

Decision of the AQAS Commission

on the Bachelor programme

“**Mass Communication**” (Bachelor)

with specializations in

Radio and Television; Public Relations and Advertising; and Graphic Design

offered by

Ajman University, United Arab Emirates

Based on the report of the expert panel and the discussions of the AQAS Commission in its 7th meeting on 7 December 2020, the AQAS Commission decides:

1. The study programme “**Mass Communication**” (**Bachelor**) (with specializations in Radio and Television; Public Relations and Advertising; and Graphic Design offered by Ajman University, United Arab Emirates is accredited according to the AQAS criteria for Programme Accreditation.

The accreditation is conditional.

The study programme essentially complies with the requirements defined by the criteria and thus the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current version. The required adjustments can be implemented within a time period of twelve months.

2. The conditions have to be fulfilled. The fulfilment of the conditions has to be documented and reported to AQAS no later than **31 December 2021**. The confirmation of the conditions might include a physical site visit within the time period of twelve months.
3. The accreditation is given for the period of **six years** and is valid until **30 September 2027**.

Conditions:

1. The academic character of the programme requires further development. Besides the well-established development of applicable skills, the theoretical and scientific foundation of Mass Communication must be increased.
2. Important skills of Mass Communication such as objective observation, critical questioning or analytical thinking require a more explicit representation and development in all three specializations.
3. Clear-cut specialization-specific courses considering the theoretical concepts for the respective specialization need to be implemented in order to broaden the academic understanding of students.
4. To demonstrate the achievement of all learning outcomes, the final project must also reflect the academic-theoretical discourse of the programme e.g. by combining the practical part with a scientific reflection of the work.
5. The course descriptions need to be updated to better reflect the contents of the programme. A special focus must be paid to:

- a. Where applicable, social media-content in the courses need be outlined transparently in the course descriptions.
- b. A clear definition of assessment and teaching methods reflecting only the relevant methods with the implemented diversity.

The following **recommendations** are given for further improvement of the programme:

1. Further strategic dialogue on the role of graphic design within Mass Communication and possible contributions within the College is encouraged.
2. The ability to work cross medial should be fostered, e.g. by implementing joint cross-media courses for all specializations.
3. Topics on new developments in Mass Communication, such as Social Media should be integrated in the curriculum or be made visible in the course descriptions.

EXPERTS' REPORT**ON THE BACHELOR PROGRAMME****“MASS COMMUNICATION” (BACHELOR) WITH THE SPECIALIZATIONS:**

- **RADIO AND TELEVISION**
- **PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING**
- **GRAPHIC DESIGN**

OFFERED BY AJMAN UNIVERSITY (UNITED ARAB EMIRATES)

Visit to the university: 28 – 29 October 2020

Panel of Experts:

Prof. Dr. Abdullah Al-Kindi	Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman, College of Art and Social Sciences, Department of Mass Communication
Prof. Dr. Nanette Besson	HMKW University of Applied Sciences for Media, Communication and Economics, Cologne, Germany, De- partment of Journalism and Corporate Communication
Prof. Dr. Claudia Nothelle	Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences, Germany, Department of Social Work, Health and Media, Chair for TV journalism
Ramón García-Ziensen	Deutsche Welle Academy, Head of Journalistic Training Department, Bonn, Germany (representative from the labour market)
Christopher Pridat	Student of Utrecht University, The Netherlands (student expert)
Coordinator:	
Ronny Heintze	AQAS, Cologne, Germany
Patrick Heinzer	AQAS, Cologne, Germany

I. Preamble

AQAS – Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes – is an independent non-profit organisation, supported by more than 90 member institutions, both higher education institutions (HEIs) and academic associations. Since 2002, the agency has been accredited by the German Accreditation Council (GAC). It is therefore a notified body for accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes in Germany.

AQAS is a full member of ENQA and also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) which confirms that our procedures comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), on which all Bologna countries agreed as a basis for internal and external quality assurance.

AQAS is an institution founded by and working for higher education institutions and academic associations. The agency is devoted to quality assurance and quality development of both academic studies and teaching in Higher Education Institutions. The activities of AQAS in accreditation are neither restrained to specific academic disciplines or degrees nor to a certain type of Higher Education Institution

II. Accreditation procedure

This report results from the external review of the Bachelor programme in Mass Communication (with three specializations) offered by Ajman University (United Arab Emirates).

1. Criteria

The programme is assessed against a set of criteria for programme accreditation developed by AQAS. The criteria are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) 2015. To facilitate the review each criterion features a set of indicators that can be used to demonstrate the fulfilment of the criteria. However, if single indicators are not fulfilled this does not automatically mean that a criterion is not met. The indicators are discussed by the experts in the context of the programme since not all indicators necessarily can be applied to a programme.

2. Approach and methodology

The initialisation

The university mandated AQAS to perform the accreditation procedure in March 2020.

The Ajman University produced a Self-Evaluation Report (SER). In July 2020, Ajman University handed in a draft of the SER together with the relevant documentation of the study programme and an appendix.

The appendix included e.g.:

- Overview over statistical data of the student body (e.g. number of applications, beginners, students, graduates, student drop-outs).
- CVs of the teaching staff
- Information on student services
- Core information on the main library
- Undergraduate academic regulations

AQAS assessed the SER regarding completeness, comprehensibility and transparency. The final version of the SER was handed in August 2020.

The accreditation procedure was officially initialised by a decision of the AQAS' Commission on 10 August 2020.

The nomination of the panel of expert

The composition of the panel of experts follows the stakeholder principle. Consequently, representatives from the respective discipline/s, the labour market and students are involved. Furthermore, AQAS follows principles for the selection of experts of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

In September 2020 the AQAS Commission nominated the before mentioned expert panel. AQAS informed the university about the members of the expert panel and Ajman University did not raise any concerns against the composition of the panel.

The preparation of the site visit

Prior to the site visit, the experts reviewed the SER and submitted a short preliminary statement including open questions and potential needs for additional information. AQAS forwarded these preliminary statements to the University and to the panel members in order to increase transparency in the process and the upcoming discussions during the site visit.

The site visit

After a review of the Self Evaluation Report, a site visit to the University took place from 28 – 29 October 2020. Due to the travel restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, the site visit took place digitally. In the virtual meetings, the experts interviewed different stakeholders, e.g. the management of the HEI, the programme management, teaching and other staff, as well as students and graduates, in separate discussions and consulted additional documentation as well as student work. The resources were assessed by a virtual live tour through the premises, studios and facilities. The experts had the opportunity to guide the tour with questions. The visit concluded by the presentation of the preliminary findings of the group of experts to Ajman University's representatives.

The report writing

After the site visit had taken place, the expert group drafted the following report, assessing the fulfilment of the AQAS criteria for the programme accreditation. The report included a recommendation to the Standing Commission. The report was sent to Ajman University for comments.

The decision

The report, together with the comments of the department, forms the basis for the AQAS Standing Commission to decide regarding the accreditation of the programme. Based on these two documents, on 7 December 2020 the AQAS' Commission took its decision on the accreditation. AQAS forwarded the decision to the university. The university had the right to appeal against the decision or any of the imposed conditions.

In January 2021, AQAS published the report and the result of the accreditation as well as the names of the panel of experts.

III. General Information on the University

Ajman University (AU) was founded in 1988 as the first private university in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the first higher education institution to accept expatriate students. As the SER describes, since

then Ajman University has continued its growth by expanding programmes, diversifying the student population and faculty, strengthening ties with the community, improving positioning on the global map of higher education, and fostering a culture of shared governance, assessment and continuous quality enhancement.

Presently, AU has nine degree-conferring colleges that offer 24 undergraduate and 13 graduate programmes. Its Faculty members come from more than 37 different countries, and a student body hails from more than 72 countries. According to QS World University Rankings (QSWUR 2020), Ajman University ranks in the range of 751-800 worldwide. It also ranks 4th globally for international faculty and 6th for international students. In the Spring semester of 2019-2020, the total number of registered students at AU is 6,471. AU has around 37,000 alumni, from 101 countries,

The Bachelor of Arts in Media program at the College of Mass Communication was launched in the second semester of the academic year 2008-2009. It includes four specializations: a) Printed and electronic Journalism; b) Radio and Television; c) Public Relations and Advertising; and d) Graphic Design. The College explains that it has updated the Bachelor of Arts in Media Program in the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016 in line with modern standards and good practices applied globally. The program development was based on the importance of broadening the general knowledge and cultural base of media students, as set by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the country.

The number of students enrolled in the program of the Bachelor of Art in Mass Communication in the academic year 2018-2019 is 649 students, and the total number of graduates from the program is 1070.

Beyond the programme under review The College has also obtained the local initial accreditation from the Commission for Academic Accreditation in the Ministry of Education for a graduate programme: Master of Public Relations and Corporate Communication.

IV. Assessment of the study programme

1. Quality of the Curriculum

The intended learning outcomes of the programme are defined and available in published form. They reflect both academic and labour-market requirements and are up-to-date with relation to the relevant field.

The design of the programme supports achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

The academic level of graduates corresponds to the requirements of the appropriate level of the European Qualifications Framework.

The curriculum's design is readily available and transparently formulated.

[ESG 1.2]

Description

There are four specialisations in the programme: a) Printed and electronic Journalism; b) Radio and Television; c) Public Relations and Advertising; and d) Graphic Design. Only the latter three of these specialisations are currently offered and subject to accreditation, while Printed and electronic Journalism does not currently enrol new students. The programme learning outcomes (PLO) of the BA in Mass Communication programme have been formulated in alignment with the Emirates Qualification Framework (QF-Emirates) as follows:

After successfully completing this program, the graduate will be able to:

Knowledge:

- PLO1: Explain the basic concepts and principles in the various media disciplines he has studied.
- PLO2: Compare scientific knowledge with common theoretical backgrounds.
- PLO3: Link the knowledge gained and recent trends in preparing various media materials.
- PLO4: Learn about the elements, applications and strategies of innovative thinking.

Skills:

- PLO5: employ analytical and practical skills in preparing, designing and producing media materials.
- PLO6: Evaluate methods used for addressing media issues.
- PLO7: compare regional and international organizations and assesses their roles in the regional and international spheres.

Efficiencies:

a- Independence and responsibility:

- PLO8: Adhere to ethical standards and professional regulations in practicing media professions.
- PLO9: Define the legal and constitutional aspects that regulate human rights principles.

b- The role in the context:

- PLO10: Contribute positively to the accomplishment of media projects elaborately within the media work teams.
- PLO11: Assume responsibility in leading the group and making innovative decisions, to address different professional situations.
- PLO12: Gain knowledge associated with new social phenomena and how to deal with them.

c- Self-development:

- PLO13: Prepare and produce different media materials effectively within a team.
- PLO14: Make self-evaluations and assess her/his media practices, acquires new skills and develops them.
- PLO15: Assess media practices used across traditional and new media.

An alignment table is used to link the PLO to the outcomes of the individual courses. The programme consists of 126 credits, 24 credits of them are general education courses that are common with other study programmes. Exclusive to the programme are 45 credits of Support Courses, 18 credits of department courses, and 33 credits of Major courses which differ depending on specialisation. Six credits can be selected from free courses.

The first year includes mainly common courses for all specialisations such as "Introduction to print and electronic journalism", "Multimedia", "Principles of Economics" and "Introduction to Advertising". The second and third year include mainly compulsory courses in the selected field of specialisation while also addressing "Human rights in the modern era" and "critical and innovative thinking". The last year includes "Media Laws & Ethics", "Communication Theories", "Research Methods and Technologies" a Training course and the graduation project.

Experts' Evaluation

The Bachelor programme with its three specialisations is a well-organised, versatile programme which prepares the students for the different tasks in the broad field of mass communication. The programme has defined intended learning outcomes which are allocated to the curricular structure, so the desired qualifications are transparently described. The experts positively conclude that the intended learning outcomes correspond to level 6 of the European Qualifications Framework. Due to the nature of the programme with specializations, the programme intended learning outcomes apply to all three specializations and the experts follow this logic argumentation, but when further developing the programme in the future, it might be wise to consider taking the specifics for each specialization and define out of these specializations a set out joint and broad intended learning outcomes which are applicable to all specializations that at the same time still reflect a specific mass communication character of an academic programme.

The programme's elements are well documented differentiating between compulsory and mandatory courses in the curriculum. Credits are assigned to every course which creates comparability in terms of workload and contact hours. Beginning with a short theoretical foundation, the students get to learn more about how to handle concrete issues of TV and Radio, public relations and graphic design. The approach that the department pursues with the programme is a practical-oriented programme which trains students in the applicable skills in the specific area of Mass Communication. Practical skills are fostered by an internship which is usually carried out by well-known regional companies, is a plus for students and clearly highlighted by the panel of experts. Eventually, it might be wise to extend the internship even more, to add additional experience on the practical skills of students and allow them to also take more complex learning tasks during the internship. Also, the graduation project includes a media project which is in general commended by the panel of experts and by the labour market because of its value to students. The achievement of the intended learning outcomes on programme level is demonstrated by the graduation project corresponding with the respective EQF level. However, besides the well-established development of applicable skills, the theoretical and scientific foundation of Mass Communication, including an emphasis on academic writing and scientific methodology is not yet visible enough and requires further development. It must be increased in its implementation in the curriculum as well as in the final project (**Finding 1**). The experts believe that this will also support the strategic intention of Ajman University to strengthen research.

Initially, the programme offered four specialisations, but the specialisation in journalism is currently frozen due to a low demand of students. Therefore, an essential component of Mass Communication is currently paused. At the same time the experts believe that fundamental skills like critical thinking, objective observation and critical questioning – courses typically reflected in the more journalistic specializations – cannot be ignored in any specialization offered under Mass Communication. The department explained that they indirectly try to include these aspects in the other specializations. The panel of experts does not only support this intention, but is convinced that skills such as objective observation, critical questioning or analytical thinking are important skills in any academically founded Mass Communication programmes and undoubtedly helpful for a career in the media. Consequently, the College will need to assure a more explicit development of these skills in all specializations. (**Finding 2**).

The curricular structure of the three specialisations starts with common general and introductory courses which are followed by more specialised courses in the respective specialisation, which supports the progression of students and is the result of a required balance within the specializations in the College. The offered specialisations cover very different branches in the vast field of Mass Communication. Although the curricular structure includes courses for each specialization on an introductory level and while respecting AU's decision to offer

one programme with three specializations, when considering the theoretical foundations of the different specializations it became clear that clear-cut specialization specific courses that focus on the theoretical basis should be implemented for each specialization. This will be required to justify the academic independence of the three specializations in terms of achievement. A deeper fundamental understanding of a variety of theoretical concepts will also help the College to strengthen the profile for each specialization. Potentially, this might be a good opportunity to create flexibility within the curriculum for each specialization while lowering courses which are focusing more on a broader understanding of Mass Communication, e.g. design courses within the Public Relations & advertising specialization. In consequence, not ignoring that the curricular structure includes courses for each specialization on an introductory level, a fundamental understanding of a variety of theoretical concepts of the respective specializations is required and will also help the College to strengthen the profile for each specialization (**Finding 3**).

The experts also recognize the positioning of Graphic Design as a specialization of Mass Communication. Comparing this situation to many European Higher Education Institutions, this might be relatively rare to be seen. However, the experts believe that AU can use this situation as a Unique Selling Point for the programmes by creating a situation of a joint approach of all three specialisations towards Mass Communication. This strategic positioning of the specialization can be very beneficial from the experts' perspective, as it allows to integrate practical aspects of Graphic Design with a clear focus on Mass Communication. The experts believe that this synergetic potential is yet not fully used and suggest that the reflection of the Mass Communication approach in Graphic Design should be subject to further strategic dialogue within the College (**Finding 4**).

The three specializations are taught in Arabic language which is a strategic decision of the college and – to a certain extend – also a benefit regarding student acquisition as the many comparable programmes give priority to English language. Also, the media market in the gulf region clearly has a need also in Arabic Language graduates. At this time, when beginning their studies, it is required that students have an intermediate level of English while the use of English language in the curriculum is a minor one. At the same time, it became obvious that the University is striving for internationalisation. The panel of experts could already see that first efforts were made by inviting international guest lecturers which is highly appreciated by the experts. The panel of experts encourages the College to implement more courses in English language for two reasons: On the one hand graduates will have improved career opportunities (as the interview with the employers confirmed), on the other hand the College will become more attractive to international students (coming from non-Arabic speaking countries). Keeping the character of a programme offered in Arabic language and aiming at qualifying graduates for the future needs of the market will be easier with a defined share of English taught classes.

Considering the well-established and well thought curricular lines that develop applied skills the experts support the broad picture of the curriculum. Additionally, the ability to work and operate on different platforms and producing content as audio, video or text and photos is a searched quality in the labour market, and young professionals should be able to create cross-media-content. Working cross-media and identifying how to respond to this trend is one of the most discussed questions of nowadays media institutions. In this light, it is recommendable for the study programme leaders to reflect on the question how to consider these trends in the curriculum and make them relevant to all specialisations, e.g. by implementing cross-media teams in the final year or by merging courses in the first years and create cross-media courses (**Finding 5**).

Other trending topics which will define Mass Communication in the nearer future are the issues of social media and the emerging media markets. By addressing questions focussing on new trends in media and the development in the media market, the study programme can foster their ability to discuss next generation's Mass Communication. In consequence, these topics should get more room within the curricular structure (**Finding 6**).

Conclusion

The panel of experts concludes that this criterion is partially fulfilled. Special attention needs to be paid to the academic-theoretical perspective of the study programme in order to fully achieve the academic dimension of the qualification defined for a Bachelor. At the same time the experts want to emphasise the well implemented focus on applicable skills which is highly valued by the national, regional, and local labour market.

2. Procedures for Quality Assurance

The programme is subject to the higher education institution’s policy and associated procedures for quality assurance, including procedures for the design, approval, monitoring, and revision of the programmes. A quality-oriented culture, focusing on continuous quality enhancement, is in place. This includes regular feedback mechanisms involving both internal and external stakeholders. The strategy, policies, and procedures have a formal status and are made available in published form to all those concerned. They also include roles for students and other stakeholders. Data is collected from relevant sources and stakeholders, analysed, and used for the effective management and continuous enhancement of the programme.
 [ESG 1.1, 1.7 & 1.9]

Description

The programme is subject to a quality assurance system that is centrally designed and the same of all AU programmes. The quality assurance for teaching and learning follows an assessment cycle that begins at programme level. For each program, the Assessment and Continuous Improvement Committee (ACIC) is responsible for carrying out the assessment, suggesting improvement actions, monitoring the implementation of suggested actions, and ensuring continuous improvement. The College Effectiveness Committee (CEC) is a higher-level committee that will review the documents prepared by ACICs and write reports about the effectiveness of each program and determine if the college goals are being achieved. The CEC shall submit its reports to the College Dean for review and approval.

The different processes are as follows:

No.	Assessment Type	Frequency	Assessment Instrument(s)	Responsibility
1	Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)	Every Semester	Written Examinations; Lab or Clinical Examinations; Computer Simulations; Course Projects; Oral Presentations; Research Reports; Case Studies; Assignments, etc.	Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Coordinator and Assessment and Continuous Improvement Committee (ACIC)
2	Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Every Academic Year	Results of assessment of CLOs for selected courses or rubrics-based assessment of Performance Indicators (PIs)	IE Coordinator and ACIC
3	Alumni Survey	Every Three Years	Alumni Survey Form	ACIC



No.	Assessment Type	Frequency	Assessment Instrument(s)	Responsibility
4	Employer Survey	Every Three Years	Employer Survey Form	ACIC
5	Exit Survey	Every Academic Year	Exit Survey Form	ACIC
6	Exit Interviews	Every Academic Year	Face-to-Face Meeting	Head of Department and IE Coordinator

AU uses a central unit to monitor career placement and development of graduates of all study programmes. The Office of Career and Placement is the responsible body in this regard. Moreover, the alumni survey also provides valuable information about program satisfaction, students' career preparedness, knowledge and skills necessary for the job market.

Furthermore, a KPI system is used to constantly monitor and compare factors such as student progression and succession rates, employability of graduates, effectiveness of the teachers, profile of the student body, and available learning resources.

Experts' Evaluation

There are standardized quality measures installed and implemented. All responsibilities are well defined which leads to well-established system for the study programme. During the online site visit it became evident that results of the evaluations on programme and on course level are being reported. The University uses a quality assurance manual which outlines all instruments when following the programme. Each year, the programme is subject to a college effectiveness report which includes evaluations on programme level, and which is the basis for the further development of the programme (including enrolment numbers of students, differentiating between male and female students). In addition, a strength and weakness analysis is done to detect shortcomings of the programme. Furthermore, based on the discussions during the virtual site visit, the experts can confirm that there is active dialogue so that students' opinions are considered in case of any room for improvement of the programme.

The data collection for the study programme is holistic and enables AU to provide up-to-date data for the study programme. Based on the information provided in the numerous annexes to the SER, the experts conclude that the relevant information on the study programme is available to students and is regularly updated. The interaction with the labour market and the integration of their feedback is established and considered when adjusting the programme. Based on this evidence, the experts conclude that the university follows closely the implementation of its mission statement and the core values of AU. It became evident that social responsibility is of importance to the study programme promoting community engagement and considering the challenges and needs of the society. Striving towards international quality standards is clearly visible and might lead to innovation considering multiple dimensions of current issues. Especially in Mass Communication, integrity and inclusiveness plays a major role on the global scale. First steps of internationalization are clearly visible and will support AU's vision also within the College of Mass Communication.

Conclusion

The panel of experts can testify well-established procedures for quality assurance, which are defined on university level and apply to the study programme. The data management for the study programme is up-to-date and all stakeholders can easily inform themselves about the study programme. The criterion is fulfilled.

3. Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Students

*The delivery of material encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.
Students are assessed using accessible criteria, regulations, and procedures, which are made readily available to all participants and which are applied consistently.
Assessment procedures are designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.
[ESG 1.3]*

Description

The course descriptions of the programme contain teaching strategies and methods used by the faculty member in delivering the content and communicating it to students in an effective way that is described to leading to achieving its outcomes. This takes into account the difference between the theoretical and practical aspects and the methods used in teaching each of them; through the e-learning system (Moodle), panel discussions, interactive presentations, field visits, brainstorming, case studies, practical applications, reciprocal education, problem solving, collaborative education and others.

AU has established the Student Success Centre (SSC), which offer a variety of student-centered services to support teaching activities. One of the SSC strategies is the Peer tutoring Student-to-student that reflects a student-oriented learning approach. Students' peer learning and reciprocal education are most prevalent methods used in teaching in the programme.

Tests and examinations are used to assess the achievement of intended outcomes. As the SER explains, the idea is to quantify and measure the students' gain of specific knowledge and skills in relation to the course outcomes. The selection of examination types depends on the particular course nature; the concerned department specifies a variety of assessments. These include Written Examinations, Lab or Clinical Examinations, Computer Simulations, Course Projects, Oral Presentations, Research Reports, Case Studies, Assignments, etc.

A central committee at the institutional level is responsible for monitoring and organizing the examination process. At the programme level, the college has its examinations committee, which works in coordination with the AU central committee. The college committee is responsible for the organisation of the exams, in terms of timing, violations, locations, and all necessary information. The college announces proposed examination dates to all students one month before the first exam date for two weeks. Attendance at the final examinations is compulsory. Failure to attend will result in the student failing the course. However, if a student does not attend the final examination due to an emergency and he/she scored at least a total mark of 30 out of 70 in coursework (tests and midterm examination) the course may be considered as "incomplete". A re-sit exam allows students to re-take the final exam of a course in which the grade "F" is obtained in their last semester before graduation.

Experts' Evaluation

Based on the intended learning outcomes on programme level, the college has defined intended learning outcomes on course level which are described in the course descriptions. Documents indicating the clear link between intended learning outcomes on programme and on course link were presented and from the experts point of view are well established. In fact, AU uses a computer programme called CAP to analyse the mapping between the ILOs. The panel of experts testify this tool as important, useful and important for the development of the study programme and to preserve the academic quality of the study programme.

In general, the course descriptions indicate the teaching methods for the respective course. Nonetheless, the course descriptions enlist all possible teaching methods (lectures, performance files, group assignments, presentation, seminars, projects, exercises, and e-learning). A good example for this can be seen at some introductory courses, which, according the current descriptions will be imparted as a project instead of a theoretical course. To a certain extent this contradicts the reality of the programme and needs to be adjusted according to the nature of the course (theoretical, practical or theory-practical) as outlined below (**see Chapter IV.6**).

Furthermore, the discussion during the site visit shed light on the highly motivated teaching staff who encourages the students to participate actively in the learning process. This great interest in students and their progression is very appreciated by the students, valuable and also really appreciated by the experts. In case of any problems, the quality assurance procedures assured that the students' opinion is considered adequately. Furthermore, it was confirmed by the labour market and also by graduates that after the completion of the study programme knowledge and skills could be easily put into practice which reflects the needs of the labour market for the study programme in the Gulf region adequately. In fact, some of the current teaching staff are graduates coming from AU which is appreciated by the experts. Consequently the experts conclude that the College manages well to implement its teaching in a way that it activates the students toward their own skill development and through the applied character of the programme students play an active part in the learning process.

Concerning the assessment methods, AU has clearly defined policies and procedures (including a student's appeals procedures and a compensating policy for students in special circumstances), which are applied university wide. The students are well informed about the content of the courses, the teaching, and examination modalities. Despite this, it became clear that AU in the implementation phase of policies and procedures manual including a reference to the diversification of teaching and assessment methods, which the experts clearly see as an important signal. Currently, the study programme still uses a standardized assessment method for all courses regardless the course type. These methods cover a test, a presentation, an assignment, quizzes, the mid-term test, and the final exam, which familiarises student with a broad spectrum of examination types. However, in cases of practical courses, it might be the case that this standardized method is not always the best way to assess students appropriately. Recognizing the high level of centralized regulations regarding student assessment, on the long run the College might consider reviewing the assessment for any room of flexibilization to enable the assessment methods to even better reflect the nature of the courses.

The final project within the study programme is of utmost importance as the final reflection of the achievement of a student in the study programme. While respecting the applied approach within the study programme, which is very valuable and accepted by the labour market, the academic-theoretical discourse that is also outlined to be an achievement of the programme is not yet well reflected in the final project. Consequently, the demonstration of achievement is very strong on the applied side, while its clearly weaker on the academic

side. In order to fully comply with the self-defined standard, some adjustment will be required. Without limiting the flexibility of the College to address this need for development, the panel of experts believe that one way to integrate this might be by combining the practical part of the graduation project with a scientific reflection of the work (**Finding 7**).

The experts have been provided with data concerning the courses (e.g. grading scales, distribution of grades), which already indicate that the college collects data on a regular basis. Based on the good discussions during the site visit, only some data could be discussed in-depth. The panel of experts appreciate these fruitful discussions concerning the data and would have wished to deepen these discussions to gain an even broader overview of the study programme's work over an extended period of time. At this time the panel believes that supervision of grading and assessment results happen in a well balanced approach and encourage the College to continue with this practice.

Conclusion

The College has well defined policies concerning the learning, teaching and assessment of students. The further developments of these policies which will lead to further redefinitions of the existing methods indicate an active engagement and a development-oriented culture on this matter. However, the experts believe that the academic reflection of the practical final projects has to be implemented in the graduation project. This will strengthen the position of the study programme for the future. Thus, this criterion is partially fulfilled.

4. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

Consistently applied, pre-defined, and published regulations are in place which cover student admission, progression, recognition, and certification.
[ESG 1.4]

Description

Admittance to the study programme

Requirements for admission to programmes at AAU are a secondary school certificate with a grade average of no less than 60 %, a proof of English language proficiency (such as 450 points in TOEFL or a score of 3,5 ITP). Applications for admission should be submitted online at apply.ajman.ac.ae or to the Office of Admissions and Registration prior to the beginning of each semester. The average applicants for one study place in the programme is 1:1, however, there is no fixed average since all applicants receive admission in the programme, provided that they meet the admission mentioned requirements and submit the necessary documents. Consequently, there is no selection procedure for the study programme.

Progression and Recognition

Each student's progress is monitored through particular forms maintained in the department. The Department Council will discuss the progress of students on probation in each of its regular meetings. The SER also explains that progress reports are sent to the Dean. The mobility of students is supported, structured and published. Students may transfer from one program to another within the University. Students from accredited institutions of higher education may apply for admission in an AU program in the same field of study if they have been of good academic standing. As described in the SER, AU recognises periods of studies and prior learning. A policy has been recently developed with this regard and has already been announced to all students

in the programme. The department explains in the documentation that the new policy will be applied in the forthcoming semesters.

Certification

The awarded degree to the graduates of the programme is “Bachelor of Art in Mass Communication” in the graduate’s concentration. Upon completion of the study programme, every student receives the following documents that reflect the qualifications achieved: Graduation Certificate, Academic Transcript, Degree Certificate. Samples of these documents are available as part of the annexes of the SER.

Experts’ Evaluation

The College has a well-established and transparent admission procedure in place. Students are informed about the requirements to enter a study programme. Manuals, policies, and procedures are formulated in a comprehensive way which makes the administrative task for the University easier. The study programme itself has currently relatively low enrolment numbers why a selection procedure for students is not necessary. The quality management system in place follows the development of student numbers closely, which enables the department to implement selection procedures quickly if needed.

As outlined above, students must have an intermediate level in English when enrolling for the programme. On the longer development process, this might be a subject of further consideration to strengthen the international orientation of Mass Communication, although the programme aims primarily for the market in the Gulf region. As a side effect, this might be a sensible step towards internationalisation of students because the possibility to invite guest lecturers, students from non-Arabic speaking countries and, even more important, students’ mobility in English speaking countries would increase. This is supported by first cooperations with international higher education institutions. The experts learned that graduates receive a certificate outlining the specialisation that they have studied and a transcript outlining the courses that he/she took during their studies.

Conclusion

This criterion is fulfilled. The study programme adheres closely to the well-established admission structures on university level. The relevant documentation is transparently described, and students are well informed about the admission procedures for the programme. First steps towards internationalisation are clearly visible and are covered by the recognition procedures at the University.

5. Teaching Staff

The composition (quantity, qualifications, professional and international experience, etc.) of the staff is appropriate for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Staff involved with teaching is qualified and competent to do so.

Transparent procedures are in place for the recruitment and development of staff.

[ESG 1.5]

Description

The department differentiates four types of staff involved in the teaching process. A) 21 Teaching Staff: Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors and Lecturers in full time and part-time; B) 3 Teaching Assistants in full time and part-time; C) 3 Administrative Staff in full time and part-time; and D) 5 Technicians in full time and part-time. Table with names and the level of involvement is available in the SER, and the CVs

are part of the annexes. The SER also explains that typically the expiry of contracts is by the end of the academic year; however, if contracts expire in the accreditation period a new filling of the position is intended as per AU policies.

All part-time staff are PhD holders; there are no part-time lecturers involved. However, Part-time/Adjunct faculty members with ranks of Professor, Associate Professor, and Assistant Professor teach courses that are beyond remedial or readiness levels. Their employment is subject to the same requirements of professional competence and experience as their full-time counterparts. Furthermore, their employment is for specified courses and for a specific semester and is not a continuing appointment.

The policy for staff development and qualification is defined and published to all staff in the AU Policies and Procedures Manual 2019-2020, and Faculty manual 2019-2020. Faculty members applying for promotion will be evaluated on the basis of the following: Teaching, Research and Service.

Experts' Evaluation

Based on the evidence given during the site visit, it can be concluded that the teaching staff is essentially diverse and cover a right mix of experienced lecturers and younger colleagues who have just recently joined the programme. Furthermore, the programme comprises of a well-balanced number of men and female teachers in the programme which are all very motivated committed and engaged in the programme. Concerning the three specialisations, the teaching staff is generally evenly distributed. The teaching body comprises of 21 teaching staff members and five full-time technicians, which also supports the applied-oriented character of the programme. Based on the impressions gained during the site visit, the teaching staff is qualified to achieve the defined learning outcomes for the programme.

The internationalisation efforts of AU become already evident since cooperation with universities in the United Kingdom or Germany have started, and international guest lecturers were invited to conferences in the past. Especially for a programme which targets more on the labour market in the Gulf region (having in mind that the programme is in Arabic) these internationalisation steps are very fruitful. The panel of experts encourages the University that these first visible impacts of internationalisation efforts should be extended and intensified with a particular focus on Mass Communication, by, e.g. inviting guest lecturers or establishing programme-specific cooperation.

The recruitment procedures for staff are transparently described, and the workload of staff is precisely outlined, which is especially important because it harmonises the academic and organisational tasks of teaching staff, e.g. support of students. The quality of processes is on a high-level and can easily compare with international standards. Tenders are publicly available, and expectation to new staff is described clearly. Being in line with the University's future priority to strengthen research, applicants must demonstrate teaching and practical experience as well as research results. The selection of applicants is made by selection committees respecting gender, professionalism, personnel development or international background. Another important aspect is that great importance is attached to recruiting alumni for the teaching staff, as well, because they have internalised the values and ideals of the University. Senior management stressed that all its faculty members maintain the highest standards of ethics and academic integrity.

Students' feedback confirmed that the teaching body is responsive, flexible and highly qualified in the respective specialisation. The feedback indicated a high grade of satisfaction within the teaching body of the programme. The University supports the further qualifications of staff and is encouraged to continue to do so, in order to keep the teaching staff updated with the rapidly changing areas of Mass Communication, e.g. new

trends such as social media or constructive journalism. Furthermore, and in line with one of the core values of the University, it should be considered to integrate topics beyond Mass Communication concerning societal changes or social challenges. There are well-documented processes to maintain a high teaching quality, and workshops are regularly offered to staff.

The curriculum and selected teaching examples show that the lecturers are intensively engaged in teaching methods, learning methodologies and e-learning. This is enabled by the excellent technical equipment – e.g. computer rooms and live television studios. A special focus is also given to teamwork and the practical application. Potentially, this spirit could be used when considering cross-media courses (see Finding 4).

Conclusion

The teaching staff for the programme consists of well-qualified personnel that covers the respective specialisations adequately. AU has transparent recruitment procedures in place which are of a high standard. The continuous offer for teaching staff to develop further indicates a high priority for this on university level. The criterion is fulfilled.

6. Learning Resources and Student Support

*Appropriate facilities and resources are available for learning and teaching activities.
Guidance and support is available for students which includes advice on achieving a successful completion of their studies.
[ESG 1.6]*

Description

The study programme is mainly financed through tuition fees. Tuition and registration fees of the University are recognised based on the year of semesters and the date of registration. Tuition fees received in advance during the previous year are recorded as income in the current year (accrual basis). Tuition fees received in advance are refunded to students who withdraw from the University during the semesters following the University's internal policies. Tuition fees in all the colleges and programs are determined following the credit hours system.

AU is a campus university with different buildings. There are two Multimedia Labs for students: one for female students and one for male students. Each lab contains 25 PCs, all of which are supported with the required software for the programme. Furthermore, there are two Mac-Labs for students: one for female students and one for male students. Each lab contains 25 Apple Mackintosh, all of which are supported with the required software for the programme.

Additionally, there are two Digital photography studios and Radio and Television Studios. A drawing room is established for students of graphic design. It is used to make students aware of the material and tools, and with the different ways of drawing through practising different ways of simulation for different items and by different materials using pencils.

The SER explains that all relevant information about the study programme is publicly available to students through the AU website. Current and prospecting students can access documents such as Student Handbook, Undergraduate Catalogue and Graduate Student Catalogue. These documents are supposed to provide comprehensive information to students about all offered programmes.

AU gives special attention and assistance to new students to ease the transition between life at high-school and the University. For this purpose, a particular programme has been designed and run several times throughout the academic year at the department level to familiarise students with the curricula, facilities, department activities, future opportunities. Departments are required to engage the Deanship of Student Services (DSS) in at least one of these activities in order to provide students with more focused details about student life, clubs, student counselling, career and other services. Senior students trained by the DSS may as well be engaged as advisers on non-academic issues.

The College has assigned a coordinator who is responsible for supervising all related issue to the academic advising. Moreover, each faculty staff member, full time and part-time offers regular consultation hours and are available to students.

Experts' Evaluation

The panel acknowledges that course descriptions which include all required information are part of the extensive documentation that is provided to the students by Ajman University. In light of the need of an up-to-date documentation – particularly focussing on the course descriptions - the experts recognized that in some cases the teaching reality apparently developed quicker than the documentation in the descriptions. Consequently, the course descriptions need to be updated (**Finding 8**). On the one hand, this concerns matters of content such as the inclusion of social media in the curriculum. Following information from the interviews with teachers as well as students, it became clear that the topic of social media is part of several courses while it received only very few mentions in the course catalogue. (**Finding 8a**). A similar trend could be observed for assessment and teaching methods which – according to the course catalogue – are the same in almost every course. In reality, however, these methods were more diverse than documented in the course descriptions; for instance, they included field trips or specific practical examinations that were not specified (**Finding 8b**). The panel, therefore, sees the need for the course descriptions to be updated to ensure the required transparency and to allow students to better understand what to expect.

Concerning the learning resources available to students, the panel is deeply impressed by what Ajman University offers its students. During the virtual tour, the panel could find no shortcomings. The University has the equipment and technology to convey their students the required skills by using up-to-date hard- and software. The library is equipped with non-digital as well as predominantly digital resources, including databases, to stimulate student learning and research. Even more important, students are also able to access the software and literature from home, which is especially but not exclusively relevant in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Altogether, the University's facilities and resources provide for an excellent learning environment.

The panel further noted positively the range of students support services offered by AU. While there are institutionalised student advisory services available, students have particularly highlighted the role of the teaching staff and academic advisors whom they described as supportive and approachable. Moreover, students that are looking for internships and job opportunities as well as graduates that are seeking employment receive support through the University and its career services. This has already resulted in successful internships as well as job placements. The panel also inquired about the support for students with disabilities. They are not only eligible for reduced fees but also profit from accessible facilities with ramps and elevators.

Lastly, the panel would like to note positively some of the measures that Ajman University has taken as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Amongst others, the University established a test centre where students and staff are tested bi-weekly so that some of the courses can be done on-site. What is more, the University actively collected donations, both financial and in the form of physical resources, to aid students that are significantly affected by the crisis.

Conclusion

The panel of experts has found the learning resources and support services for students offered by Ajman University and the College of Mass Communication to be excellent. Nevertheless, it notes a shortcoming with regards to the course catalogue which needs to be updated as to reflect the reality of the curriculum as well as teaching and examination methods. Therefore, the criterion is partly fulfilled.

7. Public Information

Impartial and objective, up-to-date information regarding the programme and its qualifications is published regularly. This published information is appropriate for and available to relevant stakeholders.
[ESG 1.8]

Description

Handbooks are used to convey the official statements of rules and regulations, and before being published, they are reviewed periodically to ensure their validity and accuracy. The OIPE edits any changes or updates and forwards the catalogues and handbooks to the Office of Marketing and Communication to be made available in both print and electronic publications (AU website), to students, faculty and staff.

Those documents include comprehensive information to stakeholders about, the programmes, intended learning outcomes (including course descriptions/module descriptions), admission requirements and selection procedure, qualification awarded, and teaching, learning and assessment procedures.

The SER explains that expectations from different stakeholders are reflected in the available information, through advisory board meetings, feedback from employers, feedback from students, alumni. Each college/office is required to periodically review and determine whether any of its policies and procedures require revision, replacement, or suspension. The policy owner prepares the first draft for the new policy or suggested revisions in an existing policy, based on an inclusive process including feedback from various stakeholders, and forwards it to the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE) and the University's legal advisor for their review.

Experts' Evaluation

The panel found that a vast amount of relevant information is publicly available to all relevant stakeholders. This includes information on the programmes, intended learning outcomes, admission requirements, the selection procedure, the qualification awarded as well as teaching, learning and assessment procedures. As noted above (**see Finding 8**), the documentation of the courses in the course catalogue needs to be updated. Other than that, the panel views the information that was provided to be accurate as it is often scrutinised by several bodies and/or people responsible. The final products are published in an appropriate format for and accessible to the relevant stakeholders.

Conclusion

As all relevant information is collected and publicly made available to the relevant stakeholders, this criterion is fulfilled.

V. Recommendations of the panel of experts

The panel of experts recommends *to accredit with conditions* the study programme “**Mass Communication**” with three specializations offered by **Ajman University (United Arab Emirates)**.

Findings:

1. The academic character of the programme requires further development. Besides the well-established development of applicable skills, the theoretical and scientific foundation of Mass Communication must be increased.
2. Important skills of Mass Communication such as objective observation, critical questioning or analytical thinking require a more explicit representation and development in all three specializations.
3. Clear-cut specialization-specific courses considering the theoretical concepts for the respective specialization need to be implemented in order to broaden the academic understanding of students.
4. Further strategic dialogue on the role of graphic design within Mass Communication and possible contributions within the College is encouraged.
5. The ability to work cross medial should be fostered, e.g. by implementing joint cross-media courses for all specializations.
6. Topics on new developments in Mass Communication, such as Social Media should be integrated in the curriculum.
7. To demonstrate the achievement of all learning outcomes, the final project must also reflect the academic-theoretical discourse of the programme e.g. by combining the practical part with a scientific reflection of the work.
8. The course descriptions need to be updated to better reflect the contents of the programme. A special focus must be paid to:
 - a. Where applicable, social media-content in the courses need be outlined transparently in the course descriptions.
 - b. A clear definition of assessment and teaching methods reflecting only the relevant methods with the implemented diversity.