

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AZERBAIJAN

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 National context	4
1.2 Statistics	4
1.3 The Vocational Education and Training (VET) system	5
2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	7
2.1 Overview	7
2.2 General information on quality assurance at VET system level	8
2.3 Quality assurance in key VET areas	8
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	12

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 National context

Azerbaijan is an upper-middle income country with a population of 10 million. The country has a young population, although its share is decreasing (in 2020 the share of population aged 0-14 was 22.4%)¹.

GDP growth rate was steady over 2018 (1.4%) and 2019 (1%), following GDP contraction caused by declining oil prices. The country has rich natural resources, particularly oil and gas. Economic diversification with a focus on industrial development and SMEs, and human capital development as a necessary prerequisite, are some of the country's primary goals.

In the labour market context, Azerbaijan has had high activity rates in the last five years (81.5% in the age cohort 20-64 in 2019, and 76% for women). The unemployment rate has been stable over the last five years (4.8 % in 2019). However, youth unemployment is more than double (12.4% in 2019 for the age cohort 15-24).

Over the last decade the participation rate in VET has been low, although slowly increasing. In 2019, only 14% of secondary education level students was enrolled in VET (ISCED 3), with a particularly low percentage of girls (7.3%). The country's active population has relatively low rates of educational attainment at high level (ISCED levels 5–8) – 16.6% in 2019. 76.4% of the active population was at a medium level of educational attainment in 2019 (ISCED levels 3–4).

The PISA test results of students from the capital Baku indicate a need to raise the quality of the education system – in 2018, over 60% of learners were underachieving in reading, while the figures were over 50% in mathematics and over 57% in science, that is failing to complete even simple tasks in the tested domains (i.e. failing Level 2 on the PISA scale).²

1.2 Statistics

TABLE 1. POPULATION

	Size of population	Size (%) of youth population (15-24)
2010	8,997,586.00	29.9
2015	9,593,038.00	24.6
2020	10,067,108.00	19,7

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

¹ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

² 3 'Key indicators on education skills and employment 2019', ETF, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-12/kiese_2019.pdf

TABLE 2. EMPLOYMENT

	Employment rate % (15+)	Employment rate of youth % (15-24)
2010	63	29.2
2015	66.3	37.5
2019	67.3	41.3

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

TABLE 3. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

	Early school leaving % (18-24)	Low (% , 15+)	Medium (% , 15+)	High (% , 15+)
2012	MD	7.4	76.3	16.3
2015	MD	7.5	76.2	16.3
2019	MD	7.1	76.4	16.6

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

TABLE 4. PARTICIPATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL AGE COHORT IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING)

	Upper-secondary (ISCED 3) VET	Post upper-secondary (ISCED 4) VET
2010	13.2	MD
2015	13.5	MD
2019	14	MD

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

TABLE 5. SPENDING ON GENERAL EDUCATION AND ON VET

	Spend on ISCED 3-4 all education (including VET) as % of GDP	Spend on ISCED 3-4 VET only as % of GDP
2010	MD	MD
2014	MD	MD
2018	MD	MD

1.3 The Vocational Education and Training (VET) system

VET in Azerbaijan comprises initial, technical and higher technical VET.

Governance and management

The Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees the functioning and development of the education system. It supervises educational institutions, develops educational standards and organises the provision of education in line with them, and it organises the accreditation of providers, and ensures monitoring and assessment. The State Agency on Vocational Education under the MoE, established in 2016, implements state policy in VET, develops and implements competence-based, results-oriented

education standards and curricula (programmes), promoting the application of innovation in the learning process.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) implements public policy in the areas of labour relations and protection, use of labour resources, social protection, and employment. It coordinates the development of occupational and qualification standards.

The Education Quality Assurance Agency, established in 2019, is responsible for the licensing and accreditation of educational institutions, recognition of foreign qualifications, and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The State Examination Centre conducts the final assessment of students at secondary schools and oversees entrance examinations and students' admission to higher education institutions.

Participation of non-state actors in VET governance is limited due to the lack of a formal social partnership mechanism in VET.

Financing

Public VET institutions are funded by the state, and private and municipal VET institutions are funded by the founders' budget. Currently, there is no mechanism for mobilising funding from private sources for public VET institutions. Public VET providers can generate revenue through provisional services but currently the amount is not significant.

Resources for VET schools are allocated by the MoE considering different factors such as school size, the number of students, expenditure of the school, and other factors. The financing norms for the following fiscal year by the public VET institutions are determined by the actual amount of budget allocations. Resource allocation does not consider the infrastructure and facility's needs, requirements of curricula, professional development of teachers or managers, or attracting professionals from employers and other organisations.

Azerbaijan is committed to developing a strong results'-based financing system. The Law on Vocational Education (adopted in 2018) envisages the establishment of "Vocational Education Development Fund" under MoE for managing and allocating funds among VET institutions in a transparent manner.

Regulatory frameworks

The VET system is mainly regulated by the:

- Education Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, adopted on 19 June 2009;
- Vocational Education and Training Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, adopted on 24 April 2018;
- Decree on the approval of the 'National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan', adopted on 18 July 2018.

Main provider institution types

Formal vocational education is provided by public and private vocational education institutions in vocational centres, vocational schools and vocational lyceums. Non-formal vocational education is provided by state-owned enterprises (e.g. SOCAR, Azerishiq, Azersu, Bakumetro, Sumgayit Chemical Park and others) and private companies. The State Employment Service conducts vocational trainings

for the unemployed and jobseekers in the training centres of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

Main provision/programme types

VET in Azerbaijan is mostly school-based and is characterised by weak ties with the world of work. Although the study programmes include industrial experience which has to take place in facilities where the learners can practise, most of the classes are held in schools or in companies where learners get minimal practical experience. With large numbers of SMEs all over the country, these are the most likely workplaces for VET school graduates. Most of these SMEs do not have the required capacity and resources to provide good-quality practical training. Most of the donor-coordinated projects, including EU projects, are piloting WBL as part of newly designed curricula.

The Strategic Roadmap for Vocational VET in the Azerbaijan Republic acknowledges that partnerships with employers is one of the critical prerequisites for taking the vocational education system to an advanced level and envisages the establishment by 2025 of 10 differently specialized pilot vocational education schools within employer partnerships.

Main qualifications according to ISCED levels

Existing VET programmes are provided at ISCED levels 2 to 4. The duration of initial VET is 6 months to 1 year, leading to diplomas or certificates of EQF level 2,3 /ISCED 2. The duration of technical VET is 1 to 3 years, leading to diplomas or certificates of EQF level 3, 4/ ISCED 2,3. Higher VET duration is from 3 years (after completion of general secondary education) to 4 years (after completion of basic education) leading to diploma of sub-bachelor degree or certificates of EQF level 5/ ISCED 4

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Overview

The strategic roadmap for VET approved in 2016 identified a number of challenges related to VET quality, such as an inflexible regulatory framework, outdated curricula and teaching resources, weak mechanisms of performance monitoring and evaluation, and a negative public perception of VET. The country implements elements of quality assurance system in VET, and important developments have taken place recently.

The Education Law states that education quality is defined by quality indicators at different levels of education (such as the curricula, learning outcomes of graduates, facilities and infrastructure, quality of teaching and others) based on educational standards. The VET Law sets out the following quality mechanisms specific to VET³:

- State standards for VET that define the content, management, facilities, infrastructure, measurable quality indicators of educators, the level of knowledge, skills and behaviour of students at each level of vocational education;

³ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/39275>

- licensing and accreditation of vocational education institutions.

A special body, the Education Quality Assurance Agency, was set up in 2019 to manage, among other tasks, the processes of accreditation of education institutions. It is also mandated to give advice and provide methodological support for the development of internal quality assurance systems in education institutions.

In 2018, Azerbaijan officially adopted an 8-level National Qualifications Framework (AzQF), spanning qualifications from general, vocational, higher and further education. One of the objectives of the AzQF is to improve learning outcomes related to qualifications.

2.2 General information on quality assurance at VET system level

The overall responsibility for education quality assurance policy belongs to the Ministry of Education.

The State Agency on Vocational Education and its Department of Management, Quality Assurance and Monitoring of Vocational Education Institutions are responsible for the overall governance of quality assurance in VET.

The Education Quality Assurance Agency operating under the Ministry of Education is responsible for the accreditation of all educational institutions, as well as for organising consulting and methodological support services related to the establishment and development of internal quality assurance systems in educational institutions, and evaluation of the activities of the internal quality assurance systems of education institutions and provision of recommendations on their improvement. Vocational education institutions organise their internal quality assurance in line with the state educational standards.

The State Examination Center carries out final assessments (attestation) of students studying at general educational institutions, and organises the admission of students to secondary vocational education institutions and higher education institutions. It also holds exams for the recruitment and continuation of work for the civil service.⁴

VET Quality assurance related legislation includes:

- Education Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, adopted on 19 June 2009;
- Vocational Education and Training Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, adopted on 24 April 2018;
- New Attestation Rules on Vocational Education, adopted on 13 March 2019;
- Rules for Accreditation of Educational Institutions, adopted 28 September 2010;
- Decree on the approval of the 'National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan', 18 July 2018.

2.3 Quality assurance in key VET areas

Evidence – Statistics and research and development

The absence of advanced mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring the performance of vocational education schools was identified as one of major problems of the VET system by the Strategic

⁴ <http://dim.gov.az/en/docs/>

roadmap for VET. Administrative data on school enrolment exist, but survey data and long-term analysis of VET are lacking.

The National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population was set up in 2020 to analyse the current situation in the labour market in order to make effective policy decisions. Its functions include the analysis of skills needs, skills' forecasts, and graduates' transition from education to the labour market.

As a result of the EU technical assistance project “EU support to VET in Azerbaijan”, a concept has been developed for VET Management Information System. A concept and a set of indicators have also been developed for the Monitoring and Evaluation system in VET. However, the systems have still to be made operational – the intention is to create national systems for the entire education sector.⁵

Quality assurance and the qualifications cycle

One of the objectives of the AzQF adopted in 2018 is to improve the quality and transparency of qualifications. It states that “all qualifications are quality assured and quality assurance encompasses all relevant processes including a description of expected learning outcomes, assessment and validation of an individual’s learning achievement”.

Quality assurance at the national level is regulated by educational standards. In March 2019, the ‘State standard for vocational education’ was adopted⁶. The standard defines expected learning outcomes in terms of learners’ knowledge, skills and competences. It specifies learning content and requirements for trainers, training infrastructures and teaching material. The standard ensures a modular structure of the curriculum. It also includes eight key competences for lifelong learning adapted to local circumstances.

Additionally, the current regulatory framework envisages a parallel use of the qualifications standards. The relationship between the qualification standards and education standards must be further clarified to ensure that the process of developing and describing qualifications is efficient and free from overlaps.

Currently, the MoE issues educational standards and the MLSPP oversees the development of occupational and qualifications standards. The relevance of qualifications is assured by the use of occupational standards which are developed by sector committees. Regulations for the development and registration of occupational and qualification standards provide sector committees with a framework conducive to collaborating with public agencies, education and training providers, trade unions and employers’ associations. Qualification standards include key, core, and specific competences. So far, a few hundred occupational standards have been developed. They are available on the website of the MLSPP⁷.

As a result of the EU Project “Support to Implementation of National Qualifications Framework in Azerbaijan”, a number of methodological and guidance tools have been developed to enhance the

⁵ SUPPORT TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) IN AZERBAIJAN, EuropeAid/137866/DH/S, Final report July 2020

⁶ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/41741>

⁷ <https://www.sosial.gov.az/en/specialty-standards>

quality of qualifications: Methodology for developing Occupational Maps, Guidelines for developing education standards from occupational standards, Guidance materials for developing Study Programmes from Qualification Standards, Guidelines for the validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, and Guidelines for the internal and external QA of assessment and certification processes, including the QA for VNFIL.

Quality assurance and VET provision/provider institutions

External quality arrangements are regulated by the Rules for accreditation of educational institutions (adopted on 28 September 2010).⁸ Accreditation of vocational training institutions is carried out every 5 years. According to the Rules, the accreditation of an education establishment is carried out in order to specify the conformity of the organisation of education process, material and technical basis of the establishment, curricula, personnel potential, financial resources and educational infrastructure to the requirements of state education standards and other normative-legal acts.

The Education Quality Assurance Agency implements the accreditation of educational institutions and sets related requirements and criteria.

Both the AzQF and the Rules for accreditation of educational institutions envisage internal quality assurance processes. In accordance with the Rules for accreditation, educational institutions submit self-assessment reports to the MoE at least a month before the accreditation process. The report on self-assessment results includes information on the organisational and legal provision of the education activity; management of the education establishment; the content and the structure of preparedness on education programmes – assessment of the organisation of the training process; quality of the preparedness on education programmes; staffing; scientific-research activity; international co-operation; the material and technical bases; social conditions; and financial provisions.

However, self-assessment and peer reviews are not widely used yet in the education sector.

The Regulation on the monitoring of vocational education institutions of 2 March 2018 provides for the monitoring of VET institutions in the domains of the curricula, personnel, educational infrastructure and teaching processes. The State Agency on Vocational Education implements this monitoring.

The planned 2021 EU-funded Twinning Project is aimed at quality improvements in vocational education through the introduction of self-assessment, peer reviews and performance monitoring mechanisms. It will support the State Agency on Vocational Education and Education Quality Assurance Agency in the development of policy and procedures for internal and external quality assurance in the VET system.

Quality assurance and VET teacher/trainer qualification standards and continuing professional development (CPD)

The minimum quality indicators for teachers and trainers/masters are set out in the Law on Vocational Education, as well as in the State Standards for Vocational Education. Thus, the VET Law states that one of the duties of the state VET is to “ensure the training of personnel for the vocational education and training system at higher education institutions, and involve highly qualified specialists in the vocational education and training system”. Related to CPD requirements, the Law states that VET

⁸ <https://nk.gov.az/az/document/4997/>

institutions must ensure that “industrial trainers are trained at relevant enterprises for acquaintance with advanced techniques and technology”. One of the duties of educators is “to attend courses and attestation for the purpose of improving qualifications, and increasing scientific-pedagogical and professional level in accordance with the legislation”. The State standards for VET state that “Vocational subject teachers and industrial training masters are provided with internships on new equipment and technologies at the enterprises and organizations determined by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan at least every 2 years in accordance with their professions”.

The VET Law defines the requirements for attestation of VET teachers and trainers. The State standards for VET require the diagnostic assessment of the knowledge and skills of educators working in VET institutions. They also provide a set of quality indicators for VET educators.

Teachers of general education subjects at VET institutions are recruited by the MoE through exam-based competitions in accordance with the “Teacher Recruitment” procedure.

Specialised teachers are recruited by the VET institutions based on the minimum requirements set by the regulatory documents. The minimum qualifications required for trainers/masters are vocational education (higher, full secondary) and a specialisation (of at least 3 years of production or pedagogical experience) in the relevant professional area, in the basic specialisation of the subjects taught.

In spite of the existing legislative provisions for the minimum quality indicators for teachers and trainers, the quality of VET staff is low. A comprehensive teacher development policy in VET has not been developed yet. Until recently, the participation of teachers and trainers in professional development courses, seminars or training has been very limited and has focused on theoretical knowledge.

A Strategic roadmap addresses the current unsatisfactory competency level of the teaching personnel. The aim of the roadmap is to establish the conditions and criteria for selecting and recruiting teachers, as well as induction measures for new teachers entering the profession. Another aim of the roadmap is to develop teacher performance evaluation measures, including student feedback surveys, and the related feedback loops.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AzQF	Azerbaijan National Qualifications Framework
CPD	Continuing professional development
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
MLSPP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population
MoE	Ministry of Education
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning