هيئة ضمان جودة التعليم و التدريب
Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training

Vocational Review Unit

Repeat Review Report

Aptech Computer Education
Manama
Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 18 – 20 January 2010

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The Vocational Review Unit

The Vocational Review Unit (VRU) is part of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET), an independent body set up under Royal Decree No.32 of 2008 amended by Royal Decree No. 6 of 2009. 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 five-point scale:

Grade description	Interpretation
1: Outstanding	This describes provision or outcomes that is/are at least good in all or nearly all aspects and is/are exemplary or exceptional in many.
2: Good	This describes provision or outcomes that is/are better than the basic level. Practice will be at least sound and there may be some particularly successful approaches or outcomes.
3: Satisfactory	This describes a basic level of adequacy. No major areas of weakness substantially affect what learners, or significant groups of learners, achieve. Some features may be good.
4: Below satisfactory	This describes situations where major weaknesses in some areas affect the outcomes for learners and outweigh any strengths in the provision.
5: Very weak	This describes situations where there are major weaknesses in all, or almost all, areas and where, as a result, learners are very poorly served.

Introduction

Description of the provision

Aptech Computer Education (Aptech) was established in 1993 to provide training in Information Technology (IT), one of the first private companies licensed for this purpose by the Ministry of Labour. It is a franchisee of Aptech Worldwide, an IT training corporation based in India, which has 3200 centres in 53 countries. Aptech has strategic links with Microsoft, International Computer Driving License (ICDL), Pearson Vue, Prometric and Velsoft. The institute offers a range of vendor qualifications and provider-accredited courses including Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator (MCSA), International Computer Driving License (ICDL), Java and the Diploma in Information Systems Management (DISM). Several new courses were introduced in 2009, notably the Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE) and the Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist (MCTS).

Over the last 17 years, Aptech has trained more than 5800 learners, most of them aged 19 or over, and sponsored by government or corporate bodies, During 2009, 349 learners attended Aptech's courses, The institute has one centre which is located in Manama and operated by a managing director, a business manager, three full time trainers, two part-time trainers, a customer relations administrator, an accountant, a driver and an office boy.

The repeat review

Aptech was first reviewed in January 2009. Although the range of programmes offered, and the level of support for learners, were satisfactory, learners' achievement, the quality of training and the leadership and management of the provision were all below satisfactory. Aptech was therefore subject to a repeat review to seek to ensure that these areas improved to the required standard.

The repeat review comprised two one-day monitoring visits and a final three-day visit. During the repeat review, reviewers observed training sessions, analysed data about the qualifications learners achieve and the courses they complete, and talked with the managing director, trainers, administration and support staff, learners and employers.

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

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Grade 3: Satisfactory

Aptech's provision is now satisfactory overall. Learners' achievement, the effectiveness of training and the range of programmes are satisfactory. The support and guidance provided to learners and the effectiveness of leadership and management in raising learners' achievement are good.

Learners' performance on provider-accredited courses is now rigorously measured, and there are high rates of achievement and retention on these courses. Success rates on the ICDL course, the only externally accredited course run by Aptech, currently stand at 74%, which is satisfactory. Learners' attendance is good, averaging 92%, and their punctuality is satisfactory. Attendance and punctuality are well monitored. Most learners have the basic skills required for their course; they acquire appropriate knowledge and skills, and enjoy their training.

Trainers are appropriately qualified in their fields and have relevant experience. They use a range of suitable training techniques and satisfactorily engage learners' interest and participation. Lessons start, on time, with an appropriate recap of previous learning. The objectives of each session are shared with learners. Lessons are suitably planned and managed. Satisfactory initial assessments for IT and communication are now in place. During lessons, less able learners are sufficiently supported, but the more able are not challenged enough. Learners work and progress are rigorously checked by trainers who supply useful feedback.

Good, internally designed course materials are available for provider-accredited courses, whilst authentic Microsoft resources are used on Microsoft courses. Aptech offers a satisfactory range of courses and has extended the number of externally accredited programmes available, although the final examinations for these courses are optional. Too few courses provide progression routes. Although responsive to employers' requests, Aptech does not actively survey labour market needs. Adequate enrichment activities are provided.

Aptech's learners receive comprehensive and effective support. Administrative staff provide useful guidance on course selection; in addition, there are informative leaflets and brochures describing Aptech's provision, and a basic but user-friendly website. The facilities available to learners have improved since the first review; the learning environment is fit for purpose and suitably equipped. There are appropriate health and safety measures, and Aptech now

has a clear, written health and safety policy which is shared with learners at the start of their course.

Learners' and employers' feedback is now more effectively sought; the forms used for this purpose are clear and comprehensive and the outcomes are analysed and acted upon. Employers are consistently updated on their learners' progress, attendance and punctuality. Aptech's managers now monitor trainers' performance thoroughly and regularly, using a range of methods including lesson observations, self-evaluation and external evaluation. They provide useful feedback on areas for improvement, which are addressed appropriately through staff development. A useful appraisal system has been introduced since the first review, but is not yet fully implemented. Aptech's strategic and operational plans are detailed and helpful. They focus sufficiently on raising learners' achievement, and draw appropriately on the learners' performance data now available.

Capacity to improve

Grade 2: Good

Aptech has acted well on the outcomes of its first review, and has significantly improved the quality of its provision. It has the human and physical resources in place to carry out its improvement plans, and has demonstrated good capacity to respond to external feedback. Learners' enrolment shows a steadily increasing trend, from 266 in 2007 to 324 in 2008 and 349 in 2009. The institute has a good and increasing rate of repeat business, which has risen from 10% in 2007 to a creditable 70% in 2009. Since the first review Aptech has upgraded its IT laboratories and its furniture, and introduced a full range of health & safety procedures.

The institute has recently been awarded ISO 9001:2008 certification. A comprehensive quality management system (QMS), manual and procedures are in place, appropriately focused on training and outcomes. Aptech also participated in Microsoft's benchmarked satisfaction survey, receiving higher than average scores.

Aptech has well focused plans for improvement, which include finalising links with international vendors, upgrading its premises and facilities, and expanding the staff team.

The institute's self-evaluation form (SEF) is detailed and informative, and identifies some appropriate areas for improvement. However, the grades are over-estimated.

Summary of grades awarded

Overall judgement	Original grade	Repeat review grade
Effectiveness of provision	**Grade 4: Below satisfactory**	**Grade 3: Satisfactory**
Capacity to improve	Grade 3: Satisfactory	Grade 2: Good
Review findings		
How well do learners achieve?	Grade 4: Below satisfactory	Grade 3: Satisfactory
How effective is training?	Grade 4: Below satisfactory	Grade 3: Satisfactory
How well do programmes meet the needs of learners and employers?	Grade 3: Satisfactory	Grade 3: Satisfactory
How well are learners guided and supported?	Grade 3: Satisfactory	Grade 2: Good
How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	Grade 4: Below satisfactory	Grade 2: Good

Main judgements and recommendations

Strengths

- **Achievement on provider-accredited courses.** Success and retention rates on provider-accredited courses are high, reaching 100% in some cases. Aptech now uses rigorous and effective methods to measure learners' progress and achievement on these courses, including internal and on-line examinations and appropriate practical assignments.

- **Monitoring of learners' progress.** Aptech trainers now rigorously check learners' progress and provide them with useful, developmental feedback. Trainers use appropriate practical assignments, internal examinations and on-line examinations to measure learners' progress, and record the outcomes.

- **Support for learners.** Learners in Aptech are effectively supported to achieve. Revision and extra classes are offered to learners who need them. If a learner is absent for two classes, they (or their employer, if they are sponsored) are contacted to find the reason for their non-attendance. The institute responds sensitively and appropriately to individuals experiencing personal difficulty, providing financial assistance to those who need it, and providing flexible class timings for shift workers.

- **Collection, analysis and use of learners' and employers' feedback.** Aptech's managers now take effective measures to gather learners and employers' feedback. The forms used are detailed; the results are analysed and followed up with appropriate actions. Learners' feedback is used as one of the criteria in assessing trainers' performance. Employers are consistently updated on their learners' attendance, punctuality and progress.

Areas for improvement

- **Progression routes**. However, there are too few courses offering progression routes, with suitable progression opportunities available on two courses only.

- **Analysis of labour market needs**. Managers are not sufficiently proactive in identifying labour market needs. Rather than analysing labour market requirements themselves, they rely on requests from employers to help them decide what additional courses to launch.

- **Self-evaluation**. Although Aptech's self-evaluation form highlights accurately some areas for improvement, it over-estimates the grades given.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Aptech should:

- offer more courses with progression routes

- proactively seek and analyze labour market needs

- ensure that self-evaluation is regular and objective.