



الهيئة الوطنية  
للمؤهلات وصفاان جودة التعليم والتدريب  
National Authority for Qualifications &  
Quality Assurance of Education & Training

# Directorate of Vocational Reviews

## Review Report

**ThinkSmart For Training & Development**  
**Zinj-Manama**  
**Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Date Reviewed: 13-15 May 2013**

VO096-C2-R046

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## The Directorate of Vocational Reviews

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The Directorate of Vocational Reviews (DVR) is part of the National Authority for Education and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA) that was officially set up in 2008 as an independent body governed and supervised by the Council of Ministers. Established to raise standards in vocational education and training, the DVR 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 DVR'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:

<b>Grade description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
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**

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### **Description of the provision**

Thinksmart For Development and Training (ThinkSmart) was established in 2011. It is licenced by the Ministry of Labor to provide vocational training in a range of information and communication technology (ICT), project management, and leadership and management courses as well as soft skills courses such as 'effective time management' and 'effective customer service'. The majority of ThinkSmart courses on offer are short non-accredited courses. However, more than two thirds of the learners so far have been enrolled on the externally accredited courses such as the Project Management Professional (PMP), the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) and the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) courses.

The centre is located in Zinj area. It is managed by a managing director, who is also the owner. The managing director leads a full-time management team comprising a general manager, two administration coordinators, two administration clerks and one care taker. The institute also employs a pool of 14 local and international part-time trainers. Since its inception, 68 learners have enrolled in 2011, 238 in 2012 and 102 in the first quarter of 2013 has enrolled, most of whom are sponsored by their employers or through the Labour Fund (Tamkeen).

### **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 available learners' written and other work, examined documents and the materials provided by the provider and met with management, staff, learners, employers and trainers.

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

## Table of review Judgements awarded

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<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	
How effective is the provision in raising learners' achievement and meeting the full range of learners' and stakeholders' needs?	Grade: 2 Good
<b>Learners' Achievement</b>	
How well do learners achieve?	Grade: 2 Good
<b>Quality of Provision</b>	
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: 2 Good
How well are learners supported and guided to achieve better outcomes?	Grade: 2 Good
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	
How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all students?	Grade: 2 Good

## Review judgements

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### Overall effectiveness

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

**Grade: 2 Good**

The overall effectiveness of ThinkSmart is good, as are all other aspects of its provision except the effectiveness of teaching and training which is satisfactory. Learners, particularly those attending the externally-accredited courses constituting more than two thirds of the total enrolment, develop very useful skills and knowledge and achieve the intended qualifications. The institute offers an appropriate balance of internally-designed and externally-accredited courses, based on well informed gauging of the labour market to match the needs of the stakeholders. These courses are delivered by qualified trainers who have good command of their specialism. While the training methods adopted by the trainers are not always effective in engaging all learners, the very useful vocational examples and the very effective support and guidance provided to learners prior to the start of the course and during the preparation for the final examinations help learners achieve well. The management team have a clear and shared focus on offering high quality provision. However, performance monitoring measures related to observing trainers in class and verification of internal assessments are not fully developed.

ThinkSmart has good capacity to improve, with a management team pursuing clear measures to improve the provision further. The institute has qualified recently for ISO and developed a very comprehensive internal quality management manual together with a detailed self-evaluation report (gap analysis). As the strategic plan shows, the institute has been active in expanding the range of the courses and seeking partnerships with other external bodies such as the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) and Bureau Veritas. So far in 2013 alone 18 new courses have been approved and the enrolment has increased from 68 learners in 2011 to 238 in 2012. In addition, the institute is working on introducing new technology such as a knowledge portal and smart boards. Both retention and success rates remain high particularly on the externally-accredited courses. Repeat business with major clients is good considering the relatively recent operation of the institute. Tamkeen is a major client and the centre won a tender recently to conduct Tamkeen's Exhibition Management Skills Training programme. ThinkSmart has adequate resources and systematically collects performance data and produces useful trends analysis. However, a course of action based on the outcome of these trends is not well identified.

## **Learners' achievement**

### **How well do learners achieve?**

#### **Grade: 2 Good**

Learners' achievement is good overall. According to the Learners Performance Data (LPD) and the achievement records analysed, most of the learners on the externally accredited programmes develop and gain effective skills and knowledge in their chosen courses and achieve the external qualifications they aim for successfully with success rates ranging from 98% to 100%. On the other hand, on the non-accredited courses, learners gain appropriate knowledge and make suitable progress.

One quarter of the learners on the externally-accredited programmes are enrolled on the PMP programme with a success rate of 98% whereas another one fifth enroll on the ITIL and achieve a success rate of 100%. The CAPM course which represent 15% of the total enrollment has a success rate of 100%. The remaining two courses; the Android Application and the Trade Show Management Skills represent the smallest proportion of the total enrolment and both have very high success rates too. On the other hand, the standard of the learners' work on the non-accredited courses as shown by the post-assessment and from learners' comments reflect a satisfactory level of progress.

Most of the learners attending ThinkSmart are professionals in their fields or university graduates. They acknowledged that attending courses at the institute has enhanced their career progression and helped them in their work. Moreover, from the sessions observed and meetings with stakeholders including learners, trainers and employers, most of the learners are highly self-motivated, enjoy their learning experience and very keen to obtain the intended qualifications. Also from sessions observations, learners' feedback and scrutiny of learners' works, learners are able to work independently and in groups and occasionally reflect critically on how well they are progressing by questioning their trainers and reflecting on their learning experience by completing learning logs in some programmes such as the Trade Show Management Skills programme sponsored by Tamkeen . According to sessions observed and analysis of the records kept, most learners attend regularly with a good attendance rate, averaging around 91% for the last three years. Punctuality is recorded and the institute's staff follow-up the few cases having punctuality issues.

## **The quality of provision**

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

#### **Grade: 3 Satisfactory**

Trainers are certified with relevant theoretical and practical command in their fields and they use hands-on real life examples and appropriate case studies. However, the training and teaching methods used are only adequate and they are not always successful enough in fully engaging and motivating all learners. Trainers on the externally accredited courses assess learners effectively using class interactions and mock examinations and learners are provided with very useful feedback prior to the final external examinations. Records of assessments on the externally accredited courses are kept. Yet on a minority of the non-accredited courses the assessment is not sufficient and the records are not well maintained.

Sessions start on time with useful recapitulation and review of gained knowledge and skills that learners benefit from. Recapitulation is also used as revision before an examination or to provide a chance to answer pending questions from the more experienced learners. Trainers are able to respond to learners questions and provide relevant and updated information to further their understanding. The trainers utilise suitable learning resources to promote learning such as relevant course materials, flip charts and data show projectors. Course objectives are shared with learners and lessons planned adequately. Although lesson plans are not informed by the outcomes of the pre-assessment, trainers usually customise their delivery well enough to cater for learners' different learning needs. However, as observed from the sessions and reported by learners, a number of trainers tend to adopt a lecturing style for large parts of their sessions which fails to engage and motivate all learners.

The assessment of learners' progress on the externally-accredited courses is constructive. Learners' work is corrected well and useful feedback is provided. On the other hand, assessment of learners' progress on a minority of the non-accredited short courses, such as in the case of Business Communication and the Balanced ScoreCard and Performance Management, is limited to formative assessments. Learners are assessed mainly through class activities, interactions and discussions. There is no clear indications if the course objectives are all achieved by each learner or not, as the grading method used for the progress is mostly subjective and based on the trainer's own observation only. Yet on other short non-accredited courses such as the Microsoft Office courses, relevant pre- and post-tests are used as assessment tools.



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

**Grade: 2 Good**

ThinkSmart offers a range of short externally accredited and non-accredited courses that are based on a well-informed analysis of labour market needs that benefits from data collected through surveys, events and professional links. Thinksmart has the ability to customise course materials and related case studies well to match learners' and employers' needs. Courses overall, are planned and structured well to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders. However, learners feel that the durations set for some of the courses are not sufficient for the amount of material to be covered. Externally-accredited courses are updated by the vendor and a minority of the non-accredited course are updated suitably by the trainers themselves. Courses are sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders and they are reinforced with extra supporting material and activities such as Android and IOS systems applications, past examination papers, mock examinations, extra examples and case studies, and invitations to relevant conferences and exhibitions.

The programmes on offer are of an appropriate balance of internally-designed and externally-accredited courses with a range that covers a broad vocational area which includes business and management, information technology, mobile applications, soft skills and leadership. The externally accredited programmes particularly PMP, CAPM and ITIL, have been particularly successful in attracting the majority of the learners. ThinkSmart makes good use of the national labour market studies published by Tamkeen, their strong links with the ICT community and their own research and surveys during the events and the exhibitions they sponsor or attend. Furthermore, the institute actively uses the professional links it maintains with its clients and the international trainers to obtain useful information and gauge the future needs of the market. To match its courses with the specific needs of the market, the provider effectively customises the soft skills and management programmes according to learners' and employers' needs through meeting the stakeholders in advance and agreeing on the type of case studies and relevant terminologies. For these type of courses informative Training Needs Analysis is conducted through meetings with learners and their supervisors.

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

**Grade: 2 Good**

Support and guidance are good overall. Despite the short nature of the conducted courses, learners receive very useful support prior to the start of the course, followed by well-targeted support and guidance. A useful induction session is conducted on the first day of the course focusing on course regulations and health and safety aspects. A dedicated course

coordinator from the institute is always available at the venue to receive the learners and attend to their queries and needs. Trainers and staff members are highly approachable and supportive outside the class, as they provide effective support through email and build good relation with the learners. Learners attending the externally-accredited courses are well guided through the continuous support provided by staff and trainers who furnish learners with very useful extra revision material and offering guidance on preparation for final examinations which is reflected positively on their achievement.

Detailed course outlines are available in advance to stakeholders. Learners and stakeholders receive useful guidance on course selection provided through different media including Facebook, direct visits, awareness sessions and exhibitions. The provider keeps useful communication with employers and responds to their inquiries. Employers are usually updated on their employees' performance through end of course individual performance report (life cycle report) which includes the pre- and post-results where applicable, useful trainer's comments and the rate of attendance. Learners on the externally accredited courses, especially those who register on Bahrain Achievers programme are made aware of their progress prior to their final examination through a formal performance report. However, learners on the non-accredited courses are not made aware sufficiently of their progress. ThinkSmart is highly flexible in the arrangement for programme delivery that matches the stakeholder's needs. Almost all courses are conducted in suitable hospitality venues that are appropriately equipped with the needed resources.

## **Leadership and management**

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

**Grade: 2 Good**

Management, staff and trainers share a common vision that focuses on working closely with the labour market to offer courses that match the needs of stakeholders and on helping learners to achieve the intended qualifications. The management maintains very effective links with a range of stakeholders, particularly those in the ICT service industry, at local and regional levels which ensure very close understanding of the market. This understanding is utilised well in informing the provision. Detailed annual strategic plans are available for the last three years with clear objectives to improve the provision and expand the range of the externally accredited courses. Detailed and critical self-evaluation and gap analysis has been recently conducted which highlighted areas for development and initiated an internal audit process. An appropriate management structure is in place with identified roles and responsibilities and assigned tasks discussed in regularly held meetings.

Certified trainers are carefully selected to deliver the externally accredited courses. Administrative staff are appropriately chosen, deployed and provided with relevant training and development activities. Regular communication with the international trainers are held prior, during and after each course either in person or through e-mails and Skype. Trainers' performance is observed in class by senior training staff and occasionally by external visitors. The form used is detailed and useful comments are shared with trainers. However, the observations are not always critical enough and evaluative of the effectiveness of the training methodologies used by the trainer. Thinksmart regularly collects learners' feedback at the end of each course and produces aggregated data annually. Verbal learners' feedback is also collected within the first sessions and shared with the trainer where necessary. Regular feedback is also collected and aggregated from employers three to six months after each course.

Although most courses are short or very short, sufficient arrangements are in place to assess learners' prior attainment for most courses including the collection of background information, interviews, English language and subject related tests. Performance data is regularly collected and monitored. However, these are not sufficiently verified and the produced analysis is not detailed enough. The premises are free from hazards and appropriate health and safety measures are in place. Almost all courses are conducted at external venues such as hotels where learners are provided with relevant health and safety instructions. The SEF is informative and contains an appropriate amount of evidence to support the judgments. However, the grades are overestimated at some places.

## The provider's key strengths

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- Most learners on the externally-accredited courses develop very useful skills and knowledge and achieve the intended qualifications
- The range of internally-designed and externally-accredited courses matching the needs of stakeholders well
- Well-maintained professional links with a wide range of stakeholders
- Well-informed analysis of the labour market needs to continuously inform the provision
- Very effective support and guidance provided to learners prior to the start of the course and during the preparation for final examinations which is reflected positively on learners achievements on the externally-accredited courses
- The comprehensive quality management manual together with detailed self-evaluation (gap analysis) and internal audit processes that are in place.

## Recommendations

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### In order to improve, ThinkSmart should:

- improve teaching and learning experience by
  - adopting a range of teaching methods to engage further all learners
  - devising more effective assessment methods for the internally-designed courses
  - adopting a learners' centre approach.
- ensure that learners on all non-accredited programmes are formally informed about their progress
- further develop the current system used to observe trainers in class, to be more critical particularly in relation to training and teaching methods
- introduce verification processes particularly of learners' performance data and expand the current trend analysis of such data to produce clear outcomes to be utilised for effective follow-up actions.