



هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب  
Education & Training Quality Authority  
Kingdom of Bahrain - مملكة البحرين

# **Directorate of Vocational Reviews**

## **Review Report**

**The American Cultural and Educational Centre  
(ACEC)  
Juffair  
Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Date Reviewed: 22-25 January 2017**

**VO068-C3-R049**

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## Introduction

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The Directorate Vocational Reviews (DVR), which is a part of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), conducted this review over four days by a team of seven reviewers. For this review, reviewers observed lessons and other related activities, analysed data about the courses and qualifications that learners achieve, examined learners' written and other work, examined documents and the materials provided by the Centre and met learners, parents, teachers, management and support staff.

In the previous review, the overall effectiveness of The American Cultural and Educational Centre (ACEC) was judged as good as well as all aspects.

This Report summarises reviewers' findings and their recommendations about what the Centre should do to improve.

## Grading scale

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Outstanding	1	Good	2	Satisfactory	3	Inadequate	4
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## Table of review judgements awarded

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Main Question	Judgement
Learners' achievement	Outstanding (1)
Quality of teaching / training and assessment	Good (2)
Quality of programmes	Outstanding (1)
Quality of support and guidance	Outstanding (1)
Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding (1)
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Outstanding (1)</b>
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding (1)</b>

## Review judgements

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### Overall effectiveness

**How effective is the provision in raising learners' achievement and meeting the range of learners' and stakeholders' needs?**

#### **Grade: Outstanding (1)**

The overall effectiveness of the ACEC is outstanding, as are the other aspects except for the quality of teaching which is judged as good. Most learners develop highly significant skills and competencies relevant to their level, with the majority achieving high proficiency rates. The vast majority of learners are highly self-motivated, enjoy their learning experience and show high confidence in completing given tasks.

ACEC teachers are highly qualified and use their professional experience to enrich teaching. Teaching is engaging and interactive, with teachers deploying a variety of teaching methods and activities which succeed in engaging and motivating the vast majority of learners in the good and better lessons. However, in the less effective lessons a few learners are not very engaged and the challenges used to stimulate their higher order thinking skills are not sufficient. Teachers assess learners' progress rigorously and provide them with constructive feedback. The Centre has a highly effective approach to assess and evaluate learners' prior attainment and place them at the right level, with an effective and reliable system for planning, delivering, assessing, moderating and verifying their achievement. Achievement data is always kept and frequently analysed as the basis for further improvement. Courses match learners' needs and abilities, and the Centre is responsive to stakeholders and learners' specific requirements. The courses are very well planned, structured, resourced and regularly reviewed and updated, while being enriched with an effective and engaging range of extra-curricular activities. Learners receive highly effective and well-structured support and guidance throughout their course to help them achieve the best outcomes. The Centre's environment is pleasant and safe.

Leadership and management are focused on improving learners' achievement and the quality of the provision. The operational plan is based on regular and accurate evaluation of practices. ACEC management selects teachers meticulously and monitors their performance carefully to ensure continuous quality improvement. Quality Assurance (QA) arrangements are rigorous and consistently applied.

## **Capacity to improve**

### **How strong is the provider's capacity to improve the quality of learning?**

#### **Grade: Outstanding (1)**

ACEC has an outstanding capacity to improve. Since the last BQA review its provision has been hugely improved through a range of development initiatives such as changes in oral assessment methodologies and introducing compulsory writing lessons to make assessment methods more systematic, consistent and rigorous. This has a positive impact on improving learners' achievement. Other significant developments include the application of a firmer policy on attendance and punctuality and introducing new levels such as Pre 99 A and B based on learners' needs and their abilities. The Centre has also broadened the range of its offerings by adding new courses such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) preparation course and Business English courses. A new series has been selected for senior learners, with the Centre being in the process of structuring and planning the lessons alongside the methods of assessment before introducing it to the learners. Other improvements include expansion in the learning resources, which are utilised very effectively by teachers to enrich the learning experience. The Centre has reviewed all policies and procedures and introduced others, such as those relevant to course design, review and updating, and transferring learners' levels. There is also a plan to further broaden the range of courses by offering Business Writing with progression levels, and more specialised courses in soft skills. It is intended to certify staff in first aid.

The Centre has a comprehensive database which contains all the information related to the learners and their achievements. A rigorous quality assurance system is in place, with capable human resources to carry out improvement plans as they arise. Enrolment numbers were maintained between 2014 and 2015 but decreased in 2016, though a high repeat business is maintained. The Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) is detailed, informative and critical, and identifies a range of improvement actions.

## **Learners' achievement**

### **How well do learners achieve?**

#### **Grade: Outstanding (1)**

Most learners consistently acquire and develop highly effective English skills and competencies, with the majority of them achieving a high level of proficiency. This shows up well in the standards of their work and achievements, along with the progress they make from

their starting points. Only a very few learners do not master their language skills as required upon course completion, specifically in writing. Learners' achievement is accurately measured through different methods of summative and formative assessment which are closely linked to course objectives. The Centre has a well-defined grading scheme with a clear rubric for the different levels of English skills; this is implemented constantly and uniformly across all courses. Most learners achieve their course objectives and the certifications they aim for in a timely manner and successfully proceed to the next level, with an overall achievement rate of 93.6%. The General English courses, which constitute 80% of the total enrolment, are offered in three progression levels – Juniors, Seniors and Adults. The achievement rates across all these levels have been sustained at a high level for the past three years, though the achievement rates in the Adults and Juniors levels are slightly better than the Seniors level.

Learners' progress is continuously monitored and learners are provided with comprehensive support to ensure that they progress well and reach their full potential. From the performance records, over half of the learners make significant progress throughout the course while most other learners make at least sufficient progress considering their background and level of entry. The majority of learners advance through the levels and maintain their high levels of achievement.

From the lessons observed and scrutiny of learners' work, most learners are able to work very well independently and collaboratively when given the opportunities. They show a high level of confidence in completing given activities, though a few still require further support from their teachers. The vast majority of learners are self-motivated and highly enthusiastic towards their learning and are eager to demonstrate their understanding and present their work. The majority of learners reflect on their learning and extend what they have been taught during lessons by participating in discussion and questioning their teachers and colleagues. Almost all learners and parents interviewed find the courses very beneficial with a positive contribution to improving language skills and enhancing self-confidence.

ACEC has a detailed and explicit attendance and punctuality policy which is rigorously implemented. It is explained to learners at the beginning of their studies. Most learners attend their courses on time, though there are a few cases of learners arriving late.

## **The quality of provision**

### **How effective are teaching/training and assessment in promoting learning?**

#### **Grade: Good (2)**

Most teachers are qualified, with relevant subject knowledge and teaching experience. This is evident in lessons, where they demonstrate high proficiency in English, provide accurate explanations including real-life examples, and respond knowledgeably to learners' questions. Teachers use standardised, very detailed and well-structured lesson plans which are informed by prior and continuous assessment of learners. Lessons are extremely well-planned, focusing on pre-defined clear objectives which are always shared with learners; most of them have effective time and class management, and appropriate pacing. Teachers modify most lesson plans across all levels by adding enrichment activities to cater for the differing abilities of learners.

Teachers use a variety of effective teaching approaches to stimulate learners' interests, motivating and engaging them productively in lessons. These include pair work, group activities, questioning techniques, discussion, role play and learning through games. These widen learners' knowledge, skills and understanding. The vast majority of the lessons observed are learner-centred with differentiated activities, where a significant minority of learners participate extremely well throughout the lessons. However, in the less effective lessons, a few learners do not engage well. Teachers accommodate learners' varying needs effectively, with sufficient challenge and individual support. They usually use effective follow-up questioning techniques and relevant activities to develop learners' understanding, build self-confidence and stimulate their critical thinking. However, in a minority of lessons the challenges provided to learners to develop their higher order thinking skills are less than sufficient. Teachers occasionally use different strategies to promote learners' self- and life-long learning within different contexts of learners' personal interests, particularly in the General English Access programme. The available learning resources and materials are used effectively to promote learners' understanding and enrich their learning experience.

Accurate and rigorous summative and formative assessment methods are used to evaluate learners' understanding and measure their achievement of course objectives throughout the course. These include relevant mid-term examinations, final tests, assessments of writing and class activities. Clear rubrics are implemented in all courses. Teachers accurately maintain and regularly update records on learners' performance throughout their period of study. They provide excellent verbal feedback to learners during lessons and constructive written feedback with their mid-term results and on the final performance reports. The remarks provided are critical, which helps learners to know their strengths and areas for improvement.

## **How well do programmes meet the needs and interests of learners and stakeholders?**

### **Grade: Outstanding (1)**

The Centre has effective practices to gather and analyse learners' educational needs through learners', stakeholders' and teachers' feedback. The results are used to offer a wide range of English programmes to suit learners' ages and meet their needs. The General English programmes for Juniors, Seniors and Adults have levels A, B, C and D which allow learners to progress seamlessly through the programme levels. As a result of understanding the educational needs of their stakeholders the Centre has made significant changes to the English programmes, such as introducing new introductory levels (Pre 99 A and B), the IELTS Preparation Course and writing skills development lessons for all courses. Customisation is very effective as industry-specific content is designed and delivered. However, ACEC data-gathering does not always address the more comprehensive educational needs.

There is a clear and formal mechanism for designing, approving, reviewing and updating the courses, which is very effectively implemented. The Centre conducts a regular and highly effective curriculum review; each course's components, such as the methods of assessment, lesson plans and teaching methodologies, are regularly updated. These reviews result in identifying areas of difficulty that learners face and also address any issues pertaining to the courses. For instant, the oral assessment criteria were modified to make the assessment more systematic, fair and rigorous. Courses are very well-structured and rigorously planned. They have clear scheduling of tasks, with assessment being manageable and the information delivered and taught in a sequence that encourages a progressive acquisition of knowledge and skills. Course outlines are detailed and are shared with learners and stakeholders. The American English curriculum is taught and a range of internationally recognised, attractive and highly relevant course books are used which are well-suited for the target learners' ages and needs.

Course content is reinforced with a range of highly useful learning resources and teaching aids to support the different course curriculum, including educational games, books, magazines and level-related enrichment activities. However, the current textbooks used for the senior levels is not very user-friendly and steps to resolve this issue are already on track. The courses at ACEC are well-supported with a constructive and engaging range of extra-curricular activities that support further development of learners' language skills and impact significantly on learners' achievement, particularly in the General English ACCESS programmes. These include for example, spelling bees competitions, creative writing and discussions' sessions with expert or native speakers to further develop communication skills.

The Centre has highly effective access and entry requirements to all the courses. These are implemented by using different placement tests with specific criteria to ensure that learners are placed accurately within levels according to their age and language abilities. Learners' levels and skills are re-assessed after the second lesson from the start of the course and levels are adjusted appropriately if needed. Also, the Centre has policies and procedures in place to allow learners to accelerate within the course if required, for which the Quick Progression Examination is effectively utilised.

## **How well are learners supported and guided?**

### **Grade: Outstanding (1)**

ACEC has a systematic and comprehensive mechanism to support and guide learners throughout their learning process in order to achieve the best learning outcomes, with effective advice on behavioural or personal matters. The support provided significantly influences the levels of learners' achievement and improves their language skills. There are a significant number of learners where the support provided helped them to successfully achieve their certificates with high marks having made outstanding progress. Learners and stakeholders have access to extensive information through discussions on opportunities for progression, a detailed and attractive website, very useful brochures, newsletters and social media networks. The teachers, management and administrative staff are extremely supportive, friendly and have close relationships with the learners. On the first day of the course, learners receive an induction session to familiarise them with aspects related to their learning. This includes holistic information about the course regulations, method of assessments, and health and safety arrangements.

The learners are provided with well-focused support and guidance throughout their course, with individualised support being provided to those with lower abilities to enable them to achieve dramatically better outcomes. Where needed, those learners who miss any lessons are provided with very well-structured and dedicated make-up classes, and have also the flexibility to attend with other groups of the same level through a systematic 'visiting learner' arrangement with their performance being effectively monitored across all the lessons they attend. Continuous support is provided to teachers and learners by the assistant teachers, who attend regular lessons whenever needed. A motivational reward system 'student of the session' is in place, where hardworking and self-motivated learners are rewarded with certificates of appreciation.

Very effective communication is maintained with stakeholders to keep them informed about learners' performance throughout the course. The Centre closely follows up with them to discuss any issues of attendance, behaviour or performance that may arise. Learners' progress is closely monitored by the teachers and the learners are regularly updated on their progress. Thorough progress reports are shared with them which indicate clearly what learners need to

do to improve further. Fit-for-purpose arrangements and practices are in place to identify and support learners with special educational needs. Policies and procedures are in place and are effectively implemented. Recently, the Centre developed a policy on supporting and accommodating learners with disabilities, though this policy is not fully comprehensive.

Arrangements for the delivery and scheduling of the courses are very highly flexible to suit the needs of learners and stakeholders. The learning environment is fit-for-purpose and well equipped, including inspiring classrooms with relevant educational posters and displays of learners' work. The learners have access to a range of educational and leisure reading books in the library, which are used effectively by the teachers to enrich the learning experience. However, a few of the classrooms are less spacious and have lighting or ventilation issues.

## **Leadership, management and governance**

### **How effective are leadership, management and governance in raising achievement and improving the quality of the provision?**

#### **Grade: Outstanding (1)**

ACEC has highly effective strategic planning with well-defined vision and mission statements. A specific set of operational targets focuses on continuous improvement of learners' achievement and raising the standards of quality of the Centre's offerings. This plan is based on the rigorous self-evaluation processes carried out by the Centre and translated into an effective and detailed operational plan with specific goals that are cascaded into clear actions with responsibilities and timelines; it is thoroughly monitored on a yearly-basis. The self-evaluation process is critical and systematic; several very constructive self-evaluation reviews have been carried out and the management team regularly evaluates its practices, with the outcomes of each end-of-course review being carefully considered in planning for the next course. This shows up well in the SEF provided for the purpose of this review, which is critical and provides detailed information about operations. The Centre's organisational structure is fit-for-purpose and suits the nature of the operation and meets its aims. Staff and senior management are qualified and have relevant experience. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Governance arrangements are in place and contribute positively to the Centre's operation and development. The Board members are kept aware of the overall situation at ACEC through regular meetings.

The Centre has comprehensive arrangements to quality assure its provision. It maintains and continuously updates the teachers' manual, which contains all the relevant and detailed policies and procedures and which explains in-depth the teachers' responsibilities within the Centre. This manual is used very effectively by the management, staff and teachers. The

verification and moderation processes are rigorous, covering lesson plans, the quality and marking of the assessment tools, performance records and the quality of the feedback provided; they are consistently implemented across all courses. Learners' prior attainment is always measured, with placement tests being carried out to place new learners at the right level, while the pre-level assessment is conducted on the first lesson of any course to assess the pre-level language skills for all new and returned learners. Learners' achievement and progress on all courses are meticulously monitored by the management. The Centre has an effective learners' achievement tracking system, where accurate records of learners' performance are maintained, aggregated, analysed and closely followed-up. Trend analysis over time is sufficiently carried out to inform decision making, with the outcomes also being used to initiate improvements.

The ACEC management selects teachers rigorously and monitors their performance carefully. Recruits are highly capable and most of them are qualified part-time teachers. They are deployed effectively according to the different levels of the courses and receive a highly effective induction. The performance of teachers and class assistants is monitored very effectively through the lesson observation process; scheduled classroom observations and walk-throughs observations are used. The completed forms are very informative, with constructive written feedback being provided to teachers to help their further improvement. Follow-up visits are carried out promptly when needed. Teachers are regularly guided on how to improve through meetings, and their training needs are assessed and acted upon through knowledge sharing sessions and spreading good practice on quality assurance and training methodologies. Performance appraisal is in place and a number of staff are provided with suitable training opportunities.

The Centre maintains effective links with parents and relevant parts of the local community. Learners' and parents' feedback is systematically collected, aggregated, thoroughly analysed and issues raised are immediately addressed. However, the survey form used for parents is not very relevant, and the employers' responses are infrequent.

The management has effective arrangements in place to ensure the well-being of learners and staff, with a healthy and conducive learning environment being maintained. The Centre has an effective health and safety policy and detailed evacuation procedures, with all the other essentials of health and safety measures, are in place.

## The provider's key strengths

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- The acquisition and development of highly effective skills and competencies which improve learners' levels.
- The accurate assessment methods carried out to evaluate learners' understanding, with highly rigorous verification and moderation processes.
- The effectively structured, planned and regularly reviewed courses that match the specific needs of learners and stakeholders.
- The comprehensive support and guidance provided to learners during their learning journey, helping them to achieve better outcomes and obtain high proficiency rates.
- The highly effective strategic planning and the well-structured operational plan based on a critical self-evaluation process.
- The close monitoring of learners' achievement and teachers' performance.

## Recommendations

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In order to improve, ACEC should:

- ensure that effective teaching strategies are spread throughout the Centre.

## Appendix

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### Description of the provision

American Cultural and Educational Centre (ACEC) was established in January 2000 and is licensed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to offer English courses for learners aged six years to adults. It offers internally-accredited general English courses including the ACCESS programmes; these courses are divided into three main categories: Young, Senior and Adults learners. The Centre also offers business English and conversation courses. The courses have progressive levels catering for age groups and learners' abilities. When required the Centre provides a number of preparation courses for other advanced English international certificates such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). It also delivers customised courses developed around employers' particular needs and requirements.

ACEC operates from one Centre located in Juffair. It is owned by two members who form the Board of Directors and is co-managed by a Head of Academic (HoA) who is currently working as Acting Principal. The Centre employs one full-time teacher, a secretary who is also in charge of information technology support, a head registrar who supervises four administrative staff, an accountant and accounts assistant, one security staff, three maintenance and caretaker personnel. All staff members are employed on a full-time basis. A pool of part-time teachers are utilised whenever needed, as is the Head of Academic who takes part in teaching when required.

Since the last BQA review the Centre has enrolled a total of 6,529 learners at various levels. This comprises 2,227 in 2014, 2,124 in 2015 and 1,428 in 2016 to the date of this review. The General English courses make up 80% of the total enrolment for the past three years. Adult General English courses form around 62% of the total enrolment, young people's courses (Junior and Senior learners) make around 17% and 15% respectively. Conversation courses make around 6% and the preparation courses almost 1%.