



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

Vocational Review Unit Review Report

National Institute of Technology
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

National Institute of Technology (NIT) was established in 1997 and offers courses in computing and information technology (IT) to individual learners as well as those from public and private sector bodies. Currently, NIT offers a wide range of externally- and internally-accredited-IT programmes and a number of short training courses in management and soft skills. Since 2008, some 1,500 learners have attended NIT's courses, more than a quarter of them following externally-accredited programmes.

NIT began as part of an IT and telecommunications solutions company, Almoayed Group. It maintains partnerships with a number of leading global IT training providers. The company is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, Oracle Approved Education Centre and Certified Internet Web Professionals (CIW) Authorized Training Partner. These partnerships enable NIT to offer, at various levels, certified IT professional programmes such as Microsoft Certified System Engineer (MCSE), Microsoft Certified Professional Developer (MCPD), Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP), Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) and Oracle. NIT is also designated as a Pearson VUE online testing centre for Oracle and Microsoft and a Thomson Prometric online testing centre for Cisco and CIW certifications.

NIT has two training centres; the main one is located in Zinj and the other was recently set up in Khamees. The two centres are managed by a head of operations, who reports to a head of business. Eleven full-time trainers carry out the training, complemented by a number of part-time trainers. The centre also has a number of administrative staff, including a dedicated guidance and counselling officer.

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 managers, trainers, administration and support staff, learners and employers.

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

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Grade 3: satisfactory

NIT offers satisfactory provision for its learners. Learners' achievements, the quality of training, the range of programmes offered, the support and guidance given to learners and the company's leadership and management are all satisfactory.

There are good retention rates on all courses. For the externally-accredited courses, the retention rate is over 80%, climbing to 100% on some programmes, while on the provider-accredited courses it is 95%. Success rates for externally-accredited courses are high, particularly, at 95%, on the MS Office course. For learners on ITIL externally-accredited programmes, the success rate is good at 82%. NIT learners generally perform their tasks well, progress effectively and work independently. Learners' attendance is generally satisfactory. Punctuality at NIT is noticeably poor, however, and the system to record and monitor lateness is not effective.

Full- and part-time trainers at NIT are adequately qualified and have reasonable vocational experience in the subject they teach. They use a wide range of practical exercises to engage and motivate learners. Learners' progress is checked thoroughly and they are given useful feedback on how to improve. Trainers use learning resources effectively to facilitate and promote learning. NIT has eleven IT labs, well-equipped with white boards, Cisco routers and switches, modern computers, laptops and data projectors. Learners also have access to extra books, DVDs, CDs, presentations and relevant software. Virtual networking labs are used effectively to allow learners to experiment with applications and practise in a simulated working environment.

Trainers do not make good enough use of initial assessment to plan their courses. NIT has recently started to use initial assessment on MS Office courses but it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of this system. Although most courses have pre-defined course materials that include thorough schemes of work and lesson plans, trainers do not share these details effectively with learners at the start of sessions.

NIT offers a wide range of internally- and externally-accredited IT courses that match learners' needs. Most courses have clear and sufficient progression levels. The programmes are periodically updated. NIT occasionally customises courses to meet the particular needs of an employer. Links with the local labour market are not developed systematically and are based on interaction with employers by the sales team. Employers' comments about their needs are gathered randomly; they are not analysed or shared by management.

Trainers provide good support for all learners during and after a course. They extend helpful personal support to those learners who need a course to be rescheduled or who want to use laboratories after office hours. Individual learners are offered counselling on the selection of programmes and career matters; this useful service is not usually extended to learners who are sponsored by employers. NIT has an adequate website that provides basic information about programmes and schedules. Both training venues are pleasant and have adequate health and safety measures including appropriate fire safety precautions and a suitably stocked first aid kit. There are, however, no signs for assembly points and learners are insufficiently aware of NIT's health and safety measures.

Although NIT's vision and mission statements focus on learners' achievement, its strategic plan is financially focused and does not sufficiently address learners' achievement. A useful database of learners is kept but it is not updated periodically. Learners' feedback is systematically collected and summarised after each course and the outcomes of these surveys are used to monitor trainers' performance. NIT depends totally on learners' feedback and does not carry out internal lesson observations to monitor the quality of training sessions. Trainers' development activities are planned and carried out well. Development plans are triggered by the introduction of new courses and by individual performance needs. NIT operates an effective staff appraisal system, with links to individual key performance indicators.

Capacity to improve

Grade 3: satisfactory

NIT has taken effective steps to widen its provision. It has recently established a new partnership with ICDL to enable it to offer additional externally-accredited courses, while maintaining relationships with major global IT partners such as Oracle and Microsoft. During 2008, NIT added six new programmes to its portfolio and in 2009 it has added three more IT programmes. The introduction of these new programmes was not based on systematic market research but rather on their availability from partners. Enrolment over the past 18 months has been steady; the number of corporate learners has risen by 5% and the rate of repeat business by 14% over the same period.

The company's strategic and business plan has little focus on improving learners' achievements, emphasising instead business synergy with international IT partners. NIT has adequate human and physical resources to improve further. NIT lacks a systematic approach for improving the quality of teaching and collecting employers' feedback. The self-evaluation form is comprehensive but most of the grades given are too generous.

Summary of grades awarded

Overall Judgement	Grade
Effectiveness of provision	Grade 3: satisfactory
Capacity to Improve	Grade 3: satisfactory
Review Findings	
How well do learners achieve?	Grade 3: satisfactory
How effective is training?	Grade 3: 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 3: satisfactory

Main judgements and recommendations

Strengths

- **Success rates on provider-accredited courses and on ITIL courses.** Success rates on the provider-accredited courses are high overall, especially, at 95%, for MS Office. On the ITIL externally-accredited course, the success rate is good, at 82%.
- **Monitoring of learners' progress.** On the majority of courses, learners' progress is checked meticulously; trainers monitor learners' work well during practical exercises. On the Microsoft Office course, for example, trainers scrutinise learners' work individually while learners are undertaking their assignments and keep a copy of each exercise. Trainers focus satisfactorily on areas in which learners require further clarification and keep learners clearly informed of how well they are doing.
- **Range of externally-accredited IT programmes.** NIT offers a wide range of externally- and provider-accredited IT programmes, including an Oracle training programme at different levels. The programmes have clear and suitable progression levels that cover employers' and learners' specific IT training requirements.
- **Support from trainers.** Trainers are readily available during and after a course and learners are given help on personal matters, and those related to their training, as and when they need this. Trainers show flexibility in rescheduling the day or time of a course and in allowing access to the labs after normal hours. They give extra support before exams. NIT offers learners free vouchers for exams on externally-accredited courses.
- **Development of training staff.** NIT has a good training and development plan for its full-time trainers; this is largely driven by market requirements and effectively triggered by the performance appraisal system. The development plan effectively addresses areas that are required to improve the skills and knowledge of individual trainers. Trainers are appraised every six months against clear and concise key performance indicators set at the start of the year; a few trainers have not been appraised on time.

Areas for improvement

- **Recording and challenging of poor punctuality.** Punctuality at NIT is poor. In most of the sessions observed learners arrived late – by up to 30 minutes – and their lateness was not recorded promptly or challenged. NIT has no effective system to

record poor punctuality and does not communicate its attendance policy clearly to all learners.

- **Initial assessment.** Except on the MS Office course funded by Tamkeen, initial assessment is not used to ensure that learners are on the right level of course, and that their individual needs are met.
- **Lesson planning.** NIT's international partners provide pre-defined objectives for each module, together with schemes of work and delivery plans; these are not used, however, to prepare effective lesson plans for each session. A few lessons did not start and end punctually, resulting in inadequate session time management. Trainers do not effectively accommodate the needs of learners with different skills and abilities.
- **Guidance on choice of courses and career progression for corporate learners.** The NIT marketing team visit employers and give them useful information about the courses offered. However, learners sent to NIT by these employers, who make up about 75% of total learners, do not have access to clear guidance on course selection and career progression. Most learners are neither advised nor guided on the next level of programme available.
- **The measurement of training quality during sessions.** NIT does not operate a lesson observation scheme to monitor the quality of teaching inside the classroom.
- **The gathering and analysis of feedback from employers.** NIT has no systematic approach to gathering employers' comments and requirements. The sales team gets occasional feedback by email or fax on NIT's performance but this data is not analysed to plan for improvement

Recommendations

In order to improve provision, NIT should:

- devise an effective system to record and monitor learners' punctuality
- implement rigorous initial assessment procedures for all courses
- ensure lesson plans are used effectively
- provide corporate learners with sufficient guidance on choice of courses and career progression

- implement a comprehensive lesson observation scheme to monitor and improve the quality of training
- introduce a method of collecting and analysing employers' feedback.