Directorate of Vocational Reviews

Review Report

National Institute of Technology (NIT)

Manama

Kingdom of Bahrain

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Introduction

The Directorate of Vocational Reviews (DVR), which is a part of the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA), conducted this review over three days, by a team of four reviewers. For this 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 learners, employers, trainers, management and support staff.

In the previous review of National Institute of Technology (NIT), the overall effectiveness and other aspects of the provision were judged as inadequate except for the quality of programme on offer which was judged as good and the support provided to learners was judged as satisfactory. Accordingly, the institute was subject to two monitoring visits, where the first monitoring visit received no progress judgment and the second visit was judged as in progress.

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

Grading scale:

| Outstanding | 1 | Good | 2 | Satisfactory | 3 | Inadequate | 4 |

Table of review judgements awarded

Main Question	Judgement
Learners' achievement	Satisfactory (3)
Effectiveness of teaching / training and assessment	Satisfactory (3)
Quality of programmes	Good (2)
Quality of support and guidance	Good (2)
Effectiveness of leadership, management and governance	Satisfactory (3)
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory (3)
Overall effectiveness	**Satisfactory (3)**

Review judgements

Overall effectiveness

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

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

The overall effectiveness of the National Institute of Technology (NIT) is satisfactory, as are the other aspects except for the quality of programmes and the support provided to learners which are judged good. NIT offers a wide range of specialised Information and Communication Technology (ICT) courses that lead to professional qualifications and respond well to learners' aspirations and stakeholder's needs. Most courses are well designed, updated and structured based on the instructions of the international awarding bodies' standards. However, a few internally-designed examinations are not sufficiently rigorous. Learners enrolled on these courses acquire and develop useful skills, knowledge and improve their competencies in the field of ICT which is reflected positively on their professional career. Although records of learners' achievements kept by the institute show high success rates in all courses, these are not an accurate reflection of the standard reached by all learners as was evident on some of the observed sessions; the progress and attainment of the majority of learners remain at an adequate level. Trainers although qualified and have relevant background and practical experience in the area they teach, they use less effective range of stimulating teaching methodologies to ensure effective participation and interaction of learners during sessions.

Administration staff and trainers are highly responsive and helpful; and as required they provide effective career guidance and technical advices. An induction session is conducted on the first day of a course that contains very useful information about NIT policies and procedures. Although NIT management has a focused vision, mission and sufficiently challenging strategic plan, arrangement for internal quality assurance and action planning is not comprehensive. Notwithstanding the above, NIT maintains highly effective links with international accrediting bodies and use this to widen its offerings.

Capacity to improve

How strong is the provider's capacity to improve the quality of learning?

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

NIT capacity to improve is satisfactory overall. Since the last review NIT has expanded its affiliation with major international awarding bodies to offer more specialised courses, such as offering a new range of ICT courses covering Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA), Cisco Security and CCNA-voice. NIT has taken a number of recent development initiatives to address previous review recommendations, such as introducing suitably focused strategic plan that has defined lines of responsibilities and has also formulised a range of internal quality assurance policies and practices. Nevertheless, these recent initiatives are not yet fully recognised throughout its operations, as the arrangements for internal verification of assessment and action planning are not sufficiently methodical. Although records of learners' achievements and progress during a course are maintained, the outcome of the analysis is not utilised to trigger improvement. Management recruits highly qualified trainers and maintains suitable human resources whom are qualified and have the required experience to undertake their duties. Additionally; it has recently managed to improve the learning environment to meet the increasing demand for ICT courses. Although, NIT maintains reasonable business retention over the past three years, the number of learners' enrolled on various courses is generally declining. The institute ascertains the views of learners and employers after a course, but the outcomes are not used sufficiently to inform improvement decisions.

Learners' achievement

How well do learners achieve?

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

Learners' achievement at NIT is satisfactory overall. Learners acquire and develop useful skills, knowledge and competencies in the field of ICT. Most interviewed learners expressed their satisfaction with the learning experience at the institute, which has reflected positively on their profession. Learners' performance and skills development throughout the course are appropriately measured using different assessments tools that include tests, quizzes, practical laboratory exercises and case studies. Although the used formative and summative

assessments vary in level and rigorousness, these are generally sufficient to measure individual learner's attainment against the course objectives. The formative assessments used are in general relevant and suitable to the course level; however, in a significant minority of courses, discrepancies were observed in the expected course objectives and the summative assessments given to learners. For instance, the pre- course tests used are generic and not sufficiently focused on the course objective likewise in the Structured Query Language (SQL) courses the post- course tests are not clearly mapped to the course-learning objectives. Similarly, in a few Microsoft Office courses, the pre- and post- course tests are the same. Taking into account the level of learners at entry, training methodologies and assessment used, learners make adequate progress overall.

The Learners Performance Data (LPD) indicates 100% achievement and retention rates in all courses. However, these rates were not accurately reflected in the observed sessions, where levels of learners' understanding and the standard of their practical work were only at satisfactory level. The Microsoft Office courses, which represent 52% of the total enrolment, are attendance-based and learners enrolled in these courses achieve their course objectives in a timely manner. The remaining portion of learners are enrolled in externally-accredited courses, which include Microsoft, Oracle and Cisco courses. While learners enrolled in these courses complete the course requirements at NIT, only a significant minority seek the external examinations and successfully achieve their qualifications at a good level.

Learners are attentive and have positive attitude towards their learning especially during class practical tasks. The majority of learners adequately reflect on their learning; which was evident during the observed sessions through the way they answer probing questions and the explanations they provide. Learners are generally able to work independently; yet, they occasionally require the support of their trainers in completing the class activities.

Attendance and punctuality are always recorded and actions are taken against absenteeism and frequent lateness as per the institute's policy. From the learners' attendance records and the observed sessions, it is evident that most learners attend on a regular basis. Nonetheless, punctuality is an issue in a few cases.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching/training and assessment in promoting learning?

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

Trainers at NIT have theoretical background and practical experience in the field of ICT relevant to the courses they teach. Trainers use structured lesson plans following the vendor's standards with clear objectives which are informed by the on-going assessment and requirements of the learners. The lessons start with useful recapitulation, sharing of session's objectives, and sessions are timely managed. The course outlined topics and assigned practical activities are usually delivered within the planned duration. Changes of session timing or addition of any activity, case studies or additional requirements requested by the learners are stated through various means such as the 'Milestone Sheet' and the 'Batch Monitoring Sheet'.

In most observed sessions, the trainers utilise the available resources effectively. However, trainers use a narrow range of teaching methodologies which limits learners' interaction and participations, and hence, learners remain passive and are not fully motivated. Suitable formative assessment methods such as practical activities, case studies and quizzes are used in the session to evaluate learners' attainment with general rubric in place to guide the grading process. However, a significant minority of summative assessments are not sufficiently rigours or mapped to the learning objectives for those courses, such as in the case of a few internally-designed examinations.

To satisfy learners' diverged levels, trainers occasionally provide a few additional activities to the more able during the class, while providing more explanation and extra time for the less able learners, and extra relevant materials provided as soft copy. Trainers use a few challenging questions, case studies and scenarios, to promote the higher order thinking of the more able learners. After each class activity through-out the course, trainers provide constructive verbal feedback to verify learners' progress level and attainment. However, limited written feedback is provided during the course tutoring. After course completion, the institute produces a useful report called 'Learners' Performance Data' which is shared and discussed with learners verbally and provided as a final record of performance in writing to the employers and learners.

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

Grade: Good (2)

NIT offers a range of externally-accredited courses that leads to professional qualifications in the field of ICT which include Oracle, Microsoft and CISCO. NIT also offers a range of internally-designed courses for Microsoft Office. The institute utilises a third party organisation to conduct a market survey to gauge the trends of the local market in the field of ICT. The outcomes of this survey along with requirements obtained through employers' inquiries are effectively utilised to shape NIT's offerings and fulfill learners' and stakeholders' needs. Learners' and employers' feedback gathered indicate a high level of satisfaction with NIT programmes that matches their abilities, needs, improve their technical competency and prepare them for their external examinations. Similarly, the outcome of the partner network satisfaction survey conducted by Microsoft targeting NIT's learners revealed that learners are satisfied with the services and training they receive from the institute.

Externally-accredited courses are designed, updated and reviewed according to the awarding bodies' standards. Courses are also well planned and structured with detailed course outlines that are linked to the courses objectives. However, the assessment structure for a few internally-designed examinations does not fully cover all the set learning outcomes for a course.

Courses are well resourced with personal computers, projectors and network equipment that are suitably configured to meet the course requirements. The infrastructure is further enhanced with 'Private Cloud Technology' that enables learners to access servers remotely; however, this service for the time being is only accessible locally within the institute's premises. Additionally, authentic and up-to-date course materials are provided either in hard or soft copies from the external awarding bodies, or from an approved third party vendor for Microsoft Office courses. The institute offers a suitable range of extra-activities to enrich the learning experience such as field visits to get real life exposure for deployment of networking infrastructure.

Arrangements for entry level requirements of courses are in place, which are clearly specified in the course outlines and further verified in the pre-screening or while meeting with employers and before course registration.

How well learners are supported and guided?

Grade: Good (2)

The institute has effective arrangements in place to guide and support learners throughout the course, provided by its friendly and supportive administration staff and trainers. Trainers are approachable; they can be contacted through mobiles and emails during and after a course for any queries related to studies or technical issues that learner may have. Most learners acknowledged that the trainers provide career professional guidance and IT technical advices to help them in preparing for their external examinations and workplace difficulties even after course completion. High achievers are encouraged by NIT staff and trainers to undertake the external examinations, and help them with the registration process, provide extra materials, mock examinations, access to laboratory for practicing, and utilise the resources available in the private cloud. Two months after completing the course, learners get follow-up calls to measure the added value on their performance at their workplace and encourage them to take other related courses that are beneficial for their career.

The institute provides a clear guidance to all inquirers by various communication channels. Effective oral or written reply is provided, and in some cases, they direct them to their informative website and social media that contains detailed courses outlines. Courses scheduled or future potential courses to be provided on special requests, with beneficial links to the main ICT international partners are also available on the website.

On the first day of a course useful induction session is delivered to learners that contains information on course content, policies, procedures, trainers and learners responsibilities, and any specific information related to the course. Staff and trainers use various approaches for identifying individual learner background and needs and decide on their entry level using 'pre-training screening' and 'pre-requisite fulfilment' forms. Additionally, learners have to set for 'pre- course test' in the first day of the course. For some learners, additional classes, or extra materials are provided based on the outcome of the screening process.

NIT's arrangements for course delivery are highly flexible to suit the needs of learners and stakeholders. The institute also has effective arrangements in place to support learner with special needs. The learning environment is adequately resourced to support the delivery of courses; however, the institute lacks some facilities such as library and canteen. At the end of a course, an informative performance report is sent to the employers and learners. The report

includes information on learners' attendance, the results of the pre- and post-course assessments, comments and recommendations for future relevant courses.

Leadership, management and governance

How effective are leadership, management and governance in raising achievement and improving the quality of the provision?

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

NIT is guided by a clear vision, mission and value statements that focus adequately on raising learners' achievements and the quality of its offering to fulfill the specific labour market needs for ICT courses and professional certifications. Whilst the institute has a sufficiently challenging strategic plan with clear lines of accountability and key performance indicators, monitoring of progress and action planning is not fully systematic to ensure timely and effective implementation. Based on the current range of the courses offered and enrolment, there are sufficient human and physical resources in place to meet the institute's aims and to deliver its courses. Staff are guided by useful job descriptions for their functions; however, some posts were vacant at the time of the review.

Whilst the institute maintains various quality assurance policies, including course pre-assessments procedures, observation of trainers' performance during sessions, and reviewing programmes, the management does not ensure that these procedures are consistently applied across all courses. As such the current approach for internal quality assurance process is not fully comprehensive to spot areas that require further improvements.

Qualified trainers are recruited, inducted and deployed according to their specialisation; trainers have the required ICT international professional accreditation for the subject they teach. They are provided with a range of development opportunities relevant to their area to provide them with up-to-date IT certifications. Quality of training is assured through random visits during sessions and a form is completed and shared with trainers after each visit, the form is fit for purpose. However, the outcomes are not sufficiently critical to have a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning, as issues identified are not followed-up effectively. The institute has a performance management system in place, however, this was not conducted for the past two years.

The institute maintains records about learners' profile including success, retention rates, examination results and progress. Achievements data are analysed further, but there has been limited improvement actions taken based on the outcome of these analyses. Suitable arrangements in place to seek the views of learners' and employers' feedback after course completion, outcomes are aggregated and sufficiently analysed, actions identified, however, some issues were raised were not addressed adequately by the management. NIT establishes effective links with the international ICT accrediting bodies and has recently widened its affiliation further with new partners within the same field.

The institute has a Board of Governance consisting of the owner who is also the chairman of the Board and the institute's general manager; the chairman is updated on the progress of the institute on a monthly basis. However, the role of the Board is not clearly specified, and there has been no evidence on its contribution to the institute's improvement strategies other than financial support.

NIT premises are safe, secure and free of any obvious hazard. All health and safety devices are checked and maintained in a regular basis. General risk assessments are carried out. However, the institute does not have a first aider. Although the submitted Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) is useful and identifies a range of relevant improvements actions, the grades provided overestimates the institute's status.

The provider's key strengths

- The well-structured lesson plans with clear ILOs that are informed by prior learners' assessment.

- The effective support and guidance most learners receive which help them in their achievement.

- The wide range of ICT specialised courses on offer that meet learners' aspirations and the needs of stakeholders' which is based on a thorough market analysis.

Recommendations

In order to improve, NIT should:

- ensure that learners are successfully achieving their courses objectives and developing the required skills and competencies by enhancing teaching and learning experience through:

    – expanding the range of teaching/training methodologies to engage and motivate learners

    – providing written feedback to learners to inform them on how to improve further.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:

    – enhancing and implementing effective action planning to address all areas that require improvement

    – improving the quality assurance arrangement practically those related to the assessment and moderation procedures to ensure consistency.

Appendix

Description of the provision

National Institute of Technology (NIT) was established in 1997 and is licensed by the Ministry of Labour (MoL) 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 courses. 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 License (ICDL) approved training and test centre. It is also designated as a Pearson VUE online testing centre for Oracle and Microsoft and Pearson VUE online testing centre for Cisco and CIW certifications. Since 2013, around 96 learners have attended NIT's courses.

The institute operates from one location in Manama. The institute is managed by a general manager who employs a head of operations, a sales manager, an administrative and finance officer, two marketing and sales officers, and seven trainers. All work on a full-time basis.