National Authority for Qualifications &
Quality Assurance of Education & Training

Vocational Review Unit
Review Report

Aptech Computer Education- Bahrain

Manama

Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 24-26 September 2012

Table of Contents

The Vocational Review Unit

The Vocational Review Unit (VRU) is part of the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (NAQQAET) that was officially set up in 2008 as an independent body governed and supervised by the Council of Ministers. Established to raise standards in vocational education and training, the VRU is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the quality of vocational provision, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, establishing success measures, spreading best practice and offering policy advice to key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education.

Reviews are based on the VRU's *Review Framework*, and carried out on providers' premises by teams of carefully selected and highly trained reviewers. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the planning of the review, and to represent them during review team meetings. Reviewers examine a range of evidence before arriving at a series of judgements and awarding grades for the quality of the provision.

Review grades are awarded on a four-point scale:

Grade description	Interpretation
1: Outstanding	This describes provision or outcomes that is/are at least good in all aspects and outstanding in the majority.
2: Good	This describes provision or outcomes that is/are at least satisfactory in all aspects and good in the majority. There may be some particularly successful approaches or outcomes.
3: Satisfactory	This describes a basic level of adequacy. There are no major areas of weakness which substantially affect what learners, or significant groups of learners, achieve. There may be some features which are good.
4: Inadequate	This describes situations where major weaknesses in some areas affect the outcomes for learners and outweigh any strengths in the provision.

Introduction

Description of the provision

Aptech Computer Education (Aptech) was established in 1993 to provide training in Information technology, one of the first private institutes licensed for this purpose by the Ministry of Labour. Aptech is a franchise centre of Aptech Worldwide, an IT training corporation based in India. The institute offers a range of non-accredited and a few externally accredited courses in information technology. Aptech is an approved Microsoft training centre, an ICDL approved training and test centre and an approved Prometric and Pearson Vue test centre.

Aptech premises are located in Zinj, Manama. It is managed by a business manager who reports to a managing director. The institute employs an academic head who supervises two full-time trainers and one part-time trainer. The academic head also works as a full-time trainer. Marketing and customer relations are handled by the business manager and a marketing executive. Aptech also employs an accountant who takes care of administration in addition to accounts, one driver and one office boy.

During the last two years, Aptech enrolled 1429 learners from both public and private sectors, most of whom were sponsored by their employers. The vast majority of courses currently conducted in 2012 are non- accredited; these make up approximately 87 per cent of total enrolment.

Scope of the review

This review was conducted over three days, by a team of four reviewers. During the review, reviewers observed training sessions and other related activities, analysed data about the courses and qualifications learners achieve, examined learners' written and other work, examined documents and the materials provided by the provider and talked with staff, learners, employers and trainers.

In the previous review, Aptech's overall effectiveness was judged as satisfactory. Learners' achievement, the quality of training and courses offered were judged as satisfactory. Support and guidance and the effectiveness of leadership and management were judged as good.

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

Table of review judgments awarded

Overall Effectiveness	
How effective is the provision in raising learners' achievement and meeting the full range of learners' and stakeholders' needs?	**Grade: 3 Satisfactory**
Learners' Achievement	
How well do learners achieve?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory
Quality of Provision	
How effective is teaching and/or training in promoting learning?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory
How well do courses meet the needs and interests of learners and stakeholders?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory
How well are learners supported and guided to achieve better outcomes?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory
Leadership and Management	
How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all students?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Review judgements

Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in raising learners' achievement and meeting the range of learners' and stakeholders' needs?
Grade: 3 Satisfactory

All aspects of Aptech's provision are satisfactory, including its overall effectiveness. The majority of learners make satisfactory progress considering their prior attainment and acquire and develop appropriate knowledge and skills. However, a small number of learners are not yet mastering the required skills upon course completion. Despite trainers being qualified and having command of their specialisms, delivery methods are not always effective in helping learners to reach their full potential. Learners are provided with a range of support activities; however the impact of these is not clearly reflected in learners' achievement. Although trainers provide learners with verbal feedback during lessons, they are not always aware of their progress or what they need to do to improve further. Aptech offers an adequate range of non-accredited and a few externally-accredited courses with progression levels, which generally meet learners' and employers' needs. Courses are appropriately planned and structured to suit the needs of stakeholders and are regularly updated. Although most of the institute's management procedures are in place, some of the current practices are insufficiently rigorous to secure continuous improvement. Day to day activities are managed well.

Aptech has satisfactory capacity to improve. Although overall success rates have slightly decreased on the non-accredited courses, from 93 per cent in 2010 to 91 per cent in 2011 and 90 per cent in 2012, it improved on the externally accredited courses from 51 per cent in 2010 to 53 per cent in 2011 and 59 per cent in 2012, the increase due mainly to the ICDL programme. During the last two years, Aptech management has made adequate improvements to provision which has included maintenance and refurbishment of the premises as well as expanding the range of courses offered by introducing Project Management Professional courses (PMP), International Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) and Service Level Agreement (SLA) in alliance with BTP Technologies Pvt Ltd (India) which provides all the training materials and trainers. Aptech has a plan to introduce English and soft skills courses in response to the outcomes of a recent labour market survey which included their existing clients. Repeat business has been satisfactory over the last three years and is improving. Aptech has sufficient and appropriate resources; staff are suitably qualified and the premises are appropriately equipped. However, the current quality assurance measures, although they provide indicators on the quality of provision, need to be more rigorous to secure continuous improvement.

Learners' achievement

How well do learners achieve?
Grade: 3 Satisfactory

The majority of learners acquire and develop appropriate knowledge and skills in the field of Information Technology (IT) and make satisfactory progress considering their prior attainment. This was evident from the lessons observed and the added-value in terms of differences between learners' pre- and post-course assessment. The majority of learners achieve the external qualifications they are entered for; these courses account for around 13 per cent of the enrolment for 2012. However, pass rates for the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) are approximately 50 per cent for both 2011 and 2012, which are low when compared to other local providers. ICDL learners represent around ten per cent of the total enrollment for the above mentioned years. The majority of learners interviewed found courses useful in their workplace. However, there are a small number of learners who have not yet mastered the relevant skills upon course completion.

Although Learners Performance Data (LPD) shows that the completion rates on the non-accredited courses are high at 91 per cent and 90 per cent in 2011 and 2012 respectively, these rates were not reflected in the lessons observed where levels of learners' understanding and the standard of their practical work were only satisfactory. Although the pre- and post-course assessments used are relevant and suitable to the nature and levels of courses, learners need to score only 40 out of 100 to pass the course which is relatively low. The review team found a number of learners scoring between 40 and 50.

Learners are attentive to their learning although not always self-motivated. In the observed lessons, the majority of learners were able to work independently on the practical exercises, however, a few of them faced difficulties in completing their tasks without the trainer's support. A few learners were able to reflect on how well they were progressing.

Records of attendance are always kept but punctuality is inconsistently recorded among the trainers. From both attendance records and the observed lessons, attendance is satisfactory overall where the vast majority of learners attend on time although in a few instances, learners arrived to their lessons between five to thirty minutes late.

The quality of provision

How effective is teaching and/or training in promoting learning?
Grade: 3 Satisfactory

The majority of the lessons observed were evaluated as satisfactory. Trainers are qualified, certified in their field and have theoretical and practical command of their specialisms. This was reflected in the accurate explanation of concepts, the professional response to learners' questions and the appropriate use of relevant vocational examples. The lessons observed generally started and ended on time and time was managed well enough. However, lesson plans used by trainers, which are based on schemes of work, are insufficiently detailed and do not reflect how individual learners' needs will be catered for. As a result, learners' individual needs are not always accommodated in lessons. In the observed lessons, there were a few cases of more able learners being insufficiently challenged and less able learners needing more support than that provided.

Lessons start by a recapitulation of the previous lesson and the sharing of objectives. In the practical part of lessons, learners are sufficiently engaged either in discussing relevant examples from their workplace or the practical implementation of what is being taught. However, the theory part is more trainer-centred with limited participation and engagement although learners are generally attentive. In the observed lessons, trainers generally check learners' understanding and work and provide appropriate verbal feedback. However, marking of the pre- and post-course assessment is insufficiently rigorous. There are no clear marking schemes used by trainers and written feedback is not provided to learners on how to improve further. Although trainers keep records of pre- and post-course assessment, no records are kept of learners' progress during courses. In addition, learners' work is not subject to any form of internal verification. In the observed lessons, the available resources were used appropriately to promote learning. Computer laboratories are equipped with a sufficient number of stations. The majority of learners interviewed stated that software and hardware are up-to-date.

How well do programmes meet the needs and interests of learners and stakeholders?
Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Aptech offers an adequate range of non-accredited and a few externally-accredited courses in the field of information technology (IT) with progression levels which generally meet learners' and employers' needs. Externally accredited courses include the International Computer Driving License (ICDL), Microsoft Certified IT professional courses such as MCITP 70-640, MCITP 70-642 and MCITP 70-646, Microsoft exchange 2010, SharePoint 2010,

Microsoft Structure Query Language (SQL) Server 2008 in Information Technology, International Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL), Project Management Professional courses (PMP) and a Service Level Agreement (SLA) course in leadership and management. The non-accredited courses include Microsoft Office, Introduction to Computers, Web-page design, Photoshop, Flash and Java. Some of the courses offered have progression levels such as Microsoft Office which has three progression levels (basic, intermediate and advanced) and Java which has basic and advanced levels. The range of courses could though be widened to include Oracle courses, advanced web design, programming and graphic design courses. Courses are appropriately planned and structured to meet the needs of learners and employers although some learners asked for more practical exercises. Courses are regularly updated following IT vendors' revisions or generally by Aptech-Worldwide. Aptech does not itself have any involvement in the planning, reviewing or updating of the available courses as it is a franchise of Aptech-Worldwide. However, with coordination with Aptech-Worldwide, Aptech reschedules the allocated hours to accommodate different learners' needs. Courses are suitably resourced although a few learners stated computers sometimes 'freeze' during examinations. In 2012, Aptech conducted a useful labour market survey which included all existing client organisations and used the outcomes to plan new courses such as English language and other soft skills courses.

How well are learners supported and guided to achieve better outcomes?
Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Aptech trainers are approachable and cooperative and provide learners with appropriate support. For example, extra free classes are provided to support less able learners, examination preparation and mock examinations are provided, examination dates are rescheduled, and complimentary online access to practice the ITIL examination is arranged. Learners are also provided with the opportunity to repeat courses within four months from the starting day of the course and are given rewards for their good attendance and performance. However, despite this range of support provided, it is not always effective in helping learners reach their full potential.

The provider maintains appropriate communication with relevant employers and is responsive to their enquiries. Employers are regularly updated on their employees' attendance during the course; however, performance reports sent to employers upon course completion include only the pre- and post-course assessment results with the overall attendance rate but do not include learners' performance during the course. Although trainers provide informal feedback to learners during lessons, learners are not always aware of their progress or what they need to do to improve further.

Basic advice is provided to learners on course selection; learners and employers receive sufficient information about the courses offered and progression levels. Stakeholders have

access to appropriate course information with adequate leaflets and brochures available for them. However, the provider's website is basic and lacks the required course information. Appropriate and updated course content and outlines are available in advance although a few have no clear course objectives. These are always provided to stakeholders in advance.

The provider's learning environment is fit for purpose with sufficient computer laboratories and testing rooms which are appropriately equipped with learning resources and visual aids. Aptech has a dedicated prayer room and a suitable refreshment area. Most stakeholders interviewed appreciate the provider's flexibility in the delivery arrangements of courses and timings to suit the needs of learners and employers.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?
Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Leadership and management is satisfactory overall. Although most relevant management procedures are in place, some of the current practices are insufficiently rigorous to secure continuous quality improvements. The management structure is appropriate considering the numbers enrolled and the range of courses offered. Vision and mission statements are clear and shared with staff, time-scaled objectives are identified and these place appropriate focus on improvement. However, action planning and progress monitoring is only done informally.

Although data on learners' achievement are kept, trends over time are insufficiently analysed to inform decision making. Currently Aptech oversees the overall annual pass rates but not pass rates per course which does not provide a sufficiently detailed picture of learners' achievement. Qualified and experienced trainers are recruited and suitably deployed, including from overseas. Their performance is mainly monitored through learners' feedback. Internal lesson observations are only occasional and not at all for the international trainers. Furthermore, the completed lesson observation forms do not always emphasise areas for development. However, trainers are provided with appropriate opportunities for upgrading their subject knowledge and professional certification.

Relevant pre-course assessment is conducted on most courses. The outcomes are used to place learners at the appropriate level or to set a starting point to measure the added-value between the pre- and post-course assessment grades. However, they are not used in lesson

planning to ensure the accommodation of individual learners' needs, an area for development identified in the lessons observed.

Learners' views and feedback are sought through an end-of-course evaluation, then aggregated and analysed. Employers' views are gathered quarterly either through a client feedback form or verbally by telephone. However, relevant issues are not always addressed such as providing learners with more practical exercises, an issue frequently stated by learners in their feedback forms as well as in the interviews conducted. Health and safety policies, procedures and practices are appropriate to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for learners and staff. The Aptech self-evaluation form (SEF) refers to relevant evidence but the grades are overestimated and the identified areas for development are not always relevant.

Aptech maintains appropriate links with stakeholders and other training providers. The institute communicates appropriately with employers through telephone calls and occasionally by marketing staff visits. At the beginning of 2012, Aptech conducted a survey on current clients' views and used the feedback to plan for new courses. In addition, the institute signed an agreement with BTP Technologies Pvt Ltd., a company incorporated in India, to provide courses like Infrastructure Technology Information Library (ITIL) and project management. In addition, Aptech launched its Corporate Social Responsibility Project in 20012 which provided subsidised courses to charity organisations such as the Bahrain Deaf Society.

The provider's key strengths

- Qualified and certified trainers who have effective command of their specialisms

- Appropriate and regularly updated courses which meet learners' and employers' needs

- Highly flexible course timings which suit the needs of learners and employers.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Aptech should:

- improve learners' achievement by:

  o improving success rate on the ICDL programme

  o ensuring that all learners make sufficient progress and are sufficiently updated and guided on how to improve.

- improve the quality of training by:

  o planning lessons more effectively using prior and continuous assessment to ensure better accommodation of all learners' individual needs

  o ensuring that assessment is rigorous and informed by an effective moderation and verification process.

- improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:

  o ensuring that trends in learners' achievement are monitored over time to inform decision making

  o enhancing the current lesson observation system to be more regular and critical to ensure continuous improvements in the quality of training.