



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

Vocational Review Unit

Repeat Review Report

New Horizons Computer Learning Centre

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 Labor 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

New Horizons Computer Learning Centre (NHCLC) was established in Bahrain in December 1996 as a franchisee of New Horizons Computer Learning Centre of California, United States, which has more than 350 branches worldwide. The centre is licensed by the Ministry of Labour and offers a range of short and long non-accredited and externally accredited courses in Information Technology (IT). It is a Microsoft gold certified partner in addition it is an authorized Prometric testing centre by Thompson, by Virtual University Enterprise (VUE) and by International Computer Driving License (ICDL) to deliver official examinations. From November 2009 to date and after its first review, NHCLC has enrolled a total of 1545 learners. Learners are either self-sponsored or sponsored by their employers.

NHCLC has one centre located in Manama and it is operated by a chief executive officer, a general manager, an operations manager, a sales manager, two full time trainers, four part-time trainers, two account executives, a front desk administrator, a facility technician and three office helpers. The management of NHCLC reports to a board of directors.

The repeat review

NHCLC was first reviewed in November 2009. The provision was below satisfactory overall. Although the range of programmes offered, and the level of support for learners, were satisfactory, learners' achievement, the quality of training and the leadership and management of the provision were below satisfactory. NHCLC was therefore subject to a repeat review to ensure that these areas improved to the required standard.

The repeat review comprised two one-day monitoring visits and a final three-day visit by a team of four reviewers. During the repeat review, reviewers observed training sessions, analysed data about the qualifications learners achieve and the courses they complete, and talked with the managing director, trainers, administration and support staff, learners and employers.

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

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Grade 3: Satisfactory

The overall effectiveness of New Horizons Computer Learning Centre (NHCLC) is now satisfactory. The training learners receive and the range of programmes delivered at the centre are judged to be satisfactory. As a consequence of this, and the good support and guidance they receive, their achievement is now satisfactory. Although the overall judgement for leadership and management was judged to be currently still below satisfactory, capacity to improve was judged to be satisfactory, mainly as a result of the initiatives begun by the new management team.

Learners' achievement is satisfactory, with learners acquiring appropriate IT knowledge and skills that are often implemented or related to their workplace. Learners are achieving their qualifications on the non-accredited and externally accredited courses, although achievement on the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) is not as high. Appropriate exercises and activities are used to measure learners' progress during the lessons. The majority of learners enjoy their courses and most have the basic skills to perform well, with the exception of a few lacking sufficient IT pre-requisite skills. NHCLC has recently undertaken pre- and post-course assessments although these are not consistently implemented. The overall retention rate is high as expected on these short courses. While attendance is high, punctuality is an issue.

Training is satisfactory with lessons usually starting on time and objectives being shared with learners. Lesson plans are detailed although there is no reference to the accommodation of learners' varying needs. During lessons, trainers generally check learners' understanding with useful verbal feedback given. They engage and motivate learners to participate although not enough vocational examples are used by them. NHCLC does not make enough use of the results of the pre-course assessment for the accommodation of learners' varying needs. Whilst less able learners are supported well during lessons, there is not enough challenge for the more able learners.

The range of programmes offered by NHCLC is satisfactory, the centre providing a range of externally accredited information technology courses with clear progression routes. Learners and employers are generally satisfied with the courses. Course content and details are available in advance to learners and employers. NHCLC gathers employers' course requirements through calls by the marketing team although no courses have yet been introduced based on this process. Limited use is made of enrichment activities on the courses conducted.

NHCLC offers good after class support to learners such as a free help desk, free repeat courses and an online structured learning experience for learners who have irregular timing. Additionally, learners can use the laboratories outside the training hours. Trainers and staff are supportive during and after lessons. Access to sufficient advice and guidance about course selection is provided to learners by the staff. A detailed and informative website and leaflets are made available by the franchiser as the centre's own dedicated website is currently under construction. Although appropriate health and safety measures are in place, fire extinguisher certificates have expired and health and safety measures are rarely communicated to learners.

Despite recent changes to the management structure at NHCLC, leadership and management was judged to be still below satisfactory. The mission statement included in the business plan is not focused on raising learners' achievement and the required actions are insufficiently detailed. NHCLC's management does not aggregate learners' achievement data for comparison and trend analysis over time.

Qualified staff and trainers are recruited and deployed. A suitable form is used for the recently implemented lesson observation process; however, the completed forms are insufficiently critical. The centre has recently implemented a suitable staff appraisal system. However, neither lesson observations nor learners' feedback are part of the trainers' performance evaluation. Useful upgrading opportunities are provided to full time trainers and detailed job descriptions are in place. Regular, appropriately documented staff meetings are now in place.

The majority of employers are updated on their learners' attendance and performance after the courses; however, they demanded a speeding up of the process. Learners' feedback is collected on a suitable form but the feedback is not aggregated or analysed. Employers' feedback is collected through telephone calls but this is neither regular nor systematic and the results of these calls are not always documented. The SEF is fairly informative but overestimates the grades.

Capacity to improve

Grade 3: Satisfactory

With the appointment of a new manager in October 2010, NHCLC has continued to tackle the outcomes of its first review and improve the quality of its provision. NHCLC upgraded its full time trainers' certifications and recently introduced a suitable lesson observation process. Although they could be made more formal and consistent, there are processes in places for collecting learners' and employers' feedback to provide appropriate information

on where further improvements could be made. The centre has a helpful employee handbook that includes working policies on matters such as the employment contract, code of conduct and compensation policy. The centre has a set of relevant policies and manuals in place, most of which are from the franchisor and these include a consumer manual, a training manager manual and an instructor's manual. Responsibility for quality assurance is currently split between the general manager and the operations manager.

The centre carries out an on-going version upgrading of its programmes. During 2010, two new courses were offered: Windows 7 and ACCM. The centre is introducing four new programmes in 2011: Microsoft Systems Centre Operations Manager, System Centre Data Protection Manager, System Centre Virtual Machine Manager, Windows Server 2008 R2 Server Virtualisation. NHCLC is planning to become a partner of Computer Information System Company (Cisco) by the end of January 2011, for which one of its full time trainers has become a Cisco certified trainer.

The centre has sufficient human and physical resources to carry out its improvement plans. The centre collects data on learners' achievement and records this in an appropriate database. However, this is not yet used for comparison and trend analysis over time.

Between its first review conducted in November 2009 and the current review, the centre had an enrolment of 1545 learners and a good repeat business from the major employers it is dealing with. The Self Evaluation Form (SEF) is fairly informative and highlights some areas for improvement.

Summary of grades awarded

Overall judgement	Original grade	Repeat review grade
Effectiveness of provision	Grade 4: Below satisfactory	Grade 3: Satisfactory
Capacity to improve	Grade 4: Below satisfactory	Grade 3: Satisfactory
Review findings		
How well do learners achieve?	Grade 4: Below satisfactory	Grade 3: Satisfactory
How effective is training?	Grade 4: Below satisfactory	Grade 3: Satisfactory
How well do programmes meet the needs of learners and employers?	Grade 3: Satisfactory	Grade 3: Satisfactory
How well are learners guided and supported?	Grade 3: Satisfactory	Grade 2: Good
How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	Grade 4: Below satisfactory	Grade 4: Below satisfactory

Main judgements and recommendations

Strengths

- **Wide range of externally accredited Information Technology courses with appropriate progression levels.** The range includes Microsoft packages, networking, operating systems, graphic design, security and project management.
- **Good support provided to learners in and out of class.** This includes a free help desk facility in which trainers are available to help the learners, an on-line learning course for those who have irregular timing and not able to adhere to a fixed schedule, access to the laboratories outside the training hours and occasional visits to their workplace to help them with their information technology requirements.

Areas for improvement

- **Inconsistent and ineffective use of pre- and post-course assessments, particularly the use of pre-course assessment for accommodating learners' varying needs.** These were initiated in the second half of 2010 but are not consistently applied to all courses. Moreover, the questions are mainly in the form of multiple choice and 'true or false' which are not always an appropriate way to measure information technology knowledge or skills and consequently as a means of accommodating learners' varying needs.
- **Insufficient enrichment activities on the courses conducted.** NHCLC has limited use of enrichment activities on the courses conducted, these being just occasional references to websites. Although useful videos and laboratory materials are available to enrich the learning experience, these are not used on the courses.
- **The NHCLC business plan not focused on raising learners' achievement; in addition, this latter not yet being analysed to identify trends.** NHCLC has a business plan but this focuses mainly on marketing and raising revenue and is not sufficiently focused on raising learners' achievement. In addition, the actions have no time frame, division of responsibility or how to measure actual performance against targets.
- **Employers' feedback not systematically collected and analysed.** Employers' feedback is collected through telephone calls but this is irregular and *ad hoc*. Furthermore, the results of these calls are not explicitly documented.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision, NHCLC should:

- devise a system to measure learners' progress consistently and regularly on all courses as a tool to raise learners' achievement and ensure that the outcomes of initial assessment are used effectively in the accommodation of learners' varying needs
- enrich the courses with related extra-curricular activities
- develop effective and robust strategic plans which are focused on raising learners' achievement and aggregate and analyse learners' achievement data for comparison and trend analysis over time
- seek employers' feedback regularly and systematically and use the outcomes to improve the provision.