IN SEARCH OF A PROGRAMME REVIEW FRAMEWORK FOR A POLYTECHNIC IN BAHRAIN: THE EXPERIENCE OF A BAHRAINI QUALITY COORDINATOR

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CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate

05 June 2015

Date

ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisors

2/7/15

Date

ABSTRACT

Across the Middle East and North Africa region the quality of education has been highlighted as an issue of concern by the World Bank, in particular the less than positive impact on economic development. Also, it has been found that improvement initiatives often fail if they are transferred from the Western world without the consideration of local and cultural aspects. This research reports on a process used to address the non-contextualised improvement models that so often fail to enhance quality outcomes for students.

The focus of this study is on a polytechnic that commenced its operation in Bahrain in 2008. The purpose of this research is to provide a coherent, meaningful and contextually appropriate programme review framework to replace a generalised one that was inherited from overseas at the institution's inception. This study's value lies in its ability to identify principles, standards and a process that have the potential to stimulate change in both the attitudes and behaviour of the people who have an involvement, or should have an involvement, in framework-associated aspects of quality management, assurance and improvement.

A qualitative interpretivist case study method was adopted. The qualitative data included documents, observations, formal interviews, discussion groups, and dialogue with both internal and external quality experts. Analysis and synthesis of the data has been informed by a comprehensive review of relevant literature, thematic coding, and ongoing reflections of the researcher during the developmental process. The dual positions of the writer as researcher and employee of the organisation is acknowledged in the development of the contextualised framework.

A key finding of the research is that the appropriateness of the process of implementation is crucial in bringing about change. The reliance on a hierarchically imposed quality system, with the expectation that commitment will cascade naturally and predictably from the top to the bottom, is problematic and inappropriate to the context of the polytechnic. Rather, there are needs for ongoing dialogue among internal and external stakeholders and to find pockets of enthusiasm within the organisation that are exemplars of quality accountability and improvement and to use this expertise to support the widening and deepening of such pockets. The intention is to have organisational units and individuals own a quality review framework, and a quality system overall, instead of seeing it as something that is imposed, and treated as no more than a matter of begrudging compliance.

The implications are particularly significant in the context of higher education in the Middle East, where most improvement initiatives have been focused on transferring ready-made frameworks from the 'West' rather than a contextually relevant framework to sustain improvement.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the content of this dissertation has not been previously submitted for any degree and it is not currently being submitted for any other degree. I also certify that to the best of my knowledge any assistance received in preparing this dissertation and all sources used have been acknowledged accordingly.

Jameel Hasan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following table provides the extended form of various abbreviations and acronyms used throughout the dissertation.

Abbreviation	Extended Form
ANQAHE	Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
APR	Annual Programme Review
AQAC	Academic Quality Assurance Committee
ASQ	American Society for Quality
AUT	Auckland University of Technology
BOT	Board of Trustees
CAC	Curriculum Advisory Committee
CAP	Certificate in Academic Preparation
EDB	Economic Development Board
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ELLI	Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory
FB	Faculty Board
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council (the member states being Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates)
HEC	Higher Education Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NCAAA	National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PAD	Programme Approval Document
PBL	Problem-based Learning
PC	Programme Committee
QAA	The United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAAET	Bahrain's Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training
QMS	Quality Management System
SMT	Senior Management Team
TQM	Total Quality Management
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research Problem

This case study explores the institution-wide initiative to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic (a pseudonym), a higher education institution that provides technical and applied professional education. The institution is in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which is a small island in the Arabian Gulf.

Across the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region the quality of education has been highlighted as an issue of concern because of its less-than-positive impact on economic development (World Bank, 2008). Improvement initiatives in the Middle East often fail if they are transferred from the Western world without consideration of local and cultural aspects (Idrus, 2010). Programme review is a difficult process and necessarily contextualised; it is also considered "an important tool for ensuring quality teaching and learning" (Bornman, 2004, p. 372). The implications of this may be particularly significant in the context of higher education in the Middle East, where most improvement initiatives have focused on transferring ready-made frameworks from overseas rather than undertaking investigations into ways of developing a programme review framework to sustain improvement.

In 2008 Arabian Gulf Polytechnic adopted a review template from the host institution of an expatriate colleague. However, this was not effective in providing quality feedback that could be used for improving the learning experiences of students. There was little buy-in to the process, as it was not contextualised to the local requirements and culture – 'the way of doing things' in Bahrain. Through a case study of the polytechnic, this research investigates the most appropriate review framework that will be sustainable in the local context.

1.2 Overview of the Literature

Exploration of the literature indicates that quality has been a focal point of effective performance in industry over the past 50 years (American Society for Quality, 2013) and has taken a similar position in education over the last 20 (Harvey & Williams, 2010a and 2010b). In industry, quality has been given credit for improved products and services, in terms of satisfying the needs and wants of customers, as well as improved processes, in terms of the efficiency with which the products and services are assembled and delivered (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2013). In education, there have been attempts to replicate the perceived successes of industry by borrowing and applying definitions, principles, standards, processes and models – sometimes with reported success; other times not (Harvey & Williams, 2010a and 2010b). For example, Total Quality Management (TQM) has been seen by some as a holistic model that can significantly improve the quality assurance and management of an educational institution but by others as a system that is too hierarchical in its control, insufficiently oriented to quality improvement, and not necessarily suited to individually different outcomes that are desired from deep learning (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010).

In relation to this study – which focuses on programme review as a particular aspect of quality in education at a specific institution in the tertiary field in the Kingdom of Bahrain – it has been considered worthwhile to review the literature from industry to gauge what aspects of quality are genuinely transferable to education. The literature was then reviewed in relation to education generally, and higher education specifically, to ascertain what might be useful and relevant for a programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. This examination of the literature has required exploring various fields of quality. First, the focus was on those of industry and business, where the quality concept was initially made popular, and then in the field of education, with its more recent quality history. There was also exploration from geographical perspectives – the Arab world in general, the MENA region (being the Middle East and North Africa), the GCC countries (being those of the Gulf Cooperating Council), and finally Bahrain.

In relation to the fields of business, industry and education, and to geographical considerations, questions that were put included: How is quality defined? What principles are attributed to it? What standards are in place? What processes are seen as appropriate? How is it assured? How is it managed? How is it enriched and sustained? What frameworks and models are applied? Additionally, there was a need to consider how such aspects might be relevant to the development of a framework at a particular tertiary educational institute in Bahrain.

This width and depth of the review of the literature had an aim of not only exploring a number of case studies of relevance but also of tapping into descriptive and theoretical papers that provided definitions and models that might be appropriate in adapted form to the present study. This raised further questions such as: What points of significance can be taken from the writings of the pioneers of quality in industry such as Deming, Crosby and Juran (American Society for Quality, 2010)? What aspects of Senge's (1990) Learning Organization are relevant to the present study? What models have been developed for higher education specifically and how might they be adapted for the present study? Some writers call for a revolutionary approach to the assurance and management of quality in education (Kristensen, 2010). Others see it as essentially evolutionary (Hodgetts, Luthans, & Lee, 1994). This literature review explores in depth what might best apply to the context of the present study and particular note is taken of models that have been developed to explain quality as a vital component in an efficient and effective system (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008).

Organisational trust is revealed as a huge factor in determining the effectiveness of a quality assurance model. The evidence in recent literature changes in the way quality is conceptualised in higher education, based on a changing agenda, from accountability to learner engagement and learning (Harvey & Williams, 2010a), resulting in a shift from an institutional focus onto programmes. However, the research to date on programme review is not all positive; this suggests that a completely different model of programme review could be explored.

To avoid criticism of inappropriateness to the educational context, this study selects and critiques models and orientations of promise such as the *Baldrige Excellence Program* (2013) and *Total Quality Management* (Hodgetts, Luthans, & Lee, 1994) and seeks to adapt them, where appropriate, to its own ends. An emergent result of such analysis and adaptation is a Pockets of Enthusiasm Approach, developed by the researcher as part of the study, which does not have the same dependence on the

hierarchical management structuring of many traditional approaches and, instead, has the appeal of sustained ownership by quality practitioners.

1.3 Aim of the Study

This case study aimed to find an appropriate Programme Review Framework for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. Stemming from this aim, the specific purposes of the research have been to:

1. Develop an appropriate process that can be used to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.
2. Develop the programme review framework and its elements which include key principles, processes and standards.
3. Identify the implications for the existing system at the polytechnic that need to be considered in the implementation of the developed programme review framework.

1.4 Research Questions

Given the aims, this overarching question provided the focus for the research and summarised the research problem:

> What emerges as an appropriate framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic from a practitioner's perspective?

The following three sub-questions form a framework to support the overarching question and assist to focus the study:

1. What emerges as an appropriate process that can be used to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic?
2. What are the key principles, standards and processes for programme review that are appropriate for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's context and in line with international practice?
3. How can programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic be best implemented?

1.5 Overview of the Research Design

The orientation of this research is qualitative. Stake (2010) argues that many people who do qualitative research want to improve how things work and that empathy and advocacy are and should be part of the lifestyle of each researcher. This research took place in the context of a higher education institution, was emergent rather than prefigured, was fundamentally interpretive, and was experiential, empirical and field oriented. It used multiple data collection tools that were interactive and humanistic. In addition, the researcher adopted a holistic view, employed iterative, complex reasoning involving both induction and deduction, and systematically reflected upon who he was in the inquiry.

An important focus of the study was to learn from participants in the polytechnic setting how they had experienced the initiative to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. Therefore, the most appropriate method to undertake this research was a qualitative case study as the research focus was on contemporary as opposed to historical events and the researcher had no control over actual behavioural events (Yin, 1994). Stake (1995, p. xi) indicates that a "case

study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case". It may also be classified as intrinsic as the researcher has an interest in the case (Stake, 1995). The use of the case study method assists the researcher in investigating the programme review process in depth, within a particular context, and this has led to the creation of new knowledge (Yin, 1994). The process of this research follows Yin's (1994) four-phase approach which comprises: (1) Design the case study; (2) Conduct the case study; (3) Analyse the case study evidence; and (4) Develop the conclusions, recommendations and implications. While these phases are considered linear, they are also iterative (Yin, 2009). The case study findings and outcomes are not generalised to other institutes in Bahrain because case study research is not sampling research and a case is not studied primarily to understand other cases (Stake, 1995). Data sources included group interviews and a researcher's journal. The group interviews were used to gather the research data related to the fourth phase, that is, to assess and refine the developed framework. As a participant observer throughout the process, the researcher used a reflective journal to capture his reflections (Jones, 2002).

The researcher's formal role during the research was Quality Coordinator at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, where this case study was conducted. As the researcher was part of the investigation, the possibility of researcher bias was kept well in mind throughout the study. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) indicate that researcher bias may be subconsciously transferred to the participants in such a way that their behaviours, attitudes, or experiences are affected. As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the researcher was aware that data were mediated through him (Merriam S., 1998). He was particularly careful with his dual role of participant and researcher, knowing that his interpretive perspective in the context was shaped by his personal experience and assumptions brought to the research process (Jones, 2002).

Validation is an important key to effective research; it is a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The researcher employed a variety of strategies to establish the trustworthiness of findings. Triangulation, involving a variety of methods to obtain evidence that would assist in the development of a programme review framework for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, was a key research strategy that was employed to increase confidence in the validity of the research findings (Yin, 2009).

1.6 Ethics

In November 2011, the Research Committee at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic granted permission for the undertaking of this study. The ethics clearance application indicated clearly the nature of the study to be undertaken and how Arabian Gulf Polytechnic could benefit from the study.

Also in November 2011, an ethics clearance was granted by the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Committee to conduct this research. All conditions detailed in the ethics clearance have been upheld in all stages of the study. The ethics process is described in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.7 Context for the Research

Arabian Gulf Polytechnic was established in 2008 as an initiative of the kingdom's Economic Development Board (EDB) to address a shortage of technical and applied professional graduates in the country. It is a higher education institution (HEI) that offers career-focused programmes to produce professional and enterprising work-ready graduates (refer to Table 1.1). Underpinned by the values of excellence, learning and innovation, it is striving to become a "world-class provider of applied higher education" (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2013a, p. 5) and to deliver on its recently approved mission of producing "professional and enterprising graduates with the 21st century skills necessary for the needs of the community locally, regionally and internationally" (p. 5).

The curriculum developed by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is specifically designed to provide graduates with the attitude, knowledge and skills that will make them employees of choice (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2008). As Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is relatively new, the institution has purchased programmes from other institutions around the world for implementation within the polytechnic context. These have included: business and engineering degrees purchased from Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand) and an information and communications technology programme purchased from Monash University (Australia). However, these programmes were found to be not entirely relevant to the needs of Bahraini students.

Arabian Gulf Polytechnic staff is made up of a variety of nationalities (more than 20) each with different understandings and beliefs regarding the function of programme reviews. The majority of teaching staff members are expatriates from teaching cultures with various interpretations of learning and teaching processes – New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, England, Scotland, the United States, Canada, Brazil, France, Pakistan and Somalia. The students, almost all of whom are young Bahraini school-leavers (both male and female), have come from a very traditional mode of schooling where they mostly experienced a teacher-centred, didactic form of teaching in both primary and secondary schools.

Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's senior management, despite changes in personnel over the research period, has consistently supported the programme review initiative. It is seen as a need compatible with the institution's mission, vision and values and is included as a component of its strategic planning. Through applied and professional education and training as well as research and consultancy services, Arabian Gulf Polytechnic plans to assist the drive towards economic diversification and development as set out in its strategic plan. The institution is organised into three faculties that offer a number of undergraduate programmes: (1) Business; (2) Engineering, Design and ICT; and (3) Humanities.

Table 1.1 Arabian Gulf Polytechnic Profile

Vision	**World-class provider of applied higher education**
Mission	Professional and enterprising graduates with the 21st century skills necessary for the needs of the community locally, regionally and internationally
Key characteristics	A higher education institution established to meet the needs of the labour market and industry requirements Serves local, regional and international learners Offers technical and applied professional programmes and short courses Awards degrees and engages in applied research Focused on producing work-ready graduates Academic staff with real-world work experience Practical learning experiences on campus and in the workplace Develops critical thinking through a Problem-based Learning (PBL) approach
Programme features	Quality applied education and training A learner-centred approach Work-integrated learning Opportunities to develop leadership and social skills Integration of applied research and scholarship with teaching and learning Environmental sustainability International opportunities Career success

Source: Constructed from the polytechnic's Institutional Listing Application (2013b).

1.7.1 Management Structure of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

The role of the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic Board of Trustees is defined by Royal Decree, Article 7. There are 15 responsibilities specified under the overarching statement of authority: "The Board shall have a controlling authority on the affairs of the polytechnic and shall have all required authority to achieve its purposes" (Cabinet, 2008, p. 3). The responsibilities of the Board of Trustees include: development and monitoring of policy; overall planning to achieve the goals of the polytechnic; approval of research and education and training programmes and the awarding of qualifications; oversight of scholarships and grants provided by the polytechnic; appointment of staff, financial management, accountabilities and audit and monitoring of other aspects of polytechnic activities outlined within the decree.

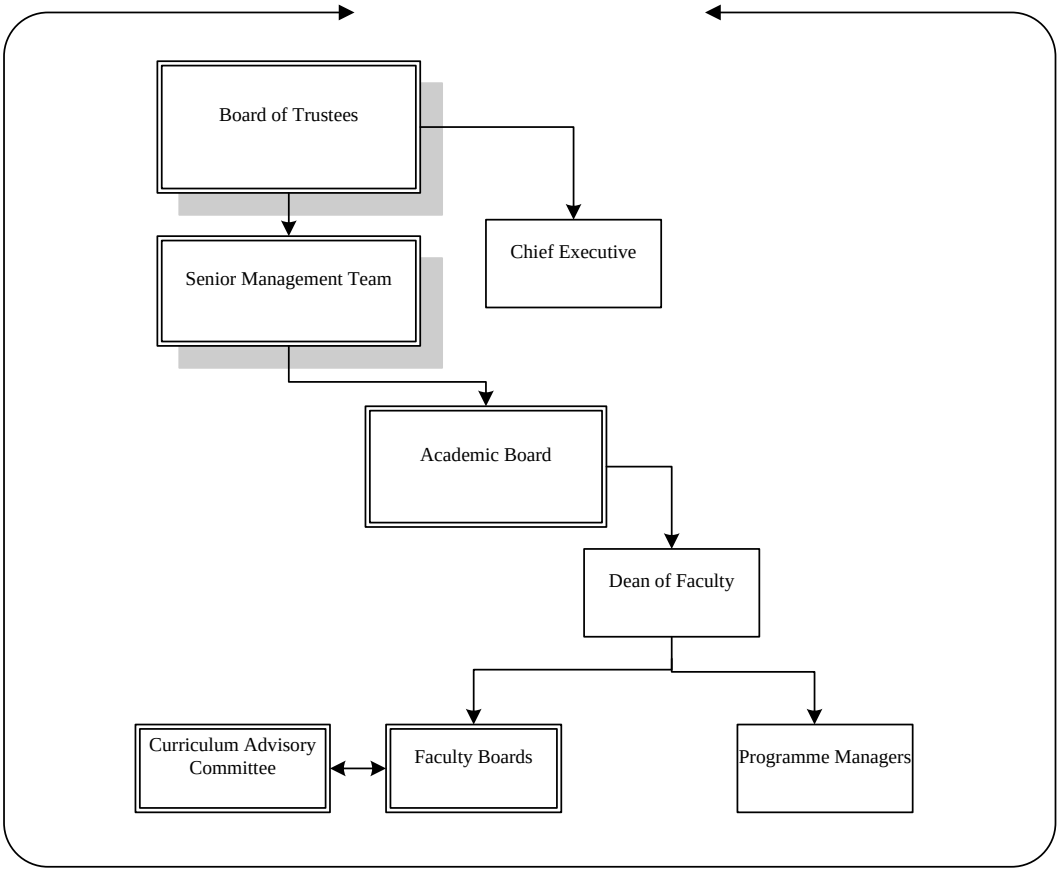
The polytechnic has a clear management structure (refer to Table 1.2 and Figure 1.1). The Senior Management Team (SMT) is responsible for the coordination of all divisions and faculties within the polytechnic and for the activities of the various committees through the Directors charged with their oversight. Within faculties and divisions there are clear middle-management structures.

Arabian Gulf Polytechnic has established a Quality and Audit Committee that oversees and monitors the effectiveness of quality assurance polytechnic-wide and reports to the Senior Management Team. The Academic Board has established an Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC) with a specific brief to ensure the quality of programme development, delivery and review (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2012).

Table 1.2 Management Structure of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

Management level	Responsibilities
Board of Trustees (BOT)	This is a body established by decree and charged with the governance of the polytechnic. Key amongst the many roles of the BOT is the employment of the Chief Executive, who is accountable to the Board of Trustees for the management and performance of the polytechnic.
Chief Executive	The Chief Executive is ultimately responsible for ensuring that an integrated Quality Management System is developed and flourishes throughout the institution. The Chief Executive is the Chair of both the Senior Management Team and the Academic Board.
Senior Management Team (SMT)	This is the senior decision-making body within the administration and management of the polytechnic, responsible to the Chief Executive. The SMT is responsible for decisions affecting the smooth operation of the polytechnic. Individual members of the SMT have a responsibility to bring matters to the attention of their SMT colleagues and to seek and respect the opinion and advice of colleagues.
Academic Board	This is a polytechnic body of key academic staff under the chair of the Chief Executive, but has an appropriately qualified senior academic (Manager Curriculum Development) to manage all the processes and procedures related to the approval, delivery and monitoring of courses. The Academic Board implements policies and procedures to ensure relevant quality courses are provided and that their standard is maintained. It receives audit reports and monitors outcomes.
Dean of Faculty	This is the title given to the senior staff responsible for managing each faculty, answering needs, identifying opportunities, supervising development and ensuring compliance with internal regulations, policies and procedures, and supervising all teaching staff.
Programme Managers	These are heads of the subject area divisions and are specialist staff as well as proven managers. Each is charged with identifying needs, assessing risks and threats as well as presenting innovative solutions for improving infrastructure. They are responsible for day-to-day operations management, liaison with industry and quality education delivery of courses in their area.
Faculty Boards	These are established by each Faculty and chaired by the Dean of Faculty. They perform the functions required by its terms of reference, to oversee the implementation of academic policies; develop and monitor procedures to ensure that courses, programmes and related services meet internal and external standards; and carry out any further responsibilities under delegation from the Academic Board**.**
Curriculum Advisory Committees	These committees ensure that Arabian Gulf Polytechnic remains true to its mission and vision. They play a crucial role in helping to provide strategic direction for the development of polytechnic programmes. They are also essential for the initiation of new programmes and they play an important role in guiding, strengthening and improving existing programmes. Faculties are responsible for seeking meaningful input at various stages of programme development, delivery, and review and for maintaining active consultation networks in the form of a formal Curriculum Advisory Committee that can provide continued advice and support.

Source: Constructed from the Quality Manual: Towards Excellence (2012).



Source: Constructed from the Quality Manual: Towards Excellence (2012).

Figure 1.1 Management Structure of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

1.7.2 Growth of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

The polytechnic has grown from 235 students and 35 staff in 2008 to 2,017 active students and 343 staff by the end of Semester 1, Academic Year 2012-2013 (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2013b). Of the 2,017 registered students, 270 (13.4%) are enrolled in the year-long Foundation Programme. Of the 1,747 students enrolled in Bachelor's degrees, 875 (50%) are studying for the Bachelor of Business degree, 292 (17%) are studying for the Bachelor of International Logistics Management degree, 245 (14%) are studying for the Bachelor of Information and Communications Technology degree, and 335 (19%) are studying for the Bachelor of Engineering Technology degree. Student enrolment comprises 99% Bahraini nationals.

1.7.3 Programmes Offered by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

As already mentioned, in order to offer programmes of an internationally recognised standard the polytechnic purchased three curriculum packages from international institutions (Bachelor of Information and Communications Technology from Monash University and both the Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Engineering Technology degrees from Auckland University of Technology). These programmes included curriculum materials, academic standards, support material and assessment tools. International academic consultants were engaged to write a Bachelor of Visual Design and the Bachelor of International Logistics Management programmes, while a

Bachelor of Web Media and a Diploma of Office Management were developed by polytechnic staff with expertise in these areas (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2010).

The English language is used as the delivery mode for all programmes at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. Consultation with key stakeholders indicated that English was the language for international business and that graduates required competent English language skills to be effective in the workplace. This underpins the common degree structure which includes additional English components as the criteria for entry (Polytechnics International New Zealand, 2007). The polytechnic regularly seeks industrial representatives' advice regarding each programme through its Curriculum Advisory Committees. Table 1.3 shows the detail of each programme offered by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Table 1.3 Programmes Offered by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

Programme Title	Specialisation	Original Source	Country of Origin
Bachelor of Engineering Technology	Mechanical; Electronic; and Electrical	Auckland University of Technology	New Zealand
Associate Degree in Engineering	Mechanical; Electrical; Electronic; and Mechatronics	Auckland University of Technology	
Bachelor of Business	Marketing; Accounting; Management; Banking and Finance; and Double Major	Auckland University of Technology	
Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning	Tertiary Teaching; Tertiary Learning	Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology	
Certificate in Academic Preparation	Academic Preparation	Otago Polytechnic	
Bachelor of Information and Communications Technology	Management; Information Systems; Programming; Database Systems; and Double Major	Monash University	Australia
Bachelor of International Logistics Management	International Logistics Management	Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport UK	United Kingdom
Bachelor in Visual Design	Visual Design	International academic consultants were engaged to write this programme	New Zealand
Diploma in Office Management	Office Management	Developed by polytechnic staff with expertise in this area	Bahrain
Bachelor of Web Media	Web Media	Developed by polytechnic staff with expertise in this area	Bahrain
Certificate in Employment Skills	Employment Skills	Developed by polytechnic staff with expertise in this area	Bahrain

Source: Constructed from the Polytechnic Institutional Listing Application (2013b).

1.8 Changes Relating to the Researcher's Role Over the Study Period

The researcher's professional role underwent several changes during the study period. In May 2010 the researcher joined Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as Quality Coordinator where his main role was to manage the Quality Management System (QMS) in terms of policy development. In April 2011 he was appointed as Academic Quality Specialist, a position which involved managing programme reviews – the focus of this study. In April 2012 he was promoted to Acting Quality Manager, a role that focused on developing quality at the strategic level. In May 2014 the researcher became Chief of Quality at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study contribute to the current body of knowledge on developing contextualised programme review frameworks in the higher education context and indicate the importance of careful consideration of local and international requirements. While the framework and the recommendations contribute in meaningful and practical ways to research in the higher education context, the study also provides direction for further investigations, dialogue, and discovery of quality education delivery within the Middle East. It challenges the common practice of importing systems successful in the West – particularly those from the United Kingdom and United States, with their own unique histories, cultures, linguistic contexts, religious and political orientations, and educational practices – without due consideration of the local context, and indicates that the experience of expatriates needs to be coupled with local knowledge for sustainable quality education.

This research also contributes to a growing literature in the field of programme review in an Arabic context, providing an exploration of influences on the programme review process, such as politics, desirability, and its historical development in the Middle East. However, given that many HEIs in the MENA region encounter similar problems in terms of importing quality processes that need contextualising, the framework for sustainable review that emerges from this study, and which builds on a solid foundation of relationships, is valuable. This study highlights the importance of giving significant weight to all key aspects of an effective framework (such as principles, standards, processes, and evaluation) and to the relationships between these aspects. In doing so, many gaps in the quality assurance systems and processes at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic were addressed by this research and this may also be useful for other similar institutions facing the same challenges.

1.10 Overview of the Structure of the Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the literature that is relevant to the study. Firstly, a review of the concept of quality in education is explored and issues associated with its application are analysed and critiqued. Secondly, a review of quality practice in the higher education sector in the Arab world is carried out, highlighting critical challenges and their impact. The third section considers programme review as a crucial component of quality practice in higher education to ensure quality education delivery and services are not only maintained but continuously improved. The fourth section explores the notion of quality culture as a major factor in the successful implementation of quality processes, with a focus on programme review.

Chapter 3 provides details of the methodology used in the study, including the processes and techniques that were involved in the collection and analysis of the data. The actual data collected are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides analysis, interpretation and synthesis of the data, with focuses on the challenges and issues related to programme review. Chapter 6 discusses the significance of the findings, limitations of the study, suggestions for further investigation and makes recommendations pertinent to the study. This final chapter concludes with a reflection of the researcher's personal growth during his engagement in this study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This research investigates the development of a contextualised framework for programme review in a higher education institution in Bahrain. The literature review acts as a foundation to support the research and is interrelated in several ways. The concept of quality, in terms of its assurance, management and improvement, is considered in both a general and historical sense and then more specifically to the Arab world – the Middle East and North Africa, the countries of the Arabian Gulf, and Bahrain in particular. Cultural considerations are a major focus and are significant in gaining an appreciation of how quality, and programme review as a significant aspect of quality, might be understood at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, the focus of the case study.

2.1.1 Conceptual Considerations

In this study, conceptual considerations relate to the concept of quality, its practice, external and internal perspectives relating to programme review, the significance of culture and contextualisation, the importance of sustainability, and the place of individual and team motivation. In terms of ordering, a review of the concept of quality is explored first. Where has it come from? What is its relevance to education in general and higher education in particular? What are the issues and trends associated with its application and how might they impact on the present study? Secondly, a review of quality practice in higher education in the Arab world is carried out. The initial focus is on the Arab world as a whole – comprising countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – and then the spotlight turns to what are known as the GCC countries, being Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain. Special attention is then devoted to Bahrain. Overall, critical challenges and implications for the Arab world and selected sub-parts of it are reviewed and gaps in the literature regarding the practice of programme review in the Arabian context are identified with the aim of having this part of the review contribute significantly to this small but developing body of literature.

The third conceptual consideration applies to programme review and is addressed through the following questions: In what way is programme review an essential component of quality practice in higher education? What are external versus internal perspectives? What have been seen as the characteristics and guiding principles? What is good practice? What is the practice that needs improvement? Overall, what has been the impact of programme review on higher education? Fourthly, the notion of quality culture as a major factor in the successful implementation of quality processes is explored. Insights into the development of a contextualised programme review framework in the Bahraini context, together with the implications for the higher education sector in the wider Arab region, are sought. Just before delving into these conceptual considerations, the major literature informing this study is presented.

2.1.2 Major Literature Informing This Study

Significant input for this literature review has been drawn from three major sources: the World Bank (World Bank, 2008), Harvey and Williams (2010a & 2010b), and the American Society for Quality (American Society for Quality, 2013). The World Bank published its report *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa* in 2008 (World Bank, 2008), where it presented a global perspective on educational reform (and one highly relevant to this study) rather than the more typical North American or European perspectives. Harvey and Williams (2010a and 2010b) provide a two part meta-analysis of 15 years of contributions, including 320 substantive contributions, to the journal *Quality in Higher Education*. The first part focuses on external processes and factors, both national and international; and the second on internal quality assurance, improvements in learning and teaching, and assessments of the impact of quality assurance. The American Association for Quality (2013), in its recent initiative, identified quality successes and opportunities from around the world. This research took nearly a year and a half to complete, with more than 2,000 survey responses from organisations in more than 22 countries. This comprehensive study is relevant primarily to business and industry but is significant for higher education as a comparison of similarities and differences.

Other input for this literature review has come from a variety of books and articles that have been located by a search of key words, and their combinations, such as quality, programme review, quality assurance, quality management, quality improvement, and self-review.

The following section explores the emergence and development of quality as a key concept of business and industry. It provides the basis for a subsequent comparison of quality in the field of education as opposed to its conceptualisation and application in business and industry.

2.2 The Emergence of Quality in Business and Industry

This section provides an overview of the history of quality management systems and how they have been applied in business and industry and later adapted for educational institutions across the globe. This sets the broad context for this research and a key issue is the multiplicity of systems that has evolved.

Much of the literature indicates that quality in general, as an idea, is problematic. Lock (1994) indicates that it is one of the most commonly misunderstood words in management. Dale (2003) mentions that quality as a concept is difficult for many people to grasp and understand; much confusion and myth surrounds it. Wittek and Kvernbekk (2011) comment:

> Quality is an inherently vague concept, and if this is right, it will have consequences for what answers you can have to the "what is" question. For example, it will run you into boundary problems, and it will force you to operate in gray zones. (p. 683)

Quality has many definitions. From a recent American Society for Quality (ASQ) survey that included over 2,000 responses from more than 22 countries, quality was reported by respondents as: efficiently providing products and services that meet or

exceed customer expectations; adding value for the customer; continuously measuring the improvement of processes and services for customers; acting as promised and reporting failures; doing the right thing at the right time in the right way with the right people; ensuring customers come back and products do not; providing the best value to customers by improving everyday activities and processes; beyond delivering what the customer wants, anticipating what the customer will want when he/she knows the possibilities; delivering customer value across the company through best-in-class products, services, and support; and meeting and exceeding the expectations of clients, employees, and relevant constituencies in the community (American Society for Quality, 2013, p. 7).

Several professional organisations have tried to define quality in the context of training and development. The Scottish Quality Management System (2001, p. 17) defines quality as the "capacity of the organisation to supply services which meet clients' and learners' expectations". The Australian National Training Authority (2005) defines quality as "the ability of a set of inherent characteristics of a product, system or process to fulfil requirements of customers and other interested parties" (p.17). The reference to product and customer – a carryover from business – is noted. ASQ CEO Paul Borawski sums up the situation: "There still is no official definition of quality that serves all purposes. The statistics remain unchanged. Fifty per cent say there is no single definition of quality. Fifty per cent say there needs to be one" (American Society for Quality, 2013, p. 7).

However, despite this confusion over definition, the review of the literature indicates there is acceptance of quality as a concept. Quality management systems and applications have gained general acceptance in almost all communities in the United States. This acceptance has evolved from industrial origins to service organisations, public and non-profit organisations, and educational institutions (Paunescu & Fok, 2004). The American Society for Quality (2013) states:

> From the breadth and depth of survey respondents it is clear that quality is a cultural management philosophy used by organisations globally of every size and industry. Over the last three decades the discipline has evolved from a strong manufacturing focus on compliance requirements to a more holistic approach that affects the daily work of every employee, regardless if they are manufacturing a part or providing a service. (p. 7)

Since debate about the appropriateness of quality systems in higher education is commonplace, it is worth keeping in mind that many different conceptualisations of quality have stemmed from industry. Essentially, the quality concept was introduced to ensure consistency in products. There was wastage in manufacturing due to a multiplicity of defects and this was particularly highlighted in World War II, where engineers sought to increase not only productivity but effectiveness through consistent quality. W. Edwards Deming, an American who spent much of his later years in Japan after the Second World War, was a prominent figure among those who sought improvement in the manufacturing process. Among Deming's key messages were: "If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, you don't know what you're doing"; "Quality is everyone's responsibility"; and "The job of management is not supervision, but leadership." (Whether he was referring to the type of leadership that might be appropriate in a higher education institution is questionable.) He introduced

14 points for management and developed a cycle of plan-do-study-act (American Society for Quality, 2010, p. 17).

Another prominent figure was Philip Crosby, who stressed the importance of "doing it right the first time" and promoted a standard of excellence based on nothing – the concept of zero defects. (The relevance of this to education, at any level, has been questioned.) Crosby stated: "Quality management is needed because nothing is simple any more, if indeed it ever was" (American Society for Quality, 2010, p. 17). Others who shaped the concept of quality in its formative years were Walter Shewhart, who combined the disciplines of statistics, engineering and economics and promoted statistical quality control as the way to address the needs of industry; Armand Feigenbaum, who coined the term total quality control which has come to be known as Total Quality Management (TQM); Kaoru Ishikawa, who developed a fishbone (or cause and effect) diagram and stressed, somewhat contrary to the idea of zero defects, that "failure is the seed of success"; Joseph Juran, who applied Pareto's 80/20 principle to quality (a rule of thumb that suggested 80 per cent of problems come from 20 per cent of causes, which management should concentrate on) but who emphasised the human rather than statistical side and the importance of improvement as a result of good planning and control (American Society for Quality, 2010, pp. 16-21).

The work of the pioneers of quality in the United States helped spawn influential movements such as the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, first in industry and later in health and education both in the United States and throughout the world (including an influence in the early years of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic). The work of Senge (1990) has also had a wide impact on improvements in quality management. Senge focused on group problem solving using a systems thinking method in order to develop companies as learning organisations with dialogue as a key enabler of team learning. Interestingly, a well-cited paper by Hodgetts, Luthans, and Lee (1994) has described quality as an evolutionary process through phases of TQM, the Learning Organization and eventually the World-class Organization. Whether it is appropriate to see quality as an evolutionary or revolutionary will be considered later in this dissertation.

Relatively recent writers, such as Lock (1994), have often echoed the thoughts of the founding gurus. For example, in agreeing with Deming that quality is everyone's responsibility and with Crosby that things should be done correctly first up, Lock (1994) highlighted that, to achieve the highest quality, everybody who works in the organisation will know precisely what to do, use correct methods and procedures, and be able to perform their task well and right first time. Winchip (1996) explored the possible adaptability of Deming's management philosophy to higher education institutions. Her empirical study suggests that, with limitations, five major Deming themes are adaptable to higher education: (1) purpose, (2) cooperative systems, (3) improvement, (4) leadership, and (5) methods-processes.

Other recent writers, such as Dale (2003), have placed more emphasis on development and improvement than the founding quality specialists. For example, Dale (2003), while still finding a prime place for TQM, stated that quality must start with education (being more a reference to training than higher education). Organisations must invest to train employees at all levels in improving skills in order to facilitate changes in behaviour and attitude. He also indicated that continuous improvement initiatives must

reach every part of an organisation and every employee and every function needs to be involved if TQM is to become total.

The literature indicates that research on quality is plentiful but, as stated by the American Society for Quality (2013), still lacking:

> We found a gap in the current research for the quality discipline; there is no comprehensive view of the current state and thus the future opportunities regarding the use of quality tools and techniques, as well as continuous improvement systems, within and across regions around the globe. (p. 7)

In relation to the emergence of quality in business and industry, the literature demonstrates that the concept of quality is problematic yet widely accepted, that there are many definitions, a multiplicity of quality systems, and often conflict over the needs for compliance versus improvement. Furthermore, there is dispute over whether changes over time in the approach to quality are to be considered evolutionary or revolutionary. There is also a need for training and development of employees in relation to quality; however, in-depth research in this area is limited and this limitation has a negative impact on the opportunities for improvement of quality applications. Among the implications for the present study are a need to craft a conceptualised definition of quality, a likely requirement to focus on both compliance and improvement of organisational quality, an imperative to provide appropriate training and development to all members of the organisation, and a confirmation of the worth of and need for meaningful research.

In moving from a focus on business and industry to a focus on education, the following guiding question is raised: What are some of the similarities and differences between the former and the latter – and within education itself?

2.3 The Quality Concept as Applied to Education

This section examines the concept of quality as applied specifically to education. Among the questions explored are: Is the concept essentially the same in business and industry and education? Does the terminology of quality in business and industry rest comfortably with the terminology of education? Can the concept be applied in much the same way in business and industry and education? Are there significant differences that should be noted and addressed? What is the relevance for programme review in a higher education institution?

Some of the ideas from industry and business have been readily accepted by education in general and higher education in particular – others not. For example, a comment by Ishikawa typically finds favour: "Companies [or educational institutions] exist in a society for the purpose of satisfying people in that society" (American Society for Quality, 2010, p. 19). However, Feigenbaum's definition of quality as the "total composite product and service characteristic of marketing, engineering, manufacturing and maintenance through which the product and service in use will meet the expectations of the customer" (American Society for Quality, 2010, p. 18), is debated, particularly in terms of the language used, with words such as product and customer remaining strictly relevant to TQM. Arcaro (1997) suggests that quality works in education as well as in business and sees its introduction as a revolution. However, he points out that quality takes time, perseverance, and a change in attitude by all,

requiring an investment in training for every staff member. He notes that quality programmes have been successfully implemented in hundreds of schools in the USA and UK and that quality provides professionals in education with the structure and techniques necessary to improve every educational process.

Consistent with the Baldrige model (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2013), which originated in the United States with a focus on what constitutes excellence in industry and business, there is now recognition that educational organisations have varying missions, roles and programmes and consequently need their own set of standards. The Baldrige education criteria stress student learning and view students as "key customers", which is plausible as an idea but can be criticised in that many of the terms used by Baldrige, such as customers, have not been changed to education-friendly terms, such as learners. The Baldrige concept of excellence in education includes three components: (1) a well-conceived and well-executed assessment strategy; (2) year-to-year improvement in key measures and indicators of performance, especially student learning; and (3) demonstrated leadership in performance and performance improvement relative to comparable organisations and appropriate benchmarks (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2013). With reference to leadership, analysis of the Baldrige literature suggests that it is top-down rather than distributed or collaborative.

According to several writers, such as Green (1994) and Newton (2012), there is a mismatch between quality as applied in industry and quality as applied in education. In industry the customer is clear and, generally, the business model makes it easy to identify a clear process for improvement. In contrast, it is much more difficult to transfer systems and processes in education because the customer and the product are not easily defined, the outcomes not easily measured and improvement defies quantitative assessment. Green (1994, p. 7) comments: "Central to the debate about quality in the educational context is the issue of whether concepts derived from the profit-centred private sector can be readily transferred to public service organisations."

An attraction of the quality concept in education has been that it can be used to prove to society that the education being delivered is effective in delivering what governments require. This leads to what the literature refers to as the quality revolution (Newton, 2012). In certain contexts, researchers have found that quality assurance systems provide powerful tools to ensure that students are given an education that prepares them for work and allows them to make meaningful contributions to society as citizens.

The undertaking of internal audits – pertinent to the present study – has been identified by some writers as important for educational institutions. For example, Paunescu and Fok (2004) recommend them as one of the components for effective and efficient implementation of a quality management system in education. They list other aspects as: commitment of top management, awareness of faculty and students, identifying processes, focusing on learning and teaching, controlling documents, undertaking corrective and preventive measures, keeping quality records, and commitment to the continual improvement of results. However, as indicated by Harvey and Williams (2010a), some writers – in pointing out that sound theory doesn't necessarily translate to practice – have suggested that many quality components, such as audit, accreditation and self-review, make little difference to what happens in classrooms and on campuses.

Overall, a review of the literature shows that many writers have alluded to the journey that quality has taken in its application to the education sector. References are made to the challenges of defining the term and to determining its applicability to education in general as well as to higher education in particular (Harvey & Williams, 2010a). A significant challenge identified by many writers, as indicated by Harvey and Williams (2010b), is to decide where quality processes should be implemented for greatest effect: the curriculum, assessment, the learning and teaching processes, or resources and facilities. These are variously targeted according to the context. The question of the transferability of quality concepts developed in the United States and Europe, where education has a long history and where there were historical practices to build on, is an important one that needs further examinations (Idrus, 2010).

In summary, some writers see models from business as appropriately applied to education; others do not. Those that see the relevance from business typically couple quality with hierarchical organisations. Some see the applications of quality as generally a good thing, while others see the introduction of quality to education as revolutionary. Most agree that training and development of staff is important. Internal audits are typically seen as important but there is some debate over the value of compliance in the absence of contextualisation and an eye to improvement. Quality, then, has brought some advantages and a number of issues to education in general. What more does the literature tell us about how quality works in higher education in particular?

2.3.1 Considerations Specific to Higher Education

Among these considerations are the contestability of the concept, the historical relationship to quality in business and industry, the various definitions and metaphors, the appropriateness of models from industry, the external and internal requirements for compliance, and the issues of ownership of the concept and practice by academia.

The literature indicates that quality is a highly contested concept and has multiple meanings linked to how further and higher education is perceived (Tam, 2001). The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2006b) comments on the quality concept as a multifaceted one that is as open to argument and negotiation in the vocational education and training (VET) environment (which, it is to be noted, is essentially the field pertaining to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, the focus of this case study) as it is in other social, economic and political contexts. Additionally, policymakers and practitioners have different definitions of quality and different views about where effort is required to achieve quality (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2006a). Further, issues surrounding the importance of measurement complicate the concept of quality in higher education. As Dew (2009, p. 5) suggests: "The general truism 'what gets measured is what gets done' demonstrates that measures play an important role in quality."

Historically, the literature indicates that quality management in higher education was introduced during the 1980s and by the beginning of the 1990s the application of popular industrial quality models – such as Total Quality Management – was widespread (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010). The literature indicates that breaking away from industrial concepts of quality has been a challenge for higher education. Harvey's (1995) research shows that after a first wave of attempts to copy private

sector models in higher education, more attention has been devoted to the development of quality management models that would take into consideration the specific characteristics of higher education institutions.

Quality in educational programmes has been variously conceptualised – among other things – as meeting specified standards, being fit for purpose or as transformative (Harvey & Williams, 2010a). Taking conceptualisation further, Harvey and Stensaker (2008) identify five ways of defining quality in higher education:

(1) *Exceptional*. This is a traditional concept of quality linked to the idea of excellence, usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed. It is worth noting that this concept reflects the *In Search of Excellence* writing of Peters and Waterman (1982), which was essentially a collection of case studies of top-rated American businesses (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

(2) *Perfection or consistency*. This focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality in this sense is summed up by the interrelated ideas of zero defects and getting things right first time. Often thought not to apply to a learning situation where no one wants students to be all the same, it does, however, have relevance in areas such as consistency of academic judgement and reliability of management information. The concepts, as indicated in the section on quality in general, come from Deming and Crosby (American Society for Quality, 2010).

(3) *Fitness for purpose*. This judges quality by the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose. The purpose may be customer-defined to meet requirements or (in education) is usually institution-defined to reflect institutional mission (or course objectives), or indeed defined by external professional bodies. Fitness for purpose is often allied with another so-called definition of quality, *fitness of purpose*, which evaluates whether the quality-related intentions of an organisation are adequate. It provides a check on fitness *for* purpose. As such, fitness *of* purpose is not a definition of quality in itself. It is to be noted that fitness *for* purpose was a focus of the original quality gurus and that fitness *of* purpose reflects Argyris and Schon's (1974) concept of "double-loop learning", which might lead to a paradigm shift for a process or system, as opposed to "single-loop learning", which relates more to fitness *for* purpose refinements of a process or system (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

(4) *Value for money*. This assesses quality in relation to return on investment or expenditure. At the heart of the value-for-money approach in education is the notion of accountability. Increasingly, students are also considering the value for money of their own investment in higher education. This definition fits comfortably, of course, with industrial and business models.

(5) *Transformation*. This view sees quality as a process of change, which in higher education adds value to students through their learning experience. Education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. This leads to two notions of transformative quality in education: enhancing the consumer and empowering the consumer (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). These ideas rest comfortably with ideas of improvement and ongoing learning.

The futility of spending too much time on defining quality is indicated by Manning (2012, p.20) who asks: "Can we define quality as it applies to higher education? It is easier to talk about quality assurance if we skip the anterior question, 'What is

quality?', and that is what we usually do. "He adds, "At the root of disputes over assurance is the unspoken dispute over what is being assured."

Many educational theorists and practitioners have been less than keen to buy into the original quality concepts. Brookes and Becket (2007) indicate that much attention has been given to quality management models developed for business and industry, and that there is a concern that such models may add little to the improvement of teaching and learning, although they might have advantages for improving accountability. Houston (2008) explains:

> The language and tools of industry-born quality models are an imperfect fit to higher education. Authentic quality improvement is more likely to result from approaches to systemic intervention that encourages exploration of questions of purpose and of the meaning of improvement in context than from the imposition of definitions and methodologies from elsewhere. (p. 61)

Harvey critiqued the TQM approach and argued that it failed to address fundamental issues of educational quality (Harvey, 1995). Harvey and Williams (2010b, p. 3), in reaffirming this view following their comprehensive meta-analysis of contributions to the journal *Quality in Higher Education*, state "an issue is the use of industrial models and TQM in particular, which contributors, on the whole, regarded as of little use in the higher education setting". Despite the concern, models from industry have had a place. The ISO 9001:2000 and the excellence models (European Foundation for Quality Management, 2009) are among the popular industry-originated models that have been applied to higher education (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010).

Significantly, in terms of finding appropriate models for higher education, Brennan and Shah (2000) emphasise the importance of taking different perspectives into account. They provide a framework for how quality management models can be categorised according to an appreciation of different wants and needs. The choice of approach depends on the values of a particular group and its conception of what quality is in higher education. Values are different according to whether the basis is academic, managerial, pedagogic, or employment focus. This, in turn, leads to important decisions on centralisation or decentralisation of quality. (More is made of this in Chapter 5 of the dissertation. The model is adapted by the researcher for use by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.)

Also in relation to models, the concept of culture has often been the focus of theory on quality. For example, it is said that quality culture can be placed in a culture-based ideal types framework where degree of group control is on one axis of a matrix and intensity of external rules (being adherence to external rules) is on the other (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). Harvey and Stensaker capture four types of groups: (i) a group that is strong in both degree of group control and intensity of external rules is termed responsive; (ii) a group that is strong in the former but relatively weak in the latter is regenerative; (iii) a group that is weak in the former but strong in the latter is reactive; and, (iv) a group that is weak in both is reproductive. Whether these should be considered ideal as types is questionable; however, the model is seen to have merit and worthy of feeding into the framework that is being developed in this research. (Again, more is made of this in Chapter 5.)

Moving to another consideration, the introduction of quality management concepts in higher education is mainly an externally driven process related to increased demands for accountability and efficiency in the sector (Brookes & Becket, 2007). Compared to the implementation of external quality assurance, the development of internal quality assurance systems at higher education institutes is progressing more slowly (Rauhvargers, 2009). The contribution of external quality assurance must be secondary and supportive, while the basic drive towards better quality must come from the institutions themselves (Haakstad, 2009). That is, it must come from their quality systems and their quality culture. Quality assessment must move from its stress on accountability for past performance to concerns about future performance and in that way must be found to influence quality enhancement strategically (Elton, 1994). Significantly, the consumerist approach to higher education quality, which is driven by governments and senior management, has not been met with enthusiasm by academics. Rather, as Harvey and Williams (2010b) suggest, there is a strong commitment to autonomy and academic freedom.

Reflecting the multiplicity of metaphors on quality, Dew (2009, p. 5) presents five popular ways to frame the issue of quality in higher education: "quality as endurance, quality as luxury and prestige, quality as conformance to requirements, quality as continuous improvement, and quality as value added". Among other interesting metaphors, education has been seen as the catch-all for a range of economic, political and societal sicknesses and ills. The concept of quality, therefore, has been very appealing to the education sector as a medicine to be administered to institutions to solve their problems.

Harvey and Stensaker (2008, p. 435), in acknowledging that the concept of quality culture is complex, state: "Given five different definitions of quality and an array of notions of culture, the intersections between the two concepts are potentially vast." So, how can educationists come to grips with this complexity? Harvey and Stensaker (2008) explain:

> It is important to note that much of this complexity is related to an implicit understanding of quality culture as manipulative, as seeing it as an end product, and by relating it to various functions raised by external and internal stakeholders in higher education. If we, as a point of departure, accept that culture is a way of life, then quality culture becomes a tool that can be useful for analysis, questioning and dialogue in higher education. This implies a change of perspective concerning the purpose associated with quality culture. Hence, instead of starting by asking who do we want to be? Perhaps a better question would be who are we? It also implies that we should look for tools that could be helpful in answering more fundamental questions about individual, group and organisational functioning? (p. 435)

On the positive side, quality assurance in higher education has resulted in clearer documentation and transparency. However, Harvey and Williams (2010b) suggest that external processes could be better aligned to everyday academic activity. Other than drawing upon and refining a model such as that of Brennan and Shah (2000), what is the way forward? Harvey (1995) asserts that it is necessary to move beyond debates about whether quality management is relevant for higher education, by having less focus on the label and by paying more attention to the content and substance of such concepts. Maintaining appropriate focuses is seen as critically important. Harvey and

Williams (2010a) posit that the concept of quality in higher education should not be detached from purpose and context and that quality has political undertones.

In summary, a review of the literature on quality in higher education confirms a number of observations from quality in education in general. The concept is contested and there is a multiplicity of meanings. Also, there is significant debate over the value of using models and practices, such as TQM, that have been imported from business and industry. Among the key issues for higher education, according to the literature, is finding an appropriate balance between external and internal requirements for compliance. Another relates to creating an environment in which quality assurance and improvement is a way of life for academia rather than an imposition of rules by outsiders. Key implications are that the practice of quality in higher education should remain true to purpose and context.

2.3.2 Internationalisation of Quality in Higher Education

In relation to the context for quality in higher education, the literature indicates the significance of internationalisation. Evidence of this and some of the implications are addressed in this section.

Quality in higher education has become "widespread within national boundaries" (Harvey, 2004, p. 65) raising interest in developing an international approach to quality. Internationalisation has come about for three main reasons: (i) globalisation of higher education; (ii) the growth of transnational education; and (iii) increasing pressure for international or cross-national recognition of qualifications. There are now more collaborative efforts among quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions for quality assurance at the international and regional levels as globalisation of higher education accelerates. However, as Umemiya (2008, p. 277) points out: each "effort is formed with different objectives and characteristics, as it is driven by different forces".

At the beginning of the 1990s, the federal government of the United States first required institutional accrediting organisations, America's principal mechanism for quality assurance in higher education, to review institutional practices with respect to the assessment of student learning outcomes. Much that affects quality assurance has changed since that time, "including a steadily increasing focus on undergraduate teaching and learning in the academy generally, transformed modalities for instructional delivery, and the fact that higher education quality assurance has become transnational" (Ewell, 2010, p. 173).

Internationalisation of higher education institutes is increasing in importance due to strengthening of the global dimension of the Bologna Process (a process that began in 1999 as an effort to reconstruct and transform higher education) and the growing need that internationalisation becomes a prerequisite for an institute's sustainability. Thus, Rauhvargers (2009) argues that quality assurance and the ensuing enhancement of the internationalisation process within a higher education institute should become an important component of the overall quality assurance. The European Union's 27 member states are all signatory states to the Bologna Process, and today 47 countries are involved in this reform process with 4,000 institutions and 16 million students working to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This now involves a number of action lines including degree structures, credits, qualification frameworks,

mobility, lifelong learning and social dimensions. Arguably, the Bologna Process is the most far-reaching and ambitious reform of higher education ever undertaken (Birtwistle & McKiernan, 2008, p. 317).

As higher education becomes increasingly internationalised, "there is a tendency for countries with younger systems to look towards western countries for models of quality assurance" (Harvey, 2005, p. 181). Middle Eastern countries have focused significantly on the practices of European countries. What, then, has been learnt from this focus?

2.3.3 Lessons from Europe

New developments are affecting quality assurance in Europe and among the questions being asked are: How can accountability and improvement be balanced? How can the shared responsibilities of higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and policymakers be balanced? How can the increasing diversity across higher education – such as diversity of pedagogies, institutions, subject areas, students, expectations, and missions – be handled? And how can the inappropriate growth of bureaucracy and cost of quality assurance be prevented? (Haakstad, 2009)

The challenges faced by European higher education institutes in these times of mass and market-oriented higher education are seen as far from trivial. Institutions are finding it difficult to align resources and expectations and to balance their mission with their responsiveness. Moreover, they often feel that quality assurance systems are subject to external mistrust and worries about homogenisation. Teixeira (2009) identifies two main trends that have contributed to explain the complex context faced by higher education institutes: on the one hand, the persistent expansion and massification of higher education; and, on the other, changes in the perceptions of the roles played by higher education institutes and in the organisation of this sector. In relation to the education authorities, what should they be doing in today's world? It is important for them to evaluate capacity and to establish monitoring systems and licensing and regulatory authorities (World Bank, 2008, p. 286). Increasingly, this is occurring and having an impact.

At the beginning of the last 20 years' so-called 'quality revolution' it was expected from most of the established national quality agencies that internal quality systems and the development of an internal quality culture would emerge automatically in HEIs from the external quality impact (Kristensen, 2010). If quality monitoring is seen as an event rather than as a process, there is little likelihood of the event making much long-term impact. Harvey (2002) suggests that external quality monitoring leads to: bureaucratisation and inflexibility; is incapable of asking the right questions and that visits are amateurish and fail to observe what really goes on in higher education institutions; leads to game playing and performance; has no real impact especially on student learning; leads to short-term response, not permanent cultural changes; has a superficial impact on standards; is obsessed with accountability; but should encourage internal quality improvement and external useful information. The more the process is one of complying with external requirements the less the lasting internal benefits. External monitoring must interact with internal quality systems: "the real benefits are products of the external-internal dialogue" (Harvey, 2002, p. 9).

Important considerations include the need to fully appreciate the complexity of enhancement-led change, and being sensitive to the difficulty of measuring the results or impact or sustainability of such change. Also, there is a need for agencies to stimulate professional dialogue about enhancement of learning and teaching, and to support the adoption of practices that are known to work (Newton, 2012). There is agreement about the lack of appreciation of enhancement aspects (Carolus, Cortvriendt, Froyen, & Bosch, 2012). A substantial number of European actors involved are disappointed, mainly because the current European Quality Assurance system focuses too little on enhancement and too much on accountability. Moreover, innovation and creativity are often annihilated by the practice of accreditation. It could be argued that accreditation results in a quality assurance culture in the short run, but that it limits the pursuit of a quality culture in the long run (Carolus, Cortvriendt, Froyen, & Bosch, 2012).

However, are things really improving significantly? The overall tenor of the contributions to the journal *Quality in Higher Education*, as analysed by Harvey and Williams (2010a and 2010b), is that external quality evaluations are not particularly good at encouraging improvement, especially when they had a strong accountability brief. An essential element in this failure is the apparent dissolution of trust. "Ultimately, the review suggests that it is still not clear that, even after 15 years, quality assurance systems have really enhanced higher education" (Harvey & Williams, 2010b, p. 81).

Writers such as Harvey and Williams (2010a), urge that improvement and accountability must be conceptually and practically distinct with separate resourcing. A clear understanding and respect for the separate purposes needs to be developed within both national agencies and institutions. A failure to accommodate different purposes could damage the quality and the integrity of higher education by leading to serious imbalances of power (Harvey & Williams, 2010a). Amaral and Rosa (2010), in an analysis of the role of the European Commission in the setting up of new quality assurance mechanisms, suggest that the mechanisms tend to promote accreditation and stratification rather than quality enhancement. Kristensen (2010) argues that a better balance must be found between internal and external quality assurance and quality improvement. On the positive side, it is stimulating, states Kristensen, that the European Standards and Guidelines (of the Bologna Process) underline that external evaluations largely depend for their full effectiveness on an explicit internal quality assurance strategy with specific objectives; and on the use, within institutions, of mechanisms and methods aimed at achieving those objectives.

Agencies and frameworks are proliferating. However, it's not all to the good. As stated by Harvey and Williams (2010, p. 3): "The proliferation of quality assurance agencies is being followed by a mushrooming of qualifications frameworks and the growing pressure to accredit everything, even if it is a poor means of assuring quality and encouraging improvement." Ranking systems can have a negative impact. They are critiqued for their validity, methodology and the inadequate information they provide for students. "National performance indicators are viewed with suspicion, especially when they simply measure the easily measurable" (Harvey & Williams, 2010a, p. 3). However, as indicated by Jabnoun (2009, p. 417), notice is taken of them: "The ranking of the world's best universities has heightened the attention given to higher education in many countries. It made Europe realise that it generally lagged far behind the USA in higher education."

Does external quality assurance and accreditation leave room to think outside the box? If a programme director and staff form a true team in which everyone feels safe to ventilate ideas, positive or negative, circumstances are right for creative quality assurance thinking. If, on the contrary, programme directors and staff immediately seek refuge in the quality assurance guidelines and standards – with all their supplementary criteria and points of attention – to know what is expected of them, there is a great risk of falling into formalism and smothering creativity (Knoors, Verachtert, & Segal, 2010). Quality assurance mechanisms need to evolve beyond an initial stage of development of mass higher education, accommodating better the realities of a diverse institutional landscape and strengthened institutional autonomy. This is a necessary step if regulators want to enhance the institutional capacity to stay focused and to be able to define and adapt their mission to a rapidly evolving context that asks institutions to do more and is less willing to follow up those demands with additional resources (Teixeira, 2009).

External quality assurance can be said to be a very successful area of development in European higher education in the last couple of decades (Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, & Westerheijden, 2011). While there is a broad consensus that impact analysis of external quality assurance in higher education institutions is very important and timely, it is also a very complex topic that deserves and still requires a substantial research effort (Grifoll, Leiber, Moldt, Rasmussen, & Sorensen, 2012). While standardisation has brought European external quality assurance forward in many respects, innovation is still needed to move things to the next level (Stensaker, 2010). After more than two decades of external quality assurance, there is an increasing interest in questions concerning the impact and effects of this activity. A major finding is that impacts are perceived as quite similar regardless of the evaluation method (Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, & Westerheijden, 2011).

Greater clarity regarding the impact of quality initiatives in higher education is required. The quality revolution has been marked by a lack of impact research, particularly the impact of quality assurance processes on academic practice, the student experience and student learning (Newton, 2012). For their part, with a primary interest in education rather than business or industry, and as contributors to a growing body of research into quality in education, Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker (2010) state that research in the field of quality management can be characterised as conceptually heterogeneous and multidisciplinary, although the contributions in the field also share a number of similarities.

In summary, the experience of Europe indicates that caution is required regarding massification, market-orientation and a confusion of roles relating to higher education. The lessons include: the need to guard against unrealistic expectations of education authorities and agencies; against the bureaucratisation, game playing, dissolution of trust and measurement difficulties that come about as a result of the requirements of such authorities and agencies; against their emphasis on accountability at the expense of improvement; against their smothering of creativity; and against a one-size-fits-all view of rules for educational institution and the departments within them. The danger is that such aspects may contribute to mistrust – externally and internally – of quality systems. Regarding internationalisation, there is the potential to take opportunities without losing sight of the contextual requirements of quality systems. In the interests of a positive and healthy environment for quality systems and practice, there are needs

for impact research and dialogue among all interested parties – including teaching and learning staff in general.

Furthermore, there is a suggestion that the improvement and accountability needs of quality should be kept distinct. However, this raises a countering question: Can enlightened groups handle both needs as parallel activities, with one (improvement) essentially an enhancement of the other (accountability)? This will be explored later in the dissertation.

2.3.4 New Bosses for Quality in Education

"Education has a new boss" (World Bank, 2008, p. 292). Accountability of higher education institutions should not be dominated by a single authority but should be to the public through institutional mechanisms, developed by government or civil society, put in place "for stakeholders to influence educational policy, resource allocation, and service delivery" (World Bank, 2008, p.292); and these mechanisms should be developed at national and institutional levels. A critical element in achieving these goals is the provision of information to the various publics – "Information, information, information" (World Bank, 2008, pp. 292-294).

The literature indicates there should be more opportunities for dialogue involving a broader range of people. This is described as a matter of institutionalising "voice" in the education sector, from the perspectives of both the government and civil society (World Bank, 2008, pp. 293-295). There would be "government-sponsored spaces for the public to contribute to the education reform process" (World Bank, 2008, p. 293) together with initiatives of universities and the public at large. Opportunities would emerge for champions, watchdogs, and public networks. Significantly, "MENA does not have a strong tradition of this type of public accountability in the education sector" (World Bank, 2008, p. 294).

A tension between increased demand for higher education and the maintenance of quality has to be addressed (World Bank, 2008, p. 285). Business as usual is not an answer. Rather, meeting the increase in demand for higher education "could be accomplished by mobilising private funding while ensuring that those who are qualified but cannot afford tertiary education have access to government funding" (World Bank, 2008, p. 286). This, it is stated, is consistent with international trends.

Incentives for professionalism are being promoted. Two ways in which incentives can be used to have teachers work more like professionals than public servants are: first, apply the incentives to teaching teams (institution-wide or to a specific department) to work together to improve quality outcomes in their institutions; and second, provide incentives for teachers "to continuously upgrade their skills and competencies, as part of requirements for continued accreditation and promotion" (World Bank, 2008, p. 292). Although this appears to be practised in some countries, neither approach was found to be practised in MENA countries. "This is perhaps the one area where there is the greatest potential for growth and change" (World Bank, 2008, p. 292). An important conclusion from such thoughts expressed in the literature is that quality systems are the responsibility of a variety of people – not just the person at the top of an organisational hierarchy. Academics, and others such as education authorities, are key stakeholders.

With these challenges and warnings in mind, the following section explores the importance and nature of programme reviews specifically (the essential focus of this dissertation) as a part of quality assurance processes in higher education.

2.4 Programme Review as a Key Quality Process in Higher Education

This section of the literature review relates to the three sub-questions which provide the focus for the research. First, programme review as a key quality assurance process is discussed. Then characteristics of effective programme review are considered, including relationships with culture within the organisational context.

Programme review is a crucial process for quality assurance because it focuses on improvement in the area that is core to the student experience and their learning – the programme of study. In recent times there has been a significant shift away from institutional accreditation and programme approval processes because these were found not to make a significant difference to what actually happened in the classroom, though useful for maintaining a minimum standard of education. The focus emerging world-wide on the programme review process as the key to continuous improvement has developed because this approach allows for greater creativity as it is not so tightly anchored into compliance-driven criteria but more open-ended and flexible, allowing for uniqueness and innovative approaches in programme design and delivery. Programme review's strength is its ability to facilitate reflection by teachers on what they do day to day with their students, shaping and reshaping the curriculum in its widest sense. Current practices that engage industry in these reviews on an ongoing basis facilitate incremental responses to changing needs in the economy and ensure relevance, and hence sustainability.

Bornman (2004) states that one of the most effective tools in the field of quality assurance is critical self-review. She points out that although programme assessment is a difficult process and necessarily contextualised, it is an important tool for ensuring quality teaching and learning. Self-review should form the basis of, and should be integral to, quality assurance and its management in an institution. In the view of Dill (2000, p. 41) an effective academic audit can help build the capacity of a college or university to compete in the new environment of higher education in the United States of America by strengthening its internal web of academic accountability to ensure the academic standards and learning outcomes that the public and market expect.

On the negative side, research on accreditation in the Netherlands and Flanders shows that professionals consider the writing of a self-evaluation report to be a very complex and time-consuming activity. Furthermore, there is a serious risk of *dramaturgical compliance*, or window-dressing, which "may satisfy the illusion of accountability, but has nothing to do with the essential nature of quality" (Harvey & Newton, 2007, p.226). Kemenadea and Hardjono (2010) suggest that writing a self-evaluation report should not be part of a compulsory external quality assurance system. It is not a reliable instrument for control. Self-evaluation can be used for internal quality management, where it can be a powerful instrument for improvement.

Other reports are more positive, such as that on a review process to enhance course quality at the University of North Carolina (Persky, 2012). A rubric was used by the review team to address five areas: (1) course layout and integration, (2) learning outcomes, (3) assessment, (4) resources and materials, and (5) learner interaction.

Approximately 3.5 recommendations per course were made, resulting in improvement in course evaluation items related to learning outcomes. Ninety-five per cent of reviewers and 85 per cent of course directors agreed that the process was objective and the course review process was important (Persky, 2012).

Ofsted (2006) found that, in schools and colleges, self-evaluation was based on a clear cycle of activities. Typically, this started with a review in July or September of the previous year's performance. Attainment data, predictions and value-added data were brought together to identify strengths and areas for improvement in terms of learners' performance. Individual subject areas and departments also reviewed critically the extent to which they had met targets in the previous year's development plan and examined information on the quality of teaching from any observations which had been made. They used this information to establish or refine priorities within the institution's overall improvement plan and built these into improvement plans for departments or subjects (Office for Standards in Education, 2006).

A study by Liu, Horng, and Lee (2010) across three education institutions established a programme review framework for tourism education. While the strength of their research is a focus on holism, there are also weaknesses. The indication of a theoretical underpinning is not clear and little mention is made of relationships between various features of programme review. Also, review of this study reminds this researcher that he should be wary of individualised use of words and terms by other writers and researchers. For example, when Liu et al. (2010) refer to profession, the present researcher would refer to what they are talking about as discipline. Likewise, contextual differences have been kept in mind in relation to the current study. Taiwan is not Bahrain. Tourism does not equate to programmes in general at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Hämäläinen (2003) states: "When one reflects on the frameworks of evaluations in different European countries, there does not seem to be any rational reason not to have a general framework for programme evaluations" (p.8). This literature review in general shows that there are customised frameworks, such as in Taiwan which was designed for a tourism specialisation, and at the University of Georgia in the United States, which was designed for an apprenticeship programme. These are unlike the Baldrige and European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) frameworks, which are generic and probably appropriate for sectors like business. Whether to develop a generic or customised framework (or a mixture of both) for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic was a challenge for this researcher to confront. A comparative analysis of various frameworks around the world was not apparent from the literature.

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (2009) sought to set a standard for programme review based on: (1) the authority of academic agencies; (2) the commitment of the agencies to educational excellence; and (3) external requirements. Aspects of this report that are relevant to this research are that it is community college-based (similar to polytechnic-based) and has a strong focus on self-review. On the latter point it argues that "program review must be a faculty-led process, motivated by professionalism and the desire to make community college programs relevant, effective, and exemplary" (The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2009, p. 1). This is based on systems theory, one of the main theoretical underpinnings of the present research, with reference to inputs (faculty actions, professional motivation), process, and outputs (relevance, effectiveness, a

model of excellence) as indicated in the quotation above. It is also consistent with constructivism, another of this study's theoretical underpinnings, as demonstrated in the statement, programme review can be "one of the most powerful and effective tools to shape and reshape a college" (The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2009, p. 44). The idea of shaping and reshaping fits very well with the concept of continuous improvement.

One of the strengths of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges' report is that it emphasises important relationships (again consistent with systems theory). For example, it indicates that programme review can contribute to "fair and transparent institutional processes" if "it is linked to budgeting, planning, and other processes to carry out its recommendations" (The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2009, p. 44). The paper suggests several recommendations in order to strengthen the programme review practice in California. The relevance of these recommendations in the development of the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic programme review framework was given close consideration. Overall the report is strong; however, one limitation from this researcher's point of view is that it is not specific to Bahrain.

A question that Hämäläinen (2003) raises is: "Are all standards and criteria equal?" He found that the number of standards varied from 30 to 120 in European frameworks. This wide range of standards raises the question about how to evaluate a programme's effectiveness. The Baldrige scoring system, for instance, allocates different scores for each framework category: results are scored out of 500 points while a leadership category has a maximum of 120 points. With a different orientation, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) framework puts more emphasis on overall effectiveness and capacity to improve (Office for Standards in Education, 2009). These examples are unlike the Bahrain QAAET programme review framework, which allocates the same value for each indicator (Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training, 2010). A comparative analysis, which this researcher has completed, seems to be missing in the literature.

Smith (1996), a researcher at the University of Georgia in the United States, carried out a study in three main parts: (1) a summary of youth apprenticeship programme activities; (2) a suggested methodology for a benchmarking process; and (3) a listing of clearly stated standards and their performance criteria. The emphasis is on contextual, real-world learning through workplace experiences. Smith suggests standards are customised for the apprenticeship programme. They cover most of the key processes of work-based learning, such as sites (that are suitable as learning spaces) and training plans. These features are absent in other programme evaluation frameworks and are a strength of Smith's approach and of relevance to the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic context. This writer argues that Smith's weakness is the suggestion of a simplified three-point standards scale of 'exceeds', 'meets', and 'below'. This writer considers this type of grading system to be not sufficiently effective in distinguishing between different performance levels. Another criticism of Smith's work is that it does not focus on generating valid and reliable instruments in order to gather evidence to support his judgements. He skips this important step in his methodology. A comparison of grading systems is a gap in the literature and is addressed in this writer's research by comparing exemplar frameworks from various parts of the world.

Scotland's HM Inspectorate of Education (2007) divides the programme review process into two categories, self-evaluation activities and self-evaluation reporting, with the main focus on the second. Given the importance of formal documentation as evidence of what has taken place and for ongoing comparative purposes, this writer agrees that it is important to distinguish between the two aspects and found weaknesses in reporting in comparison with the activities category, both at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic and from examples in the literature. This dual categorisation was considered in the development of the polytechnic's programme review framework. The report concludes that self-evaluation reporting "has encouraged a culture of reflection and questioning amongst college staff, and underpins a focus on continuous improvement" (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007, p. 9). This is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of this writer's research (reflective practice, critical thinking, and continuous improvement) which aims to develop such a culture in the polytechnic's framework.

Hämäläinen (2003) analysed standards, criteria and indicators used in programme evaluation and accreditation in Europe and indicates that the "accreditations and programme evaluations are often considered in isolation of their environment/context" (p.7). Accordingly, changes in regulations, funding and politics might not be taken into account. This is a signal to this writer for the need to consult stakeholders (particularly labour-market representatives) when developing a review framework for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

2.4.1 Characteristics of an Effective Programme Review

Several bodies around the world have released characteristics of an effective programme review. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (2006) lists principles that apply to programme review in organisations in Scotland. These relate to: integrity, honesty, objectivity, and impartiality. The European Foundation of Quality Management (2009) offers a set of principles that focus on: achieving balanced results; adding value for customers; leading with vision, inspiration and integrity; managing by processes; succeeding through people; nurturing creativity and innovation; building partnerships; and taking responsibility for a sustainable future. The Baldrige National Quality Program (2011) also offers: visionary leadership; student-centred excellence; organisational and personal learning; valuing workforce members and partners; agility; focus on the future; managing for innovation; managing by fact; societal responsibility; focus on results and creating value; and systems perspective. The weakness in all of these instances, and an apparent gap in the literature, is that there is no indication of how the principles were derived. In other words, there is no indication of the underlying theoretical bases from which these principles were drawn. This is something this writer sought to address through his research. Table 2.1 presents the list provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (2007, pp. 15-26) of the characteristics of effective self-evaluation.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of Effective Self-evaluation

Characteristic	Description
Teamwork	Self-evaluation reporting is effective when it provides a mechanism for college staff to collectively identify, share and agree ways of improving and enhancing the services they provide.
Commitment of college teams	Self-evaluation reporting is effective when college staff value it as a means of continuously improving services for learners.
Evidence	Self-evaluation reporting is effective when college teams gather, analyse and respond to key messages from various sources of evidence, including other evaluations.
Action plans	Self-evaluation reporting is effective when it generates a clear agenda for team action (a quality improvement action plan) aimed at improving services to learners.
College-wide approaches	Self-evaluation reporting is effective when college systems support it and colleges use it to gather intelligence for whole-college planning.
Reporting	Effective self-evaluation reporting enables college teams to generate reports which provide assurance on whether they are effective at continuously improving their services.

Source: Adapted from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (2007).

According to Wilkinson (2003), the important issues that need to be considered when managing the evaluation process are shown in Table 2.2, along with implications, interpreted by the present researcher, that these might have on the effective review of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

In summary, in order to carry out an effective programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic several vital elements need to be considered including: everyone in the programme is to have opportunities to engage in dialogue on the quality of the programme; fostering pockets of enthusiasm; encouragement of innovation and analysis; compliance and accountability; a sense of ownership; and evidence-based and collaborative leadership and management.

Table 2.2 Important Issues in Managing the Evaluation Process and Their Implications for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

Issues	Implications
External and internal factors that have an impact on the quality assurance process at an institution, and influence it either positively or negatively, should be considered and addressed.	Have an appropriate balance between internal and external requirements.
It is important to recognise that the quality assurance process is first and foremost for the institution itself and not for outside agencies or external quality audits.	Enhance equity and innovation as advocated by the leadership at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.
Build on successful systems and implement them in an incremental fashion that allows for small gains and the building of trust.	Start with a pilot phase.
Recognise that special efforts are needed to induce reluctant faculty to come on board but a good start can be made by including the enthusiasts, the change champions, as allies in the pilot phase.	The relationship to pockets of enthusiasm, which is an important aspect of this research, is noted.
Provide academic staff members with guidance at a very high level and empower them to take ownership of the quality assurance process at faculty/departmental level.	Use a collaborative rather than a hierarchical approach. Respect the expertise of staff members throughout the organisation.
Ensure that the methods of assessment are reliable and valid for the purpose, emphasising qualitative measurement as much as quantitative.	Make sure the research is evidence-based.
Provide a fairly structured framework and process to make it digestible to the newcomers.	Keep it simple and make it fit for purpose.
Communicate that the required reporting should be simple, easy to use, fairly structured and meaningful.	Provide an indication of the required format: for example, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and recommendations.
Regard evaluation of the review as extremely important to enhance the trustworthiness of the process in current as well as future applications.	This researcher notes that it also contributes to the feeling of ownership.
Address in honest fashion staff members' problems with the execution of the self-evaluation process and provide as much support as possible.	Make sure that opportunities for dialogue are presented and that they are followed by agreed decisions and actions.
Use competition among faculties as a positive steering factor, but guide against window dressing in the process.	The promotion of positive competition is noted. This should not be done at the expense of collaboration.
Use available sticks and carrots purposefully but discreetly in steering the self-evaluation process on programme level in the required direction.	This metaphor is noted by this researcher. The sticks may hinder; the carrots may help.

Source: Issues adapted from Wilkinson (2003, p. 166).

A survey by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, England) conducted in the autumn term 2005 and the spring term 2006 looked to identify the common features of best practice in self-evaluation, as well as investigating those aspects that are weaker, together with the reasons for this (Office for Standards in Education, 2006). (Although focused on schools rather than higher education institutions, there may be some relevance to self-review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic). Among the findings were:

- Head teachers, principals and council leaders gave priority to and led self-evaluation personally. They had a clear overview of their institutions, based on an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses.
- Self-evaluation was integral to the culture of the organisations. People at all levels were committed to it and fully involved.
- Self-evaluation was a continuous process, governed by the needs of the institution rather than the requirements of external bodies. Self-evaluation was clearly built into management systems. External inspection supported but did not replace internal review. It provided, however, the main external source of validation.
- An increasingly sophisticated use of a widening range of performance indicators enhanced the quality of self-evaluation.
- Rigorous analysis of strengths and weaknesses, particularly of teaching and learning, led to the clear identification of priorities and strategies for improvement.
- Sharply focused monitoring, based on clear indicators, helped institutions to measure the extent to which their work improved outcomes for pupils and young people. The views of those who received services, particularly learners but also parents and carers, were actively sought and influenced decision-making. In schools and colleges, indicators to identify the personal development and well-being of young people and the outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda were at a very early stage of development.
- Schools, colleges and local authorities were only beginning to solicit the views of external partners and peers to inform their self-evaluation.
- The lack of detailed information on pupils' progress in the foundation subjects in primary schools detracted from the rigour and quality of schools' self-evaluation.

According to Ofsted (2006) important points are: First, take account of the views of a wide range of stakeholders to inform self-evaluation. Second, use the findings from self-evaluation to inform the priorities in planning for development. Third, focus self-evaluation specifically on the impact of provision on the outcomes for children and young people.

Points of note from the Ofsted survey, of likely relevance to the present research, are the need for ownership of the process not only by top management but all members of the organisation, the importance of doing self-review for authentic purposes and not just because it is a requirement of external authorities, and the need to have performance indicators that are meaningful to all parties involved. Also, it is indicated that an essential focus should be kept on the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning, and the views of learners and their sponsors should be actively and frequently sought. Further, on an ongoing basis, there should be a sharing of self-review ideas with peers and exemplary organisations.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (2007) provides strategies to enhance the programme review process. The focus of the inspectorate's process includes:

1. Encouraging and facilitating self-evaluation activities such as professional dialogue, especially on learning and teaching, retention and attainment.
2. Ensuring that self-evaluation reports and quality improvement action plans record the impacts that previous actions arising from these processes have had on improving quality for learners and other stakeholders.
3. Ensuring that self-evaluation reporting by teaching teams focuses on learning and teaching, and retention and attainment, and involves the rigorous analysis of evidence, including performance indicators.

4. Ensuring that self-evaluation reporting is evaluative rather than descriptive.
5. Ensuring that quality improvement action plans use SMART targets.
6. Providing targeted training and support to improve evaluative skills and self-evaluation report writing, using appropriate training materials.

In conclusion, the characteristics of an effective programme review are central to discussions in the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic about how to carry out programme review as effectively as possible, and further develop effective institutional quality cultures. These characteristics should therefore be considered carefully in the process of developing the contextualised programme review framework at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

2.4.2 Quality Culture and Its Links to Programme Review

This section addresses the following questions: (1) What are the key aspects of cultural appreciation that need to be taken into account as they relate to the development of a framework for programme review in tertiary institutions (and for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic in particular)? (2) What is missing from the literature? (3) How has the research contributed to the public knowledge base?

Throughout this research, the following key aspects guided the process: (1) relevance to the Arabic world (and particularly Bahrain and its neighbouring countries); (2) relevance to the functions of tertiary education institutions; and (3) a clear indication of theoretical underpinning. With these key aspects in mind, criteria for selecting the literature in this category were: published within the last 25 years by a reputable publisher; based on well-cited academic sources; has some relevance to the Arabic world (particularly Bahrain or the Arabian Gulf countries in general); may come from one or more of a variety of contexts throughout the world but with greater weight given to items written by Arabs for Arabs; has some relevance to polytechnic-level learning and teaching; and has some relevance to programme review within an educational institution or institutions. The first two criteria were required and with at least two of the four others met.

Abdulmajeed (2005), a Bahraini, provides comments to a large extent based on a survey conducted between 1989 and 1991 at Bahrain's College of Health Sciences. His findings place emphasis on the importance of training of teachers, especially Western teachers, most of whom (he suggests) "tend to use certain materials that are close to their own culture(s) and experiences" (p. 36). Abdulmajeed's work, although set in a Bahraini context, did not have a focus directly related to this research (programme review). It is questionable whether the College of Health Sciences of over 20 years ago is contextually similar to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. Nevertheless, he did raise issues related to the delivery of programmes and the impact of teachers' cultural understandings that were useful input to the present researcher's analysis and drawing of conclusions.

Merriam and Associates (2007) cover a wide range of non-Western perspectives in their book and there are three chapters in particular that were relevant to the present research. The first chapter, 'An Introduction to Non-Western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing', by Merriam herself, together with the preface, provides a set of questions (pp. viii-ix) that were useful input for the current considerations: How is

learning thought of and/or what is the purpose of learning from this perspective? What is the nature of knowledge? How is this knowledge learned? How is it known when one has learned? Who decides that one has learned? What is the role of the teacher? Who can be a teacher? What is the end result of learning? What is the role of society, community, and/or family in learning? How does this perspective on learning manifest itself in your society [Bahrain] today?

The last chapter, 'Broadening Our Understanding of Learning and Knowing', also by Merriam, indicates themes that non-Western perspectives have in common: "First, learning really is a lifelong endeavour unfettered by institutional or other boundaries. Second, what counts as knowledge is broadly defined, and third, learning and instruction can be holistic and informal" (p.187). These themes are consistent with the observations of Kamis and Muhammad (Merriam & Associates, 2007, pp. 21-40) in the second chapter of the book, 'Islam's Lifelong Learning Mandate', relating to "adult learning viewed from Islamic lenses" (p. 21). To be kept in mind is that the orientation of Kamis and Muhammad is Malaysian rather than Bahraini; accordingly, this researcher sought distinctions as well as similarities with their observation in relation to the current investigation, which aimed to fill a gap in the research literature as it is by a Bahraini in the context of Bahrain. Merriam's questions listed above, adapted as appropriate, were a useful guide for this researcher's investigation.

Nydell (2006), makes the point: "It is essential that we look at Arabs realistically as they are today, and not attempt to describe and explain them in terms of Middle East history that goes back centuries" (p. xxi). To an Arab and Bahraini, this makes sense to this writer and the intention has been to assess the behaviour and attitudes of employees at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as they are today and not as stereotypes from the past. Nydell's (2006) book is also valuable in indicating differences between Arabs in different parts of the Middle East. In looking at national, social, and cultural characteristics, she states:

> The most important single difference that affects foreigners is the distinction between the conservatism of Saudi Arabia (and to some extent, the rest of the Arabian Peninsula) and the more liberal, or tolerant, ways of life elsewhere (Nydell, 2006, p. 147).

Williams (1998) parallels Nydell (2006) by contrasting both similarities and differences between Arabs throughout the Middle East. It is a book written by a Westerner mainly for Westerners (like the book by Nydell).

In summary, the points of the various authors that have been reviewed had some relevance for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. They were tested against the research focus question and sub-questions as the study proceeded. It was confirmed that the literature has limitations. This researcher noted that, with just one exception, the researchers are Westerners writing primarily for a Western audience. There is a gap in the literature of Middle Easterners writing for Middle Eastern readers. Having Middle Eastern (specifically, Bahraini) input (such as this writer's) is important.

Some important considerations are conspicuously absent from the literature on programme review. These include: the identification of principles that underlie effective programme review frameworks (mention of principles in studies being very much the exception rather than the rule); Arab perspectives on the topic (particularly

from research done by Arabs for Arabic institutions); and studies that give significant weight to all key aspects of an effective framework (such as principles, standards, process, and evaluation) and the relationships between these aspects. This research has aimed to address these gaps. There has also been ongoing exploration of aspects of programme review such as the politics, its desirability, and its historical development.

Culture is the greatest challenge for improving quality and many failures are attributed to it. Institutional culture is the most important element in the polytechnic system for enhancing and assuring quality. A pervasive and embedded commitment to reflecting on and improving what institutions do, how they support learners, how they engage with students, and the standards they maintain, is essential to achieving our goals for quality. To gain a clearer understanding of how cultural considerations impact on the development of a contextualised programme review framework in the higher education context, it is appropriate to next consider the cultural aspects in the Arab world and Bahrain.

2.5 Cultural Considerations

This section (and sub-sections) examines the cultural aspects that relate to this research, particularly in the Arab world, GCC and Bahrain. First, however, to enhance an appreciation of terminology, an examination of the word 'culture' as applied to organisations as a whole as well as higher education institutions is discussed.

There are significantly different approaches to organisational culture. For example, from one perspective culture is seen as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid. Cultural elements are values, artifacts and assumptions (Schein, 1992). From another perspective, culture is mental coding which allows acting coherently; it can be described according to symbols, heroes, values and rituals (Hofstede, 1991). Yet another perspective sees culture as a social and collective phenomenon which refers to the ideas and values of a social group and is influencing their action without them noticing it explicitly. Cultural elements are value, knowledge, belief, legislation and rituals (Morgan, 1986). Further, quality culture can be held as a process that can be operated through evaluation and measurement (Ali & Musah, 2012). Quality culture can also be defined as the overall attitude of an institution, which focuses on the concept of quality and applies it to all aspects of its activities (Ali & Musah, 2012). National culture provides an explanation for many of the variations observed. In particular, the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and power distance (Hofstede, 1991) and diffuse/specific and affective/neutral of Trompenaars (1994) appear particularly powerful in explaining national differences observed (Mathews et al., 2001).

It is unwise to be categorical about which approach to quality management is best. There are indications that the quality management approaches mirror the culture in which they develop. Cultures that are consistent with the imperatives of TQM develop styles that will support the underpinning values of quality management. Others, that are at variance, may adopt the tools and approaches but not the philosophy that TQM requires (Mathews et al., 2001). The results of the study by Mathews et al. (2001) suggest that the consequence of uncertainty avoidance is the adoption of a version of quality management that is rule-based rather than of dispersed responsibility. On the

other hand, uncertainty avoidance also appears to lead to a greater adoption of quality tools and techniques associated with quality management; so the overall outcome in terms of competitiveness and customer focus may well be similar to countries where other cultural values prevail (Mathews et al., 2001).

It is apparent that different countries implement quality systems in different ways. There is significant variation in all aspects of quality management, from the reasons stimulating the quality management programme through to the problems faced (Mathews et al., 2001). For national and international quality bodies, the message perhaps is to build quality assurance processes around a culture which values and supports quality enhancement in an unequivocal style and manner (Newton, 2012).

Higher education is generally considered to be "a repository and defender of culture, an agent of change in this culture, an engine for national economic growth, and an instrument for the realisation of collective aspirations" (Johnstone, 1998, p. 2). We are entering a new era in quality management for higher education. While it is difficult to mark its exact beginning, it is clear that it is moving away from a mechanistic to a holistic and cultural view of quality in education (Ehlers, 2009). Concepts like quality control and quality management are often perceived as technocratic top-down approaches which frequently fail in higher education. Ehlers (2009) suggests that in recent times the field of quality management in higher education has changed. The new generation – or era – uses different and more holistic quality approaches in order to develop an organisational culture of quality. Quality culture for higher education has not yet received a lot of attention from research or management literature (Ehlers, 2009). It is a matter of focusing on change instead of control, development rather than assurance, and innovation more than compliance to standards. In this process, quality management systems and instruments, competencies, and individual and collective values are not seen as separate entities of quality development but are combined into a holistic concept – the concept of quality culture (Ehlers, 2009).

Applying quality culture in a higher education setting should be done with caution, as Harvey and Stensaker (2008) affirm:

> Thus, our main conclusion is that quality culture first and foremost can be a tool for asking questions about how things work, how institutions function, who they relate to, and how they see themselves. The dominant problem with quality culture as it is used today is that the concept is thought of as the *answer* to challenges, while in reality, it is a concept for identifying potential challenges. (p. 438)

In the process of identifying potential challenges, the following nine caveats in Table 2.3, and the present researcher's interpretation of their implications, should be kept in mind (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008, pp. 438-439).

Table 2.3 Caveats and Their Implications for the Research

Caveats	Implications for this Research
1. There is often an implicit cultural imperialism associated with quality culture. This ranges from the presumption that quality culture is necessary through to an assumption that best practice is transferable from one context to another: usually, in higher education, from north-west European or North American practices.	Keep in mind the significance of the internationalisation of quality as a concept and practice but ensure that models are contextualised to the Bahraini situation.
2. One should be careful in seeing quality culture as predefined, rather viewing it as a way of life.	Develop a contextualised definition that is owned by all practitioners within the organisation.
3. Quality culture is not mechanistic or codified – a system produced by specialists for adoption by others – but an iterative, dialectical, process of evolution that does not just focus on internal processes but relates them to a wider appreciation of social and political forces and locates them historically. Quality culture is not a panacea; something that can be disengaged from a wider lived reality.	Accept the requirements of compliance to external agencies but, in parallel, have holistic and improvement orientations. Appreciate the dynamic aspects of the concept and practice.
4. The dialectical evolution is compatible with a democratic notion of quality culture as a lived, learned experience that itself generates knowledge, rather than simply processes it.	See quality processes, such as programme review, as cyclic and iterative. Look for continuous improvement. Consider double loop as well as single loop possibilities.
5. A quality culture is not just about checking outputs at each stage but is also a frame of mind, as much of the management literature implies.	Create an environment in which positive attitudes are the norm. Take account of feelings and beliefs as well as analytical thoughts.
6. This is not just a matter of raising consciousness but a fundamental question of ideology. A quality culture is an ideological construct, a fact that cannot be glossed by a set of prescriptions or recipes for implementation.	Develop models that are based on sound theory and comprehensive research of behavior in context.
7. A quality culture is not likely to be constructed irrespective of the context in which it is located, which again limits the possibilities for knowledge transfer.	Again, focus on context. Be wary of generalising.
8. A quality culture is nothing if it isn't owned by the people who live it.	Find pockets of enthusiasm where the quality culture is owned. Then help spread them.
9. If there is resistance to engagement with quality cultures, that will be endemic in higher education if academics see quality culture as a managerial list fad, as a means to reduce their academic freedom or in any other way disempowering.	Respect the academic freedom and empowerment of people within the organisation. Support the widening and deepening of pockets of enthusiasm of quality culture throughout the institution.

Source: Caveats adapted from Harvey and Stensaker (2008, pp. 438-439).

In summary, in relation to this section, the concept of quality is useful but there are various interpretations of its meaning. What might be considered culture for business and industry is not likely to be the same as culture for education. One should beware of trying to apply quality culture in higher education – it is important to keep in the

mind the caveats of Harvey and Stensaker (2008) and, for the present study, interpret their implications.

2.5.1 The Arab World in General

In relation to the Arab World, there are questions to be answered about the transferability of concepts of quality from other parts of the world, the appropriateness of styles of organisational management, and the flexibility of methods of teaching and learning.

As stated by Harvey and Williams (2010a): "A key issue for countries more recently introducing quality systems, especially less developed countries, is the transferability of systems established elsewhere in the world" (p. 3). They note that it is apparent "how conceptions of quality assurance that originated in North West Europe and the USA have been the basis of developments around the world and how little variation there is in the methods adopted by quality-assurance agencies" (p.3). Similarly but perhaps more positively, Idrus (2010) notes that transplanting concepts, ideas and practices into developing countries seems natural as they are unable to create, initiate and disseminate these concepts, ideas and practices. Quality is one of those concepts. However, it does appear to have some formidable obstacles to acceptance in developing countries (Idrus, 2010).

The style of management has been seen as a pervasive problem. Universities in developing countries need to alter and revamp their autocratic-hierarchical organisations to profoundly substantiate quality service for their students. According to Abouchedid and Nasser (2002, p. 204), TQM revolves around democratic sharing of responsibility and needs to be adopted in higher educational institutions in developing countries. However, Ehlers (2009) sees TQM as hierarchically based (rather than democratic) and unsuitable for use in higher education. Traditionalism as opposed to progressivism is also seen as an issue. The overwhelming traditional knowledge delivery system for higher education in the Arab world demonstrates the pronounced information technology (IT) gap between Arab countries and the developed world (Abouchedid & Eid, 2004, p. 15).

Accelerating developments in the field of higher education have impinged on Arab countries, as the World Bank (2008) explains:

> The modern history of education reform in MENA is a tale of brazen ambition, struggle against internal and external odds, unintended consequence, tactical error and success, accomplishment, and unfinished business. It is also the story of the interaction of competing visions of the purpose and ends of education, pitching global trends in education strategy and content against age-old education traditions. Along this tumultuous path, the region should indeed be proud of its accomplishments. (pp. 297-298)

However, much is yet to be accomplished. It is apparent that the role of higher education institutions needs to be modified in order to respond to current international developments, with their various political, economic, and social dimensions (Galal & Kanaan, 2011). The literature indicates that education is seeing many changes. Globalisation has led to a demand for a different mix of skills and competencies, and this will influence the content and nature of what education systems should provide

(World Bank, 2008). All over the world, the organisation of education systems is changing on pedagogical (student-centred and competency-based learning), structural (lifelong learning), financial (diversification of funding), and managerial (decentralisation and coordination) fronts to keep pace with the changing place of human capital in the development equation. Hence, the success of future education reform programmes will require a change in tack. It will require a sharing of responsibility among sector authorities, potential service providers, and civil society. In other terms, it will require a new balance of *engineering*, *incentives*, and *public accountability* (World Bank, 2008, pp. 297-298). On the positive side, "tremendous gains in education have been realised" (World Bank, 2008, p. 281).

2.5.2 The GCC Countries

A variety of comments from a range of critics suggest that all is not well with quality in the GCC region. For example, GCC countries don't compare well with other Arab states, let alone with the rest of the developing world. There needs to be greater access to higher education for more students, an improved level of post-university teaching, reinforcement of academic exchanges and links among higher education institutions in the region, thus supporting the free movement of students to provide access to all of the region's universities (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Given their very high average income per capita, the oil states, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, all seem to provide, on average, lower quality education than most other MENA countries (World Bank, 2008). Appropriate changes to the systems within the public institutions should be made; and it is important to ensure that the systems within the private institutions are appropriate. Carroll et al. (2009) point out that proceeding without change can lead to "two unpalatable options: (a) to lower morale in the sector by failing many higher education institutions; or (b) to lower the standards, thereby weakening the purpose of accreditation" (p. 21).

The poor quality of higher education is the most important challenge for almost all Arab countries. They all face a mismatch between the needs of the competitive open labour markets and the skills that students gain in schools and universities. Documenting this claim is not easy, given the scarcity of objective information about the quality of higher education systems, but some useful indicators are available. For instance, none of the Arab universities are routinely listed in the top 500 universities in the world in any classification. High rates of unemployment among highly educated jobseekers serve as another indication. Third, the majority of university students in these countries are enrolled in fields within the humanities and social sciences rather than in science and engineering or other practical and professional fields (El-Araby, 2011). In addition, the majority of Arab states were not able to meet the students' needs and ambitions due to a lack of resources to meet the rapid increase in student population (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011).

Some reasons and requirements are given for the less-than-satisfactory higher education situation. There has been a huge increase in the number of institutes. In the 1950s, there were no more than ten universities dispersed across the region, whereas today there are more than 300 higher education institutions. This rise has emerged from an increase in public demand for education, an increased population, and the governments' determination to make higher education as accessible as possible (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Opportunities should be provided for people to be

educated in their own country. There should be a sufficient number of higher education institutions, with appropriate disciplines and programmes, to accommodate those seeking tertiary education in the country – secondary school leavers and others, such as expatriates (Jackson, 2009, p. 85).

There have been many issues facing the development of quality systems in higher education institutes. Many sensitive areas have been considered to be straining higher education in the Arab region, including high population growth and the massification of secondary education, inadequate financial resources, inflexible and centralised management, lack of diversification of institutions and programmes, inability to meet students' needs, the lack of the links between higher education institutions, general and secondary education institutions, local communities, and societal and human development needs (UNESCO, 2003).

Key points from the literature point to the need for a paradigm shift together with impactful and wide-ranging action. For example, Arab countries need to be ready to implement change; even radical change (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Effective think tanks, together with research and development, are needed (Shaw, 2003). And there should be a focus on holism. As stated by Carroll et al. (2009, p. 26): "Each element needs to make sense on its own but also as part of the whole."

The British Council has taken an interest in the area. A British Council workshop 'Quality Management in Higher Education', November 2005, was run with the support of the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and was attended by 29 delegates from eight countries. (The countries comprise the British Council's Middle East Region that includes the six Gulf states together with Yemen and Iraq.) About two-thirds of the attendees were from universities and the remainder from education ministries or quality assurance agencies (Morgan & D'Andrea, 2009, p. 1). The British Council later launched a programme 'Excellence in Higher Education' that was informed by the priorities of the delegates to the November 2005 workshop (Morgan & D'Andrea, 2009, p. 1).

Jackson (2009) indicates that there should be a quality assurance agency within each country that has responsibility for programme accreditation, the licensing of new institutions, and the establishment of standards for institutional management. Encouragingly, in relation to this point, many agencies, bodies and commissions have now been set up. Various states have instituted quality assurance commissions or organisations and initiated new processes (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011).

Darandari, Al-Qahtani, Allen, Al-Yafi, Al-Sudairi, and Catapang, (2009), writing for the special issue of the journal *Quality in Higher Education*, explain that the rapid growth in the number of post-secondary institutions in Saudi Arabia over the last few years necessitated the creation of a government agency for accreditation and quality assurance – the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA). They indicate that the development was a sound mix of outside help and inside appreciation:

> Between 2005 and 2008, it developed a new three-stage quality assurance and accreditation system that benefited from the international expertise, while keeping its characteristics. This comprehensive detailed system was implemented gradually with wide acceptance. (p. 39)

In only four years, Saudi Arabia has developed, established, tested and implemented a new quality assurance system for higher education, benefiting from international expertise, while keeping its unique characteristics. Darandari, Al-Qahtani, Allen, Al-Yafi, Al-Sudairi, and Catapang (2009), as well as reflecting on the positive side of the development, indicate things to watch out for:

> The size of the institution, its type (private or public) and management structure were major factors in the quality management approaches used and the time needed for implementation. As the quality assurance system was introduced very recently, the concept of quality culture is still underdeveloped in many of Saudi Arabian institutions. In addition, the differences between the management ideologies within the universities that depend on centralisation, and the ones introduced by the new quality system that needs decentralisation and a quality culture, proved a challenge in the implementation. (p. 49)

There is a need for systems of frameworks – like the human body. Appropriate frameworks for institutional and programme review should be built and principles, standards and processes should be developed and applied as Carroll et al. (2009) suggest:

> A comprehensive national quality management system for higher education involves a number of distinct but interrelated frameworks and processes, in much the same way that the human body requires the distinct but interrelated skeletal, muscular, respiratory, cardiovascular and digestive systems all working together. (p. 26)

The methods used to develop frameworks are significant. Carroll et al. (2009, p. 17) reflect on lessons learned from the post-secondary education sector in Oman, which consists of a complex suite of public and private institutions, in a number of distinct segments, offering local and foreign programmes developed through their respective quality assurance systems. Carroll et al. (2009) conclude:

> Experience shows that the methods used to develop national frameworks and processes are, in themselves, vital factors in the success of those frameworks and processes. Most particularly, benchmarking and consultation have proven effective when complemented with training and support strategies, sourced internationally and, of increasing importance, locally. (p. 17)

A quality map can be useful. Darandari, Al-Qahtani, Allen, Al-Yafi, Al-Sudairi, and Catapang (2009) indicate that lessons learned from their study of institutions in Saudi Arabia "are changing the mind set of participants and drawing a concept map" (p. 49). They explain that these maps are important in achieving quick successful quality implementation. A quality map needs to be designed, introduced and clarified to all stakeholders before implementing the system. It should provide a broad overview of the quality assurance system, framework, tools, management structures and analysis for the national and global environments. Participants need to know where they are, where they want to go, how they are similar or different from others nationally and internationally, what should be changed and to what level and what the alternatives are. Change within an institution or a system is a process that needs to be addressed so everyone will be on the same page.

There is a need to develop specialists who can then pass on the information. Morgan and D'Andrea, (2009) comment:

> Originally, it was intended to develop a smaller community of practitioners to diffuse in-depth knowledge and understanding to their peers. It proved difficult to ensure continuity of representation because the ministries, quality agencies and universities that nominated delegates preferred to share capacity-building opportunities amongst their staff. (pp. 1-2)

Consultation at all stages is needed, as suggested by Carroll et al. (2009):

> A key to success is the tandem strategy of benchmarking plus the involvement of many stakeholders through a range of consultative methods before, during and after the development and approval of the various system elements. Consultation beforehand helps identify and gain common agreement on the sector's needs. Consultation during development helps gain the sector's confidence in the proposed solutions; expands the pool of knowledge contributing to the solution; and helps set the ground work for post-approval implementation. Consultation after approval helps disseminate and explain final decisions, thereby leading to speedy implementation. (p. 26)

Razvi and Carroll (2007) are supportive and state that "the involvement of the sector strengthens the legitimacy of the system" (p. 12). The obtaining of feedback is important. Al Attiyah and Khalifa (2009), in describing the situation in Qatar and making specific mention of programme review, state:

> There is still room for considerable improvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement in QU [Qatar University], in particular, the processes need to address the sustainability of efforts to self-evaluate and manage improvement plans. There is a definite need to establish coherent systems at the university, faculty, programme and course levels. These include: (1) an annual evaluation to monitor and make provision to anticipate problems and deal with them as and when, and before they arise; and (2) to enhance quality through regular programme reviews to maintain and ensure its currency. Specifically designated persons or committees need to be identified to account for quality assurance and enhancement. Processes and procedures need to be established to ensure the timely identification of problems. (p. 37)

More interactive use of feedback from all stakeholders, including students, staff, schools, professional bodies and Ministry officials, where relevant, would be helpful in this process as well. The point of feedback is not to gather data and return results; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement. This leads to developing a culture in which increased awareness and commitment to quality assurance and enhancement becomes the norm. Lastly, it is also critical that the Qatari community engage with the University to ensure it fulfils its vision in serving the needs of Qatari society. "Peer assessment is one of the critical elements. The recommendations of the peers have an important place in the accreditation process" (Darandari, et al., 2009, p. 49).

The literature indicates that some thought has been given to sustainability of programmes. Morgan and D'Andrea (2009) indicate:

> To address sustainability and diffusion, a quality assurance programme for universities comprising six modules with associated booklets, the exercises for which can be contextualised to national and local experience, is being developed. Besides forming the basis of future British Council workshops, they can subsequently be used for locally led, in-country training. (p. 2)

Some notice has been taken of the guidelines of international bodies. The tailoring of such guidelines to local contexts is important. Al-Atiqi and Alharbi (2009) state that, for Kuwait, a major concern is "ensuring the quality of education offered by private providers" (p. 5). They provide a case study of how the country has developed a system of quality management of these providers. They indicate that the accreditation programme for private higher education institutions, run by the Private Universities Council (PUC), is compatible with the guidelines of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Accreditation is conducted according to a bi-directional measure. Institutional accreditation is awarded if positive quality assurance reports are received from international partners and local by-laws, regulated guidelines and traditions are "jurisdictionally observed and sensibly executed" (Al-Atiqi & Alharbi, 2009, p. 15). This suggests that contextual aspects should be incorporated into a quality model. Local differences, wants and needs should be recognised. "Kuwait's model of managing the quality of the country's higher education is rationally successful because it connects international principles with local conventions" (Al-Atiqi & Alharbi, 2009, p. 5).

Partnerships are needed among the states. The GCC countries should collaborate in developing and promoting the region as a network of high-quality higher education. In relation to Bahrain, Jackson (2009) sees this as a need for the support of big brothers: "The smaller countries, such as Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman, have limited opportunity for the development of effective peer-review systems and need the expertise offered by other countries to help establish common standards and good practice" (p. 86). In a positive move, the *Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ANQAHE) – an independent, nonprofit, nongovernmental organisation – was established in 2007 (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011).

The free movement of students between higher education institutes in GCC countries should be encouraged. As Jackson (2009) proposes:

> The Gulf region represents a shared market and a common framework for economic development within which skilled professionals need to be able to move freely and where qualifications are mutually recognised and respected. A comprehensive strategy for higher education will help to underpin these developments and will also help to promote the reputation of the Gulf States as a region for high-quality higher education and increase its international competitiveness. The challenge is to make this through mutual consent and collective responsibility. (p. 86)

Approaches have been taken in individual countries that are worth further investigation. How contextual are they? Would they have relevance to Bahrain and quality assurance, quality management and quality improvement at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic?

Leahy (2006, pp. 130-131) indicates there was no formal quality model in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) between 1988 and 1997, internal and external examinations being the sole mechanism used to determine the standards of the institution. In 1997 the UAE launched an institutional Programme Quality Assurance System (PQAS) based on an Australian academic quality model at the Higher Colleges of Technology. The UAE now has over 30 higher education institutions, most with comparable male-female ratios (Findlow, 2013). Rawazik and Carroll (2009) describe causes for increasing demand for higher education in the UAE. They outline the three UAE education segments and their respective quality assurance systems: federal institutions established by royal decree; private institutions licensed by the Commission for Academic Accreditation; and Free Zone institutions in Dubai quality assured by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). Rawazik and Carroll (2009, p. 83) state:

> Each of these three segments serves a distinct and valuable role in the UAE. However, the differences in their quality assurance systems presents a challenge to develop protocols for mutual recognition between them. It would be sensible, and in keeping with international trends, such as the Bologna Accord, for the two forms of quality assurance in the UAE to negotiate a system of mutual recognition of institutions and programmes.

O'Rourke and Al Bulushi (2010), in reporting on a case study collaboration between Oman and New Zealand, warn that materials written for Omani society must be sensitive to the local culture but the colleges may also need to consider educating students to accept other cultures and values as preparation for their roles in the media and as potential international postgraduate students.

In conclusion, there has been a proliferation of higher education institutions and agencies in Gulf countries in recent years. The emphasis on quality is a recent phenomenon and there has been much criticism of quality standards and processes. There is a need for institutions to develop quality maps and frameworks for all aspects of quality, including programme review. On the positive side, there has been international support, especially from Britain, and compliance initiatives are increasingly apparent. However, there is a need for a focus on improvement as well as on compliance. The need for contextualisation is recognised but also a need for teachers, learners and administrators to have a world perspective. Consultation with and feedback from stakeholders is needed. Partnerships among states, with a sharing of expertise and ideas, are needed. Research on quality in higher education is considered weak.

2.5.3 Bahrain

Education at all levels is seen as being at the "crossroads" for the future of Bahrain as much as other MENA countries (World Bank, 2008, p. xv). However, the comment is also made that generalisations of this type do not apply equally to all countries in the MENA region (World Bank, 2008, p. 298). The World Bank (2008) notes that significant public monies were being spent on education by MENA countries – Bahrain included – but that the monies were not being apportioned in ways appropriate to evolving societal needs. There was a need for "better services" with "greater efficiencies" and appropriate "diversification of funding" (World Bank, 2008, p. xvi).

In general, education in Bahrain compares favourably with other GCC countries. In 1919, Bahrain was the first of the GCC members to introduce a public education system. Compulsory, state-funded education was introduced in 2005 and 11 per cent of total government expenditure is currently ring-fenced for education. The adult literacy rate in Bahrain is 91.4 per cent, among the highest in the region (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013). Bahrain boasts more than 250 primary and secondary schools including 65 private schools that offer curricula from the UK, US, France, India, Japan and Pakistan, with discussions under way to set up a German school in Bahrain (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013). The University of Bahrain was established in 1986 and has nine colleges, including arts, science, business, law, IT, education and engineering. In 2010 over 12,700 students enrolled at the university and there were over 670 full-time academic staff, 40 per cent of whom were international (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013). In Bahrain, the Gulf Technical College offered subjects to only male students in 1968. Today, the University of Bahrain, with which the Gulf Technical College merged, has a student population of which about 60 per cent are women (Findlow, 2013). At much the same time as the publication of the report of the World Bank (2008), the Qualifications Authority for the Assessment of Education and Training (QAAET) was established in Bahrain.

Al-Alawi, Al-Kaabi, Rashdan, and Al-Khaleefa (2009), using the University of Bahrain as a case study of applying quality assurance in higher education in the kingdom, make the following observations:

> In recent years, Bahrain has taken serious actions to diversify its sources of income and solve major national problems such as unemployment. Through this process it discovered that one of the main factors for its economic problems was the quality of higher education on offer. This led to the creation of a national Quality Assurance Authority that aims to regulate higher education institutes according to the national standards. This initiative is expected to both improve higher education in Bahrain and maintain international standards to ensure its reputation outside the country. To start, the Quality Assurance Authority relied indirectly on the good practices of higher education institutions in Bahrain. These were used as a benchmark for standards. (p. 61)

As well as GCC comparative indicators, some worldwide measures are also more than satisfactory. The World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013* ranks Bahrain 35th out of 144 countries worldwide for the quality of its educational system. The report notes Bahrain's primary school net enrolment rate is 97.8 per cent (World Economic Forum, 2011). In line with international trends, Bahrain has a high percentage of school graduates going into higher education (Quality Assurance Authority for Training & Education, 2012). The number of students at the University of Bahrain increased threefold over the last decade, with Bahraini women accounting for approximately 70 per cent of students (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013). The World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2012* also notes Bahrain's commitment to education, stating Bahrain is characterised by higher-than-average performances on education attainment. It also states that the secondary and tertiary education enrolment rates for women are higher than those of men; while the primary education enrolment rate is exactly the same for both genders (World Economic Forum, 2012).

Quality reviews of Bahrain's education institutions by the QAAET are not so positive. However, there are points of promise. It is evident from the results of the reviews carried out to date that the higher education institutions operating in Bahrain are at different stages with respect to the quality of provision; many still have a considerable way to go to reach a good standard both at the programme and institutional levels. Nevertheless, this report shows that there are signs that improvement in all areas is beginning to emerge (Quality Assurance Authority for Training & Education, 2012). All institutions now have quality assurance offices, dedicated staff responsible for quality assurance, and quality assurance committees. However, many institutions still have to develop terms of reference for these committees. A quality culture across each institution has still to be established within the institutions (Quality Assurance Authority for Training & Education, 2012).

On the negative side, the quality of teaching and learning continues to be weak in a number of institutions. There is a paucity of varied and innovative teaching strategies; a lack of different types of formative and summative assessment that ensures students acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This, in turn, means that students are being assessed at the exit level in terms of recall and description rather than higher-level skills. This negatively impacts on academic standards and by implication on the marketability of the graduates of these programmes (Quality Assurance Authority for Training & Education, 2012). Many institutions still do not have formalised mechanisms to support students at risk of failure; there is a need for institutions to address this issue (Quality Assurance Authority for Training & Education, 2012). The results of the institutional and follow-up reviews show that most private higher education institutions are weak in planning and governance (Quality Assurance Authority for Training & Education, 2012). In some private providers, higher education is still taking place in inadequate, cramped buildings. There is a lack of recreational as well as sufficient library space. In the meantime some private institutions have rented extra space until their new campus is built and is operational. While this attempt to ameliorate the situation is noted, the student learning experience in many institutions is severely compromised and urgent steps need to be taken to provide a quality learning environment for students (Quality Assurance Authority for Training & Education, 2012).

There are some positive indications relating to satisfaction of the demands of the labour market. In 2011 the Central Bank of Bahrain reported that the financial services sector employed over 14,300 people, with more than 9,000 Bahraini nationals employed, making up over 65 per cent of the sector workforce (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013). Bahrain's increase in labour productivity was rated by the Conference Board, an independent organisation of the United States of America, as the highest in the Gulf since the year 2000. Its report concluded that Bahrain's labour productivity was five times that of the GCC average (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013). However, Bahrainis are not the preferred choice for employers in the private sector, since the education system does not yet provide young people with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in "our labour market" (Economic Development Board, 2008).

Drowley and Marshall (2013) warn that higher education in Bahrain is too easily influenced by external consultants. They note the involvement of the Scottish Qualifications Authority in the development of a Bahrain qualifications framework and comment that Scotland's progress has been slow in this type of development. This,

they say, is mainly because it was first in the field and began its programme of progressive educational reform unaware it was heading towards a unified National Qualifications Framework. Drowley and Marshall (2013, p. 76) conclude: "Evidence suggests countries are quick to borrow models from others but less ready to evaluate lessons learned during implementation."

It is of interest to note the priorities for education in Bahrain as stated by influential bodies. Perspectives of the Council of Ministers and the Economic Development Board (both representing the voice of the Bahrain Government) follow.

Improving the organisation's physical infrastructure and aligning it with the highest quality standards will be the focus of the next stage (Council of Ministers , 2010).

Efforts to enhance essential education infrastructure, including information technology, will continue during the next stage in attempt to enhance the teaching and learning process (Council of Ministers , 2010).

After an "honourable achievement" has been reached at the quantitative level, the focus in the next phase will be on a similar achievement at the quality of education level (Council of Ministers , 2010).

The Government of Bahrain will gradually move away from mere service provision. It will shift its focus to generating and enforcing sound, forward-looking policies in critical areas, such as economy and finance, health care, education, the environment, security and social justice (Economic Development Board, 2008).

A first-rate education system enables all Bahrainis to fulfil their ambitions (Economic Development Board, 2008).

There will be setting of standards for quality across the education sector, regular review of the performance of Bahrain's educational and training institutions and comparison of them with those of Bahrain's competitors (Economic Development Board, 2008). (By way of comment, it is worth noting the focus on competitors.)

Because education is essential for making Bahrain's *Vision 2030* a reality, there is a need to develop an education system that provides every citizen with educational opportunities appropriate to their individual needs, aspirations and abilities. Education and training need to be relevant to the requirements of Bahrain and its economy, delivered to the highest possible quality standards, and accessible based on ability and merit (Economic Development Board, 2008).

So what is Bahrain doing at the educational crossroads of its future? Consistent with the findings of the World Bank, the relationship between education and economic growth was seen to be weak. A divide between education and employment was seen to be in need of bridging and the quality of education was considered disappointing (World Bank, 2008, p. xvi; Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013).

This writer notes that, from all of the points mentioned above, education as a contributor to a healthy economy, the matching of graduates with employment opportunities, and quality as an essential aspect of practice are of vital interest to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, which was a government initiative of Bahrain's Economic Development Board to address those very things. The complement of government

programmes introduced within the last five years with the aim of improving education are a teacher training initiative, improvement of upper-secondary vocational programmes, a quality assurance initiative to raise the accreditation standards, and a 'polytechnic college' – as it was initially called, referring to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013). The Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) was launched in February 2009. The QAAET reviews and assesses schools, universities and training institutes, as well as conducting national examinations. The body aims to raise educational standards within Bahrain (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013).

Are such moves by the Bahrain Government addressing the needs identified by the World Bank (2008)? The World Bank (2008), in focusing on a 'youth bulge' that is evident in Bahrain and other MENA countries make the following point:

> Today, these education systems must adjust from an environment where they can select their clientele to one where the clientele selects them – and this clientele has grown in size and diversity, has continually changing educational needs, and has become increasingly discerning. Essentially, are the people in Bahrain who want education able to get it? And is it appropriate education? (p. 283)

The World Bank (2008) also notes that there has been too much reliance on public sector employment for graduates of higher education in MENA countries. So, are Bahraini graduates getting appropriate opportunities in the private sector? Furthermore, MENA countries have put "cumbersome and costly regulations" in place (World Bank, 2008, p. 283). Is this the case with Bahrain? Does it have an influence on quality assurance, management, and improvement? The World Bank (2008) also makes the point that "issues of quality and efficiency constitute pressing challenges for the education systems" (p. 284). Are these being addressed in Bahrain?

What is needed, in terms of management style, is a shift from "command and control" to "coordinate and evaluate" (World Bank, 2008, p. 284). The development of new functions is required. Education authorities need to be effective at managing and regulating partnerships, diversifying resources, and ascertaining that both public and private educational institutions have appropriate quality systems in place. Education authorities, when dealing with potential providers, contractors and sponsors of education and associated activities, "must learn to negotiate the terms of partnership rather than impose them" (World Bank, 2008, p. 284).

Overall, it can be said that the intention of the Bahrain Government, in implementing its educational reforms, is good. However, whether management styles are appropriate in the way the reforms are being introduced is questionable.

In a study that explored higher education research in Asia, the publications of 38 specialised journals on higher education over the past three decades were examined. The findings indicate a growing number of higher education research publications but the proportion of Asian publications in relation to the total world publications in higher education research remains stationary. The higher education research community in Asia is heavily concentrated in a few countries and universities, resting on a relatively small number of core scholars who publish research in the international specialised higher education journals. In response to increasing challenges in Asian higher

education systems, Jung and Horta (2013) suggest that the higher education research community in Asia needs to be expanded and include more regional and international collaborations.

Western Asia has less institutional engagement in higher education research. This region includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Jung & Horta, 2013). Eastern Asia comprises China, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Macao, and is where universities are more active in higher education research. The only exceptions are Mongolia and North Korea, with no publications. Eastern Asia accounts for half of the total universities in Asia working on higher education research, suggesting that the higher education research community is highly concentrated in Eastern Asia (Jung & Horta, 2013).

Encouragingly, there has been some research of significance on quality that has been undertaken by employees of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. This is useful input for this study. In particular, Hornblow, Donnelly, and Hornblow (2010), in a case study carried out at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, ask the questions:

> Is quality management a matter of begrudging compliance or positive, proactive involvement to the employees of an organisation? Is the leadership approach command and control or encouragement of share, own and innovate? Is the underpinning model of quality assurance appropriate to the context and time? (pp. 1-2)

In exploring such questions with an administrative services team that was looking to develop its abilities in both analytical and creative thinking, Hornblow et al. (2010) conclude: "Organisational needs for compliance and creativity go hand in hand" (p. 1). They propose an evolutionary model for quality, adapted from Hodgetts et al. (1994), which recognises a development from TQM to the Learning Organization to Innovative Quality Management (this being a substitute for the last phase of World-class Organization of Hodgetts et al.).

Otherwise, there are many gaps in the research. There are many questions to be answered. For example, how effective has the Qualifications Authority for the Assessment of Education and Training (QAAET) been? How is it perceived? And in relation to World Bank (2008, p. xvi) findings: Is the relationship between education and economic growth strengthening? Is the divide between education and employment being bridged? Has the quality of education improved?

The next section explores the initiative to establish Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as a quality-based project.

2.6 Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as a Quality-based Initiative

Arabian Gulf Polytechnic was launched towards the end of 2008 to provide vocational qualifications for Bahrainis. It is considered "a bold and visionary initiative contributing to the support of social and economic development in the Kingdom of Bahrain, in line with *Vision 2030*" (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013, p. 5). It has been established as "a progressive educational institution committed to providing young Bahrainis with the education and skills needed to contribute to and

benefit from the economic transformation of the Kingdom of Bahrain" (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013, p. 5). The polytechnic aims to address the need for a skilled domestic labour force with a view to producing graduates that are work-ready. Programmes provided by the polytechnic have been developed in consultation with business, industry, professionals and international education and training institutions (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2013). The initiatives are compatible with the concept of employability. As stated by Yorke and Knight (2006, p. 2): "Employability refers to the potential a graduate has for obtaining, and succeeding in, graduate-level positions." Yorke (2006, p. 2), in spelling this out a little further, comments that the potential to get a job at an appropriate level is "subject to influences in the environment, a major influence being the state of the economy".

The vision statement of the institution is: "Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is to be a world-class provider of applied higher education." The mission statement of the institution is: "Arabian Gulf Polytechnic produces professional and enterprising graduates with the 21st century skills necessary for the needs of the community locally, regionally and internationally" (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2014, p. 1). Again, the concept of employability is compatible with the polytechnic's mission and vision. As stated by Yorke (2006, p. 8), employability is "a set of achievements – skills, understandings, and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy".

Quality has been tagged by the polytechnic's top management as an important component of being a world-class institution. It is recognised that a consideration in developing frameworks, for quality in general and for programme review in particular, is that the concept of quality should not be detached from purpose and context (Harvey & Williams, 2010, p. 3). It is also to be reiterated that quality has political undertones (Harvey & Williams, 2010, p. 3). Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is set in a part of the world that has seen considerable disturbance in recent times. Kuhn (2012) states that "popular explanations for the Arab Spring have highlighted food insecurity, unemployment, and frustrated youth" (p. 649). But this may be simplistic. Scholars have noted that such grievances alone are insufficient to explain the Arab revolutions and have offered three interconnected narratives of change. First, some argue that popular outrage over the government's failure to meet social needs went well beyond mere grievance (Amin & et al, 2012). Second, many have highlighted the role of social media and new protest movements in enabling rapid, unexpected change (Dalacoura, 2012). Finally, some point to the emergence of a new pan-Arab identity oriented toward justice, progress, and dignity (Lynch, 2012).

All of the aspects mentioned above (education as a contributor to a healthy economy, the matching of graduates with employment opportunities, and quality as essential aspect of practice), are of vital interest to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, which was a government initiative of Bahrain's Economic Development Board to address these very things.

2.7 Conclusion

This dissertation is about the quest for a key process that will formulate institution-wide and sustained improvement. Theoretical underpinnings were kept well in mind in selecting items for the literature review. This chapter has reviewed the literature

related to a higher education institute seeking to intentionally build a contextualised programme review framework by using a case study method. This signifies an appreciation that a situation or opportunity (such as that indicated by the research question) can be observed, analysed, developed and evaluated according to the needs, wants and capabilities of interested parties. It acknowledges that changes can be made, with an intention of improvement, in a dynamic and less-than-stable environment. This fits the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic programme review initiative.

Associated theoretical bases of significance are: systems theory (Gharajedaghi, 1999), with its strategic relationships among inputs, transformation process, outputs, and feedback, and an appreciation of both internal and external environments, recognised by the institution that is the focus of the research (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2008); and the Learning Organization (Senge, 1990) as a particular interpretation of systems theory and including aspects of effective teamwork, again recognised as important by the institution.

What is written about the value added aspects of programme review suggests that it is a difficult and time-consuming process. However, it can be very effective when done within the bounds of context and purpose, where the people involved in teaching the programme are also part of designing the review process and conducting the review. They are part of the problem and the solution.

Trust is revealed as a huge factor in determining what types of quality assurance models are effective. Evidence in recent literature indicates changes in the way quality is conceptualised in higher education; it is based on a changing agenda, from accountability to learner engagement and learning, resulting in a shift from an institutional focus onto programmes. However, the research to date on programme review is not all positive; this suggests that an alternative model of programme review should be explored.

As stated by the World Bank (2008) in drawing a conclusion from its study:

> The broad and principal message of this report is that MENA has yet to fully embark on the road of reforming its education systems to satisfy its development needs. It also has yet to catch up with the more dynamic economies of the newly industrialised world (p. 298).

A new paradigm is needed (World Bank, 2008, p. xv). However, developments can be seen as evolutionary as well as revolutionary (Hodgetts, Luthans, & Lee, 1994). Key findings from the literature review which proved helpful in appreciating the context for the development of programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic include:

- We live in a fast-changing, dynamic world that demands that people are highly and appropriately educated (American Society for Quality, 2013; Harvey & Williams, 2010a; Hodgetts et al., 1994; World Bank, 2013).
- It is important to make sure an institution's graduates can receive higher education qualifications that are recognised locally and internationally – by potential employers, for example, and other interested parties (Economic Development Board, 2008).
- The needs of all parties involved should be kept well in mind – the learners, the institutions, industry, the wider community, the country, regional institutions, agencies and organisations throughout the world (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Kristensen, 2010; World Bank, 2013).

- Quality management, assurance and improvement systems in higher education should be world class. Contextual aspects should be incorporated in the quality model. Local differences, wants and needs should be recognised (Harvey & Williams, 2010a; Hodgetts et al., 1994; Jackson, 2009).
- Quality systems are owned by all vitally interested parties – the learners, teachers, administrative and specialist support staff, and management at all levels. The organisational structure should be appropriate to the quality strategy. It is important to establish an environment that is conducive to education, training and development in quality (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Harvey & Williams, 2010b).
- Appropriate frameworks for institutional and programme review should be built and principles, standards and processes should be developed and applied. Appropriate metaphors for quality management, assurance, and improvement should be chosen and used (Morgan, 1986).
- There should be agreement on deadlines and budgets for development. They should be met and accommodated. The opportunities for project management and accomplishment should be enjoyed. A positive, collaborative, analytical and innovative quality culture should be fostered (Morgan & D'Andrea, 2009; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Stensaker, 2010).
- Opportunities should be provided for people to be educated in their own country. There should be a sufficient number of higher education institutions, with appropriate disciplines and programmes, to accommodate those seeking tertiary education in their country, including secondary school leavers and others (Jackson, 2009).
- There should be an appropriate mix of public and private institutions. Appropriate changes to the systems within the public institutions should be made (Carroll et al., 2009; World Bank, 2013).
- It is important to ensure that the systems within the private institutions are appropriate. Collaboration with higher education institutions in other countries should take place as appropriate (Carroll et al., 2009; World Bank, 2013).
- There should be a quality assurance agency within the country that has responsibility for programme accreditation, the licensing of new institutions, and the establishment of standards for institutional management. It should be supportive, not dictatorial (Jackson, 2009).
- There should be appropriate, coordinated relationships with international agencies and other quality-focused organisations. Opportunities should be taken to explore and share thoughts on international best practice. Research, and the potential for development and improvement, should be actively encouraged and supported in the field of quality (Harvey & Williams, 2010a; Newton, 2012).
- The GCC countries should assist, collaboratively, in developing and promoting the region as a network of high-quality higher education. The quality of education at an institution such as Arabian Gulf Polytechnic should contribute to the social, economic and technological development of the country (Jackson, 2009).

Finally, the findings from this comprehensive review of the literature are an essential component of this study as they provided an opportunity to build on established theories and perspectives, where possible and appropriate. This process also enabled an assessment of gaps in the literature that allows this study to contribute to new understandings. The next chapter describes how the research was designed and conducted.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to undertake this research. In particular, the research orientation, research strategy, data design and collection procedures and the data analysis process are explained. In addition, the writer discusses his position as a practitioner-researcher, the criteria for judging the quality of the study, and ethical considerations.

The focus of this study was the development of an appropriate framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic from a practitioner's perspective. This was achieved by creating a process to develop a contextualised framework for programme review. The developed programme review framework included key principles, standards and processes to undertake programme review that are appropriate for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's context and in line with international practice. Furthermore, the developed programme review was implemented and refined based on stakeholders' reflection and feedback.

3.2 Research Orientation

The orientation of this research is qualitative. Characteristics of qualitative research influence both the nature of the research itself and the approach taken by the researcher. Stake (2010) proposes several special characteristics of qualitative study as follows:

- It is interpretive. It focuses on the meanings of human affairs as seen from different perspectives and as such qualitative researchers are comfortable with multiple meanings and they respect intuition.
- It is experiential which means it is empirical and field-oriented. It emphasises observations by participants – what they see more than what they feel. It strives to be naturalistic, to neither intervene nor arrange in order to get data.
- It is situational. It is oriented to objects and activities, each in a unique set of contexts. It makes the point that each place and time has uniqueness that works against generalisation.
- It is personalistic, that is, it is empathic, working to understand individual perceptions. It seeks uniqueness more than commonality; it honours diversity. It seeks people's points of view, frames of reference, and value commitments. Often issues are emic (emerging from the people) more than etic (brought by researchers). The researcher is often the main research instrument.

Stake (2010) emphasises that when qualitative study is done well, it is also likely to be well triangulated, with key evidence, assertions, and interpretations considered from various angles. Qualitative research acknowledges researcher bias and that the meaning-making of the data is co-constructed. Therefore, before reporting, researchers try deliberately to disconfirm their own interpretations. The report discloses the researchers' positioning and, as such, gives ample information so readers can also make their own interpretations. Stake (2010) also indicates that qualitative researchers make strategic choices, leaning more one way or another, towards knowledge production or towards assisting practice or policy development. In addition, qualitative researchers aim to represent typical cases or to maximise understanding of unique cases.

Freebody (2006) concludes that qualitative researchers lay claim to acting on complexity at the potential expense of simplicity, on fidelity of observation at the potential expense of formalised techniques of design and analysis, and on the distinctiveness of experiences at the potential expense of their standardisation across people and settings. To some researchers, these are serious losses; to others, they impose new rigours that can offer the promise of higher-impact research in education and a professionally honest relationship between the people doing the studying and the human objects of their study.

This research undertaken at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic took place in the context of a higher education institution, was emergent rather than prefigured, was fundamentally interpretive, and was experiential, empirical and field-oriented. It used multiple methods that were interactive and humanistic. In addition, the researcher adopted a holistic view, employed iterative, complex reasoning involving both induction and deduction, and systematically reflected upon who he was in the inquiry, being sensitive to the ways in which his personal lifestyle shaped the study (Stake, 2010).

The purpose of the study was to learn from participants in the polytechnic setting how they had experienced the initiative to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. This purpose is reflected in the research focus question: What emerges as an appropriate framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic from a practitioner's perspective? A qualitative orientation was adopted to permit the researcher to learn and understand the perceptions of the participants and the complexity of their interpretations. The aim was to seek answers to the research questions that focus on the social construction of experience and how meaning is created (Cooper & White, 2012).

3.3 Research Questions

Given the purposes of the research, the overarching question provided the focus for the research and summarised the research problem:

> What emerges as an appropriate framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic from a practitioner's perspective?

Three sub-questions that formed a framework to support the overarching question and assist to focus of the study were:

1. What emerges as an appropriate process that can be used to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic?
2. What are the key principles, standards and processes for programme review that are appropriate for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's context and in line with international practice?
3. How can programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic be best implemented?

3.4 Research Method: Case Study

In education, the case study approach has enjoyed prominence as a research methodology for some decades. One reason for this is researchers' frustration at the apparent lack of impact of the more traditional forms of research on daily educational practice and, conversely, educators' frustration at the apparent non-translatability of

many research findings (Freebody, 2006). Freebody (2006, p. 81) indicates that "the goal of a case study, in its most general form, is to put in place an inquiry in which both researchers and educators can reflect upon particular instances of educational practice".

A case study method was used to undertake this research. This was appropriate because the research focus was on contemporary, as opposed to historical, events and the researcher had no control over actual behavioural events (Yin, 1994). Stake (1995, p. xi) indicates that a case study is "expected to catch the complexity of a single case", and adds:

> We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (p. xi).

This research was a qualitative case study and may also be classified as intrinsic as the researcher had an interest in the case (Stake, 1995). The use of the case study method assisted the researcher in investigating the programme review process in depth, within a particular context, and this led to the creation of new knowledge (Timmons & Cairns, 2009).

Taking into account the nature of the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic community, which is a mixture of nationalities, the case study method worked well in addressing cultural sensitivities. Banister, Begoray and Nimmon (2009) indicate that the case study approach is particularly important for developing cultural sensitivity. It helps the researcher to gain knowledge, practise skills and develop attitudes to prepare for longer-term work involving a larger sample of the culture-sharing group.

The case study method supported the theoretical underpinnings of this research, which included constructivism and systems theory. Yin (2009) indicates that the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as small group behaviour and organisational and managerial processes.

As is typical of case study research, it was conducted in collaboration with others. The others in this instance were essentially people with a direct interest in the research question: What emerges as an appropriate framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic from a practitioner experience perspective? Their own practice at the polytechnic (including this author's) was researched, with evidence that there has been a change in their practice (and this author's) in line with the findings of the research. Dialogue, involving open minds and the sharing of ideas, was integral to the approach.

A key reason for selection of the case study method was acknowledgement of this author's involvement in the research as both a researcher, with a need to consider evidence critically and objectively, and as an employee of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, with a personal and organisational interest in developing a process that could be used for a contextualised framework for programme review.

3.5 Design and Data Collection

Stake (2010) points out that qualitative researchers review documents, gather artefacts and use all kinds of data, including numerical measurements, photographs, indirect observation and texting, to clarify the picture of what is going on. Much qualitative data does not fit easily into statistical analysis, although the researcher could classify each datum according to a categorical scheme such as youth initiated, coach initiated, and college official initiated. Stake (2010) indicates that in all of his research settings documentation was central and posits that research involves both analysis (taking things apart) and synthesis (putting things together). He states that researchers gather data to increase their experience. Researchers look closely at the patches of collected data – the parts of their experience; that is, they analyse and then put the parts together, often in different ways than before.

The method of this research followed Yin's (1994) four-stage recommended approach which comprises: (1) Design the case study; (2) Conduct the case study; (3) Analyse the case study evidence; and (4) Develop the conclusions, recommendations and implications. These stages are linear but iterative (Yin, 2009). Figure 3.1 presents the six sources of evidence used for this case study: documents; archival records; open-ended interviews; group interviews; structured interviews; and surveys and observations (direct and participant) (Yin, 2009). These sources of evidence were used in order to increase the reliability of the study by using multiple sources of data and minimising the weaknesses of each method (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995). A case study database was created to allow the researcher to organise the evidence and for data validation purposes (Yin, 1994).

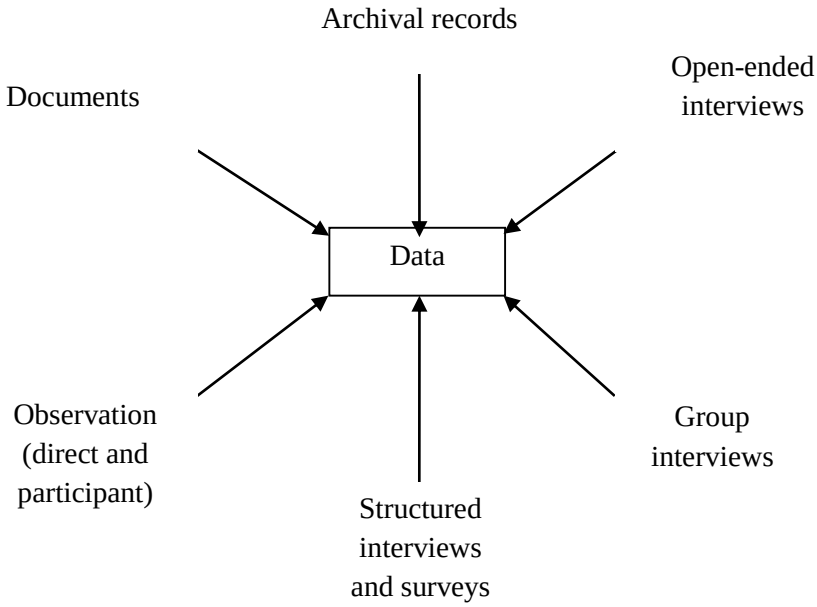


Figure 3.1 Multiple Sources of Data

The informed consent of participants in the research was obtained. The purpose of the study was described in detail in advance and people participated on a voluntary basis. Acceptance was documented. Anonymity of participants was honoured where requested and appropriate (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2009). Permission of the

institution to carry out the research was confirmed through its Research and Ethics Committee.

A group interview technique was adopted to gather the research data. Marczak and Sewell (1998, p. 1) define a group interview as a group of "interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue". Krueger and Casey (2000) indicate that group interviews work particularly well to determine the perception, feelings, and thinking of people about issues, products, services, or opportunities. Furthermore, they indicate that a group interview is one of the strategies used to test solution ideas. The group size was limited to no more than eight participants as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2000).

The research participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) willing to share; (2) currently working at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic or working in further education in Bahrain; (3) have five or more years of experience in the field of programme review; (4) have a post-graduate degree; and (5) have experience in polytechnic-level education. Chosen participants met a minimum of three of the five criteria.

Research Process: Four Phases

Data were collected in four phases, each of which employed qualitative methods. Phase One was designing the case study, Phase Two was conducting the case study, Phase Three was analysing the case study evidence, and Phase Four was concluding, recommending and considering the implications (refer to Figure 3.2).

In relation to the linear iterative process of the case study, Phases One and Two were part of the planning, Phase Three involved acting and observing, and Phase Four involved reflecting and sharing (Yin, 2009). As an important part of the methodology, participant observation was employed because this fitted the two-hat situation of being both a researcher and an influential member of the organisation in the context of the case study. As recommended by Jorgensen (1989):

> Participant observation is especially appropriate for scholarly problems when little is known about the phenomenon, there are important differences between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders, and the phenomenon is somehow obscured from the view of outsiders. (p. 12)

Both process and content aspects of meetings were recorded electronically, daily comments entered in the reflective journal, and, where appropriate, on charts with the names of participants on the vertical axis and contribution categories (being 'positive comments on process aspects', 'negative aspects on process aspects', 'positive comments on content aspects', and 'negative comments on content aspects') on the horizontal axis. Analysis was conducted on selected audio transcriptions, graphical representations, documented reflections on holistic aspects of meetings and other interactions with research participants, and in the reflective journal entries.

3.5.1 Phase One: Design the Case Study

Following Yin's (1994) suggestion, the first step was the development of the case study protocols. This phase consisted of two parts. First, it involved consideration of

the skills that the researcher needed to undertake the case study and, second, development of the case study protocol. According to Yin (1994) the researcher should master several key skills including: (1) be able to ask good questions; (2) be a good listener; (3) analyse and interpret the participants' responses; (4) be flexible to manage difficult cases; (5) understand the research topic; and (6) reduce possible sources of bias.

The second part of this phase was about developing the case study protocol. Yin (2009, p. 1) defines a case study protocol as a "formal document capturing the entire set of procedures involved in the collection of data for a case study". The protocol adopted, in line with requirements for completeness suggested by Yin (2009), included the following: (1) the procedures for contacting key informants and making field work arrangements; (2) explicit language and reminders for implementing and enforcing the rules for protecting human subjects; (3) a mental agenda to be addressed throughout the data collection, including suggestions about the relevant sources of data; and (4) a preliminary outline for the final case study report. In incorporating these ideas, the case study protocol enhances the reliability of the case study (Yin, 1994).

The case study protocol outlined the process that was used to undertake the case study. This answered the first research sub-question: What emerges as an appropriate process that can be used to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic?

The researcher provided the research participants with an opportunity to comment on and provide feedback about the protocol, which led to review and improvement as well as to ensuring the research participants' involvement and agreement. As recommended by Yin (1994), this was achieved by a group interview.

The design of the case study consisted of two parts. Part One was an analysis of the first and second cycles of the programme review undertaken at the polytechnic in academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. The second part focused on the programme review undertaken, using the existing process and a facilitated session technique, for the academic year 2010-2011. The purpose of this step was to use existing institutional knowledge to achieve several objectives. These included: building on the existing strengths; identifying the main difficulties and problems in the existing process; establishing a dialogue with staff members in order to understand their perspectives about the existing process; observing staff interactions while developing the review framework; developing a smooth and gradual translation to the new programme review framework; providing an opportunity for the staff to engage in the process of developing the new framework; and providing learning opportunities to build staff capacity.

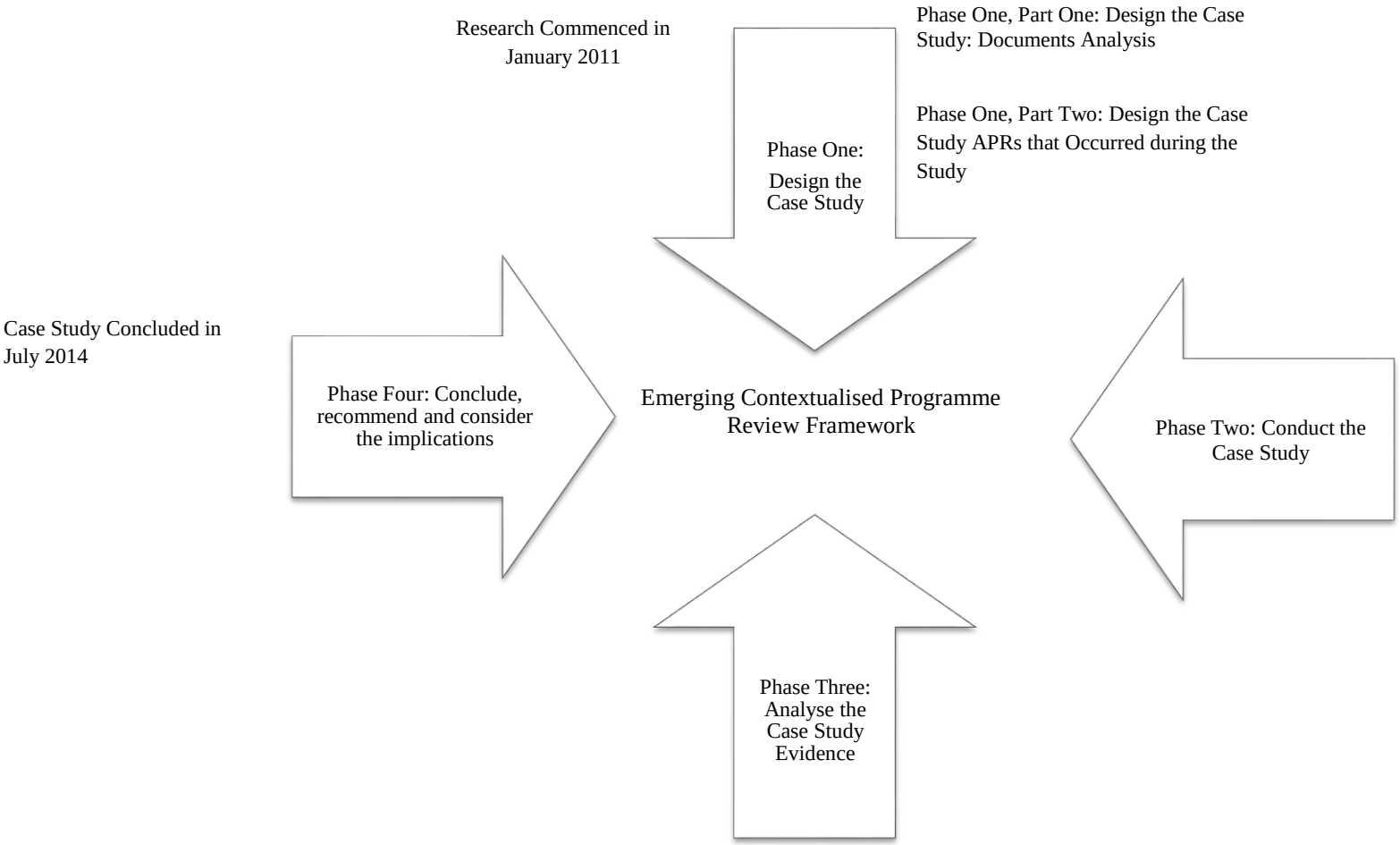


Figure 3.2 Case Study Method and Timeline

Annual Programme Reviews that Occurred before the Study

This researcher conducted an analysis of the programme review reports that were produced by the managers of each programme in the academic years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. These included the following programmes: Bachelor of Business; Bachelor of Engineering Technology; Bachelor of Information and Communication Technology; Bachelor of International Logistics Management; Bachelor of Visual Design; Bachelor of Web Media; Certificate in Academic Preparation (Foundation); Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning; and Diploma of Office Management.

Annual Programme Reviews that Occurred during the Study

This researcher added a facilitation session (something that hadn't been done for previous reviews) to the programme review for the academic year 2011-2012 (refer to Figure 3.3). The new process used the existing polytechnic programme review process with this one significant change.

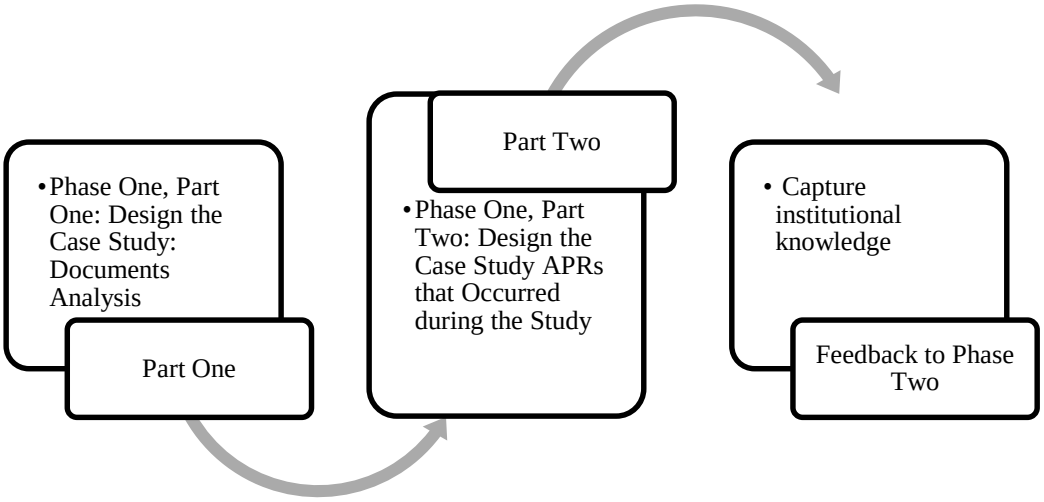


Figure 3.3 Case Study Design

All active polytechnic programmes were represented in the facilitated sessions. All Programme Managers were asked to undertake the Annual Programme Review as per the existing process using the same review template, same timeline and same approval process. A number of research instruments were used, including archival records (document analysis), observation (direct and participant) and group interviews.

3.5.2 Phase Two: Conduct the Case Study

This phase included input from a polytechnic-wide group as well as input from the literature. A principle that recurs in organisational management literature is the need for ownership of projects and systems by employees (Bennis & Biederman, 1997). Accordingly, it was assumed that having input at the developmental stage of the research by invited employees would foster such ownership. Having participants meet in groups was done in the interests of synergy, with those involved being able to share thoughts and build on them.

Group interviews were conducted with employees of the polytechnic who had an interest in programme review. They were representative of a number of categories of employment: senior management, programme management, faculty, academic affairs, quality assurance, and administrative services (refer to Table 3.1). Members were self-selecting within the categories. This was done to guard against motivated individuals being excluded because of selection bias that might have been attributable to the researcher, either as a deliberate or inadvertent action. Follow-up prompting by the researcher occurred in categories that lacked volunteers.

Table 3.1 Pilot Study Groups

Study Group	No. of participants
Review Group Research participants who undertook the pilot review exercise	8
Challenge Group Selected participants who critiqued the pilot review report	6
Programme Representative Group Persons with responsibility for programme leadership and management	3
Review Facilitator A selected person with known expertise in facilitating programme review	1
Quality Coordinator Participant-researcher with institutional responsibility as Quality Coordinator	1
Advisory Group A group of experienced reviewers and industry representatives	6
Student Group Current students and alumni of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic	8

The qualitative case study method seldom proceeds as a survey with the same questions asked of each respondent; rather, each interviewee is expected to have had unique experiences – special stories to tell. The qualitative interviewer should arrive with a short list of issue-oriented questions, possibly handing the respondent a copy, indicating there is concern about completing an agenda (Stake, 1995).

Stake (1995, p. 65) suggests that "trying out the questions in pilot form, at least in mental rehearsal, should be routine". In this research, Stake's comments were accepted by this researcher and his requirements were adhered to, that is, this researcher as interviewer had a short list of issue-oriented questions that had been tried out previously in pilot form. During observation, this researcher kept an accurate record of events to provide a relatively incontestable description for further analysis and ultimate reporting (Stake, 1995).

Interviews were conducted in groups that ranged between five and ten members in size (Krueger & Casey, 2000). This was in the interests of adequacy and manageability, and such a number is supported in the literature. There was no need for multiple groups in a particular category of employee, or of students, as this was not warranted by the number of people who offered themselves. Members of the groups self-selected. There was shoulder tapping by this researcher where there was underrepresentation in

particular categories. Opportunities were provided for individual responses where people were unavailable or did not wish to be part of a group.

Prior to asking the questions, introductory comments were provided in accordance with the case study protocol. These included an overview of the case study project, the purpose of the research, definitions of key terms, ethical considerations, and the methodology. An appropriate structure was developed for the meetings. This included: securing of informed consent; recording of the proceedings; assurance of confidentiality; maintenance of anonymity; security of documentation; and, finally, making arrangements for disposal of documentation after a suitable time.

To avoid researcher bias in selection of group interview members, this researcher put an open invitation to potential members of the polytechnic-wide group interview. Among those invited to the polytechnic-wide group were senior management staff, programme managers, curriculum unit members, quality unit members, tutors, professional development unit members, and teaching support staff. Among those invited to the Bahrain-wide group were labour market representatives, QAAET representatives, Bahrain Centre for Excellence representatives, HEC representatives, and other institutions' representatives. In the case of the Bahrain-wide group, practicalities dictated that this researcher was selective in choosing members rather than offering an open invitation. The inputs of the interview groups were recorded and later transcribed. Notes were taken during the group interview sessions and kept as documented evidence.

Framework Development

Based on the Case Design Phase, the researcher developed the new programme review framework as shown in Figure 3.4.

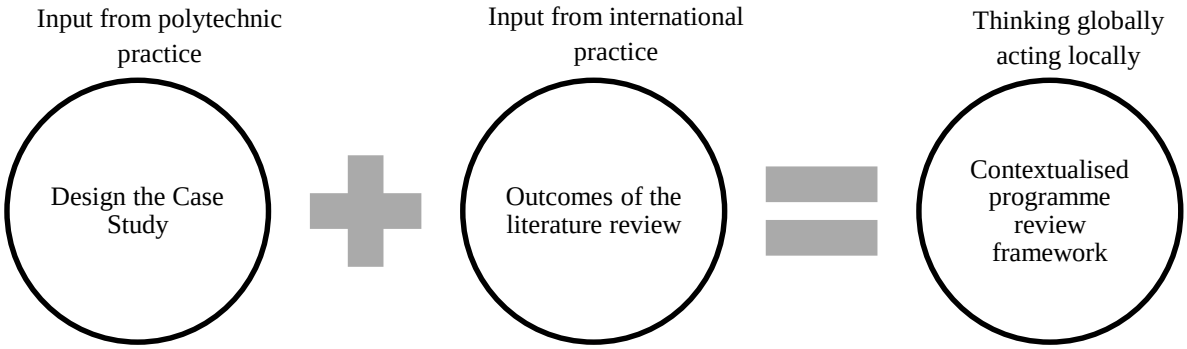


Figure 3.4 Framework Development

The researcher chose the Bachelor of Business programme in order to pilot the developed programme review framework. In 2009, Arabian Gulf Polytechnic purchased the Bachelor of Business programme from Auckland University of Technology (AUT). It was important to review this programme to ensure its appropriateness for Bahrain's requirements. This is the largest programme at the polytechnic in terms of the number of students and staff and was scheduled for external review by QAAET. The pilot testing was designed to form part of the preparation for

this programme review. Figure 3.5 illustrates the method that was used to undertake the pilot programme review for the Bachelor of Business programme.

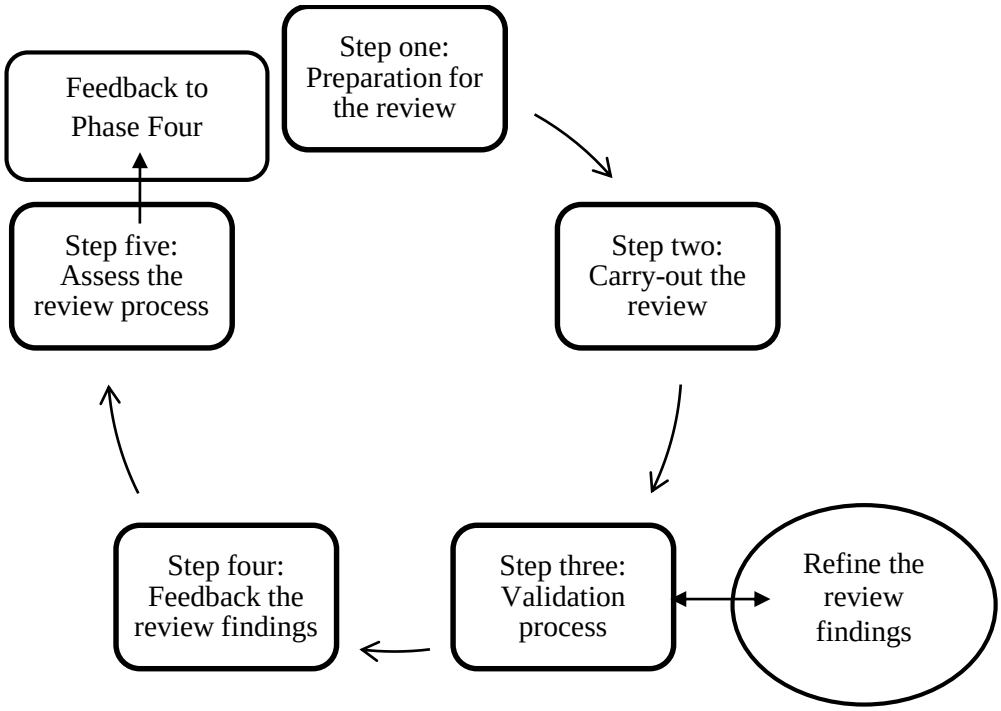


Figure 3.5 Pilot Testing Process

Preparation for the Review

The researcher selected a review facilitator and review team members as shown in Table 3.2. Before starting the review process several activities were undertaken to build awareness among review team members. The researcher decided to use the review standards suggested by QAAET. The review scope was identified and agreed on among the review team.

Table 3.2 Business Programme Review Team Members

Code	Number of years at the polytechnic	Gender	Role in the review process
R1	1	F	Reviewers
R2	4	M	
R3	5	F	
R4	4	M	
R5	4	M	
R6	3	F	
R7	3	M	
RF	3	F	Facilitator
QC	4	M	Quality Coordinator (Interviewer)

Carrying out the Review

Conducting the review included the stages: gathering evidence, developing review judgments, and issuing the draft review report.

Validation Process

The researcher selected the challenge team members as shown in Table 3.3 and established the challenge session protocol. Two challenge sessions were conducted to validate the review report findings.

Table 3.3 Challenge Team Members

Code	Number of years at the polytechnic	Gender	Role in the review process
C1	2	M	Challengers (Critical friends)
C2	4	M	
C3	4	M	

Advisory Group

One last set of research interviewees comprised six people external to the polytechnic. Two were consultant working in the field of quality, and both with experience of working with QAAET. Two others were owners of small businesses – one a management consultancy and the other an education and training consultancy, both of which were employing graduates of the polytechnic on a probationary basis, with the support of funding from a government agency. The remaining two were senior managers of large organisations in the private sector, both of which, again, were employing graduates of the polytechnic (refer to Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Advisory Group

Code	Role	Gender
E1	Consultant	M
E2	Consultant	F
E3	Owners of small businesses	M
E4	Owners of small businesses	M
E5	Senior managers of large organisations	F
E5	Senior managers of large organisations	M

3.5.3 Phase Three: Analyse the Case Study Evidence

Key inputs of data came from a review of the literature, the comments of polytechnic and external advisory groups, and the researcher's reflective journal. Key points from the literature review were tabulated and critiqued according to an appropriate adaptation of the criteria for selection of the review items. Recording and selective transcribing of input from the advisory groups was conducted. Key points from the advisory groups, and from advisory individuals who contributed but did not take part in group work, were tabulated and critiqued according to criteria pertinent to the research focus question and sub-questions. Key points from the reflective journal were also arranged and clarified.

The criteria that were applied to tabulated data were pertinent to the research focus question and sub-questions. An essential aspect of this was the maintenance of an appropriate focus throughout the study. Criteria were reviewed from phase to phase and adapted as necessary. Keeping an open mind and flexibility of approach were important aspects of the case study (Yin, 1994). There was a process of tabulation, critiquing, and synthesis, and inputs and interpretations were considered in an ongoing fashion alongside the stages of the case study process. In this way, the study adhered to its espoused methodology.

Data were analysed and interpreted with the researcher looking for similarities, categorisations, and items of particular significance. Analyses and interpretations were documented. While ensuring clarity was not lost, creative ways were found to present the findings.

Analysis started as soon as the research began and was ongoing. The research design was adapted, as appropriate, according to what was learned. General categories were established in advance. These were developed from the research focus question and sub-questions. Within the general categories, sub-categories that reflected recurring and emerging patterns and themes were identified and named.

This researcher was sensitive to the biases inherent in the case study method. These are documented in the reflective journal and are reported as an important aspect of the research. Making meaning from the data was the final step (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2009).

The researcher met with the review participants, including the review team members, challenge session members, programme owner and the facilitator, to assess the review process (refer to Table 3.5). Several tools were used to gather data, including group interviews, individual interviews, observation and questionnaires.

Table 3.5 List of Review Participants and Their Roles

Code	Number of years at the polytechnic	Role
R1	1	Reviewers
R2	4	
R3	5	
R4	4	
R5	4	
R6	3	
R7	3	
C1	2	Challengers
C2	4	
C3	4	
PR1	2	Programme Representative
PR2	4	
PR3	3	
RF	3	Review Facilitator
QC	3.5	Quality Coordinator

The researcher also met with eight students (four current and four alumni) to gather their views on existing programme review practice (refer to Table 3.6). The questions related to the periods prior to the study, during the study, and future possibilities and located in Appendix D.

Table 3.6 List of Students Interviewed, Including Specialisation and Status

Code	**Number of years at the polytechnic**	**Specialisation**	**Status**
S1	4.5	IT	Alumni
S2	5	Business	Alumni
S3	1	Web media	Current student
S4	1	IT	Current student
S5	4	Logistics	Current student
S6	3	Web Media	Current student
S7	4	Business	Alumni
S8	5	Business	Alumni

3.5.4 Phase Four: Conclude, Recommend and Consider the Implications

In this phase the case study conclusions were drawn based on a comprehensive analysis of the evidence. Another element of this phase was the development of the case study recommendations. This was followed by consideration of the implications for the existing system at the polytechnic when implementing the developed programme review framework. The polytechnic-wide group interview was used to identify these implications. The developed framework and its elements were refined based on the outcome of the previous phase. New refined review principles, refined review standards and a refined review process were introduced as an end outcome of the study. Table 3.7 presents the relationship between research questions, research method, research instruments and research outcomes.

Table 3.7 Links Relating Research Questions to the Research Process

Overarching research question	Research sub-question	Methodology phase	Research instrument	Research outcome
What emerges as an appropriate framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic from a practitioner's perspective?	Q1: What emerges as an appropriate process that can be used to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic?	Phase One: Designing the case study	Group interview Observation Literature review Reflective journal	Case study protocol Required skills Process to develop the framework
	Q2: What are the key principles, standards and process for programme review that are appropriate for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's context and in line with international practice?	Phase Two: Conducting the case study Phase Three: Analysing the case study evidence	Group interview Advisory group Observation Reflective journal	Programme review framework Key principles Standards Process to undertake the review
	Q3: How can programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic be best implemented?	Phase Four: Concluding, recommending and considering the implications	Group interview Observation Reflective journal	Identification of implications Refining of the framework Recommendations

3.6 Participant-Researcher

The researcher was the Quality Coordinator at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, where this case study was conducted. As the researcher was part of the investigation, the possibility to experience researcher bias was expected throughout the study. Onwuegbuzie (2003) indicates that researcher bias occurs when the researcher has personal biases or a priori assumptions that he/she is unable to bracket. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006, p. 236) indicate that "researcher bias may be subconsciously

transferred to the participants in such a way that their behaviours, attitudes, or experiences are affected".

The researcher made his assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation explicit and was aware of the implications of conducting backyard research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Glesne and Peshkin explain that there are a host of methodological as well as potentially ethical and political dilemmas associated with conducting research at the institution at which one is employed. While sensitive to the biases inherent in the kind of research undertaken (Merriam, S., 1998), the researcher was also aware that closeness does not make bias and loss of perspective inevitable (Patton, 2002).

As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the researcher was aware of two issues. First, the data collected were mediated through him (Merriam S., 1998) and second, as a participant-researcher, meaning is co-constructed with others involved in the research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). He was particularly careful with his dual role of participant and researcher, knowing that his interpretive perspective in the context was shaped by his personal experience and assumptions brought to the research process (Jones, 2002). His dual role also created the potential for role conflict, for ethical considerations related to the findings affecting the institute, and for not eliciting important data (Jones, 2002). Creswell (2003) cautions that this situation could lead to compromises in the researcher's ability to disclose information and raise difficult power issues, as well as creating problems of reporting biased, incomplete or compromised data.

A variety of techniques were used to assess the trustworthiness of this study. Each has its advantages and drawbacks as shown in the next section.

3.7 Criteria for Judging Quality

Qualitative research can be more credible as long as certain techniques, methods, and/or strategies are employed during the conduct of the inquiry (Cho & Trent, 2006). Validation is an important key to effective research and is a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research: (1) credibility; (2) transferability; (3) dependability; and (4) confirmability. Figure 3.6 illustrates these criteria and how they were addressed in this research.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006, p. 244) comment that "an important way of providing credibility to findings is by collecting rich and thick data, which correspond to data that are detailed and complete enough to maximise the ability to find meaning". Cho and Trent (2006) suggest that member checking occurs throughout the inquiry, and is a process in which collected data is played back to the informant to check for perceived accuracy and reactions. Peer debriefing provides an external evaluation of the research process and is essentially another form of inter-rater reliability, the major difference being that it is not empirically based but logically based (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

The researcher employed a variety of strategies to establish the trustworthiness of findings (refer to Figure 3.6). Triangulation involved a variety of methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009) to obtain evidence that helped in the development of a programme review framework for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, and was a key research strategy that was employed to increase confidence in the validity of the research

findings (Yin, 2009). A database was created to manage the triangulation process. The researcher also actively sought and described negative instances that contradicted prior observations.

A reflective research journal was kept throughout the phases. Additionally, in order to check subjectivity and ensure trustworthiness of the findings, data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions were tested with the members of those groups from whom the data were originally collected. Furthermore, the researcher developed an in-depth understanding of the case, extensive knowledge of the context, and characteristics of the participants. A peer reviewer was also charged with asking and reviewing questions about the findings as they emerged by using informal and formal discussions in a process of peer debriefing.

Finally, after completing the case study, the researcher conducted a data audit that examined the data collection and analysis procedures and made judgements about the potential for bias or distortion.

Source: Adapted from Merriam (1998) and Patton (2002)

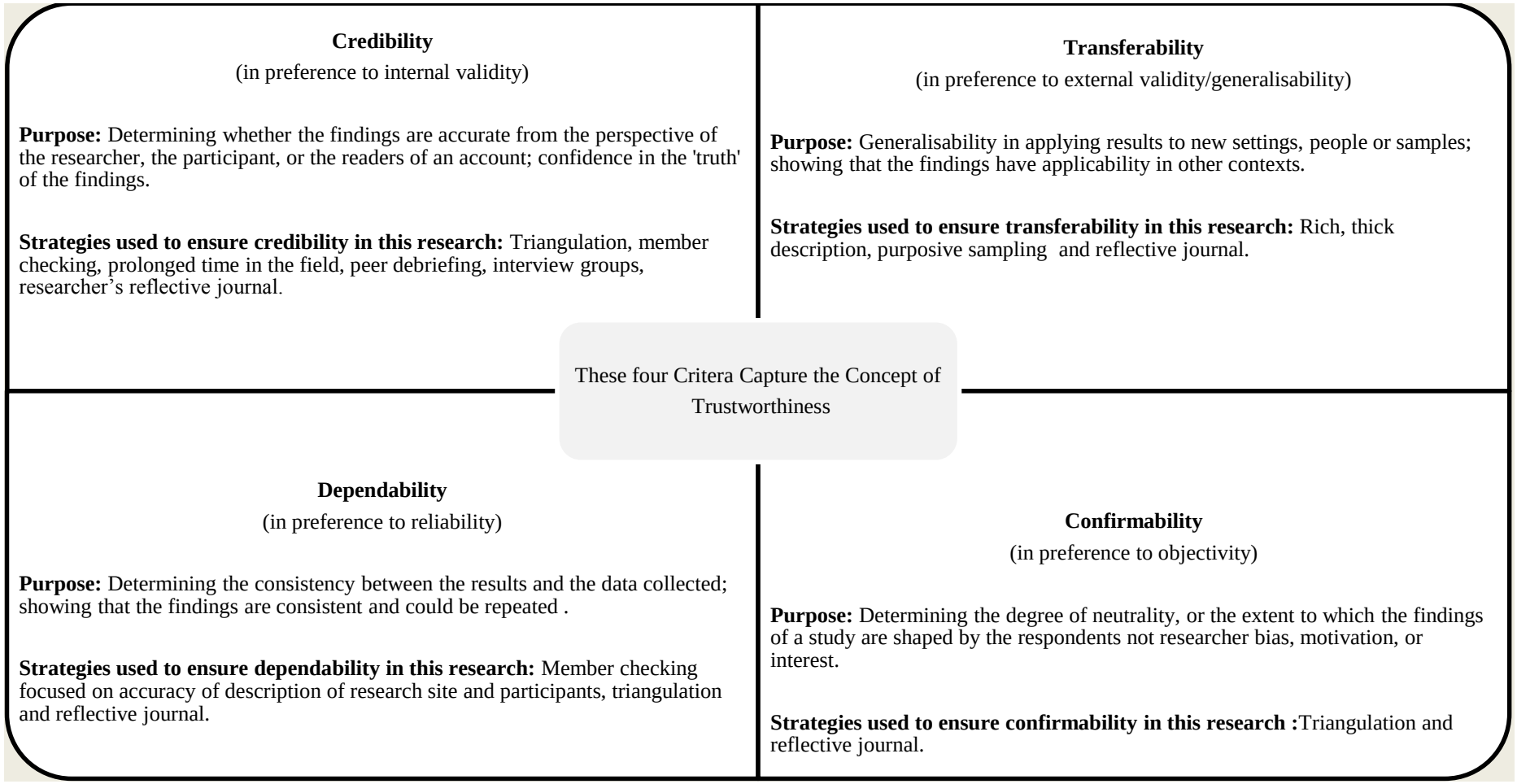


Figure 3.6 Criteria and Strategies for Judging and Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Research

3.8 Ethics

All participants at the polytechnic and the interviewees external to the polytechnic were briefed on the nature and purpose of the research, which had ethics clearance from both the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic Research Committee and the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Committee. Anonymity has been protected by providing codes instead of the names of participants and significant titles for positions within the polytechnic have been changed. Also, a pseudonym has been provided for the polytechnic.

This researcher was aware that his dual role of Quality Coordinator and researcher created the potential for role conflict and for ethical concerns related to the findings affecting the polytechnic. From the outset, all participants were made aware that the findings of the research would be available to any interested parties at the polytechnic. In this way, the potential for compromising the researcher's ability to disclose information or raise difficult issues uncovered through the research was mitigated against.

Important ethical considerations in conducting research are respecting sensitivities and safeguarding the privacy and dignity of the research population. Informed consent was sought as an essential component of involvement by participants in the research. According to Wiersma (2000) and Coombes, Danaher and Danaher (2004), informed consent means that participants must be informed about their role in the research and that they give their written consent for participation. In order to achieve this, the researcher designed an informed consent form. This covered the aims of the study and the role of the participant. It was made clear to participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

Study data was stored in the researcher's personal computer and he was the only person with access. Hard-copy material relating to research participants was kept in a locked filing cabinet. The study data was used only for the purposes of the research as described in the informed consent form. The group interview sessions were undertaken in a safe and pleasant environment (e.g., comfortable temperature, humidity, ventilation, and lighting).

Participants were given an opportunity to read the study report before it was made public in order to demonstrate "greater respect for potential difference of interpretation and the right to a fair voice" (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 57).

3.9 Conclusion

This study is classified as qualitative research. A qualitative orientation was considered to be appropriate for the purpose of this study, which was to uncover how the participants in a polytechnic setting had experienced the initiative to develop a contextualised programme review framework. This study also aimed to investigate and understand the perceptions of the participants and the complexity of their interpretations to answer the research questions. The case study strategy allowed a holistic focus on the context of the study and an in-depth exploration through multiple sources of data.

The method of this study followed Yin's (1994) four-phase recommended approach. These stages are linear but iterative. Data were analysed concurrently using the constant comparison method of data analysis, and the understandings constructed from the data at one phase informed the data collection process and the growing understandings of the next phase. The researcher exercised considerable sensitivity and systematically reflected upon his role as participant-researcher in the study. The trustworthiness of this study has been achieved by using various techniques as illustrated in this chapter. The rich, thick description used to communicate the findings conveys them in a way that allows readers to experience the setting and a sense of the outcomes associated with the initiative to develop a contextualised programme review framework, thus aiding transferability of the findings to other contexts.

The focus of Chapter 4 is on the data that was collected. This came from perusal and analysis of documents such as the polytechnic's original strategic plan, quality assurance model, and quality templates with an indication of some review principles and standards. Opinions on this data were gleaned from tutors, programme managers, heads of school, curriculum specialists and quality specialists through facilitated sessions. This led to establishment by the researcher of an initial form of a contextualised framework that was to be pilot tested within the School of Business. Data from the pilot testing came from face-to-face individual and group interviews. In addition, informed comments were received from students, alumni, and interviewees external to the polytechnic.

CHAPTER 4 DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the context in which the study was conducted and then outlines the findings from the three phases of the research journey. First, in Phase One, the Annual Programme Reviews (APRs) that occurred before and during the study were analysed. This analysis captured the existing Arabian Gulf Polytechnic practice and participants' perceptions about the APRs. From the findings of the first phase a programme review framework was developed, which includes three elements: review principles, review standards, and review process. A full programme review was carried out for the Business programme in Phase Two. Phase Three provided the analysis of the case study evidence in the light of participants' feedback. Boxed comments from the researcher's reflective journal appear throughout the chapter to inform the analysis.

Finally, in Phase Four, the findings of the assessment were detailed and the refined programme review framework described. Phase Four is covered in Chapter 5. The data were collected between January 2011 and February 2014. Figure 4.1 shows the case study timeline and the main phases.

4.2 General Context

This research was conducted at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, a higher education institution that provides applied education mainly for Bahraini secondary school-leavers. It is located in Isa Town in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which is a small island country in the Arabian Gulf. Arabian Gulf Polytechnic was a key reform initiative aimed at meeting industry requirements for graduates with technical and applied professional qualifications (Polytechnics International New Zealand, 2007). Underpinned by the values of excellence, learning and innovation, Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's vision is to become a "world-class provider of applied higher education" and to deliver on its mission of producing "professional and enterprising graduates with the 21st century skills necessary for the needs of the community locally, regionally and internationally" (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2014, p. 1).

4.2.1 Case Study Timeline and Main Research Phases

The researcher joined the polytechnic 20 months after its commencement. By that time, there had already been two cycles of Annual Programme Reviews. After the research commenced, in January 2011, there were five cycles of APRs. In Phase One, Part Two, there was a focus on APR within all seven programmes at the polytechnic. After that, the research focused primarily on the School of Business, which emerged as a pocket of enthusiasm and where the greatest number of students and staff resided. Essentially, this research moved from a macro approach, which included a comprehensive review of the literature, through a micro approach with a concentration on the School of Business, and then back to a macro approach in drawing conclusions, making recommendations, and considering implications (refer to Figure 4.1).

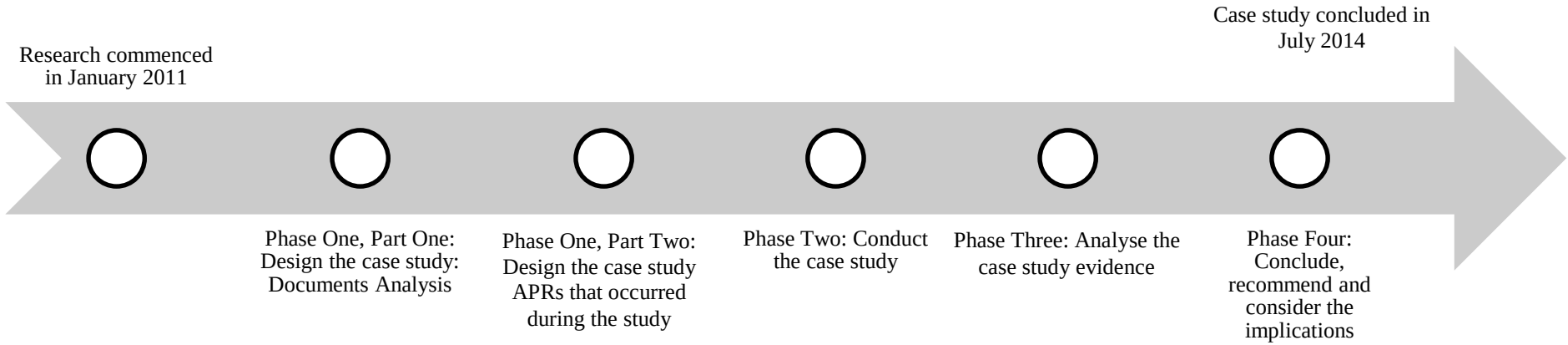


Figure 4.1 Case Study Timeline and Main Research Phases

4.3 Phase One: Design the Case Study

This phase consisted of two parts; with Part One involving document analysis and Part Two the annual programme reviews that occurred during the study (refer to Figure 4.2). A key purpose of Phase One was to capture the existing institutional knowledge so as to build on its strengths as well as to prepare for ongoing dialogue with participants with the aims of understanding their needs and involving them in developing a contextualised programme review framework.

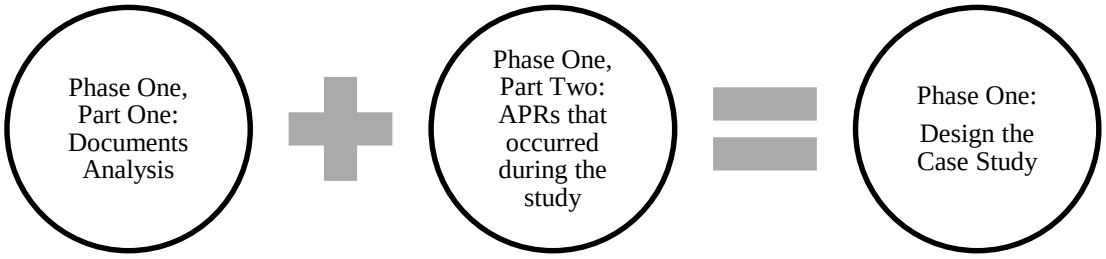


Figure 4.2 Phase One: Design the Case Study

4.3.1 Phase One, Part One: Analysis of Documents

APR-related documents pertaining to the Academic Year 2010-2011 were analysed and these documents included: Arabian Gulf Polytechnic Strategic Plan, Arabian Gulf Polytechnic Quality Assurance Model, Evaluation and Review Policy, and the Annual Programme Review Template. The analysis for each of these documents follows.

4.3.1.1 Strategic Plan and Quality Assurance Model

Arabian Gulf Polytechnic focuses strongly on developing programmes and qualifications. The polytechnic's Strategic Plan 2008-2014 includes the strategic objective: "Arabian Gulf Polytechnic programmes and qualifications will be recognised as key contributors to the economic and social development of Bahrain with clear targets for each year" (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2008, p. 37). For instance, the 2012 target was that 85 per cent of the students score the polytechnic's programmes as very satisfactory or above (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2008, p. 37).

The analysis of this document indicated that the polytechnic has an approved Quality Assurance Model (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2013) that describes Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's quality philosophy to achieve excellence in teaching, learning and research activities and associated support and service functions. This model is made up of detailed methods, processes and routines put in place by the polytechnic to assure quality across the full range of polytechnic activities. It purported to ensure "that all activities required for the design, development, delivery and review of services are effective and efficient with respect to the system and its performance, and meet compliance requirements as well as stakeholder expectations" (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2010, p. 8).

This analysis also indicated that the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic quality model incorporates two main components: (1) an internal Quality Management System

(QMS), comprising policies and procedures; and (2) a multi-level accreditation system incorporating stakeholder feedback to assure stakeholders that the polytechnic delivers on its promises (Coutts & Leder, 2010). This model focused on a learner-centred approach in all of the activities required for the design, development, delivery and review of programmes and services (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2010). The review practice is a vital part of the quality assurance model:

> Quality Assurance at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is based on a quality culture of critical self-reflection, accountability, feedback from stakeholders, continuous reviews and audits, both internal and external, which in turn form the basis for further improvement as we strive for excellence (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2010, p. 7).

The performance of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is ultimately determined by how well it meets stakeholders' requirements. The purpose of the evaluation and audit cycle is to identify, measure, control, evaluate and review how well the polytechnic meets these requirements. To deliver effectively on this purpose, it is considered critical that the QMS be outcome-focused, as well as process-based. That is, the QMS delivers a framework and mechanisms to provide evidence that processes have been followed and that outcomes are achieved (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2010, p. 14). To support a culture of self-review and reflection the polytechnic established a quality plan for each department and has a monitoring system aimed at ensuring appropriate action in response to review findings. This involves a quality report generated regularly against identified areas of improvement (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2010, p. 16). Faculties are responsible, therefore, for seeking meaningful input at various stages of programme development, delivery, and review and for maintaining active consultation networks in the form of a formal Curriculum Advisory Committee that can provide continued advice and support (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2010, p. 18).

4.3.1.2 Evaluation and Review Policy

The Evaluation and Review Policy approved on 7 September 2008 provides guidelines for programme review. A programme is defined as one or more courses that usually lead to an award (certificate, diploma or degree), has been approved by the Academic Board for delivery and is described in terms of total credit value and level (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2008, p. 2). Evaluation is defined as any activity (formal or informal) undertaken to obtain information about the effectiveness of a particular aspect of work, at a specific point in time and from a particular perspective (such as student, employer or staff). The purpose of evaluation as outlined in this policy is to discover what is being done well and what can be improved (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2008, p. 2). Review is defined as a more formal approach to evaluation, undertaken to obtain information about the effectiveness of an identified programme, support service or process, usually in more depth and over a longer period of time (for example, from one review to the next).

Evaluations and reviews can answer a variety of different questions, depending on how they are designed (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2008). The Evaluation and Review Policy provides guiding questions to programme review (2008, p.3). These questions include:

1. Are we teaching what is wanted and needed by our various stakeholders?
2. Are we organising learning opportunities in the most appropriate way?

3. How much are our students learning and how satisfied are they with that learning? What improvements can be made?
4. Are programme outcomes meeting the needs of industry and other identified user groups?
5. Are the standards reached consistent with the recognised standards for the particular course, programme or service?
6. How appropriate, adequate and effective are our administrative systems and support services? How can they be improved?

Table 4.1 shows the minimum requirements identified by the Evaluation and Review Policy. The Evaluation and Review Policy (2008) stipulates that programme review must be informed by input from the following groups: current students, internal and external monitors, members of the Curriculum Advisory Committee, other industry and professional people and, where possible, students who enrolled but stopped attending. In most cases of the APRs undertaken during academic year 2010-2011, these evaluations were carried out through the use of a programme satisfaction survey, moderation and monitors' reports, course evaluations, feedback from Curriculum Advisory Committees and analysis of student results. The policy also indicates that staff are required to cooperate with course and programme evaluations endorsed by the Academic Board or the Senior Management Team as well as faculty-based evaluations that meet the standards set by either of these bodies. Information obtained from course and programme evaluations is made available to the Academic Board and the Senior Management Team as appropriate, and used as the basis for reporting in the Annual Report, and to other reviewers such as institutional review teams.

The main purpose of a programme review as outlined in the Evaluation and Review Policy (2008) is to obtain an overall picture of the effectiveness of the programme and to assess its ongoing viability. Reviews often use previous evaluations as the starting point and then focus on a longer timeframe, usually since the date of the last review. The Faculty Head is responsible for ensuring that the reviews are completed on time and according to the stated procedures. Table 4.2 illustrates the programme components that need to be evaluated as per the Evaluation and Review Policy.

Table 4.1 Minimum Requirements Identified by the Evaluation and Review Policy

Item	Minimum Requirements
Purpose	Evaluation and review methods are designed to identify not only what can be improved, but also what is being done well.
Role of students	All students are given the opportunity to provide formal feedback on their programme, including the quality of teaching and relevant support services, on at least an annual basis.
	Student feedback is used in conjunction with other information about the programme and services to make improvements. Overall results are communicated to students, either globally or at programme service level, depending on the type of evaluation undertaken and what is considered feasible.
Administration process	Centrally administered evaluations and reviews are conducted on a prescribed basis, according to procedures set by the Academic Board and/or Senior Management Team, including protocols related to reporting the results and monitoring any action plans.
	Faculty administered evaluations and reviews are conducted according to protocols determined by the faculty, but which are consistent with the requirements set out in this policy. Faculties are responsible for ensuring that results are made available to those who were involved, as well as to those with the responsibility for acting on the information obtained. They also are responsible for producing and monitoring action plans arising from the evaluations and reviews.
Staff appraisal	Formal staff appraisal is carried out by people with the responsibility and training to do so, according to the policies overseen by the Human Resources Directorate.
	All staff are expected to be involved in evaluations, reviews and appraisals as part of their normal professional practice.
Role of management	Management is required to inform staff of any evaluation, review or appraisal being conducted which involves or affects them, and to provide information about the intended process.

Source: Constructed from the Evaluation and Review Policy (2008).

Table 4.2 Programme Components that Need to Be Evaluated as per the Evaluation and Review Policy

Programme Components	Description
Evaluation of learning	Assessment of student learning is carried out according to the policies developed by the Academic Board. Faculties are expected to develop procedures for the implementation of these policies, including the following: an overall assessment plan for each course or programme, formative and summative assessment methods, marking guides, internal and external moderation, methods of reporting assessment results to students and systems for recording and storing the results.
Evaluation and review of services	Evaluation and review of services, including administrative functions, are required on a regular, prescribed basis. The main purpose is to obtain information on how well they are meeting the needs of the primary users, usually students, and to identify areas for improvement. The procedures used vary according to the nature of the service, the number of staff involved and the service recipients. These can include: formal audits; student feedback from the programme satisfaction survey; specially designed user feedback surveys, initiated by the relevant division; and faculty and division reviews. Information obtained from the evaluation and review of services is made available to the Academic Board, the Senior Management Team and Board of Trustees, as appropriate. Managers of administrative and support services are required to use the results to make or recommend changes within their sphere of responsibility. Staff are required to cooperate with such evaluations, as well as any centrally administered evaluations.
Student feedback	Student feedback is a vital component of almost every evaluation and review. Students are therefore involved in decisions about what, how and when evaluations and reviews are conducted. They are also privy to the results and decisions made, provided confidentiality of formative evaluations is acknowledged. Because of the large and varied student body, consultation is usually achieved via the Students' Association and their representatives on bodies such as the Academic Board, Board of Trustees, Faculty Boards and Programme Advisory Committees.

Source: Constructed from the Evaluation and Review Policy (2008).

4.3.1.3 Annual Programme Review Template

The Annual Programme Review template was approved by the Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC) on 2008 (AQAC Minutes, 2008). The following statement highlights the Annual Programme Review's key objectives. This statement is included in the Annual Programme Review template that has been used in undertaking the programme reviews since 2008-2009:

> *The Annual Programme Reviews are an integral part of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic quality assurance practices. The completion of the Annual Programme Review has two objectives. The first is as a means to collect statistical data which is needed for the completion of the Institute's Annual Report. The second is as the focus for critical self-evaluation aimed at identifying opportunities for improvement. These two objectives are both*

important, and they are interrelated as part of the self-evaluation that will involve analysis of the statistical data (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2008, p. 1).

The template includes 11 sections with each section indicating the requirements which form the review standards (refer to Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Review Requirements of the Annual Programme Review

Section title	Standards / Requirements
Programme details	Name of programme Programme code Programme leader Programme manager Review prepared by … Brief description Target description
Programme statistics	Number of students enrolled Number of students withdrawn Number of students retained Retention rate Number passed Number failed Pass rate Comment on programme and course statistics
Highlights	Positive Negative
Programme and course surveys	None
Programme review	Provide feedback on actions taken regarding the recommendations made in the last review
Constraints and risks	Briefly comment on major issues that may impact on the programme
Moderation	7.1 Internal 7.2 External
Learning services	Comment on the use and accessibility of learning support by students
Resources	9.1 Upgrading of systems 9.2 Upgrading of equipment 9.3 Library resources
10.1 Actions taken	Summary of any changes or actions taken to improve the programme during review period. What has been done? Why was this done? Date completed (if applicable)
10.2 Actions planned	Summary of any changes or actions planned for next review period
General comments	None

Source: Constructed from the Annual Programme Review Template (2009).

All academic programmes at the polytechnic are subjected to the Annual Programme Review. Programmes Managers are required to submit the completed review report to the Academic and Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC) and Academic Board. However, no detailed process was available for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 review cycles (AQAC Minutes, 2010). The purpose of the Academic Quality Assurance Committee is to ensure the quality of programme development, delivery, and review. It is also responsible for developing and reviewing academic policies to ensure

excellence in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment (AQAC Terms of Reference, 2011).

As part of the APR process, AQAC is required to provide feedback about the status of the APR reports to the Programme Managers. The feedback should then be considered by the review team of each programme. In addition, AQAC works on identifying key trends across all the polytechnic programmes and reports these trends with recommendations to the Academic Board. The Academic Board approves the APR reports as per AQAC recommendations and take the necessary actions.

4.3.1.4 Documents' Analysis Outcomes

The Annual Programme Review process does not reflect some Quality Assurance Model principles, such as those relating to a learner-centred approach, critical self-reflection and the balance between being outcome-focused and process-based. Likewise, the Evaluation and Review Policy does not reflect the Quality Assurance Model. For example, it does not explain how the critical self-reflection culture will be established at the polytechnic. In addition, the Annual Programme Review process does not reflect the Evaluation and Review Policy. For instance, the policy suggests that the review should cover some aspects such as: whether the polytechnic is teaching what is wanted and needed by our various stakeholders; whether we are organising learning opportunities in the most appropriate way; and how much our students are learning and how satisfied they are with that learning. The Quality Assurance Model has introduced some concepts such as the quest for excellence and the requirements of audit, but these terms are not mentioned in the Evaluation and Review Policy or the Annual Programme Review. These three documents need to be reviewed carefully to ensure consistency.

One key finding was that the Annual Programme Review was not aligned with key QAAET indicators and their sub-indicators (refer to Table 4.4) even though both the Quality Assurance Model and the Evaluation and Review Policy highlight the need for accountability and compliance. Imported material may not match the context when this needs to be the case. Programme review methodology and instruments do not fit QAAET requirements nor do the programme standards.

In summary, the absence of a comprehensive programme review framework was identified as a result of the analysis that occurred during Phase One, Part One. At that time the Annual Programme Review was only about completing a template and was usually undertaken by an individual rather than a team. The review process was not well defined, there were no principles specific to the Bahraini context, and there were no meaningful standards.

Table 4.4 Comparison Between the Requirements of the APR and the QAAET Programme Evaluation

Annual Programme Review Arabian Gulf Polytechnic	Programme Self-evaluation QAAET
Programme Information Programme Statistics Highlights Programme and Course Surveys Programme Review Response to Monitor's Report Constraints and Risks Moderation Learning Services Staffing and Professional Development Activities Research Resources Advisory Committee Actions Taken and Actions Planned General Comments	**Template 1: Summary of the Programme and Data Set** Part 1: Administrative Information Part 2: Statistical Information Part 3: Programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes. Part 4: Staff Contribution Directly to the Programme **Template 2: Outline of Self-evaluation Report** Background Evaluation Indicator 1: The Learning Programme (1.1 - 1.6) Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme (2.1 - 2.6) Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates (3.1 - 3.4) Indicator 4: Effectiveness of the Quality Management and Assurance (4.1 - 4.6) Conclusion Improvement Plan **Evaluation** A summary of the value of each of the characteristics as set out in the Framework for Evaluation (Programme Review Handbook, page 32). **Framework for Evaluation** Indicator 1: Curriculum Indicator 2: Efficiency of the Programme Indicator 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates Indicator 4: Effectiveness of the Quality Management and Assurance 4 Indicators 22 Characteristics

Source: Constructed from the Annual Programme Review Template (2009) and QAAET Manual (2010).

4.3.2 Phase One, Part Two: Annual Programme Reviews that Occurred during the Study

The researcher introduced a process that had a series of steps and defined outcomes as presented in Table 4.5. He also introduced a set of principles that underpinned the process and facilitated sessions that enabled reflection and encouraged dialogue amongst all parties involved – Programme Managers, tutors within the programme, selected peers from other programmes, and the Quality Coordinator as facilitator. Each Programme Manager was asked to prepare a first draft of her or his APR, then to submit the draft to the Quality Coordinator; and, once the draft was returned, to respond to questions raised by the Quality Coordinator during a facilitated session, and to make adjustments as appropriate. Seven review principles that emerged from the literature review were used in this second part of Phase One. These principles relate to the commitment of faculty and Programme Teams, facilitated sessions, teamwork, an

evidence-based focus, an evaluation-based focus, a focus on improvement and dissemination, and the promotion of good practice.

All of the polytechnic's programmes at the time were included in the exercise as presented in Table 4.6 (Academic Board Minutes, 2011).

Table 4.5 Actions Relating to Phase One, Part Two: APRs that Occurred during the Study

Stage No.	Action	Responsibility	Outcome
Stage 1: Preparation	Refine the APR forms considering the review themes (Themes: areas to be reviewed).	QMA and Academic Development	Refined APR forms
	Communicate the APR forms to all stakeholders	Academic Development	Instructions to launch the APR via SharePoint
	Build capacity in review if needed	QMA and Academic Development	Training delivered
Stage 2: Data Gathering	Provide Program Managers with student data	Registry	Students data delivered to PMs
	Provide Program Managers with HR-related data	Human Resource	Staff data delivered to PMs
	Provide Program Managers with student survey results	Measurement and analysis	Course survey results
Stage 3: Review	Undertake the APR	Review Team	APR first draft report
	Upload APR first draft report on SharePoint	Review Team	APR first draft reports available on SharePoint
Stage 4: Moderation	Nominate moderation team members	AQAC	Moderation team members assigned
	Undertake moderation process for APR first draft reports	Moderation team	Moderated APR reports
	Upload moderated APR report on SharePoint	Moderation team member	Moderated APR reports available on SharePoint
	Revise moderated APR reports	Review team	Revised APR reports
Stage 5: Approval	Distribute revised APR reports for Faculty Board for approval	Review team	Approved APR reports by Faculty Board
	Distribute revised APR reports for AQAC for approval	QMA	Approved APR reports by AQAC
Stage 6: Improvement	Identify key findings across the polytechnic programmes	QMA	Key findings for next review cycle
	Monitor programme action plan	Review team	Monitoring reports

Table 4.6 List of Programmes Considered during Phase One, Part Two

Programme Name	Draft version received	Facilitated session	Revised version received	Forward to AQAC
Bachelor of Business	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes
Bachelor of Engineering Technology	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes
Bachelor of Information and Communication Technology	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes
Bachelor of International Logistics Management	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes
Bachelor of Visual Design	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes
Bachelor of Web Media	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes
Certificate in Academic Preparation (Foundation)	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes
Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes
Diploma of Office Management	Yes	Completed	Yes	Yes

Source: Constructed from AQAC Minutes (2012).

Data needed to undertake the APRs were supplied to the Programme Managers by the Quality Directorate during this review cycle (refer to Table 4.7). The data provided to the Programme Managers included students' surveys, students' results, the Programme Approval Document and staff data. Data, as the basis of evidence, were collected and stored centrally in the interests of consistency of interpretation and accuracy.

A timeframe to provide the data was important for the completion of the APRs. For example, as a significant point on the timeframe, students' surveys and the results were released in July each year (as shown in Table 4.7). The APR activities usually started in August and were completed in November each year. Most academic staff are on annual leave during July and August each year, which necessitates that programme review activities take place during September, October and November. As September is a busy month with the start of the new academic year, a major concern raised by students and staff was that the timeline for the review was not appropriate and needs to be repositioned to different times during the year to make it more effective and fit for purpose.

The review process included facilitated sessions run with Programme Managers and their teams to present the overall findings from the document analysis of the Annual Programme Review, utilising the principles of Phase One, Part Two. The emerging findings were fed back to all nine Programme Managers and their teams in order to gain agreement and validation. Ethical considerations were raised in this process. Ethics approval from Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as well as University of Southern Queensland's research committee provided guidance with these aspects.

Table 4.7 Data Collection Tools and Timing Required for the APR

Timeline	5-Jun	12-Jun	19-Jun	26-Jun	3-Jul	10-Jul	17-Jul	24-Jul	31-Jul	7-Aug	14-Aug	21-Aug	28-Aug	4-Sep	11-Sep	18-Sep	25-Sep	2-Oct	9-Oct
Surveys						Surveys end		Surveys Compiled											
Results								Results released		Results compiled									
PAD				Programme Approval Document (PAD)															
Staff data				Professional development activities and research outcomes		Data compiled													
New academic year								Staff break							Orientation programme	New academic year start			
APRs process											APRs data are available to the Programme Managers and reviews activities started in August and completed in November from each year.								

Source: Constructed from AQAC Minutes (2011).

4.3.3 Students' Views on the Existing Practice of the Annual Programme Reviews

This part includes four elements: (i) Student understanding of the term "Annual Programme Review"; (ii) Student participation in the APRs; (iii) Awareness of changes made to the programme as a result of the APRs; and (iv) The impact on students of changes made.

The following questions were asked of the students:

1. What do you understand by the term 'Annual Programme Review'? (Facilitator is to ensure that there is an appropriate shared definition.)
2. Have you participated in one or more of these reviews? If so, how?
3. If you did participate, are you aware of any changes that were made to the programme as a result of the review or reviews? If so, what were they?
4. Are you aware of any way in which you have been influenced by the outcomes of a review? If so, in what way or ways?

Student Understanding of the Term 'Annual Programme Review'

The facilitator started with sharing some terms in order for all the participants to have a shared understanding; the group interview started with defining the word 'programme' in relation to participants' study. S4 stated that: *It is a useful thing to do with a certain time*; while S1 defined it as: *It is a designed pathway that can take you to different stages and levels in order to learn, obtain and achieve certain goals within the educational programme.* An example of an educational programme, *Web Media Programme,* was shared.

The definitions continued with the term 'course', with S2 mentioning: *It is something that is part of the programme, and different courses that can be under it*. All participants agreed on this shared understanding, with S1 summarising the relationship between programme and course as *one to many; one programme has many courses*.
The group agreed on the word 'review' as an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of improvement. S4 stated: *It's someone who has an experience in a programme and giving comments about how they felt about it and how good is this programme or not by rating it.*

Student Participation in the APRs

S3 said, *I think I participated by answering the surveys for each course and each tutor… and after every course and every semester we have it*. The participants commented that those surveys were optional for students to do; as S2 stated: *For me, I don't think I have participated in any programme reviews. There were surveys but I don't think we were forced to do them, so it is either you do it or not*. S2 continued by

adding: *I wasn't exposed to this term before, 'programme reviewing', but now after you* (referring to the RF*) explain it to me, I don't think I have participated in such a thing.*

S8 highlighted that: *We used to get hard copies. By email we'll never read it.*

S1 commented: *We participated in surveys with course review and tutor review which is part of the programme; so it is not entirely covering the entire programme, but a proportion of it.*

S4 added: *But there is a problem – that not many students answer it honestly, they just try to finish it up to do something else… because students are not interested in giving such an opinion, as it is a waste of time.*

S7 indicated that: *With hard copies lots of people don't feel comfortable, even though the tutor steps out of the room, because, for example, they are afraid the tutor will know their handwriting. But how do you get students to do it online?* And added, *But they might not be comfortable because of privacy and who will read it.*

S1 described the problem of not effectively participating in those surveys:

> *To give you the answer directly, it is because those who put the questions of the surveys, they don't tell you what's the outcome of it. If we don't have the defined outcome of these surveys, the person himself will not feel obligated or more responsible towards it, so tell me what's going to happen next, then I'm going to do it. If you don't tell me what's going to happen next, then I think it is a waste of time.*

S1 continued by giving an example of an outcome: *You are changing or enhancing certain courses by adding or removing certain topics and subjects.*

S6 commented: *Students often don't care about the surveys because they never see any results from what they say.*

While S2 added:

> *We don't know the outcomes, the results and findings of those surveys and what's going to happen with them, or what we said has put into consideration or not. We don't know if they are going to use students' perspectives toward a certain matter. So we haven't been informed, nor have enough information about what's going to happen about them.*

S7 added: *There is no background to them, no context, so we don't know what the outcome is for us as students in filling them in.*

All the participants agreed that during their study journey no one approached them with clear outcomes or provided them with facts on certain matters. S2 said: *I am the first batch to graduate, and we are the 'lab rats', so they do the experiment on us, and they improve it to others. But we are also not really sure if they improve courses for others.* S3 added: *It is a good practice, but I don't know if they consider it or not.* [This in reference to students' feedback on the surveys.]

Awareness of changes made to the programme as a result of the APRs

S1 stated: *I had some experiences with other courses, and then I have given my opinion but nothing was changed.*
Another participant, S4 shared his experience: *We have complained, me and my class, about the IT course, that the computers are not working and they fixed it. We complained to out tutor and also by answering the survey that computers are not working.*

S2 put a different slant on the problem solving experience:

> *I think this is something different. If you complained about something, they have to fix it as it is something directly related to your study, and if they don't fix it, you will not continue doing what you are supposed to be doing. But if there is something regarding the course plan or the material or the outline, I don't think it will be fixed.*

S6 highlighted:

> *Last semester individual assessments were given more weighting than before; this was good. There has been an issue with group assessments, they are sometimes unfair to some students, especially if it is a big group. Now in Year 3 it's getting better because we meet up and study together. It builds collaboration, but 35% individual and 65% group is a better balance of marks.*

The impact on students of changes made

The group had no idea about an annual programme review; none of them had heard about it before and they were not aware that students are allowed to be exposed to such materials, can participate in it and be a part of it.

The participants confirmed that they have not seen any reports during their study journey in relation to their programmes. S1 added:

> *I don't remember, honestly, but I saw just one marketing brochure that highlights 'the IT achievements'. It was in one page or two pages marketing brochure that was for the ICT and web media, and I don't think it is the same thing, maybe it is something more related to the marketing.*

However, the participants had experienced some major changes in their programme courses but they did not know if they were related to the programme reviews. S1 mentioned: *Significantly, there were a lot of changes, in sense of number of subjects and prioritisation of those subjects.* Then S1 provided examples of these changes:

> *I remember in the first year I took some courses that did not exists two to three years later, so they changed it and removed it completely and some courses were just elective 'optional'. They made it mandatory to take them, so that became more challenging for me because I hadn't taken them in my first year so I had to take them in the last year just before my graduation because it was mandatory.*

S1 continued describing those changes:

> O*f course those changes are good for the new batch and they will benefit a lot as now it makes more sense the sequence of having these subjects one after another. But in our days the polytechnic was still new and they were developing, and were actually experimenting some of these courses on us.*

The changes impact on students: *It was challenging, I felt like a 'lab rat' as he* [S2] *said, but I think I have learnt, at least.*

Other occurrences to some of the programmes were changing the sequence of the courses. As S1 shared:

> *In the third year we had a project; now they removed it for the fourth year. So I remember when I was in my third year they told me that if I don't finish this one you cannot go to the fourth year.*

The RF shared with participants: *This is the impact of the programme review, but you don't know at that time where this is coming from. This is a result of the programme review.*

S4 mentioned other changes that affected the CAP students and extended students learning journey: *I heard that they made CAP one year after it used to be one semester, so I think I am lucky that I finished it.* S4 resented the extending of the CAP course for one full year:

> *I think some is better with one semester, one semester is enough for them like, for example, some are ready to go to degree, but they want to study foundation first to learn courses. But if it is for one year, no one would want to enter it, only one course just to understand and know how things go.*

In relation to take one semester or a year, S4 said: *It depends on the person himself and how they are capable to learn.*

S2 pointed to the unfairness of some of the changes that affected their programme: *In our days, we had to take foundation for one whole year, and then whoever came after us graduated with us. It was for us completely unfair.*

RF stated: *From what you are sharing with me, you belong to an institute which is very dynamic and keeps changing things.*

S4 also added that some positive changes had accrued from the programme reviews in relation to the math course: *I also heard that they made some courses harder like 'Math'; it was easy. 'Math1' was exactly as 'Math2'... I agree with this change as they are not learning something new. They are both similar but on different levels.*

S2 pointed out other changes in relation to the Accounting programme:

> *Accounting major faced dramatic changes, when we had to take one semester at the BIBF* [Bahrain Institute for Banking and Finance]*, so that was very hard, and the material later on it seemed that it is for a Master degree not Bachelor and lots of students have failed that course.*

S2 reasoned that change was made because of a lack of accounting tutors: *As they lack having enough tutors; they had to send us to the BIBF.* S2 recalled other bad changes in relation to the programme:

> *For the next semester they had to bring UOB tutors* [University of Bahrain]*; they were unqualified and the courses were not designed well in my opinion. I did not learn anything that semester.* T*hat whole year was a waste of time.*

S2 concluded: *I think the Dean knew that the courses are bad enough, but I don't think they could do much about them at that time.*

Researcher's Reflection:

The term 'programme review' was encountered for the first time by the interviewed group. All participants stated that they had not been involved directly with the review. They had interacted indirectly through answering 'surveys' only, and those surveys were optional, and this resulted in various issues:

- Not all students would answer those surveys; therefore, some changes may apply based on a minority of students' views.
- The students do not feel obligated to answer, as the outcomes of those surveys are not shared. Therefore, many feel that it is a waste of time and effort.

Most participants stated that they have faced many dynamic changes on their major programme, but they were not aware that those were a result of the programme review. Some of the changes were:

- Removing some courses that were mandatory.
- Changing of the sequence of the courses.
- Changing of the assessments.
- Changing the level of difficulty of some courses.
- Having some courses run off-campus.
- Because of a lack of tutors, outsourcing of some classes to unqualified teachers.

4.3.2.1 Outcomes of the Annual Programme Reviews that Occurred During the Study

The researcher conducted nine facilitated sessions as per Phase One, Part Two (refer to Table 4.6). Participating staff provided constructive feedback on issues with the existing Annual Programme Review and identified opportunities for improvement. The outcomes of Phase One, Part Two, as reported by the participating staff, have been analysed by the researcher and are presented as themes.

Commitment of Faculty and Programme Team

The review process was not led by faculties and was viewed more as a compliance issue rather than an opportunity to review and improve programmes. Responsibility for managing and completing the Annual Programme Review was varied. A principle of quality was a very important principle that emerged as a result of the exercise. A basic principle of quality is that it is driven at the point of delivery, which implies that the programme teams themselves should own this process. There was a feeling amongst the programme teams that the process was being driven externally and a suggestion was raised that the polytechnic should start from scratch and convene a team of programme managers to come up with a solution.

Researcher's Reflection

The attitudes and skills of team leaders, in particular, have a significant influence on the attitudes of team members, and therefore on the outcomes of a programme review. In addition, the skills of leaders such as Deans and Programme Managers are critically important in facilitating programme review discussions, prioritising outcomes and drawing up action plans to which everyone has agreed.

I noticed that staff who value the programme review are more likely to carry it out thoroughly and honestly and are more likely to follow through on resulting quality improvement action plans. In order to enhance this concept I decided to undertake the following steps in the next study phase: (1) Involve concerned staff in developing the new programme review framework and use the concept of ongoing professional dialogue and reflection; (2) Provide more flexibility in undertaking the programme reviews, for example, by allowing review teams to add their own review standards as per their needs; (3) Design a new programme review process that puts clear role and responsibilities for all concerned committees at the polytechnic; (4) Undertake the review through teams rather than individuals.

Overall, the positive attitudes to programme review in Arabian Gulf Polytechnic provide a sound basis on which to develop it further and give it even more prominence within quality processes.

Review Framework

The lack of a complete framework (review principles, standards and processes) resulted in an inconsistent understanding of the existing Annual Programme Review process and variation in how each programme undertook the review. The existing process was used as a prescriptive tool for review rather than an evaluative tool for improvement. This made it more difficult to evaluate risks to the programme and develop appropriate action plans.

There was a perceived lack of clarity as to how English and Elective courses offered within Degree programmes were reviewed within the Annual Programme Review process. This resulted in little or no review of the effectiveness of these courses, although it was noted by Programme Managers that a specific review was planned for English. Although timelines for the Annual Programme Review were approved by the Academic Board and Senior Management Team, it appeared these were not always communicated within Faculties. Ongoing issues were raised as to the time that Annual Programme Reviews took to complete and the timing of the process each year. Absence of a clear process to undertake the review was one of the key concerns of the staff.

The participants acknowledged that the existing Annual Programme Review required amendments and additional standards. For example, the participants suggested that the following key items were not considered when completing the review: accreditation, teaching and learning process, strategic initiatives such as Work Integrated Learning, Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) and e-Learning.

There was little comment or reflection by reviewers on institutional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and objectives and how individual programme performance compared to these. These KPIs are included in the Strategic Plan and were available to all staff. In addition, the reviews did not explicitly focus on evaluating the teaching and learning process and learners' attainment. Therefore there was clear need for training, coaching and feedback on how to undertake and write a programme review.

Researcher's Reflection:

There is a need to develop a comprehensive and integrated programme review framework that includes principles, standards and processes. This framework should incorporate the following six points:

1. Strike a balance between compliance and internal improvement. The requirements of external agencies need to be considered in developing the review standards. At the same time, the polytechnic internal requirements need to be considered (such as its vision, mission and key initiatives) while developing the review standards to ensure that reviews help in identifying gaps and risks.
2. Involve tutors from English and elective courses in the review teams to put more focus on these courses as part of the programme.
3. Use the SharePoint site or any other suitable software to enhance communication.
4. Consult staff on the proposed timeline to undertake the programme review and consider their views to make it more realistic and attainable.
5. Focus on training to enhance review practice.
6. Focus on reviewing the teaching and learning process and learners' attainment.

Facilitated Session

While there was some initial resistance by management to the facilitated sessions, the feedback was generally positive. All Programme Managers accepted and incorporated some feedback offered to improve their reviews. One-to-one support was offered by Quality Unit staff and requested by all Programme Managers (refer to Table 4.6). Engagement in the facilitated sessions was varied and feedback ranged from useful and challenging to "what is the point when we know our programme" type comments.

The response by Programme Managers to the provision of facilitated sessions was generally positive. Feedback was provided to Programme Managers to assist with preparing and finalising their Annual Programme Review. During each session feedback was provided that focused on improving the APR process and enhancing the analysis of statistics, considering links to institutional measurements and strategic initiatives and developing appropriate actions to identified issues. Feedback was considered in all cases and incorporated as appropriate into the Annual Programme Reviews.

Researcher's Reflection:

Facilitated sessions encouraged a culture of reflection and questioning amongst staff, and underpinned a focus on continuous improvement. Several factors were identified by this writer that may enhance the effectiveness of future facilitated sessions. These include:

1. Asking meaningful questions "driven from the review report" to make the review more rigorous and evidence-based.
2. Enabling review teams to enhance the quality of the review and ensure consistency between the review findings and the improvement actions.
3. Appreciating that preparation is required of the facilitator by providing the questions and comments in advance.
4. Appreciating that the idea of having one or more staff members who work for another programme in the facilitated session is effective in sharing successful practice.
5. Aiming to encourage and facilitate APR activities (such as professional dialogue) especially in the areas of learning and teaching processes and learner attainment.
6. Developing clear guidelines and protocols for the facilitated session as a highly recommended action because the facilitator needs to be very clear about his/her role.

Teamwork

The existing process of completing the Annual Programme Review was managed by one or two people in each programme. When staff attended the facilitated session this often raised issues of a shared understanding of the actions recorded in the review. Questions were raised by some staff at the facilitated sessions as to why they needed to be present. There was some initial resistance to having a peer present at the facilitated sessions although this was generally found to be a positive process for both the programme team and peer. The contribution of an external programme peer reviewer was initially seen as irrelevant. However, most programme managers found this practice meaningful and useful. Peers appreciated the opportunity to contribute to other programmes and staff.

Researcher's Reflection:

The collective aspect of programme review is particularly important. When an effective programme review takes place amongst a group of people with a common purpose, they generate positive team interaction, creative thinking and collaborative, efficient approaches to improving and enhancing services for learners. The fostering of pockets of enthusiasm by selecting influential review team members – who were not necessarily high in the formal hierarchy – proved successful.

Evidence-based

The existing process did not describe appropriate evidence or the level of analysis required by programmes. Although statistics were provided from a central source,

issues of accuracy and validity were raised. Qualitative statements were often unsupported by data or evidence.

Data was not always analysed effectively and sometimes recorded without comment or action. One main concern by the participants was commenting on course statistics, which might drive wrong perceptions. The target pass rate of 90 per cent is a useful institutional benchmark of efficiency but it is not an appropriate driver at the course level. Pass rates can be outside the quoted range for all sorts of reasons and this should not necessarily be a subject of the review, as this issue is discussed and addressed in depth at results meetings of the Academic Board.

Researcher's Reflection:

There was a consensus that the most challenging part of the APRs at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is searching for the most appropriate evidence. This may be enhanced by:

1. Providing professional dialogue amongst programme staff with more immediate and private mechanisms for addressing concerns. However, because evidence of these discussions is not generally well documented in the programme review, opportunities to provide assurance that they are taking place are often missed by the programme review team.
2. The accurate and timely provision of data is essential if it is to be useful.
3. Properly analysing evidence, and not simply relying on the opinions of team members or on hearsay, to facilitate effective APRs.
4. Most importantly, review teams must evaluate where the strengths and areas for improvement lie based on the interpretation of the key messages from gathered evidence.
5. Maximising the use of evidence generated through professional dialogue, including the measure of performance through staff, self and peer assessment.
6. Professional reflection provides an important source of evidence about how well staff have effected improvement in learning and teaching.

Evaluation-based

Reviews were often written as opinion and description rather than fact and evaluation. Most review reports used descriptive language rather than evaluative language, which does not provide an accurate or measurable judgement of the effectiveness of the programme. The ability of programme managers and staff to write evaluative statements was identified as a key training need to enhance the quality of the reviews.

The participants indicated that while the polytechnic's intent is good, the institution had outgrown manual data collection and reporting and needed to be e-savvy and far more effective about waste reduction.

Researcher's Reflection:

Most importantly, in order for a programme review to have meaning, it has to evaluate services and not simply describe them. Without this filter of interpretation, it cannot provide assurance that review teams fully understand what the evidence is telling them or that they know whether they are responding to its messages. Most programme review reports do not analyse evidence rigorously enough.

The quality of programme reviews generally improved over the facilitated session, but still varied widely. A few provided very full, well-evidenced evaluations of services and their impact on learners, and included clear action plans with SMART targets. To enhance this practice further this writer recommends that:

1. As APR reports need to communicate their findings effectively to different audiences, the reports have to be detailed, clear and meaningful; otherwise they are unsuitable input for moderation, whether by internal agents or external bodies.
2. When Programme Managers carrying out APRs, key messages from teaching and support teams should be used to provide an important evidence base.
3. Ensure that APR reports are evaluative rather than descriptive by providing targeted training, using appropriate training materials and support, to improve evaluative skills and APRs report writing.

Focus on Improvement

The feasibility of action for improvement in each programme varied in terms of the number of actions, relevance to identified issues, ability to implement the action realistically, and the way each action was written (many were not written as specific and measurable). It was noticed that some programmes suggested action be taken in other departments while others limited their actions to their specific area. Also, there were some instances where issues were identified but no action was documented to address them. Where there were no actions stipulated to address an issue, the lack of resources to take any action was often the response.

The researcher also noted that where actions were directed at corporate departments, there was not always an awareness of the resolution or progress of the issue. Finally, the previous year's actions were not always reviewed for completion nor was any evaluation undertaken to ascertain the effectiveness of the previous year's improvement efforts. Actions taken from the previous year's programme review process needed to be integrated into a single quality improvement plan. The participants highlighted that the Annual Programme Review needs to be incremental in nature and part of an integrated, streamlined and continuous improvement cycle.

Researcher's Reflection:

Programme review is most effective when it builds on and reports the findings and impact of professional dialogue and other review activities. This writer noticed that a programme team does not always make this linkage well. In a majority of cases, insufficient evaluation or analysis of underpinning evidence in the APR reports resulted in action plans that did not effectively address weaknesses. Action planning following the APRs was mostly insufficiently detailed and not comprehensive. In addition, most action plan targets were insufficiently specific or measurable. It is vital to ensure that APR reports and quality improvement action plans record the impacts that previous actions arising from these processes have had on improving quality for learners and other stakeholders.

Dissemination and Promotion of Successful Practice

The researcher noticed that successful practice was often the last item added to the reviews. There was no mechanism that actively promoted and deployed successful practice at the polytechnic. Most of the focus was on identifying areas for improvement rather than strengths. The concept of identifying strengths in each programme for the purpose of sharing successful practice with others to use them to improve programme effectiveness was not evident in most programme reviews.

Researcher's Reflection:

Dissemination and promotion of successful practice is an important outcome of any programme review. To enhance this practice, this writer suggests that capturing successful practice as part of the APR reporting becomes a focus; and that appropriate tools for the dissemination and promotion of successful practice across the polytechnic be used.

Phase One in both parts identified the mismatch between what the polytechnic aimed to achieve in relation to programme review as stated in its official documents –the Quality Assurance Model and the Evaluation and Review Policy – and the actual practice as observed and perceived by staff during the second part of the first phase of this research (refer to Figure 4.3).

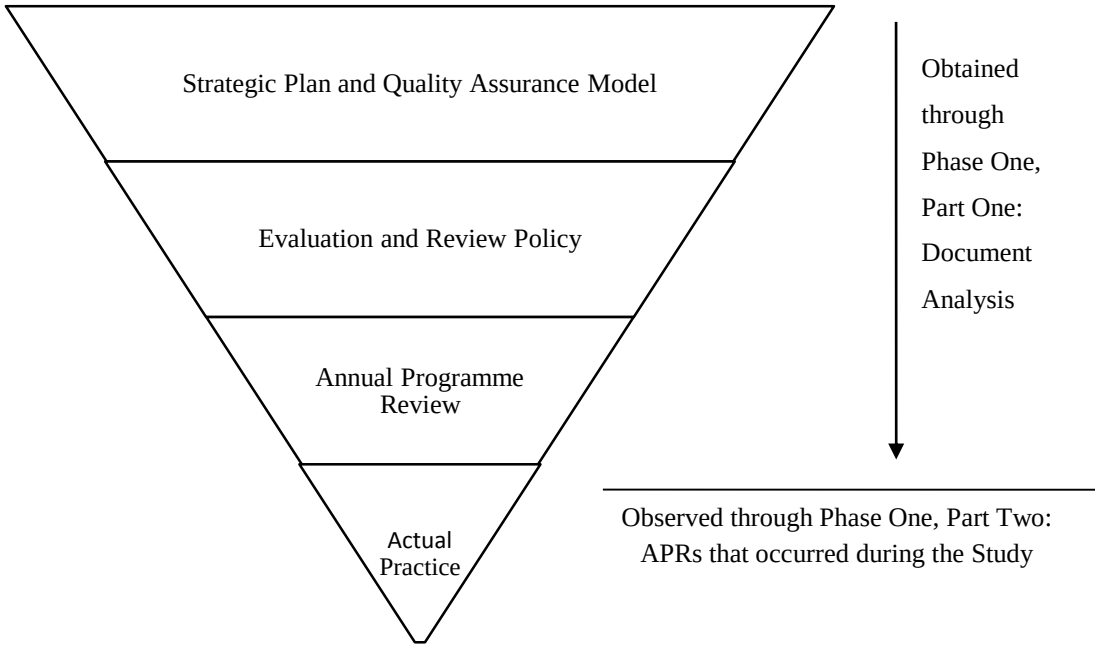


Figure 4.3 Gaps between Espoused Theory and Actual Practice

Summary

Participation in the APRs was seen as compliance and not an improvement process. Programme Managers were obligated to carry them out on the instructions of Faculty Deans who, in turn, were acting on the requirements of the Academic Board. Essentially, most APRs were conducted without evidence of teamwork and ownership by team members. Review reports were often written as opinion and description rather than fact and evaluation, and findings were not based on adequate evidence and data. In addition, most improvement actions were not written in specific and measurable terms and there was no mechanism that actively promoted and deployed successful practice at the polytechnic. Another challenge concerned the timing of the APRs and the perceived conflict with the academic timetable. A possible solution for this problem is breaking down the review into a number of sub-reviews, which could accumulate to become the total review in a more timely fashion. Overall, it became apparent that the existing programme review framework lacked contextualised principles, standards and a process. On a more positive side, facilitated sessions, with opportunities for dialogue among various members of the Faculties and Schools, were very effective in improving the quality of the reviews and building staff capacity. This was an effective innovation of Phase One, Part Two.

4.4 Phase Two: Conduct the Case Study

The programme review framework that emerged from Phase One, Part Two was devised as a new programme that included review principles, review standards and a review process. This framework was used with the Business Faculty as a pilot and each of the indicators was dealt with one a time through their monthly reports to AQAC, which was monitoring this process. Review principles, standards, and process are seen as essential elements of a programme review framework. In response to this research's

second question (What are the key principles, standards and processes for programme review that are appropriate for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's context and in line with international practice?) the researcher developed a framework as indicated in the next section of this chapter.

4.4.1 Framework Development

The programme review framework that was developed for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic includes the essential elements of review principles, standards and elements. Following is a description of each element.

4.4.1.1 Programme Review Principles

Based on the literature review outcomes and the Polytechnic's needs within the existing context, Figure 4.4 illustrates the programme review principles, by name, that were identified as contextually important by the researcher.

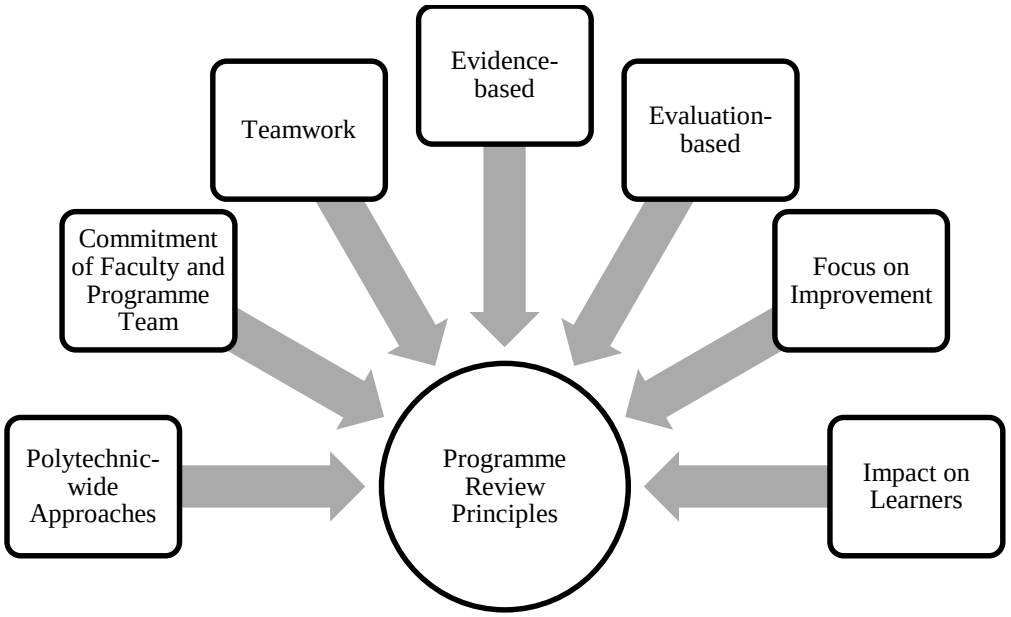


Figure 4.4 Programme Review Principles

The review principles to be used for the pilot exercise were then classified into three categories as shown in Table 4.8 and Figure 4.5). The first category in Table 4.8 highlights leadership commitment across the polytechnic, faculty and programme. The second covers essential characteristics of a rigorous programme review, which includes teamwork-based, evidence-based and evaluation-based principles. The third category focuses on the impact of the review. All categories, appropriately, focused on improving services for all learners.

Table 4.8 Programme Review Principles Tested in the Pilot Exercise

Category Name	Review Principle	Description
Leadership Commitment	Polytechnic-wide Approaches	Programme review is effective when the polytechnic's systems support it and use it to gather intelligence for systematic planning to continuously improve services for learners.
	Commitment of Faculty and Programme Team	Programme review is effective when programme staff value it as a means of continuously improving services for learners.
Review Characteristics	Teamwork	Programme review is effective when it provides a mechanism for programme staff to collectively identify, share and agree on ways of improving and enhancing the services to learners.
	Evidence-based	Programme review is effective when programme teams gather, analyse and respond to review indicators from various sources of evidence, including other reviews.
	Evaluation-based	Programme review is effective when it is written in evaluative language (rather than descriptive). It should evaluate core services to learners such as learners' achievement and personal development.
Review Impact	Focus on Improvement	Programme review is effective when it generates clear improvement actions (a quality improvement action plan) aimed at improving services to learners.
	Impact on Learners	Programme review is effective when it enables programme teams to generate reports which provide assurance on whether they are effective at continuously improving their services to learners.

Figure 4.5 Categories of Programme Review Principles Tested in the Pilot Exercise

4.4.1.2 Programme Review Standards

The programme review standards for the pilot exercise were adopted from QAAET and included the learning programme, efficiency of the programme, academic standards of the graduates, and effectiveness of the quality management and assurance (refer to Figure 4.6). Each standard included a title, definition and sub-standards (refer to Appendix A).

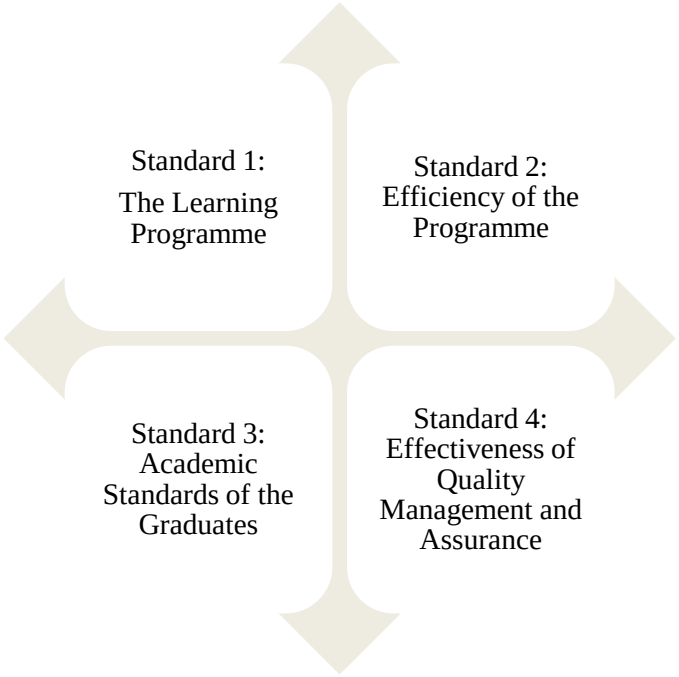


Figure 4.6 Programme Review Standards Tested in the Pilot Exercise

4.4.1.3 Programme Review Process

A contextualised programme review process (refer to Figure 4.7) was designed by the Quality Unit (which included input from the researcher) and was modified and then accepted for use by the Academic Quality Assurance Committee. It was based on the programme review principles and the polytechnic's organisational structure and needs. (However, it is to be noted that the process was not sent to faculties for consultation; rather, it was presented to the School of Business as a given to be tested.) Table 4.9 describes the three categories of the review process (facilitation, review and improvement) and serves as a guide for following the process in Figure 4.7.

Table 4.9 Categories of the Programme Review Process Tested in the Pilot Exercise

Category Name	Description
Review facilitation	The Quality and Measurement and Analysis directorate is responsible for facilitating the review by creating the review teams, providing training and deciding on the review scope. In addition, they distribute the review reports to Academic Quality and Assurance Committee and Quality and Audit committees after ensuring that they are within the required standards (Step 1, 2, 3 and 13 as stated in the programme review process – refer to Figure 4.7).
Review and validation	This category is divided into two parts: review and validation. The review team is responsible for undertaking the review, writing the review report, and refining the review report based on the challenge team's feedback (Step 4, 5, 7 and 8 as stated in the programme review process refer to Figure 4.7). The challenge team is responsible for validating the review report by conducting the challenge session (Step 6, 9, 10, 11 and 12 as stated the programme review process refer to Figure 4.7).
Improvement	The improvement initiatives and their monitoring process are taking place across the polytechnic based on the improvement action type. Four committees are managing the improvement initiatives including Programme Committee (PC), Faculty Board (FB), Academic Quality and Assurance Committee (AQAC) and Quality and Audit Committee. Each committee is responsible for developing the quality improvement plan, monitoring the improvement and reporting progress on a monthly basis (Steps 14a, 15b and 16b as stated in the programme review process - refer to Figure 4.7).

Table 4.10 shows the intended link between the review principles, review standards and review process in this framework. The existing committees managed the improvement initiatives, including the monitoring of progress. Challenge teams were required to ensure the quality of the review outcomes. The work related to the programme review process was carried out collaboratively in teams. This allowed a large number of staff to participate in the process – with the intention of enhancing the key concept of quality as shared responsibility.

Table 4.10 Links Relating to Review Principles and Process Tested in the Pilot Exercise

Principle No.	Review Principles	Implementation
1 and 6	Polytechnic-wide Approaches and Focus on Improvement	Responsible committees for undertaking improvement and monitoring the progress across the polytechnic: Programme committee Faculty Board Quality and Audit committee
2	Commitment of Faculty and Programme Team	Involvement of most staff in the review process.
3	Teamwork-based	All work is carried out by teams: Review Team, Challenge Team, Programme Committee, Faculty Board, AQAC and Quality and Audit committee.
4 and 5	Evidence-based Evaluative-based	The challenge teams are responsible for ensuring that the review outcomes are evidence-based and evaluation-based.
5	Impact on Learners	Majority of the review sub-standards focus on learners.

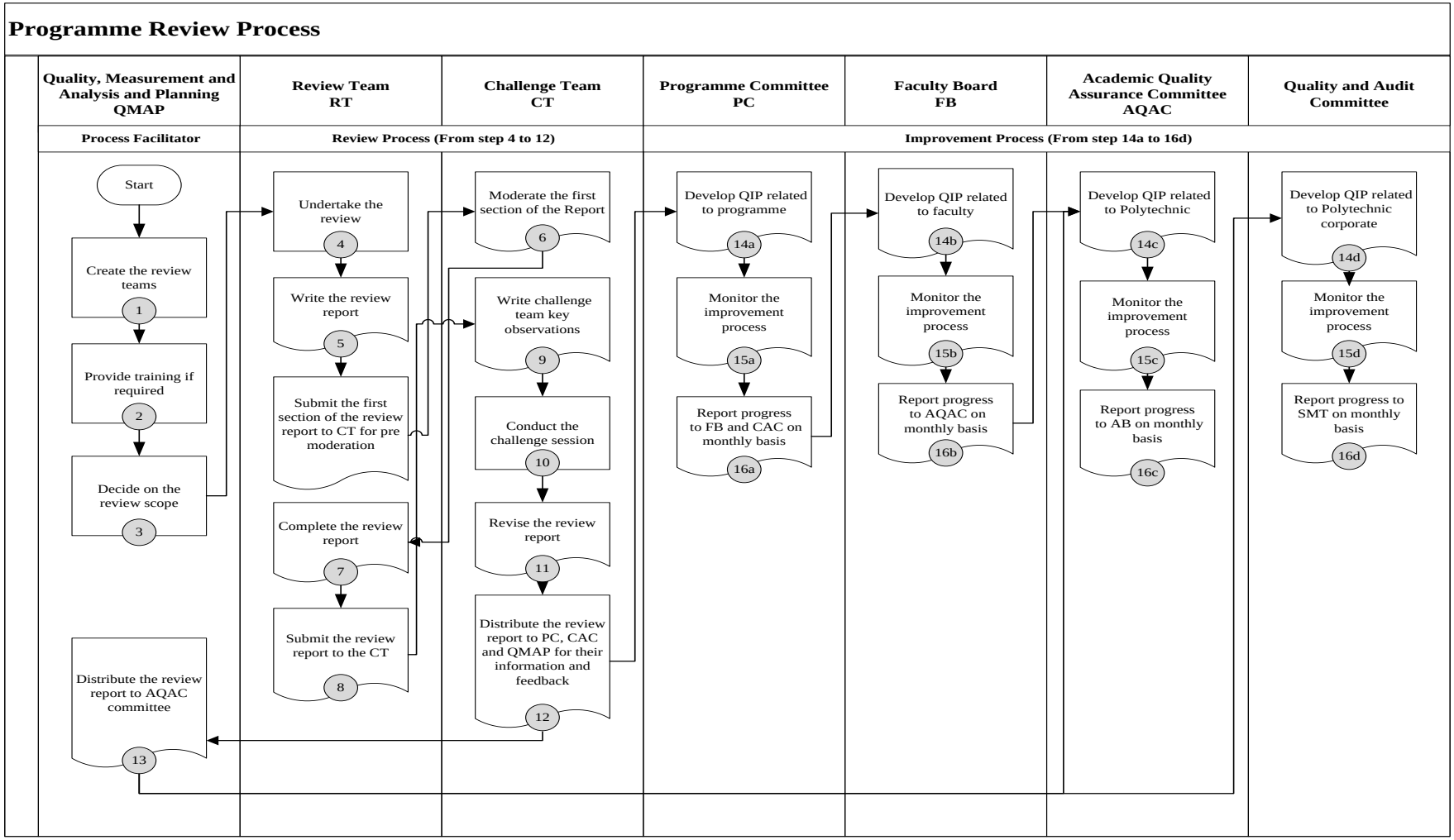


Figure 4.7 Programme Review Process Tested in the Pilot Exercise

4.4.2 Prepare for the Review

This section responds to the third research question: How can programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic be best implemented? In order to answer this question the researcher chose the Bachelor of Business programme to pilot the developed programme review framework. In 2009, Arabian Gulf Polytechnic purchased the Bachelor of Business programme from Auckland University of Technology (AUT). It was important to review this programme to ensure its appropriateness for Bahrain's requirements. This is the largest programme at the polytechnic in terms of number of students and staff and was scheduled for external review by QAAET in September 2014.

4.4.3 Carry Out the Review

The method that was used to undertake the pilot programme review for the Bachelor of Business programme was outlined in Figure 3.5 (in section 3.5.2). The review team used different approaches to undertake the review. The purpose of this method was to identify the most contextually appropriate way to implement the programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. As described in Phase Two, the programme review framework includes three elements (review principles, standards and process), which were implemented and 20 staff from the Business Programme participated in the pilot study. The staff members were divided into six categories (as shown in Table 3.1 in section 3.5.2) and Table 3.2 (in section 3.5.2) shows the review participants' roles, the number of years they have been at the polytechnic and their code.

4.4.4 Validation Process

Table 4.11 illustrates the implementation strategy and the allocation of sub-standards per reviewer across the review cycle. Different arrangements were used to study the effectiveness of each method. Challenge sessions were used to validate the review findings in Standard One and Two while written feedback was used to validate Standards Three and Four. Appendix C shows the Business Programme review outcomes after the validation process was completed.

Table 4.11 Validation Process

Standard number	Sub-standard allocation	Challenge session	Comment
1	Sub-standard per each reviewer	Yes	Conducted challenge session as a meeting (open dialogue)
2	Sub-standard per two reviewers	Yes	
3	Sub-standard per two reviewers	No	Written feedback was provided by the challengers
4	Standard per review team	No	

4.4.5 Students' Views on the Pilot Exercise

This part includes three elements: student participation in the pilot exercise; student views on the emerged actions of the pilot exercise; and any additional actions.

The following questions were asked of the students:

1. Did the reviewers interact with you during the pilot exercise? If so, in what way?
2. Have a look at the actions that emerged from the pilot exercise. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these actions?
3. Are there other actions that you would like to add?

Student participation in the pilot exercise

The interviewees confirmed and approved that they don't think they were involved in the programme review process in an adequate and direct way, and that the handed documents that were shared with them were introduced for the first time during the meeting.

Student views on the emerged actions of the pilot exercise

S1 said: *Some of them I don't understand. Like I don't know what the business existing strategic plan is.* S6 added: *It's scary how many documents and reports are involved. When I see this I'm scared of the involvement; it's huge.* S6 added: *My first impressions are there are a lot of things to improve.*

S8 suggested: *Use figures, map the actions, categorise which actions are important to the students*. S6 added: *And even after that, categorise by sub-division, for example, Year 2, Year 4 or individual courses*. S7 said: *Students don't need to know changes which are not related to themselves.* S6 commented on the presentation of the actions as: *Visually, it's a chunk of text. It's going to make students back away. It needs space, colour*. S5 suggested: *Simplify the language and improve the layout.*

S2 said: *Some of the actions, yes, it involve students. But I think there should be more, because I see that there is a list of things that its related to the process of improving the programme, and lots of policies and procedures and protocols to follow*.

S3 added: *I have some comments about some policies that they want to improve, that we don't know about*. W*e don't know about those policies and we don't know that they exist.*

S8 commented on the action related to an industry project: *Regarding the Industry Project, yes, there was an issue with it. There was only one question and it was not clear.* S8 agreed.

S1 commented: *I don't see any involvement of students in this process*. *I don't see the students are being part of this and involved*. S1 added: *There are some actions that directly affect the students, yes, some of which are very good, but I don't see the involvement in it as a student – that is, in the process of putting these actions down.*

S7 said: *There's no mention of summer courses. These are very important for many students.* S8 added: *Yes, maybe use Bahraini tutors in the summer for some courses.*

S2 added: *For me, also, I don't see the outcome or the effect of these actions to the students. As I'm reading it, there are some things that I don't understand as a student.*

S6 indicated that the list of actions can't be shared with students as: *it needs to be simpler and more interesting.*

All participants were certain they would not read the whole hundred pages. As mentioned by S4: *It's a lot of things to read, and this is only part of these hundred pages.*

S1 said, *They won't like it*, and repeated: *They won't like it*. S2 commented: *It's really good that it's in bullet points; but it's still not helpful.*

S5 asked: *What about the delivery of the programmes? It's important for students to be included.*

Additional actions

The participants shared their comments on what they wanted to see in the report from the students' viewpoint.

S5 indicated: *I believe in PBL but it's not used in the right way. It depends how the tutor applies it.* For example: *When a tutor says, 'I don't know', it's worrying. It's a negative picture. Students need to look at the tutor as the person with the knowledge. They should never say 'I don't know'.*

S6 added: *There are only 20 students in the group, so everyone should get time with their tutor – not be left to struggle alone. These actions here are not tackling PBL.* S7 indicated: *The polytechnic needs to build awareness of PBL for the students and make sure the tutors deliver it in the right way. So far it's just a problem thrown at them with no help.*

S4 suggested: *Something that would benefit the students, like one page, would tell us the main points, and what will happen at the end.* And added: *We don't really care about the learning programme or the whatever. We want to know what its benefit is for us. This thing is good for tutors and other people but not us.*

S2 recommended: *Something that's related to me and will affect me as a student – that's what is wanted.*

S3 shared another suggestion in relation to presenting the findings/outcomes:

> *Everyone have something that they are interested in more than something else , so this outcome comes from issues of the programme or the tutors, so maybe as you said that linking when we come to the page you just write the issues if it related to tutors or the programme or the students and what's the issues and what's solution for it, so we don't have to read all the pages, but only the sections that you are interested in … I only care about changes for me as a student I want to know what you have done for me.*

S1 mentioned the need for changing the way of writing the report: *For students understanding, definitely, it needs to be made more interesting. At the moment – Aah, boring!*

Researcher's Reflection:

The participants were not familiar with the pilot project and did not hear anything about it in relation to the programme review. They expressed some concern that they have not been involved as those actions mostly affect them.

Many views were shared regarding the outcomes of the programme review which had been handed to participants. The members of the group did not understand the document fully, and did not show an interest in reading right through it. This was because they thought that:

- The language that the documents was written in was very difficult to understand, and not presented at a level that students could access. The vocabulary mostly relates to the 'how' aspects of the system – something that was not of great interest to them.
- Many of the terms and associated policies and procedures were unfamiliar to them.
- Some actions in the documentation were of little interest as they did not directly involve students, and the effects of those actions were not clear.
- The students had not been involved in listing the actions in the first place, so why should they be bothered about reading them.
- The findings were not presented in an attractive manner.

The group also shared their views and suggestions about the way the report might be presented. They considered that:

- It should not be a long document; it should be summarised in one or two pages, maximum.
- They would prefer to see the actions that affect students only.
- The document should highlight each section separately; this way, everyone would be interested in reading about specific actions and outcomes in relation to that section (for example, tutors, courses and students).

4.4.6 Advisory Group Views

The following questions were asked of the interviewees:

What are the employers' expectations of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic graduates?

How do employers perceive the performance of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic graduates who they have employed?

E6 said:

> *What we do need among our employees are not just people who can do the job but also people who can look for opportunities. People who ask the question, 'How can this be improved? Is there a better way of doing it? How can things be looked at in a new light?' Fortunately, from what I've heard, and from what I'm starting to see in our graduates from the polytechnic, this seems to come from the problem-based learning that they've done. It's to be applauded. The more, the better.*

E5 commented: *We want people who can produce mind maps as well as thoroughly compiled list of actions – and our polytechnic graduates seem capable of that.*

E6 said:

> *Yes, it's important for the poly to have an employment focus for its students. They've got to be ready for the cut and thrust of industry. We're happy spending time on training new recruits but we've got to feel confident that we're selecting them because they're employable. They've got to have good generic skills – things like time management and learning how to learn.*

E5 commented: *We want people who can start making a contribution immediately – keen to start and ready to learn. We want graduates who can put the theory into practice.*

E2 made a comment that learning has to go both ways: *What we found out is that we were not quite ready to take on good graduates. We have some work to do. We have to plan better to keep them busy. They don't want just to sit around; they want interesting work.*

E5 commented:

> *I have two daughters, one who has graduated from Bahrain's largest university and one who is about to graduate at the polytechnic. What makes the polytechnic special, I think, is its emphasis on problem-based learning and other generic skills. The people we're employing from the polytechnic are proving more work-ready than those from other institutions.*

E6, referring to his own organisation, where he had worked up the ladder to a top managerial position, commented:

> *Over 50 per cent of the top managers here, including myself, graduated from an institution like the polytechnic that was opened in the 1970s but then was absorbed into the University of Bahrain in the 1980s. What we learned, most of all, was how to be excited about being in employment and working our way through the organisation. We helped each other to get on, and that's how we know a successful company succeeds – by people working together as a team, communicating with each other, getting consensus, sharing a vision. That's what we're looking for in the graduates we're employing. And I see that same spark in the eyes of many of the polytechnic ones.*

E6 commented: *People who can work as a team are very important to us. The group project work that seem to be a feature of the polytechnic is a help. Our recent recruits are keen to impress, are asking questions when they should, and are fitting in well.*

Researcher's Reflection:

Employers' expectations of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic graduates are:

- People who can look for opportunities.
- People who can produce mind maps as well as thoroughly compiled list of actions.
- People who can be selected because they're employable.
- People with good generic skills, time management and the ability to learn how to learn.
- People who start making a contribution immediately – keen to start and ready to learn. Graduates who can put the theory into practice.
- People working together as a team.
- People who communicate effectively with each other.
- People who can come to a consensus.
- People who can share a vision.

Employers' perceived Arabian Gulf Polytechnic graduates as follows:

- Our recent recruits are keen to impress, are asking questions when they should, and are fitting in well.
- And I see that same spark in the eyes of many of the polytechnic ones.

Approaches that appear to be used by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic to enhance the graduates' employability skills:

- Employment focus for the students
- Problem-based learning
- A quest for interesting work
- An emphasis on generic skills

4.5 Phase Three: Analyse the Case Study Evidence

In order to analyse and refine the developed programme review framework this researcher interviewed the pilot review participants, who included review team members, the review facilitator, review challengers and programme representatives. Table 3.3 in section 3.5.2 shows the summary of review participants and their roles and Appendix B contains the interview protocol.

Consent to participate in the interviews was sought and confirmed in writing prior to the interview commencing and the consent form is included with the interview protocol in Appendix B. The interviews, which were conducted, in English were tape-recorded and then transcribed.

The review team was invited to a group interview. This group interview included seven reviewers, being R1 to R7. An individual interview was conducted with the Review Facilitator (RF) and the review challengers. Four individual interviews were conducted. Three were with the review team challengers – from C1 to C3 – and one with the RF.

The review participants represented the various divisions at the polytechnic, including teaching staff, Deans, Heads of Schools, Programme Managers, Human Resources staff, moderators and administrators. The review participants had been employed at the polytechnic over a number of years ranging from one to five. The review participants worked together for over a year to undertake the review. During this time they tested many approaches and techniques to examine their effectiveness. Eleven review participants attended the group interview and the individual interviews. Four females and seven males participated in the review from four different nationalities: five from New Zealand, three from Bahrain, two from Ireland and one from the United Kingdom.

The data from this round of interviews are presented in four parts: review standards (4.5.1); review process (4.5.2); challenge sessions (4.5.3); and capacity building (4.5.4). A researcher's reflection is included at the end of each of these parts. This data shaped the key themes that emerged and provided a lead for follow-up in-depth interviews and linking to literature findings (presented in Chapter 5). The four parts of the data are explained in Table 4.12.

The data gathered are presented in an integrated approach to determine the overall view of the various review participants, including reviewers, challengers, facilitator and programme representatives under each theme element. By triangulating interview data, rich and descriptive content has been achieved.

Table 4.12 Categorisation of the Collected Data

Part	Description
1. Review Standards	This part includes four elements: clarity of the standards, relevance to the polytechnic (fit for purpose), alignment with international practice and comprehensiveness.
2. Review Process	This part includes five elements: role of review facilitator, working as part of a team, evidence gathering/sourcing, writing of the review findings /evaluative language and support provided.
3. Challenge Session	This part includes five elements: importance of the challenge session, roles of the challenge session, challenge session outcomes, different views within the challenge team and suggested ideas to improve the challenge session practice.
4. Capacity Building	This part includes two elements: examining perceptions of the effectiveness of the Bachelor of Business Programme Review and building capacity for the reviewers.

According to Bakhtin (1981, cited in Schiffrin, 2000), "any act of reporting speech is both an appropriation of another's words and a transformation of the original act" (p. 10). Speech is reported in a variety of ways which vary in the degree to which they transform the original act ranging from verbatim (direct) quotations – e.g., she said *I'm sorry* – to indirect quotations – e.g., *She said that she was sorry* – and paraphrasing of verbal action through speech act verbs – e.g., *She apologised* – (examples cited by Schiffrin, 2000, p. 10). In this thesis, review participants' accounts of their own experiences are paramount. To give weight and acknowledge the central position of the voices of the participants, what they said is presented as verbatim quotes,

recognisable by the use of italics and differentiated from the body of the text by indented blocks of speech or narrative segments placed in quotation marks.

4.5.1 Review Standards

The following question was asked of the interviewees:

> What are your views on the review standards in relation to the following aspects: clarity of review standards, relevance to the polytechnic (fit for purpose), alignment with international practice and comprehensiveness?

Clarity of Review Standards

When they started most reviewers were not entirely clear about what was required in response to the indicators:

> *Clarity was an issue at the beginning*, Reviewer three (R3) said, explaining that: *you and a colleague might both look at the same sub-indicator, and you might have different evaluations* because there were *overlaps in the sub-indicators.*
>
> Another felt that this was because there were *too many ideas floating around in one indicator* (R5).
>
> A third reviewer believed that the cultural context was a factor in this lack of clarity: *Certain terms like assessment have different meanings in different countries. When we sat down and reached consensus, I was concerned if what we had agreed was what QAAET were actually thinking. You can never get 100 per cent clarity. We kept going to the Quality Coordinator* (R6).

The reviewers struggled a great deal with this issue. It was difficult to come to a shared understanding initially but, with experience, clarity developed. R4 explained at the group interview:

> *The experience of going through the process, understanding the indicators, the meaning, what they stood for, also, the ability to talk to the facilitator was very useful in checking I was going in the right direction. The consensus of the group was what helped, but even so, we weren't sure where we were going. Some indicators were multi-layered and some sub-indicators would have been useful. We got more clarity with experience*.

Reviewers found that by talking to each other during the meetings, which were held weekly for the duration of the review, agreement was developed. This agreement arose through dialogue and seeking advice from the Quality Coordinator, rather than from the indicator statements themselves. The events that the reviewers felt helped them to gain clarity were the challenge session and moderation processes. R3 said:

> *Sometimes there were overlaps in the sub-indicators but the moderators will look and they want consistency. The facilitator eased it. I didn't know if the evidence was enough at the end.*

The RF said:

> *The fact it took us six weeks to define what Review Indicator One was, meant they weren't clear. The words used and the interpretation of those words was unclear, especially as regards the level and depth – that is, when should you stop asking questions? How much detail is needed? Do you need to just ask questions or also see documents . . . As a group we came to a common understanding after several weeks, but not necessarily the same understanding as QAAET because of the lack of clarity.*

The RF explained the technique that had been used to ensure common understanding regarding each indicator:

> *As a group, we got together to discuss the meaning of the sub-indicators, then each member went and investigated our sub-indicator, then one week later we came back together and reported our findings. The group then decided whether the evidence was sufficient or whether further investigation was required . . . We also looked at how QAAET looked at other institutions as a guide. I still think we are just guessing; we may need guidelines.*

However, Challenger 3 believed:

> *The indicators are clear to me. For the reviewers, they need training to understand the jargon. I've had that training. You need to understand what QAAET are looking for.* [The key reason was] *I had training at the second annual QAAET conference. Prior to the conference about 50 people were given information, did role plays, group work in order to build capacity for people who were going to be involved in programme reviews. It was useful, although my background in programme accreditation and review also prepared me for that.*

Furthermore, C3 highlighted several key aspects in responding to the review indicators:

> *It requires a level of intellectual background and discipline. Discipline in answering the question, the indicator, not something else, making sure there is direct evidence for any assertions and maintaining independence when what you're looking at may have a direct impact on yourself or your faculty. The indicators are clear to me, but you need discipline.*

C1 went on to say:

> *The bigger question was how they unpacked those. When we first met it was clear that a conceptual framework had not been provided. There are many models of frameworks for programme reviews, for example with ADRI there's a conceptual approach.* [C1 explained ADRI as] *Approach, Deployment, Results, and Improvements that guides what to investigate, and how. For example, the Approach would be mission and vision statements and then within Deployment, how the policies fit with those statements, and then looking below policy level and so on, so that you're always looking back to a focal point and measuring against that. When you look at Results, you can ask how you are effective, and how you know that. Where's the evidence and how does it relate back to the Approach?*

C1 indicated key benefits for ADRI as follows:

> *You can be precise with this framework. I think the reviewers took more of a descriptive approach rather than a methodical step-by-step conceptual approach to doing a review. If you have that framework then you can ask: How do the policies, statements and practice line up with the approach of the institution, with its Mission and Values? If we had a framework like ADRI you'd have institutional consistency and you'd be able to say to writers: this is what we need to look at and what we need to write about. Their skills would be upgraded, and they would become more confident.*

There was clear agreement among the interviewees around the importance of the professional dialogue to reach common understanding of the review indictors among the staff. For instance, the Programme Representative (PR) said:

> *One observation, they're clear once people have had a short discussion about the meaning, and if staff are knowledgeable about the programme. However, they're a baseline, a minimum standard, I'd say like a 'factory' quality. They're about consistency, but that can be of a cheap or a high-end product. To me the 'factory level' quality is OK when there's not much cognitive going on, but where you want to promote creativity, critical thinking, it becomes minimalistic. The indicators are a good starting point, if you meet them, at least it means the capability is there inside the institution.*

Similarly, C2 commented:

> *There's always a debate. It's never a perfect world, and there's always debate on the interpretation of the wording. Reviewers need to answer as asked, as they interpret the words, with the evidence needed. The panel may have a different interpretation, which is when you enter into discussion. There's not usually a significant mismatch.*

Likewise, C1 said:

> *One of the things with indicators in a new institution is that people may understand different things by the indicators, and have different concepts of what is intended by them. It's always important to sit together and unpack meaning and come to some agreement, and to unpack the purpose of them within the institution*.

Relevance to the Polytechnic (Fit for Purpose)

The reviewers' comments about the relevance of the indicators varied. Reviewer 4 said: *It seemed relevant to me*; R5 agreed: *Yes, they're relevant to a polytechnic*; while R6 suggested: *They are for an autonomous organisation, which we aren't at the moment. . . I'm not sure they are relevant to what we are now*. Reviewer 5 added: *We don't know what industry thinks of our graduates, we don't know if they're capable of working at the right level. So indicator four is quite difficult to answer because we don't have graduates yet.*
Further, R7 indicated that:

> *Missions, visions and values vary from educational institution to educational institution. A public institution is not a private institution; a research-based university is not a technical institute; a community college is not an elitist*

organisation that is selective in the candidates it allows to undertake its programmes of study.

The RF identified several missing elements from the existing review indicators when mentioning: *Yes, they are relevant but not complete. It needs to be more about practice. . . For example, we're not checking what actually happens in the classroom. The paperwork can look OK, but it might not mean that the institution is following policies.* The RF also mentioned: *There isn't enough focus on students' views* and *financial control isn't asked about in the indicators*. Adding: *The indicators look at depth and breadth of subject material, this is not particularly relevant for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic because we're light on text books, but more on the practical side. The indicators are not set up to assess competency-based learning.*

The challenge team had a different view regarding the relevance of the review indicators to the polytechnic. C2 said: *QAAET have done a pretty good job of developing the indicators. In my experience they're based on good practice internationally. They cover learning programme, structure, major resources, staff, quality systems and academic standards. They're not missing anything significant*.

On the other hand C3 said:

> *Indicators are for QAAET to review Arabian Gulf Polytechnic against their requirements. The review for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic should be to review a programme against Arabian Gulf Polytechnic requirements (mission and policies) and QAAET. However to me the reviews have been a gap analysis against QAAET's requirements and have lacked the rigour of a programme review. . . Whether we are meeting the strategic objectives in terms of producing work-ready graduates, work-ready learning, PBL et cetera. They're NOT central to QAAET, but they are to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. We have a vision statement, things that we want, things which make Arabian Gulf Polytechnic different from University of Bahrain and Bahrain Technical Institute . . . QAAET's focus isn't as keen as Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's should be. We need to write our own indicators . . . We need to be more independent in our reviewing. At present it's too 'incestuous', we're looking at ourselves, but reviewers need more independence – for example, having an independent Chair, more independent members (either not working for the programme itself, or for the polytechnic).*

C2 described the whole process as:

> *It's a self-evaluation review, it's not about a compliance-driven model, and it's not an audit. There's a major difference. It's about identifying weaknesses and putting a plan in place to remedy those weaknesses. Staff are worried we may fail, because we're not doing something, or not doing it well. I'm saying that doesn't matter, it's finding the gaps and making a plan to improve which matters. Nothing is perfect, not even at Ivy League level, or anywhere else.*

Finally the Programme Representative (PR) responded:

> *Absolutely, they're relevant to any higher education institution. The issue is what are the additional indicators you'd want? For example, in Bachelor of Business, assuming we meet all the indicators for QAAET, they're happy. But, compared to the accreditation criteria for business programmes, right now the*

structures in Arabian Gulf Polytechnic are nowhere near the levels. It's like a ten year development. If we want to be the best at what we do as an applied institute, we need to be trying to meet business programme benchmarks.

Alignment with International Practice

Most participants believed that the review indicators are aligned with international practice. R5 said: *Yes, these indicators are what you'd expect in other international organisations.* Similarly, C3 said: *I think they are.* In the same way C1 responded: *Yes, I think so.* Also, the PR felt the same: *Yes, but maybe too prescriptive*; and asked: *Does it give creativity for people to reflect on their own programme themselves?*

The RF had a different view:

> *I can only speak about Business. Business accreditation bodies have very similar indicators. QAAET's indicators are not aligned with these, e.g. finances come in heavily, there's a lot regarding links with industry. If QAAET is not preparing you for international accreditation, then I don't see the point. So if we go to the engineering field we need to have more indicators relevant to engineering.*

Comprehensiveness

C3 said: *I think the indicators are based on good practice, within international systems.* While R5 felt:

> *One thing missing is to bring in views and opinions of students. We've reviewed ourselves, but what do the students think? Surveys etc. have been superficial. I think it would be very useful to add this element . . . I was thinking more of indicators based on students' views of various areas such as focus on learning and teaching and student input.*

R4 believed that teacher development and classroom observation needed more attention: *How exhaustively did we look at teacher development? We talked about further studies. We often talk about processes, but the dialogue of how well we're doing in our classrooms and lecture rooms is assumed to be OK.*

The RF said: *It's missing several aspects such as Bachelor of Business related indicators, Finance, Practice and competency-based learning.* The PR's view was comprehensive:

> *One thing which is not looked at is how you maintain the quality of the people who are teaching. Harvard, for example, won't even look at these standards. Arabian Gulf Polytechnic needs an HR strategy that promotes professional development of the staff and is fully aligned with the individual schools. Now it's a shotgun approach, depending on what's available, but it's not a strategy. We need to up-skill staff to PhDs, as a golden standard. All teachers need to be properly qualified for what they're teaching; it's important for ensuring the quality of the teaching is up to scratch. It's about experience, qualification and backgrounds.*

Researcher's Reflection:

Clarity of the review standards was a challenging issue. However, the ongoing professional dialogue and discussion and debate among all parties resulted in maintaining a shared understanding of the review standards. Consideration of the polytechnic context is an important factor in understanding the review standards because the terminologies may be different from one context to another. There is a need to contextualise the terms used in the review standards to the polytechnic and make them more meaningful. Another issue identified that related to the review standards was overlapping. The clarity of the review standards may be enhanced by:

1. Developing guidelines that may assist in understanding the review standards, reading pervious review reports and providing training.
2. Reviewers' background and discipline to respond to the review standards were important elements.
3. Using a model like ADRI is very helpful to structure the review report and focus more on evaluating the services.

The review standards used in the pilot exercise were relevant to the polytechnic context. However; some missing elements have been highlighted such as a focus on learning and teaching, and a greater focus on practical and industrial experience. In addition, an appropriate balance between accountability and improvement is required. For example, the standards used did not focus enough on the polytechnic vision, mission and strategic initiatives. The review standards also need more focus on the actual practice of teaching and learning, such as classroom observation. More focus on students' views and financial aspects is also required. Overall the review standards used in the pilot exercise were aligned with international practice.

To address the above issues the following review principles were introduced in the revised programme review framework: opportunity for dialogue, specialisation within review teams, and a focus on compliance and accountability as appropriate.

4.5.2 Review Process

The following question was asked of the interviewees:

> How do you feel about the review process in terms of the following: role of review facilitator, working as part of a team, evidence gathering/sourcing, writing of the review findings in evaluative language and support provided?

Role of Review Facilitator

The role of the review facilitator is challenging. This was evident from the interviewee responses. R3 said: *Challenging! You have to keep reviewers motivated, this is the key.*

Keep asking people for evidence, keep calling people, meetings, keep to timings plus knowledge, this is very important. R6 mentioned that: *It's a position with all the responsibility and no authority, needs good inter-personal skills. Due to staff changes only three people are still on the team.* The RF said: *Not easy! You have to be good at influencing people, because you have no control over deadlines, for example*. The RF explained: *Communication! I met informally with the individual group members once or twice a week and sent emails. We had the discussion group going the whole time, so the group was in constant communication*.

The RF added:

> *None of us had any experience of a review or an audit. A lot of time was spent at the beginning on understanding what information we would need, the style of writing required et cetera . . . The facilitator role wasn't well-defined in terms of the Business Programme management. The facilitator didn't have the authority to ask, 'Can you get this done before next Tuesday?' I didn't know if anyone was being paid to do this work or if it was voluntary . . . The group quickly became more competent in understanding what to do, how to do it, and where to go for information. My role became less as they understood more.*

The RF explained: *There were different people with different experience, different lengths of time at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic and therefore different institutional knowledge. Some things like Higher Education Council publications are only in Arabic. We would never have even known of the existence of these without one of the members, who also translated them all for us*.

The interviewees identified a number of key characteristics of the effective review facilitator. R2 said: *The review facilitator needs to be calm, keep going, and not give up.* The RF advised:

> *You have to be good with scheduling, especially when people are busy with their teaching schedules. You need to help with organising meetings. Keep checking up. You need to be good at convincing people across Arabian Gulf Polytechnic that they need to give up information.*

The interviewees agreed that the review facilitator was very effective in undertaking the role. C3 said: *The review facilitator developed into the role very well. I think now the group are more focused, but we have drawn the process out over a long period*. PR added: *Personally, I think the review facilitator did a very good job.* C2 agreed: *Excellent, great job from my perspective, as regards review facilitator interaction, and was always willing to share*.

Similarly, R5 mentioned: *Without facilitators to organise, understand, be the reference point, it wouldn't have happened. It's a very big role.* R4 agreed and explained:

> *Crucial. They did a fantastic job. They took on the role of tidying up our individual inputs, getting the 'same voice' . . . The review facilitator very calmly organises people, and was able to get the best out of people, very good listener, very knowledgeable, very well organised. When we got our management information system sorted, it was much tighter.*

Finally R3 sums up the group's feeling towards the review facilitator: *The review facilitator did a great job, more than just explaining the indicators. When people were hesitant to get evidence, to reveal information, she organised it, made it happen.*

Working as Part of a Team

R7 commented, and research participants agreed:

> *We've recognised ourselves as pockets of enthusiasm within the polytechnic. I like that term. It's an idea that should be pushed throughout the organisation. If groups come to see themselves that way – as professionals who take pride in what they're doing – they'll take ownership of the review process and seek continuous improvement.*

One key challenge the review team encountered was about scheduling the meetings. The RF explains:

> *The only issue is scheduling. They're all busy teaching, overtime often, we had to try to find time when everyone was free and that means you can't use certain times. Beginning of semester, first three weeks, 'no', end of semester, marking, et cetera, 'no'. Assessment time: 'no'. Non-teaching time, 'no', as people are travelling.*

The RF added:

> *When we first started this review people worked individually. I was the central person, but then as people got to know each other, they started meeting up and working together. There were pairs of people who teamed up and helped each other.*

Similarly, C1 added:

> *It was, at the early stages, an inexperienced team, and they weren't led into how to conduct a review as clearly as they could have been. For example, if we go back to Indicator one, it was not as clearly written, they were not as clear. With later indicators they were much firmer, stronger, and more concise. They learnt a lot, you can see that from their later writing. As a team I think they came through very well.*

R4 said: *My ignorance was profound at the beginning, and there was a graciousness about the team. The team gave me understanding and I would not have liked to have been doing it more independently*. R5 said: *It added to the richness and robustness, lots of different experiences.*

C2 commented on the review team selection in Arabian Gulf Polytechnic context:

> *It's important that everyone gets involved, not a select team. You automatically get different ages and backgrounds. Hopefully some of the younger ones will still be here in five years' time, and will have grown, so I think it's good to involve people of different ages. Cultural backgrounds are important because this programme has to meet the needs of Bahrainis without necessarily transplanting the way 'we' (ex-pats) do things, but we can learn from each other. We can steer the Bahrainis away from an overly bureaucratic approach. At the end of the day, we (ex-pats) will walk away, which is why programmes*

from abroad have to be modified, you have to look at how it's applied in a local environment, although the fundamentals will be the same.

On the other hand, C3 said:

> *To have consistency you need to have good, tight teams, and I don't see that. They tended to allocate tasks, go and beaver away, and then we get three people asking the same question. In a way that's OK because it builds capacity. But it worries me that if reviewers don't know, for example, that there are Programme Approval Documents and they are doing a review, maybe it needs to be more senior people in terms of knowing these things.*

R7 commented: *We're all leaders, one way or another, and we need to take responsibility for our part of the process. And we need to keep our focus on why we're doing all this – for the benefit of the learners.*

The RF described the team interaction and debate considering the reviewers' background and differences:

> *The debate between Westerners was quite strong, they had an understanding that it was the issues which were being 'attacked', not the person. I think this was difficult for people from other cultures, they took things more personally, so it had to be carefully managed.*

Similarly the PR said:

> *Bahraini culture within the polytechnic is quite autocratic, so there's less room for critical thinking, people tend to look to people above them for answers. There's an argument that says if there was a major lack of support, like probably staffing and budgets right now, and senior people* [like this respondent] *don't get support, people from the West would resign.*

While C3 said: *Some people would say Bahraini staff were less willing to criticise, but that has not been my observation. It's more to do with experience and confidence.*

C3 indicated:

> *One of the things I noticed was that the Bahraini staff had a far greater focus on non QAAET standards – for example, HEC standards, whereas the ex-pats tended to focus on the review against QAAET standards. It's a difficult thing, but we need to look at what we're reviewing. Sometimes our reviews do need to be bigger than QAAET, and if we need to meet HEC regulations, we should be focusing on that as well.*

In terms of the review team size the RF highlighted:

> *One of the mistakes was having such a large group. It was good being diverse because of our different experience, but it was then difficult to complete the review within a certain timeframe. Four people would be easier to manage, and one person to write the report, then have it moderated.*

To what extent should people who manage the programme, such as Programme Manager, Head of School and Dean, participate in the review process and what should

be their role and authority? When the review started none of the programme representatives were involved in any sense. The RF said:

> *In the first indicator, we didn't involve them at all. That was a huge mistake because they felt we were attacking them. In subsequent indicators the Quality Co-ordinator and I met with the PR at the beginning of the process and this was important. They were regularly involved, we updated them without them influencing the process.*

Evidence Sourcing and Gathering

A large body of interviewee responses illustrate that the evidence gathering was not an easy task for the reviewers. R4 said: *Very different. Some people very amenable, others gate-keeping information, very suspicious of why we were doing the review. Others just wanted to promote their own points.*

C1 explained:

> *There wasn't a robust chain of links because of the lack of framework. Also, as an institution, you need to locate certain information, the evidence and the data, you need to draw conclusions. It was very difficult to locate, and the reviewers hadn't really been able to access all of that evidence, and they weren't aware that they should do that*.

The RF added:

> *The way Arabian Gulf Polytechnic was set up makes it very difficult to find evidence. Many departments were set up almost as autonomous units with everyone tightly controlling their own area, and getting people to release information was very difficult as we were going to be critically appraising them. When I say difficult, I mean impossible.*

In addition, the RF highlighted:

> *Our information system here is poor. There are many versions of the same document available, so it's difficult to find the right one. You don't know if you're working on the latest version of a policy document or not*.

R5 added: *I think it highlights our lack of managing information and our attitude to information. Information is our life-blood, it needs to flow, but here leaders guard and use and hold on to information*. On the other hand, R1 highlighted fears about *how can I make myself or my department look good? People are less trusting*. R4 said: *Once people knew their name wasn't going to be on anything, and they would see what I had written to agree that was what had been said, they were more relaxed*.

R3 said:

> *In my case, I knew where the evidence was – sometimes it went smoothly, other people did not want to share. The facilitators dealt with this. It was good learning and I think now people are more willing to share. There were lots of questions – 'Who's going to see it? Read it?'*

R2 highlighted: *I used to communicate a lot with people in the polytechnic, in my old role, which helped me a lot to know where to go*. R7 said: *We've got to keep questioning, questioning, questioning. We should never think we've got the right*

answer. We go with what we've got – and enjoy the ride – but always look for improvements.

C3 indicated:

> *I saw that as a development that improved as time went on. The first review we did a year ago was heavy on opinions, it was subjective, there was a certain amount of the Dean playing devil's advocate and it caused some confusion. As time has gone on, the evidence in reviews has improved, but finding the evidence internally has been difficult*.

PR added: *I have no issue with the report, it's pretty factual, and they have tried to reference things where they have made a claim. The team went through a steep learning curve; they were coached to only report facts*.

C1 suggested that the polytechnic needs to build a conceptual framework for information management and explained the idea:

> *If you have a conceptual framework, you can say what you want people to report on – for example, attrition rates, numbers of students going to Student Services etc. then institutionally, that information can be gathered, and it has to be available to be gathered. I'm not sure how and in what form that would be, but rather than keep reinventing the wheel every time we have a review, we should have a place where this information is kept and can be accessed*.

Similarly, C3 indicated:

> *We need to improve evidence gathering so it's from wider sources. There was a focus on documentation, which was good, but maybe a broader group of faculty and students need to be asked . . . One of the areas for improvement was that students didn't seem to have been asked questions. There was the standard student survey which asked some questions, but the survey response rate was low.*

Finding the right evidence to support reviewer judgements was an issue. C1 commented: *The supply of evidence still worries me, it's a concern that we don't have a single source of 'truth', of where the latest version of everything is stored.* Similarly, C3 explained:

> *It's a difficult job because the evidence they are seeking should be there. They're spending a lot of time trying to find it, to interpret data. It's not what they should be doing. Arabian Gulf Polytechnic needs the evidence to be readily available. It's the role of the quality and measurement directorate to organise this in my opinion. It should be produced, maybe on a yearly basis.*

In addition, C3 highlighted the impact of lack of evidence on the reviewer work: *The reviewers will keep compensating for the lack of evidence by developing their own if it is not there, and it will keep on happening every time there is a review. The polytechnic needs to do something.*

Finally, C3 stressed the importance of evidence for the external quality agency: *QAAET will have our policies, our reviews, and they will make a judgement over one*

to two days. Their findings may be that we're non-compliant or partially compliant if the evidence isn't there.

Writing of the Review Findings in Evaluative Language

It was clear from the views expressed by the interviewees that the writing of the report in evaluative language was an issue. R5 said: *Even with experience, it wasn't easy, there are different styles. How to get these things written was a challenge.* The RF pointed out: *Very difficult to come up with a common voice.* C1 indicated that: *The evidence wasn't always as robust as it should have been. Triangulation of evidence is an important point and I'm not sure if this happened with the Business Programme review*. C2 admitted: *It's still sometimes descriptive in that first indicator*; as did PR: *It was a bit descriptive.*

Another key issue was the tendency to focus on the institution as a whole instead of on the programme review, specifically. R6 highlighted: *We need to look at the impact on the programme, not the institute.* Similarly, R4 said: *Advice to others would be don't get bogged down in institutional policy, but focus on the programme.* Likewise, R6 stated: *Lots of people wrote from the polytechnic's perspective rather than from the perspective of the Business Programme. I still think there wasn't enough focus on the programme itself.*

C2 elaborated:

> *There is variability in what is written for different indicators. There's an inherent problem; some writers will be more evaluative, some more descriptive. In our case, a steering committee will look at the initial review writing and give feedback, give a milestone check part of the way through. Involving everybody gives variability, but that's not a problem, it is a self-review, it's a learning process for everyone.*

The RF used a particular strategy to improve the review writing style and commented:

> *I used a template to allow for context, evaluation and judgement. It was quite a tight template and it made it easier to edit . . . The team as a whole needs to find the evidence then you need one person writing up the findings*.

Support Provided

The interviewees found the review exercise akin to a learning journey. R5 said: *This was Problem Based Learning. We all learnt a lot, we were practising what we preach.* Similarly, R7 stressed the Programme Teams should *practise what we preach*. The RF said: *Yes, I think it was adequate. You, as the interviewer, were always there to answer questions, and this helped because of your knowledge of QAAET. The management of the Business team were also very supportive*.

C3 said: *I think it was developing itself, now we're in a stronger situation. It will require the Quality Department in particular to maintain that independence and to be demanding*. C1 highlighted: *We struggled at the beginning with setting up the review – for example, Indicator One. Institutionally it was a learning process. Hopefully next time we'll have a structure*.

Researcher's Reflection:

The important role of the review facilitator is challenging and requires communication, administration, deep knowledge, organisation and motivation. The review facilitator needs to be self-motivated, have a high level of enthusiasm and be selected carefully. In addition, working through a team was a crucial factor in establishing teamwork and encouraging the professional dialogue that would enhance the review culture.

Maintaining an evidence-based review was a very challenging issue at the polytechnic because of the unclear documentation and archiving system in place. There was a clear need for training and building of capacity among reviewers in areas such as writing in an evaluative language.

To address the above issues, the following review principles were introduced in the revised programme review framework: fostering of pockets of enthusiasm, specialisation within review teams, evidence management, introduction of the challenging session technique to enhance the review findings, and the providing of opportunity for a dialogue.

4.5.3 Challenge Session

The following question was asked of the interviewees:

> To what extent did the challenge session support you to improve the quality of your review findings?

Importance of the Challenge Session

Most of the interviewees felt that the challenge session was effective in improving the quality of the review. R6 said: *That* [the challenge session] *told me we were focusing on the institution not the programme, so that helped me*. C3 stated: *There was consensus that challenge sessions are important.* The PR indicated that the challenge session is *very important. QAAET will probably want to validate our programmes in time, so it's good to get staff used to it. Also it's preparing staff for robust discussion, forcing them to think about the programme in a friendly way*. C3 felt: *You could see an improvement in what the reviewers produced as we went on, so you could see that the advice, support had been useful.*

C2 commented on the challenge session:

> *Overall, positive. There were unclear things in the review which needed tightening up, and it has happened. It's hard when you're on the receiving end, to have your work pulled apart in front of everybody, but you have to get used to it. You do it in a nice manner*.

C3 said: *As long as we maintain the process of having internal reviewers, we will need to have robust challenge. If they're external reviewers, you'd still need challenge to ensure there is integrity in the reviewers' assertions.*

Role of the Challenge Team

C3 described the challenge team role as: *You have two roles: to judge, and to provide feedback. The first one is developmental, the other is decision-making.* In relation to the challenge team role C1 said:

> *The writers had mixed feelings towards us acting as a challenge team. Quite rightly, because they were slightly insecure about our role, and also slightly insecure about what they had produced, as we were. They perhaps looked at our comments as a criticism rather than as a critique. They were most upset by us saying, 'Where's your framework?', and them saying, 'We didn't know we needed one.', and perhaps they felt let down that they weren't guided more in the beginning.*

C1 described their role as:

> *The reviewers had been through a learning process, and we wanted to grow them. It was partly about motivating and encouraging the members, and at the same time offering some 'challenge' but I don't like that word. It's too in-your-face, and we did more mentoring, advising. We shied away from challenging perhaps. But we were three different people from three very different backgrounds with different experience, and therefore viewed the challenge session in perhaps different ways.*

R7 commented: *The idea of challenge is good. You have to develop a thick skin. For one thing, you never know what's going to turn up from the Qualifications Authority – what kinds of curly questions they're going to throw at you.*

C3 said in terms of their role: *I think it's about the challengers providing friendly, independent advice, and it's up to the review team to consider that advice and decide where to go from there.*

Challenge Session Outcomes

Both the reviewers and the challengers found the first challenge session difficult. R6 said: *There were so many issues with the first challenge session.* R4 added:

> *I was only present at one. We'd prepared in a way where we thought we'd be able to talk through our points. [C3] talked about his issues with it, and [C1] told us how we might have done it differently. We weren't prepared for this, it was entirely different from our expectations. We need to stick to clear mandate and we need transparency.*

The RF highlighted: *The first challenge session was so difficult that it helped us to start asking each other difficult questions as we were writing up our findings*. C2 felt differently: *I didn't perceive any problems. I think they sometimes felt defensive; it's a normal reaction.*

The RF explained: *We knew we would be asked questions, it made us tighten up.* C3 added: *The first time around we had some significant concerns, we wrote a lot of*

comments, comments were rightly seen as negative. But I believe some hijacking had taken place. C3 elaborated:

> *We were feeling uncomfortable. When we came in to talk to the team, it was almost adversarial, opposite sides of the table. We said things, they tried to defend themselves. Probably then both sides tried to defend themselves, particularly the review group who had spent so much time on it. Also there were senior members of the faculty staff in the room who took over and it was not their role.*

Things improved in the second challenge session. C3 commented on the second challenge session:

> *In the second session, that didn't happen. After the experience of session one, the challengers discussed how it went, weren't happy and met again with the reviewers and gave more developmental advice, gave suggestions about how and where to find evidence.*

Different Views within the Challenge Team

The RF felt that: *The challenge team didn't have a shared understanding of the criteria.* In relation to this aspect C1 said: *The challenge team were four people from different faculties, different educational backgrounds, different experiences of quality frameworks and understanding.* C3 added: *Each challenger has their own background and strengths. We provided friendly challenge and advice, then it was up to the review team to decide if it was valid or not.*

C3 explained the different views of the challenge team as something normal:

> *Yes, that's life, and when QAAET come, it will be the same. Some may have a particular interest in assessment for example, and will focus on that. There are differences in the challengers' approaches based on their own experience and the time they have available.*

Suggested Ideas to Improve the Challenge Session Practice

It is clear that the concept of having a challenge session is accepted by all review participants; however, it needs some improvement. C2 highlighted:

> *There's the concept of having a challenge team as part of the quality process. It was very time-consuming and lengthy overall in that it was broken up into separate indicators, then we challenged an indicator by itself, which was fine, but time-consuming. I prefer the model where we run it like a mock evaluation panel with three or four members with an external person running it, and write up a report in the short term with feedback. It became too internal, too much inward navel-gazing. The reviewers went off and rewrote, but it was a long process.*

The RF said: *We need to publish a set of criteria to make the challenge session fair.* C3 indicated that:

> *The challenge session is vital. I'm concerned that the last one didn't happen well because the challengers had little or no experience. To maintain a robust*

> *system of challenge, you need to appoint people with experience, not people who are building up their own skills.*

R4 indicated: *If challenge sessions were one tool which helped us to have one voice, then this was a good thing. Will it ever happen?* C1 said: *The most important aspect was deciding what a challenge team is, and what it's there to do*. C1 commented on the word challenge: *I think a challenge team is necessary, but I'm not comfortable with the word 'challenge'. Maybe 'advisory committee'.* C1 indicated that:

> *The adoption of a conceptual framework for reviewers by the institution, so that it's clear to all and we become familiar with it . . . If the skills sets of the people conducting the review are stronger in the future you can be more challenging if they have a strong framework to work from.*

Finally, C3 concludes: *I don't think it's sustainable in terms of the numbers involved, the lack of consistency, the reports show different writers, some have been clear and answered the questions, others not. It needs to be more consistent.*

Researcher's Reflection:

The challenge sessions were effective in improving the quality of the review report, encouraging professional dialogue and building capacity among participants. The roles of the challenge team were to judge and to provide feedback. The first one was developmental; the other was decision-making. The challenge session outcomes were very useful in building the reviewers' capacity. However, it was time-consuming and requires clear guidelines and suitably qualified people.

To address the above issues the following review principles were introduced in the revised programme review framework: fostering pockets of enthusiasm, building clear guidelines for the challenge session and providing opportunity for dialogue.

4.5.4 Capacity Building

The following question was asked of the interviewees:

> What do you expect will be the impact of programme review on the effectiveness of the Bachelor of Business programme?

Examining Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Bachelor of Business Programme Review

The outcome of any review is the improvement initiatives and the positive impact on the programme particularly on students' achievement after implementing those initiatives. The interviewees varied in their views about the expected impact of the review on programme effectiveness. The RF highlighted: *It won't be as impactful as it could have been due to the nature of the indicators, leaving out practice.* R4

indicated: *Where the review has highlighted resource deficiencies, it must go forward, but I can't see it being addressed. The report was valid; I worry that the things we have suggested might not be implemented*. R5 stated: *Things within our scope, yes, they can be changed. But large or small impact, don't know.*

The RF raised an issue regarding the possibility for the programme review team to suggest recommendations for other departments and commented: *Some of the findings were against other departments, like Information Technology, Quality, Registry, Curriculum, but we are told we cannot put an improvement item against those departments, so it ends up as 'feedback' to the department on these issues.* The RF questioned: *What is the point of doing a review if the services to the programme won't change? It should be the only focus of doing a review, to make improvements.* The RF also added: *The services departments aren't working to support the programmes. The department which is supposed to be serving the programmes won't change.*

In terms of the impact of the review on the programme, C2 said: *I think it's a worthwhile exercise because we're brand new. The timing is good, our first graduates are coming. We're forced to sit down and review everything we're doing, it needs to be done*. R1 raised the question: *Can identifying things which are easy to change engender hope that things will improve?*

C2 added:

> *The Business Programme review is concluded, they've started on the improvements, on what will happen. We're optimistic. I've already seen some positive outcomes, for example, discussions about strategic direction in the Business School with regard to its environment here. I suspect the review was part of that. What is going to be our point of difference for our graduates going out into the workforce? So I think I've already seen something positive come out of the review.*

The RF said: *The impact only happens because we agreed to an improvement plan based on the review. People are more focused on improvement now there is a deadline to fix these issues.* The RF was concerned about the impact of the review on classrooms. *We're fixing all the paperwork, but it's just paperwork, not classroom practice*. R5 indicated that people who did not share in the review need to see its impact: *Feedback to people outside of the review needs to occur in order to see benefits and changes which can be made*.

Finally, the interviewees focused on the importance of finding a balance between compliance and improvement. As C3 responded:

> *Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as a whole, and in particular senior management, needs to take ownership of what quality improvement is, the Quality Department too. We're too much in a compliance mentality. I'd like to see more commitment from senior management in leading us to a quality improvement based culture.*

R7 commented:

> *It's not just a matter of complying so that audit reports can be filled out. We should be doing things because they're important to us in doing a good job.*

For example, we should be seeking better ways of doing things and we should be proactively identifying risks and putting plans in place to avoid risks.

Similarly, C1 stated:

One of the biggest dangers is that people see the recommendations as being imposed on them from an external body, so they have to modify things until those people are out of the door. Things need to be developed from the bottom up, so that you enhance good practice from the bottom up because you have their involvement. This can initiate a cycle which is operating at different levels. Then people see it as what they want to do, rather than as complying.

Likewise, C3 explained:

It will improve in terms of being compliant. But we haven't reviewed ourselves in terms of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic standards. People will have justified what we do, but does that mean we'll get better? I have some doubts. There'll be evidence of, for example, Problem Based Learning, but is everyone actually doing it?

Capacity Building for the Reviewers

The following question was asked of the interviewees:

How has this experience helped you to build your capacity as a reviewer?

Most of the reviewers found this experience very useful in building their knowledge and skills. R6 said: *The review process helped, I did it wrong at the beginning, learnt along the way.* Similarly, R4 indicated: *I've been well and truly Problem Based Learning. I've come on a lot. Were I staying, I'd feel much more confident about contributing.* R2 stated:

Definitely! I'm starting to use this experience in other areas of my life. It has been enjoyable in some points. As a reviewer, you're trying to find the positives and negatives of the programme which was challenging, yes, but fun, enjoyable, you get to meet people.

R3 indicated: *It was necessary, new learning for me in my new role, and it gave me institutional knowledge.* The RF felt the same way and elaborated:

A very good experience. I'd only ever managed direct reports before. Managing very diverse people who were only meeting for a common goal was different . . . It's been huge. For example, my institutional knowledge, where to go to find information. That's quite difficult in the polytechnic. You told me about triangulating the evidence, you have to do it, then prove it, there's no point in talking about it.

C3 said: *I think the people involved all the way through built capacity. Others got a taste because of change of personnel.* C1 commented on the reviewers' experiences: *I think the review helped the group to improve their skills, and I think we should train others given the number of reviews we have.*

The challengers also found the experience very useful to strengthen their capacity. As C3 explained:

> *Definitely. Having the opportunity to be a challenger is very good because you take a step away from writing a review to critiquing someone else's. You can step back, be independent. It also shows what we can slip into if we don't maintain that reviewer's discipline.*

C1 added: *At the moment we're being hit with so many different reviews, but on the whole I think we're doing pretty well as an institution. We're growing in confidence in this area.*

Researcher's Reflection:

How to deal with recommendations that relate to other departments remains something of a challenge. The link between review and improvement effort needs to be clear to make it more meaningful. Service departments were not represented adequately in the pilot review exercise, however, the pilot exercise proved to be a very useful process to build reviewers' capacity.

To address the above issues the following review principles were introduced in the revised programme review framework: quality culture as situational types and fostering pockets of enthusiasm.

4.5.5 Students' Involvement in the New Contextualised Programme Review

This part includes student involvement in the new contextualised programme review.

The following questions were asked of the students:

1. How do you feel about being involved in the following activities as part of the programme review process?
    - Be part of the review team.
    - Share in writing the programme review report.
    - Share in reviewing the programme review report.
    - Share in approving the programme review actions.
    - Meet with internal reviewers.
    - Answer surveys.
    - Receive feedback on the improvement progress.
2. What else would you like to add?

Student Involvement in the New Contextualised Programme Review

All the participants agreed that programme review is an important process in many different aspects and in education particularly. As S4 commented: *of course, as it is for improving things, so it is good to improve*; and S1 also added:

> W*ell, for any establishment or association or anything in the world, they have to seek development between time to time, having something settle for five ten years is completely unacceptable and non-sense … even in education it's very important as it changes every two years, it changes dramatically; so seeking development is definitely something they should be looking after*.

As for students' involvement toward being part of those programme reviews process, the interviewed group insisted that it is a 'must be' action. S3 reasoned the need for being involved as: *we experience the change*.

One process of students' involvement other than surveys is a 'focus group' for each course being introduced for the current students who are still studying, as suggested by S1:

> *For the current students, I believe they should have two to three levels of focus groups each semester for each subject or course being introduced; the reason for that is you can eliminate or distinguish the students with high scores from the students with low rates and put them in one group and ask them the same questions and you can from that estimate the level of learning or the similarities of challenges that they have been facing.*

S1 continued with an example:

> *If we have five students they are getting below ten out of twenty, you would want to know the reason, so you put them in a focus group and you start structuring the questions that would help you estimate these challenges that broadened or hardened the students capabilities to learn*.

The other participants agreed that a 'focus group' is a good idea that can be used as part of the programme review.

S6 said: *Create a committee with representatives from the student body. You need to get students on the review team.* S5 added: *Have a committee of students and meet every semester to see what recommendations and comments they make.*

S6 indicated: *You need to build trust and confidence that they will make a difference.* He further suggested that trust can be built by: *Transparency, and it takes time to show that there will be change.*

S5 added: *That there will be an outcome.* S6 suggested: *Maybe the Student Council could be involved in the programme review*. S7 agreed on that: *Yes, I was thinking about that initially.*

S6 indicated:

> *The Council actually needs to have students from each Programme. There should be a policy on this, and they (student reps) should give more to students, they need to go further, not just take. I think it might be better this year.*

S4 also shared that 'individual interviews' could also be part of the reviewing process, as some students might have some stories or comments that they do not wish to share with a group *because sometimes when you are alone without other people, you speak freely and more open*. S2 shared a concern regarding the introduced process: *They need to make sure that it is confidential, because some students might be afraid to express their feelings, so this matter needs to be sorted out first.* The group agreed, as S1 introduced a solution for this matter:

> *Yes, confidentiality is very good point, there is a way to do that; they can hire a quality check institution for any quality checking as 'independent body', and Arabian Gulf Polytechnic sets goals and let the independent body structure a way of questioning and surveying for certain students, but no one will know who are these students and when they have met, and by the end of that the independent body give their recommendation or suggestions to the polytechnic*.

S1 also suggested another interesting process by involving the students who graduated and currently working, 'alumni,' in the review process, as they already experienced the previous courses and can relate to them by their experience with the labour market needs:

> *Also there is a very good way I think can be done, they can have a panel discussion between the deans, between the students alumni and between the current students; the reason for that is; the alumni that have worked in the same field for example if they work in a telecommunication company and they were IT students they can give recommendation of the current market, what's going on in the current market … they can report it directly to the deans, and at the same time the current students will be there and they will start thinking about how they can see their path toward their bachelor degree*.

S6 indicated: *Alumni have done the course and they can give feedback on how the course can be applied in real life in the workplace.* All participants agreed that alumni are an important resource for the programme review.

In comparison with written feedback 'surveys' or 'face to face' through dialogues, the participants agreed unanimously that interviews are better. As S3 said: *because other than words, you can express more by talking and can directly ask them what do you mean by this point.* S2 also added: *it's also links to deep thinking and ask you more questions and they will get more details, specific examples on specific areas to improve*. S4 added his support: *Some people can't express well with writing, and you can get an honest opinion rather than just writing.*

The participants agreed that the programme review should be shared with all students, as it would encourage the students to participate in the future as the impact is seen, published and shared with student. S2 stated: *It shows that students voice mattered and that it put into consideration*; S4 added: *They will be encouraged to do more reviews*. S1 shared another method of sharing the programme review other than through emails:

> *See, there is a way that is very interesting and very encouraging to get the students to know about the outcome and getting students coming to see the outcome, it can be in one ceremony event where you invite these students and tell them about the results of their hard commitment*.

S2 partially disagreed with S1's idea: *I don't think it should be the only programme within the ceremony, I don't think I would go to this ceremony is just to hear someone saying what are the changes that happened.* He also shared that programme review results should be part of but not the whole ceremony as it would not attract many students.

The group had mixed opinions regarding involving the 'Student Council' in programme reviewing as student representatives. S1 expressed his disagreement:

> *I disagree, as much as I put my trust in those people who I elected to be my representatives in the student council, I still see many gaps in their personalities, their skills and their education to fill the gap of developing a programme itself, they can be supportive way as a way of encouraging to do the event, as a way of doing the surveys. Personally I see them they are still growing and especially in the under graduate level they are still seeking their bachelor degree and still building and forming their personalities from the bottom up, so when you speak with one of them, you don't feel them mature enough … so, saying that student council being a way or a method to take our voice and form it in a way that can be a way to make a change in the programme can sometimes be bumpy.*

The interviewed group also shared their opinions on other aspects: being part of the review team, sharing and writing the programme review report, sharing in approving the actions resulting from the programme review, meeting with internal reviewers, and receiving feedback on the improvement process.

Being part of the review team

Most participants showed discomfort in being part of the team, as S3 said: *they are my tutors!!! I want to be free to talk about anything*; and S2 explained: *it is debatable, because I still don't have enough knowledge to criticise specific programme, or I don't know how to evaluate or review certain programmes. Of course I want to be involved; but then I might have wrong judgment*. S6 said: *Happy, we are all different. Year 1 students would not feel confident to speak freely*. S7 added: *I wouldn't feel comfortable. It would depend on the students, picking the right ones*. S7 indicated: *I will be afraid to participate in such like this committee*.

S8 refused to be part of the review team: *No, students do not have enough experience.* S5 added: *No! We have too much writing and course work.* On the other hand, S6 indicated: *With certain students, it would be good, for example if students are willing and mature, they really want to do this.*

S6 indicated: *A committee would be excellent. Students can meet and speak freely together. The surveys are not making a difference. And the understanding is much better face to face.*

S4 added: *It is good idea to not just hear yourself, it is nice to hear the tutors and someone else, but the problem is we don't want to be members; we won't benefit anything, we need someone else to take our places.*

S1 showed interest in being a member: *Personally, I would love to take place, it's more encouraging for me to give a direct word to the person who is teaching me*.

Sharing in writing the programme review report

S1 also showed an interest in being involved in the stage of writing the review report: *Actually it is also good, because I can do remarkable change in that, not vandalising, but I wouldn't really prefer it*.

The other participants did not show any enthusiasm toward this process, as S2 said: *I don't think it would benefit me in anything because the decisions have already been made, I don't think at this stage you would be able to make any change*. S2 added: *maybe it is for those who have good writings they can share*; and S4 said: *If they want my opinion 'OK', but writing it 'no*'.

Sharing in approving the actions resulting from the programme review

The participants expressed their concerns for empowering the students with accepting and rejecting actions. S4 said: *Some people don't like to change, but some changes are good.*

S2 commented:

> *It depend on who you will give the power, and who will use this power, as I am thinking of the whole picture, if you give the power to the whole students you might not get the same results you were seeking, but if you are asking the right students, then 'yes' they might use this power for the good … we are still students, we are not yet professional, so we don't know the impact for those changes.*

S7 asked: *If we go back to students approving actions, would that be done by a majority vote? Would the committee members be representative of the students?*

Some students might use the power in the wrong way and not allow good changes, as pointed out by S1:

> *For example those students who are not attending their classes, they will force a new role to have 40% absence, and if you think about it, it would be disadvantage for the quality of learning … for example those who are qualified at least for approving or disapproving they should at least have finished two years of the programme or should at least be in the fourth year 'senior students'; those ones who have passed into the experience*.

S1 shared a concern about involving the alumni students in this process: *Alumni can sometimes seek revenge as they were depressed and under pressure through previous years, so I will do something for my brother who is still studying*.

Meeting with internal reviewers

The entire group felt comfortable meeting any of the internal reviewers to discuss certain issues, documents and facts.

Receiving feedback on the improvement progress

All participants presented their interest toward being updated about any changes that occur, as S1 stated: *I want to know the outcomes*. S5 added: *Yes, not the whole report, or no-one will look at it. Very basic, plus why things have changed.* S5 elaborated: *It*

can be both a brief e-mail and the report as an attachment. It needs to say what you are changing, why and in straightforward terminology. S7 highlighted: *It should be clear and simple*; and added: *We want to receive the feedback as long as there aren't too many emails.*

S6 explained:

> *I've done research on communication between Student Services and students last semester, as there is a problem, and we wanted to develop an App. Students don't check their emails, the Inbox gets full, they change their mobile numbers and SS don't know. There needs to be a simple, central channel.*

S7 added: *Instagram is easier for me.*

Students' additional comments

Most participants have faced many changes during their studies, and after the interview they discovered that these changes were the result of programme reviews.

At the end, S2 declared:

> *I think there is one point to be highlighted is, after this interview now, we realised that there is a right for students' involvements, but before we didn't know. I think it's because of our culture we don't know if the students' voice will matter or not, so I think we don't know our rights well, so now you introduced something to us … thank you for opening our eyes, now we know that we have right on something and I think I wanna start more searching for the students' rights.*

S4 said: *It's now good to do annual reviews, because at first we didn't know about those annual reviews about programmes, so now its good next time to bring more students for more information and give opinion.*

S8 suggested: *Information can come from mentors. Most of the time we see our mentors and just sign but we could talk about this.*

S6 indicated: *Maybe some workshops and seminars, or a Fun Day where students can eat and drink and talk about the issues. A Special Day to have fun and discussion around the programme, but not with tutors or PMs.*

Suggestions for improvement

The group agreed on introducing a document or guideline which outlines the students' rights regarding programme reviewing, as current practices concerning students' rights and roles remain unclear. As S2 concluded: *I think in all universities in Bahrain not just the polytechnic, I don't think we know that we have this power and that we have this right.*

Researcher's Reflection:
As the review is an important process in the educational cycle, the entire group believes they must be involved in such a process as they are the ones experiencing the transformation.

The interviewees suggested their involvement can be formed in:

- Focus groups with current students from different levels in order to know students capabilities and to learn and share the challenges faced in a course.
- Individual interviews with students as it will allow students to speak freely and openly.
- Involving alumni in panel discussions with deans, tutors and current students, as they are a vital source of information and have experience and familiarity with current labor market needs.
- Student Council should be involved in supporting the review process, but not as representatives of students' opinions.

Furthermore, they responded to the other suggested processes as; the group wouldn't prefer being part of the review team, as they consider themselves still not professional nor skilled to criticise some actions. Additionally, they showed they disliked participating in the writing process. The group shared their concerns toward empowering the students with accepting or rejecting some actions as not a preferable idea, as it might be used for wrong purposes. A common interest was shared toward meeting with one of the internal reviewers and receiving the feedback on the improvement process.

The participants expressed their opinion that their contribution and involvement should be direct and in a formal way set aside from surveys. Furthermore, the outcomes should be shared in order to build trust and ownership.

Additionally, they preferred direct contact 'face to face' dialogues rather than written surveys; as it focuses in understanding students real opinions.

As the confidentiality is an important matter, the team suggested that a separate 'independent body' be formed in order to ensure good quality practices.

The participants discovered for the first time that the many changes that they have faced through their learning journey was the result of the programme review, and some put the blame on the culture for them not being aware of their rights as students. It would strengthen them to search more for other students' privileges and to be part of the review process in a direct way in order to make significant changes.

4.5.6 Summary

The review team, challenge team, programme representatives and the Quality Coordinator worked together for over 12 months to test the developed programme review principles, standards and process to develop a contextualised programme review framework. The pilot exercise took longer than expected. This was because of factors such as the lack of experience of the people involved in the review, their workload commitments that were unrelated to the review, and their need to get various approvals from the Academic Quality Assurance Committee and the Academic Board – committees that met only once each month.

In the case study, the process of engagement (opportunities for dialogue) was found to build trusting relationships, creating an environment in which risk taking and innovation were encouraged. The engagement of both Bahraini and expatriate staff in this pilot exercise provided all parties with appropriate opportunities to build capacity and reflect on programme review – with a particular focus on how review principles, standards and the process might work together as a contextualised framework. However, the challenge of building and maintaining commitment to the concept of review and continuous improvement remains. The Polytechnic has the best chance of successfully embedding a sustainable programme review framework by expatriate staff engaging with local staff to develop an understanding of the deep-rooted values and beliefs that exist and that pose challenges in establishing a quality culture.

Deans of Faculties were happy to delegate responsibility for the carrying out of the reviews to their Programme Managers but they were wary of receiving negative feedback from them. Through the reluctance of the Deans to get directly involved, a seeming lack of trust eventuated.

Overall, the pilot exercise did not adequately reflect the unique learning aspects of the polytechnic (such as Problem Based Learning and Work Integrated Learning) and neither did it sufficiently comply with the polytechnic's vision and mission nor effectively engage students in the review process. More focus on internal improvement aspects and students engagement is required.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented and commented on the findings and outcomes of the initiative to build a contextualised programme review framework for a higher education institute. A description of the context into which the initiative was introduced was provided. Findings were presented that relate to the first three research phases of this study.

The findings were presented from several perspectives, including those of the reviewers, challengers, programme representatives, review facilitator and advisory group. From these perspectives attention was given to outcomes associated with the initiative, its impact on the context, relationships, and culture prevailing at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, and the review principles that emerged from the initiative.

The data presented in this chapter provide the basis for further analysis and interpretation of the findings. This is presented in Chapter 5, which covers the last phase of this research: conclude, recommend and consider the implications.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

What has been done to this stage of the dissertation? An overarching and support questions were established for the research. A comprehensive literature review was undertaken. In relation to the methodology, a case study approach was adopted and various people of the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – the institution of focus of the case study – provided responses to interviews. The data from the various sources were recorded and presented.

Now, in this chapter, key questions that are being addressed are: What has emerged as an appropriate framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic from a practitioner's perspective? What are the key principles, standards and processes for programme review that underpin and apply to the proposed framework? What were the strengths and limitations of the process that was used to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic? The remaining research question – How can programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic be best implemented? – will be addressed in part in this chapter and more fully in Chapter 6.

Also, in the following paragraphs, the researcher indicates how he has made important enhancements to models and orientations from the literature in the interest of developing and providing a Contextualised Programme Review Framework (CPRF) for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. In relation to a model by Brennan and Shah – where perspectives to be taken into account are identified as 'managerial', 'employability-focused', 'academic', and 'pedagogic' – a perspective relating specifically to learners has been added. In relation to a categorisation by Harvey and Stensaker, which focuses on culture within HEIs, the ideal types of 'responsiveness', 'regeneration', 'reaction' and 'reproduction' have been reinterpreted as situational preferences – and the first two have been given greater significance as effective approaches that can be taken by programme review teams – and by faculties and departments overall – within the polytechnic. In relation to positive developments that are considered to be needed in education, a metaphorical idea of a single road ahead, as indicated in a World Bank report, has been reinterpreted as an appreciation of several roads ahead – relating, in turn, to the four 'situational preferences' (that is, the just-mentioned four 'ideal types' of Harvey and Stensaker's categorisation).

So, given the above-mentioned input, how does the chapter unfold? First, the Contextualised Programme Review Framework (CPRF) that is proposed as the key result of the research is presented diagrammatically. In support of the proposed framework and the labelling of its components, comment is made on the underlying theory and on the need for a contextualised definition of quality in higher education. Then, with reference to the findings from the literature review and input from research participants, the framework is described and explained in terms of its dynamics and essential components. These essential components – principles, standards, enablers, process, outcomes and feedback – are addressed one by one, with the assistance of figures and tables, and are also explained in terms of their relationships to each other and to the framework overall. After that, the strengths and limitations of the process that was used for the research are indicated and discussed. Finally, comment is made

on the importance of ongoing critical examination of the framework if and when it is accepted for use by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

5.2 The Emergence of a Contextualised Programme Review Framework

Comments of the research participants indicated that the review process at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is not well defined, there are no principles specific to the Bahraini context, and there are no meaningful standards. All in all, they confirmed there is a lack of a comprehensive programme review framework and the development of one that fits the mission, vision and values of the polytechnic is very well justified.

In support of the comments of the research participants and the view of the researcher, the literature indicated that an effective programme review framework depends on a coherent set of relationships among principles, standards and operational processes (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007; The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2009; Winchip, 1996). The literature also indicates – again consistent with the comments of the research participants – that a quality system of an institution such as Arabian Gulf Polytechnic (or any organisation for that matter) must be fit for purpose and, to be effective in its strategic initiatives, the purpose (essentially the mission) must be understood and accepted by all interested parties (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

Similarly, the literature shows that the programme review framework for an institution such as Arabian Gulf Polytechnic requires contextualisation to be effective. The framework and its theoretical basis should be coherent, meaningful and appropriate to the specific requirements of the institution (Al-Atiqi & Alharbi, 2009, Harvey 1995, Harvey & Stensaker 2008, Harvey & Williams 2010a, 2010b, O'Rourke & Al Bulushi, 2010, Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010). As put by one of the research participants:

> *Missions, visions and values vary from educational institution to educational institution. A public institution is not a private institution; a research-based university is not a technical institute; a community college is not an elitist organisation that is selective in the candidates it allows to undertake its programmes of study.*

And as put by another: *We have a vision statement, things that we want, things which make Arabian Gulf Polytechnic different from University of Bahrain and Bahrain Technical Institute*.

Also, with a focus on contextualisation, the research indicated that the concept of quality as applied to higher education institutions needs a definition that can be understood and accepted by all stakeholders (Green, 1994; Harvey, 1995; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Harvey & Williams, 2010a, 2010b; Winchip, 1996). As stated by a research participant, in referring to the need for a definition: *Having one will keep us on the same page*.

Stemming from various comments of research participants and the reflections of the researcher, words that lend themselves to a definition of quality in higher education were considered to be: improvement, sustainability, assurance, management, regeneration, sustainability, responsiveness, accountability, ownership, compliance,

responsibility, authority, standards, principles, frameworks, satisfaction, appreciation, enjoyment, trust and culture.

From the current research, then, as a result of dialogue involving the researcher with research participants, a definition has been crafted as follows:

> *Quality in higher education is a recognition that there are needs for both compliance with internally and externally agreed standards, based on sound principles, and with improvement and sustainability objectives that are ideally owned by teams as 'pockets of enthusiasm' within the organisation. Ideally, it resides in a culture of shared ownership and responsibility that has developed throughout the organisation.*

This contextualised definition will help employees at the polytechnic avoid the "boundary problem" and the consequential "grey zones" of operation, stemming from working with a "vague concept", as referred to by Wittek and Kvernbekk (2011). It fits, it will be seen, with the research findings and it will be recommended for use throughout the polytechnic. Its key terms – for example, 'pockets of enthusiasm' and 'shared ownership and responsibility' – are explained below.

The CPRF proposed for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is consistent with systems theory as promoted by Senge (1990) and Gharajedaghi (1999). It involves inputs, transformation, outputs, and feedback. The inputs are shown in Figure 5.1, as standards and enablers, the outputs as outcomes, transformation as the arrow that leads from the former to the latter, and feedback as a loop that moves from the outcomes back to the standards and enablers. An applied education environment, being the environment identified in the mission and vision of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, pervades the model; as does a set of underlying principles.

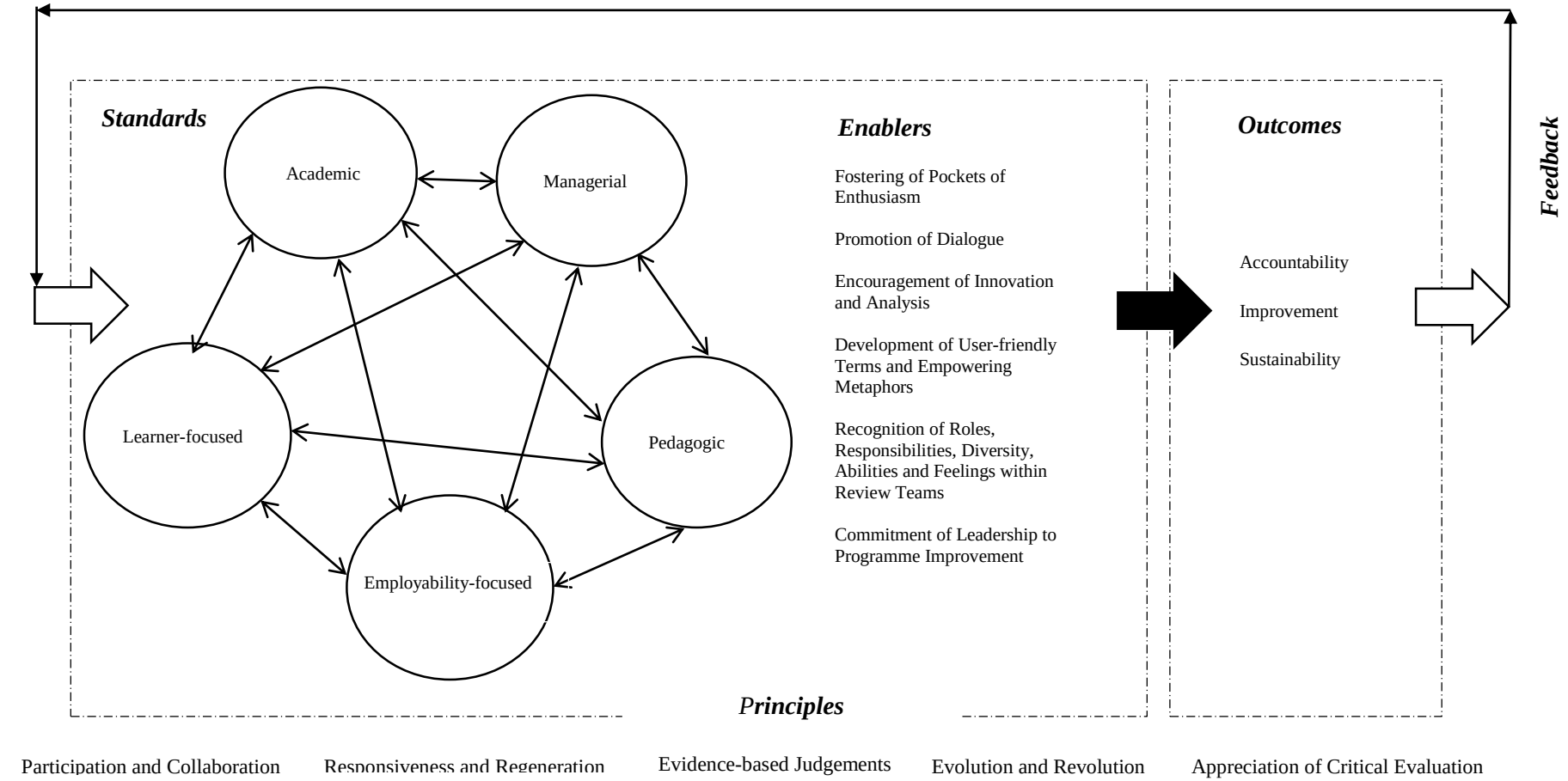


Figure 5.1 The Contextualised Programme Review Framework

5.3 Essential Components of the Proposed Framework

Now, in this section, in the light of the research findings, the framework will first looked at as a whole and then in relation to each of its essential parts.

It is proposed that standards fit within five different groups – namely, the learner-focused, academic, pedagogic, managerial, and employability-focused groups. It is to be noted that the academic, pedagogic, managerial and employability-focused groups have been taken from the model of Brennan and Shah (2000). The learner-focused group has been added to the CPRF as the primary and not-to-be-forgotten component of the network. The groups have different perspectives and values. Essentially, the groups are a network where each has the opportunity of two-way communication with the others. It is this network of relationships, under a common organisational mission and vision, that enables the transformation of enablers to outcomes within the overall system.

Transformation occurs through fostering of pockets of enthusiasm, promotion of dialogue, encouragement of innovation and analysis, development of user-friendly terms and empowering metaphors, recognition of specific roles, responsibilities, diversity and abilities within review teams, and commitment of leadership to programme improvement. The outcomes, again consistent with the mission and vision of the organisation, are categorised as accountability, improvement and sustainability. They are consistent – as will be explained later in the chapter – with the behaviour of responsive-type and regenerative-type groups (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). It is appropriate to consider them as satisfying the needs of the enablers and, accordingly, they can fall within individual, departmental, organisational and industry-based (that is, employability-focused) categories. They come from objectives that are specific, measurable, achievement-oriented, results-focused, and time-based. They represent standards that have been achieved or not yet achieved.

The CPRF is cyclical. Once one cycle comprising inputs, transformation through appropriate processes and activities, and outputs has been completed, a feedback loop makes the shift back to the next cycle. This emphasises the dynamic nature of the programme review process. It is consistent with the concept of continuous improvement (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003), a desirable outcome of a programme review process, and with the systems theory of, for example, Senge (1990) and Gharajedaghi (1999). Table 5.1 provides descriptions of the essential components.

Table 5.1 CPRF Essential Component Descriptions

Component	Description
Principles underlying the framework	The principles provide the foundation for achieving sustainable programme review practice at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. They form the basis of a description of the attributes of an effective programme review.
Standards to review programmes	The standards are the specification of elements against which a judgment is made.
Enablers to sustain the framework	Essentially, the enablers are the inputs to the framework that are then transformed – by the review process – to become the outputs.
Processes for the programme reviews	The processes are the phase-by-phase activities and their associated structures and guidelines that are involved in the implementation and use of the CPRF.
Outcomes to be achieved	The outcomes are the results that Arabian Gulf Polytechnic achieves through implementation and use of the CPRF and focus on accountability both internally and externally, improvement, and organisational sustainability.
Feedback	The feedback is a loop that moves from the outcomes back to the standards, enablers and processes.

First, in looking at the essential components one by one, the proposed principles are identified and explained.

5.3.1 Principles underlying the Framework

The principles should provide the foundation for achieving sustainable programme review practice at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. They should form the basis and indicate desired attributes of an effective programme review.

The five principles of significance for programme review that emerged from the study are Participation and Collaboration, Responsiveness and Regeneration, Evidence-based Judgements, Appreciation of Critical Evaluation, and Evolution and Revolution. They are illustrated as foundational components in Figure 5.2.

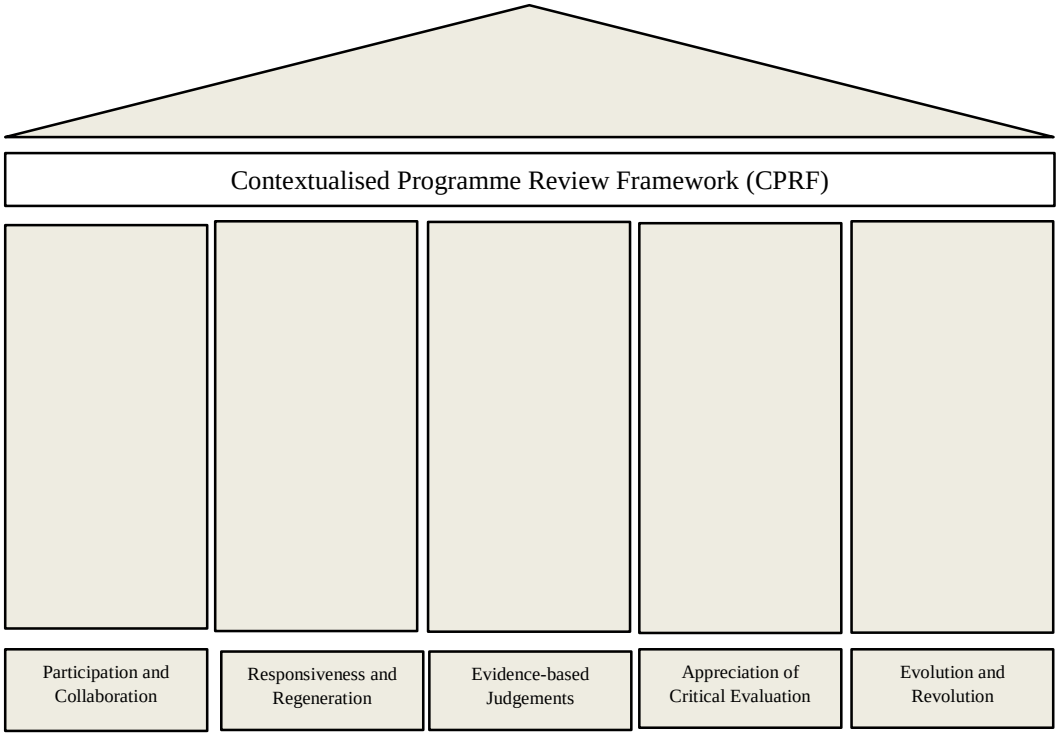


Figure 5.2 Five Principles underlying the Framework

The principles underpin the programme review framework. Although they are discussed separately, they interact dynamically in the review process. Definitions of the principles – stemming from interviews, meetings and observation throughout the research, and from associated material from the review of the literature – are shown in Table 5.2. The sections that follow the table provide the rationale for the principles.

Table 5.2 Five Principles underlying the Framework

Principle	Description
Participation and Collaboration	Programme review is effective when it provides a mechanism for all parties to collectively identify, share and agree on ways of improving and enhancing the services to learners.
Responsiveness and Regeneration	Effective programme review is based on an appreciation of holism, dynamism and contextualisation. The review process is continuously responsive to emerging findings and developments. Also, it enables the incorporation of external opportunities, if seen appropriate, into its self-generated plan.
Evidence-based Judgements	Programme review is effective when programme teams gather, analyse and respond to review indicators from various sources of evidence, including other reviews.
Evolution and Revolution	The development of quality within an organisation is necessarily both evolutionary and revolutionary. It is evolutionary in the sense that the best aspects of previous approaches are fed into new approaches. It is revolutionary in the sense that attitudes that lead to reproductive-type and reactive-type behaviour are encouraged to become attitudes that are consistent with responsive-type or regenerative-type behaviour.
Appreciation of Critical Evaluation	Programme review is effective when it is written in evaluative language (rather than descriptive). It should evaluate core services to learners such as learners' achievement and personal development.

Principle 1: Participation and Collaboration

The literature indicates that an effective review process is the result of facilitation and teamwork, not management by decree (Ehlers, 2009; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003; Winchip, 1996). In accordance with this orientation, School of Business interviewees commented that everyone should practise what they preached in programmes run for students by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – for example, team building and other collaborative models in business.

Research participants suggested that collaborative and constructive relationships are critical in establishing the trust necessary for effective programme review practice at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. There was agreement through dialogue, without dissenting voices, that a collaborative, participatory approach encourages the participation of stakeholders and helps to ensure that the review generates new insights for the programme and strengthens its capacity for ongoing development and improvement. In addition, stakeholders take greater ownership of the review processes, and the outcomes of the review are more likely to be useful and used.

A finding of the research was the need of reviewers to maintain positive relationships with organisational managers and members of the Quality Directorate. As reported by a member of a review team: [At first], *we didn't involve them* [the managers or quality specialists] *at all. That was a huge mistake because they felt we were attacking them. In subsequent indicators the Quality Coordinator and I met with the PR at the beginning of the process and this was important. They were regularly involved; we updated them without them influencing the process*.

It was found that being part of a Review Team was positive training and development in itself. One example: *When we first started this review people worked individually. I was the central person, but then as people got to know each other, they started meeting up and working together. There were pairs of people who teamed up and helped each other*. And another: *The team gave me understanding and I would not have liked to have been doing it more independently*. And yet another: *It added to the richness and robustness; lots of different experiences*.

Principle 2: Responsiveness and Regeneration

The literature review showed that different types of quality practice, which may be interpreted as situational preferences, may be appropriate to different units within the organisation (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Harvey, 1995; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Harvey & Williams, 2010a, 2010b).

Dialogue with the research participants confirmed the perceived value of recognising different stages of development of quality practice from organisational unit to organisational unit, and of innovative approaches within units that can be promoted throughout the polytechnic. (The latter, it is to be noted, relates to the Pockets of Enthusiasm Enabler.) In line with such thoughts, the researcher shared material from the literature on ideal types of quality culture (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008) with the School of Business research participants. Again, like the perspectives of Brennan and Shah (2000), it was agreed that this would be a useful model to develop.

Harvey and Stensaker's terms for the so-called ideal types are *responsive*, which is characterised by a 'strong degree of group control' as well as a 'strong intensity of external rules'; *reactive*, with a 'weak degree of group control' but a 'strong intensity of external rules'; *regenerative*, with a 'strong degree of group control' but a 'weak intensity of external rules'; and *reproductive*, with a 'weak degree of group control' as well as a 'weak intensity of external rules'.

The terms were thought useful by the researcher and the School of Business research participants but there was agreement that seeing all four types as 'ideal' did not fit the context of the polytechnic. Rather, the types would be better seen as 'situational preferences' instead of 'ideals'. Accordingly, the Regenerative Type could be considered as best in most polytechnic situations and the Responsive Type as appropriate if not best. However, the Reactive and Reproductive Types would be typically less than ideal, or even unsatisfactory, in many polytechnic situations. They would both require improvement. The types as reinterpreted by the researcher are shown in Table 5.3. There has been significant editing of the original text. Most item of Harvey and Stensaker remain; others, contextualised to the polytechnic, have been added by the researcher.

Table 5.3 Quality Culture Ideal Types interpreted as Situational Preferences

	Strong Degree of Group Control	**Weak Degree of Group Control**
Strong Intensity of External Rules	**Responsive** Led by external demands (such as government imperatives or agency expectations). Positive in taking opportunities offered or forced on the institution. May voluntarily undertake self-review and audit. Has an improvement agenda with single loop but not double loop aspects. Acutely aware of accountability issues and compliance requirements. Learns from and adopts good practice models; but limited evidence of holistic appreciation. Sees quality culture as created by others: Who are we being asked to be? Lacks a genuine feeling of ownership or control. Sees quality culture as unconnected to everyday life. May harbour counter cultures.	**Reactive** Reacts to external demands (such as government imperatives or agency expectations). Reluctant to take opportunities unless linked to obvious rewards. Unlikely to undertake self-review and audit. Doesn't have an improvement agenda; not proactive. Driven by compliance and, reluctantly, by accountability. Tends to deal with one thing at a time in a disjointed manner; little or no evidence of holistic appreciation. Sees quality culture as created and imposed by others and the responsibility of a centralised unit: Quality is a beast to be fed. What are we obliged to do? Has little or no sense of ownership or control. Sees quality culture as unconnected to everyday life. Likely to harbour counter cultures.
Weak Intensity of External Rules	**Regenerative** Focused on internal developments but aware of the external context and expectations. Incorporates external opportunities, if seen appropriate, into its self-generated plan. Undertakes self-review and audit as appropriate activities. Has an improvement agenda with single loop and double loop aspects. May redefine quality in own terms. Sees its improvement plan as an indication of accountability. Takes and believes in a holistic, systems-based approach. Sees quality culture as attuned to the aspirations of the team and something, unquestioningly, to be sustained: Quality is opportunity. The group as a pocket of enthusiasm. Has a feeling of ownership and control. Accepts quality culture as indistinguishable from everyday life. Who are we? Who might we become? Likely to harbour counter cultures if external requirements are seen as silly or unnecessary.	**Reproductive** Attempts to minimise the impact of external demands (such as government imperatives or agency expectations). Concentrates, looking inwards, on what it does best and is rewarded for. Undertakes self-review and audit only on request. Doesn't have a coordinated improvement agenda. Meets minimum requirements of compliance and accountability. Sticks to established norms; little or no evidence of holistic appreciation. Sees quality culture as created, imposed and required by others – internally and externally. What is the deadline? Will minimal changes to the last report be OK? Lacks a feeling of ownership or control. Quality is a deadline to be met. The quality culture reflects only the expertise and aspirations of individual members. Likely to harbour counter cultures if the better performers of the group are threatened.

A key point is that the Regenerative Type should not be seen as weak in terms of intensity of external rules (being adherence to external rules) but only as *relatively* weak in relation to degree of group control. Overall, this type demonstrates strength on both axes. In many respects, the Regenerative Type can be seen as the ideal – preferable even to the well-balanced Responsive Type.

One other reference to the literature is worth making regarding this contextualised Responsiveness and Regeneration Principle. In contrast to a statement that education has "a road yet to be travelled" (World Bank, 2008), the researcher on reflection proposes that it is more helpful to appreciate quality improvement as dependent on several roads to be travelled. It is noted that flexibility rather than rigidity in how to achieve goals, and different goals for different contexts and stages of development, is important (Harvey, 1995; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Harvey & Williams, 2010a, 2010b).

The idea of a road to be travelled is strong but is suggestive of a single right answer. Depending on whether a group fits a regenerative, responsive, reactive or reproductive situational type, the road may be long and straight (as is likely in the case of the responsive type), or long and curved towards a creative oasis (the regenerative type), short and zigzagged with some unpaved sections (the reactive type), or short and somewhat zigzagged with many unpaved sections (the reproductive type).

All roads might be leading in much the same direction but the destinations at a given time will not be the same. An important aim is to have the reactive and reproductive types moving towards the destinations of either the responsive or regenerative types (refer to Figure 5.3).

There is a need for both innovative and analytical, step-by-step approaches. Creativity leads to improvement; analytical activities are necessary for compliance requirements (Hornblow et al., 2010). With a creative component, it is surmised, quality can be exciting, satisfying and sustaining. This fits with regenerative and responsive situational approaches to quality management and with a choice of roads to be travelled – but with two being more fulfilling and adventuresome than the others.

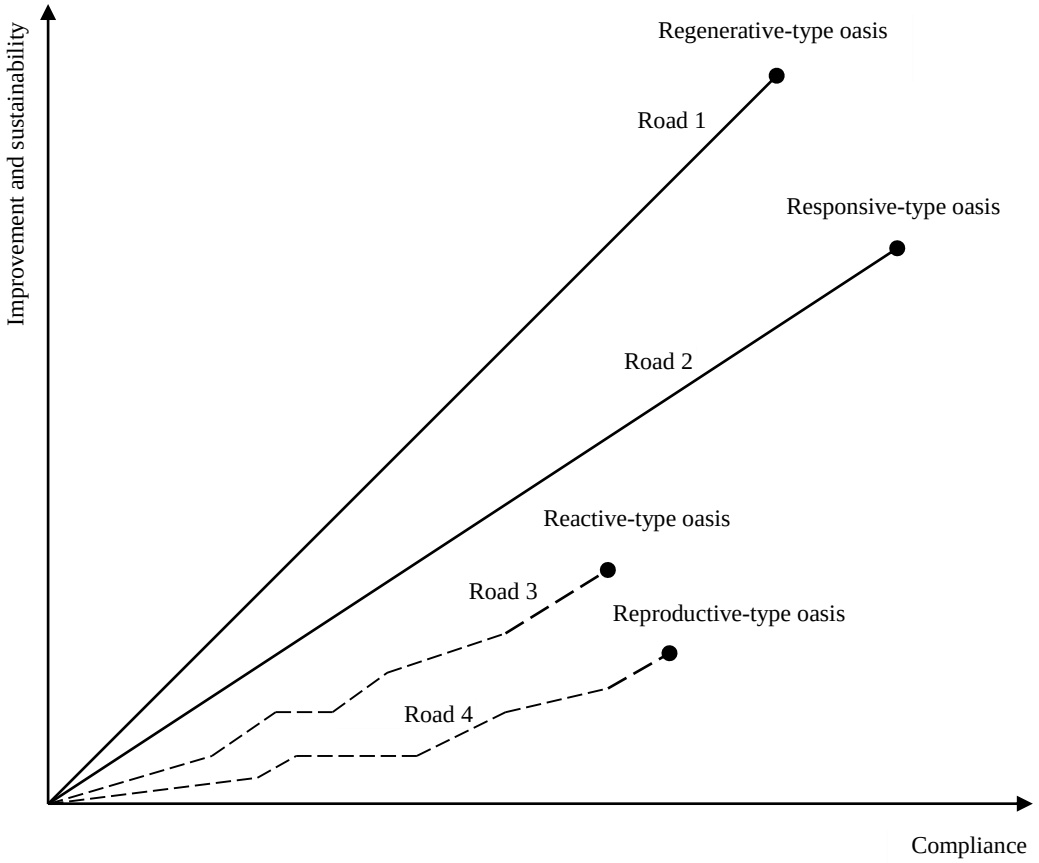


Figure 5.3 Several Roads Being Travelled

Principle 3: Evidence-based Judgements

The literature shows that evidence of effective quality practice is to be drawn from a variety of sources (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007; Yin 2009). Triangulated evidence is an essential part of the planning, organising, leading and controlling of quality within the organisation.

Participants agreed it is important to "report facts" and "reference things" when claims are made.

In relation to evidence, some research participants commented on inefficiencies in preparing for reviews, that is, of *spending a lot of time trying to find it, to interpret data*. One solution, research participants agreed, was to make sure the data was available on the polytechnic's collaborative intranet. This would be a great help in making evidence should be readily available.

Research participants indicated that communications and understandings between divisions and units of the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic often impacted negatively on collecting evidence. For example: *Many departments were set up almost as autonomous units with everyone tightly controlling their own area, and getting people to release information was very difficult as we were going to be critically appraising them. When I say difficult, I mean impossible*.

The finger was pointed at the polytechnic's information system. *Our information system here is poor. There are many versions of the same document available, so it's difficult to find the right one. You don't know if you're working on the latest version of a policy document or not*. Also: *I think it highlights our lack of managing information and our attitude to information. Information is our life blood, it needs to flow, but here leaders guard and use and hold on to information*.

Research participants commented that important information – for example, attrition rates, retention rates, completion rates, students with special needs – should be readily accessible from a central point. *Rather than keep reinventing the wheel every time we have a review, we should have a place where this information is kept and can be accessed*. Much dialogue on this topic identified the polytechnic's collaborative intranet – known as SharePoint – as the appropriate place.

Principle 4: Evolution and Revolution

The literature review showed that effective quality management and assurance depend on both evolutionary and revolutionary change (Arcaro, 1997; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Hodgetts, Luthans & Lee, 1994; Kristensen, 2010; Newton, 2012; Townsend & MacBeath, 2011).

The development of quality within an organisation is necessarily both evolutionary and revolutionary. It is evolutionary in the sense that the best aspects of previous approaches are fed into new approaches. It is revolutionary in the sense that attitudes that lead to reproductive-type and reactive-type behaviour are encouraged to become attitudes that are consistent with responsive-type or regenerative-type behaviour.

Evolutionary improvement in quality comes from refining and building on models and practice that are already available to theorists and practitioners (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003).

Hodgetts et al. (1994) make a convincing argument for the progression from Total Quality Management (TQM) to Senge's Learning Organization to the concept of a World-class Organization as being an evolutionary development. Similarly, Hornblow et al. (2010) – with Innovative Quality Management (IQM) being substituted for World-class Organization in the progression – reinforce the idea of evolution rather than revolution.

Realistically, there are places for both the evolutionary and revolutionary conceptualisations. Changes should be sought proactively and that fits the revolutionary metaphor. However, it is also a matter of taking the best practices from the past and refining and adding to them. That can be seen as evolutionary. Both approaches suggest the need for a new paradigm for quality management, assurance and improvement.

Principle 5: Appreciation of Critical Evaluation

A finding of the research, from the input of research participants and observations of the researcher, was that the Annual Programme Review process of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic has not reflected sufficiently the importance of critical self-reflection as an essential attribute of all participants. Reviews to date, research participants pointed

out, have been used as prescriptive tools rather than as evaluative tools that lead to opportunities for improvement. Also, the emphasis on prescription at the expense of evaluation has made it difficult to evaluate risks to programmes and develop risk-avoidance action plans.

The literature also supports the need for this principle. Importantly, too, a focus on students as well as staff is indicated. For example, Bornman (2004) states that programme review is a form of critical self-evaluation that includes peer evaluation and evaluative input from students (Bornman, 2004).

It is a principle that needs to be worked on and appreciated. People can be sensitive when critiqued. As stated by a Challenge Team member in reference to the Review Team documenters: *The writers had mixed feelings towards us acting as a challenge team. Quite rightly, because they were slightly insecure about our role, and also slightly insecure about what they had produced, as we were. They perhaps looked at our comments as a criticism rather than as a critique*.

Generally, however, there was strong support for the principle. For example, in referring to it, a comment was made: *As a reviewer, you're trying to find the positives and negatives of the programme which was challenging, yes, but fun, enjoyable, and you get to meet people*.

Next is consideration of a second essential component of the proposed framework – the review standards.

5.3.2 Types of Standards for Contextualised Programme Review

The comments of interviewees indicated that the standards used in the pilot exercise, most of which had come from QAAET, were generally relevant to the context of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic context. However; it was pointed out that some elements were missing, such as sufficient focuses on learning and teaching, particularly in relation to the students, themselves, and their needs to develop industrial knowledge and skills. For example: *We're not checking what actually happens in the classroom. The paperwork can look OK, but it might not mean that the institution is following policies*; *How exhaustively did we look at teacher development? We talked about further studies. We often talk about processes, but the dialogue of how well we're doing in our classrooms and lecture rooms is assumed to be OK*; *One thing which is not looked at is how you maintain the quality of the people who are teaching*.

It was felt there was a need to add several contextualised items. This was in line with comments such as: *QAAET's focus isn't as keen as Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's should be. We need to write our own indicators*.

From dialogue with School of Business research participants, following the suggestion of the researcher, it was thought to be a good idea to use the perspectives of Brennan and Shah (2000) to ensure that the standards, overall, covered an appropriately wide range of categories – namely, those relating to 'managerial', 'academic', 'pedagogic' and 'employment-focused' from Brennan and Shah, and with an additional perspective, 'learner-focused', according to the wishes of the research participants. This new perspective is defined as: "In relation to the learner-focused type of standard, the

emphases are on personal development and the positive relationships that can emerge from being at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic."

There was a change in name, also, of one of Brennan and Shah's perspectives: namely, 'employment-focused' renamed as 'employability-focused'. This was suggested by the researcher and had the support of research participants. The change, it was agreed, put the focus of employment more properly on the potential employee.

In support of the additional type of standard, and the renamed one, Yorke and Knight (2006, p. 2) indicate that employability (a key focus of the polytechnic's teaching and learning) encompasses "practical intelligence" as well as "academic intelligence". They add that "co- and extra-curricular achievements of students contribute to a graduate's employability".

Hence, the five types of standards for the CPRF together with their brief descriptions are as shown in Table 5.4. The standards are the specification of requirements against which judgements are made. As indicated in this section, they can be categorised as managerial, employability-focused, academic, pedagogic, and learner-focused. First, there is an explanation of why the five types have been selected for the proposed framework; then each type is explained one by one.

Table 5.4 Five Types of Standards for Contextualised Programme Review

Standard	Characteristics
Academic	Subject focus – curricula, qualifications, learning outcomes, professional authority, and quality values vary across institutions.
Managerial	Institutional focus – policies and procedures, managerial authority, quality values are invariant across institutions.
Pedagogic	Teaching focus – facilitation skills and competencies, the influence of staff developers, and quality values are invariant across institutions.
Employability-focused	Output focus – graduate standards, learning outcomes, employment and professional authorities, and quality values are both variant and invariant across institutions.
Learner-focused	Student focus – academic achievement, personal development, and quality values are both variant and invariant across institutions.

Source: Adapted by the researcher from Brennan and Shah (2000, p. 14).

Importantly for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's context, the revised standards employ words related to the field of education, and particularly to higher education, and not ones that academics might consider peculiar to business and industry (such as references to production and customers rather than educational outcomes and learners). Appendix E is a list of the standards in their revised forms.

Following are fuller descriptions and the indication of sources of the types of review standards proposed for the CPRF.

Standard 1: Academic

In relation to academic (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010, p. 39), the focus in on the subject field, which is associated with professional authority and where the academic values are of great importance. "Conceptions of quality are based on subject affiliation and vary across the institution, which has limited scope to define and access quality" (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 14).

As stated by Yorke and Knight (2006, p. 2), consistent with the need for this type of standard, "Curriculum auditing offers a way of testing how and where employability-related learning is incorporated into curricula." And worthy of note is the comment of Yorke and Knight (2006, p. 3) that "the focus needs to be on employability across a whole programme rather than on individual programme components (modules)". Further, as stated by Yorke and Knight (2006, p. 3): "Support for employability can be incorporated into curricula in a range of ways", contextualised to suit different departments, and not as a "'one size fits all' solution".

In line with above, the polytechnic is in the process of integrating the teaching of employability knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout its curricula. There is keen discussion on the incorporation of the CareerEDGE model of Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007, p. 281) as a framework for such teaching and learning. The components of this model, according to their CareerEDGE acronym, are: "Career Development Learning; Experience (Work and Life); Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding and Skills; Generic Skills; and Emotional Intelligence". The authors state that once these foundational aspects have been experienced, reflected upon and evaluated, there is the opportunity to develop self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem as "crucial links to employability". There is support, too, for the definition of employability provided by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007, p. 280). They state: "Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful." What is important in this definition, it is to be noted, is that there is a focus on job satisfaction as well as job success.

Standard 2: Managerial

In relation to managerial, it is suggested (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010) that this type has institutional policies and procedures as the main focus of assessment, underlying good management practices as the key factor of quality production. The characteristics of quality are considered as being invariant across the institution (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Here, centralisation is seen as an essential characteristic of a quality-management system, along with the coupling to institutional strategies and more coherent quality standards.

Standard 3: Pedagogic

In relation to pedagogic (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010, pp. 39-40), this type focuses on staff training and development of teaching skills and methods. The characteristics of quality are regarded as invariant across the whole institution. Unlike the 'academic' type, a lot of attention is paid here to a more standardised delivery process rather than the content of education. In support of the use of this type of

standard, the School of Business interviewees pointed to the lack of focus on classroom practice. For example: *We're fixing all the paperwork, but it's just paperwork, not classroom practice*.

As stated by Yorke and Knight (2006, p. 2), in much the same way as it applies to academic types of standard, curriculum auditing can test how and where employability-related learning is incorporated into curricula, and may point to the need to rethink pedagogic practices.

Standard 4: Employability-focused

In relation to employability-focused (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010, p. 40), this approach "focuses on learning outcomes, standards and output characteristics of graduates". (The emphasis, it is to be noted, is on graduates – not the yet-to-graduate, current students.) This approach deals with customer requirements, where the customers are often seen as the employers of graduates. "It tends to take into account both subject specific and core characteristics of high quality education" (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 15). In relation to this type of standard, quality characteristics are regarded as both invariant and variant depending on a specific subject. The invariant dimensions could in this approach be linked to the generic skills often identified in national qualification frameworks.

A focus on the employability of its graduates is integral to the vision of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, which is to be a "world-class provider of applied higher education", and the mission, which is to produce "professional and enterprising graduates with the 21st century skills necessary for the needs of the community locally, regionally and internationally" (Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, 2013a, p. 5). Accordingly, employability attributes have been identified (refer to Table 5.5) and the facilitation of them has been a focus of academic programmes and mentoring and career guidance activities.

Table 5.5 Employability Attributes Identified by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

Skill	Description
Communication	Communicate effectively in ways that contribute to productive and harmoniously relationships across stakeholders.
Teamwork	Work effectively, independently and in collaboration with others through a common approach towards a common goal.
Problem solving	Analyse a problem critically and respond appropriately to organisational and societal needs.
Initiative and enterprise	Apply resourcefulness, innovation and strategic thinking in an organisational context.
Planning and organisation	Efficiently and effectively plan and manage work commitments.
Self-management	Demonstrate self-discipline, resilience and adaptability, and be able to plan and achieve personal and professional goals.
Learning	Understand the need for and engage in lifelong learning.
Technology	Utilise information technology effectively and ethically in their personal and professional lives.

Source: Adapted from Huijser, Coutts & Almulla (2012)

Employability, this important focus of the CPRF, is also being looked at longer-term than just the time of a student at the polytechnic. As stated by Yorke (2006, p. 3): "Employability is not merely an attribute of the new graduate. It needs to be continuously refreshed throughout a person's working life." Accordingly, the topic is being seen as one to be addressed through ongoing communications with alumni of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Standard 5: Learner-focused

In relation to learner-focused type of standard, the need for which has emerged from the research, and as indicated above – the emphases are on personal development and the positive relationships that can emerge from being at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Specifically, in relation to this type of standard, what are the desired characteristics of students who graduate from Arabian Gulf Polytechnic? According to profiling by the polytechnic (Bukamal, Buheji, Janahi, & McLoughlin, 2015), graduates of the institution are expected to be able to communicate effectively in ways that contribute to productive and harmoniously relationships. They should be able to work effectively – both independently and in collaboration with others. They should be able to analyse problems critically and respond appropriately to organisational and societal needs. They should be able to think strategically in organisational contexts. They should plan efficiently and effectively in managing work commitments. They should be resourceful and innovative. They should demonstrate self-discipline, resilience and adaptability. They should plan for and achieve personal and work-related goals. They should use information technology effectively and ethically – at work and personally. They should experience the joy of being lifelong learners.

The characteristics are essentially consistent with the thoughts of Gardner (2007), who posits that the graduates of today's world – wherever they might be in the world and from whatever institution – need five 'minds' for the present and the future. He identifies these as 'disciplinary', 'synthesising', 'creating', 'respectful' and 'ethical' minds. In relation to the CPRF, standards related to the disciplinary and synthesising minds fit appropriately with the category of 'Academic'. They relate to achievements in a particular academic discipline – such as engineering – together with an appreciation of how that discipline complements and interfaces with other disciplines – including, for example, logistics, business, design and the humanities. Standards related to the respectful and ethical minds can be seen as appropriately 'Learner-focused'. They relate to personal characteristics that are consistent with positive, enriched, empathetic and socially desirable behaviours in both life in general and life in business settings. Standards related to the creative mind divide between the 'Academic' and 'Learner-focused' categories. There is, of course, a place for creativity and innovation – alongside and supplementing analytical and rational behaviour – in all spheres of life.

Hillard and Pollard (1998, cited in Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p. 278) suggest that employability consists of four main elements: *employment assets* – comprising "knowledge, skills and attitudes"; *deployment* – comprising "career management skills, including job search skills"; *presentation* – which is concerned with "job getting skills" such as "CV writing, work experience and interview techniques"; and *personal circumstances* – such as "family responsibilities", and which may be affected by

external factors such as "the current level of opportunity within the labour market". Importantly, all of these elements have a clear focus on the learner.

Yorke and Knight (2006, p. 3), in emphasising the importance of having students see employability as a crucial aspect of their education, state: "Employability can be enhanced through personal development planning, but success will depend upon the extent to which students see a 'pay-off' for the effort that they put in." Field visits and short periods of sponsored work experience are current initiatives of the polytechnic, in collaboration with employers, to get this link between employability and pay-off appreciated.

Next, the enablers as an essential component of the desired framework are considered.

5.3.3 Enablers of Contextualised Programme Review

The place of creativity in approaches to quality is important (Bornman, 2004). However, it is creativity with a mix of rationality. What is required, according to Hornblow et al. (2010), is right brain and left brain activity, not just right brain or left brain activity.

This means that there is a need for both innovative and analytical, step-by-step approaches. Creativity leads to improvement; analytical activities are necessary for compliance requirements. With a creative component, it is surmised, quality can be exciting, satisfying and sustaining. This fits with regenerative and responsive situational approaches to quality management, assurance and improvement – and accordingly with the Principle of Regeneration and Responsiveness of the proposed CPRF.

Significant comment was received from interviewees external to the polytechnic on this topic. For example, a top manager of a large corporation said:

> *What we do need among our employees are not just people who can do the job but also people who can look for opportunities. People who ask the question, 'How can this be improved? Is there a better way of doing it? How can things be looked at in a new light?' Fortunately, from what I've heard, and from what I'm starting to see in our graduates from the polytechnic, this seems to come from the problem-based learning that they've done. It's to be applauded. The more, the better.*

And the owner of an education and training consultancy, who was employing two graduates of the polytechnic, said: *We want people who can produce mind maps as well as thoroughly compiled list of actions – and our polytechnic graduates seem capable of that*.

This enabler applies, of course, to both staff and students of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. It is good for programme review; it is essential for life in general (refer to table 5.6).

Table 5.6 Six Enablers of Contextualised Programme Review

Enabler	Description
Fostering of Pockets of Enthusiasm	Exemplary behaviour is to be identified within the organisation, encouraged by observers such as leaders in general and quality specialists, and shared with other groups so that pockets of enthusiasm and excellence can widen and deepen.
Promotion of Dialogue	Everyone in the organisation is to have opportunities for dialogue about quality – that is, they will be able to air their views as if placing them in the middle of a circle, be in a position to consider the views of others, and be able to exit a dialogue with a positive frame of mind and with a likelihood of enhanced or changed views.
Encouragement of Innovation and Analysis	Programme review is effective when it examines how programme management teams select, gather, analyse, manage, synthesise and improve their data in the interests of knowledge and information. Alongside, consideration to given to new approaches and paradigm shifts.
Development of User-friendly Terms and Empowering Metaphors	Words and terms that are used to describe and explain quality in the organisation are chosen carefully so that they are appropriate to the context and user-friendly to the individuals and groups throughout the organisation.
Recognition of Specific Roles, Responsibilities, Diversity, Abilities and Feelings within the Review Team	The need for different roles and responsibilities within quality review teams is recognised and appreciated, and each team is responsible for the allocation, evaluation, and change of the roles over time and from project to project and task to task. There is also a need to appreciate the strengths that can come to a team from the diversity and range of abilities and feelings of its members.
Commitment of Leadership to Programme Improvement	Programme review is effective when leaders throughout the organisation – at all levels – value it as a means of continuously improving services for learners. Leaders, through their commitment, should be seen as positive role models by staff members in general.

Each enabler is outlined as follows:

Enabler 1: Fostering of Pockets of Enthusiasm

Acceptance and ownership of effective quality practice are critically important for the organisation (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Hornblow et al., 2010; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Wilkinson, 2003). Accordingly, from the literature and the supportive comments of research participants, the researcher has identified the need for a Pockets of Enthusiasm Approach. This is dependent on identifying such pockets, sharing their exemplary aspects through organisation-wide dialogue, and encouraging like practice – as contextually appropriate – throughout the organisation. The aim is to have the pockets of enthusiasm widen and deepen.

Structurally, the Pockets of Enthusiasm Approach is consistent with a non-hierarchical representation of groups within the organisation (such as a circular one or a dynamic network) and not a rigid pyramid. Through the development of the approach, there is

the potential for everyone within the organisation seeing themselves as a quality specialist – and that is a desired outcome.

In support of the choice of this enabler, the findings identify the need to promotion and dissemination of effective practice to the rest of the Faculty. For example, a reviewer stated: *Feedback to people outside of the review needs to occur in order to see benefits and changes which can be made*.

It was found that being part of the Review Team was positive training and development in itself. One example: *When we first started this review people worked individually. I was the central person, but then as people got to know each other, they started meeting up and working together. There were pairs of people who teamed up and helped each other*. And another: *The team gave me understanding and I would not have liked to have been doing it more independently*. And yet another: *It added to the richness and robustness; lots of different experiences*.

Who should seek the pockets of enthusiasm? This can be a key function of a Quality Directorate in terms of recognition, recording, and the sharing of information. Other groups and individuals may also wish to be involved. In a Baldrige-type approach, quality champions will be involved. Information will be gleaned from personal observations and internal and external reviews.

Enabler 2: Promotion of Dialogue

The opportunity for dialogue is a key aspect of understanding and acceptance of quality policy and practice throughout the institution. This includes opportunities for critical thinking and decision-making and opportunities for deep rather than shallow learning. Informed and agreed action result (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Harvey, 2002; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007; Newton, 2012; Senge, 1990).

At the initial stage of the case study, opportunity for dialogue was observed by the researcher as vital to ensure shared understanding of the review standards as indicated by the review participants. Also, as confirmed by research participants, during the challenge session this opportunity for dialogue played a main role in validating the review reports and outcomes. Accordingly, a key outcome of this case study has been the capacity building for all review participants which was achieved by the opportunity for dialogue throughout the process. This involvement was a major contributor to finding a framework that is fit for purpose for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

In all phases of the research study, dialogue in its many forms was highlighted as a critical aspect contributing to the effectiveness of review process. Although Wilkinson (2003) suggests that ownership is important to carry out an effective programme review, the mechanism by which this is created is not particularly well addressed in the literature. Dialogue, a finding of the research indicates, is such a mechanism.

Everyone in the organisation is to have opportunities for dialogue about quality – that is, they will be able to air their views as if placing them in the middle of a circle, be in a position to consider the views of others, and be able to exit a dialogue with a positive frame of mind and with a likelihood of enhanced or changed views (Senge, 1990).

That everyone in the organisation should be involved is consistent with the views, among others, of Deming (2010) and Lock (1994).

Dialogue is meaning-making. In the words of a research participant: *It's always important to sit together and unpack meaning and come to some agreement, and to unpack the purpose of them within the institution*.

There are waves of dialogue (that is, iterations); the sharing of ideas is not a one-off event. The research confirmed the importance of looking for continuous improvement (American Society for Quality, 2013).

The consensual view that emerged from this research was that getting clarity of the review standards was a challenging issue. However, the ongoing dialogue, discussion and debate among all parties resulted in having a shared understanding of them. Comment was made about dialogue as a time-saving clarification tool. For example: *The experience of going through the process, understanding the indicators, the meaning, what they stood for, also, the ability to talk to the facilitator was very useful in checking I was going in the right direction.*

Opportunities for dialogue were found to build trusting relationships, creating an environment in which risk taking and innovation were encouraged.

The Review Facilitator, as a key part of her role, was in a position to foster dialogue with and among the separate groups and encourage and maintain trustful feelings and relationships.

In conclusion, it was found that dialogue relates to the process whereby essential components of the framework can be interpreted in a way that is relevant to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's unique context. For example, it enables Bahrainis to develop an understanding of the relevance or otherwise of concepts imported from overseas. It encourages flexibility, innovation and creativity; it promotes the shaping and reshaping of ideas.

Enabler 3: Encouragement of Innovation and Analysis

The place of creativity in approaches to quality is important. However, it is creativity with a mix of rationality. What is required, according to Hornblow et al. (2010), is right brain and left brain activity, not just right brain or left brain activity.

This means that there is a need for both innovative and analytical, step-by-step approaches. Creativity leads to improvement; analytical activities are necessary for compliance requirements. With a creative component, it is surmised, quality can be exciting, satisfying and sustaining. This fits with regenerative and responsive situational approaches to quality management, assurance and improvement – and accordingly with the Principle of Regeneration and Responsiveness of the proposed CPRF.

Programme review is effective when it examines how programme management teams select, gather, analyse, manage, synthesise and improve their data in the interests of knowledge and information. Alongside, consideration to given to new approaches and paradigm shifts.

Enabler 4: Development of User-friendly Terms and Empowering Metaphors

The research participants pointed out that terminologies differ from one context to another. There is a need to use words and terms relating to programme reviews that are meaningful and user-friendly. Accordingly, in consultation with School of Business reviewers, words were chosen carefully for the essential components of the Contextualised Programme Review Framework. For example, instead of 'inputs' and 'outputs' the choices were 'enablers' and 'outcomes' – the latter terms being considered by the polytechnic's academics to be more educational and less like industry.

Ready understanding and acceptance of policy models, policy and practice, it was generally agreed, is dependent upon the use of suitable language. One comment was: *People should not be called human resources; people are people*. And the CPRF should be seen as *a dynamic, holistic, transformational model rather than a static framework* – which raised the question of whether the word 'framework' was the right one. (A preferable substitute has not so far found favour with the research participants.) In relation to Figure 5.3, the selection of the word 'oasis' as the descriptor of the end point of a situational preference is chosen, of course, because of its relevance to Bahrain and the Arab world in general. It is suitably contextual.

On the appropriateness or otherwise of metaphors, it was felt they should represent collaboration rather than competition – this being more in keeping with the teaching and learning approaches promoted by the polytechnic. For example, 'conducting an orchestra' would usually be preferable than 'leading an army into battle' and 'having everyone celebrate diversity' would be better than 'having one sporting team annihilate another'.

The above would not always be the case, however. One reviewer commented, in reference to an important aspect of the review process: *I'm not comfortable with the word 'challenge'. Maybe 'advisory committee'*. This led to much discussion and eventual agreement among the reviewers and challengers that 'challenge' was indeed an appropriate term in this instance. It was important, though, everyone agreed, that the reason for the usage was well understood and that the challenging be done *with a smile on your face*. The comment was made by a challenger: *You have two roles – to judge and to provide feedback. The first one is developmental, the other is decision-making*. And another added: *It was partly about motivating and encouraging the members and at the same time offering some 'challenge'.*

A metaphor commonly found in the literature is that education can be seen as the catch-all for a range of economic, political and societal sicknesses and ills. The concept of quality, therefore, has been very appealing to the education sector as a medicine to be administered to institutions to solve their problems (Green, 1994; Houston, 2008; Newton, 2012). A group of reviewers who took the opportunity to discuss this type of metaphor felt it was good in the sense that it would be owned by everyone, whether they be in business or education or whatever – but would be better served by an emphasis on prevention in place of cure. For example, in relation to the present case study, instead of saying that programme review is about "whipping people up to improve their attitudes", one might say it is "a journey of discovery" that is done "hand in hand" with good "role models".

A schema worthy of repetition was noticed in the literature. Strong examples of firefighting and fire prevention metaphors, together with description of how they can relate to organisational improvements – in either industrial or educational setting, being related as they are to health and safety – are provided in Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence (2012) (refer to Table 5.7). Such a schema would be well worth developing for various activities that relate specifically to higher education context of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Table 5.7 Exemplary Use of Metaphors

Maturity level	Description	Metaphor
Reacting to Problems (0–25%)	Operations are characterised by activities rather than by processes, and they are largely responsive to immediate needs or problems. Goals are poorly defined.	**Reacting to the problem:** Run with the hose and put out the fire (0-5%) **General improvement orientation**: Install more fire hoses to get to the fires quickly and reduce their impact (10-25%)
Early Systematic Approaches (30–45%)	The organisation is at the beginning stages of conducting operations by processes with repeatability, evaluation and improvement, and some early coordination among organisational units. Strategy and quantitative goals are being defined.	**Systematic evaluation and improvement:** Evaluate which locations are most susceptible to fire, install heat sensors and sprinklers in those locations (30-45%).
Aligned Approaches (50–65%)	Operations are characterised by processes that are repeatable and regularly evaluated for improvement, with learning shared and with coordination among organisational units. Processes address key strategies and goals of the organisation.	**Learning and strategic improvement:** Install system wide heat sensors and a sprinkler system that is activated by the heat preceding fires (50-56%)
Integrated Approaches (70–100%)	Operations are characterised by processes that are repeatable and regularly evaluated for change and Improvement in collaboration with other affected units. Efficiencies across units are sought and achieved through analysis, innovation, and the sharing of information and knowledge. Processes and measures track progress on key strategic and operational goals.	**Organisational analysis and Innovation:** Use fireproof and fire-retardant materials. Replace combustible liquids with water-based liquids. Sensors and sprinklers become the secondary line of protection, with prevention the primary approach for protection (70-100%).

Source: Adopted from Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence (2012)

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007, p. 281) provide a metaphorical model of employability, 'CareerEDGE – The Key to Employability', with the illustration of a door that can be opened to opportunity. This is a good example of a metaphorical application that would be appropriate to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – with its focus on employability – and, indeed, it is being critiqued as a model to be used by the institution.

All in all, both the research participants and the literature point to the use of user-friendly terms and appropriate metaphors as worthy enablers for a Contextualised Programme Review Framework.

Enabler 5: Recognition of Specific Roles, Responsibilities, Diversity and Abilities within Review Teams

It was found from the research interviews that responsibilities for managing and completing Annual Programme Reviews have not been well understood or accepted. However, from ongoing dialogue, it was accepted that there will, naturally, be specialisations within review teams. Among the specialists, by name of the role, might be coordinator, writer, idea generator, critic, task leader, and team member. Their characteristics, which were itemised through the dialogue, are shown in Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Programme Review Parties and their Desired Characteristics and Activities

Review Party	Desired Characteristics
Review Facilitator	Communication and administration skills, deep knowledge regarding the review standards, ability to motivate others, self-motivation, enthusiasm, inter-personal skills, writing and editing skills, resilience, people organising skills, listening skills, problem solving, leadership skills, project management skills and persuasive skills. Task-oriented aspects: asking people for evidence, calling people for meetings, time keeping, being the reference point, organising meetings, scheduling, following up, providing updates, provide training, and editing.
Challengers	Ability to judge, decision-making ability, inter-personal aptitude, communication skills, and coaching skills. Task-oriented aspects: providing feedback (developmental), motivating and encouraging the reviewers, mentoring, advising, critiquing rather than criticising, and providing friendly and independent advice.
Reviewers	Team players, sound background of the review standards, communication skills and inter-personal aptitude Task-oriented aspects: gathering of evidence, triangulation of evidence, discipline in responding to the review standards, unpacking meaning of standards, engaging in dialogue with other reviewers, working together and helping each other.
Management Team	Commitment to and support of the review process. Task-oriented aspects: taking ownership of review, commitment to quality improvement, providing evidence to reviewers, answering reviewers' enquiries and managing the post-review improvement process.
Service Departments	Commitment to and support of the review process. Task-oriented aspects: providing evidence to reviewers, answering reviewers' enquires and undertaking the post-review improvement required to support programmes.
Students and Alumni	Task-oriented aspects: participating in panel discussions, participating in focus groups and individual interviews, and responding to surveys on the appropriateness of academic programmes and associated services.

The research data indicates that the role of the Review Facilitator is crucial to the process. It is challenging and requires communication and administration skills, deep knowledge, organisation and motivation. The person needs to be self-motivated and have a high level of enthusiasm. As stated by the high-performing Research Facilitator in this case study: *You have to keep reviewers motivated, this is the key. Keep asking people for evidence, keep calling people, meetings, keep to timings plus knowledge, this is very important.* And: *Frankly, you don't have the authority to ask, 'Can you get*

this done before next Thursday'. For the wrongly selected person, it could prove more than a little frustrating. Accordingly, the person needs to be carefully and wisely selected.

The responsibility should be with the team itself, to decide how the specialisations are shared and allocated. For one team it might be appropriate to have specialisations decided and allocated from the outset, and kept that way without change. For another team, the choice might be to rotate specialisations among team members according to their multiple strengths and needs for training, development and variety. For yet another team, the roles may be changed according to different types of tasks.

It was indicated by research participants that there is a need to design a new programme review process that has the roles and responsibilities of all participating committees and teams clarified. The clarifications are indicated in Table 5.9. A key point that was made by the research participants is that unnecessary steps should be removed from the programme review process. The sending of documentation from a Programme Team to a Faculty Board before it then moved on the Academic Board was seen as one such unnecessary step. Accordingly, it was agreed that Faculty Boards should be excluded from the formal steps of the process and need not be shown as having a formal role or responsibilities. Documentation could be provided to them, for information, while moving it formally to the Academic Board at the same time.

Appropriate recognition of the feelings of all people involved in the programme review process was emphasised by some of the research participants. This is supported by literature that indicates the importance of fostering environments in which positive attitudes are the norm. Feelings and beliefs should be appreciated as well as analytical thoughts. The academic freedom and empowerment of people within the organisation should be recognised. Quality should be seen as exciting, satisfying and sustaining. A healthy quality culture should be facilitated. Opportunities to develop trust as a binding ingredient should be provided (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Dale, 2003; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007; Ofsted, 2006; The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2009; Wilkinson, 2003).

A feeling expressed by a reviewer was: *It's hard when you're on the receiving end, to have your work pulled apart in front of everybody, but you have to get used to it*. Another commented: *Staff are worried we may fail, because we're not doing something, or not doing it well*. And a comment of a challenger was: *We were feeling uncomfortable. When we came in to talk to the team, it was almost adversarial, opposite sides of the table. We said things, they tried to defend themselves. Probably then both sides tried to defend themselves, particularly the review group who had spent so much time on it. Also there were senior members of the faculty staff in the room who took over and it was not their role*. Clearly, there is room for empathetic approaches to the challenge situations.

Table 5.9 Desired Roles and Responsibilities of Teams and Committees in the Review Process

Quality Directorate	Review Team	Challenge Team	Programme Team	Academic Board	Senior Management Team (SMT)
Facilitate the process in terms of timeline Indicate the scope of the review – Annual or Periodic, the latter being four yearly and with external input. Form the challenge teams Sharing successful practice with polytechnic in general Report to the SMT, with copies to the Programme Committees and Academic Board, critiques of reviews and exemplars of improvement and compliance	Carry out the evidence-based review Develop review judgements – in relation to both compliance and improvement Report on the review to the Programme Committee, with copies to the Challenge Team and Quality Directorate	Critique the review findings Uncover exemplars of improvement and compliance Provide feedback to the Quality Directorate on the findings of the critique	Take responsibility for initiation of the review and the forming of the review team Receive the review reports from the Review Team and Quality Directorate Discuss findings, approve corrective procedural improvements for Programme Teams, and pass on policy recommendations and successful practice exemplars to the Academic Board Monitor improvements	Make formal recommendations of policy and substantive changes to procedures – in relation to both compliance and improvement Monitor improvements in relation to polytechnic-wide issues	Discuss recommendations and approve policy and substantive changes to procedures as appropriate Ensure that successful practice exemplars are given recognition and publicised throughout the polytechnic Inform all relevant parties – including the Academic Board, Programme Committees and Quality Directorate – of decisions and recognition of successful practice exemplars

The literature indicates that an appreciation of the different perspectives of stakeholders is essential to the development of an effective Programme (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Carroll et al., 2009; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Ofsted, 2006). Also, the literature suggested that an appreciation of and tolerance for cultural differences is essential to effective programme review teamwork (Ehlers, 2009; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Mathews et al., 2001; Merriam and Associates, 2007; Nydell, 2006; Williams 1998).

Consistent with the literature, there can be strength in diversity and there was some appreciation of this by research participants. In relation to team composition, for example, there was comment that it is good to have a mix of age and background. It was stated by a research participant: *I think it's good to involve people of different ages. Cultural backgrounds are important because this programme has to meet the needs of Bahrainis without necessarily transplanting the way 'we' [ex-pats] do things, but we can learn from each other*. Also, diversity in the members of a challenge team was seen as a good thing: *The challenge team were four people from different faculties, different educational backgrounds, different experiences of quality frameworks and understanding*. And: *We were three different people from three very different backgrounds with different experience, and therefore viewed the challenge session in perhaps different ways*. And yet again: *Each challenger has their own background and strengths. We provided friendly challenge and advice, then it was up to the review team to decide if it was valid or not*.

It was found that the wide difference in terms of background and experience between the participants made the dialogue rich and interesting, which led to learning opportunities for all participants. The developed process proved to be very useful in building participants' capacity. For example, a reviewer indicated: *It was necessary, new learning for me in my new role, and it gave me institutional knowledge*.

One other key point that came out of the dialogue was that people with experience from the reviews could be later used as trainers, coaches and mentors. As mentioned by one of the research interviewees: *I think the review helped the group to improve their skills, and I think we should train others given the number of reviews we have*.

Enabler 6: Commitment of Leadership to Programme Improvement

It is indicated in the literature that an effective review process is the result of facilitation and teamwork, not management by decree (Ehlers, 2009; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003; Winchip, 1996). In accordance with this orientation, School of Business interviews commented that everyone should practise what they preached in programmes run for students by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – for example, team building and other collaborative models in business.

The literature also indicates that leadership for quality should not be restricted to top management; rather, it should be dispersed – with appropriate accountabilities and authority – throughout the organisation. Once dispersed, it should be seen more as inside-out and outside-in – that is, a circular structure – than as the top-down and bottom-up of a hierarchical structure. It should be situational (Darandari et al., 2009; Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010; Wilkinson, 2003; Winchip, 1996).

Comments of the research participants included both top-down and bottom-up requirements of leadership. For example, in relation to the former: *I'd like to see more commitment from senior management in leading us to a quality improvement based culture.* Also: *Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as a whole, and in particular senior management, needs to take ownership of what quality improvement is, the Quality Department too.* In relation to the latter, among the comments was: *Things need to be developed from the bottom up, so that you enhance good practice from the bottom up because you have their involvement. This can initiate a cycle which is operating at different levels. Then people see it as what they want to do, rather than as complying*.

Dialogical exchanges of the research participants suggested that quality management, assurance and improvement will be ineffective unless owned by employees throughout the institution and, as appropriate, other stakeholders. It was agreed, generally that dispersed leadership would positively impact on ownership.

The literature indicates that, organisationally, service departments should live by their names and provide service to academic units so that the essential needs of students can be best met (Winchip, 1996). Reviewers of the School of Business commented that this needed to be the case at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. Again, it was considered that dispersed leadership could have a positive impact. With decentralised responsibilities and authority, there would be more credibility to sideward communications, between academic and service departments.

A research finding was that Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's review process was not led by Faculties – rather, its leadership was juggled in a somewhat confusing way by two units, Quality and Academic Affairs – and was viewed as a compliance issue rather than an opportunity to refine and improve programmes. This was a case for clarification of roles and responsibilities.

Finally, for this section, there is a key point to be made. This is that it was strongly agreed by research participants, through dialogue, that the essential focus of leadership, like all enablers, is on people – ultimately in the interests of the students.

Now, keeping in mind the dynamic and people-focused characteristics of the components (refer to Figure 5.4) that have been so far considered, the spotlight falls on the transformational aspects of the process of the proposed CPRF.

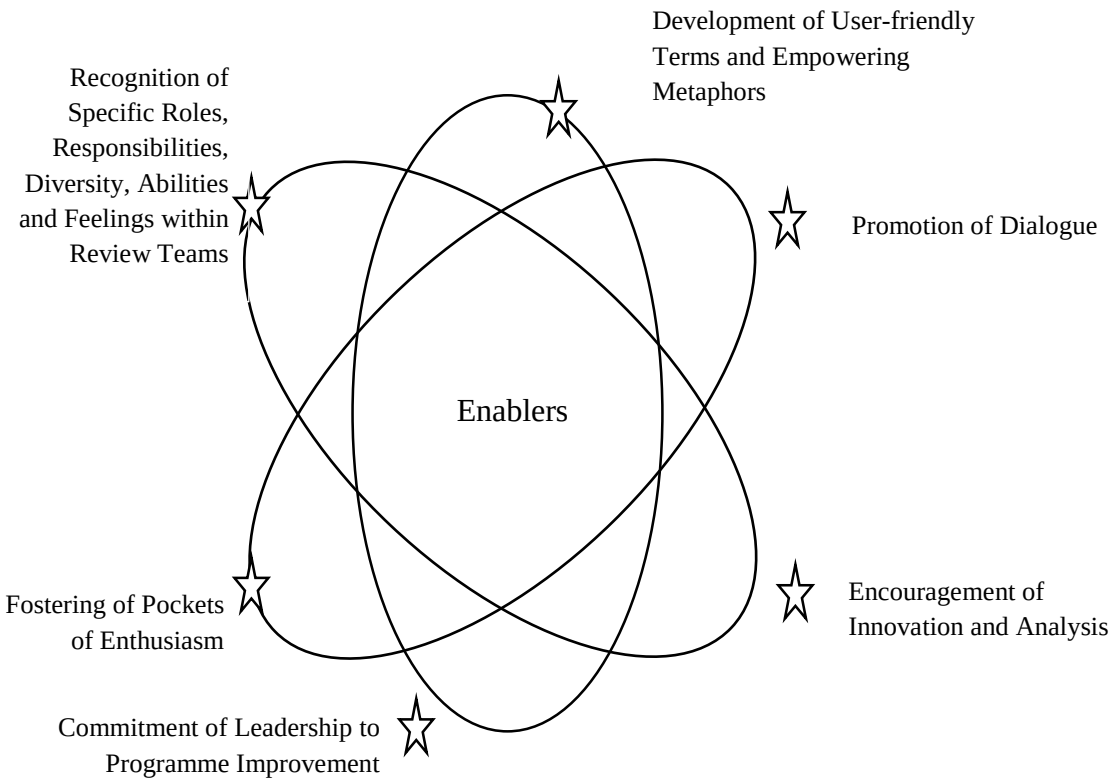


Figure 5.4 Six Dynamic, People-oriented Enablers of Contextualised Programme Review

5.3.4 Transmission of Enablers to Outcomes

Transmission – represented by the large black arrow in Figure 5.1 – is an essential aspect of the process of phase-by-phase activities and their associated structures and guidelines that are involved in the implementation and use of the CPRF.

As indicated in Figure 5.5, it involves, primarily, channels of: *face-to-face communications*, where, for example, mentoring and coaching might be taking place in relation to programme review; *emailing*, where messages about programme review are communicated electronically either person to person or broadly to a group of people; *collaborative intranet sharing of ideas*, enabling communications about programme review to be accessed by people throughout the polytechnic on what is known in the institution as SharePoint; and the *handing over of formal reports* on programme review, which, in communications theory and systems theory jargon, involves encoding in the writing of the reports and decoding in the reading of them.

To contextualise this aspect of the proposed programme review process, it was suggested by the researcher and agreed through dialogue with the research participants that the transmission could be seen as involving problem solving, decision-making, opportunity-taking and learning – the components of Problem Based Learning, which is a key focus of the teaching and learning at the polytechnic.

Problem solving, as defined at the polytechnic, is the process of working through details of a problem to reach numbers of solutions. In the context of this research, it can be a gauge of an individual's or group critical thinking skills that support

programme reviews. Decision-making can be seen as a process of effective use of key data and information to support operational and strategic decision making and innovation that relate to programmes.

Learning, essentially, in its positive sense, can be seen as change that comes from opportunity-taking. It can come through cycles of review and improvement, where there is sharing of refinements and innovations with individuals and groups throughout the polytechnic.

As indicated by a research participant, in support of this contextualisation of the transmission of enablers to outcomes: *Being involved in the review process was truly Problem Based Learning*.

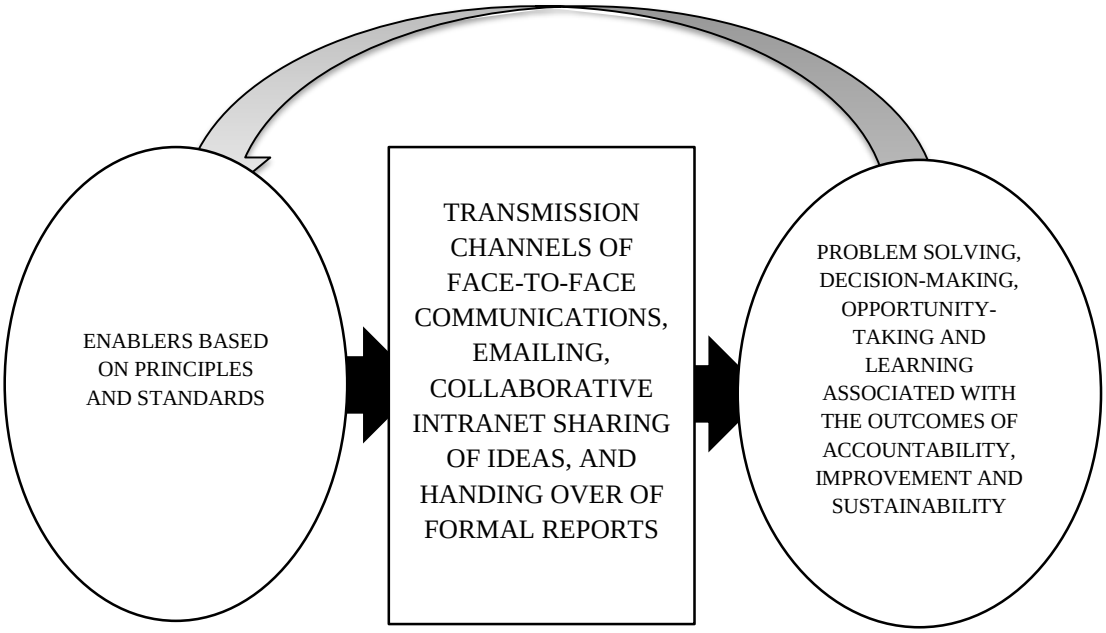


Figure 5.5 **Systems Theory as the Basis of Problem Based Learning and the Contextualised Programme Review Framework**

5.3.5 Outcomes of the Contextualised Programme Review

The outcomes are the results that Arabian Gulf Polytechnic achieves through implementation and use of the CPRF and, from the findings of this study, can best relate to accountability, improvement and sustainability.

Accountability, as defined by the polytechnic, is the requirement, when undertaking an activity, to expressly address the concerns, requirements or perspectives of others. These requirements include those of the Higher Education Council and QAAET. *Improvement*, as defined by the polytechnic, is the process of enhancing, upgrading or enriching the quality of provision in relation to the polytechnic internal requirements such as the mission and programme outcomes. *Sustainability* is surviving as an institution in today's world of dynamism, complexity and accelerating change. As defined by the polytechnic, it includes the positive impact of the polytechnic on

Bahrain in general by enhancing the country's economic, environmental and social conditions. It doesn't relate purely to the polytechnic; it is linked to the communities it touches.

There is strong support in the literature for the dual focuses on improvement as well as accountability (Carolus et al., 2012; Dale, 2003; Haakstad, 2009; Harvey, 2002; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Harvey & Williams 2010a; Kemenadea & Hardjono, 2010; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007; Newton, 2012; Paunescu & Fok, 2004; Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010; Wilkinson, 2003; Winchip, 1996). Also, the comments of research participants pointed to the need to see beyond accountability alone. For example, one comment was: *We're too much in a compliance mentality*.

Sustainability, in addition, is crucial. It can be interpreted as continuous improvement (American Society for Quality, 2010); more so it is a matter of survival in dynamic, fast-changing world (Hodgetts et al., 1994).

There are internal and external requirements and considerations that are of relevance to each of the outcomes and these are well covered in the literature (Haakstad, 2009; Harvey, 2002; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Harvey & Williams, 2010a, 2010b; Winchip, 1996). As indicated by a research participant, sometimes the focus can be too much on an external agency: *One of the biggest dangers is that people see the recommendations as being imposed on them from an external body, so they have to modify things until those people are out of the door*. This was added to by a second research participant, who said: *Indicators are for QAAET to review Arabian Gulf Polytechnic against their requirements. The review for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic should be to review a programme against Arabian Gulf Polytechnic requirements – mission and policies – and QAAET*.

In the context of the Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, accountability can typically be seen in relation to various types of audits, for example, those of the Finance Department, internally, and those of QAAET, the external agency. Improvements are made with the accountabilities in mind and with keen focuses on the needs of the students and stakeholders such as prospective employers. Sustainability is in the interests of not only the polytechnic, in isolation, but of communities at large.

The outcomes are consistent with the mission, vision and values of the polytechnic. Each of them is broken down into key performance indicators in the interests of the polytechnic's strategic planning and performance. There is evidence that the CPRF can contribute to the strategic performance. For example, a research participant commented: *I've already seen some positive outcomes, for example, discussions about strategic direction in the Business School with regard to its environment here*.

In the Contextualised Programme Review Framework, as shown in Figure 5.1, achievement or otherwise of the outcomes feeds back to the standards and enablers in a cyclic assessment of how well the system is working. The associated problem solving, decision-making, opportunity-taking and learning are contributors to the continuing health – through both preventive and curative means – of the polytechnic. It is an ongoing quest for new ideas, new approaches and new opportunities to strengthen programme review practices within the polytechnic.

Now, finally, in terms of essential components of the proposed framework, feedback is further considered.

5.3.6 Feedback relating to the Contextualised Programme Review

Feedback, importantly, may be seen as a loop that moves from the outcomes back to the standards, enablers and processes, and in doing so moves the institution forward as it develops more sophisticated shared understandings. It enables iterations and continuous improvement (refer to Figure 5.6).

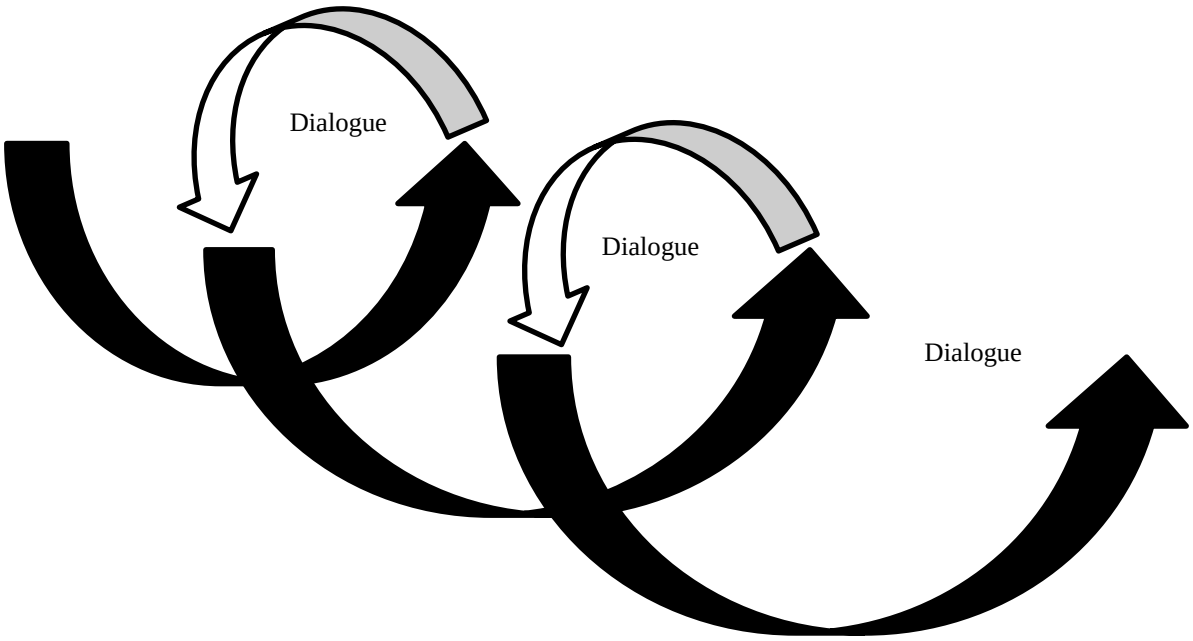


Figure 5.6 The Importance of Iterations of the CPRF Process

The literature indicates it is important to consider double loop as well as single loop possibilities (Argyris & Schon, 1974, Senge, 1990). In-depth and frequent feedback is essential to the cyclical process. All aspects of programme review should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised as needed to reflect changes in the contextual practice of the institution. There should be an integrated approach to programme review (Al Attiyah & Khalifa, 2009; Carroll et al., 2009; Darandari et al., 2009; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007).

The findings identify the need to promotion and dissemination of effective practice to the rest of the Faculty. For example, a reviewer stated: *Feedback to people outside of the review needs to occur in order to see benefits and changes which can be made*.

Research participants indicated that the trust can be built through some practice frequent face-to-face communication between members of the review teams and interviewees, and frequent feedback from the members of the review team to the interviewees on what had been recorded.

5.4 The Research Process for Contextualisation of Programme Review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic

The research question that applies is: What emerges as an appropriate process that can be used to develop a contextualised framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic?

The following section discusses the strengths of the process that was used for this research. It also highlights the limitations of this process and indicates how things could be improved for a similar study in the future. In addition, it discusses in what ways does the process used for the research apply to ongoing cycles of programme review within Arabian Gulf Polytechnic? How? Why?

This research provided evidence that contributes to our understanding of how the processes used apply to ongoing cycles of programme review within Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. Specifically, several ideas that emerged from these processes were later used in the framework. These ideas included the promotion of dialogue, fostering of pockets of enthusiasm, participation and collaboration, and recognition of specific skills within review teams.

5.4.1 Research Process: Strengths

Staff engagement and participations throughout the study provided different perspectives. The involvement including students, tutors, Programme Managers, the Quality Coordinator, Heads of School, Deans, the Deputy CEO, Curriculum Specialists, the Moderation Specialist and the Quality Manager at Faculty level. This was essential to ensure that all stakeholder perspectives were considered in the developed framework.

It was found that the wide difference in terms of background and experience between the participants made the dialogue rich and interesting, which led to learning opportunities for all participants. The developed process proved to be very useful in building participants' capacity. For example, a reviewer indicated: *It was necessary, new learning for me in my new role, and it gave me institutional knowledge*.

Another significant characteristic of the process as indicated in the research findings was its iterative nature, which made it very helpful to ensure continuous improvement. Further, it allowed the use of multiple data collection tools that were interactive and humanistic.

A further strength of the research process, which was confirmed by participants, was the way research participants were selected. Members were self-selecting within their various categories. This was done to guard against motivated individuals being excluded because of a selection bias – intended or otherwise – that might have been attributable to the researcher. Follow-up prompting by the researcher occurred in categories that lacked volunteers. In this way, all categories were sufficiently covered.

Overall, the challenge sessions that were a significant part of the process were effective. The sessions were described by participants as *vital* and effective in preparing staff for *robust discussion*. The recognition of diversity in the composition of challenge teams was a strength: *We were three different people from three very different backgrounds*

with different experience, and therefore viewed the challenge session in perhaps different ways.

Some interviewees wanted assurance of anonymity – they didn't want their names to be on any of the documentation. Given those assurances, they felt more relaxed. Strict adherence to the ethical requirements of the research – in relation to all interviewees – proved beneficial to both the researcher and the research participants.

5.4.2 Research Process: Limitations

The following section will present the limitations of the process used in this research to develop the contextualised programme review framework.

As indicated in Chapter 4, some research participants felt that students had not been tapped significantly for their thoughts on programme review and its implications for them. Among the comments were: *There isn't enough focus on students' views*; *One thing missing is to bring in views and opinions of students. We've reviewed ourselves, but what do the students think?* Such comments confirmed to the researcher the importance of this focus and fed into comprehensive interviewing of both a group of students and a group of alumni.

Service departments were not particularly well represented in the pilot review exercise. Only two of six were proactively involved. More data could have been collected on the extent to which how service departments should be involved in the programme review.

Significant input was received from interviewees external to the polytechnic. They were originally seen as members of an advisory committee but it was not found convenient to have them meet as a group. The individuals – two quality consultants, two owners of small businesses, and two senior members of large private organisations – were selected by the researcher rather than by objective means. It would have been of value to include greater numbers in the research and have the method of selection closer to random.

Comment was made by some research participants that the review process did not adequately reflect the *unique learning aspects* of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – these being Problem Based Learning and Work Integrated Learning, known as PBL and WIL within the organisation. To at least partly satisfy this perceived need, it is noted that the researcher's proposed CPRF has problem solving, decision-making, opportunity-taking and learning as transformation channels between enablers and outcomes, and has 'Employment-focus' as one of the five types of standards.

The pilot exercise took longer than expected. In part this was because of factors such as the lack of experience of the people involved in the review, their workload commitments that were unrelated to the review, and their need to get various approvals from the Academic Quality Assurance Committee and the Academic Board – committees that met only once each month. Further, the lack of available evidence to support review findings resulted in taking unnecessary time to complete the review.

5.4.3 Lessons Learned

Being sensitive to the feelings of people being researched is very important. This was apparent from the comments of several interviewees in relation to their taking part in challenge sessions. One said: *We were feeling uncomfortable. When we came in to talk to the team, it was almost adversarial, opposite sides of the table.* Another commented: *It's hard when you're on the receiving end, to have your work pulled apart in front of everybody, but you have to get used to it. You do it in a nice manner*. And from the perspective of a challenger: *They perhaps looked at our comments as a criticism rather than as a critique.* Hence, setting the scene appropriately for challenge session is important. Something of help might be, as suggested by a challenger: *to publish a set of criteria to make the challenge session fair*. Also, as indicated by interviewees, there is a need to appoint challengers who have empathy and appropriate experience.

Otherwise, it is essential to keep reminding ourselves that learners are the essential focus of the mission of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – and this should be both in terms of institutional activities in general and any research, such as this, associated with those activities. On the acceptance that programme review is an important process in the quality of education, the student interviewees believed they must be involved in such a process as they are the ones experiencing the transformation. They suggested their involvement could be in:

- Focus groups – with current students from different levels – in order to get students' views and to learn and share the challenges faced in a course.
- Individual interviews with students as this method is likely to encourage students who are uncomfortable in group situations to speak freely and openly.
- Involving alumni in panel discussions with deans, tutors and current students – given that alumni are a vital source of information and have experience and familiarity with current labour market needs.
- Dialogue with the Student Council – to provide valuable input, but not the only input from students of the institution.

Figure 5.7 shows methods that are, and that can be, used to get significant involvement of students in the review process.

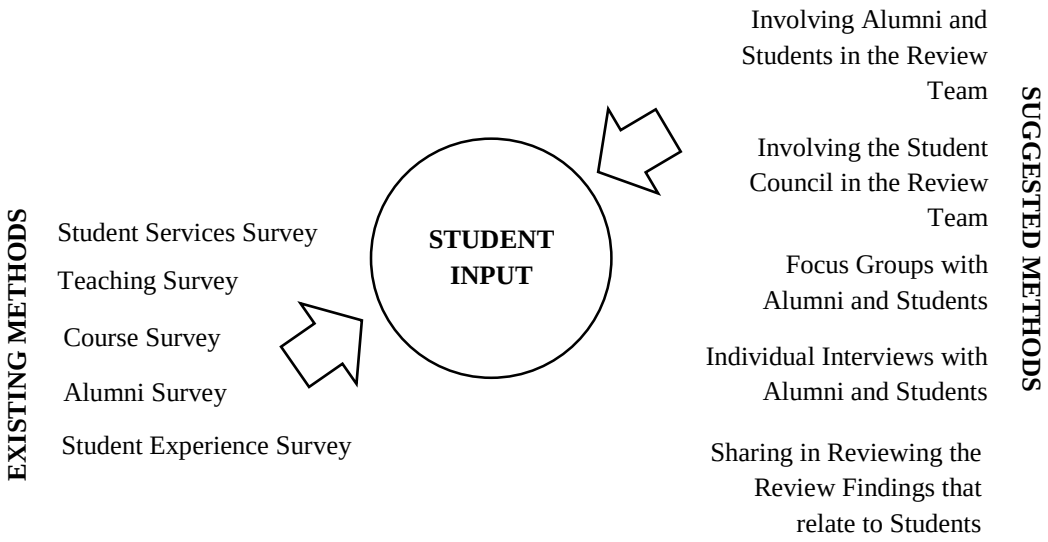


Figure 5.7 Existing and Suggested Student Input Methods for Programme Review

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a diagrammatic representation of the proposed Contextualised Programme Review Framework, comments on its theoretical basis, and explanations of its essential components. As well, there has been comment on the research process – its strengths, weaknesses, and lessons learned.

The suggested framework is not chiselled in stone. Consistent with the systems theories of Senge (1990) and Gharajedaghi (1999), for example, it is a dynamic concept. It should be revisited frequently to check on its appropriateness and to consider how it might be further refined or changed. As indicated in Figure 5.8, in the interests of continual improvement, each of the component items would be questioned in turn: Does it still apply? Could it be better named and explained? Should it be removed? Is there another item, or other items, that should be added to this component? Also, the naming and relevance of the components, themselves – principles, standards, enablers, transformations processes and activities (indicated in Figure 5.5 as problem solving, decision-making and learning as being appropriate for the institution's current focus on problem-based learning), outcomes, and feedback – would be critically questioned: Are they still what we want? Is the way they are connected still suitable? Do they still constitute an overall model that serves us best for programme review – or is it perhaps time for a shift of paradigm and a new model? This ongoing questioning, overall, is neither more nor less than the *practise what we preach* exhortation of one of the research participants – being an essential focus on critical thinking.

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007, p. 288), in referring to their metaphorical model for employability (which is compatible with the mission and vision of the polytechnic), state: "The model does not depict a process that a student embarks upon during their time in higher education and then graduates with employability for life. The issues within the model are likely to be revisited many times to ensure adaptability to the

demands of a changing world and a better chance of occupational satisfaction and success." Of particular significance is how Dacre Pool and Sewell see their model is a similarly dynamic and questioning way to that of this researcher's perception of the Contextualised Programme Review Framework.

With the essential nature of this ongoing questioning in mind, it is now timely to move to the final chapter of this thesis and its coverage of the significance and limitations of the study, implications for implementation of the CPRF at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, possibilities for further research, recommendations, and, as a final work, the reflections of the researcher.

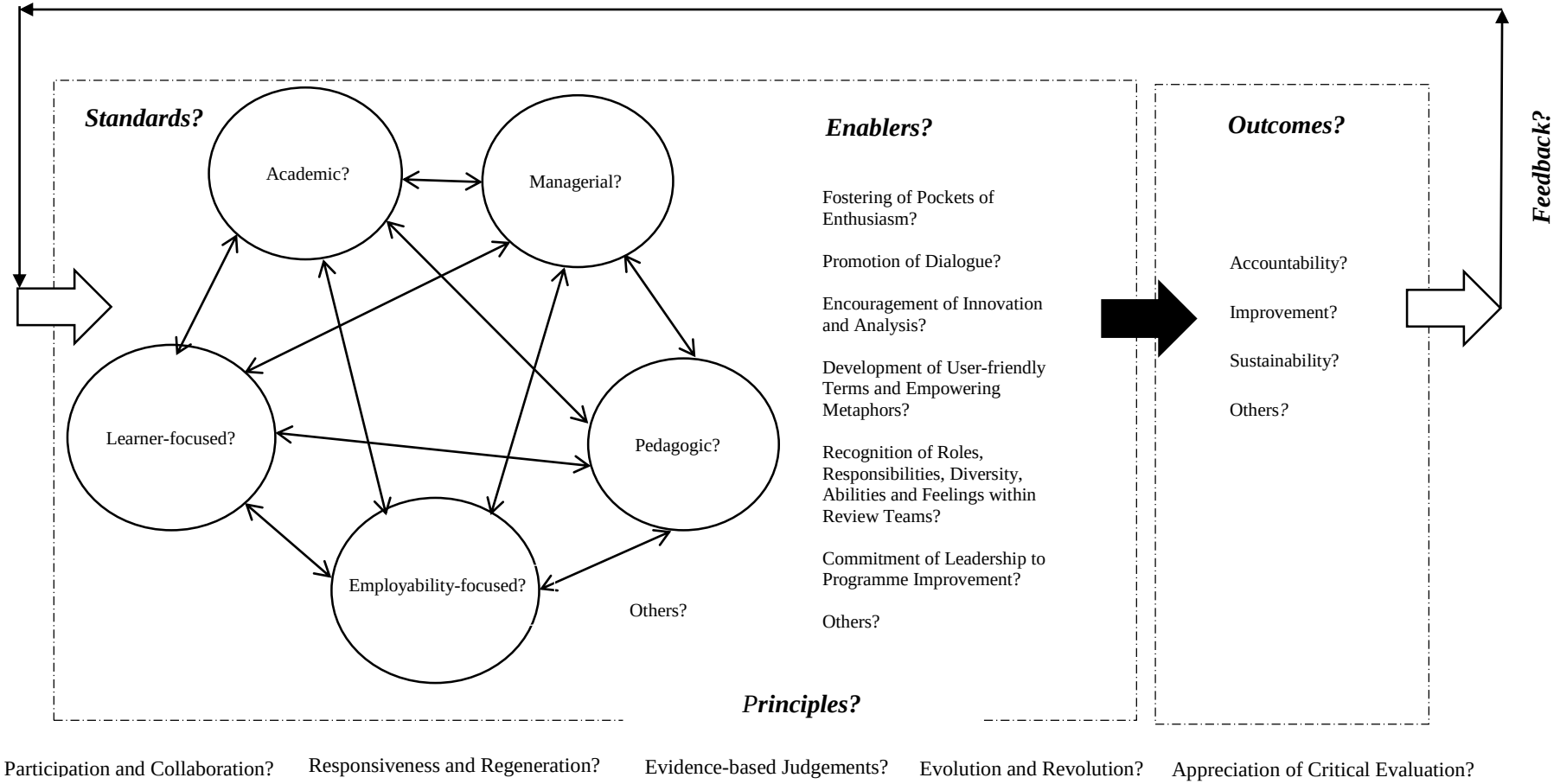


Figure 5.8 In Search of an Even More Contextually Appropriate Programme Review Framework

CHAPTER 6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

6.1 Introduction

A framework for programme review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic was developed and considered from a practitioner's perspective. A process, key principles and standards were established. How programme review can be best implemented at the institution has been considered in part and is addressed further in this last chapter.

A key finding of the research was that the appropriateness of the process of implementation is crucial in bringing about change. The reliance on a hierarchically imposed quality system, with the expectation that commitment will cascade naturally and predictably from the top to the bottom, is problematic and inappropriate to the context of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. Rather, there is a need to find pockets of enthusiasm within the organisation that are exemplars of quality accountability and improvement and to use this expertise to support the widening and deepening of such pockets. The intention is to have organisational units and individuals own a quality review framework, and the quality system overall, instead of seeing it as something that is imposed and a matter of no more than begrudging compliance.

There is comment on the significance and limitations of the study, suggestions for further investigation, and, from the research findings, specific recommendations relating to principles, standards and process are made and their implications for implementation detailed. Finally, the researcher offers personal reflections on his research journey.

Programme review can be very effective when done within the bounds of context and purpose, where the people involved in teaching the programme are also part of designing the review process and conducting the review. They are part of the problem and the solution.

An observation of the researcher was that trust among the reviewers and programme managers was essential to the efficiency and effectiveness of the process.

In the reviewed literature it was indicated that a quality system of an institution such as Arabian Gulf Polytechnic (or any organisation for that matter) must be fit for purpose (Argyris & Schon, 1974). The purpose must be understood and accepted by all interested parties. Whether it is effective – that is, is 'fit' – will depend on how well it sits within the vision, mission, values and strategic initiatives of the institution and the coherent set of quality principles, standards and operational processes.

6.2 Significance and Limitations of the Study

The intent has been to find a framework that authentically fits the context of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as a higher education institution in Bahrain. Significantly, throughout the research, a focus was maintained on contextualisation. Hence, the proposed principles, standards and process are specific to the needs of the particular institution with the increased likelihood that they will be owned by the employees of that

institution. The components of the framework have the potential to stimulate changes in both attitude and behaviour towards using a programme review process within the organisation.

The study could be considered limited in the sense that the main focus of the research, in the interests of manageability, was on practice within the School of Business. However, practice within the School of Business of the institution can be used as an exemplar for other faculties and departments within the organisation. Reflections of the researcher can translate into opportunities to widen and deepen ownership of a programme review framework (or programme review frameworks) throughout Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as a whole.

It was beyond the scope of the study to generalise to other higher education institutions. However, the research process can be applied to other contexts and the critical questioning that is very much a part of the approach to both the research, itself, and the proposed ongoing application of cyclical programme review, are likely to be of benefit to educational institutions generally – in the Middle East and further afield.

In relation to data collection, there was significant involvement from members of staff of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – both academic and administrative – and also from stakeholders external to the organisation. Students, most importantly, were involved but were not tapped as much as they might have been for thoughts and feelings on quality practice. In future, it will be beneficial to get more input from both students and alumni. Also, more input could come from people external to the polytechnic, such as present and prospective employers of the institution's graduates.

6.3 Implications for Implementation

A significant body of the literature indicated that leadership for quality should not be restricted to top management; rather, it should be dispersed – with appropriate accountabilities and authority – throughout the organisation. It should be situational (Darandari et al., 2009; Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010; Wilkinson, 2003; Winchip, 1996). Accordingly, senior managers, through dialogue, would have to appreciate and accept the positive value of dispersing leadership responsibilities throughout the organisation.

Dispersed leadership would help, as indicated in the literature, in having quality systems owned by all vitally interested parties – the learners, teachers, administrative and specialist support staff, and management at all levels. As long as the players at all levels accepted and appreciated the responsibilities, authority and accountability that go with dispersed leadership, collaboration between departments could be improved – for example, between the academic and support departments, such as IT Services and Registry. Communications across the organisation, in place of unnecessary communications up and down through various levels, would be encouraged.

In essence, the quality management system would have to be accepted as decentralised, focusing on disciplinary characteristics and applying quality standards that may vary according to the context. Significantly, the organisational structure would have to adapt to the quality strategy – and not vice versa.

Roles and responsibilities of committees and teams as indicated in Table 5.9 would have to be discussed and accepted by the various parties. This would involve the removal of some elements from the programme review process – such as reports having to go to meetings of Faculty Boards for discussion and not decision – in the interests of speeding up the CPRF process. An associated implication is that the polytechnic's Review and Evaluation Policy, Quality Assurance Model and Terms of Reference for Committees would have to be revised.

An appreciation of cultural differences, and the consequent need for sensitive management, would be a key need. Cultural differences would be celebrated; diversity would be viewed in a positive light.

As indicated by a member of a Challenge Team, of importance is *the adoption of a conceptual framework for reviewers by the institution, so that it's clear to all and we become familiar with it*. The CPRF would have to be accepted and promoted. The proposed framework would be distributed across the polytechnic for comment prior to approval by the Senior Management Team. Once accepted, it would be important to find innovative ways of promoting it – for example, lunch-time seminars might feature presenters from exemplary pockets of enthusiasm. And the pockets of enthusiasm for quality would be sought throughout the organisation. It would be a matter of finding the exemplars within the organisation and supporting and fostering them. The Quality Directorate could take a role in this.

Students would be involved in Programme Review through a wide range of input activities (refer to Figure 5.7). Again, the Quality Directorate could take a role in this, perhaps as part of or alongside ongoing research initiatives. Alumni would be offered the opportunity to air their views.

A high standard of training, coaching, mentoring, feedback and continuing professional development would be essential for all staff members involved in programme review. There is much support in the literature for this (Arcaro, 1997; Dale, 2003; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2007; Wilkinson, 2003). Among the topics of value would be:

- Principles and practice of Programme Review
- The underpinning theory, terminology and critical understanding of the CPRF framework
- Techniques for gathering and evaluating different types of evidence
- Critical evaluation
- Giving oral and written feedback
- Roles and responsibilities for planning, organising, carrying out and evaluating Programme Reviews
- Reporting on the analysis and outcomes of Programme Reviews
- Project management as it applies to Programme Review
- Change management as it applies to implementation of findings of Programme Reviews
- Opportunities and challenges relating to implementing of findings
- Sharing of exemplary practice
- Monitoring progress and impact of improvements

- Emotional intelligence (in relation to appreciation of the feelings as well as the abilities of people throughout the organisation)
- Appreciation of diversity

It is noted that people with experience from the reviews could be later used as trainers, coaches and mentors. This is supported by a comment by one of the research interviewees: *I think the review helped the group to improve their skills, and I think we should train others given the number of reviews we have*. This idea should be pursued.

A wise choice of people to play key roles in Programme Review would be important. This could involve searches of pockets of enthusiasm to find people capable of being role models; people who can help to shape the behaviour of others. In appointing people in the role of challengers of reviewers, the comments of one of the research interviewees might well be taken into account: *To maintain a robust system of challenge, you need to appoint people with experience, not people who are building up their own skills*. People in such roles need to be both confrontational, in an acceptable and understood manner, and helpful.

Where resource deficiencies are highlighted, they will need to be addressed. Appropriate spaces for interviews will have to be available. Recording templates, as appropriate, should be provided. Time – an essential resource – will have to be willingly allocated. Overall, the principles and practice of sound project management need to be applied to programme review.
And what are the implications for implementation from the perspective of a Quality Coordinator – the formal organisational role of the writer during this research? What are key thoughts that can be passed on to anyone else taking on that role – at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic and perhaps in other HEIs? Reflectively, they are:

> Start by reminding yourself of the outcomes that are desired – accountability, improvement, and sustainability of programme review, in the interests primarily of the learners. Then, with the purpose well in mind, make sure you understand the compliance requirements – both internally and externally. Have dialogue with stakeholders to seek clarification as necessary and to maintain positive relationships. Remind yourself – and have the members of your team remind themselves – that the Quality Unit is there to provide a service to people throughout the organisation; it is not a policing authority. You will be there to support people in departments throughout the organisation who have decentralised responsibilities for programme review.
>
> At the start of a new programme review cycle, take responsibility for coordinating workshops for all staff that get agreement on contextualised programme review principles, standards, enablers, transmission channels, outcomes, and feedback opportunities. In other words, provide all staff with the opportunity to own the process. Also, provide opportunities for students and alumni to comment. Get a common understanding with all parties on things that are givens – like QAAET standards that have to be met – and things that should be questioned from cycle to cycle – like the appropriate, contextualised mix of elements of the framework. Gain acceptance, through dialogue, that the process will be run according to sound project management principles and

procedures – with agreed deadlines and budgets and with wise selection of key influencers.

Once a cycle is under way, take responsibility for seeking exemplars of programme review practice – the successful activities of pockets of enthusiasm within the organisation. Find innovative ways to publicise and celebrate exemplars; give them the opportunity to spread in tailored form to other areas of the organisation. Publicity might include things such as lunch-time 'paper bag lunch' seminars, articles on the polytechnic's collaborative intranet, articles in local newspapers, research projects and the associated publishing of papers and presentations at conferences, and celebratory end-of-project lunches or dinners with congratulatory comments. Importantly, in this type of collaborative environment, take not that you have become just one of a growing number of programme review champions.

Overall, as one programme review cycle is coming to an end, prepare to go through the same process again. Don't be complacent; leave nothing to chance. Continue creating opportunities for dialogue. Make sure everyone has a chance to have a say and be listened to. Remind yourself that the essential components are there to be questioned and contextualised – and that contextualisation will change over time. Through collaboration and cooperation, share the thrill of continuous improvement of the programme review process.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

As the programme review process continues to be seen as key to the maintenance of quality in higher education institutions, a greater understanding of the context of practice is needed. There is much room for comparative studies around the world – and for context-specific studies that can be compared through meta-analysis – and Middle Eastern studies should be encouraged.

As mentioned above, further investigation should seek greater input from students and alumni.

Investigation into the transferability of industrial quality concepts into education and particularly higher education should be further explored. The present research indicates that terminology and language used for quality practices of higher education should be meaningful for educators and have their roots and links to learning and teaching activities. There is room for further investigation of this aspect.

Further investigation is needed into the challenges faced by institutions to balance accountability and improvement. Among the questions that might be addressed are: How can the shared responsibilities of higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and policymakers be balanced? What are various ways in which compliance and improvement responsibilities can be accepted positively by academic staff? What are different ways in which improvement-based cultures evolve?

It would be worth researching the transferability of knowledge, skills and feelings gained from Programme Review at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic (and other quality management, accountability and improvement involvement at the institution) to more

general usage. This would be further exploration of the statement of one of the research participants: *I'm starting to use this experience in other areas of my life*.
Also, the cyclic nature of Programme Review provides a research opportunity at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic for longitudinal study.

6.5 Recommendations

In line with the focus of the research, these are specific to the development and implementation of a programme review framework at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Recommendation 1
That a contextualised programme review framework, as depicted in Figure 5.1, be adopted by Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Recommendation 2
That quality be defined in the context of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic as a recognition that there are needs for both compliance with internally and externally agreed standards, based on sound principles, and with improvement and sustainability objectives that are ideally owned by teams as pockets of enthusiasm within the organisation. Ideally, it resides in a culture of shared ownership and responsibility that has developed throughout the organisation.

Recommendation 3
That the framework be based on the underlying principles that have emerged from this research: namely, Participation and Collaboration, Responsiveness and Regeneration, Evidence-based Judgements, Appreciation of Critical Evaluation and Evolution and Revolution.

Recommendation 4
That standards satisfy the requirements of both Arabian Gulf Polytechnic and external agencies and are developed and applied according to managerial, employability-focused, academic, pedagogic, and learner-focused categorisations.

Recommendation 5
That essential enablers of the process be accepted as Fostering of Pockets of Enthusiasm, Promotion of Dialogue, Encouragement of Innovation and Analysis, Commitment of Leadership to Programme Improvement, Development of User-friendly Terms and Empowering Metaphors, and Recognition of Roles, Responsibilities, Diversity, Abilities and Feelings within Review Teams.

Recommendation 6
That the transformation of enablers to outcomes be seen as being effected by problem solving, decision-making and learning – consistent with the Problem Based Learning orientation of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Recommendation 7
That the focuses of the outcomes for programme reviews are accountability, improvement and sustainability.

Recommendation 8
That the process be seen as systemic (being inputs, transformation, outputs and feedback within internal and external environments) and cyclical, with feedback from the outcomes back to the enablers once a phase has been completed and the next phase is to start.

Recommendation 9
That the programme review be appropriate to the mission and vision of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic and its applied management context.

Recommendation 10
That longitudinal research initiatives be developed, approved and implemented relating to the ongoing suitability of the standards, principles and processes of the Contextualised Programme Review Framework – from cycle to cycle – in relation to the intended outcomes of accountability, improvement and sustainability.

6.6 Personal Reflection

The term 'journey' is used as a metaphor to reflect on my research story. This journey occurred essentially between, January 2011 to July 2014. Along with, I expect, many other students doing case study qualitative research, I struggled with issues relating to being a participant-researcher, grappling with the iterative nature of the research and managing the research data.

There were previous journeys that led to this one. I launched my first research journey in late 2009. It was concerned with building quality standards for an apprenticeship programme in a secondary school. At the time I was Assistant Headmaster at a technical secondary school which had adopted an apprenticeship programme from Australia. My thinking at that stage was about contextualising this programme to the Bahrain context. However, as a full-time worker in a responsible position, I soon encountered the difficulties of trying to apportion my time between work and research. This, I have found out, requires great commitment, determination and optimism. That first journey didn't make it to the first oasis on the way!

Just over a year later I got the opportunity to join Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. The implications of this move were huge on my research experience as I moved from an environment with minimal promotion of research activities – that is, technical education in Bahrain – to one that was looking to establish a research culture – that is, higher education at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. I quickly had good feelings about that.

I had moved from a school where the vast majority of staff and students were from Bahrain and the Arab world into an institution with teachers of many nationalities, and mainly of countries of the West. From the early days of my new appointment, I noticed there were some similarities in the working environment between my previous post and the new one. One of the points was that both institutions had adopted quality systems and academic programmes from oversees. In both cases, I felt there was a need to contextualise the adopted quality systems and academic programmes to make them valid. I consulted my supervisors at USQ and decided to undertake a case study aiming at searching for a contextualised programme review framework for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. I was excited about the opportunity.

As I was part of the research, the possibility of affecting the research participants throughout my research journey was expected. This was one of the key challenges that I encountered across my journey. One of my supervisors at USQ shared with me an excellent metaphor that helped me to maintain a level of separation between my dual roles of participant and researcher. In a one-to-one meeting it was suggested to me, "Imagine you are in a dancing hall and a group of people are dancing in the theatre on the first floor while you are sitting in a place, up above, where you can see all of the people. You're in the environment of the dancers but at a distance from them. You are able to study their behaviour – like research. Maybe from time to time you'll get down from your place and have a dance on the dance floor – as a participant. What you find out is that you can be both." This metaphor was always in my mind during my research journey. I found it very useful. However, in some occasions it was difficult to not be one of the dancers when I should have been a looker-on. A technique that helped me recognise when I had left my place inappropriately was making entries in the electronic file that served as my reflective journal.

As a Bahraini with English very much as a second language, I become accustomed to using specialised terminology. My research journey was linear but iterative. When I first heard the word iterative I did not appreciate the affect it would have on my study journey. However, once I got into my research it became apparent. Draft, redraft, redraft – refine, refine, refine – these activities became, in time, a matter of habit. I found that during the journey my knowledge and skills were changing rapidly as I read more literature and engaged in dialogues with more and more colleagues. I started viewing things in different ways. The result was that I found I had to modify conclusions that I thought I had already reached. On some occasions it was difficult to make the changes as I felt I was making the journey too risky. For example, my intention was at first to develop a contextualised programme review framework that met compliance requirements. However, when I started reading more and more literature I found that a key concern is focus on improvement and its impact on classroom practice and, importantly, the learner. With the backing of my research, I came to appreciate that having a programme review framework without considering the place of quality improvement in it is not a comprehensive or meaningful solution. My journey took a more fertile route. Together with that, the nature of my exploration was effective in shaping and reshaping my thinking. For example, through iterations, the programme review framework principles changed in shape many times as I proceeded.

The word 'contextualised' was a key word in my research journey. It appears in this thesis, one way or another, hundreds of times. I always asked this question, "Is this idea working for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic?" If not, I thought about reshaping it to make it work – to make it fit for purpose. Throughout my research journey I felt that most of the research participants were positive about the journey because the focus was on developing something that could work for them in their own environment. This became apparent from individual and group interviews. People liked to talk about the opportunity of having their own thing. It made me feel good to hear it. And, with my researcher's hat on, it committed me to recording the thoughts of the interviewees accurately.

A key factor that helped me in enhancing the participants' ownership of the framework was a focus on the resources available within Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. It was a matter

of capturing and sharing institutional knowledge. We – the participants and I – gave attention to what people actually do on a daily or periodic basis in relation to the research topic. Again, this was effective to enhance participants' ownership.

On many occasions, I was grateful for the advice offered by my USQ supervisors in regard to several issues such as document organisation. One particular piece of advice that had a significant impact on organising my thesis was using a 'seriation' strategy. (This was another fine word to add to my English vocabulary.) One of the supervisors commented, "Your thesis examiner relies upon you to organise the sections and sub-sections of the thesis such that the examiner does not have to think about how the document is organised." Put another way, it was said, "Seriation is a very good strategy for organising a document." This I found to be excellent advice. I became strategic about it and have seen its impact on the document.

In order to move from one destination to another on my journey, and therefore travel from surface to deep levels in terms of learning and experience, I have focused on three things. First, I have taken opportunities to network and enter dialogue with a wide range of practitioners. This has played a major role in shaping and reshaping my thinking and moving it to a more meaningful level.

My networks included practitioners from different background and nationalities. Some are located in Bahrain and others overseas. They have been able to share thoughts on current practice in their home countries and their current and past experience. For instance, some were not keen on the compliance idea and view this as an issue and a barrier to improvement. These thoughts came from practitioners based overseas in regimes that had practised compliance for over 15 years. It made me wary of accepting things just because they have been in place for a long time. It encouraged me to think critically.

Networking is essentially good but caused some challenges. Everyone has his or her own beliefs around key issues in higher education and has 'logical' justifications. Contrary views made me confused from time to time and left me wondering which side I should take and why. I realised it is important to think in a holistic way to consider such issues. To illustrate this, if I discussed an issue with a practitioner I needed to put in my mind the context and the background of that person so I could understand the big picture. In the main, the key thing was to listen, keep opinions to myself, and reflect. Eventually, I was able to make decisions on what was a good fit or not in relation to my research questions.

I realised that most practitioners have a set of beliefs that enables them to respond consistently to personal and professional matters. For instance, if a person believes in a collaborative approach rather than competitive one, their way of thinking will usually lead to teamwork-type behaviour. Towards the end of my research journey I started to develop my own set of beliefs – which went through cycles of shaping and reshaping as my understanding of concepts and issues become deeper and deeper. I changed. And I know this process won't stop and is an integral part of me.

A key source of my learning was the literature review and the theoretical knowledge that came with it. The information was exciting – stimulating topics from around the world. It helped me to examine trends and trace historical changes. It gave me ideas about what's next in higher education and in the fields of quality assurance and

improvement. This research process, overall, was effective in allowing me to articulate the local, provincial, national, regional and global dimensions, challenges and issues of my areas of interest.

I came to appreciate the rich bodies of literature from various places around the world. In relation to my topic, the body of literature is decidedly limited. The paucity is a challenge. It encourages me to be not just a reader but also a contributor.

Yet another important source for my study was the field of 'research context' or 'theatre'. As I conducted a case study, the field source was critical to examine my thoughts and ideas through networking and interacting with research participants. I came to realise the significant influence of the type of research I was absorbed in.

Some research participants stood out as effective participants, or fellow travellers, in relation to my research journey. They engaged well in the ongoing dialogue. They liked the journey and decided on their own to be a significant part of it. They completed the journey with me and maintained a high level of keenness. They were 'Pockets of Enthusiasm', individually and collectively.

In parallel with my research journey, I had another two journeys going on at the same time. The first related to my working life and the second to my personal circumstances. There were challenges in trying to balance the three commitments. As a participant-researcher I felt I was wearing two hats; as a researcher-worker-family man I was aware I was wearing three! A positive thing is that my research and work journey were related to each other and that helped me in applying knowledge and skills that I was acquiring to life in general. For one, I became a better and more sympathetic listener whether I was at work or at home.

In summary, this professional research journey provided me with great opportunities to build deep experience and knowledge relevant and meaningful to my interest and my work context which in return supported me to fulfil my commitment to serve society by supporting Arabian Gulf Polytechnic community to develop a contextualised programme review framework.

Finally, this journey may support other researchers in their coming journeys, particularly through the Arab world, to contribute to the advancement of knowledge relating to programme review in higher education. It may also help to serve society, generally, as academics, critical thinkers and people of positive action. At a personal level this journey has provided me with great opportunities to exhibit competencies and commitment in pursuing goals related to my areas of specialisation.

I have reached an important oasis. However, there will be more journeys to come – more important oases a wait.

6.7 Final Word

From this research, there are encouraging signs that the proposed Contextualised Programme Review Framework can be a significant contributor to Arabian Gulf Polytechnic and the quality of education in Bahrain and, more generally, the Middle East. It provides principles, standards and a cyclical process – with enablers, transformation channels, outcomes and feedback – that can stimulate appropriate

attitudes and behaviour of people who have an involvement in programme review and the encompassing aspects of quality management, assurance and improvement.

Through incorporating local and cultural aspects, it is likely to improve greatly its chances of successful implementation and sustainability. By meeting both internal and external compliance requirements, by making improvements that are compatible with those requirements, and by networking with institutions and agencies both in Bahrain and throughout the world, it has the promise of gaining international acknowledgement and respect.

It supports the hypothesis that reliance on a hierarchically imposed quality system, with the expectation that commitment will cascade naturally and predictably from the top to the bottom, is problematic and inappropriate to the context of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. It provides support and encouragement for a Pockets of Enthusiasm Approach where exemplars of quality accountability and improvement are actively sought, celebrated, fostered and spread – and tailored appropriately according to the needs and orientations of different departments and units –throughout the organisation.

It offers promise that programme review, and quality in general, can be *owned* by people throughout the organisation – *in the interests of the learners*. Significantly, through its focus on improving the employability skills and attitudes of graduates of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, it is likely to contribute positively to the economic development of Bahrain.

For higher education in the Middle East, it is offered as an exemplar – holistic, dynamic, focused on continuous accountability and improvement – of a contextually relevant programme review framework.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Review Standards

Standard 1: The Learning Programme
Standard definition: The programme demonstrates fitness for purpose in terms of mission, relevance, curriculum, pedagogy, intended learning outcomes and assessment. This standard includes 8 sub-standards.
Sub-standard There is a clear academic planning framework for the programme which shows that there are clear aims that indicate the broad purposes of providing the programme and are related to the mission of the institution and the faculty and its strategic goals. The curriculum is organised to provide academic progression year-on-year, suitable workloads for students, and it balances between knowledge and skills, and between theory and practice. The syllabus (i.e. curricular content, level, and outcomes) meets the norms and standards of the particular disciplinary field and award and is accurately documented in terms of breadth, depth, and relevance, with appropriate references to current and recent professional practice and published research findings. Intended learning outcomes are expressed in the programme and course specifications and are aligned with the mission and programme aims and objectives and are appropriate for the level of the degree. There are course/module ILOs appropriate to the aims and levels of the course/module and they are mapped to the programme and courses. Where relevant to the programme, there is an element of work-based learning that contributes to the achievement of learning and receives credits and there is a clear assessment policy. The principles and methods used for teaching in the programme support the attainment of aims and intended learning outcomes. Suitable assessment arrangements which include policies and procedures are in place, and known to all academics and students, to assess students' achievements.

Standard 2: Efficiency of the Programme
Standard definition: The programme is efficient in terms of the admitted students, the use of available resources - staffing, infrastructure and student support - and the ratio of admitted students to successful graduates. This standard includes 13 sub-standards.
Sub-standard There is a clear admission policy which is periodically revised and the admission requirements are appropriate for the level and type of the programme. The profile of admitted students matches the programme aims and available resources. There are clear lines of accountability with regard to the management of the programme. Faculty members and others who contribute to the programme are fit for purpose: • There are sufficient staff to teach the programme • There is an appropriate range of academic qualifications and specialisations • Where appropriate there is relevant robust professional experience • The profile of recent and current academic research, teaching or educational development • Matches the programme aims and curricular content. There are clear procedures for the recruitment, appraisal, promotion and retention of academic staff that are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner and arrangements are in place for the induction of newly appointed academic staff. There is a functioning management information system to enable informed decision-making. There are policies and procedures, consistently implemented, to ensure security of learner records and accuracy of results. Physical and material resources are adequate in number, space, style and equipment. These include classrooms, teaching halls, laboratories and other study spaces, IT facilities, library and learning resources. There is a tracking system to determine the usage of laboratories, e-learning and e-resources and it allows for evaluation of the utilisation of these resources. There is appropriate student support available in terms of library, laboratories, e-learning and e-resources, guidance and support care. Arrangements are in place for orienting newly admitted students (including those transferring from other institutions with direct entry after Year 1). There is an appropriate academic support system in place to track students' progress which identifies students at risk of failure; and provides interventions for at-risk students. The learning environment is conducive to expanding the student experiences and knowledge through informal learning.

Standard: 3 Academic Standards of the Graduates
Standard definition: The graduates of the programme meet acceptable academic standards in comparison with equivalent programmes in Bahrain and worldwide. This standard includes 12 sub-standards.
Sub-standard Graduate attributes are clearly stated in terms of aims and achieved learning outcomes for the programme and for each course and are ensured through the use of assessment which is valid and reliable in terms of the learning outcomes. Benchmarks and internal and external reference points are used to determine and verify the equivalence of academic standards with other similar programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally. This will include clear statements and evidence about: The purpose of benchmarking The choice of what is benchmarked and what it is against How the process is managed How the outcomes are used. Assessment policies and procedures are consistently implemented, monitored and subject to regular review and are made available to students. There are mechanisms to ensure the alignment of assessment with outcomes to assure the academic standards of the graduates. There are mechanisms in place to measure the effectiveness of the programme's internal moderation system for setting assessment instruments and grading student achievement. There are procedures which are consistently implemented for the external moderation of assessment and there are mechanisms to allow for feedback on assessment in line with assessed courses. The level of achievements as expressed in samples of students' assessed work is appropriate to the level and type of the programme in Bahrain, regionally and internationally. The level of achievement of graduates meets programme aims and intended learning outcomes, as demonstrated in final results, grade distribution and confirmation by internal and external independent scrutiny. The ratios of admitted students to successful graduates, including rates of progression, retention, year-on-year progression, length of study and first destinations of graduates, are consonant with those achieved on equivalent programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally. Where assessed work-based learning takes place, there is a policy and procedure to manage the process and its assessment to assure that the learning experience is appropriate in terms of content and level to meet the intended learning outcomes. Mentors are assigned to students to monitor and review this. Where there is a dissertation, thesis or industry project component there are policies and procedures and monitoring for supervision which states the responsibilities and duties of both the supervisor and the postgraduate student and there is a mechanism to monitor implementation and improvement. There is a functioning programme advisory board with clear terms of reference and it includes discipline experts, employers and alumni and its feedback is used systematically to inform programme decision-making.

Standard 4: Effectiveness of Quality Management and Assurance
Standard definition: The arrangements in place for managing the programme, including quality assurance, give confidence in the programme. This standard includes 10 sub-standards.
Sub-standard The institution's policies, procedures and regulations are applied effectively and consistently across the institution. The programme is managed in a way that demonstrates effective and responsible leadership. There is a clear quality assurance management system, in relation to the programmes within the faculty that is consistently implemented, monitored and evaluated. Academics and support staff have an understanding of quality assurance and their role in ensuring effectiveness of provision. There is a policy and procedures for the development of new programmes to ensure the programmes are relevant, fit for purpose, and comply with existing regulations. There are arrangements for annual internal programme evaluation and implementation of recommendations for improvement. There are arrangements for periodic reviews of the programmes that incorporate both internal and external feedback, and mechanisms are in place to implement recommendations for improvement. The structured comments collected from, for example, students' and other stakeholders' surveys are analysed and the outcomes are used to inform decisions on programmes with mechanisms for improvement and are made available to the stakeholders. The arrangements for identifying continuing professional development needs for all staff and meeting them are effective. These are monitored and evaluated. Where appropriate for the programme type, there is continuous scoping of the labour market to ensure that programmes are up-to-date.

Appendix B: Group Interview: Review Participants

Time: 10 minutes

Greeting and Introduction

Thank you for coming today, you have participated in the programme review for Business. The purpose of the review is to examine the effectiveness of the Business Programme in the light of QAAET indicators. Your input into this process will be critical in shaping a programme review framework at the Polytechnic.

Purpose of the Group Interview

The purpose of today's session is to learn from you and to share with each other about your role as a reviewer. We are looking at what's happening now but would also like to hear from you about what programme review should be, given our context. This is an open discussion. Your comments and opinions will be anonymous and we encourage you to speak out. However, this should be done in a collegial and non-confrontational manner.

We want to know what you're experiencing and seeing in your role as a reviewer. We would like to know where things are going well, but also where they are not going well, and how things could be improved.

Use of Technology, Note Taking and Confidentiality

We are recording this session and making notes so that we can study what you have said, but it won't go beyond this group except being reported in the form of "Business tutors point out that…" The recordings of the notes will be transcribed and listened to or read only in strict confidentiality. You will be referred to in the transcriptions as Reviewer 1, Reviewer 2, etc. Again, this information will be used to study and improve the programme review process at the polytechnic.

Open-ended Questions

Answer the following questions based on your contribution as a reviewer in the Business Programme Review:

Time: 20 minutes
Theme 1: Review Indicators
What are your views on the review indicators in relation to the following aspects?

Clarity.
Relevance to polytechnic (fit for purpose).
Alignment with international practice.
Comprehensiveness.

Time: 30 minutes
Theme 2: Review Process (Conducting the programme review)
How do you feel about the review process in terms of the following:

Role of review facilitator.
Working as part of a team.
Evidence gathering and sourcing.
Writing of the review findings using evaluative language.
Support provided.

Time: 20 minutes
Theme 3: Challenge Session
To what extent, did the challenge session support you to improve the quality of your review findings?

Time: 30 minutes
Theme 4: Building Capacity
What do you expect will be the impact of programme review on the effectiveness of the Bachelor of Business programme?

How has this experience helped you to build your capacity as a reviewer?

Time: 10 minutes
Is there anything else you would like to add?

Informed Consent Form

A. Research details:

Title of Project:	In Search of a Programme Review Framework for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. The Experience of a Bahraini Programme Coordinator
Researcher name:	Jameel Hasan
Organisation:	Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – Kingdom of Bahrain
Address	PO Box 33349, Isa Town, Kingdom of Bahrain Phone: +973 17897000 Fax : +973 17897009 - +973 17897048 Jameel.Hasan@polytechnic.bh

B. Participant information:

Name (Optional):	
Nationality:	
Highest degree completed:	
Highest degree completed awarded from:	
Number of years as an educator:	
Number of years of engagement at programme review process:	

C. Consent items

Item	**Status**		**Comments**
	Yes	No	
I confirm that I have received adequate information regarding the above research project.			
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.			
I understand that I will have an opportunity to access the research report prior to publish it.			
I confirm that I have understood the research aims and my roles and based on that I agree to participate in this research.			

Participant Name	**Date**	**Signature**

Researcher comments	**Date**	**Signature**

Participant identification number: P

Instructions for the Group Interview Facilitator:

Phrases to expand participant's idea:
Can you expand on that?
Can you be more specific on that?
Do you remember any other incidents?
Can you clarify that?

Probes to expand participant's idea:
Do you agree with that?
Do you feel that way too?
Is that what it really is?
Anything you can add?

- ✓ Be a facilitator, not a participant!
- ✓ Keep your opinions, agendas and pet themes out of the group interview. This is not your time.
- ✓ Stay close to the participant's usage of words.
- ✓ Be interested in everything, even if repetitive.
- ✓ Lack of respect shuts down a group talk.
- ✓ Empathy.
- ✓ Control your sense of humour – maybe?
- ✓ Stay on topic, keep track of time.

Questions to gain richer detail:
When did you hear about that?
How did you hear about it?
Is that the same for all of you?

Counters
For different participant personality types (extreme):

Counter the expert participant personality with:
Does anyone else have something to say about this ideal?

Counter the dominator participant personality with:
Does anyone feel different about this?

Counter the rambler participant with: avoiding eye contact and focusing on other participants, then insert questions to other participants during pause/break.

Counter the disrupter with:
We are not asking everyone to agree; all opinions are valued and will be heard.

Counter the shrinking violet with:
Can you add to that? Are you ready?

Counter the griper with:
Asking him/her to say something positive.

Appendix C: Review Outcomes

Review Outcomes
Standard 1: The Learning Programme
Refine the existing strategic and business plan for the Business School in the light of the new mission, vision and values. Establish an ongoing reporting mechanism in order to identify achievements against strategic objectives. Review the PAD to ensure alignment with the polytechnic vision, mission and values review. Provide feedback to the owner of the Enrolment and Progression Policy, in particular section 2.2.1, with a view to giving students the responsibility to ensure they have met the relevant prerequisites. Revise course descriptors for intuition-based courses to ensure the correct balance between contact and self-directed learning hours. Review course descriptors to ensure that learning outcomes are categorised as skills, knowledge, theory, and practice. Update guidelines for course developers to include a requirement to 'align with international norms and standards' for each subject area. Revise the Programme Approval Document to include a matrix that maps individual courses to overall programme aims. Develop course descriptors for the industry project. Provide feedback to the owner of the Assessment and Moderation Policy in relation to the assessment of industry projects. Define a process for identifying and acquiring industry projects for our growing student body. Provide feedback to the Dean responsible for CTTL on its revision. Provide feedback to the owner of the "Philosophy on student-centred learning" to ensure that the document is up to date and disseminated widely amongst staff. Develop a guideline on the level of individual assessment at programme level for tutors. Develop a process for including industry guest speakers and industry visits across the programme rather than at course level. Provide training for business school staff on relevant academic policies. Develop policy/procedure specifying the minimum amount of time between releasing assessment details and the due date of the assessment. Require a post-marking check on a sample of student work compulsory on all courses before releasing results. Develop staff training on delivering quality feedback to students on their assessments.

Review Outcomes
Standard 2: Efficiency of the Programme
Provide feedback to the owner of the Student Admissions Policy on general entry criteria. Expand the research summary maintained by the Head of School to include all professional development activity, such as the development of teaching effectiveness. Conduct an audit to determine how the software architecture can be enhanced so that staff members use SharePoint as a single source of information concerning the Business School. Formalise current practice surrounding the security of learner records which are intermittently required by Programme Management. HEC have some criteria that the programme does not meet. Specifically the teaching space for computer labs and workshops, which according to HEC should be 3.5 square metres for each student in workshops and 6 square meters for each student in each lab but in the polytechnic it's 2.6 square metres in labs and workshops. LLC space needs to expand to match HEC requirements. Give feedback in the consultation period for the Students At-Risk Policy which includes a robust system for managing students who are academically at risk. Cooperate with Registry to improve the reporting process for data generated from the student management system to communicate clear and accurate data to the concerned staff at the right time to be able to intervene effectively. Cooperate with HR to employ more learning advisors to allow adequate time and follow-up with students who are academically at risk. Provide adequate space for academic advising and mentoring of not less than 9 square metres each with enhanced privacy in line with minimum HEC requirements.

Review Outcomes
Standard 3: Academic Standards of the Graduates
Revise all course descriptors to include the employability skills matrix. Appoint an external monitor to independently verify the standards within the programme. Initiate external moderation of assessments. Assess whether the current assessment and moderation policy is appropriate to adequately cover the industry projects after completion. Develop a mechanism to implement improvements to the monitoring and supervising of industry projects. Review all documentation referring to Curriculum advisory Committee and ensure that this is up to date. Ensure all documentation surrounding CAC, including meeting minutes, is stored on the programme's management information system to ensure greater transparency. Introduce a tracking system to systematically monitor any progress made on actions arising from the CAC.

Review Outcomes
Standard 4: Effectiveness of the Quality Management and Assurance
The institution should ensure all relevant policies and procedures follow the relevant review cycle and are available to all staff in English and Arabic. With the introduction of the new quality role in faculty and the restructuring of the Quality Directorate further thought should be given to improving the structure between Faculty Quality and the Quality Directorate. The Programme Approval Policy should be reviewed in the light of institutional standards developed by QAAET and the policy should meet all requirements stated in Standard One entitled 'Design, approval and verification of level and credit of programmes and awards'. The process for Annual Programme Review should be revised to ensure consistency, fairness, and efficiency. The template should provide more guidance for PMs as to what to include and to what level of detail. The purpose should be clarified. Issues arising from the APR should form part of a programme improvement plan. Finally, APRs should be approved or rejected by AQAC only once they have been checked against clear success criteria. Appoint an appropriate external monitor to verify standards. Establish a system of periodic review and enhancement. Incorporate survey feedback into an improvement plan, the progress and results of which are fed back to staff and students. Provide updates to members of CAC on programme improvements that have happened because of their feedback. Establish a regular update to staff on activities of CAC and how feedback is used to inform programme enhancement. Provide feedback to HR in order to ensure that professional development address programme and institution needs.

Appendix D: Group Interview: Students

Time: 10 minutes

Greeting and Introduction

Thank you for coming today, we are in the process of developing a programme review framework for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic.

Purpose of the Group Interview

The purpose of today's session is to discuss your involvement in the Annual Programme Reviews that occurred in the past, during the pilot exercise and how you see your involvement in the future. This is an open discussion. We would like to know where things are going well, but also where they are not going well, and how things could be improved. We are looking at what's happening now but would also like to hear from you about what your involvement in the programme review should be, given our context. Your comments and opinions will be anonymous and we encourage you to speak out. However, this should be done in a collegial and non-confrontational manner.

Use of Technology, Note Taking and Confidentiality

We are recording this session and making notes so that we can study what you have said, but it won't go beyond this group except reported in the form of Student (1) point out that… The recording will be transcribed and listened to or read only in strict confidentiality. Your comments will be transcribed only as information and will be described as those made by Student 1, Student 2, etc. Again, this information will be used by those involved in this project in order to study and improve the programme review process at the Polytechnic.

Open-ended Questions

Time: 20 minutes
Part One: Before study

1. What do you understand by the term Annual Programme Review? (Facilitator is to ensure that there is an appropriate shared definition.)

2. Have you participated in one or more of these reviews? If so, how?

3. If you did participate, are you aware of any changes that were made to the programme as a result of the review or reviews? If so, what were they?

4. Are you aware of any way in which you have been influenced by the outcomes of a review? If so, in what way or ways?

Time: 20 minutes
Part Two: During study

1. Did the reviewers interact with you during the pilot exercise? If so, in what way?

2. Please look at the actions that emerged from the pilot exercise. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these actions?

3. Are there other actions that you would like to add?

Time: 20 minutes
Phase Three: Future

1. How do you feel about being involved in the following activities as part of the programme review process?
    - Be part of the review team.
    - Share in writing the programme review report.
    - Share in reviewing the programme review report.
    - Share in approving the programme review actions.
    - Meet with internal reviewers.
    - Answer surveys.
    - Receive feedback on the improvement progress.
2. What else would you like to add?

Time: 10 minutes
Is there anything else you would like to add?

Informed Consent Form

A. Research details:

Title of Project:	In Search of a Programme Review Framework for Arabian Gulf Polytechnic. The Experience of a Bahraini Programme Coordinator
Researcher name:	Jameel Hasan
Organisation:	Arabian Gulf Polytechnic – Kingdom of Bahrain
Address	PO Box 33349, Isa Town, Kingdom of Bahrain Phone: +973 17897000 Fax : +973 17897009 - +973 17897048 Jameel.Hasan@polytechnic.bh

B. Participant information:

Name (Optional):	
Nationality:	
Highest degree completed:	
Highest degree completed awarded from:	
Number of years as an educator:	
Number of years at the polytechnic	

C. Consent items

Item	**Status**		**Comments**
	Yes	No	
I confirm that I have received adequate information regarding the above research project.			
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.			
I understand that I will have an opportunity to access the research report prior to publish it.			
I confirm that I have understood the research aims and my roles and based on that I agree to participate in this research.			

Participant name	**Date**	**Signature**

Researcher comments	**Date**	**Signature**

Student identification number: S 1

Appendix E: Contextualised Programme Review Standards

Type of Standard: Academic
Subject focus – curricula, qualifications, learning outcomes, professional authority, and quality values vary across institutions.
The curriculum is organised to provide academic progression year-on-year, suitable workloads for students, and it balances between knowledge and skills, and between theory and practice. The syllabus (i.e. curricular content, level, and outcomes) meets the norms and standards of the particular disciplinary field and award and is accurately documented in terms of breadth, depth, and relevance, with appropriate references to current and recent professional practice and published research findings. Intended learning outcomes are expressed in the programme and course specifications and are aligned with the mission and programme aims and objectives and are appropriate for the level of the degree. There are course/module ILOs appropriate to the aims and levels of the course/module and they are mapped to the programme and courses. Graduate attributes are clearly stated in terms of aims and achieved learning outcomes for the programme and for each course and are ensured through the use of assessment which is valid and reliable in terms of the learning outcomes. Where relevant to the programme, there is an element of work-based learning that contributes to the achievement of learning and receives credits and there is a clear assessment policy. There are mechanisms to ensure the alignment of assessment with outcomes to assure the academic standards of the graduates. There are mechanisms in place to measure the effectiveness of the programme's internal moderation system for setting assessment instruments and grading student achievement. There is a policy and procedures for the development of new programmes to ensure the programmes are relevant, fit for purpose, and comply with existing regulations. There are arrangements for annual internal programme evaluation and implementation of recommendations for improvement. Where appropriate for the programme type, there is continuous scoping of the labour market to ensure that programmes are up-to-date. Where assessed work-based learning takes place, there is a policy and procedure to manage the process and its assessment to assure that the learning experience is appropriate in terms of content and level to meet the intended learning outcomes. Mentors are assigned to students to monitor and review this. Suitable assessment arrangements which include policies and procedures are in place, and known to all academics and students, to assess students' achievements. There are arrangements for periodic reviews of the programmes that incorporate both internal and external feedback, and mechanisms are in place to implement recommendations for improvement. There is a functioning programme advisory board with clear terms of reference and it includes discipline experts, employers and alumni and its feedback is used systematically to inform programme decision-making.

Type of Standard: Managerial
Institutional focus – policies and procedures, managerial authority, quality values are invariant across institutions.
There is a clear academic planning framework for the programme which shows that there are clear aims that indicate the broad purposes of providing the programme and are related to the mission of Arabian Gulf Polytechnic and the faculty and its strategic goals. There are clear lines of accountability with regard to the management of the programme. There is a functioning management information system to enable informed decision-making. There are policies and procedures, consistently implemented, to ensure security of learner records and accuracy of results. Physical and material resources are adequate in number, space, style and equipment; these include classrooms, teaching halls, laboratories and other study spaces; IT facilities, library and learning resources. There is a tracking system to determine the usage of laboratories, e-learning and e-resources and it allows for evaluation of the utilisation of these resources. Assessment policies and procedures are consistently implemented, monitored and subject to regular review and are made available to students. There are procedures which are consistently implemented for the external moderation of assessment and there are mechanisms to allow for feedback on assessment in line with assessed courses. Arabian Gulf Polytechnic's policies, procedures and regulations are applied effectively and consistently across the faculty. The programme is managed in a way that demonstrates effective and responsible leadership. There is a clear quality assurance management system, in relation to the programmes within the faculty that is consistently implemented, monitored and evaluated. There is a clear admission policy which is periodically revised and the admission requirements are appropriate for the level and type of the programme.

Type of Standard: Pedagogic
Teaching focus – facilitation skills and competencies, the influence of staff developers, and quality values are invariant across institutions.
Faculty members and others who contribute to the programme are fit for purpose: • There are sufficient staff to teach the programme • There is an appropriate range of academic qualifications and specialisations • Where appropriate there is relevant robust professional experience • The profile of recent and current academic research, teaching or educational development • Matches the programme aims and curricular content There are clear procedures for the recruitment, appraisal, promotion and retention of academic staff that are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner and arrangements are in place for the induction of newly appointed academic staff. There are a range of teaching methods in line with Problem based learning approach. Academics and support staff have an understanding of teaching practice and their role in ensuring effectiveness of provision. The arrangements for identifying continuing professional development needs for all staff and meeting them are effective. These are monitored and evaluated. There is opportunity for practical learning experiences on campus and in the workplace. The principles and methods used for teaching in the programme support the attainment of aims and intended learning outcomes. The learning environment is conducive to expanding the student experiences and knowledge through informal learning. The learning opportunities are equivalent to opportunities regionally and internationally.

Type of Standard: Employability-focused
Output focus – graduate standards, learning outcomes, employment and professional authorities, and quality values are both variant and invariant across institutions.
There is clear focus on producing work ready graduates Gradates developed a range of critical thinking skills through a Problem-Based Learning approach High rates of employment post-graduation and a significant proportion of graduates who are entrepreneurs. Producing graduates with the skills necessary for the needs of the community locally, regionally and internationally. Graduates success in their career and career progression over time. The level of achievement of graduates meets programme aims and intended learning outcomes, as demonstrated in final results, grade distribution and confirmation by internal and external independent scrutiny.

Type of Standard: Learner-focused
Student focus – academic achievement, personal development, and quality values are both variant and invariant across institutions.
There is a focus on a learner-centred approach in the learning and teaching practice, and teaching and learning are seen as the core business. There are services available to local, regional and international learners. The profile of admitted students matches the programme aims and available resources. There is appropriate student support available in terms of library, laboratories, e-learning and e-resources, guidance and support care. Arrangements are in place for orienting newly admitted students (including those transferring from other institutions with direct entry after Year 1). There is an appropriate academic support system in place to track students' progress which identifies students at risk of failure; and provides interventions for at-risk students. The level of achievements as expressed in samples of students' assessed work is appropriate to the level and type of the programme in Bahrain, regionally and internationally. The ratios of admitted students to successful graduates including rates of progression, retention, year-on-year progression, length of study and first destinations of graduates, are consonant with those achieved on equivalent programmes in Bahrain, regionally and internationally. The structured comments collected from, for example, students' and other stakeholders' surveys are analysed and the outcomes are used to inform decisions on programmes with mechanisms for improvement and are made available to the stakeholders.

Appendix F: Student Input to Programme Review

Input from Current Students: Teaching and Learning

Teaching Survey

Students are asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with the following items:

- I am clear about the aims for this course

This Tutor:

- Clearly explains ideas and instructions to me
- Provides activities that help me learn
- Encourages me to take part in class discussions
- Treats students with respect
- Encourages me to take responsibility for my learning
- Checks with me to make sure I am learning
- Gives me feedback that I can use to help me learn
- Assesses fairly
- Shows a good understanding of the subject
- Makes the subject interesting to me
- Provides opportunities for me to develop my English language skills in this subject
- Relates class activities and tasks to work-related needs

Open-ended questions

- The most important things that the tutor does to help me learn are:
- The most important things that this tutor could do to help improve my learning are:

Source: Institutional Quality Survey Framework 2014

Course Survey

Students are asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with the following items:

- I understand why this course is part of my studies
- I understand how this course leads to higher level study
- I know what I need to do to pass this course
- The course is well organised
- The amount of work for this course is manageable
- Assessments are related to what is studied in this course
- I have been able to contact staff when I needed to
- The teaching materials (handouts, textbooks, workbooks) for this course are useful
- The equipment (computers, laboratory equipment etc.) for this course are available when needed
- The course resources on Moodle are useful
- The classrooms used for this course are suitable
- The library has good resources for this course

Open-ended questions

- The best things about the course are:
- The most important things that could be improved in this course are:

Source: Institutional Quality Survey Framework 2014

Input from Current Students: Student Services and Experience

Student Experience Survey

Students are asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with the following items:

- The quality of teaching is satisfactory
- The programme I am studying meets my expectations
- The facilities and infrastructure (buildings and general campus environment) are satisfactory
- Equipment and technology (computers, internet access, audio-visual equipment) are satisfactory
- Student support (e.g. library, learning support, mentoring) is satisfactory
- Student services (e.g. administration, enrolments, careers advice) are satisfactory
- Overall polytechnic staff performance is satisfactory

Overall, I have found Arabian Gulf Polytechnic to be a high performing organisation
Open-ended Questions
The best thing about studying at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is:
The most important thing that could be done to improve Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is:

Source: Institutional Quality Survey Framework 2014

Student Services Survey

For each service students are asked to indicate how important it is and their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

- Academic Advising
- Campus Security
- Career and Employment Centre
- Class Representative
- Counselling Services
- Disability Services
- Health and Wellness Centre
- ICT Services
- Learning Difference Services
- Library
- Mentoring
- Registry
- Student Activities
- Student Council
- Wireless Computer Network

Open-ended Question

- The most important thing that could be done to improve Student Services at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic is:

Source: Institutional Quality Survey Framework 2014

Input from Labour Market and Alumni

Curriculum Advisory Committee Survey

Committee Members are asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with the following items:

- The Curriculum Advisory Committee meetings are at a time that suits me
- The Curriculum Advisory Committee meets often enough to be effective
- The Curriculum Advisory Committee's purpose is clear to me
- The Polytechnic openly shares information about the programmes with me
- The Polytechnic provides enough information to enable the Curriculum Advisory Committee to be effective
- The Curriculum Advisory Committee informs the Polytechnic of new trends in the industry
- There have been improvements to programmes as a result of the committee's work
- The Polytechnic's programmes are satisfactory
- The Curriculum Advisory Committee is able to represent industry adequately
- I am satisfied with the Polytechnic's processes for engagement with industry
- Maintaining representation on the Curriculum Advisory committee is important for my industry
- The Polytechnic acknowledges the contribution I make to the committee

Open-ended questions

- Things that this Curriculum Advisory Committee does well are:
- The most important things that could be done to improve the curriculum advisory process are:

Source: Institutional Quality Survey Framework 2014

Alumni Survey

Alumni are asked to indicate their perceptions with the following items:

- How long is it since you graduated with your most recent qualification?
- How easy has it been to find a job since graduating?
- Has your qualification helped in looking for a job?
- Are you currently looking for a job?
- Are you currently in paid work?
- If you are working, is your job related to your qualification?
- Please indicate your current salary range
- Please indicate the response that best reflects your opinion. (level of agreement/disagreement)
    - The programme content I studied covered knowledge and skills expected by industry
    - The employability skills (communication, teamwork, problem solving creativity and initiative) I developed at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic prepared me to enter the workforce
    - The technology and equipment available to me at the Polytechnic was appropriate for training me for industry
    - I am satisfied with the standard of teaching I received
    - Overall, from my experience at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic, staff performance was satisfactory
    - The Polytechnic's administration process were satisfactory
    - The student services that were available to me at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic were satisfactory
    - People with qualifications from Arabian Gulf Polytechnic are sought after by employers
    - I am confident to recommend studying at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic to others
    - Arabian Gulf Polytechnic delivers what it promises
    - Overall, I found Arabian Gulf Polytechnic to be a high performing organisation

    Open-ended Questions
    - If you are working please write the title of your position in the box below
    - The best thing about studying at Arabian Gulf Polytechnic was:
    - The most important things Arabian Gulf Polytechnic could improve are:

Source: Institutional Quality Survey Framework 2014