



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

Vocational Review Unit

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 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

New Horizons Computer Learning Center (NHCLC) was founded in 1996 as a franchise of New Horizons Computer Learning Centres in the USA. The company holds a license from the Ministry of Labour, and offers a range of IT technical training, desktop application, business skills and language courses for all levels of computer users, in multiple delivery methods and formats. Externally accredited training courses such as Microsoft Office User Specialist (MOUS), Microsoft Certified System Engineer (MCSE), International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL), Oracle DBA, Certified Internet Web Professionals (CIW), Computer Information System Company (CISCO), and the CompTIA A+ certificate are on offer. The company is a Microsoft Gold Partner. NHCLC also runs non-accredited courses, on topics such as Microsoft Office and Adobe design; these courses make up some 50% of its business. Courses are of between 10 and 80 hours duration. In 2009, 1,656 learners enrolled with NHCLC. Learners come from government departments and local businesses or are individuals who sponsor themselves.

NHCLC operates two centres, one in Manama and a second that was opened in 2008 at Isa Town. NHCLC has two testing centres; a Pearson VUE online testing centre for Oracle and Microsoft and a Thomson Prometric online testing centre for CISCO and CIW certifications. The institute is led by a general manager and employs a sales executive, an operations manager and six administration staff. There are four full-time trainers, and four who work part time.

Scope of the review

This review was conducted over three days by a team of five reviewers. During the review, reviewers observed training sessions, analysed data about the qualifications learners achieve and the courses they complete, and talked with staff, learners and employers.

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

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Grade 4: below satisfactory

NHCLC's provision is below satisfactory overall. Although the institute offers a satisfactory range of programmes and appropriate support and guidance to learners, learners' achievements, the quality of training, and the leadership and management of the provision are all below satisfactory.

Retention rates, at just over 90%, are satisfactory for most courses but the institute does not maintain a system to adequately assess and monitor learners' achievements. The only achievement data made available for this review was for the 2008 and 2009 ICDL programme. The success rate varied from module to module of this programme, from 61% in word processing, which is satisfactory, to 28% in database, which is below satisfactory.

All learners who attend for more than 50% of the course hours are judged successful and awarded a completion certificate. This approach does not ensure that learners who complete a course gain the required vocational skills or achieve their learning goals. Learners' progress is insufficiently monitored and recorded. Most trainers provide only oral feedback during class activities. Occasionally, learners' understanding is appropriately monitored through open questioning. Opportunities for assessed assignments, quizzes and group interaction are few, making it difficult for trainers to objectively assess learning progress, and for learners to see how well they are doing.

On courses such as Excel and Word, most learners gain basic skills that are relevant to their jobs, but on other courses, such as graphics, more advanced vocational skills are not adequately developed. Learners enjoy their practical exercises and are generally sufficiently engaged and motivated; however, in some of the sessions observed, not enough time was allocated for particular tasks, or the trainer moved the session along too quickly. Such shortcomings affect learners' mastery of practical skills. NHCLC does not monitor learners' attendance and punctuality adequately or challenge lateness and absence sufficiently. Records indicate that most courses have high absenteeism and almost one-third of learners miss classes frequently.

Most trainers use the basic course objectives and lesson plans provided by international IT partners but these are rarely shared with learners. Although most trainers have a relevant IT background and appropriate knowledge most of them use only a narrow range of training

techniques during sessions. Trainers generally recap learning effectively, but often have to repeat themselves because of the punctuality problem, losing valuable training time. Initial assessment is done only when requested by clients and the outcomes are not recorded. NHCLC's initial assessment does not sufficiently measure learners' previous knowledge.

NHCLC's range of IT programmes is satisfactory and generally meets learners' and employers'. Most programmes have adequate progression levels. Although the institute has a broad range of externally accredited programmes it does not always ensure that external assessment is carried out or check whether learners have gained their chosen qualification. NHCLC makes insufficient use of enrichment activities to enhance the learning experience; most trainers draw largely on course material only.

Trainers and sales executives provide effective support for learners at NHCLC. Learners who need extra help are offered free repeat courses and additional practical exercises in the labs. NHCLC gives employers sufficient advance information about course content but does not always check that learners receive the same details before their course starts.

NHCLC recruits well-qualified trainers with relevant vocational experience. New recruits receive an appropriate basic orientation and introduction of how to teach at NHCLC. A few of NHCLC's trainers do not have the proper certification for courses they teach. NHCLC has no system to monitor and improve the quality of training. Trainers are not set clear written targets or observed while delivering sessions.

NHCLC lacks a strategic or operational plan focused on learners' achievements or improving the quality of the provision. Learners' achievements and progress are not monitored or analysed. The data provided for this review was fragmented and inaccurate.

Although NHCLC uses two post-event learners' evaluation forms, it does not collect or analyse the outcomes to plan further improvements. A few learners have given low scores for learning effectiveness; NHCLC's management has not addressed this matter effectively. NHCLC collects the views of corporate clients only randomly by means of the sales executive's phone calls and visits. There is no evidence of actions taken in response to these visits or calls.

Capacity to improve

Grade 4: below satisfactory

NHCLC has some plans for improvement. It is currently recruiting a training manager and a full-time trainer for the MCSE course. A new staff appraisal system will be implemented in

2010. The institute's range of programmes has stayed the same as the previous year. Enrolment has been on the decrease since 2007, dropping by 19% in 2008 and by 44% during 2009. Repeat business from corporate clients has declined during 2009.

NHCLC lacks a cohesive quality improvement system, and fails to collect data critical to improvement. It does not focus sufficiently on learners' achievement and progress. The quality of training is not closely monitored or measured. Managers do not set themselves or their staff challenging targets and clear objectives.

NHCLC has inadequate arrangements for assessing local labour market needs. Although sales executives maintain contact with major clients, NHCLC's management has no system for recording and analysing the outcome of these visits and contacts. Post-event feedback from learners is not used effectively to trigger improvement.

The institute's self-evaluation form (SEF) is not critical or comprehensive, nor is it based on clear evidence. NHCLC's higher management were not sufficiently involved in the self-evaluation process. The grades proposed are higher than those awarded by the review team in all areas. Whilst accurately identifying a few areas for improvement, the SEF fails to acknowledge major issues found by the review team.

Summary of grades awarded

Overall Judgement	
Effectiveness of provision	Grade 4: below satisfactory
Capacity to Improve	Grade 4: below 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

- **Repeat courses for learners who need extra support.** Learners are given useful support while they attend a training programme. Free repeat courses are offered for those who need extra help.

Areas for improvement

- **The measuring, recording, monitoring and analysis of learners' achievement.** NHCLC's measures to assess and record learners' achievement are inadequate for non-accredited courses and most externally accredited courses. All learners who attend for more than 50% of their course hours are judged successful and awarded a completion certificate. Learners receive these certificates without fulfilling the objectives of their course or undergoing any assessment. This approach does not present an accurate reflection of learners' achievement or attainment. It does not show whether learners have gained the skills they set out to develop, or achieved their learning goals.
- **Learners' punctuality and attendance.** Almost one-third of learners are recorded as having only partial attendance. Some only attend just over half the required sessions. Lateness and absences are not sufficiently challenged.
- **Initial and post-course assessment.** Initial assessment is only done at the request of employers. The method currently used is inappropriate; the assessment is mainly verbal and is not recorded. Although trainers frequently check learners' practical and written work during sessions, providing them with useful feedback, end-of-course assessment is too narrow. Too much reliance is placed on the learners' evaluation of the course. Trainers do not check sufficiently whether learners have gained the skills and qualification they were aiming for. Only a minority of learners take final exams for accredited courses.
- **The range of training techniques used.** Most trainers use a narrow range of training techniques. Insufficient use is made of direct questioning to check learners' understanding and very little use is made of group work.
- **The measurement and checking of the quality of training.** NHCLC operates no lesson observation schemes. Trainers are not set targets related to improving learners' achievements or progress, and their performance in the classroom is not evaluated. Learners complete two post-course evaluations. NHCLC does not make

adequate use of the results of either evaluation. For example, the feedback indicates that learners think learning effectiveness is low on almost a third of courses, but this finding has not been acted upon.

- **Use of labour market analysis and employers' views.** NHCLC does not systematically assess employers' needs and emerging labour market requirements. NHCLC's only source of such information is the random visits and phone calls made by its sales team. Managers do not analyse the information gathered.

Recommendations

In order to improve the provision, NHCLC should:

- devise a robust system to measure, record, monitor and analyse learners' achievements
- implement a rigorous system to improve punctuality and attendance
- introduce systematic initial and post-course assessment
- use a variety of training methods
- introduce a comprehensive lesson observation scheme to monitor and improve the quality of training
- establish an effective system to ascertain and analyse the needs of employers and the labour market