

INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON- FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

2021 COUNTRY REPORT: GEORGIA

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BRIEF 2023 UPDATE ON THE REPORT

This report was originally produced in August 2021 by Thea Siprashvili.

In March 2022, Georgia applied for EU membership. In June 2022, the EU granted Georgia a membership perspective and the prospect of receiving candidate country status, subject to conditions.

In 2023, Georgia joined the European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) Advisory Group. During the same year, the European Commission launched a new edition of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning¹. In order to include this report on the website of the European Inventory on VNFIL, the ETF has produced, in collaboration with the Georgian National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, a brief update on the statistics on validation service providers and beneficiaries under the Recognition of Non-Formal Education (RNFE) scheme, available as of August 2023:

- **Number of trades (qualifications and NQF levels) for which validation services are available:** validation of non-formal and informal learning in Georgia is available in 11 fields: business and administration, information and communication technologies, personal services, engineering and engineering trades, security services, education, health, architecture and construction, agriculture, manufacturing and processing, and the arts. Validation is available for qualifications at levels 3 to 5 of the NQF.
- **Number of VET centres authorised to offer validation services:** the right to validate non-formal and informal learning has been granted to the following nine VET institutions: LTD Community College – Nataly Academy; LTD Tegeta Academy, LTD Business and Technology Academy, LTD Georgian Business Academy, Iberia LEPL College, Black Sea LEPL College, Spektri LEPL College, LTD Iakob Gogebashvili Georgian College, and N(N)LE Institute of Culture.
- **Number of candidates certified through validation:** two educational institutions implemented validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2022: Black Sea LEPL College and LTD Tegeta Academy. 1 in every 21 applicants was unsuccessful. 19 applicants obtained partial recognition with a state-recognised certificate. One applicant fully confirmed the learning outcomes necessary to achieve the qualification stipulated by the educational standard. Accordingly, Black Sea LEPL College issued a vocational education document (diploma). Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been implemented in the fields of engineering and engineering trades and personal services.

¹ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/european-inventory-on-validation>

1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that the term ‘validation of non-formal and informal learning’ (VNFIL) is not used in the Georgian education system, systems for validating learning outcomes acquired in informal and non-formal settings are in place in general and vocational education, and partially in higher education. On average, 10 000 individuals sat the validation exams in general education each year between 2016 and 2019 (the figure has now dropped to 1 500 annually), while the processes have not benefited anyone in vocational education so far.

The concept of validating non-formal and informal learning is best established in vocational education, where the distinction between formal and non-formal learning was introduced under the Law of Vocational Education (VE) of 2007 and maintained in the Law of VE of 2018. These laws also provide for the possibility to recognise and validate learning outcomes acquired beyond the formal education system. The term ‘non-formal education’ is used in the Georgian vocational education system to apply to both non-formal and informal learning². The latter, though distinguished in different government documents, has never been formalised in legislation. ‘Recognition of non-formal education’ is the term established since then to mean exactly the system of VNFIL in vocational education and, therefore, throughout the report, ‘recognition of non-formal education’ (RNFE) will be used to denote VNFIL in vocational education.

A few pilot RNFE projects were implemented between 2008 and 2009 by the LEPL National Professional Agency, a VE qualifications body that was abolished at the end of 2008. A first Rule for Recognising Non-Formal Education was approved by a Decree of the Minister of Education and Science in 2010. The current RNFE system has been in place since 2019 and allows applicants to get their learning outcomes acquired beyond formal education identified, documented, assessed, recognised and validated. RNFE is possible for both secondary and tertiary cycles of VE, which in Georgia is provided at levels 3 to 5 for long-term vocational education (initial and further VE) and levels 2 to 5 for short-term vocational training (a sort of adult education system).

Unlike in vocational education, in secondary general education (GE) the terms ‘formal education’ and ‘non-formal education’ are rarely applied. However, learning outcomes can be achieved independently without going to a GE institution, by having them recognised through an extramural exam organised for each grade and for all three cycles of GE – primary, basic and secondary. The process is laid down in the Law on GE of 2005 and is referred to as ‘certification of education acquired through external studies / externship’. It allows applicants to get their learning outcomes assessed and validated for general education programmes in a specific subject, grade or cycle.

Besides the certification process referred to above, Georgian law allows for the recognition of prior education (mostly undocumented or unrecognised general education) for refugees, IDPs and asylum seekers under international conventions and for humanitarian purposes.

Similarly to GE, the term ‘non-formal HE’ is rarely applied in the Georgian education system. However, from a quality-assurance perspective, the system carefully defines an HE that is recognised by the state and can issue state-recognised diplomas, as well as defining whether and how learning acquired

² Non-formal education is defined as ‘a part of lifelong learning (LLL) system, which means acquiring knowledge and understanding, skills, and autonomy/responsibility beyond formal education’ (Article 3, clause B, Law of Georgia on Vocational Education of 2018).

elsewhere can be recognised and transferred. This particularly concerns recognition of higher education degrees acquired in ‘licensed’ HE institutions³, recognition of HE acquired in the Occupied Territories of Georgia, and recognition of HE of refugees and asylum seekers. The National Education Quality Enhancement Center is responsible for the recognition for these specific target groups through established procedures.

The Rule for Calculation of Credits and internal rules of universities govern the processes of recognising learning outcomes in HE system. Recognition of prior learning, credit accumulation and transfer from formal settings is the focus here, while recognition of non-formal education (apart from the cases mentioned in the previous paragraph) is very limited.

2 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

In the vocational education sector, the Laws of Georgia on Education Quality Enhancement (2010)⁴ and Vocational Education (2018)⁵ provide the legal basis for RNFE and are further stipulated in the Rule for Obtaining a Right to provide RNFE⁶, under GoG Regulation No 459 of 20 September, 2019, and the Rule for RNFE⁷, an MoES decree. The definition of RNFE in the Rules of RNFE (Clause 3, ‘The Objectives of Recognition’) is ‘to validate/certify the learning outcomes acquired beyond the formal education for a person willing to get recognition in order to facilitate LLL, personal development, access to further education and/or awarding qualification and/or employment/career development/self-employment.’ The rules allow any applicant to get their learning outcomes recognised towards any formal VE qualification – a basic vocational education qualification (NQF level 3), a secondary vocational education qualification (NQF level 4), a higher vocational education qualification (NQF level 5) or a vocational training/retraining qualification (NQF levels 2 to 5). The basis for recognition is the existence of either vocational education standards/modules (documents developed by the NCEQE based on occupational standards serving as programme standards for all vocational education programmes at basic, secondary or higher VE level), or of training and retraining programmes, since RNFE is restricted to learning outcomes and qualifications that are regulated by vocational education programmes.

³ The term ‘licensed HE institution’ in the Georgian education system specifically applies to former HE institutions that provided HE on the basis of a licence under previous HE legislation, but lost their right to provide HE because they failed to apply for or pass through the new HE quality assurance procedures established under new HE legislation since 2005. Despite formally losing the right to provide HE, the institutions continued their programmes, trapping some students in a system that was recognised neither nationally nor, therefore, internationally.

⁴ Law of Georgia on Education Quality Enhancement of 2010 (in Georgian, 2021 version):

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/93064?publication=20>

⁵ Law of Georgia on Vocational Education of 2018 (in English, 2018 version):

<https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/4334842?publication=0>

⁶ GoG Resolution No 459 of 20 September 2019 (in Georgian, 2021 version):

<https://eqe.ge/res/images/images/NewFolder/N459.pdf>

⁷ MoES Decree No 188/5 of 6 September 2019 (in Georgian, 2021 version):

<https://eqe.ge/res/images/images/NewFolder/N1885%20ბრძანება%20-%20არაფორმალური%20განათლების%20ფარგლებში%20მიღწეული%20სწავლის%20შედეგების%20აღიარების%20წესი.pdf>

The Law of Georgia on General Education (2005)⁸, together with the MoES Decree 15N of 2010, creates the legal basis for the certification of education acquired through external studies/externship in the general education system. The rule covers recognition possibilities for all general education cycles, grades and subjects in general education programmes. The assessment, recognition and validation of externships is done through a written examination and administered by the MoES directly, or through its regional offices (Educational Resource Centers) and GE schools.

The Rule for Recognising General Education Obtained in the Occupied Territories of Georgia⁹ is applied specifically for applicants from the Occupied Territories who have acquired full or partial primary, basic or general education at educational institutions in the Occupied Territories that are not in compliance with the Georgian education system and legislation. This process allows applicants to get their learning recognised as part or full GE cycles for further education purposes.

The Law on Higher Education (2004)¹⁰ provides the legal basis for recognition within HE: recognition of higher education acquired within 'licensed' HE institutions¹¹, recognition of HE acquired in the Occupied Territories of Georgia¹² or recognition of HE of persons covered by the Law of Georgia on International Protection¹³ (i.e. refugees and asylum seekers)¹⁴, and HE credit calculation.

MoES Decree No 147 of 2016¹⁵ (the Rule for Verification of Education Documents Issued in Georgia and Recognition of Education Received Abroad¹⁶) creates a legal basis for what is referred to as 'state recognition of higher education received by persons enrolled in licensed HE institutions', or simply 'state recognition of education'. This window of opportunity was specifically created for students or graduates of licensed HE institutions. Despite conveying a positive meaning by being referred to as 'licensing', the term 'licensed HE institution' was created to refer to former Georgian HE institutions that lost the right to provide HE under the reformed HE quality-assurance system¹⁷. However, the institutions continued enrolling students into their programmes for quite some time, thus creating cohorts of people whose diplomas are not recognised in Georgia but whose education can be recognised under established procedures set out by the Rule (MoES Decree No 147n of 2016). The right for recognition of such education is linked to enrolment in formal HE in line with Georgian

⁸ Law of Georgia on General Education of 2010 (in Georgian, 2021 version): <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/29248?publication=90>

⁹ The Rule for Recognising General Education obtained in the Occupied Territories of Georgia (in Georgian and English): <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/82846?publication=0>

¹⁰ Law of Georgia on Higher Education of 2004: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32830?publication=88> (in Georgian, 2021 version); <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/32830?publication=56> (in English, 2017 version).

¹¹ The term 'licensed HE institution' in the Georgian education system applies specifically to former HE institutions that provided HE on the basis of a licence under previous HE legislation, but lost their right to provide HE because they failed to apply for or pass through the new HE quality assurance procedures established under new HE legislation since 2005. Despite formally losing the right to provide HE, the institutions continued their programmes, trapping some students in a system that was recognised neither nationally nor, therefore, internationally.

¹² Recognition of HE acquired in the Occupied Territories of Georgia: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/87712?publication=0>

¹³ Law of Georgia on International Protection of 2016 (In English: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/3452780?publication=4>).

¹⁴ 'Refugee and humanitarian status holders, or of persons under temporary protection'.

¹⁵ Replaces MoES Decree No 98n of 2010.

¹⁶ Rule for Verification of Education Documents Issued in Georgia and Recognition of Education Received Abroad: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3427059?publication=0> (in Georgian).

¹⁷ The former Bologna Process licensing procedure was replaced by quality assurance procedures known as the accreditation programme and institutional authorisation.

legislation, and the NCEQE is responsible for the administering the process together with the HE institution where the applicant is enrolled. The recognition procedure identifies and assesses the transferable learning outcomes, sometimes through examination. Transferable learning outcomes are those that are comparable to the learning outcomes of the education programmes of the HE institution where the applicant is enrolled.

A similar recognition process applies to HE qualifications acquired in the Occupied Territories if an educational institution is illegal under the Georgian education system pursuant to the Rule of Recognition of HE Acquired in the Occupied Territories¹⁸ (MoES Decree No 1067 of 2009).

The Rule for HE Credit Calculation (MoES Decree No 3 of 2007¹⁹) defines the rules for transforming HE learning outcomes into credits. The process is based on ECTS recommendations and introduces ECTS into the Georgian HE system. The validation process is administered by HE institutions for the purpose of recognition within their educational programmes. The recognition process covers learning outcomes acquired within formal HE, and is restricted to being used for the recognition of non-formal education.

Thus, VNFIL in Georgia mainly covers the general and vocational education sectors. The processes, especially in GE, have been operational for quite some time, and the responsible institutions have the capacity to administer the process while satisfying qualitative and quantitative outcomes. Despite the fact that conceptually (in terms of the existence of respective terms and a legal basis comparable to that of EU legislation), VNFIL is best represented in the Georgian vocational education system, operationalisation is at early stage here, and outreach to potential beneficiaries is limited. The system here has the widest potential for application since it covers all potential target groups, which is probably both a benefit and a challenge. It has the potential to benefit everyone, but it is not targeted to any specific groups that can benefit from the system, unlike similar systems in HE and GE, which are tailored to potential users (e.g. students/graduates of licensed HE institutions, persons who acquired GE or HE in the Occupied Territories, etc).

- That said, it should be noted that VNFIL mainly covers learning outcomes that are comparable to those in formal education (National Curriculum for General Education, Vocational Education Standards, and HE programmes of authorised HE institutions). However, skills and learning outcomes that are outside the formal education system cannot be recognised.
- In higher education, the recognition process is still closely linked to formal education inputs – study periods, intermediate and final assessments, and physically being within the borders of the country, or even on the HE institution’s premises²⁰ – thus limiting vast possibilities to get one’s learning outcomes assessed and recognised, even from internationally recognised and respected MOOCs (massive open online courses).
- In vocational education, validation is fee-based, with no government funding. Therefore, fees might be an obstacle for the operationalisation of VNFIL and for reaching out to the target groups that with the biggest recognition needs.

¹⁸ <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/87712?publication=0>

¹⁹ The Rule for HE Credit Calculation of 2007: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/68458?publication=0> (in Georgian).

²⁰ E.g. distance learning and electronic learning are not recognised. An exception is the distance learning that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic;

- It should also be noted that the systems with unregulated labour markets do not make intensive use of official VNFIL procedures, Therefore, the low interest in VNFIL in Georgia in vocational education may also be attributed to unregulated labour markets.

2.2 Validation in education and training

Recognition of non-formal education (RNFE)

The concept for RNFE and the respective procedures were introduced in Georgia through 2010 amendments to the 2007 Law of VET. However, the MoE unofficially started to discourage RNFE practices because of fears of possible malpractice in the absence of strong quality-assurance measures. This delayed the introduction of recognition processes in vocational education for several years. However, under the National Center of Education Quality Enhancement²¹, groups of international and national experts invested considerable resources between 2013 and 2019 into revising RNFE procedures and regulations and capacity-building for potential stakeholders.

RNFE is currently implemented by bodies specially licensed by the NCEQE through a procedure established by GoG resolution No 459 of 20 September 2019, on Obtaining a Right to provide RNFE. The NCEQE quality-assures higher education, vocational education and general education providers through special authorisation boards, training and retraining providers and VNFIL bodies directly through its relevant departments.

Only institutions having the right to provide officially recognised vocational education qualifications²² are eligible to obtain the right for RNFE within the fields of their current education programmes (Article 2.3, GoG Decree No 459). The right for VNFIL has been so far granted to the following four institutions: LTD Community College – Nataly Academy; LTD Tegeta Academy; LTD Business and Technology Academy; and LTD Georgian Business Academy.

The Rule for RNFE (MoES Decree No 188n of 2019) describes the RNFE process. It consists of four major steps: filing an application for RNFE; consultation/documentation; assessment (which might include an examination); and a decision on the right to provide validation services (Article 3.1, MoES Decree No 188n). The validation committee created by a validation provider must consist of representatives of relevant employers, education institutions, teachers of the vocational subject and, in some cases, other persons as deemed necessary by the validation body. The consultation and documentation process is conducted by a certified consultant. The NCEQE trains and certifies RNFE consultants. The list of certified consultants is published on the official NCEQE website (<http://www.eqe.ge/>). There are currently 42 RNFE consultants. Validation is done against the existing education standards and modules. All information about the RNFE process, eligible legislation, validation bodies and resources (such as guidebooks for validation consultants, validation applicants

²¹ A national quality assurance and qualifications agency established under the Ministry of Education and Science in 2010 under the Law of Education Quality Enhancement (replacing the National Accreditation Center) and responsible for qualifications and quality assurance for all education levels in Georgia.

²² There are two ways for obtaining a right to provide formal vocational education programs. Authorization is the procedure for obtaining a right to conduct long-term vocational education activities from Vocational Education Authorization Council (related to NCEQE) and approval is the procedure for obtaining a right to provide formal short-term training (“training and retraining”) programmes from NCEQE directly.

and validation bodies) is available on the NCEQE website at <https://eqe.ge/en/page/static/873/araformaluri-ganatilebis-aghiareba>²³.

The RNFE process is partially automated. All applications and documentation are conducted through the special electronic system developed by EMIS. It also registers the results of RNFE, thus automatically collecting all the statistics on RNFE processes and results.

Furthermore, the Rule for Recognition of Learning Outcomes Acquired within Formal Education²⁴ defines the actual process of how validated learning outcomes are transformed into credits and formal qualifications. The same rule applies for certifying learning outcomes validated through RNFE, only for the purpose of their transfer into formal education.

Tegeta Academy as an RNFE centre

Tegeta Academy²⁵ was founded in 2013 under the holding company Tegeta Motors, a leading brand in the Georgian automotive industry. The objective is 'to promote the professional development of staff, to develop and share new knowledge and international experience in order to improve services.' Tegeta Academy's training course is led by local and foreign trainers and representatives of leading global car brands such as Porsche, Toyota, Bosch, Motul and others. In 2017, Tegeta Academy conducted more than 80 training courses throughout Georgia (Tbilisi, Zugdidi, Kutaisi and Batumi) graduating 200 people (114 of whom went on to be employed by Tegeta Motors). Tegeta Academy was one of the first entities to seek the right to provide RNFE services in 2019 (following the adoption of the new Rule for RNFE). Considering its recent experience with authorisation as a VET provider, the process for getting approval for RNFE services from the NCEQE was not difficult. As expected, Tegeta Academy has a RNFE consultant certified by the NCEQE. According to the Rule for RNFE²⁶, it has a procedure in place for creating a validating commission represented by employers, college representatives and other field experts. The responsibilities of a validation commission are to assess the applications for recognition of a full or partial qualification and the portfolio of evidence created during the consultation period, and if necessary to plan an assessment and make a decision on validation and certification. It is the first RNFE centre to be applied to by a person seeking recognition of their prior learning to get a full qualification for car electrical and electronic systems repair. However, the case is still under consideration, so no case of recognition has occurred so far. The RNFE process is administered through an electronic platform by EMIS, where an interested person can file an application stating their objectives and select the RNFE centre from which they are seeking recognition. Based on the application, Tegeta Academy has referenced the applicant to the RNFE consultant, whose job is to guide the applicant through

²³ Please note that the information in Georgian language is more comprehensive, than in English.

²⁴ Rule for Recognition of Learning Outcomes Acquired within Formal education of 2020 (in Georgian, the version of 2021 <https://eqe.ge/res/images/matsne-5065322-0.pdf>)

²⁵ <http://tegetaacademy.edu.ge/en/istoria>

²⁶ Tegeta Academy RNFE internal Rule (in Georgian)

http://tegetaacademy.edu.ge/Content/docs/არაფორმალური%20განათლების%20ადიარების%20წესის%20შესახებ_db07b8a4.pdf

the processes of identifying and documenting prior learning relevant to the qualification sought. During consultations, the consultant and the applicant create and file a portfolio of evidence to be submitted to the validation commission for assessment. The evidence normally includes job descriptions and contracts from previous employment, certificates from formal or non-formal training undertaken, etc. The assessment process might include an examination or a skills demonstration (if skills cannot be evidenced otherwise). The fee that the applicant pays for RNFE is decided by each RNFE centre. Tegeta Motors has defined the following fees: GEL 50 for reviewing the application (paid upfront), a fixed fee of GEL 200 plus GEL 50 for each learning outcome to be recognised for administering the process from identification and documentation, to assessment and certification / issuing the certificate (paid after the assessment and before the decision is issued). Considering the specifics of the field, Tegeta does not charge extra fees for an examination; however, some other fields such as confectionery or beauty services might bear huge costs for skills demonstrations, and will set recognition fees in this regard. All the fees for recognition are borne either by the applicant or by the centre itself. The government does not provide any funding, even means-tested. The internal quality assurance of the process is the responsibility of the centre itself, while the NCEQE performs external quality assurance through granting the right for RNFE as a starting point, certifying RNFE consultants and monitoring the RNFE processes regularly.

Certification of GE acquired through external studies / externship

The certification of GE acquired through external studies / externship is 'a process for obtaining a state document, certifying general education, by a person who has independently completed the general education programmes' (Law of Georgian on General Education²⁷, Article 2, clause k(j)). The process is administered by the MoES (and its Educational Resource Centers). The applicants for certification can apply for recognition of learning outcomes related to a subject or group of subjects within a grade, a whole grade or a whole GE cycle (e.g. primary, basic or secondary general education). Applicants are entitled to a consultation for the certification process, with the achieved learning outcomes identified in relation to the relevant GE programme (subject programme, grade or cycle programme). The assessment is done through a written examination for each subject within each grade or cycle to be certified. Only applicants of same age as or older than students in the respective grades can apply for certification (exceptions to this rule are granted exclusively by the Minister of Education and Science). In line with the rule, the examination is administered by a GE institution if recognition is within primary or basic education, or a Resource Center if recognition is within secondary general education. The examination instruments are developed by GE institutions and/or Resource Centers, and are approved in advance by the MoES. The examination commissions are staffed with people possessing the respective qualifications and experience (subject teachers, school administration, representatives of Resource Centers). The MoES is authorised to allocate external observers to examination sites if and when needed.

²⁷ <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/29248?publication=68>

The experts consider the process efficient in its outreach to potential beneficiaries. However, they point to challenges with the quality of the process, in the sense that, so far, the examinations assess more declarative than functional knowledge, and improvement is needed in this regard. Besides, it is noted that the process is not widely applied to by vulnerable groups, who are better covered by so-called 'second-chance programmes' which are tailored to this specific group of potential GE students, allowing them to receive general education through accelerated processes and, if needed, to catch up with the gap in GE (to catch up with their age group).

Validation and recognition in higher education

In higher education, the NCEQE is entitled to recognise and validate learning and qualifications obtained beyond the formal higher education system. The process usually involves verifying the learning and qualifications and/or assessing and validating learning outcomes and/or recognising and validating learning outcomes within formal higher education or the qualification.

The verification process consists of submitting relevant documentation attesting to the existence of the learning process and/or the learning outcomes and qualifications; interviewing witnesses; and in some cases testing through examinations. This procedure is mostly applied for the recognition of education and qualifications acquired in the Occupied Territories or for refugees and asylum seekers. The process is administered by the NCEQE itself by analysing the content of programmes, courses, credits and learning outcomes obtained beyond the Georgian education system and comparing it with those in the formal system.

Identification of transferable learning outcomes, assessment, recognition and validation are applied for students/graduates of licensed HE institutions. The process is still administered by the NCEQE, however, with a more active role for HE institutions. In this process, HE institution representatives sit on the recognition commission, analyse the content of the learning outcomes, decide on the examination content, prepare and administer examinations and recognise learning outcomes.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

2.3.1. Labour-market players as RNFE providers

Employer and employee associations are actively involved in RNFE:

- They are represented on the sector committees that develop occupational standards²⁸ and education standards that are basis for the recognition process;
- They are represented on validation commissions that make decisions on recognition and certification of informal/non-formal learning;
- They provide environments for skills demonstrations.

Moreover, since workplace training is encouraged by the government, many providers of short-term training and retraining programmes, as well as RNFE centres, are industry representatives. The NCEQE plans to further increase their participation and create conditions where industry

²⁸ The occupational standard development procedures are currently under revision by the government and may be replaced by a new rule assigning even more responsibilities in the process to employers (a draft rule has been under public and ministerial debate since August 2020).

representatives with no prior links to the formal education sector (having a formal right either as long-term or short-term programme providers – currently the prerequisite for eligibility to obtain RNFE centre status) will be able to receive the right for RNFE.

2.3.2. Skills audits

The employment service provides individual support and counselling for jobseekers. The Employment Support Law (2020) defines the services to be offered to persons who register in the public employment system, including the central Employment Agency and regional public employment services (PES). These services and tasks include different forms of skills audits. PES offices offer individual and group counselling services on career planning and job applications. During the initial job-search phase, the jobseeker and the PES office work together to identify skills and individual needs. This process is called profiling (Article 20) and results in a career plan being drawn up. Profiling includes filing the following data and evidence in the official electronic system www.worknet.ge (where each individual jobseeker is given an account): personal information, information on prior education (qualifications, degrees obtained, specialisations); information on prior non-formal training, additional qualification or additional skills; work experience (duration and field); gaps in employment history; information on self-employment experience; etc. Instructions on how to conduct profiling are provided by the employment agency.

The online service www.worknet.ge has been developed to support career planning. It provides access to information about training and employment opportunities and services provided by PES, including ways of assessing each individual's interests and objectives.

The Employment Agency closely collaborates with the MES and its agencies and education institutions. PES procure training services from authorised training providers. The employment services administer services for IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers, while the NCEQE provides recognition of prior learning when official recognition and certification are requested by employers.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

The Georgian education system is open to the participation of the third sector in many areas. For example, civil society representatives often sit on school and college supervisory boards, and are invited to various governmental advisory or administrative commissions.

The rule for granting the right to provide vocational training and retraining programmes and RNFE services is liberal enough to invite third-party institutions. There are numerous cases where third-party organisations have applied for the right to provide formal training and retraining programmes and, as stated during the interviews, there are also preparing to apply for the right of RNFE.

In 2019, a youth agency was created under the cabinet of ministers. The objectives of the agency²⁹ are to create an infrastructure for youth work in Georgia, develop a system of youth workers, contribute to the training and certification of youth workers, provide non-formal education to youth, and support their employment in other ways.

²⁹ Charter of the Youth Agency <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/4642829> (in Georgian)

2.5 Role of other institutions in VNFIL

Detailed information on all the institutions involved in VNFIL is included in the previous sections and, as indicated, includes public and private education providers at all levels, public and private training and retraining providers, RNFE centres, the NCEQE, the Employment Agency and PES, the MoES and Resource Centers.

3 LINKS TO THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The National Qualifications Framework of Georgia (GeoNQF)³⁰, approved under the Education Enhancement Law (Chapter IV)³¹, is a document referencing all Georgian qualifications, formal education, certification of GE acquired through external studies / externship and RNFE processes, and all recognition of prior learning in HE.

The NQF consists of two documents: the qualifications framework (levels and level descriptions) and the classification of fields of study, which also defines rules for naming qualifications. The NQF is the basis for all authorisation (obtaining the right to provide education at all levels), programme accreditation (mostly functional in higher education), and the granting of the right to provide training and retraining and RNFE processes.

RNFE is conducted to recognise informal/non-formal learning against the vocational qualifications registered in the GeoNQF, education standards and modules referencing to the NQF. Moreover, the electronic system for RNFE has the GeoNQF level framework and fields of study inbuilt into it, automatically directing users to the qualifications registered therein.

The qualifications registry is a live tool allowing new qualifications and related occupational standards, education standards and subject benchmarks to be approved (and referenced to the GeoNQF), and old qualifications (education standards, subject benchmarks) deleted from the register. The NCEQE is the official body responsible for managing the GeoNQF.

It is possible to have either full or partial qualifications approved. At GE level, this allows for the approval of learning related to one educational subject, grade or cycle, while at VET it would be the approval of one learning outcome or a group of learning outcomes – a module, a group of modules or a full qualification –related to the whole education standard. At higher education, prior learning can be recognised for one or more credits or a whole qualification.

Qualifications obtained through recognition have the same value as qualifications gained through formal education³².

³⁰ The GeoNQF (in English original version <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/4480034?publication=0>)

³¹ The Law on Education Enhancement (in Georgian <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/93064?publication=20>)

³² With one technical exclusion: externat studies do not give a person eligibility for a distinction ('medal') in GE, something that experts consider a technical failure and inequality in the system.

4 STANDARDS

Recognition at general education level is based on the National Curriculum (ეროვნული სასწავლო გეგმა), the national standard for general education. This document is developed and approved by the MES with the involvement of field experts and through public discussions. The current National Curriculum can be found at <http://ncp.ge>.

RNFE is based on the vocational education standards and modules (national standards for vocational education in Georgia) that are also the basis for formal education. The NCEQE is responsible for developing vocational education standards through its sector skills councils. The catalogue of approved vocational education standards and modules can be obtained at www.VET.ge.

5 ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN ARRANGING AND COORDINATING VALIDATION ARRANGEMENTS

The MoES is a coordinating body for recognition in the GE system. It approved the externship policy and procedures (MoES Decree 15), and coordinates – and in some cases administers – the process directly or through the education institutions. It also coordinates the quality-assurance processes for recognition in GE by monitoring the processes and collecting the data on recognition results. The table below specifies the roles and responsibilities within the externship process:

TABLE 1: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR COORDINATING AND ADMINISTERING EXTERNAL EXAMS

Organization involved	Responsibilities
Parliament of Georgia	Develop overall validation policy through the Law on GE
MoES	<p>Develop and approve externship policy and regulation</p> <p>Develop and approve the National Curriculum against which validation is conducted</p> <p>Approve assessment instruments for the five compulsory subjects during validation of the full GE certificate</p> <p>Administer the process of validation of full GE certificate directly by organising assessments in the five compulsory subjects in the school concerned</p> <p>Register validation results of the compulsory subject assessments in cycle validations</p>

	<p>Coordinate the process of validating subject and class certification through education institutions</p> <p>Monitor the validation process by directly observing the validation sites</p> <p>Discretionary right to grant eligibility on an individual basis to persons not complying with the Rule for Externship</p>
NCEQE	<p>Authorise education institutions, thus giving right to perform validation within their approved programmes</p>
EMIS	<p>Manage the Eschool platform, the electronic system for managing education processes in GE schools, including the registration of class and cycle completions</p> <p>Collect data on cycle completion, including through externat exams</p>
Educational Resource Centers	<p>Coordinate cycle, class and subject (approve examination schedules, register applicants for cycle validation)</p> <p>Provide overall consultations on the validation system and validation providers to applicants and potential validation providers</p> <p>Monitor the validation process by directly observing the validation sites</p> <p>Coordinates the appeals process</p>
Public and private education institutions (within their competencies)	<p>Coordinate the process of class and subject validation (develop examination schedules with the deadlines established by the MoES, register applicants, register results)</p> <p>Provide consultations to applicants</p> <p>Develop assessment instruments in line with the National Curriculum</p> <p>Administer subject and class assessments thoroughly, administer assessments for selected subjects for education cycle validation</p> <p>Register validation results (other than compulsory subject assessments in cycle validation)</p>

Vake-Saburtalo Educational Resource Center (ERC)

Vake-Saburtalo Education Resource Center is responsible for one of the biggest municipalities in Tbilisi. It coordinates 79 public and private schools in the area.

Coordination of the externat exams is one of the core processes for the ERC. There is a person specially allocated to coordinating all activities in this area.

Validation of GE through external studies is an active process and many individuals benefit from the services. This is used by children of expat or immigrant families, but no less actively by permanent resident children who cannot attend school because of illness, internal migration or other family reasons. There is also a tendency for externat exams to be used by students in the final grades of general education schools, who are trying to prioritise tutoring in the subjects they need for HE entrance exams to attend a normal general education programme, or students of private schools attending international GE programmes not accredited in Georgia, to gain a GE certificate recognised in Georgia that is a prerequisite for enrolment in higher education and for eligibility to state grants for HE.

The ERC coordination process includes registering applicants for cycle recognition, approving externat exam schedules for schools undertaking the validation process, monitoring the validation processes selectively and registering the results of cycle certification. The Center is also the first port of call for seekers of GE validation who come from outside the formal Georgian education system, and for providing initial consultations on the validation opportunities, procedures and deadlines and the validation bodies within their areas.

Vake-Saburtalo ERC is one of the busiest entities, registering at least 300 cycle validation applications each year. Thus, validation processes are a considerable strain on its limited resources.

According to Vake-Saburtalo ERC's representatives, the GE validation process GE is well defined and quality-assured, being based on the National Curriculum and authorised schools, and also thanks to the active role played by the MoES and ERCs.

RNFE is mainly the responsibility of the NCEQE and RNFE centres. The NCEQE coordinates the process, grants entities the right to provide RNFE services, certifies RNFE consultants, develops RNFE resource materials, develops and approves education standards/modules through sector skills councils, manages the GeoNQF, and externally monitors all the RNFE processes. RNFE centres provide fee-based validation services for all applicants for recognition of VET-related learning outcomes. For this purpose, they develop RNFE procedures in line with the Rule for RNFE, hire certified RNFE consultants, create validation commissions, administer validation exams in partnership with industry representatives, register the validation services they offer, and manage validation process and validation results through the special electronic system administered by EMIS. The table below specifies the roles and responsibilities within RNFE:

TABLE 2: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE ADMINISTRATION AND DELIVERY OF RNFE

Organization involved	Responsibilities
GoG	Develop and approve the policy for acquiring the right for RNFE
MoES	Develop and approve the policy for delivering RNFE
NCEQE	<p>Contribute to RNFE policy development</p> <p>Grant legal entities the right to provide RNFE services</p> <p>Externally monitoring RNFE</p> <p>Develop and approve the Rule for Certification of RNFE consultants</p> <p>Plan and administer the certification process for RNFE consultants</p> <p>Develop RNFE resource materials</p> <p>Through authorisation boards, authorises education institutions (a prerequisite for eligibility to apply for the right for RNFE within approved programmes)</p> <p>Through special boards, grant legal entities the right to provide vocational training and retraining programmes (a prerequisite for eligibility to apply for the right for RNFE within approved programmes)</p> <p>Through sector committees, coordinate the education standard development process, develop and approve education standards and modules (RNFE standards)</p> <p>Manage the GeoNQF</p>
EMIS	<p>Manage the eVET platform into which the electronic system for managing RNFE processes is built</p> <p>Collect data on RNFE processes and qualification awards through RNFE</p>
RNFE providers (public and private)	<p>Coordinate the RNFE process (develop RNFE internal procedures, RNFE internal quality-assurance procedures), hire RNFE consultants and conduct consultation processes through them (support applicants in identifying and documenting the skills to be validated)</p> <p>Create validation commissions and conducts assessments of skills portfolios</p> <p>Administer skills assessments (in partnership with industry partners, unless the RNFE centre itself is an industry partner)</p>

6 INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

6.1 Information

Information on externat exams is normally available through the MoES departments, ERCs and GE providers. The MoES website and the government online legal publication *Herald* have all education-related legal documents publicly available on their official websites, while information on the externat exam timeframe each year is published as a news article on the ministry website. However, there is no special page on the MoES website or its social media platforms, which should have all information for potential externat beneficiaries arranged in a user-friendly manner.

Unlike validation in GE, information on VNFIL opportunities in vocational education is readily accessible on the NCEQE website (<https://ege.ge/ka/page/static/873/araformaluri-ganatilebis-aghiaireba>), which has a page dedicated to RNFE, including RNFE providers, RNFE-related regulations, RNFE consultants and resource materials.

The site would benefit from more user-friendly content for potential users of RNFE processes, with an in-built search engine directing to potential RNFE centres to ease beneficiaries' access to providers. Despite the fact that the newly rebuilt www.VET.ge website is dedicated to providing user-friendly information and search engines on all formal and non-formal vocational learning opportunities, it does not give potential beneficiaries simple information on RNFE opportunities.

Officially, communication with potential RNFE beneficiaries is the responsibility of RNFE centres, whose readiness and instruments for such communications are assessed at the initial stage of the granting of the right by the NCEQE. The fact that not a single RNFE procedure has been conducted (completed) so far might indicate to the inefficiency of the instruments and the lack of such communications, though it might also speak to the gap in the feedback loop for the NCEQE as an external quality-assurance body for RNFE on the effectiveness and impact of the RNFE system in Georgia.

The MoES and the NCEQE have tried to popularise RNFE through TV and social media appearances; however, there does not seem to be a well-informed or structured outreach strategy in place so far. Respondents pointed out to the inexistence of studies on potential beneficiaries of RNFE and their needs in Georgia, or the potential barriers they might face in attempting to benefit from the services.

Information on profiling procedures and programmes is available through the official website of the Employment Agency and the government online legal publication *Herald*. Information on the scope of the profiling activities administered is available through agencies' annual reports. Information on profiling and other employment support services is available through the official website, the Ministry of IDPs, Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MIDPLHSA), the Employment Agency and PEC offices.

PES employ technologies to communicate with potential beneficiaries by creating individual accounts for jobseekers and sending text notifications. It seems that interagency communication and cooperation between the NCEQE and employment services could be improved. This could include

sharing information on each other's services with their beneficiaries and coordination activities within validation of prior learning.

6.2 Advice

The General Education Development Department within the MoES, ERC offices, and private and public schools provide advice on GE certification obtained through external studies/externship. The advice is free of charge to potential applicants and may cover externat process stages and timelines, externat exam providers, potential content of externat exam instruments, the appeals procedure, etc. Schools support applicants in registering for externat exams.

The Vocational Education Quality Assurance Department of the NCEQE, VET colleges, ERCs and RNFE centres provide advice on RNFE. The RNFE electronic management system within eVET has some capacity to provide advice to potential RNFE beneficiaries, although the site could be further developed to have more user-friendly and proactive advice built in. The NCEQE official website, www.vet.ge, which is run by the MoES for outreach to VET stakeholders, contains information and advice on RNFE opportunities and available infrastructure. Additionally, the NCEQE has developed a guide to RNFE³³, which can be used by RNFE applicants to guide them through the RNFE procedures and providers.

RNFE providers are officially required to provide consultative and guidance services. The Rule for RNFE specially identifies RNFE consultants as key RNFE staff and checks the availability of certified RNFE consultants in entities seeking the right to deliver RNFE services. A certification rule for RNFE consultants defines consultants' responsibilities towards advising potential RNFE applicants (Article 5, Rule for Certification of RNFE consultants). Officially, the right to consult an RNFE consultant is available to applicants only after filing the application and paying the application fee.

6.3 Guidance

Guidance and applicant support services are the weak point of the externat system. There is no official procedure, budget, institution or specialist available for guiding students through the validation procedure.

Contrary to GE, in vocational education, guidance in identifying and documenting skills acquired in the informal/non-formal system is a key part of the validation process, and the system has infrastructure in place. RNFE providers must have certified consultants whose job descriptions include guidance in line with the established template and procedures. The RNFE guide further supports guidance practitioners in performing their tasks successfully. The certification process has a strong focus on the guidance skills of RNFE practitioners. Consultants' activities are closely monitored by the NCEQE, which is responsible for assessing the activities, analysing the consultation process and developing annual reports on consultants' activities.

The guidance process is well defined and structured within the RNFE system in Georgia. The Rule for RNFE has two attachments: an application form and a consultant's form. An individual seeking RNFE starts by filing an application through a special electronic system on the eVET platform, where they are requested to choose between options for their objectives for RNFE. The options cover the following: personal development; further education: for obtaining qualification or for employment; and

³³ <https://eqe.ge/res/docs/განათლებისალიარებისგზამკვლევითაპრობები.pdf>

career development: self-employment. The consultant's form registers all the consultation meetings: date of the meeting, objectives of the meeting, skills identified, evidence provided, and further action. At the end, the consultant must fill in the section stating the objective of RNFE (validating a full or partial qualification) and a form for referencing the skills identified to the learning outcomes and performance criteria in vocational education standards, and the titles and reference numbers of relevant evidence. The completed form must be co-signed by the applicant and the consultant. The form is managed electronically through the RNFE system built into eVET, and allows the NCEQE to monitor and assess the activities of all certified consultants.

7 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

7.1 Profile of a validation practitioner

The profile of a practitioner involved in VNFIL in Georgia will be described separately for general education and vocational education.

The certification of GE acquired through external studies involves coordinators from the MoES and its ERCs; guidance specialists, validation specialists and assessors from GE schools; and monitors and observers from MoES and schools.

RNFE is conducted by coordinators, guidance consultants, validation specialists, assessors, and external and internal quality-assurance specialists.

7.2 Qualification requirements

Normally, there are no specialist staff allocated to the certification of GE acquired through external studies; rather, they are assigned to regular roles at the MoES, ERCs and schools that perform similar functions in formal education.

TABLE 3: KEY TASKS OF PRACTITIONERS INVOLVED IN THE CERTIFICATION OF GE ACQUIRED THROUGH EXTERNAL STUDIES

Practitioner	Key tasks	Qualification requirements
Registrar	Register candidates	No specification – an assigned person at the ERC or school
Exam commission member	Evaluate applicants' tests	School staff: a representative of school administration, a subject teacher or a subject faculty representative
Counsellor	Provide subject-specific guidance to applicants regarding the exam programme Enable access to the library, textbooks and other school resources	School staff; no specifications
Exam test instrument developers	Develop exam instruments based on the National Curriculum	School staff; no specifications

Observer	Observe the testing process Develop protocols on breaches of testing procedures	A person specifically assigned by the MoES or its structures to observe the testing process
Overseer of the testing process	Oversees the testing process Develops protocols on breaches of testing procedures	A person who is employed by the MoES or its structures and is specifically assigned by the ERC person
Member of appeals council	Discuss appeals applications	No specification; an ERC staff member

Similar to externships above, staff performing similar functions in formal vocational education and training normally perform the tasks, except for guidance experts and RNFE consultants, who are specifically trained and certified. The recruitment and certification of RNFE consultants is regulated by NCEQE Decree 837 of September 2019. The Decree defines the qualification requirements, rules for recruitment and certification, the tasks and responsibilities of RNFE consultants and the monitoring of their work. The consultants conduct their work in line with the RNFE Rule via RNFE electronic system, which allows the NCEQE to monitor and assess the effectiveness of counselling processes and results. The NCEQE is responsible for developing annual assessment reports of the work of RNFE consultants.

TABLE 4: KEY TASKS OF PRACTITIONERS INVOLVED IN RNFE

Practitioner	Key tasks	Qualification requirements
College administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administer the process of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o applying and acquiring the right for RNFE services; and o providing RNFE services, including outreach to potential candidates 	No specifications
RNFE consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide support to the registration of candidates - Provide counselling on RNFE procedures, stages, timelines and possible results - Provide counselling meetings to each candidate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o assist the candidate in identifying the skills acquired in a non-formal/informal setting; o assist the candidate in identifying documents that serve as evidence of their skills; o take minutes of the counselling meetings; and o develop an applicant portfolio to be submitted to the validation commission - May participate in the validation process, but cannot vote 	A specially certified person Qualification requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HE or VET diploma; - knowledge of MS Office programs; - team-oriented and has effective communication skills; - data-collection, analytical and debating skills.

Validation commission member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess applicant portfolios and validate (or not) skills acquired in informal or non-formal settings 	Subject teachers, field practitioners, college administration representatives
External quality-assurance specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider applications from potential RNFE providers and grant rights - Develop monitoring procedures and monitor RNFE providers' compliance with established standards - Monitor and assess the work of RNFE consultants 	VET Quality Assurance Department staff
Internal quality-assurance specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute to the development of internal quality-assurance systems; - Monitor the quality of RNFE processes 	No specifications

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The training programme offered by the NCEQE to potential RNFE consultants focuses on NQF and VET qualifications, education standards and modules, RNFE processes and the tasks of RNFE consultants. The certification examination is conducted by a special commission created by the VET Quality Assurance Department and involves case-study simulations, where candidates are expected to participate in role-playing and answer specific questions posed by evaluators.

No specific training or certification is required of other practitioners involved in the RNFE procedures.

8 QUALITY ASSURANCE

The validation of non-formal learning in both GE and in VET have relevant developed quality-assurance systems in place. The right of schools to certify GE acquired through external studies is connected with having authorisation to provide GE programmes (or to accredit the programmes).

MoES staff approve the tests developed for subjects that are compulsory for secondary general education cycle certification. The test instruments should be in line with the requirement of the National Curriculum, which provides guidance on assessment approaches and required learning outcomes at each subject, grade and cycle.

The rule for certification of GE acquired through external studies is very specific with regard to the monitoring of the testing and identification process and penalties for breaches of conduct by applicants during the exam. Examinees may appeal against both the results of the exams and the process of identifying and penalising alleged breaches of conduct. The MoES and ERCs have the right to observe the exam sites directly.

Even more refined are the QA procedures for RNFE. RNFE is implemented by bodies specially licensed by the NCEQE through a procedure established by GoG Resolution No 459 of 20 September 2019 on Obtaining a Right to provide RNFE. In line with the rule, only institutions having a right to

provide officially recognised vocational education qualifications³⁴ are eligible to obtain the right for RNFE within the fields of their current education programmes (Article 2.3, GoG Decree No 459). Applicants seeking to obtaining this right must meet the following requirements:

- have developed and published an internal regulation – a Rule for Recognising Non-Formal Education;
- have a system in place for informing potential RNFE applicants of their service fees for RNFE;
- provide consultations to applicants through a certified RNFE consultant.

Potential providers obtain the right to provide RNFE services by filing an application to the VET Quality Assurance Department, which checks whether the applicants meet the requirements set out under the Rule. After checking the compliance of the applicant institution with the aforementioned three requirements, the NCEQE's VET Quality Assurance Department may grant the right for RNFE. The NCEQE has the right to monitor RNFE procedures and revoke the right if necessary. Beneficiaries and field experts consider the QA measures too complex, pointing to the fact that there is no argument for separating the process from regular authorisation processes (in any case, only authorised providers are eligible for obtaining the right for RNFE). Moreover, the granting of the right by the NCEQE's VET Department may be considered less transparent and objective. The procedure does not involve a collegial body, uses experienced quality assessors only on a limited scale, and guarantees neither independence from government nor equal participation of the parties in the process.

A key to the quality assurance of RNFE processes is the certification of RNFE consultants, whose tasks include guiding candidates in RNFE procedures and supporting them in identifying and documenting their skills in line with their objectives. The NCEQE specifically monitors consultants' activities through the electronic system through which the consultants work, and it is expected to produce an annual report on their effectiveness and to revoke certification where justified by the monitoring results.

The NCEQE provides training to consultants and has developed guidebooks for RNFE consultants and applicants, which the respondents assessed as very helpful.

The documentation follows the recommendations in the guidebook, and assessment is done in line with the qualification standards (learning outcomes and assessment criteria) in the education standards. If skills need to be assessed through direct observation, the RNFE providers arrange skills demonstrations on industry facilities involving experienced assessors from academia or industry.

The validation commission is staffed with field experts from either academia or industry. No special training or certification is laid down in the current regulations.

³⁴ There are two ways to obtain the right to provide formal vocational education programmes. Authorisation is the procedure for obtaining the right to conduct long-term vocational education activities and is granted by the Authorization Council of Vocational Educational Institutions (related to the NCEQE), while approval is the procedure for obtaining the right to provide formal short-term training ('training and retraining') programmes, and is granted by the NCEQE directly.

9 INPUTS, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

9.1 Funding

There is no funding envisaged for validation of non-formal learning. The process is covered through the regular resources of the MoES, ERCs and schools for GE and is free for applicants. However, it is fee-based in vocational education. Each RNFE provider sets the fees for validation in line with their own cost calculations.

9.2 Distribution of costs

Validation is free to applicants in GE and is covered by the providers (MoES, ERCs and schools) themselves. The costs for validation are almost completely borne by applicants in vocational education.

The fees are calculated based on actual costs related to the validation process and, while they normally include a lump sum for application processing and counselling services, the full cost normally relates to the volume of the work to be undertaken by the validation commission and assessors (number of learning outcomes to be validated).

The absence of a government subsidy for RNFE may be considered one of the barriers to potential applicants, especially from vulnerable groups.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Considering the trends in validation in GE, it seems to be very useful for potential applicants. So far, not much evidence has been gained for validation in vocational education, as there has not been a single case of validation so far. While the MoES and the NCEQE have basic systems in place to collect validation data, they do not have a strategy for monitoring the effectiveness of the system in place and have not conducted any such assessments so far. The existing statistics contain gaps in categories, so this does not allow for good analysis in terms of effectiveness and beneficiary groups.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

The certification of GE acquired through external studies / externship seems quite in demand and availed of in Georgia. Table 1 below shows the number of certification cases in each grade and cycle. Almost 50 000 children and youth have benefited from the process in the last 6 years.

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF GE CERTIFICATIONS BY GRADE, 2015-2021

Year	Grade	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Full GE	Total
2016		18	26	23	2 3	72	74	788	1 61 1	3 078	2 36 7	3 00 9	1 38 2	12 471
2017		14	27	30	3 9	45	66	619	969	2 313	1 49 2	2 27 7	859	8 750
2018		21	48	43	5 8	72	107	641	1 11 6	2 178	1 37 7	2 23 8	1 40 7	9 306

2019	49	58	88	67	101	105	648	1 283	2 935	1 813	2 484	3 072	12 703
2020	32	63	70	62	76	88	104	191	282	296	583	333	2 180
2021	22	147	52	49	43	51	78	95	172	176	306	384	1 575

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF GE GRADE/CYCLE CERTIFICATIONS BY AGE AND GENDER, 2015-2021

Year Age	Girls					Boys					Total
	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	>=19	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	>=19	
2016	16	65	1 597	2 557	213	21	82	2 896	4 627	397	12 471
2017	12	62	1 097	1 807	147	24	83	2 030	3 189	299	8 750
2018	25	118	1 076	1 804	181	40	129	2 183	3 438	315	9 309
2019	50	143	1 388	2 542	394	60	174	2 682	4 630	641	12 704
2020	41	103	162	339	145	51	118	251	696	275	2 181
2021	80	61	122	257	102	89	76	164	455	169	1 575

9.4.2 Validation users

The validation users for externship exams come from a variety of groups:

- families of former emigrant Georgian families who have returned and are continuing their studies in Georgia;
- individuals who could not attend a subject, grade or cycle of formal education for personal reasons (mostly illness or migration); and
- graduates of GE programmes with no formal recognition in Georgia, who want to continue HE in Georgia (a GE certificate is a prerequisite for HE entrance exams).

9.4.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

The process is rarely used by the most vulnerable groups, for whom the MoES runs so-called 'second chance' fast-track general education programmes that seem to meet their needs better than the externship exam.

Vulnerable groups are not targeted by RNFE processes either, considering the absence of a subsidy for RNFE fees.

10 VALIDATION METHODS

In general education, the assessment of learning outcomes through testing is the only method used for validation.

In RNFE, validation methods are based on best international experiences and involve self-assessments, third-party assessments and observations. Normally, multiple methods are used to obtain reliable results, and they are tailored to fit different contexts, target groups and purposes.

The RNFE processes are automated, so applicants can file their requests and provide documentation, while RNFE consultants also conduct their work through a special electronic system integrated into eVET (the official VET governance system run by EMIS under the MoES).

11 THE POSITION OF VALIDATION IN SOCIETY; VISIBILITY AND TRUST

Certification of GE acquired through external studies/externship is a well-established system and is effectively used by potential beneficiaries. However, both the MoES and other practitioners indicate to some shortcomings in the system, which are currently being addressed:

- The assessment methods used during the certification need improvement to better check the learning outcomes described in the National Curriculum. The tests mostly check knowledge of facts and basic principles, and fail to check higher-order skills.
- Considering the number of validations, externship exams seem to be increasingly used by GE students to find an alternative way to certification, as opposed to attending general education schools. This is not the primary goal of the procedure, and the sheer number of applicants is putting great strain on the system's resources.
- There is no clear webpage providing potential beneficiaries with all the information on externship exams and the opportunities they offer.

The visibility of RNFE in society is very low, despite some PR activities from the MoES and the NCEQE. Considering the extensive quality-assurance procedures in place, there are unlikely to be any challenges with trust.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

- The MoES should consider creating a webpage dedicated to the certification of general education acquired through external studies / externship, explaining in user-friendly language the associated procedures, potential providers, deadlines, opportunities for individual counselling and results.
- The MoES should consider creating guides for externship exams for applicants and making it accessible via a specially dedicated webpage or through ERCs and schools.
- Although the guidance of applicants is the responsibility of schools, practitioners indicate that the services that schools provide in this regard are basic and are unlikely to cover the needs of the most vulnerable groups. The MoES should invest more in resources, developing guidelines and providing finances for guidance services to be delivered to potential applicants, including tutoring activities for those who need it.

- The assessment instruments need to be developed in such a way as to really measure applicants' achievements of the skills targeted by the National Curriculum for general education.
- The MoES, EMIS and all practitioners should consider improving data collection for the externship exams (applicants by category, externship exam results).
- The MoES should regularly analyse data, study the system's effectiveness and have a development mechanism in place.
- The NCEQE should consider making quality-assurance mechanisms for RNFE more efficient and transparent, relying more on authorisation boards than on unilateral decisions by the NCEQE's VET Quality Assurance Department.
- There should be more possibilities for skills recognition using national or international occupational standards, instead of education standards and modules.
- The quality of validation procedures should be further improved by training validation practitioners.
- Consider subsidising RNFE, at least for vulnerable groups.
- Consider cooperating with employment services and exchanging mutual services to jobseekers.
- Study the potential beneficiaries of RNFE in Georgia and their needs, and tailor services to meet them.
- Provide better outreach services to potential beneficiaries.
- Finalise the development and testing of the special electronic platform to ensure that the RNFE processes work smoothly, including removing extra barriers such as deadlines for some RNFE processes, or provide for exceptions that might fit potential users.
- Explore ways of validating HE learning outcome and develop the system accordingly.

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ABBREVIATIONS

GoG –Government of Georgia

GE – general education

HE – higher education

MoES – Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

RNFE – recognition of non-formal education

VE – vocational education

VNFIL – validation of non-formal and informal learning