



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

Vocational Review Unit

Review Report

Aptech Computer Education

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 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

Aptech Computer Education (Aptech), is a franchisee of Aptech Worldwide. Established in Bahrain in 1993, Aptech was one of the first private companies licensed by the Ministry of Labour to offer information technology (IT) training programmes in the Kingdom.

Aptech ran nine short courses and three longer courses during 2008, and enrolled a total of 324 learners. Most courses are accredited internally. The topics covered include web page design, SQL Server, Microsoft Word and Excel, Access, the Certificate of Proficiency in Information and Systems Management (CPISM), the Diploma in Information and Systems Management (DISM) and the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL). Courses range in duration from three days to 12 months. Aptech has been an ICDL approved training centre since 2006, and started conducting ICDL courses in 2007. In 2006 Aptech established two testing centres, one for Microsoft-related products and one for products from CISCO.

Most of Aptech's learners are aged 19 or over, and come from government or corporate bodies. The majority of training programmes are held on Aptech's site, with a few delivered, at the clients' request, on clients' premises. The company has a managing director, a marketing executive, a business manager, a counsellor/customer relations officer and four trainers, three full-time and one part-time

Scope of the review

This review was conducted over three days by a team of four reviewers. During the review the team examined learners' work, analysed data about the qualifications learners achieve and the courses they complete, and talked with staff, learners, trainers and employers.

This report summarises reviewers' findings regarding Aptech's IT provision, and their recommendations for improvement.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Grade 4: below satisfactory

Overall, Aptech's provision is below satisfactory. The range of programmes offered is adequate, as is the level of support provided to learners. However, learners' achievement, the quality of training, and the company's leadership and management are below satisfactory.

Most learners develop useful practical skills that help them in their current job. Their motivation is high, especially during practical sessions. Achievement on Aptech's one externally-accredited course, the ICDL, was satisfactory in 2008. On internally-accredited courses, achievement is judged on the basis of learners' attendance, a measure which does not show whether learners have achieved their goals or gained the skills they need. Learners' prior attainment is not assessed when they start their course. Some learners are on programmes which do not match their level of ability. A minority of those on non-accredited courses have difficulty in speaking and understanding English, which hinders their progress.

The majority of Aptech's trainers are knowledgeable and deployed effectively. However, a majority of sessions are unsatisfactorily planned and most lack variety. Assessment is not thorough enough. Few trainers take into consideration the needs of all the learners in the group. Whilst less able learners are adequately supported, those with higher abilities are, at times, insufficiently challenged. Aptech's classrooms are, in the main, dull and shabby.

Aptech offers a wide range of IT programmes, but few of them provide the option of external accreditation. The company's arrangements for gauging employer satisfaction and checking on market needs are not systematic enough. However, Aptech has responded positively and promptly to employers' requests to deliver an ICDL course in Arabic. Aptech has a well-structured and user-friendly website. A customer services officer has recently been employed to provide additional support and counselling for learners.

Aptech lacks a clear strategic plan or any other means to monitor or drive improvement. The company's arrangements for assuring the quality of training are inadequate. Although trainers are visited by managers during training programmes, the result of these visits is not recorded or used to help trainers improve their performance. The company's attempts to gather learners' feedback are not thorough enough. Neither the feedback from learners, nor that collected informally from employers, is analysed.

Capacity to improve

Grade 3: satisfactory

Aptech demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. Its relationship with Aptech Worldwide gives it access to sufficient, well-qualified trainers. Communication within the company is effective. Key messages are shared with staff during regular meetings. These meetings are well minuted and followed up; there is a clear distribution of responsibilities among team members. In response to growing demand for externally accredited courses, Aptech has launched a range of Microsoft-accredited and approved courses; these programmes will be available during 2009. The company has demonstrated some growth, with a 21% increase in enrolments, from 276 in 2007 to 324 in 2008.

Aptech's managers pay insufficient attention to the monitoring and analysis of learners' achievement, particularly on non-accredited courses. The company's current measures for checking and improving the quality of training are inadequate. The self-evaluation form is not comprehensive. It does not include the views of all staff, and the grades proposed are over-generous. However the form highlights a few of the areas for improvement identified by the review team, such as the need to develop a robust initial assessment procedure.

Summary of grades awarded

Overall Judgement	
Effectiveness of provision	Grade 4: below satisfactory
Capacity to Improve	Grade 3: satisfactory
Review Findings	
How well do learners achieve?	Grade 4: below satisfactory
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 3: satisfactory
How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	Grade 4: below satisfactory

Main judgements and recommendations

Strengths

- **Aptech's trainers.** Aptech's trainers are knowledgeable, with good vocational skills and experience. The company uses only certified trainers, who have undergone rigorous instruction in the products covered by its programmes, and in the use of appropriate teaching techniques. Most sessions include well-focused practical work, which covers a broad range of topics.
- **The customized provider-accredited courses on offer.** Aptech's managers are generally responsive to employers' needs. On request, training is carried out on the employer's premises, or customised to meet the requirements of a particular client group. The introduction of the ICDL in Arabic as well as English was undertaken at the request of employers.
- **The personal support extended to learners.** Trainers provide effective personal support for learners both during their programme and once they have completed it. The help given includes helping learners to search for a better career, giving extra free classes to learners who need them, and allowing them access to Aptech's laboratory for two months after they finish the course. A member of staff is available to help learners identify suitable courses and provide counselling and guidance services as required.

Areas for improvement

- **Arrangements to monitor and record learners' achievement.** Achievement on Aptech's internally-accredited courses is calculated only on the basis of learners' attendance, a measure inadequate to show whether they have met their learning goals. Trainers do not keep records relating to the progress learners are making and, on most courses, learners are unaware of how well they are doing. They have insufficient opportunity to reflect critically on their work or identify what they must do to improve.
- **Assessment of learners' knowledge and skills prior to starting their courses.** Aptech's measures for initially assessing learners' prior attainment and experience are neither thorough nor systematic. Some learners are placed on courses which do not match their ability. Information about learners' individual needs is not gathered and used to inform session planning.

- **Session planning.** Sessions are poorly planned. Although most trainers make appropriate reference during the introduction to each session to the work covered previously, few prepare or use session plans, and, whilst most of them are clear about the objectives of each session, they do not share these objectives with learners. Some sessions are poorly structured. Schemes of work provide no more than a list of the topics to be covered during the programme.
- **The lack of accredited programmes.** The company offers only one externally accredited course, the ICDL programme, which was introduced in 2006 and is available in both Arabic and English. Enrolment in this programme represented 11% of all learners during 2008.
- **The learning environment and resources.** Most of Aptech's classrooms are dull and uninspiring, with no posters on the walls. Although specialist IT equipment and accommodation are fit for purpose, some equipment is worn and outdated. The layout of computers and desks within classrooms hinders the use of group activities. There is no dedicated prayer room for learners. The company has no health and safety policy. Although there are adequate fire extinguishers, fire alarms and fire exits, no assembly area has been identified for learners in case of emergency.
- **Measures to monitor and improve the quality of training.** Managers monitor each trainer's performance by randomly visiting various sessions. However, although they provide some verbal feedback to the trainer concerned, the outcomes of the observations are not recorded, nor used as part of a performance management system. Trainers receive insufficient guidance on how to improve the quality of their training delivery. The evaluations gathered from learners are not detailed enough. The outcomes are aggregated, but not analysed or used as a trigger for improvement. Measures to gather and use the views of employers are insufficiently thorough or systematic.
- **Strategic planning.** Aptech has a vision statement which is displayed and shared with staff. However, this is not focused on increasing the level of learners' achievement or on improving the quality of training. Although the company has a financial plan, it lacks a written strategic plan, or clear measures to enable managers to plan for improvement.
- **Self-evaluation.** The self-evaluation form (SEF) is comprehensive, and identifies some of the areas for improvement highlighted by the review team. However, it is over-generous in terms of the grades given, rating the company's performance too high in all areas. The process of compiling the SEF was not consultative enough.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Aptech should:

- monitor, record and analyse learners' progress and achievement on all courses
- develop procedures to assess and record learners' prior attainment
- introduce and follow comprehensive session plans for all courses
- introduce more externally accredited courses
- improve the learning environment and facilities
- implement a quality assurance system to monitor and improve the quality of training
- undertake strategic planning, focusing on learners' achievement and the quality of training
- adopt a more self-critical approach to self-evaluation.