



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

Vocational Review Unit

Review Report

English Language Skills Centre
Tubli - Kingdom of Bahrain

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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

The English Language Skills Centre (ELSC) was established in 1996, and holds a license from the Ministry of Education to offer courses in general English, aimed at students aged between 5 and 18 years. Three categories of courses are available, depending on a student's level of ability: beginner, junior and senior. Most students are in the age group of 5 to 15 years and most follow beginners' and juniors' courses. ELSC enrolled 300 students in 2008 and 351 in 2009. The institute is run by a director, who is the only full-time member of staff. All teachers work on a part-time basis, and all classes are held in the afternoon.

Scope of the review

This review was conducted over three days by a team of four reviewers. During the review, reviewers observed teaching sessions, analysed data about the skills and qualifications students achieve and the courses they complete and talked with management, teachers, students and parents.

This report summarises reviewers' findings and their recommendations for improvement.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Grade 4: below satisfactory

The overall effectiveness of ELSC is below satisfactory. The institute offers a satisfactory range of general English courses, but the quality of teaching, the support and guidance, and the effectiveness of leadership and management are below satisfactory. There was not sufficient evidence to grade how students achieve at ELSC.

Although students develop some appropriate skills in grammar, vocabulary and speaking, the progress they make from the time of entry to the end of the course is not assessed consistently. No overall picture is gained of how well students achieve. The attendance rate is satisfactory, with an overall rate of 83% for the past three years' courses, which require attendance two or three times a week over a period of two months.

Teachers are generally adequately qualified. They succeed in capturing students' attention throughout lessons but do not engage them sufficiently in pairs or in group exercises. Although students are generally placed at a level that suits their English skills, lessons at ELSC are not effectively planned to meet the varying needs of students in the same class.

ELSC offers an adequate range of English courses that broadly suit young students. The courses are designed using updated and suitable curricula and textbooks. Teachers use the textbooks as the primary source of teaching, and do not enrich courses sufficiently with extracurricular activities.

Students are occasionally rewarded and encouraged to achieve more. The learning environment inside the classes is not inspiring and does not encourage dynamic and participative learning in group activities. ELSC does not take effective safety and health measures at its premises to ensure the wellbeing of its young students. There is a lack of easily accessible information and guidance about the courses available at ELSC.

The management maintains good relationships with parents and responds appropriately to any complaints. ELSC takes insufficiently effective measures to monitor and analyse students' achievements and students' and parents' views. It does not adequately check teachers' performance in the classroom. ELSC has no coherent, structured strategic plans to improve the overall effectiveness of the institute.

Capacity to improve

Grade 5: very weak

ELSC regularly updates the curricula and text books used for its courses. Enrolment has increased slightly in the last three years, from 194 in 2007 to 300 in 2008 and 351 in 2009.

The institute has no clear and coherent strategic plans to bring about improvement. It does not effectively monitor and analyse students' achievements or gather and analyse students' or parents' views to plan for improvement. It is under-staffed, and depends wholly on part-time teachers, who follow inconsistent practices and among whom there is a high turnover rate. ELSC did not prepare a self-evaluation form (SEF) before this review, to show the institute's capacity to critically analyse its strengths and areas for improvement.

The institute shows no history of improvement; rather, it has discontinued some of the good practices that were once in place. ELSC used to take students out to watch English movies, offer students enrichment activities on the "Mother Day", hold open days for parents, gather students' feedback forms, and produce leaflets that explained the courses and levels available at the institute. All these practices have been discontinued in the past two to three years. The progress reports given to parents at the end of the course used to give some useful remarks about a student's skills. The report now, however, gives grades only.

Summary of grades awarded

| Overall Judgement | Grade |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Effectiveness of provision | Grade 4: below satisfactory |
| Capacity to Improve | Grade 5: very weak |
| Review Findings | |
| How well do learners achieve? | Insufficient evidence to grade |
| How effective is training? | Grade 4: below satisfactory |
| How well do programmes meet the needs of learners and employers? | Grade 3: satisfactory |
| How well are learners guided and supported? | Grade 4: below satisfactory |
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | Grade 4: below satisfactory |

Main judgements and recommendations

Strengths

- No significant strengths

Areas for improvement

- **Measuring students' progress and achievements.** ELSC does not consistently measure students' progress and their achievements at the end of the course. Only students at the senior level sit a final exam and this is a subjective assessment that can vary from teacher to teacher. The records of students' achievements are not aggregated to reflect how the senior students achieve overall. The final achievements of the junior and beginner levels are not assessed.
- **The use of initial assessment.** Although an initial assessment is carried out to place students at the level that roughly suits their skills, these placement tests are general and do not assess important skills like reading and listening. A few students are placed at levels that do not suit them properly. The outcomes of placement tests are not used in lesson planning to accommodate the varying needs of individuals during lessons.
- **Lesson planning.** There is a set curriculum but it is not necessarily followed by teachers. The lessons are not sufficiently planned; instead, teachers record what they have covered at the end of each lesson.
- **Lesson observation system.** The basis on which teachers are selected is not rigorous enough, and they are put straight into the classroom without sufficient preparation. New teachers are occasionally observed during their early lessons, and sometimes students are asked for verbal feedback about their teacher, but the performance of teachers is not systematically monitored and they are given insufficient direction on how to improve.
- **Health and safety risk assessment and measures.** No health and safety risk assessment has been conducted at the learning centre and ELSC has no appropriate health and safety policy or measures in place. The entrance to the centre is low and set below a staircase, posing a risk of head injury to young students as they run down the stairs, and the male toilet is not hygienic. No fire detection system is in place and the only fire extinguisher has not been maintained since 1996. The institute has an adequate first aid kit, but no qualified first aiders.

- **Gathering and analysing students' and parents' views.** Students' and parents' views are not gathered or analysed. The institute had a system for gathering feedback at one point, but stopped it.
- **Classrooms and the learning environment.** Most classrooms are cramped and uninspiring; the decoration is dull and does not provide sufficient stimulation, especially for young students.
- **Strategic planning.** The institute has no vision or mission statement. It does not carry out strategic planning to make improvements.

Recommendations

In order to improve, ELSC should:

- ensure that students are assessed rigorously and consistently throughout a course; aggregate and use the resulting data
- improve the initial assessment to measure more accurately students' initial skills and needs, and use the results in lesson planning.
- introduce lesson planning to help meet the varying needs of all students in a group.
- conduct proper health and safety risk assessments for the premises and take appropriate measures accordingly.
- introduce a structured system of observing all teachers regularly, to improve their performance.
- ensure that students' and parents' views are systematically gathered and used to plan improvements.
- improve class layouts and environments
- formulate proper strategic plans that have clear targets and resources to improve the overall effectiveness of the institute.