



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

Vocational Review Unit Review Report

**Horizons HRD
Manama
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 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

Horizons HRD was established in 1999 to offer a range of vocational courses, mainly in leadership, management and soft skills. All the courses currently on offer are short and non-accredited. Course duration ranges from 8 to 20 hours. The centre is affiliated with a range of internationally accredited bodies such as the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), City and Guilds (UK) and Cambridge International University. However it is only currently offering the short, non-accredited courses.

During 2011, the centre had enrolled 473 learners on various training courses. Most of the Horizons HRD learners come from the private sector and are sponsored by their employers. Horizons HRD uses either employers' premises or hotel venues to conduct courses.

The centre operates from one location in Manama. The centre is run by a managing director who is also the owner, who employs on a part-time basis a business services and operation coordinator, an operations coordinator, an HR advisor and a quality assurance and qualification development advisor. Horizons HRD uses a pool of local and international trainers, mostly on an assignment basis.

Scope of the review

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

In the previous review, overall effectiveness was judged as satisfactory as was learners' achievement, the quality of the programmes and support provided to learners. The quality of training, leadership and management and the capacity to improve were judged as good.

This report summarises reviewers' findings and their recommendations about what Horizons HRD 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

The overall effectiveness of Horizons HRD is satisfactory, as are all other aspect of the provision. Most learners develop useful vocational skills, knowledge and gain qualifications that they aim for. However, a minority gain skills that are not always according to their expectations but the majority make at least adequate progress from their starting points. Most trainers are highly qualified and specialised in the vocational subject they teach and use a range of teaching techniques to create a positive learning experience. However, lesson planning is not always well informed by the outcome of the pre-course assessment tests. A suitable range of non-accredited soft skills and management courses are offered that meets learners' and employers' needs. Learners are supported well enough including ensuring that all learners receive a useful induction before they start courses. The leadership and management team have a clear vision and mission statement that is geared towards providing personal and professional development. Their strategic and action planning is sufficiently detailed but the monitoring and follow-up mechanism is not consistent.

The centre has moved to a new location in Manama which is fit for purpose. Although learners' achievement rates have improved in the year 2011 by almost 12 per cent in comparison to the previous year, the enrolment has declined by 42 per cent for the same period. The repeat business during 2011 has been similar to that of the previous year. The centre widened its affiliation with international accreditation organizations such as the University of Cambridge International Examinations to run training courses for teachers and the ICAEW (Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales) for accountancy courses. It can draw on a pool of highly qualified trainers to deliver its courses which it runs either at employers' premises or other suitable external venues.

Learners' achievement

How well do learners achieve?

Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Most learners at Horizon HRD develop useful vocational skills and knowledge that they use at their work. From lessons observed, meetings with stakeholders and learners and the available progress records, the majority of learners make at least adequate progress considering their prior attainment. Learners Performance Data (LPD) shows that retention and success rates are high at 100 per cent and 88 per cent in the year 2011 and 2010 respectively, although this is based mainly on learners completing the required number of hours to receive an attendance certificate. A few learners stated that the skills gained on the courses were not always according to their level and hence they did not benefit from them, finding them very similar to ones attended earlier, although with a different range of practical activities used.

Most learners are self-motivated and enjoy the practical activities in the sessions. Almost all the practical activities are done as group work, where learners demonstrate their ability to work collaboratively and also, when required, to work as independent learners. However, learners are not always given sufficient opportunities to reflect on how well they are progressing or what they must do to improve.

The centre does have arrangements in place to monitor learners' progress and achievements but the pre- and post-course assessments are not always methodical or reliable in measuring individual learners' attainment or progress against the course objectives. Although the centre uses a range of open ended questions for their assessment of learners, they limit them to 'Yes' or 'No' answers.

Records of attendance and punctuality are kept; learners are attending regularly and their overall rate is high at 91 per cent for the last two years. The vast majority of learners attend on time and punctuality is recorded but for learners who arrive late to sessions, the trainer does not always challenge them.

The quality of provision

How effective is teaching and/or training in promoting learning?

Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Most trainers are highly qualified and have relevant experience in the subject they teach and use their knowledge and work related experience to promote effective training. During training sessions and workshops, most trainers make effective use of real life vocational examples to engage and motivate learners. Some trainers use a participative approach and respond professionally to learners' questions, provide a range of role play, group discussion and games. Trainers utilise a variety of learning resources to promote active learning such as relevant Power Point presentations, ICT and flip charts.

Although Horizons HRD conducts pre-course assessment tests on entry to any course, the results are not reflected well enough in lesson planning. However, most lessons have some planning with sessions starting with effective recapitulation and sharing of objectives but some in-class activities overrunning. Trainers accommodate the needs of the less able learners by helping them to understand what is being taught and assist them to move forward, but more able learners are not provided with sufficient extension activities or are not sufficiently challenged, although they are at times asked to take the role of team leader within a group.

Trainers assess learners' progress using practical exercises, interaction games and group work, but it is not always clear how the assessments are linked to the course objectives and how they are used to check individual learners' progress. They provide feedback on formative assessments and session activities, but in most cases, only verbal feedback is provided to learners and in some cases fails to highlight areas of improvement. Although the institute produces a useful progress report at the end of a course, the report is not shared with individual learners or sent to their employers unless requested.

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

Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Horizons HRD offers a range of non-accredited courses, mostly focused in the area of soft skills and management. Learners and employers are generally satisfied with the offered range and that this range generally meets their needs. However a few learners were not fully aware of the range offered. Most courses are offered at one level, except for a few such as the English communication that is offered at advanced level. Most courses delivered are sufficiently resourced and supported with relevant additional activities that enhance

learners' experience. Although a few courses are periodically reviewed and updated according to stakeholders needs, the process is not systematic. For its market information, the centre relies largely on surveys from governmental and local organisations rather than carrying out its own independent market research to introduce new courses to their portfolio. However, Horizon HRD offers a personalised training needs analysis (TNA) to corporate clients to establish their specific needs. The outcomes of the TNA and further discussion with the employer are used to customise suitable courses for groups of learners.

The institute is affiliated with a number of international accreditation bodies such as the ILM, the City and Guilds and the Cambridge International University to run their courses locally but have not run these courses recently. Most trainers use a range of extra activities to support learners, such as shopping visits, extra group activities and video recording of classes' role plays that are shared with employers and learners. Courses are supported with appropriate resources such as relevant books, magazines and references to further study material when needed.

How well are learners supported and guided to achieve better outcomes?

Grade: 3 Satisfactory

The centre conducts a useful induction session for all learners at the first day of a course to give learners initial guidance about the centre, venue facilities, health and safety and the daily agenda of the course. Also a complaint form is made available to learners in case of any issues. During the training sessions learners receive suitable support in the form of translation when needed and vocational advice about work related issues. Most trainers are approachable and provide support when requested. In situations where the employer is not fully satisfied with the course outcome, the centre provides an opportunity to repeat a course or offers an alternative course. On occasions, all learners are provided with a range of incentives such as gifts and suitable related books at the end of a course but, this is not linked to any achievement criteria.

Generally, all learners receive adequate guidance on course selection and career progression. The institute makes available details about course descriptions with clear learning objectives and content, but these are not always received before the start of a course. Stakeholders have access to proper media for course selection such as a course portfolio. The centre's website provides basic information about the courses on offer and has an online registration facility with learners' support section to guide them for course selection on the international qualifications and the site has a few useful hyperlinks.

The provider's learning environment is fit for purpose with sufficient training rooms and an information centre which is equipped with suitable learning resources and visual aids,

however, it is not regularly accessed by the learners. Horizons HRD conducted almost all of the courses in suitable hospitality venues or employers' work premises. A comprehensive checklist is conducted before the start of a course to ensure that external training venues are suitable. Almost all courses are offered with flexible timing for the convenience of learners and stakeholders.

Trainers are generally aware of the progress of their learners and keep a close relationship with them, however updating learners and stakeholders with the progress during the course is not systematic enough. Although an individual achievement summary report is always produced by the centre, which covers grades of the pre- and post-course assessment, along with the exercises grades, this is only communicated to employers on request.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Horizons HRD operate from one centre which is well maintained and fit for purpose. The centre has a clear health and safety policy and procedures. Relationships between management and staff are generally good, staff meetings are held as required to address emerging issues and these are documented and followed up by the management. Horizons HRD have clear vision and mission statements shared with staff. The centre's strategic plan is based on a thorough SWOT analysis and geared towards improvement of the provision. Additionally, the centre has a detailed quality and corporate guidance manual but, currently these procedures are not fully implemented. Although the centre responded to QAAET recommendations, the identified areas for improvement have not yet been fully completed. The institute recruits on an assignment basis from a pool of well-qualified and experienced local and international trainers that are appropriately deployed within their field of training. Most trainers are appraised on an annual basis and some are offered opportunities for development, however the trainers are not always asked to agree their own appraisal form nor does the form provide space for trainer's comments. Horizons HRD evaluates the quality of training with the management randomly visiting some training sessions, but this is not sufficiently critical with the feedback provided to trainers mostly verbal and issues not recorded well enough to drive improvements. As a consequence, trainers do not always know how well they are performing.

The system to seek learners and employers views is in place, and occasionally includes taking views using face-to-face meetings with major corporate businesses. The outcomes are aggregated and analysed by the management team, although the centre does not always

communicate these outcome to all stakeholders. However, the centre recently introduced a new employer's satisfaction survey but the impact of this is yet to be assessed. The centre's system to maintain records of learners' achievement is useful, but the collected data is not used effectively to inform improvement decisions. Assessment of learners' prior attainment is documented but, the effectiveness of assessment varies and the approach is not systematic nor used effectively for lesson planning. Effective links are maintained with local and international stakeholders and the centre is effective in supporting the local community. The SEF is informative and supported by relevant evidence, but is not sufficiently critical; it identifies some areas for improvements but the grades given over-estimate the provision.

The provider's key strengths

- Most learners enjoy the practical activities in lessons and are self-motivated
- Trainers are highly qualified and have the relevant experience in the subject they teach; they use their knowledge and work related experience to promote effective training
- Customisation of internally-designed courses and activities is offered to match stakeholders' needs and learning objectives
- The centre has a clear vision and mission statement focused on learners' achievement and progress; the strategic plan has been developed well, being based on a methodical SWOT analysis.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Horizons HRD should:

- ensure that all learners achieve their courses objectives and they are always aware of their own progress
- develop a system to rigorously assess learners' activities and reflect on individual progress
- ensure that all the courses on offer are systematically updated with current relevant information
- improve the effectiveness of assessment methodologies for all the courses.