



Executive Summary

Renewal of Institutional Licensure Al Qasimia University Sharjah

March 1-4, 2020

An External Review Team (hereafter ERT) formed by the Commission for Academic Accreditation visited the Al Qasimia University (AQU) from 1-4 March 2020 to evaluate its Self-Study (hereafter the *Self-Study*) for Renewal of Institutional Licensure. The exit interview was held on 4 March 2020.

AQU was established in 2013 by the Emiri Decree of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council - Ruler of Sharjah; With a vision to be a beacon of science and knowledge and to accept students from all over the world, and to be guided by the foundations and principles of Islam and be open to the world to consolidate the values of dialogue between religions, cultures, and civilizations. His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah has allocated buildings and equipment for AQU to fulfil the purpose for which it was established and to achieve the desired goals of its vision and mission.

AQU has five colleges: College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, College of Arts and Humanities, College of Economics and Administration, College of Communication, and College of the Holy Qur'an). It offers four accredited programs at the bachelor's degree level in addition to a 5th program that is still under initial accreditation procedures.

The number of students currently registered at the university is 1374, distributed among its five colleges. The total number of faculty members holding a doctorate degree is 34 with students to faculty ratio of 40:1. The highest student-to-faculty ratio is in the College of the Holy Qur'an which is about 48:1.

The ERT appreciates the AQU's noble goals and objectives in teaching Arabic language and literature, and promoting and spreading Islamic culture to the world, especially among non-Arab societies. It also appreciates its tireless work in spreading the Islamic message of tolerance among all nations. Undoubtedly, this gives a distinct characteristic to AQU, but at the same time it constitutes an ethical mission for its administration, faculty members, and administrators, in order to fulfil the obligation of this trust and do well by it. The ERT also highly appreciates the continuous and unlimited support provided by His Highness Sheikh

Sultan Al Qasimi to the university in providing all means to secure an appropriate environment for teaching, learning, and creativity for students, all at his own expense, so that these students when they graduate become the best ambassadors for AQU and the best advocates who carry its message to their communities.

The ERT found several positive points that should be commended, including:

- The noble goals and objectives of AQU, to promote and disseminate Islamic culture and the Arabic language in non-Arab societies, and to carry the Islamic message of tolerance to the world by attracting and educating students from all countries, offering them complete educational scholarships, and enabling them to return to their countries as ambassadors of Islam who are acquired the necessary sciences, knowledge, and skills to best carry this message.
- The infrastructure and the distinguished physical and learning resources that AQU provides to its students, including classrooms, computer laboratories, language learning laboratories, equipment, and computer software. This is in addition to the excellent students' dorms that provide them with a comfortable environment for academic achievement.
- Effective management and administration that is keen to follow up on the various activities and provide the appropriate educational environment for students of different origins and ethnicities.
- The loyalty of the faculty and administrative staff, and their commitment to using and employing modern methods and techniques in teaching.
- The ERT also praises the high morals of students and their feeling of belonging to the university and their respect for its cadres, which confirms the good relationship between different members of the university family.

The ERT would like to note some concerns that must be addressed to improve AQU and enhance the effectiveness of its administrative units and colleges. The ERT's main observations can be summarized as follows:

- While the *Self-Study* and its appendices refer to the AQU's organizational structure, the ERT found that some positions are still vacant. For example, AQU does not have a Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs despite what the Policies and Procedures Manual refers to this position in many documents. Also, there is no Dean of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, nor a Dean of Student Affairs.
- The lack of a clear and complete strategic plan, as the previous plan expired at the beginning of 2020. Based on the strategic plan, an operational plan must be formulated with measurable performance indicators to follow up on the achievement of the strategic objectives. The ERT also found no evidence that the current plan had been approved by the Board of Trustees.
- The lack of Manuals and Handbooks that are clearly consistent to the requirements of academic accreditation, particularly the Student Handbook and the Faculty and Staff Handbook. These should be available on the university's website in multiple languages that allow students from all over the world to view them as one of the means of recruitment. This also deprive faculty members and employees of transparent access to information, regulations, instructions, and procedures to which they are subject. The

ERT also noted that the *Self-Study* includes some inaccuracies, contradictions, and deficiencies. For example, it mentions in one of its paragraphs that the university has a branch in Khorfakkan which is not the case. The *Self-Study* also mentions that new students are subject to a level exam in four subjects, although he/she is subject to only two exams.

- Regarding faculty members, the ERT noted that the teaching load for the majority of faculty exceeds the maximum limits allowed by the *Standards*. In addition, special topic courses are not considered when calculating the load. The ERT also noted that some contracts are not consistent with the regulations stated in the AQU Policies and Procedures Manual, nor with the requirements of the *Standards*. There are some faculty members who are contracted for one semester at a time, for several successive semesters, which deprives them of many privileges that are enjoyed by their colleagues. Most of the permanent contracts do not exceed two years, so faculty loses the sense of job security.
- The lack of a clear policy to encourage research, publication, and attendance of scientific conferences by faculty members. Although this policy is presented in the annexes, it is not distributed to the faculty.
- The ERT found that AQU campus lacks sports and recreational facilities for male and female students. These facilities are necessary in a university that hosts many of its students residing in dorms inside the campus.
- The ERT stresses the need to linking graduates to the labour market through direct supervision of their training in their senior year, measuring their performance in the workplaces, and communicating with them even after they return to their countries.

The ERT makes its recommendations in a spirit of constructive engagement, with the aim of ensuring that the *Standards* are met, and to aid AQU in its desired objective to renew its licensure and achieves its ambitious mission.