

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

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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	6
2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	8
2.1 Overview	8
2.2 General information on quality assurance at VET system level	8
2.3 Quality assurance related to key VET areas	9
3. STRENGTHS, DEVELOPMENTS AND NEEDS	12
3.1 Main strengths of the national VET quality assurance approach	12
3.2 Most significant developments for more effective VET quality assurance (in progress)	12
3.3 Most urgent reform needs for VET quality assurance	13
LIST OF ACRONYMS	14

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 National context

Belarus is an upper middle income country¹ with a declining population of 9.4 million. The total population dropped by 0.97% from 2010 to 2020, and by 4.6% from 2001 to 2010. The population of Belarus is aging. The share of youth (aged 15–29) is in net decline, dropping from 22.7% in 2010 to 17.7% in 2018².

After years of impressive economic growth, Belarus showed a downward trend after 2010 and a recession after 2015. The economy started to recover in 2017. In 2019, the country's GDP grew 1.2% compared to 2018³. Trade, services and the industrial sector are the main sources of the country's economic development, with a focus on innovative high-tech sectors. In 2018, the production sector accounted for 37.9% of GDP (26% industrial production and 6.6% agriculture and fishing) and services accounted for 47.7%.

The labour market in Belarus is characterised by high employment and activity rates (67.7% and 70.7% in 2019 respectively) and a relatively low unemployment rate (4.2% in 2019). However, youth unemployment is higher (17.3% aged 15–19, 9.3% aged 20–24)⁴. The public sector is still an important employer, absorbing around 40% of the workforce. Although employment has been steadily decreasing in the public sector, the share of employment in the private sector is among the lowest in the region. In 2019, the biggest labour shortages in the history of the country hit Belarus⁵. Skills gaps and qualitative skills mismatches are growing in certain sectors. Despite an abundance of university graduates, companies in the private sector are reporting skills shortages. Gradual reform and heavy government interventions in the economy have helped Belarus to avoid the social costs of economic restructuring. However, the challenge for the country is to make the transition from a resource-focused economy with low-cost labour and capital towards a growth model based on a high rate of productivity and innovation⁶.

1.2 Statistics

TABLE 1. POPULATION

Year	Size of population	Size (%) of youth population (15–24)
2012	9 465 150	13.6%
2014	9 468 154	12.2%
2018	9 491 823	10.2%

Source: Belstat

¹ World Bank country and lending groups, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>

² Belstat, <https://www.belstat.gov.by/en/>

³ World Bank data

⁴ Belstat

⁵ ETF TRP assessment 2020, ETF

⁶ Education, training and employment developments 2018, ETF

TABLE 2. EMPLOYMENT

Year	Employment rate % (15–74)	Employment rate of youth % (15–19)	Employment rate of youth % (20–24)
2016	66.7	8.4	69.1
2018	67.5	7.9	70.4
2019	67.7	8.6	69.3

Source: Belstat

TABLE 3. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Year	Early school leaving % (18–24)	Low (% , 15–74)	Medium (% , 15–74)	High (% , 15–74)
2012	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2016	1.6	1.3	45.4	53.2
2019	2.1	1.5	43.1	55.3

Source: Belstat

Note: Low – primary and basic general education; Medium – general secondary and vocational-technical education; High –secondary specialised and higher education

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

Year	Share of students in general upper-secondary education	Share of students in TVET	Share of students in secondary specialised education	Share of students who did not continue their education
2014	64.5	20.0	15.5	0.0
2016	65.2	18.7	15.8	0.3
2019	61.8	19.4	17.8	1.0

Source: Unesco Institute for Statistics

TABLE 5. SPENDING ON GENERAL EDUCATION AND ON VET

Year	Spending on ISCED levels 3 and 4, all education (including VET) as % of GDP	Spending on ISCED levels 3 and 4, VET only as % of GDP
2012	2.9	0.6
2014	2.8	0.6
2018	2.7	0.5

Source: Belstat

1.3 The Vocational education and Training (VET) system

Governance and management

The education system in Belarus includes formal, continuing and specialised education. Formal education is divided into pre-school, general secondary (basic and secondary), vocational, secondary specialised, higher and postgraduate education.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is the national body responsible for education at all levels. Its Directorate for Professional Education steers policy implementation in higher education, VET and lifelong learning. VET is state-regulated and is managed by the MoE, other ministries and state authorities or organisations at national, regional and local levels. The Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO) is responsible for the development of national standards and training materials, research and analysis on VET, VET teacher in-service training and other support and methodological work related to VET. An interaction procedure has been established between the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) and MoE, in accordance with the Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on forecasting the staff demand of the economy, adopted in 2017. The three ministries coordinate their actions to jointly develop five-year forecasts of the economy's skills needs.

MLSP and MoE regulate and implement the Strategy for improving the national qualifications system⁷. To ensure systematic work on the implementation of this strategy, a multi-stakeholder National Council for the Development of the Qualifications System was created under the Council of Ministers. It coordinates the work of state institutions and organisations to create sectoral councils, develops occupational standards and defines related priority economic sectors, and establishes an independent assessment and certification system. It also defines priority directions of national qualifications system (NQS) modernisation and makes proposals for related legislative acts.

Financing

VET financing is decentralised from republican to regional budgets. VET institutions manage the funds and property that they are allocated.

The financing mechanism has a complex structure and includes legal regulation, a system of state financial administration authorities, and state control and auditing of educational institutions.

The sources of funding for vocational education in Belarus are funds for education envisaged by the state budget, institutions' financial investments, funds received from income-generating activities of vocational education institutions, grant (sponsorship) assistance provided by legal entities, individuals and individual entrepreneurs, international grants, procurement of educational services for the population, and other sources permitted by law.

The education system is piloting normative per-capita financing of educational institutions⁸. Projects in the Mogilev and Brest regions are being implemented in 2020–2021 to pilot normative financing from regional budgets.

⁷ Torino Process 2018–2020 Belarus - National Report

⁸ Torino Process 2018–2020 Belarus - National Report

Regulatory frameworks

The Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (2011) regulates all levels of education and continuing education. It covers legal aspects of the education and training system; regulates the rights and obligations of educational institutions, their staff and learners; outlines requirements for the educational process and certification; and describes governance, financing, quality control and international cooperation arrangements and principles. The code is currently being revised to address, among other issues, distance learning, which will obtain legal status as an education and training modality. The revision is also addressing optimisation of the VET providers' network.

VET modernisation and reform in Belarus is also framed by the following strategic documents :

- Strategy for inclusive socio-economic development of the Republic of Belarus, 2030.
- Strategy for improving the national qualifications system (NQS) and the related action plan for 2018–2025. This is designed to make the current qualifications system more flexible, to recognise qualifications during different stages of working life, to facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning, to improve confidence in qualifications through independent assessment and certification and to make qualifications in Belarus more relevant and easier to compare with those in Europe and neighbouring countries.
- Decree on certain issues of additional adult education⁹.
- The state programme Education and Youth Policy 2021–2025, which outlines key directions and priorities for state authorities and institutions in the area of education and youth policies.
- The Law on employment of the population of the Republic of Belarus, which defines states and conditions of employment and unemployment, and the responsibilities of state employment support policies and of the state employment service. It also regulates the participation of trade unions and the responsibilities of employers.

Main provider institution types

The Republic of Belarus has a wide network of VET institutions. At the start of the 2020–2021 school year, there were 127 TVET institutions and 44 institutions of other levels implementing TVET programmes, 110 secondary specialised education (SSE) institutions (among them, 9 private ones) and 83 institutions of other levels that implement SSE programmes.

Main provision/programme types

In accordance with the VET curriculum, 30 to 35% of the time is devoted to theoretical training, and 65 to 70% to work-based training (including internships). Work-based training takes place in two stages: first in the workshops of educational institutions and then in enterprises. The amount of time allocated to internships is determined by the educational institution and is associated with the amount of time allocated to work-based training, considering the specifics of the profession.

Main qualifications according to ISCED levels

The main qualification types are given below:

- Technical VET obtained on the basis of general basic education takes one to two years and leads to ISCED 3.

⁹ Torino Process 2018–2020 Belarus - National Report

- Technical VET obtained on the basis of general secondary education takes one to two years and leads to ISCED 4.
- Secondary specialised education obtained on the basis of general basic education takes three to four years and leads to ISCED 5.
- Secondary specialised education obtained on the basis of general secondary education takes two to three years and leads to ISCED 5.
- Secondary specialised education obtained on the basis of TVET and general secondary education takes one to three years and leads to ISCED 5¹⁰.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Overview

Quality assurance in VET has a traditional, centralised, prescriptive approach, with a focus mainly on inspection and control. Recently, a number of measures have been implemented to organise processes and procedures to manage and ensure the quality of VET. These measures relate to the development and implementation of quality standards using common principles, criteria and indicators. Measures to ensure VET quality are undertaken at macro, meso and micro levels. Modernisation of the quality management system is one of the issues covered by the Strategy for improving the national qualifications system approved by the Government of the Republic of Belarus. Quality assurance is an important part of the EU project for Employment and Vocational Education and Training that aims to improve quality assurance measures for VET qualifications and VET provision and align it with European practice.

In shaping a modern model for ensuring VET quality, great importance is attached to the development of resource centres as centres of excellence. A resource centre is a separate or structural subdivision of an educational institution, in which quality conditions have been created for students to be trained through work-based learning and internships. The aim is for students to gain practical skills to work with modern equipment in the framework of educational programmes of vocational, secondary specialised, higher education and adult education.

2.2 General information on quality assurance at VET system level

MoE is responsible for education quality improvement. The MoE Department for Quality Control coordinates the activity of committees, local education and youth departments and other organisations responsible for quality assurance of education provision by educational institutions. MLSP is currently responsible for professional standards and the National Qualifications System (NQS), and MoE is responsible for educational standards. A number of strategic and regulatory acts establish targets for quality assurance in VET:

- the Education Code;
- the state programme Education and Youth Policy, 2021–2025;

¹⁰ Torino Process 2018–2020 Belarus - National Report

- the Strategy for improving the national qualifications system.

Currently, state control of quality in VET is assured through the activities of state bodies that verify the compliance of education with educational standards, curricula documentation and regulatory requirements on educational activities. State control has three levels: institutional (by higher authorities over lower authorities), internal control by education providers and external institutional control¹¹.

As a result of the EU project for Employment and Vocational Education and Training (Component on the improvement of quality assurance measures for VET qualifications and VET provision), a draft national strategy and roadmap for a VET quality assurance system has been developed. Development of the action plan for piloting and implementing the new strategy is in progress. Work is also underway on external and internal quality assurance measures, including guiding materials for VET providers.

2.3 Quality assurance related to key VET areas

Evidence – Statistics and research and development

Official statistical information is developed by state bodies (the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus), territorial state statistical bodies and state organisations authorised to maintain state statistics. The Information and Analytical Centre (GIATS) is a body under the MoE that is responsible for education statistics, information systems in the education sector and digitalisation of the education system. MLSP is responsible for statistics on working conditions and safety, registered unemployment and social protection. The collection, analysis and dissemination of statistics in the country is regulated by the Law on State Statistics (2004) and the Manual on the national model of production of official statistics. The country has also developed a Strategy for the development of state statistics until 2022, which sets objectives for the effective functioning of the national statistical system to meet the information needs of all categories of users.

As an outcome of the previous strategy that was in force until 2017, a unified information system of state statistics was introduced and operationalised.

Under the current EU project on Employment and Vocational Education and Training's draft concept for an integrated labour market information system, a related roadmap and the mapping of institutional roles were developed¹².

Ten quality assurance indicators, considering European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) indicators, have been drawn up to monitor the quality of VET providers. The monitoring results can be used to assess the effectiveness of the educational process, determine compliance of learning outcomes with regulatory requirements and with social and personal expectations, analyse the adaptation of VET to changes in the labour market and the possibility of expanding access to VET for socially vulnerable groups, and identify perspectives for quality improvement.

¹¹ Torino Process 2018–2020 Belarus - National Report

¹² Employment and Vocational Education and Training in Belarus, ENI/2017/383–822, fifth progress report

Quality assurance and the qualification cycle

Traditionally, state education standards set requirements for certification. State education standards for vocational and higher education have been based on tariff qualification characteristics reflected in the Unified tariff and qualification handbook of workers' jobs and occupations, and the Unified qualification handbook for employee positions or occupational standards. Educational standards are developed by the Republican Institute for Vocational Education. Educational standards for implementing curricula for TVET and SSE are validated by MoE, in coordination with the relevant line ministries.

Currently, educational standards' requirements for higher education (HE), SSE and TVET are renewed at least once every five years. There has been no special approach to ensure the quality of qualifications to date. However, the identification of relevant profiles based on labour market information, the work of sector qualification councils, occupational standards, sector qualifications and learning outcomes, and the validation of learning outcomes will be part of quality assurance measures and of the system of independent assessment.

The current Unified Tariff Qualifications System includes classifiers of occupations and job titles, handbooks of qualifications' characteristics and a list of curricula and occupational profiles, which are all linked. However, the system is seen as too rigid for an innovation-based economy. The Strategy for improving the national qualifications system and the NQF implementation plan up to 2025 (approved in 2018) address the ongoing discrepancy between the structure and quality of vocational education and labour market needs¹³.

Currently, a regulatory legal framework is being created for consistent implementation of the strategy. The Council for the Development of the Qualifications System was created under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus. The Provision on the Sectoral Qualifications Council, as well as the Guidelines for the development of occupational standards have been approved.

Recommendations have been developed on the use of occupational standards. Occupational standards will form the basis for the development of VET education standards. The framework architecture of the NQF was endorsed (eight levels with descriptors) and fifteen sector skills councils have been established. To date, 12 occupational standards have been approved and 17 more developed. Activities have also started to prepare education standards and learning outcome-based curricula¹⁴.

Quality assurance and VET provision/provider institutions

To guarantee the quality of education, an accreditation procedure is carried out by the Department of Education Quality Control. Educational institutions must confirm their state accreditation at least once every five years. The following areas are analysed during accreditation: educational processes, adherence to health and safety standards, staffing situation (availability of qualified personnel based on needs, adherence to teachers' assessment requirements, and provision of continuous professional development and retraining opportunities), material and technical facilities, management, organisation and effectiveness of self-control (its regularity, development of an action plan and recommendations)

¹³ Torino Process 2018–2020 Belarus - National Report

¹⁴ Employment and Vocational Education and Training in Belarus, ENI/2017/383–822, fifth progress report and midterm evaluation report

and alignment with the requirements of educational standards and curricula, based on testing results¹⁵.

Beyond external accreditation, internal quality assurance is carried out by educational institutions (self-control). Self-control involves comprehensive analysis of educational activities, including self-assessment of educational activities carried out by the educational institution. The order and frequency of self-control are determined by the head of the educational institution. The basis for accreditation and confirmation of accreditation is a statement on the results of self-control.

To improve the quality of vocational education, a network of 49 resource centres has been created, where it is possible to implement educational programmes in a network form of interaction. Resource centres concentrate and provide access to scarce, expensive resources for students of a number of educational institutions of TVET, SSE, HE and adult education¹⁶.

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

At pre-service education level, VET teachers and trainers must have higher education qualifications in the areas of pedagogy or pedagogy for vocational education or in the subject or occupations that they teach. There are no work experience requirements for VET trainers.

In 2019, the Sectoral Qualifications Council was established under MoE. Its functions include the identification of policies in the field of professional development of pedagogical staff. The development of a sectoral qualifications framework is underway in the education sector. Occupational standards for pedagogical activity in TVET and SSE institutions have been developed. The development of the occupational standard Management of TVET and SSE institutions is also in progress.

Teachers must undergo in-service training once every five years for continuing professional development (CPD). RIPO is mandated with providing CPD for VET system managers and teaching staff. National priorities and plans for CPD are established at the level of the Ministry of Education, considering the results of analyses of assessments of educational institutions.

The mechanisms for assessing teaching staff in the field of VET include an exam, assessment of practical results, interviews and expert assessments. Assessments are designed to award or confirm a qualification category (first, second or highest category). Assessment for awarding a qualification category takes place on the initiative of teaching staff. Assessment to confirm a category takes place on the initiative of the head of the educational institution, with the consent of the institution's pedagogical council. This type of assessment takes place not more than once every five years. It is used for teachers with poor performance whose activities do not meet the established requirements or teachers who have not taught for over two years.

Teachers' performance is also evaluated in the framework of an accreditation process based on indicators related to compliance with qualification requirements, the results of students' tests, the results of students' questionnaires, and an analysis of outputs of their activities (curricula-related

¹⁵ Methodological recommendations on the implementation of accreditation, Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 29 August 2018, number 6

¹⁶ Torino Process 2018–2020 Belarus - National Report

documentation and methodological resources). The results of monitoring and performance evaluation are the basis for developing a plan to improve an organisation's performance¹⁷.

3. STRENGTHS, DEVELOPMENTS AND NEEDS

3.1 Main strengths of the national VET quality assurance approach

Belarus has developed a regulatory framework that establishes the obligation of educational institutions to ensure the quality of educational services.

State control of education quality is continuous in the course of licensing and state accreditation of educational institutions and other organisations that carry out educational activities. Requirements for assessing the quality of education at all levels are laid down in the regulations on the educational institution, educational standards and curricula documentation.

Documents regulating the development of the education system and the activities of educational institutions include criteria and indicators.

The quality assurance system in Belarus is centralised and focuses on the concept of quality control and conformity using mainly quantitative criteria that detect potential problems, but do not allow identification of the root causes.

In general, quality assurance is achieved through the use of external and internal control mechanisms. External control is carried out using standards, accreditation and certification procedures of educational institutions. Internal quality control is carried out as part of self-assessment.

3.2 Most significant developments for more effective VET quality assurance (in progress)

Indicators and criteria have been developed for quality assessment. They will be part of the Republic of Belarus's quality assurance system and will allow:

- streamlining of the system of indicators at various levels of management of educational institutions;
- updating of information on VET institutions;
- optimisation of management processes in VET institutions;
- an increase in the objectivity and competence of teaching staff in the field of quality management.

The criteria and indicators are included in the terms of reference for the development of the information system Electronic College. The purpose of this information system is to collect, store, process, analyse and disseminate information about the state of the sector, its internal and external efficiency, its pedagogical and institutional activities, its results, shortcomings and needs. This will optimise the collection of information at the level of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, RIPO and educational institutions.

¹⁷ Torino Process 2018–2020 Belarus - National Report

Various concepts have been generated, including the electronic library of vocational education and the development of the educational system of the Republic of Belarus, valid until 2030.

Drafts of the National strategy for quality assurance in vocational and specialised secondary education and a roadmap have been developed.

3.3 Most urgent reform needs for VET quality assurance

A new edition of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus needs to be introduced and the National strategy for quality assurance in vocational and specialised secondary education needs to be approved.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CPD	Continuing professional development
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
ESA	Employment Service Agency
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIATS	Information and analytical centre
HE	Higher education
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
MoE	Ministry of Education
NQF	National qualifications framework
RIPO	Republican Institute for Vocational Education
SSE	Secondary specialised education
TVET	Technical vocational education and training
VET	Vocational education and training