Directorate of Vocational Reviews
Review Report

Bahrain Institute of Technology (BIT)

Manama

Kingdom of Bahrain

Date Reviewed: 24-27 October 2016

VO029-C3-R040

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Introduction

The Directorate of Vocational Reviews (DVR), which is a part of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), conducted this review over three days by a team of five reviewers. For this review, reviewers observed sessions and other related activities, analysed data about the courses and certificates that learners achieve, examined learners' written and other work, examined documents and the materials provided by the Centre and met learners, employers, trainers, management and support staff.

In the previous review the overall effectiveness of Bahrain Institute of Technology (BIT) was judged as satisfactory. All aspects of BIT provision were judged as satisfactory, except quality of programmes which was judged as good.

This Report summarises the 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)
Quality of teaching / training and assessment	Satisfactory (3)
Quality of programmes	Good (2)
Quality of support and guidance	Satisfactory (3)
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)

With the exception of the quality of the programmes which is graded as good, all aspects of BIT provision are satisfactory.

Learners gain relevant vocational skills, knowledge and competencies, although a minority have difficulty in completing the tasks required in their course. The vast majority of learners enrolled in the local completion courses achieve their course learning outcomes. However, only approximately half of the learners who sit for the external examinations achieve the qualifications they aim for, some of these being successful at the second attempt; these courses constitute a significant minority of the total number enrolled since the last review.

BIT learners have a positive attitude towards their learning and the majority make sufficient progress considering their prior attainment. BIT trainers are knowledgeable and have practical command of their subjects, with those teaching the externally accredited courses being certified. They use appropriate teaching methods which succeed in engaging the majority of learners. Suitable lesson plans are used, although these are not informed by learners' prior or continuous assessment. Assessment is adequate and includes formative and summative methods; though in a few local completion courses the post-course assessment is not rigorous and does not completely cover all course learning outcomes. BIT utilises information gathered about the labour market effectively in order to regularly update the provision and manage affiliations. Courses are well-structured, planned and resourced to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders. Although courses are updated regularly, the available policies and procedures are insufficiently detailed. Learners at BIT are provided with appropriate support and guidance, though the support provided is *ad-hoc* and not focussed to enable learners to reach their full potential. The learning environment is fit for purpose and well-equipped. Learners and stakeholders have access to informed advice and guidance about courses on offer and about their progression routes.

The institute's strategic planning is suitable, although it needs more explicit focus on improving learners' achievement and the quality of training. Learners' performance is adequately monitored, with achievement data being kept but not aggregated or analysed to monitor trends over time. Results of the externally accredited courses are monitored and analysed to improve the provision. Trainers' performance is suitably monitored through

class observation and learners' feedback, though class observations are only occasional. Insufficient quality assurance arrangements are in place, with the available policies and procedures not sufficiently detailed and with no internal verification being carried out for the majority of the courses conducted. Learners' prior attainment is sufficiently measured in all courses, and utilised to place learners in a suitable course level.

Capacity to improve

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

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

During the last two years BIT management has carried out some improvements to the provision. These include recruiting more staff, improving the resources such as purchasing Cisco routers and switches, computers and monitors and revamping the institute website. The management has also expanded the range of externally-accredited courses, with BIT obtaining recognition by the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) as a learning partner, becoming an accredited study centre for the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), and becoming an accredited training partner for the Charted Institute for Securities and Investment (CISI). BIT has also signed memorandums of understanding with international training providers who provide the Institute with the consultancy, trainers and training materials needed to offer courses such as Project Management Professional (PMP) and Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL). The Institute also received MoL approval to conduct commercial and administrative training courses.

BIT has sufficient human and physical resources to enable improvements to be carried out. Nevertheless, the current quality assurance arrangements are insufficient to ensure continuous quality improvement, and the Institute's strategic planning, although focused on expanding the range of the courses offered and improving the resources, needs to place more emphasis on quality assurance matters.

The recommendations of the previous review are partially addressed, for example learners' prior attainment is currently measured but the outcomes are insufficiently used to inform lesson planning to meet the varying needs of learners.

The number of enrolments increased during 2014-2015 and repeat business is satisfactory.

Learners' achievement

How well do learners achieve?

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

Learners' achievement is satisfactory overall. They gain adequate vocational skills, knowledge and competencies in the field of information and communication technology (ICT). However, a minority of learners still have difficulty in completing tasks as required upon completion of their course. Learners' acquisition of knowledge and development of skills is sufficiently measured against the pre-set course learning outcomes through appropriate summative and formative assessment tools. These include pre- and post-course tests, hands-on practical activities and external online examinations. Nevertheless, in a few of the local completion courses, discrepancies in terms of level and rigour were observed in the intended learning outcomes and in the summative assessments given to learners.

The vast majority of learners enrolled in the 'Qudarat' course, which is an attendance-based course with attendance certificates being given on completing at least 70% of the required guided hours. Apart from the 'Qudarat' course, about 60% of learners are enrolled in the local completion courses, with the vast majority successfully achieving the course learning outcomes. The remaining learners are enrolled in the externally-accredited courses, which include Microsoft, CompTIA and the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) courses. Approximately half of the learners sitting the final online examinations are successful in achieving the qualifications they aim for, with a number of them achieving at the second attempt. A prerequisite test was introduced in the Microsoft advanced courses to ensure that learners have the necessary prior knowledge for the course level, following which the pass rate improved to 73% in 2016. Taking into account the prior knowledge of learners at entry, training methodologies and the assessment structures used, the majority of learners make sufficient progress overall.

Learners are attentive and have positive attitude towards their learning, especially during practical activities. A significant minority of learners take responsibility for their own learning, this being evident during the observed sessions through their responses to probing questions. Learners are required to complete an end of course evaluation form, in which they evaluate the extent to which they use the acquired skills and competencies in the workplace. Learners are able to work independently, though a minority occasionally requires the support of their trainers in completing class activities.

Attendance records are kept across all courses, with action taken against frequent absenteeism and lateness. However, punctuality is not recorded. From the records of

attendance and the observed sessions it is evident that most learners attend on a regular basis, though punctuality is an issue.

The quality of provision

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

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

BIT trainers have theoretical and practical command of the areas they teach. They provide accurate explanations, respond professionally to learners' questions and provide a range of relevant vocational examples and useful real life cases to link theory with practice. Those who teach the externally-accredited courses are certified in their subjects.

Sessions usually start with recapitulation of the previously covered material and sharing the current session's objectives. Time management was effective in the majority of the observed sessions. Trainers use suitable lesson plans which follow the vendor's material, though only a few plans have further details such as including the topics to be covered, the training methodologies and the resources to be used. However, they are insufficiently based on learners' prior or continuous assessment.

Adequate training methods and activities are used by the trainers, who engage the majority of learners. They occasionally challenge learners by further questioning techniques and promote self and life-long learning through discussion and case studies. However, in a minority of the observed sessions, trainers do not sufficiently stimulate learners' critical thinking or engage them adequately particularly in the theoretical elements of the session.

Learners' understanding and abilities to complete relevant tasks are adequately assessed through a variety of practical exercises. Summative assessment methods are used to evaluate learners' attainment, such as pre- and post-course assessment, quizzes and mid-term tests. However, in a few of the local completion courses, summative assessments are insufficiently rigorous or do not completely cover all course learning outcomes. Instant verbal feedback is provided during sessions, but assessments lack written feedback on how and where to improve further. Although records of learners' marks in the summative assessment are kept, limited records are available on the outcomes of the formative assessment conducted during the course. Moreover, the review team was provided with limited learners' work. The Institute has a basic rubric to evaluate the practical work of learners which is shared with trainers; however, it is ineffectively implemented as the marks given are mostly subjective.

From the observed sessions, learners' different needs are suitably addressed, with the less able learners being sufficiently supported. However, the more able learners are insufficiently challenged. The available learning resources and materials are appropriately utilised to ensure a smooth delivery of training and facilitate learning.

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

Grade: Good (2)

BIT gathers information from various sources and utilises it to regularly update their courses and manage affiliations. A competitor analysis was compiled based on MoL statistics of IT training providers, from which an action plan was developed to identify potential courses, affiliations and the necessary resources. The Institute also utilises the recommendations of Ahlia University on offering professional qualifications such as CIMA, CIM, CISI and Project Management Institute (PMI) certificates; these are based on a study of 'Industry and Employer Graduate Skills Requirements' developed by Bahrain Higher Education Council. BIT is aware of Tamkeen's 'Ehtaref' professional courses, as well as communicating with employers to determine their needs. Although courses are not fully tailored for individual clients, they are modified to suit clients' needs or cover particular aspects in more depth.

Courses are regularly updated and resources and technology needed for course delivery are up-to-date. However, the procedures for course design and update are insufficiently detailed. Courses are well-structured and planned, with detailed course outlines that indicate the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) plus the teaching and assessment methods. BIT is an authorised training centre for several IT vendors, where all course materials used are specific to the vendor or an approved third party developer. In a few local completion courses the ILOs are too many, or vaguely stated. Courses are well-resourced to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders, with the Institute having a sufficient number of laboratories which meet the requirements of the IT vendors. Laboratories are well equipped with a sufficient number of PCs, with updated hardware and software. Learners enrolled in the externally-accredited courses are provided with authentic textbooks and CDs, with vendors' training material being used in all these courses.

Learners are provided with a range of extra-curricular activities to enhance the learning experience, such as laboratory simulation, extra online resources and videos. Access and entry level requirements for courses are implemented effectively, particularly in the externally-accredited courses. Course outlines clearly identify the targeted audience or prerequisites for each course; for example, Microsoft professional course learners have to score at least 70% in the prerequisites test to be eligible. Those who fail this test are provided

with a free entry level Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA) course to ensure that they have the prior knowledge needed.

How well are learners supported and guided?

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

Learners at BIT receive appropriate support and guidance throughout their learning experience. Staff and trainers are friendly, approachable and supportive. Before starting a training course, learners are provided with induction on policies and information such as the attendance and punctuality policy and the assessment included within the course. For the externally-accredited courses the induction also includes initial guidance about the course, including the prerequisites and the certification path. Learners enrolled in the externally-accredited courses have access to previous and mock examinations, extra revision and support sessions, and extra supporting documents. Nevertheless, this support is ad-hoc and is not sufficiently structured to enable learners to reach their full potential.

BIT lacks a written support policy and procedures which cover all categories of learners, including special needs. The learning environment is fit for purpose and well equipped with the essential training materials and relevant educational posters. It includes a good number of classrooms with appropriate lighting, ventilation and air conditioning.

Trainers provide more detailed information about the technical and professional courses and their progression paths. The BIT website is newly revamped with detailed course outlines and direct links to international accrediting bodies. Through the Ministry of Labour (MoL) the institute presents a few seminars to the public, Ahlia students and job seekers, highlighting the importance of professional certificates, marketing the courses and answering enquiries.

The majority of stakeholders are well informed about learners' attendance throughout the course, though learners' achievement is reported only occasionally and on employers' request. The Qudurat course is an E-Government project, with the certificate being granted based on attending the required hours. The Institute sends weekly, monthly and quarterly attendance reports to the stakeholder. Arrangements for courses delivery are highly flexible to suit the needs of learners and stakeholders. Course timing, dates, days or venue can be changed upon learners' and stakeholders' request, as can the examination date and time as long as it complies with the main vendor's requirements.

Although BIT lacks a written special needs policy, there are cases where such learners are provided with support to help them overcome their difficulties. For example, there was a case of one learner with vision impairment where the Institute provided a magnifier screen and arrangements were made to facilitate his online examination. The institute has also

conducted a 'Qudarat' course for the Blind Friendship Society in-house, with special arrangements and extended course duration to accommodate their needs.

Leadership, management and governance

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

Grade: Satisfactory (3)

The BIT mission statement is focussed on learners' advantage. A SWOT analysis was conducted as part of the strategic planning. The strategic objectives are relevant and sufficiently challenging. The business plan includes initiatives for improving the resources, expanding the range of courses offered and increasing international partnerships. It is regularly reviewed and monitored, though the initiatives are not always clearly linked with the strategic objectives to ensure their full and timely achievement. There is also no explicit focus on improving learners' achievement and the quality assurance of the provision.

Considering the type of the courses offered and enrolment numbers, BIT's current organisation structure is adequate. Roles and responsibilities are clear, though some staff are overstretched which impacts on their performance, particularly in the quality assurance processes. The Institute's performance is monitored by the Managing Director who is a member of the recently established Board of Directors.

Quality assurance arrangements are insufficient; the Institute has a set of quality assurance policies and procedures but they are not detailed enough, particularly where related to the training processes, and are not always implemented. With the exception of the Ahlia University modules, which represent a significant minority of the enrolment numbers, there is no internal verification carried out in the rest of the courses. Learners' prior attainment is sufficiently assessed and the outcomes are used to place learners at a suitable course level.

Although learners' achievement is adequately monitored, the data is only kept at individual course level and is not aggregated to monitor trends over time. Results of the externally accredited courses are monitored and the outcomes are used to improve the provision. For instance, BIT managers noticed that the pass rates in Microsoft courses were low in 2014 and 2015, being approximately 50%; they investigated this issue and the prerequisite test was introduced in mid-2015 to ensure that learners have the prior knowledge needed for their courses. Accordingly, the pass rate in these courses improved in 2016 to 73%.

Qualified trainers are used, having sufficient induction and deployed effectively. Their performance is adequately monitored through class observations and analysis of learners' feedback. Learners' feedback per trainer is aggregated and analysed quarterly.

Nevertheless, class observations are occasional and the majority of them do not identify specific areas for development. Performance appraisal is in place and trainers are provided with relevant opportunities for training and development.

Learners' feedback about the provision is regularly gathered and analysed quarterly. Learners are mostly satisfied with the courses and their outcomes. Although BIT maintains communication with employers regarding arrangements for course delivery, their feedback about the courses is insufficiently sought. The institute has partnerships and networks with various international providers, IT vendors and awarding bodies.

BIT premises are free of any obvious hazards, and essentials of health and safety are in place. The Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) submitted in preparation for this review is fairly informative, though the grades provided are overestimated.

The provider's key strengths

- Qualified and experienced trainers are recruited, inducted and deployed effectively.

- Courses are well-planned, structured, resourced and regularly updated.

- The learning environment is fit for purpose.

- Partnerships and networks are in place with various international providers, IT vendors and awarding bodies.

Recommendations

In order to improve, BIT should:

- ensure that all learners make sufficient progress and achieve the qualifications they aim for

- ensure that assessment matches the course ILOs and that a clear rubric is developed and implemented effectively

- improve the leadership and management through:

    - developing and implementing an effective quality assurance system

    - ensuring that data on progress and attainment are aggregated and analysed, and the outcomes are used to improve the provision.

Appendix

Description of the provision

Bahrain Institute of Technology (BIT) was established by Bahrain Development Bank (BDB) in 2001 and licensed by the Ministry of Labour (MoL). In 2010 the name of the Institute was changed to Bahrain Institute of Entrepreneurship and Technology (BIET), due to the introduction of an Entrepreneurship programme by the BDB. In 2014, BIT was acquired by the Arab Academy for Research and Studies (Ahlia University) and the name changed back to Bahrain Institute of Technology (BIT). BIT is an authorised training centre for Microsoft, CompTIA, and the International Computer Driving License (ICDL). BIT is also an approved testing centre of Pearson VUE to conduct exams for major IT vendors such as Microsoft, Cisco, Oracle and others. BIT offers externally accredited and local completion certificate courses. It also offers the Qudarat attendance programme, last conducted during the period from November 2013 to May 2015.

The Institute operates from a single centre located in Manama. It employs a general manager, business development manager, finance and operation manager, and head of training and corporate communication. There is also a sales and marketing manager and assistant manager, one senior IT trainers, two IT trainer, an administrative staff for the test centre, an accountant, an assistant administrator, two driver/messenger and a security/caretaker. The head of training and corporate communication also work as a full time trainer, and one of the senior IT trainers also has responsibility for quality assurance. All staff work on a full time basis. The Institute also has three part-time trainers who are utilised as and when needed.

Since the last review, 1,451 learners have been enrolled; 75 in 2013, 398 in 2014, 559 in 2015 and 419 in 2016 up to the date of this review. Externally accredited courses include Microsoft, CompTIA and ICDL; these form 39.69% of the total enrolment. The rest are completion certificate courses. In addition, 5,527 learners were enrolled in Qudarat attendance certificate programme.