

Accrediting vocational training for persons with visual impairment in Malaysia

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Introduction

The Gurney Training Centre for the Blind (GTC) was established in 1953 by the Social Welfare Department. Its administration was handed to the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) in 1957 with the government continuously providing grants to support its services. Thanks to the government grants and public donations, the services are provided free of charge to trainees with visual impairment which include training, lodging, food and pocket money.

As at January 2006, 1,810 trainees with visual impairment have completed their training. Most of them are gainfully employed as stenographers, telephone operators, masseurs and factory workers. Some of them managed to gain admission to local/foreign universities/colleges thus improving their education for better careers.

In line with the rapidly changing job market with the current emphasis on knowledge-based workers, MAB is striving to upgrade its facilities, review the training curriculum and retraining its staff to cater to more trainees with visual impairment who now possess better academic qualification and have higher expectations. The redevelopment of the GTC Site commenced in 1994 and was completed in 1997 providing more physical space for expansion. The construction of the new hostel will be completed by this year which will allow us to increase the number of trainees from the present 55 to 80 per intake.

Objectives

1. To assist newly identified persons with visual impairment to readjust to their new condition through individualised rehabilitation programme.
2. To give the necessary prerequisites to persons with visual impairment to go for further studies.
3. To prepare persons with visual impairment for gainful employment through vocational training suitable to their abilities.
4. To provide retraining to workers with visual impairment so that they can improve their skills to remain competitive in the job market.
5. To strengthen self-confidence and self-esteem among persons with visual impairment to enable them to integrate into society.

Upgrading And Accreditation

The newly upgraded GTC strives to be a centre of excellence providing comprehensive up to date rehabilitation and vocational programmes for the blind not only in Malaysia but in the Asia-Pacific Region. We will work in partnership with local organisations and if necessary adapt programmes from foreign organisations to give our trainees the highest quality training.

At present our trainees are being tested and evaluated internally in collaboration with representatives from the industry. For example, for the Telephony Course, the trainees are tested by Telekom Malaysia. Even though our certificates are recognised by the government, it is not a national certification.

Training programmes at GTC are based on what workers with visual impairment can do best such as telephony, handicraft and stenographer. Up to 20 years ago, graduates of such training programmes can get jobs quite easily. But this is not necessarily true nowadays with the advancement of ICT and Malaysia aspiring to be an industrialised country by 2020.

A good example to explain my point is the plight of stenographers. The training programme for stenographers was introduced in the early 1960s. This 10 months programme covers typing skills, English and Malay shorthand. Only from the beginning of 1990s, ICT skills were added into this programme. The examinations are conducted by the Public Services Department. Most of our trainees did very well in the examination and were successfully employed as stenographers in the public sector. Their job performance was admirable. In fact, some of them were stenographers for

very high ranking Government officials. This programme was a preferred choice for trainees with visual impairment who were qualified.

Unfortunately, the post of stenographers slowly but surely disappeared with the introduction of ICT in the mid 1990s in the public sector. Stenographers were not only required to equip themselves with ICT skills but have to cover additional duties as administrative officers.

GTC was not prepared to cope with the sudden change. The only thing that could be done at that time was to provide ICT training to the stenographers with visual impairment. With the high cost of voice synthesizers, it was not possible for the Government to allocate such facility to their stenographers with visual impairment. Only a small fraction was lucky to receive voice synthesizers and was able to carry on with their job. Most of them were requested to become telephone operators or left without any work. It was a very depressing time for them and some of them even took optional retirement. We would not like to see this happen again and are taking proactive steps to ensure that our training programmes are in line with the requirement of the job market.

With the introduction of the national skills certification for skills training, it is felt that the training programmes at GTC should be tailored accordingly. In 2004, we applied and received accreditation from the National Vocational Training Council (NVTC). The first training programme accredited was the Massage Programme. We hope to have 2 more programmes accredited i.e. Reflexology and Information System Administrative Assistant.

In the upgrading process, existing programmes will be upgraded and new programmes introduced to equip the trainees with higher level skills and ability. The summary is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1
Summary Of Existing, Upgraded and New Programmes At GTC.**

Existing Programmes	Upgraded Programmes	New Programmes
Rehabilitation	Rehabilitation	
Telephony	Information System Administrative Assistant	
ICT	ICT	
Massage	Malaysian Traditional Massage	
Reflexology	Reflexology	
Woodwork		
	Adapted Technology for the Blind	

		Accessible Web Design
		Computer Programming
		Entrepreneurship
		Job Preparation
		Practical Training

National Vocational Training Council (NVTC)

NVTC was established under the Ministry of Human Resources on 2 May 1989, for the purpose of promoting and coordinating skills training strategy and programme in keeping with Malaysia's technological and economic development needs. NVTC's main objectives are-

- a. To establish a coordinated skills training system attuned to Malaysia's development goals and needs.
- b. To promote the development of skills training.
- c. To certify skills competence.

National Skill Certification In Malaysia: Concept, Criteria And Application

In the National Skill Certification System, ACCREDITATION is defined as:

"A procedure in which the MLVK evaluates and approves an organisation as an ACCREDITED CENTRE for undertaking training and assessment leading to the award of the Malaysian Skill Certificates."

Implicit in the above definition is the mandate given by NVTC to Accredited Centres to offer, administer and maintain the quality of the Malaysian Skill Certificates for specific jobs covered by National Occupational Skill Standards (NOSS).

Any organisation, be it a training institution or even workplace, that satisfies the following set of criteria may apply to NVTC to be approved as an Accredited Centre.

Criteria To Be Approved As An Accredited Centre

- a. The organisation has been legally established in Malaysia.
- b. It can provide, by itself or in collaboration with other organisations, the requisite physical facilities and resources such as workshops, classrooms, tools and

equipment for undertaking training and assessment to meet the requirements of relevant National Occupational Skill Standards (NOSS).

- c. It has, or can gain access to, competent and qualified trainers and training officers to undertake training and assessment to meet the relevant NOSS.
- d. It is able to meet quality assurance policies and procedures stipulated by MLVK, including having Assessors and Internal Verifiers who have been accredited by NVTC through special Induction Courses
- e. It can provide the requisite support and guidance to candidates in order to facilitate their learning and acquisition of the Malaysian Skill Certificates.

Accreditation is given to a Centre for a period of 3 to 5 years, after which the Centre may apply for re-accreditation. The Accredited Centre is required to submit the application for re-accreditation 6 months before the expiry of its accreditation. Re-accreditation is usually given for a further 3-5 years.

Benefits Of NVTC Accredited Programmes To Skills Training Providers

To skill training providers in Malaysia, the National Skill Certification system, particularly its component NOSS, may be used to improve training delivery in various aspects, including the following:

- a. Training Objectives and Curriculum: NOSS may be used as the reference for developing training objectives and curriculum.
- b. Instructional and Learning Resource Development: NOSS may be used as the fundamental basis for developing instructional and learning guides.
- c. Training Equipment and Facilities: NOSS is useful in identifying the main tools, machines, equipment and facilities that are required for undertaking competency-based training programs.
- d. Instructor's Profile: NOSS is indicative of job descriptions and specifications that are expected of the instructors involved.
- e. Assessment and Certification: NOSS provides the primary basis for assessing the achievement of training objectives, as well as awarding skill qualifications.

The National Skill Certification system is also beneficial to skill training providers, in other ways, such as the following:

- Adopting, or shifting towards, competency-based training approaches.
- Enhancing the corporate and public image of the training institution, by virtue of its status as an approved Accredited Centre for National Skill Certification.
- Allowing trainees to gain access to training loan provided under the Skill Development Fund, which started its operation on 2 January, 2001.
- Adding value to existing academic or training programmes, to produce graduates who are more marketable and relevant to workplace requirements.
- Providing graduates with greater opportunities for upward skill qualification and job mobility.
- Demonstrating contribution and commitment to national efforts in terms of skill qualifications, rather than subscribing to, or being dependent on, foreign-based qualifications.

Benefits Of NVTC Accredited Programmes To Employers And Industry

To employers and industry at large, the National Skill Certification system can be beneficial in the following ways:

- The National Skill Certification system provides a common platform for trainees of all skills training institutions, both public and privately-run, to obtain the same national skill certificate, thus reducing the problems of having too many different skills and vocational certificates in the Malaysian job market.
- By giving due consideration to Malaysian Skill Certificate holders, the recruitment and selection of the right persons for skilled jobs can be enhanced.
- The MLVK 5-level skill qualification framework provides a basis for developing a fairer and more systematic compensation and career structures for skilled jobs.
- Relevant NOSS may promote a climate for better industrial relations at the workplace, by providing a common understanding of skilled job requirements.
- Using NOSS as reference can assist the evaluation of in-house training activities, identification of skill training needs, and setting of training objectives.

- Using NOSS as benchmarking and performance enhancement tool can improve productivity.
- By encouraging workers to go for further training, and gain national skill qualifications, help demonstrate organizational commitment to the investment in people.
- By encouraging workers to gain higher skill qualifications can promote lifelong learning.
- By placing emphasis on the achievement of outcomes (competencies) based on actual workplace requirements, the national system seeks to produce more competent skilled workers.

Benefits Of NVTC Accredited Programmes To Individual School-Leavers And Workers

To individual school-leavers and workers, the National Skill Certification system may assist them in the following ways:

- By acquiring the Malaysian Skill Certificates, job and career development prospects can be enhanced, since Certificate-holders have been assessed and verified as fulfilling the requirements of gainful employment in Malaysian industry.
- By possessing the Malaysian Skill Certificates, individuals may project themselves as dignified professionals in their own rights, thus enhancing the status of skills jobs and careers at large.
- Individuals who have acquired job competencies, either through training or prior learning and achievements, can be individually assessed or qualified.
- The 5-level national skill qualification framework provides individuals with a career development path, which promotes upward mobility and lifelong learning.
- The national system seeks to change the negative societal perception and low image of skills-based careers, as only for those deemed to have failed academically, thus giving greater recognition to the skilled workforce in the country, commensurate with its important role in Malaysian society today.

National Occupation Skills Standards (NOSS)

In 1993, the National Vocational Training Council (NVTC) introduced a new National Skill Certification system involving two major changes:

- Adopting a new 5-level Skills Qualification Framework to replace the existing 3-tiered (Basic, Intermediate and Advanced) skill certification system; and
- Introducing the Accreditation Approach in place of the trade testing system.

The policy changes were fundamentally geared towards improving the quality and productivity of the country's skilled workforce, thus enhancing the competitive position of the Malaysian economy at large. The changes also sought to co-ordinate more effectively the diverse skill training activities carried out by both the public and private sectors in the country, and to gear them towards meeting the actual needs of the Malaysian industry. The basic thrusts of the reforms were:

- To reinforce the adoption of Competency-Based Education/Learning (CBE/L) principles in the skill training system in Malaysia; and
- To make the National Skill Certification System in Malaysia more flexible, accessible and user-friendly.

The adoption of the CBE/L approach in skill training basically entails shifting the emphasis from an instructor-centred approach towards a trainee-centred approach. It focuses on distinct and verifiable competencies that are actually required in the world of work, thus enhancing the relevancy and effectiveness of skill training in the country.

1. In order to ensure that skill training programmes are benchmarked against actual workplace requirements, as required in the competency-based training approach, the NVTC develops National Occupational Skill Standards (NOSS) for specific job areas.
2. NOSS is defined as 'a specification of the competencies expected of a skilled worker who is gainfully employed in Malaysia for an occupational area and level'. NVTC develops NOSS with the direct participation of industry experts and practitioners, in order to ensure that every NOSS reflects workplace competency requirements in the relevant industry. Up to April 2001, the NVTC has approved NOSS for a total of 456 job areas covering various industry sectors.
3. By utilising NOSS as the basis for developing and delivering training programmes, training providers are ensuring that their graduates effectively meet the workplace competency requirements expected by the Malaysian industry.

Concept & Structure of NOSS

Type of Skill Certification:

- SKM Level 5 - Management Level
(Diploma/Advance Diploma Technology)

"Competent in applying a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation accountability for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation."

- SKM Level 4 - Supervisory Level
(Diploma/Diploma Technology)

"Competent in performing a broad range of complex technical or professional work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and allocation of resources is often present."

- SKM Level 3 - Supervisory Level
(Malaysian Skill Certificate)

"Competent in performing a broad range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of context, most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy control or guidance of others is often required."

- SKM Level 2 - Operation and Production Level
(Malaysian Skill Certificate)

"Competent in performing a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of context. Some of the activities are non-routine and required individual responsibility and autonomy."

- SKM Level 1 - Operation and Production Level
(Malaysian Skill Certificate)

"Competent in performing a range of varied work activities, of which are routine and predictable."

Developing NOSS For Massage

The first step in the development of NOSS is to carry out a market survey on the need of a particular occupation. The massage services industry is found to be very suitable for persons with visual impairment. However, it is being threatened by luxury spas, unlicensed operators and worse of all being associated with immoral activities. There is an urgent need to regulate this trade in order to protect the genuine masseurs especially masseurs with visual impairment.

Based on these factors, a request was made by GTC with NVTC to develop NOSS for massage in 2002. A 12 member committee comprising operators of massage centres, beauty saloon and training centres was set up to design the NOSS. 6 out of 12 members of this committee including myself were related to massage for persons with visual impairment.

The committee defined the Occupational Profile of a masseur which outlines the structure of the occupation and its level. The Occupational Profile was then used to draw the Task Profile. The committee met 5 times within a period of 6 months before the NOSS was presented for approval by NVTC. This was the first time persons with visual impairment were directly involved in drawing up the NOSS. We had the opportunity to ensure that all the tasks and steps to be taken by a practicing masseur were able to be carried out by persons with visual impairment. This has been a very enriching experience for me and my colleagues.

Conclusion

Professionals involved in vocational rehabilitation for persons with visual impairment are often being look upon to provide the answers for the employability of their graduates. It seems that we are supposed to know the right kind of training and able to predict the future trends in the job market. This is certainly not an easy task.

I strongly believe that we should follow the patterns of the industry in a particular country and adapt accordingly to the special needs of persons with visual impairment. We should not merely look at what our friends are doing in the other side of the world and adopt them 100%. Of course, we can use them as guidance. I sincerely hope that all of us can work together in finding the best way in increasing the employment opportunities of persons with visual impairment.