



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

Vocational Review Unit Review Report

**National Institute of Technology
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

National Institute of Technology (NIT) was established in 1997 and is licensed by the Ministry of Labour to offer courses in computing and information technology (IT) to corporate and individual learners. NIT offers a wide range of externally-accredited and non-accredited IT programmes and a number of short training courses in management and soft skills. The institute is a Microsoft Silver Certified Partner, an Oracle Approved Education Provider, a Certified Internet Web Professionals (CIW) Authorized Training Partner and an International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) Approved Training and Test Centre. It is also designated as a Pearson VUE online testing centre for Oracle and Microsoft and a Thomson Prometric online testing centre for Cisco and CIW certifications. Since the last review, around 600 learners have attended NIT's courses.

NIT has two training centres; the main training centre is located in Zinj and the other facility is in Khamis. The two centres are managed by a recently appointed general manager who employs a head of operations, a country sales manager, an administrative and finance officer, three marketing and sales officers, two operation staff and seven trainers. All work on a full-time basis. The centre also employs three part-time trainers.

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, documents and the materials provided by the institute and talked with management, trainers, staff, learners and employers.

In the previous review, overall effectiveness was judged as satisfactory as were all other aspects. The provider's capacity to improve was judged as satisfactory too.

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 4: inadequate
Learners' Achievement	
How well do learners achieve?	Grade 4: inadequate
Quality of Provision	
How effective is teaching and/or training in promoting learning?	Grade 4: inadequate
How well do courses meet the needs and interests of learners and stakeholders?	Grade 2: good
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 4: inadequate

Review judgements

Overall effectiveness

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

Grade 4: inadequate

The overall effectiveness of NIT is inadequate. Despite the focused vision of the centre's new leadership and management and its drive for change, and the good range of programmes on offer, actual practices that impact on learners' achievement remain ineffective. Lack of effective monitoring of trainers' performance and the limited teaching and assessment methods employed by the trainers has resulted in inconsistent levels of achievement among groups and inadequate progress of significant groups of learners. While sufficient support is provided to those intending to sit for the external examinations, progress and attainment is insufficiently monitored and recorded and learners and other stakeholders are not provided with useful feedback.

The centre now has a full-time general manager and runs as an independent business entity. Critical self-assessment was effectively carried out by the newly appointed management and priorities for improvement fairly accurately identified. Overall, NIT has satisfactory capacity to improve with these recent improvements and a number of initiatives started including the expansion of the range of courses on offer. An electronic system for pre-course and post-course assessment that tracks learners' progress and provide reports is being prepared for launch next month. The Centre's website has been improved with more dynamic links and the laboratory equipment was recently upgraded. An electronic customer relationship management (CRM) system to record and follow-up clients' needs was put into operation earlier this year. A student portal is also being developed by a private company. The centre has ISO9001:2008 certification and a quality manual, although the procedures on learning and assessment are not yet detailed enough and the impact of measures to deal with the issues related to improving the quality of teaching and learning outcomes has yet to be realised.

Learners' achievement

How well do learners achieve?

Grade 4: inadequate

Learners' achievement is inadequate at NIT. Although the majority of learners reported that they gained varying knowledge and skills, progress and attainment of significant groups of learners is minimal. Achievement is inconsistent and varies considerably among courses and groups. Reasons for this include trainers not regularly assessing learners through independent assignments or tests or direct questions and not keeping progress and attainment records. Those on the externally-accredited courses have the option to sit for the external examinations or leave without being assessed by the centre. Despite more than half of the learners enrolling on these courses, the centre issues the majority of learners only with an attendance certificate.

A significant number of learners end up without achieving their intended qualifications on the externally-accredited courses. The pass rate on the ICDL programme which constitutes about 17 per cent of the business ranged between 59 per cent in 2010 to 65 per cent in 2011 and then dropped again to just 55 per cent in 2012. Submitted data for other programmes such as Microsoft and Oracle certifications indicates that just about half of the learners on these courses sit for the final external examinations and of these 80 per cent of them pass but this only represents a small proportion of total learners. The progress of a significant minority of learners on the non-accredited courses, especially the MS Office short modules, is insufficient and both the pre-course and post-course tests used were ineffective. A number of learners reported that they gained little from these courses as their level was already higher than the courses they were placed on.

The majority of learners are self-motivated and able to work independently on the short tasks provided to them but few opportunities are provided for them to work as a team to solve problems or handle group projects. In a few cases, learners expressed their disinterest with the hands on practical work as it did not provide sufficient challenge and opportunity to reflect critically on their own progress. While retention is satisfactory, ranging between 85 and 96 per cent, attendance and punctuality at NIT are an issue. Learners' attendance is irregular and the centre has no effective system to record poor punctuality. In most of the sessions observed, learners arrived late by more than 30 minutes and sometimes longer and left unchallenged.

The quality of provision

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

Grade 4: inadequate

Most NIT trainers are certified in the field they teach, however, some are either not certified or lack the practical exposure. Generally, sessions are planned by following the vendor provided materials and schemes. However, no formal lesson plans are in place and trainers often start late and occasionally repeat what they have already done due to learners' poor punctuality resulting in poor time management. While most trainers make suitable use of resources in their sessions and provide appropriate explanations with relevant vocational examples, they leave little scope for learners' interaction and engagement. Most sessions are trainer-centered and lack the use of motivating learning strategies. Learners' understanding is not checked thoroughly and their work is insufficiently assessed. Trainers do not maintain records of learners' progress and just few of them provide useful feedback to learners.

Generally, learning objectives are shared with learners at the beginning of sessions. However, the majority of learners are not able to complete the planned activities and exercises detailed in the vendor provided lesson plans within the allocated time. Most trainers do not cater well enough for the less able learners in class and if they do so, it is at the expense of the more able learners who have to wait. This is a recurring issue on some courses where learners of varying abilities and backgrounds are grouped together at the same level because initial assessment is ineffective. Furthermore, it is not normally used to inform lesson planning. The accredited courses lack any form of internal assessment, marked exercises or assignments. The only exception is the ICDL course where trainers use mock on-line tests to enhance learners' understanding, improve their practice and prepare them for the final external examination. Activities and exercises completed in class are not assessed and marked. Furthermore, the pre- and post- course assessments for most non-accredited courses are in the form of a self-rating checklist where learners rate themselves against course objectives rather than a form of a rigorous assessment of the skills and knowledge gained.

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

Grade 2: good

NIT offers a wide range of externally-accredited as well as internally-designed courses, mostly in the IT field, that are appropriately resourced, have up-to-date original material, are regularly reviewed and should meet learners' and other stakeholders' needs very well.

Whilst the centre does not carry out its own independent market survey, it uses input from its clients, published studies and analyses of IT industry developments and trends.

The externally-accredited courses represent around 70 per cent of the total offered courses, which are mainly from Microsoft, Oracle, Cisco, ICDL and other smaller providers. The courses cover IT security, networking, programming and development, administration, graphics design as well as Microsoft Office applications. These courses match the needs and aspirations of learners and other stakeholders in terms of, content, structure, latest versions, resources and certifications very well. A new technology awareness session has been added as an additional activity to enrich the programmes. However, a few learners highlighted the need for adding more real practical exercises on some courses.

NIT keeps its programmes in-line with labour market requirement by gauging labour market needs and trends through informal gathering of information from clients through its regular marketing activities and personal visits. The centre's management also follows national studies and IT initiatives such as the Tamkeen skills gap analysis and updating its courses when new product versions are launched and following developments from its external partners.

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

Grade 3: satisfactory

Learners at NIT receive sufficient support and guidance particularly during enrollment. The registration officer, who also works as a counselor, provides learners with useful information about the courses available and how these programmes help them with their careers. However, not all learners are aware of such counseling activities, especially those at the Khamis branch. Useful information about the programmes offered are available to learners prior to the start of the courses, either through the updated and informative website or outlines sent through emails or from the useful collection of flyers and leaflets at the registration office.

Trainers are approachable and respond to learners' queries related to their studies and the external examination. ICDL learners are provided with appropriate support in the form of guided on-line mock test opportunities to help them improve their practice and attain the requisite speed and build confidence to enable them to attempt the final external examination. Learners on Oracle and Microsoft certification courses are also provided with access to examination material to practice at home. However, this is not monitored by the trainer. Learners and other stakeholders are not made aware of the progress learners make during the course, even on the long courses.

Both NIT premises at Zinj and Khamis are fit for purpose and suitably resourced. However, the computer desks in some of the IT laboratories are not comfortable and a number of computers were found to be poorly maintained which affected the work of some learners. Learners have also complained about lack of sufficient private space for prayers.

Leadership and management

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

Grade 4: inadequate

The recently appointed NIT management have a clear vision for improvement, which is suitably shared with staff who have defined roles and attend regular meetings. However, strategic and detailed action plans are not yet developed. While learners' feedback is collected systematically and analysed and shared with trainers, feedback from other stakeholders is insufficiently collected. The centre lacks rigorous initial assessment arrangements and the monitoring and analysis of progress and attainment is not effectively carried out. A number of learners reported that they found themselves at levels much below their entry level or have in their groups learners who lack some essential basics which limited their progress. Most trainers are suitably recruited and provided with opportunities to pursue further IT certification. However, monitoring their performance in class has only recently been done through peer observations. The outcomes are not critical enough to have a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. On a few occasions, less effective trainers were identified by employers and learners and had been replaced.

The NIT management are generally updated about issues related to the running and administration of courses but not on the actual progress and attainment of learners. The centre lacks key performance data and its analysis to inform the management on trends and highlight areas for developments. Despite a significant proportion of learners sitting for their on-line tests their test results are not made readily available for periodic review and analysis. NIT have suitable health and safety measures in place and a risk assessment was conducted last month. However, only basic guidance has been made available to learners and some aspects are missing such as assembly points and a first aid box in the Khamis branch. The provider maintains appropriate links with the international IT vendors and accrediting bodies and has recently started to share proposals to enhance national IT skills initiatives through talks with Tamkeen, the High Council of Vocational Training and the Supreme Council for Women. While the management have a fair idea of their current status, the submitted SEF was not well-evidenced, failed to identify key areas for improvement and over-estimated all grades.

The provider's key strengths

- Learners and stakeholders are satisfied with the wide range of programmes on offer that meets most of their IT needs.
- Learners and stakeholders have access to detailed course information through an informative website, emails, leaflets and flyers.
- The views of learners are systematically collected, aggregated and analysed.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the National Institute of Technology should:

- ensure that all learners achieve the intended qualifications or course objective they aim for by:
 - implementing effective procedures for assessing, analysing and utilising learners' prior attainment
 - introducing an effective system to assess, record and analyse learners' progress and assessment and regularly inform learners and stakeholders about the outcomes
 - devising effective measures to improve attendance and punctuality.
- ensure that teaching and training is learner-centred and effective in motivating all learners and accommodating their individual needs
- enrich courses with additional supporting activities
- introduce more effective trainers' performance monitoring systems.