# Directorate of Vocational Reviews
## Review Report

## Thinksmart for Development and Training

## Manama

## Kingdom of Bahrain
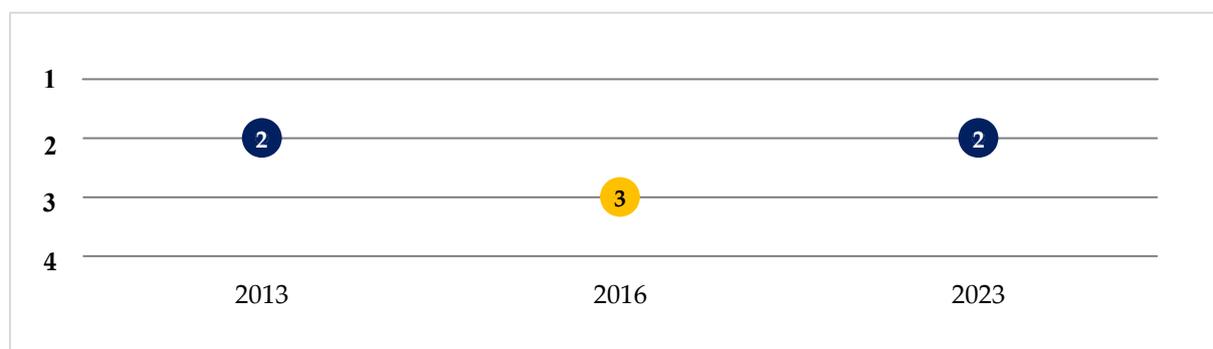
**Date Reviewed: 15-19 January 2023**

VO096-C4-R032

# Introduction

The Directorate of Vocational Reviews (DVR) of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), conducted this review over five days by a team of seven reviewers. For this review, reviewers observed training sessions and other related activities, analysed data about the courses/programmes and qualifications learners achieve, examined learners' written and other work, examined documents and materials provided by Thinksmart for Development and Training and collected feedback from learners, employers, trainers, management and support staff.

This Report summarises the review team's findings and their recommendations about what the provider should do to improve.

| Summary of review judgements | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Aspect** | | **Judgement** |
| Outcomes | Learners' achievement | **2** |
| Programmes and processes | Effectiveness of teaching/training and assessment | **2** |
| | Quality of courses/programmes | **2** |
| | Learners' support and guidance | **2** |
| Management and governance | Effectiveness of leadership, management and governance | **2** |
| **Capacity to improve** | | **2** |
| **Overall effectiveness** | | **2** |

| Provider's overall effectiveness throughout the last three reviews |
|---|

| Outstanding | 1 | Good | 2 | Satisfactory | 3 | Inadequate | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

# Overall Effectiveness: 'Good'

## Judgement justifications

- All Aspects of Thinksmart for Development and Training (Thinksmart) provision are judged as 'Good'.

- Thinksmart strategic planning is sufficiently informed by the outcomes of a regular self-evaluation process, directed to enhancing learners' achievement and improving the quality of its provision.

- Based on a careful understanding of learners' skills gaps and the needs of the local labour market, the Institute offers a range of externally accredited and local achievement courses/programmes, mainly in the field of Information Technology (IT) in affiliation with international IT awarding bodies such as Microsoft (MS) and Amazon Web Services (AWS).

- Courses/programmes are well-structured and follow the awarding bodies' standards, utilising well-prepared authentic materials and resources that are available to learners.

- Most learners at Thinksmart gain and develop effective knowledge and vocational skills relevant to their chosen IT courses/programmes, and the overall success rates are high at (93%) for the past three years. Learners who opt to sit for the external examinations achieve the qualifications they aim for in a timely manner. Furthermore, most of the learners successfully achieve the stated course objectives/Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and the

qualifications they aim for in a timely manner. However, mastering skills and developing the course objectives/ILOs for a minority of learners vary compared to other learners.

- Trainers are qualified, certified and experienced in the field of IT. They deploy pertinent knowledge and actual experiences and use a range of effective training strategies and learning resources to stimulate learners' purposeful learning and engagement.

- Trainers effectively implement fit-for-purpose internal formative and summative assessments that are designed based on the awarding bodies' standards. However, in a few cases, the moderation and verification processes are insufficiently critical in highlighting the internal formative assessment issues.

- The Institute has an effective range of support mechanisms to support and guide learners to overcome their learning difficulties and achieve better outcomes. Additionally, trainers effectively prepare learners for the final awarding bodies' examinations. However, the support policy is brief and not comprehensively detailed.

- The Institute has relevant and regularly implemented quality assurance arrangements in place. These include a number of documents/policies and procedures that are sufficiently detailed to reflect the current practices. Yet, the available

policies and procedures are scattered, and inconsistent in content and structure.

# Capacity to Improve: 'Good'

## Judgement justifications

- Thinksmart's Overall Effectiveness and all review Aspects' judgements have improved by one grade compared to its previous review.
- The Institute has effective strategic and contingency planning guided by the outcomes of periodic self-evaluation processes and previous review recommendations.
- The management team has implemented effective contingency plans to rapidly respond to the emergent exceptional circumstances and executed relevant initiatives to its operations.
- Thinksmart has a fit-for-purpose organisational structure supported by the necessary physical and human resources to meet its objectives and carry out improvement initiatives. The institute has a qualified staff in addition experienced and certified trainers.
- Based on Thinksmart understanding of market needs, the range of externally accredited courses/ programmes has expanded. In

addition, the Institute maintains effective partnerships with international IT awarding bodies; it has been selected by Microsoft as an 'Education Global Training Partner', and it is also an authorised AWS training provider.

- To discharge its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the institute has been actively engaged in a wide range of community service events, through its well-established links with clients in the market, in addressing the needs of the labour market and providing job opportunities, internships and career advancement to learners.
- The number of enrolments has varied since 2019 with reasonable repeat business, though enrolments in 2022 were lower than the year 2021. Accurate and reliable records on learners' performance are kept and the success rates have been maintained high over the past three years as per the provided Learners' Performance Data (LPD).

# The Provider's Key Strengths

- Learners achieve the qualifications they aim for in a timely manner.
- Certified and experienced trainers who use effective training strategies to productively engage learners.
- Well-structured and resourced courses/programmes that meet the needs and requirements of learners and stakeholders.
- Well-established links with awarding bodies and clients, which are effectively utilised to enrich the learning experience.
- Effective strategic and contingency planning and monitoring of performance.

# Recommendations

In order to improve its provision, Thinksmart should:

- Further improve learners' mastering of vocational skills and progressive acquisition of the course/programme objectives/ILOs.
- Strengthen the leadership and management by:
    - improving the effectiveness of the internal assessment verification process.
    - improving the quality assurance policies and procedures to be detailed, consistent and comprehensive to cover all aspects of the provision and ensure effective implementation.

# Learners' Achievement: 'Good'

## Judgement justifications

- Learners gain and develop effective knowledge and vocational skills relevant to their chosen courses/programmes in the IT field.

- Learners enrolled in the 'MS Azure Administrator Associate' courses, which represent (42%) of the total enrolment, score relatively above the awarding bodies' passing rates. On the other hand, mastering skills and developing the course objectives/ILOs for a minority of learners vary compared to other learners.

- The Institute's comparison of learners' pre and post-test results shows that most learners progress well throughout the course/programme. This is evident from the standards of learners' produced work. However, there is still a minority of learners who neither master the required skills nor demonstrate consistent progressive acquisition of the objectives/ILOs in comparison to others.

- Considering the type and duration of conducted courses/programmes, most learners successfully achieve the course objectives/ILOs. Overall, retention and success rates are high at (93%) for the past three years. In the externally accredited courses/programmes which comprise (81%) of the total enrolment, most learners who chose to sit for the external examinations achieve the qualifications they aim for in a timely manner. However, a few learners achieve their qualifications after several attempts.

- Learners show high commitment and have a positive attitude towards their learning experience as reflected in the productive class discussions, regular attendance and submitted learners' work. However, a minority of learners are varied in their interactivity level and/or attend training sessions late.

- Most learners and employers express high satisfaction with the learners' acquired skills and positive impact on their workplace performance and career development.

- Learners successfully respond to the variety of internal formative and summative assessment methods. These are supplemented by practical activities that are administrated effectively throughout the course to measure learners' progress against the course's objectives.

- Thinksmart has a proper attendance procedure, which is sufficiently detailed and shared with learners. The attendance and punctuality records are regularly maintained though the punctuality policy is not sufficiently detailed.

- Learners are able to work well independently and collaboratively through in-class activities contributions, case studies and assignments.

**Areas for improvement**

- Mastering the skills and progress towards acquisition of the course/programme objectives/ILOs for a minority of learners.

# Effectiveness of Teaching/Training and Assessment: 'Good'

## Judgement justifications

- Thinksmart trainers are qualified, certified and experienced in the field of IT. They have effective theoretical and practical commands that are deployed positively during training sessions.
- Trainers apply a range of effective training strategies such as lecturing, individual guided practice, and group discussions to stimulate effective learning and learners' engagement. Additionally, trainers utilise the available learning resources and relevant online platforms to extend learners' productivity during training sessions.
- Trainers effectively utilise fit-for-purpose internal formative and summative assessment tools and methods that follow awarding bodies' standards; these are used prior to, during and toward the end of courses/programmes to evaluate learners' understanding and measure their achievement of the objectives/ILOs.
- The Institute assessment tools and methods include, for instance, various questioning techniques pre- and post-tests, midterm, interactive practical in-class activities, and case studies that vary in level and complexity, in addition to the awarding body's online practical laboratory assessments.

- Learners' assignments and quizzes are conducted online, controlled and accurately auto-corrected and marked with clear awarding bodies' key answers. However, there are a few cases in which the moderation process is insufficiently rigorous.
- The majority of sessions are effectively planned, structured and timely managed. Trainers internally develop suitable lesson plans with action plans that are appropriately informed and updated by the useful learners' initial assessment outcomes.
- Trainers suitably tailor their teaching/training and assessments to address individual learners' needs and accommodate the less able learners' needs by providing them with hints and further explanations, repeating the demonstration steps, and providing formative assessments with various complexity to suit learners' levels.
- Trainers effectively stimulate self-learning, higher order, and critical thinking skills amongst learners by using extended questioning techniques and job-related IT issues to encourage them to research cases and to reinforce learners' problem-solving skills.

- During the sessions, trainers constantly provide learners with constructive verbal feedback that essentially contributes to their development throughout the course/programme. Furthermore, trainers maintain and regularly update records on learners' achievement, attendance, and punctuality.

**Areas for improvement**
- The effectiveness of the moderation and verification assessment process.

# Quality of Course/Programmes: 'Good'

## Judgement justifications

- Thinksmart offers a range of IT externally accredited and local achievement courses/programmes. The externally accredited courses/programmes are offered in affiliation with major international IT awarding bodies such as MS and AWS. The local achievement courses/programmes are designed to suit different fields and employment sectors either separately or as part of a custom-designed programme.
- Thinksmart courses/programmes on offer rely on the management team's experience, knowledge and careful understanding of stakeholders and labour market needs. The Institute offers courses/programmes wherein the stakeholders' feedback and learners' requirements are gathered, analysed and successfully utilised to improve the range of offerings.
- The externally accredited and the local achievement courses/programmes are well-planned and clearly structured and maintained up to date following the awarding bodies' standards, utilising well-prepared and authentic course materials as well as following suitable Guided Learning Hours (GLH) to cover the intended course objectives.
- The local achievement courses/programmes are designed to enhance and support practical and theoretical learning; course components are planned in a sequence that facilitates achievement of the stated learning objectives/ILOs. The certified trainers structure the internal formative and summative assessments to clearly cover the theoretical knowledge and practical learning skills, wherein assessments are fit-for-purpose and, in line with the international awarding bodies' standards and requirements. However, in a few cases, the level of questions is basic, straightforward and/or not appropriately timed.
- Thinksmart has a suitable internal approval process to approve the courses/programmes and the internal assessments include sufficient levels of approval to bundle the courses into the offerings of the Institute. However, the

available policy is generic in its content, and it mostly displays procedure rather than stating the policy. It is worth mentioning that Thinksmart has initiated communication with MS for the process of the alignment of a number of qualifications.

- Thinksmart has a relevant range of courses/programmes' resources that are available to learners through useful online learning portals. Digitalised material is readily available to learners even after the course/programme completion. The available resources and facilities are fit-for-purpose considering the different modes of delivery.

- The Institute has a suitable access and entry practices which is well adapted through three steps: registration, interview and placement. However, there is no formal policy to guide this process, and, in a few cases, the placement test is general.

**Areas for improvement**
- Documentation of the courses/programmes design, development, reviewing and updating.
- Process of implementing the access and entry requirements.


# Learners' Support and Guidance: 'Good'

## Judgement justifications

- The Institute has an effectively implemented policy and procedure to support and guide learners to overcome their learning difficulties and achieve better outcomes. Trainers and administrative staff are reachable, and they provide learners with effective and timely personnel, technical and academic support and guidance. Moreover, support is provided via different channels, such as mock examinations, extra sessions and flexible arrangements that suit learners and stakeholders.

- Learners at Thinksmart are effectively supported and guided to overcome their learning difficulties and achieve better outcomes. However, the Institute lacks comprehensive and explicit support policies and procedures that ensure the effectiveness of support and guidance provided to learners.

- At-risk learners are identified through the support form and are suitably supported, whereas trainers provide extra sessions to ensure that they are confident with the mock test and become independent to take the final examinations.

- Learners and stakeholders have access to accurate information about the courses/programmes through a variety of channels of communication including a well-designed, informative and up-to-date website and useful social media accounts, in addition to informative brochures.

- Thinksmart provides two types of effective induction to familiarise learners with aspects related to their learning. The general induction is conducted before the commencement of the course/programme and the technical induction conducted on the first day of the course/programme enables them to settle quickly and confidently.

- Learners are provided with a range of effective extra-curricular activities through the e-learning portal such as free webinars, external learning resources, recommended links, videos and invited key speakers for different courses/programmes, which effectively enrich learners' life skills and experiences. Furthermore, the Institute has effective initiatives to offer learners an internship and in a few cases was able to secure permanent posts relevant to their chosen profession.

- The Institute maintains effective communication with employers and relevant stakeholders to keep them informed about learners' performance. Upon course/programme completion, fit-for-purpose 'Learner Productivity Report' along with 'Trainee Achievement Student Sheet' are shared with learners and stakeholders highlighting learners' overall performance, attendance, and progress made; however, the written feedback in these forms is limited and not reflecting the areas for improvement.

- The 'Health and Safety policy' includes a brief section for learners with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). The section states insufficiently detailed arrangements to deal with emerging situations. Although there are no permanent cases of SEND learners, the Institute has implemented proper arrangements to handle emerging situations, such as a learner with physical mobility.

**Areas for improvement**
- Details of the support policies and procedures including SEND.

# Effectiveness of Leadership, Management and Governance: 'Good'

## Judgement justifications

- Thinksmart has a proactive business-driven strategic planning, which is sufficiently informed by thorough annual performance reviews, regular self-evaluation processes, and a management's mature understanding of the labour market needs. The success measures are driven through a set of objectives that focuses on the key areas of the Institute's performance aimed at raising learners' achievement and improving the quality of its provision. The Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) submitted for the purpose of this review is sufficiently detailed. All Aspects have been appropriately supported with relevant evidence; however, the awarded grades overestimate the provision by one grade. Furthermore, contingency planning reflects the management's swift response to the challenges imposed by emerging circumstances.

- The majority of the conducted courses/programmes are short and externally accredited, where learners' performance is closely monitored and analysed, and the outcomes are sufficiently utilised to promote improvement and inform decision-making. The Institute maintains clear policies and procedures to ensure the security and protection of staff and learners' records, and the security of the online systems and platforms from unauthorised access.

- Trainers' performance is regularly monitored, and the outcomes of session observations wherein follow-up observations are effectively conducted to promote continuous quality improvement.

- Thinksmart systematically monitors staff performance through the annual performance appraisal. Staff and trainers are provided with sufficient opportunities for training and development including the technical support needed for the mode of delivery and platforms used.

- Thinksmart has a fit-for-purpose organisational structure which is supported by qualified staff; the majority of whom have considerable professional experience. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and staff and trainers are well-inducted when they join.

- Relevant quality assurance arrangements are in place including a number of documents/policies and procedures that are sufficiently detailed to reflect the current practices in addition to a mechanism to monitor trainers' performance, which is regularly implemented. However, the available policies and procedures are scattered, and inconsistent in content and structure.

- Thinksmart has a conducive and safe learning environment, and effective policies, procedures and practices are in place to ensure the health, safety

and well-being of learners and staff. The health and safety procedures are updated to meet the needs of the exceptional circumstances, and effective measures are implemented.

- Well-established links are maintained with the IT awarding bodies, government entities, and leading organisations. The Institute effectively utilises the partnership with awarding bodies, leading organisations and local universities to introduce national initiatives that address the needs of the labour market and provide job opportunities and career advancement to learners. Clients, learners, and trainers' feedback about the provision are systematically collected, analysed

and where needed utilised to derive improvement actions. The Institute participates in various community services events, such as the annual workshops, career counselling, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) job fairs, and eCommerce Conference.

- Thinksmart has effective governance arrangements in place; the Board of Directors has clear roles and responsibilities and holds quarterly meetings to oversee the performance of the Institute. The Chairman has professional exposure to influence the business direction of the Institute.

**Areas for improvement**
- coverage, consistency and version-control of quality assurance policies and procedures.

# Appendix: Provider Information

| Provider Name (English) | Thinksmart for Development and Training W. L.L | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Provider Name (Arabic) | شركة ثينك سمارت للتدريب والتطوير | | | | |
| Licensing Body | Ministry of Labor | | | | |
| Year of Establishment | 2010 | | | | |
| Age Range of Learners | 16 years and above | | | | |
| Number of Learners | Male | 310 | Female | 343 | Total | 653 |
| Learning Areas | Externally Accredited | <ul><li>Microsoft Azure Administrator Associate</li><li>Microsoft Azure Developer Associate</li><li>Microsoft 365: Modern Desktop Associate</li><li>Power BI Data Analyst Associate</li><li>Microsoft Office 365</li><li>Programming in HTML5 with JavaScript and CSS3</li><li>Developing ASP.NET MVC Web Applications</li><li>Basic Web Designer</li><li>Certified Blockchain Expert</li><li>Amazon Web Services (AWS) Certified Cloud Practitioner</li></ul> | | | |
| | Local Achievement | <ul><li>Amazon Web Services (AWS) Essential</li><li>eCommerce - Internet Marketing Associate</li><li>eCommerce - Mastering Digital Marketing</li></ul> | | | |
| | Local Attendance | Not applicable | | | |

| Available Learning Platform(s) | • Microsoft Teams<br>• Zoom |
|---|---|
| Institution's Listing Status | • Not yet listed on the National Qualification Framework (NQF) |
| List of Qualification placed on/aligned to the NQF | • Not Applicable |