Good, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory**), and made on the evidence

provided by each institution. The criteria on which judgements are based are clearly set out in the Project's *Handbook on Academic Subject Review*.

Educational Testing Services Network (ETS) is an independent body based in the USA, providing a wide range of educational services, worldwide (see **benchmarking**).

Evaluation refers to the process by which individuals or groups of individuals, such as a subject team or an evaluation committee, monitor and critically assess the achievement of ILOs and/or aims of a programme, departmental or institutional aims (see **SED**).

External examiner (see **moderation**)

Higher-level skills are cognitive skills involving critical and analytical thinking, the ability to develop a rational argument, structure data evaluation and the ability to synthesise complex data into a coherent whole (see **cognitive skills**).

ICT is Information and Communication Technology.

Independent learning (see **autonomous learning**)

Intended learning outcome is an unequivocal requirement to be set out by the programme providers on types of knowledge, understanding and skills expected to be acquired by students upon satisfactory completion of the programme. Each programme outcome is normally mapped onto detailed elements of the curriculum (courses or modules), methods of teaching, and learning, methods of assessment that are organised to achieve that outcome. For the purposes of quality assurance systems, programmes are defined in terms of their intended outcomes rather than as traditionally written syllabus, which also makes their achievement capable of being measured.

Intranet is a computer network set up within a site or between the different sites of an institution, allowing staff and students easy access to intercommunications.

Internet is the global network of computers that support the Worldwide Web deemed essential in modern times and rendered accessible for all students at all levels.

Key indicator is an aspect, characteristic or quality of a product, service or study identified as essential to any successful delivery.

Learning opportunities are provided by a programme in an institution for students to develop and /or improve their professional knowledge and expertise. These include the range and quality of teaching, the quality and effectiveness of student support, the range and quality of resources (books, teaching materials, specialist equipment, ICT, accommodation and institutional 'ambiance' or 'ethos' (see **curriculum**).

Major Field Test (MFT) is the family of Major Field Tests (MFT) developed and managed worldwide by the Princeton-based Educational Testing Services in the UK. The published topics for each test set out the threshold contents of knowledge and skills that graduates of the respective fields are expected, by ETS, to acquire at the point of graduation. The degree to which any given programme conforms to the threshold can be judged by either, or both, a comparison of the programme specifications with the MFT or an appropriate test given to students.

Moderation is the review of marking and assessment by an independent person or persons to ensure fairness and consistency. Thus, a moderator might be internal from within the same institution (e.g. a second marker marking an already marked paper), or external from outside the institution (e.g. an external examiner/s or moderator/s). Best practice, internationally, involves both internal and external moderation.

Module is a term commonly used in UK universities to indicate a discrete part of a programme with usually a credit rating, assessed at the point of completion. A module may be short (e.g. half a semester or a term), or long (e.g. a whole semester or two or three terms). It may also be compulsory (often referred to as a 'core' module), or optional, depending on the way in which a programme is structured (see **credit** and **credit hour**).

Programme Handbook (or Handout) specify in detail a relevant structure, content, assessment regimes etc. of a given programme. They are often a student-friendly version of programme specifications and include appropriate reading lists, timetables and so on. They complement *Student Handbooks* (see **student handbook**).

PC is the personal computer.

Peer reviewer is professionally equal in calibre and subject specialism to those delivering the provision. He/she should not be from the same institution undergoing the review process to ensure neutrality and that there is no overlapping or conflicting interests. The peer reviewer can contribute to the review of an educational programme either for internal quality assurance (QA) or for accreditation purposes.

Periodic review is a routine process, usually cyclic, by which the continued validity of a programme components as pertaining to its content, academic standards, currency, market relevance etc. is evaluated.

Postgraduate generally refers to academic levels of an award following the BA or the BSC degree.

Practicum is the assessed practical element in a programme such as teaching practice, counselling practice, administration, etc. in the subject of education.

Programme is a complete diet of required academic components leading to the award of a qualification. It usually consists of a coherent structure of courses and/or modules (units).

Programme specifications set out in detail the design of a programme, its overall purposes and aims, its structure, the content of its various component parts (modules/units courses etc.), the ILOs, assessment methods and weighting.

Qualification (academic) is awarded on the successful completion of a study programme; e.g. certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, etc..

Quality Assurance (QA) and Enhancement (E) refers to the processes and mechanisms through which subject, programme teams, departments, faculties and institutions evaluate the achievement of their aims, maintain the currency of their programmes and agree on methods for continuously improving their overall provision (see **quality loop**, **corrective action** and **feedback**).

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is an independent body based in the UK and provides quality assurance services for higher education in England and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It has published a wide range of relevant literature (see **benchmarking**).

Quality loop is an evaluation process conducive to a continuous improvement cycle such as, Plan > Do > Monitor > Correct > Modify Plan > Do > and so on. It is necessary to ensure the continued effectiveness of the provision and that no mistake is made again.

RBAS is the Regional Bureau for Arab States

Research is work that involves the methodic pursuit, enquiry, or study of new knowledge for some new facts. It can be theoretical, or experimental, or both. There is also basic research, usually referred to as 'applied' research, focusing on specific practical issues. It is the aim of educationists to train teachers to be reflective practitioners, capable of action research in the classroom.

Scholarship is serious involvement in research, or academic study, or learning and other knowledge-based processes. Undertaking original scholarly work and promoting intellectual vigour and activities are essential for maintaining a competent academic standard and for being up to date with the latest developments of a given subject. Teaching large cohorts of students and long teaching hours can seriously hamper scholarship progress.

Self-Evaluation Document (SED) is intended to be a critical analysis (not a description) of a programme, carried out by the providers, on which further developments and improvement of this program can be based. It is also the point of departure for a review team when organising a review visit. The expected content and structure of a SED are set out in *The Handbook*.

Set-lecture (usually a one-hour session) is delivered formally by an academic to a group of students (usually large) gathered in one location. Although the lecture is a passive, didactic experience for students, there may be time given for brief interactions, discussions, short questions and answers. It is a very economical method of teaching large cohorts of students, and can be effective only if the lecturer has expertise, charisma, and an ability to communicate ideas.

Special indicator in this report (and the Project) refers to a particular feature or sub-aspect of the reviewed programme which is expected to be assessed by the reviewers in the course of making an overall judgment on a major aspect of the programme. For example, the sufficiency of the number of qualified academic staff, the state of the libraries, etc. are special features or sub-aspects of learning resources which is a main aspect of that programme.

Stakeholder denotes those groups with a legitimate vested interest in the outcomes of a process, activity or enterprise. Thus, students, parents, private and public employers, professional bodies, commerce, government ministries, society at large, as well as education providers, can all be described as stakeholders of university education. Their interests may conflict as well as converge.

Strategy (strategies) is a coherent plan designed to achieve specific long-term aims and objectives derived from the institution's mission and perception of its potential challenges. It normally includes well-planned measures by which the successful achievement of these objectives can be assessed. Thus a 'learning resources' strategy or a 'teaching and learning' strategy implies coherent planning

on the part of departments or programme teams to achieve specific institutional objectives.

Student tracking is a routine collection of accurate statistical data on every aspect relating to students right from admission through qualification to final destination. These data are generally regarded as essential to the effective management and development of provision.

Student handbook generally sets out full and clear information about the whole range of programmes and student services available in an institution. A good student handbook is a key element of student support.

Subject specialist skills refer to acquired abilities or levels of competence and proficiency enabling the pursuit of specialist activities in a given subject. Such skills might be practical like, in the field of education, those enhancing the ability to teach effectively or the ability to interpret educational statistics.

Transferable skills are types of abilities, work or activities acquired through special training and knowledge in one context but can also be applied to another. For example, most high-level cognitive skills are by their nature transferable, as are interpersonal skills. Literacy, numeracy and ICT are referred to as 'core' transferable skills. Some practical skills can also be transferable, like effective classroom teaching, presentational skills, report writing and others. (People are considered to have transferable skills when they utilize the skills or semi skills they have acquired in a certain context in other similar, and not necessarily the same, work activities and contexts.

UNOPS is United Nations Office for Project Services

UNDP is United Nations Development Programme

Annex 1 - University Representatives (Education Review Cycle)

1) Universite' d'Oran Es-Senia, Oran – Algeria

Coordinator: Dr. Abd Elkader Derbal, University President
Representative A1: Dr. Meziane Mohamad, Director of Scientific Council, Faculty of Social Sciences
Representative A2: Dr. Mahi Brahim, Chairman, Department of Psychology and Education, Faculty of Social Sciences

2) Bahrain University – Bahrain

Coordinator: Dr Jawaher Al-Madhaki
Representative A1: Dr. Faisal Hameed Al-Mulla, Coordinator, Accreditation Committee, College of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Khalil Ebrahim Shubbar, Chairman, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education
Representative A3*: Dr. Mona Al-Balooshi, Head of Accreditation Office, College of Education

3) Cairo University – Egypt

Coordinator: Dr. Ahmed Farghally M. Hassan
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Representative A2: Dr. Soheir Mohamed Hewala, Vice-Dean, Institute of Education

4) Ain Shams University – Egypt

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Representative A1: Dr. Sohir Anwar Mahfouz, Department of Educational Psychology
Representative A2: Dr. Mahmoud Ahmed Mohamed Omer, Vice-Dean & Professor of Educational Psychology
Guest: Dr. Eman Fawzi Said Chahine, Staff Member

5) Zarka Private University – Jordan

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Representative A2: Dr. Khaled Mohammad Al Khatib, Staff member Faculty of Educational Sciences

6) Lebanese University – Lebanon

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7) Mohammed V Souissi University – Morocco

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Representative A2: Dr. Mohammed Melouk, Head, Department of Language Education, Faculté des Sciences de l'Éducation

8) An-Najah National University – Palestine

Coordinator: Dr. Maher Natsheh, Vice President for Academic Affairs
Representative A1: Dr. Ali Habayeb, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs
Representative A2: Dr. Ghassan Hussein Al-Hilo, Dean, Educational Sciences College

9) Islamic University of Gaza (IUG)

Coordinator: Dr. Hatem Ali Elaydi, Member of the Quality Assurance Unit

Representative A1: Dr. Nazmi Abdul-Salam Al-Masri, Chairman, Department of Curriculum Committee
Representative A2: Dr. Sanaa Ibrahim Abou-Dagga, Graduate Students' Chairperson, Faculty of Education

10) Sudan University of Science & Technology

Coordinator: Dr. Izzeldin Mohamed Osman
Representative A1: Dr. Abdel Azim Zeinelabdin Ahmed, Chairman, Department of Science, College of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Izzeldin Abdelrahim Magzoub Mohammed, Deputy Dean Faculty of Education

11) King Abdul Aziz University – Saudi Arabia

Coordinator: Dr. Salem Ahmed Sahab, VP for Development
Representative A1: Dr. Abdulahi Ahmad Obaid Al-Subahi, Supervisor General of the Pedagogic Diploma, Department of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences
Representative A2: Dr. Hind Moh'd Badr

12) Baath University – Syria

Coordinator: Dr. Hassan Al-Haj Ibrahim
Representative A1: Dr. Hassan Al-Haj Ibrahim, Charmain of Accreditation Commission
Representative A2: Dr. Ahmad Irfan Salluta, Lecturer, Dept. of Psychological Counselling, Faculty of Education

13) Sana'a University – Yemen

Coordinator: Dr. Abdul-Kareem Al-Obaidee
Representative A1: Dr. Radman Mohamed Saeed, Department of Mathematics, Faculty of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Ismail Masoud Naji, Ex-Head, Department of English, Faculty of Education

14) Arabian Gulf University – Bahrain

Coordinator: Dr. Hossam Hamdy, Dean, College of Medicine & Medical Sciences
Representative A1: Dr. Fathi Abdelgadir Salih Alshaikh, Director, Distance Teaching and Training
Representative A2: Dr. Ali Abdulrahman Aljasim, Sphere of Educational Studies, College of Graduate Studies

15) Helwan University – Egypt

Coordinator: Dr. Ahmed Sharaf Eldin Ahmed
Representative A1: Dr. Hosam Hamdy Abdelhameed Elsayed, Lecturer, Department of Foundations of Education, Faculty of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Saida Abdelsalam Ali Khater, Educational Technology, Faculty of Education

16) Jordan University – Jordan

Coordinator: Dr. Nabil T. Shawagfeh, Vice-President for Academic Affairs
Representative A1: Dr. Muna Sobhi Zaki Hadidi, Dean, Faculty of Educational Sciences
Representative A2: Dr. Ibrahim Al-Momani
Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Educational Sciences

17) Yarmouk University – Jordan

Coordinator: Dr. Adnan Yousef Atoum, Dean, Faculty of Education
Representative A1: Dr. Adnan Mohammad Farah, Chairman, Department of Psychology
Faculty of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Shafiq Falah Alawneh, Graduate Studies Advisor,
Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology,

Faculty of Education

18) Balamand University – Lebanon

Coordinator: Dr. Georges N. NAHAS, Vice President
Representative A1: Dr. Naim El Rouadi, Chairperson, Department of Education
Representative A2:

19) Birzeit University – Palestine

Coordinator: Dr. Othman Ibrahim Abulibdeh
Representative A1: Dr. Khawla R A Shkhshir, Department of Education and Psychology,
Faculty of Arts
Representative A2: Dr. Maher Hashweh, Associate Professor, Department of Education & Psychology

20) Sultan Qaboos University – Oman

Coordinator: Dr. Moosa Abdullah Alkindi, Assistant Vice President for Humanities Colleges
Representative A1: Dr. Abdullah Khamis Ali Ambusaidi, Assistant Dean, Undergraduate Studies, Faculty of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Hamood Al Harthi, Department of Educational Foundation Administration, Faculty of Education
Representative A3*: Dr. Amel Ali Salman, Assistant Professor, Dep. of English Language and Literature, College of Arts and Social Studies
Representative A4*: Dr. Fawzia Aziz Al-Seyabi, Assistant Professor, Program coordinator of English for English Specialists, Language Center
Representative A5*: Dr. Salma Hamad Al-Humaidi, Assistant Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education

21) Qatar University

Coordinator: Dr. Mohammed Al-Naemi
Representative A1: Dr. Asma Abdulah Al-Attiyah, Faculty Staff, Department of Psychological Sciences, Faculty of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Batoul Muheedin khaliefa, Faculty Staff, Department of Psychological Sciences, Faculty of Education

22) University of Khartoum – Sudan

Coordinator: Dr. Elsiddig Ahmed Elmustafa Elsheikh, Deputy President
Representative A1: Dr Abdelgabar Nasser Gumma, Faculty of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Hanan Mohammed Osman, Curriculum and Teaching Methods, Faculty of Education

23) Damascus University – Syria

Coordinator:
Representative A1: Dr. Ali Saud Hassan, Faculty of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Sam Ammar, Dean, Faculty of Education
Representative A3*: Dr. Hala Dalbani, Department of English Language and Literature

24) Aden University – Yemen

Coordinator: Dr. Yacoub Abdallah kasem, Dean, Faculty of Education
Representative A1: Dr. Abdulwahab Awad Kuwairan, Member of the Higher Studies Committee, Faculty of Education
Representative A2: Dr. Anees Ahmad Taya, Faculty of education

*Added representatives with special assignments by their universities.

Annex 2 - Milestones of the Education Review Cycle

April – June, 2005	Identification of participating universities and nomination by the president of each university of a coordinator for project matters at the senior management level, and of two leading academics from the field of Education, as the university representatives in the project.
July 11-14, 2005	First training and planning workshop (4 working days) held in Amman and attended by the two representatives A1 and A2, of each programme. Main topics: framework for academic subject review. Concepts, criteria and practical training on the academic subject review model, with emphasis on self-assessment.
August 2005	Representatives embark on the long process of internally evaluating their programmes and on the preparation of self-evaluation documents (SED) with support from home departments and advisory support (through email) from project.
August-November 2005	Selection of UK reviewers. Production of a third edition of the training handbook to reflect the new experiences gained through the previous review cycle (Business Administration).
November 2005	Preliminary drafts of Data Set, Programme Specifications and Self-Evaluation Document for each programme prepared by representatives and reviewed and commented upon by training consultants.
November 3 rd , 2005	One-day pre-review coordination meeting convened in Oxford by the Project Manager for the selected UK reviewers and attended by the Projects' training consultants and QAA advisor.
November 24-25, 2005	Second training and planning workshop (2 days) held in Tunis for Group 1, which consists of representatives of 11 universities. Group discussions and individual tutorials organised to review progress of SED preparation and to identify and address remaining issues. A plan for final submission of SED agreed.
November 26-28, 2005	Third training workshop (3 days) held in Tunis for Group 1 (11 universities). Interactive theoretical and practical training (with simulations and role-playing) on the conduct of external reviews. Final schedule of review missions to participating universities are agreed. A detailed plan for hosting missions by each programme is agreed. Selection of qualified representatives to act as external reviewers for universities in countries other than their own.
December 12-13, 2005	Second training and planning workshop (2 days) held in Tunis for Group 2, which consists of representatives of 13 universities. Group discussions and individual tutorials organised to review progress of SED preparation and to identify and address remaining issues. A plan for final submission of SED agreed.
December 14-16, 2005	Third and final training workshop (3 days) held in Tunis for Group 2 (13 universities). Interactive theoretical and practical training (with simulations and role-playing) on the conduct of external reviews. Final schedule of review missions to participating universities are agreed. A detailed plan for hosting missions by each programme is agreed. Selection of qualified representatives to act as external reviewers for universities in countries other than their own.
December 2005 - January 2006	Formation of peer-review teams for all programme, with each consisting of two UK and two Arab reviewers. Final scheduling of on-site review missions, each of five-day duration, for each programme.

January 15, 2006	Finalised Self-Evaluation Documents (including Programme Specification and Data Set) for each programme submitted to project management and copies forwarded to appointed review teams.
February – May 2006	External review missions carried out on schedule for the 23 participating universities. ⁷
May – June, 2006	First draft of review reports submitted to project editing team by review mission coordinators.
June 7 th , 2006	One-day post-review coordination meeting convened in Oxford by the project manager for reviewer coordinators, attended by the projects' training consultants and QAA advisor. Guidelines for final editing of reports agreed.
August 2006	Final drafts of the (23) review reports are produced. A first complete draft of the overview report is also produced.
Early October 2006	The RBAS Regional Director dispatches printed copies of the final review report on each reviewed programme to the president of the programme's host university. Electronic copies sent by the Project to the providers of the programme.
December 2006	Overview report on Education ready for printing.

⁷ The original number of scheduled missions was 24. However, the mission to the Islamic University of Gaza was not carried out due to restrictions on entry to the city by the occupying army.