



# **Directorate of Vocational Reviews**

## **Review Report**

**Training Plus Institute  
Manama  
Kingdom of Bahrain**

**Date Reviewed: 23-25 December 2013**

VO035-C2-R068

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## The Directorate of Vocational Reviews

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The Directorate of Vocational Reviews (DVR) is part of the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA) that was officially set up in 2008 as an independent body governed and supervised by the Council of Ministers. Established to raise standards in vocational education and training, the DVR 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 DVR'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 four-point scale:

<b>Grade description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
1: Outstanding	This describes provision or outcomes that is/are at least good in all aspects and outstanding in the majority.
2: Good	This describes provision or outcomes that is/are at least satisfactory in all aspects and good in the majority. There may be some particularly successful approaches or outcomes.
3: Satisfactory	This describes a basic level of adequacy. There are no major areas of weakness which substantially affect what learners, or significant groups of learners, achieve. There may be some features which are good.
4: Inadequate	This describes situations where major weaknesses in some areas affect the outcomes for learners and outweigh any strengths in the provision.

## **Introduction**

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### **Description of the provision**

Training Plus Institute (TPI) formally known as 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. Since April 2012, TPI has become an independent Bahraini company with the name of TPI. The centre is licensed by the Ministry of Labour and offers a range of non-accredited and externally-accredited courses mainly in Information Technology (IT) covering basic computer courses, graphics design, programming, networking and advanced technical courses. TPI is a Microsoft approved partner, an Autodesk authorized training and certification centre, an International Business Skills (IBS) training centre, a CISCO learning partner associate, a CompTIA partner, a CIW certified training partner, and an authorized Prometric testing centre by Thompson and by Pearson-Virtual University Enterprise (VUE). Since the last review conducted in January 2011, TPI has enrolled a total of 3345 learners; 1172 in 2011, 1098 in 2012 and 1075 in 2013 up to the date of review.

TPI has one centre located in Manama that is operated by a part-time chief executive officer, a general manager, an operations manager, a sales manager and a training manager. The institute employs five full-time trainers, three sales executives, one accountant, one customer relation officer, three administrators, one technical support staff and two office helpers. The institute utilizes a pool of 15 part-time trainers as needed. TPI management report to a board of directors.

### **Scope of the review**

This review was conducted over three days, by a team of four reviewers. During the review, reviewers observed training sessions, analysed data about the courses and qualifications learners achieved, examined available learners' written and other work, studied documents and materials provided by the provider and met with the management, staff members, learners, employers and trainers.

In the previous review, the overall effectiveness was judged as satisfactory as were learners' achievement, the quality of training, the quality of the programmes offered, and the provider's capacity to improve. The support and guidance was judged as good. However, leadership and management was judged as below satisfactory.

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

## Table of review judgements awarded

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<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	
How effective is the provision in raising learners' achievement and meeting the full range of learners' and stakeholders' needs?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory
<b>Learners' Achievement</b>	
How well do learners achieve?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory
<b>Quality of Provision</b>	
How effective is teaching and/or training in promoting learning?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory
How well do programmes meet the needs and interests of learners and stakeholders?	Grade: 2 Good
How well are learners supported and guided to achieve better outcomes?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	
How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	Grade: 3 Satisfactory

## Review judgements

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### Overall effectiveness

**How effective is the provision in raising learners' achievement and meeting the range of learners' and stakeholders' needs?**

#### **Grade: 3 Satisfactory**

The overall effectiveness of TPI is satisfactory. While useful recent initiatives have been taken by the management to develop the training practices and resources further and a good range of well-structured IT courses are delivered by certified and supportive trainers, most learners make satisfactory progress with only a minority of them sitting the external examinations. For the non-accredited courses, the vast majority of learners achieve their course objectives and develop useful knowledge and vocationally relevant IT skills and receive TPI's course completion certificate. Teaching methods used by most trainers are generally appropriate. However, the theoretical parts tend to be insufficiently engaging and a minority of learners are dependent grossly on the trainer's direction during the practical activities. Assessment of learners' work and achievement is appropriate but the marking is not fully consistent, particularly the practical laboratory work. The strategic planning is detailed and regularly monitored through operational plans. However, monitoring of trainers in class and analysis of performance data and trends are not comprehensive enough.

TPI has good capacity to improve, with a management that has a clear focus on developing quality procedures and practices together with a drive to enhance the knowledge and skills of the staff and the trainers through relevant and continuous development opportunities. These efforts have been recently enhanced with external inputs from consultancy companies on process improvements and preparation for ISO certification. Strategic planning and monitoring on action plans are well developed as well as the recent critical self-evaluation reporting, providing the management very useful gap analysis and recommendations. Most functions are documented well in an updated procedures manual with clear process charts and assigned responsibilities. Nonetheless, while achievement data are maintained, the institute lacks an effectiveness system to track trends, including success rates on the externally-accredited courses, and to use the outcomes of these trends for further improvements. Relevant initiatives that have been taken since last review include: renovating some sections of the centre, hiring more staff, improving resources such as upgrading the capacity of the computers and installing two smart boards. The institute has also expanded the range of courses, started communications with more IT awarding bodies to launch Oracle and Android certification. Plans are also in place to install more smart boards, implement the outcomes of the recently introduced 360-degree staff evaluation and

career paths plan for staff and address the issue of car parking. Appropriate repeat business and steady enrolment are maintained over the years.

## **Learners' achievement**

### **How well do learners achieve?**

#### **Grade: 3 Satisfactory**

The vast majority of learners at TPI achieve their course objectives and develop useful knowledge and vocationally relevant IT skills. Enrolments on the non-accredited courses represents 93% of the total learners where 81% of them pass and receive TPI's completion certificate. On the other hand, only a minority of the learners, representing less than 7% from the total enrolment in the past three years sit for their external examinations. The overall pass rate within this small group is at 82% with a few of them achieving their externally-accredited qualification after several attempts. The observed sessions, learners' produced work and end of course results indicate that learners demonstrate a satisfactory level of attainment. Tracing the progress learners make, as seen from their practical exercises and their marks, reveal that their progress is generally maintained within the class and over the levels. From the observed sessions, learners were able to complete the given tasks at a suitable level independently. However, a minority of learners, could not manage to accomplish the given tasks without the need for continuous direction of their trainer which impacted negatively on their progress and the development of their skills. Whilst the majority of learners, as revealed from the observed sessions, are attentive and enjoy the practical activities they perform during a class, only a few question their trainer, share their experience, and show the ability to reflect on how well they are progressing or what is needed to improve. Most interviewed learners and employers expressed their high satisfaction with the learning experience received at TPI.

Learners' achievement is suitably measured through practical exercises and final-course examination. The submitted Learners' Performance Data (LPD) reveals that retention rates are high for the past three years, as expected in such short and very short courses. Learners' attendance is regularly checked and records are always kept. Recently, learners' punctuality is recorded too. It is evident from the records and the observed sessions that the majority of learners are attending regularly and on time. However, in a few cases, learners attended classes late by more than twenty minutes.

## The quality of provision

### How effective is teaching and/or training in promoting learning?

#### Grade: 3 Satisfactory

Trainers at TPI have relevant theoretical and practical command of their subject and provide some real vocational examples; they are knowledgeable and have professional certificates in the courses they deliver. Although, they mostly use appropriate teaching methods and activities, theory sessions tend to be delivered mostly using trainer-centred approach with minimal learners' engagement and participation. Trainers do not sufficiently invite learners to take more active part during the theory sessions through questions and answers or open discussions. Most sessions start with effective recapitulation and objectives sharing and has sufficiently detailed lesson plans. However, these plans address the needs of the average learner and generic in nature and do not cater for the needs of the more or less able learners. Consequently, the accommodation of different needs at sessions are not always provided for, especially in the cases of the more abled who are usually left without being extended with extra activities. Nonetheless, in some sessions, trainers enabled learners to further their understanding appropriately through follow-up challenging questions and requesting learners to conduct individual internet searches.

Learners are appropriately assessed and general verbal feedback is provided. However, the provided samples of students work revealed that marking of learners' work is not always consistent. It is evident from the observed sessions that trainers normally use a few open questions and answers to check the general understanding of the whole class, while for the practical activities, learners individually practice on their computers often with the help of the trainers. Learners are assessed sufficiently through post-course written assessments as well as through practical laboratory work. However, the allocation of marks for the practical assessments are left to the trainers' own judgment rather than through a clear marking scheme. Learners' marks are appropriately recorded and maintained by the trainers for all courses using *trainee achievement sheets*. Fit for purpose learning resources are utilized at classes. This includes effective use of smart boards, clear PowerPoint presentations and appropriately resourced laboratories.

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

### **Grade: 2 Good**

TPI offers a wide range of externally-accredited and non-accredited courses mainly in IT with suitable progression levels. These courses are classified into programming, networking and security, graphics and other areas such as basic Microsoft office and AutoDesk courses. The institute has started to communicate with respective vendors to seek approvals for offering Oracle and Android courses. TPI is an approved training and testing centre for various international IT vendors such as Microsoft, CISCO and AutoDesk. The externally-accredited courses offered by TPI are resourced with vendor approved course material, which are well structured and planned. The institute has arrangements so that an international third-party vendor supplies the course materials used for the non-accredited courses which are also well structured and planned. Courses are well resourced with workstations and up-to-date servers that enable learners to have hands-on experience rather than relying on simulation software or virtual machines. However, the courses have limited additional activities for further enrichment, where on a few of the graphics courses the trainer provides learners with design magazines to update them on the latest design concepts.

While the institute does not carry out an independent market survey, it depends on input from clients, learners, certification bodies and Labour Fund (Tamkeen) when introducing new courses. As the courses are linked with external bodies, TPI depends on them to be notified about the new versions and the updates required on the existing courses or on the new courses to be offered. According to the analysis of learners' and employers' feedback, the offered courses specifically meet their needs and open career opportunities. Furthermore, TPI responds to employers' and learners' needs in different ways such as through the informal analysis of the calls that are received by the sales team, responding to different local tenders for specific courses and offering courses from Tamkeen's approved list of the externally-accredited IT courses.

## **How well are learners supported and guided to achieve better outcomes?**

### **Grade: 3 Satisfactory**

TPI staff and trainers are approachable and supportive. The welcome note at the start of any course, delivered by the sales members of staff, offers the learners the essential needed information about the institute's facilities, and health and safety aspects. A learner's guidance leaflet has been recently prepared that has some further information. TPI utilizes

the user-friendly website and its recently acquired accounts on social media, such as *Instagram* to promote the institute. While the website displays the quarterly course schedule, it lacks course specific information and access to relevant course-related materials. Clear course outlines are made available in advance to stakeholders and learners. Moreover, learners are provided with open access to the laboratories and can attend on Saturdays for extra support sessions. However, the impact of these are yet to be reflected on the learners' achievement.

The provider is viewed to be very flexible in its course delivery approach with learners and employers; as indicated by stakeholders' feedback. This is evident through rearrangements of course timings and venue. In addition shifting TPI hardware (i.e. computers) to the client's location to deliver the course on the client's premises. Nonetheless, a few learners highlighted their concern with some course timings durations. TPI premises are fit for purpose with physical CISCO laboratory, adequate computers with suitable specifications for graphical design courses and properly equipped IT laboratories, two of which have smart boards while the rest have projectors. The hallways, halls and the reception area have been renovated recently and an additional toilet facilities are added upon learners' request. However, a few learners highlighted that the building is old, lifts occasionally breakdown, some stair steps have cracks and there are issues with the parking.

TPI prepares suitable learners achievement reports sent to the employers in the form of the class log-sheet records. However, customized and detailed reports on learners' achievement are provided upon employers' request only. Moreover, learners are not provided with written progress reports or feedback on their performance to help them plan what they need to improve. They only receive verbal feedback regarding their work during the class, in addition to their final certificate.

## **Leadership and management**

### **How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?**

#### **Grade: 3 Satisfactory**

TPI has a clear strategic plan, with relevant goals and objectives focusing on quality improvement. Progress on objectives are monitored regularly through monthly action plans. Appropriate vision and mission statements are available and shared with staff and learners. The management structure is suitably set with relevant functions and clear roles and responsibilities. Qualified trainers with required certifications are recruited and updated through regular meetings, communications and useful handbooks. The trainers and staff

receive very useful training and development opportunities including attending certification courses. Trainers are regularly observed in class using an observation checklist and usually are provided with some useful feedback, although these are not always critical or specific enough. The institute has started recently using an external company to observe trainers, which has produced detailed report and highlighted relevant areas for development.

Learners' achievement data is available and each batch is monitored by the management sufficiently. However, the data is not readily available for aggregation and analysis to monitor trends and the records for learners sitting for the externally-accredited qualifications are not easily traceable by the institute. Additionally, the institute has not yet developed a rigorous verification system to assure the quality of assessment and marking decisions. The pre-course assessment procedures are also inconsistent where a large portion of delivered courses have verbal pre-course assessment only. Learners' feedback is regularly collected at the middle and by the end of the course. The feedback is aggregated and actions are taken upon direct feedback or through complaint forms. Whilst suitable links are maintained with stakeholders through sales communications and visits and occasional management networking at relevant external events, employers' feedback is collected occasionally. Ongoing relationships are also maintained with various international IT vendors.

The institute is free from obvious hazards and a detailed health and safety policy is in place. The staff have recently attended a first aid awareness course and the learners are provided with health and safety briefing on the first session of each course. While most essential health and safety measures are in place, a regular risk assessment is not conducted and there is no designated assembly point. The institute uses the monthly meetings and action plans to evaluate the provision and this has been recently enhanced by contracting an external company to identify gaps and improve processes. The SEF is sufficiently informative, refers to a range of evidence and identifies areas of development. However, the grades are overestimated.

## The provider's key strengths

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- The trainers who have the relevant theoretical knowledge and the required licences for the subjects they train in
- The broad range of externally-accredited and non-accredited IT courses that meets stakeholders' needs well
- The setting up of the strategic plan and the initiatives taken by the management, particularly in offering continuous development opportunities to staff and trainers.

## Recommendations

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### **In order to improve, Training Plus Institute should:**

- ensure that learners make the progress expected from them and achieve their goals
- improve the teaching methodologies to engage all learners and enable them to work more independently
- enhance courses further by introducing more industry relevant additional activities
- introduce an effective data management system to ensure that achievement records are effectively verified and readily available for analysis to monitor trends and inform improvements
- devise a more effective pre-course assessment procedure to assess learners prior attainment more accurately and use the outcomes more effectively.