



VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

CURRENT SITUATION AND PERSPECTIVES

WORKING DOCUMENT

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The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Training Foundation or the European Union.

Preface

This report was prepared in the framework of a review of the education sector in Kyrgyzstan in April 2009 by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), whose final report includes a chapter on vocational education and training (VET) based on this report, but with a more compressed structure adapted to the length and approach of the remaining chapters of the OECD review.

Ian Whitman suggested that the European Training Foundation (ETF) publish this comprehensive report on VET in its entirety, as, in his opinion, it is of value both to Kyrgyzstan and to international readers interested in VET developments in Kyrgyzstan.

The ETF is grateful to Ian Whitman for the valuable support provided during its mission in Kyrgyzstan and also to Johanna Crighton and John Coolahan for their review of the VET chapter in the OECD review of education in Kyrgyzstan. Acknowledgements are also extended to Mary Canning, Mihaylo Milovanovitch, Myako Ikeda and Aisuluu Bedelbaeva. The ETF also thanks all those entities that kindly shared information and views during and after the mission, in particular the National Statistical Committee, the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, the State Migration and Employment Committee and the Centre for Education Assessment and Teaching Methods. A special word of recognition is addressed to the Forum for Educational Initiatives for its crucial support in terms of collecting a substantial proportion of the policy and legal documents used in the analysis.

The author of this report is Eduarda Castel-Branco, who was Country Manager for ETF activities in Kyrgyzstan in 2009.

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List of acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EQF	European qualifications framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
GTZ	Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit/German Technical Cooperation
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KGS	Kyrgyzstan som (1 KGS = 0.02 EUR (approximate values, January 2010))
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NQF	National qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollar (1 USD = 0.72 EUR (approximate values, January 2010))
VET	Vocational education and training level
VET I	Vocational education and training level I (initial)
VET II	Vocational education and training level II (secondary)

1. Executive summary

The issue of quality in education has gained new importance and visibility in national political debate in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2009. The performance of the education sector, cited as a national reform priority by the president of the country (re-elected in mid-2009), represents a multifaceted challenge.

The results of the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) depicted very poor country performance in science, reading literacy and mathematics, revealing a substantial and widespread problem of poor quality basic education. This fact is confirmed by poor performance in the subsequent education levels, high secondary vocational and higher education dropout rates and a widely recognised problem of inadequate human resources, despite a growing number of students and higher education graduates.

A government endeavour to reform education is underway under the National Education Project, which aims to improve the quality of education by tackling the basics: purpose and functions, financing, teaching and management capacity, curricula, methods and excellence in education. The very succinct documents available show poor interactions with the reinforced Ministry of Labour and Social Protection that administers initial VET, managed by the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and employment and migration policies and programmes, managed by the State Migration and Employment Committee until the recent restructuring of October 2009.

International analysts underline the relatively high public spending on education in Kyrgyzstan, with a gross domestic product (GDP) spend in the range of 5%-6% in recent years. Steady growth in this spend has not been sufficient to compensate for the years of low expenditure, especially because the poor efficiency of spending is partly responsible for the low quality of education. Salaries act as a disincentive to younger and better trained specialists to embrace teaching as a career. Ratios for average education wages to average wages overall is approximately 0.5 for secondary education, 1.1 for higher education and 0.7 for adult training, with data for the period 2004-06 showing a downward trend.

Despite government incentives aimed at attracting young people to the teaching profession (free university education in pedagogical disciplines and salary enhancement schemes), the stock of teachers in general education is dominated by older professionals. Their wealth of experience is often not enough to compensate for a poor capacity to adopt the new teaching methods so essential to education nowadays. There is evidence that most of the students graduating from university pedagogical courses do not take jobs in teaching.

The decentralisation process in the country has led to a disconnection from other areas of education management (and performance) in general education funding, which flows from the Ministry of Finance directly to local self-governance bodies. The Ministry of Education and Science administers a mere fifth or less of total public spending on education.

Kyrgyzstan—with fewer natural resources and a much lower GDP per capita than neighbouring Kazakhstan—has managed to improve overall educational attainment in the population in the transition years, despite the widely acknowledged hardship for households and the state as a whole. The share of the population aged over 15 years age with tertiary education grew from 9.4% in 1999 to 13.2% in 2006 (both complete and incomplete higher education). The share of the population with secondary VET decreased over time, until an upturn in 2006 to 11.6%. It is important to highlight the substantial contraction in the population with lower educational attainment (basic and primary education), by approximately 7.6% between 1989 and 2006. In 2006 around one fifth of the population aged over 15 years had basic or primary education; however, the challenge for policy makers lies in the 5%-6% of the population with no education or incomplete primary education.

In the transition years in Kyrgyzstan two opposing trends developed in parallel: substantial growth in participation in higher education and growth in the numbers of young people dropping out of school, after

and even before completion of compulsory education. Enrolment numbers for higher education and initial VET are significantly disproportionate, at over 250,000 against fewer than 30,000, respectively, in 2008.

The employment rate was close to 60% between 2005 and 2008, but the breakdown by gender showed substantial difference, at 70.9% for men compared to 49.7% for women in 2008. The unemployment rate floated between 8.1% in 2005 and 8.2% in 2008, remaining stable despite the economic crisis.

In 2007 employment in agriculture fell to 34%, while the share for construction grew to over 9.5%. Net employment growth was recorded in the following sectors in 2007: manufacturing, gas, energy and water production and distribution, construction, trade and repair, hotels and restaurants, transport and communications, education and public administration.

Another significant feature of employment relates to the very large informal market. According to the National Statistical Committee, informal employment as a share of total employment is around 70% (69.1% in 2005 and 70.4% in 2007). Informal employment was much greater in rural compared to urban areas, in a proportion of 2.8 to 1. Another fact worth mentioning is the continuing growth in employment in the informal sector. Finally, the majority (96%) of those employed in the informal labour market declared having this activity as their sole employment,¹ a fact of interest from the perspective of employment and VET policies.

Analysis of the educational attainment of the employed population reveals that informal employment is dominated by people with secondary education and, in general, with lower levels of educational attainment compared to the picture for total employment. Around 65%—a consistent trend in the period 2005-07—of those in informal employment have general education (secondary and basic), compared to 48% of all employed people. Informal employment compared to overall employment is featured by a much lower share of people with higher education, at 7.9%-8.8% and 17%-17.7%, respectively, for the period 2005-07.

In 2007, 13.7% of the total employed population had secondary VET, 9.9% had initial VET and 48% had secondary education. Nearly half (42%) of the employed population with higher education were absorbed by the education and public administration sectors, followed by the trade and repair sector (14.7%) and manufacturing (8%).

The State Migration and Employment Committee is the only public institution that offers career guidance services to youth, mostly to students from upper secondary education and mostly through the Information and Counselling Centre located in the capital, Bishkek. There is no vocational guidance to support adults (unemployed people and job seekers), not even those engaged in training for the unemployed funded by the State Migration and Employment Committee. This is an important shortcoming that the State Migration and Employment Committee is trying to overcome, with support from the ETF, in a project started in 2009.

Education and active labour market policies are concerned with the challenges of lifelong learning. Although dialogue and actual interactions are not always as productive as they should be, a sound basis for cooperation has been established and formalised between State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and the State Migration and Employment Committee, as the leading VET and employment agencies. The Ministry of Education and Science is less involved in this cooperation—also the secondary VET institutions that could, theoretically, deliver relevant training to population groups targeted by the National Employment Policy.

In the last quarter of 2009, the reformed Kyrgyzstan government responded to one of the key questions raised by this report: what is the future position of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education (and of initial VET) in the institutional setting? Indeed, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection has emerged with a reinforced mandate, as both the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and the State Migration and Employment Committee were merged within this ministry. The hope is that the lessons learnt in the last three years will avoid a return by the government to poor VET and employment leadership.

¹ National Statistical Committee, Employment and Unemployment. Results of the Integrated Household Survey 2007, pp 68-70.

One of the possible reforms announced by the new Ministry of Labour and Social Protection—although not, as yet, described in detail—concerns one of the key questions discussed in this report: the quality of integration of general and professional education for lifelong learning for young people in the initial VET programmes. While our recommendations underline the need for VET programmes that build on broad professional competencies and key skills that enable further personal and professional lifelong development, the information available in mid-November 2009 points to the future exclusion of general education from curricula in initial VET schools. As this executive summary was being drafted, additional and comprehensive information on possible accompanying measures (such as reform of VET curricula based on competencies, and recognition of prior learning) was unavailable. Hence, some questions remain open for the present. What bridges between education pathways are being considered for post-compulsory education of young people enrolled in VET schools that will ensure continuous education progression? Will VET schools now cater only for the training of adults in various age groups? Will these schools focus on short-term courses (up to 1 year) providing training only in technical skills? The ETF believes that a proper analysis of all the possible scenarios for implementation of the announced VET reforms will be essential to avoid decisions leading to dead-ends and to a worsening in the quality of VET outcomes.

Discussions with leading public institutions on barriers to innovation and legal constraints on flexibility in VET have generally revealed a clear openness of policy makers to school initiatives and innovative solutions. According to the official vision, the law permits school initiatives that better respond to the needs of regions and local enterprises, engagement in new types of training activities and participation in partnerships. Hence, policy and decision makers at the macro-level believe that all key premises for micro-level (school) initiatives are possible and admissible by law. The other half of the premise for school initiatives and innovations is not necessarily available however, namely capacity. This wide gap between what is possible by law and the effective capacity (human, financial, institutional) of the players at the micro-level represents a permanent source of tension. It also shows the narrow understanding of the role of policy making, reduced to the enactment of legal texts and regulations, and largely ignoring the role of the public service in strengthening capacity, minimising waste and supporting an efficient use of system knowledge.

In a context of scarce public funding and the many significant issues at stake in terms of developing human capital in Kyrgyzstan in a sustainable and relevant manner, one of the key recommendations of this report concerns reinforced management of good practices by identifying and analysing good practices at the micro- and regional levels, thereby building up a coherent well-planned resource network, based on good schools and centres throughout the country, for the exchange of knowledge and experiences and thereby making validated approaches available to all. This would open up VET schools and colleges to networking with each other and with universities and enterprises, independently of the frontiers of the responsible ministries. Kyrgyzstan has benefited from substantial financial, technical and intellectual support from various international partners; the VET sector, moreover, has captured a visible share of these exchanges. These are true goldmines of relevant good practices in VET that are either forgotten after conclusion of the international assistance programme or are not widely disseminated to other schools or to the central level. Methodology and teacher development institutions need to explore this knowledge with a view to system development. Good practices built in harmonious synchrony in the national and local contexts deserve recognition in the system. But this has not happened for reasons linked with the functioning (frequent changes of leadership, routine approaches) of the institutions that grant official authorisations.

From another viewpoint, methodology specialised institutions could benefit from more and better exposure to international experiences and capacity-building actions in the framework of the many international cooperation efforts underway in the country. But the usual participants in these knowledge-building platforms are top-level decision makers in the sector's leading institutions or the school directors concerned. This points to defective targeting of some donor initiatives, related to poor stakeholders analysis and a poor understanding by national institutions regarding the place of various projects in national policies.

Networking and partnerships have been supported as basic project approaches by international partners; there are likewise cases of good VET partnership practices between VET schools, rural communities, governance bodies and large enterprises. While recognising that partnership education and economic

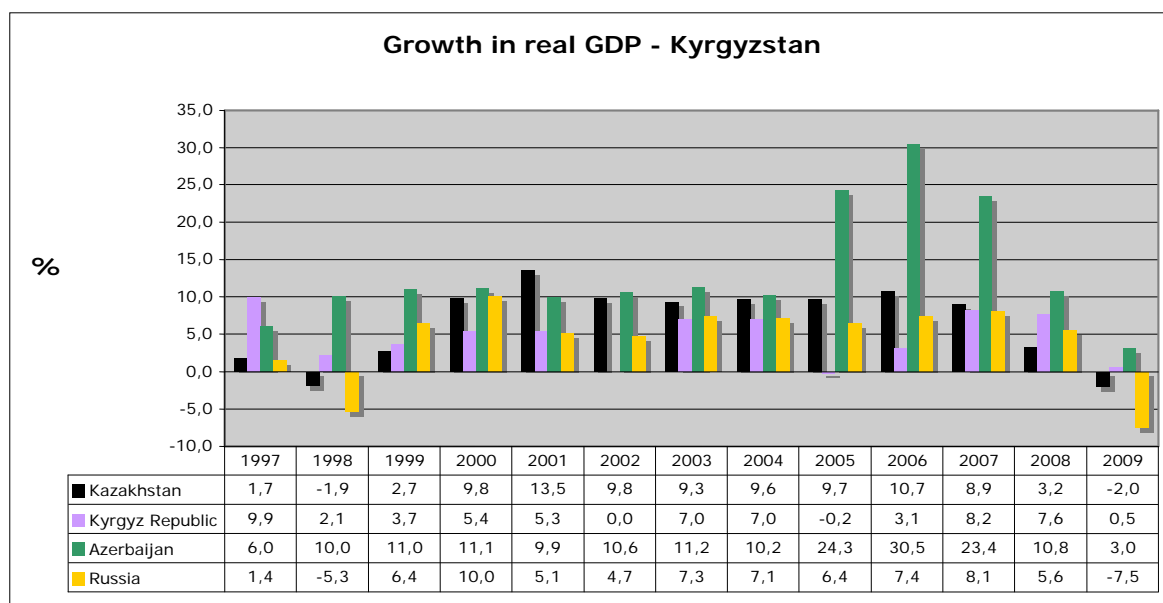
partners are important factors in effective VET modernisation and human capital development strategies, there is much room for improving the legal and policy framework to support social partnership, motivate enterprises to cooperate more systematically with providers and policy institutions and make VET providers more organically aware of their responsibility for training outcomes.

The European Union (EU) is preparing a new sector programme to support reforms in the education sector. We hope that this report can shed some light on key issues that affect the VET sector and that could be addressed in the new programme.

2. Macro-economic overview

The performance of the Kyrgyzstan economy has been mixed in the last decade, alternating between years of real GDP growth above 7% and years of decline and negative growth (Figure 1). This is partly connected with political instability and an unfavourable context for a country with relatively few natural resources.

Figure 1. Growth in real GDP



Source: www.ebrd.com/country/sector/econo/stats/index.htm. Table: GDP. 2008 figures are estimates, 2009 figures are projections. Graph: author.

Interestingly, Kyrgyzstan is one of the few economies in the region with a projected positive GDP growth rate for 2009—unlike, for instance, neighbouring Kazakhstan and Russia. According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Transition Report 2009, the GDP growth rate is projected to be 1.5% in 2009.

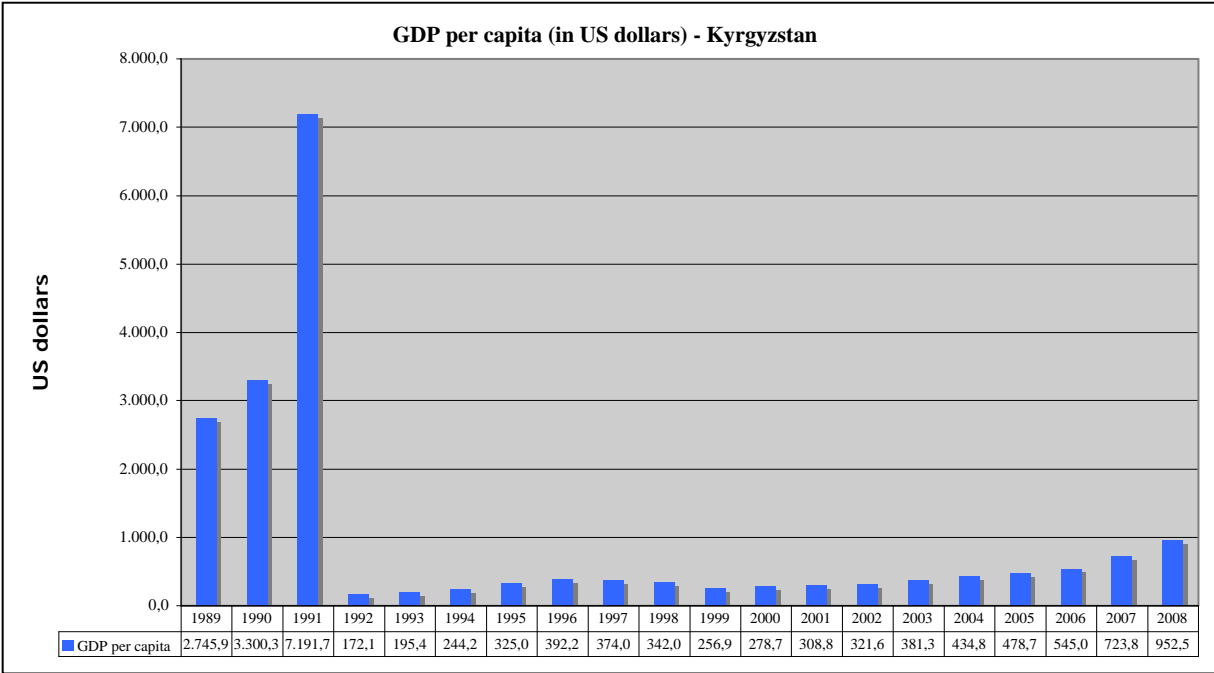
The inflation rate declined from 20.1% in December 2008 to 4.9% in June 2009. The current account deficit increased in 2008 to 8.2% of GDP, primarily due to worsening terms of trade caused by increases in fuel and food prices. The deficit is likely to remain high in 2009 as export volumes and remittances decline.

In December 2008, the government agreed a new 100 million USD financial support programme over 18 months with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The fiscal deficit narrowed to 0.1% of GDP in 2008 as the government cut back on non-priority expenditure. The fiscal position has been strengthened by Russian financing in April 2009, amounting to approximately 9% of GDP. Russia also cancelled 194 million USD of existing debt.

Remittances declined by 29% year on year in the first quarter of 2009, affecting, in turn, household consumption.

Annual GDP per capita remains low, at under 1,000 USD in 2008, despite the fact that it more than doubled since 2004 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. GDP per capita



Source: www.ebrd.com/country/sector/econo/stats/index.htm. Table: Selected economic indicators. Graph: author.

According to the EBRD report cited above, the share of the population living in poverty in 2004 reached 51.9%; according to the nationally defined poverty line, this indicator was 44% in 2005.

Government expenditure on education and health in 2008 was 5.2% and 2.4%, respectively.

3. Education and training data and main trends

This chapter, mainly based on an analysis of statistical data, provides an overview of the main issues affecting the Kyrgyzstan education and training system and, consequently, human capital development in the country. We focused on analysing dynamics and interdependencies related to providers, students, financing, choices of study areas and teachers. The statistical data analysis is the sole responsibility of the author of the report, as are the main conclusions.

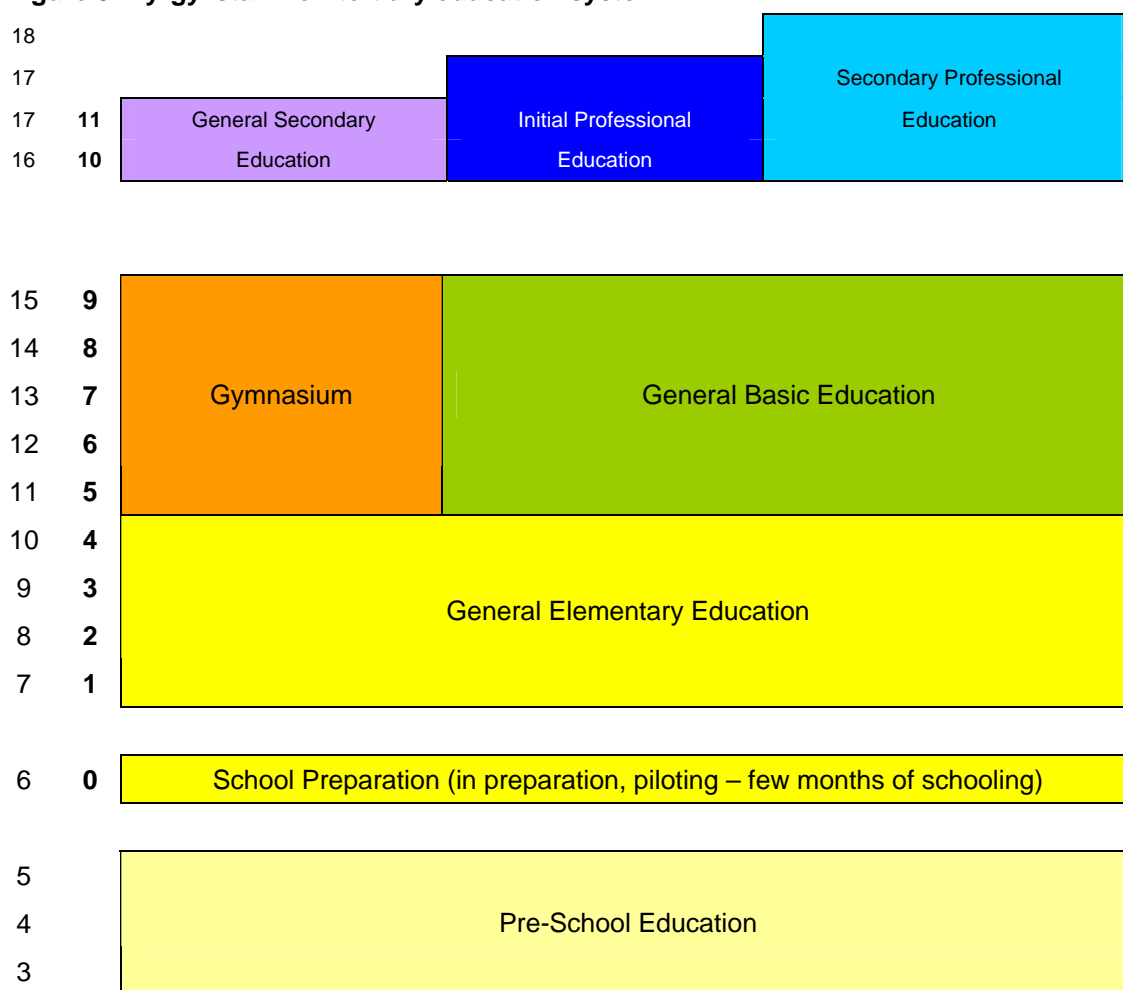
This chapter deals only with the two sub-sectors of "initial" and "secondary" vocational education in Kyrgyzstan. The definition of "initial VET" internationally is broader than the definition accepted in the Kyrgyz legal basis, and encompasses both levels of the Kyrgyz VET system, as both provide career / employment oriented education and training for youth for initial entrance in active life. "The general definition of IVET is preparation of people with skills and/or competences to gain entry into a specific occupation/sector. At least this is the definition provided in most instances, but IVET is an evolving concept in all countries and, in many respects, this limited definition is becoming outdated. IVET is no longer considered only as a vocational pathway, but as an alternative pathway to the academic route that contains many elements of an academic education which can, ultimately, lead to a tertiary level, university education. This, at least, is an aspiration for IVET"².

In Kyrgyzstan "initial" VET refers to training of operators, while "secondary" VET (or VET II) refers rather to training of technicians and middle managers with higher autonomy than operators. Secondary VET is based on longer schooling (three years and ten months), unlike initial VET that has a maximum duration of three years in the integrated programmes. Adult education and training is also analysed in this report, with particular attention paid to training the unemployed and job seekers as an active labour market policy in Kyrgyzstan.

The diagram of the education system below tertiary level (Figure 3) shows the split in education paths that occurs at the upper-secondary level, in which vocational (professional) paths diverge from academic paths. This separation is anchored in different school types with different institutional reporting frames. VET I is provided in professional schools and *lizei* whereas VET II is provided by colleges and *technikum*. The former reports to the Agency for Professional-Technical Education, and the later – to Ministry of Education and Science.

² Cedefop, Initial Vocational Education and Training in Europe Review, undated, www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/IVET_Review_08.pdf

Figure 3. Kyrgyzstan Non-tertiary education system



Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 2009

3.1 VET within the legal frame of the education system

Definitions and purposes for the different education levels, as described in the legislation, are presented below. A complementary analysis of the policy framework and institutional setting is provided in Chapter 5.

The Education Law of 30 April 2003 stipulates the following as the educational programmes offered in Kyrgyzstan.

- a) General education programmes, with the aim of "... forming general culture, adapting personalities to social life and creating a basis for an informed choice and acquisition of professional education" (Chapter II, Article 11):
 - a. pre-school education,
 - b. primary education,
 - c. basic education,
 - d. secondary education,
 - e. complementary education.

- b) Professional education programmes, with the aim of "... sequentially enhancing the professional level of students and preparing specialists in the respective qualification":
 - a. initial professional education (programmes combining general and vocational curricula corresponding to ISCED level 3),
 - b. secondary professional education (classifiable as ISCED level 4),
 - c. higher professional education,
 - d. post-university professional education (various post-graduate levels),
 - e. complementary education.

It is also important to read how the Education Law defines each professional education level (Chapter I, Article 1).

- Initial professional education. Preparation of qualified labourers (workers, employees) for the main socially useful activity areas, with an access level of basic or secondary general education.
- Secondary professional education. Preparation for learner acquisition of professional knowledge and skills related to an area of specialisation, on the basis of basic secondary education or initial professional education. Furthermore, in Article 22 the law stipulates that people with secondary professional education may receive higher professional education via accelerated programmes.
- Higher professional education. Training, preparation and re-training of specialists in the corresponding education level programmes and standards.
- Specialist education. Professional qualification level related to full higher education programmes in the respective area of specialisation, giving the right to improve a qualification in post-university education.

The term 'professional education' is used in the Education Law to designate three levels:

- initial professional education,
- secondary professional education,
- higher professional education.

Although the required entry level (complete general basic education) is similar for both initial and secondary professional education, permeability is largely absent. Higher professional education covers all tertiary education programmes.

Graduates from the combined programme of initial professional education (three years) receive a secondary education diploma and a professional qualification for the respective area and level. Consequently, access to higher education is possible, depending on grades and performance in entrance procedures. Although the Education Law allows graduates of initial professional education to enter secondary professional education, this is not a common option.

Graduates from secondary professional education (just under four years) are entitled to enter the second or even third year of the relevant programmes in higher professional education, bypassing common unified entrance examinations and procedures.

This educational programme can be classified as ISCED level 4. Referring to classification criterion 74 of ISCED 4: "It requires as a rule the successful completion of level 3, i.e. successful completion of any programme at level 3A or 3B, or, for 3C programmes, a cumulative theoretical duration of typically three years at least."³ However, the criterion for successful completion of ISCED 3 should be interpreted in the context of the duration of the programme. For instance, a programme lasting four years that builds on a

³ UNESCO, International Standard Classification of Education 2007.

two-year ISCED 3 programme would normally be classified at ISCED 4 even though the preceding 2-year programme at ISCED 3 does not qualify for the completion of ISCED 3.

Initial professional education is now administered by the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, an institution established in early 2007 that reports to the government of Kyrgyzstan. Before 2007, initial professional education was administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, through a dedicated Directorate for Initial Professional Education. Most of the staff in the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education comes from the previous institution.

Secondary and higher professional education are administered by the Ministry of Education and Science's Department of Secondary and Higher Professional Education. This reveals a perspective that secondary professional education tends to be closer to higher education, reflected by the principle of accelerated higher programmes for graduates of secondary professional education (in the relevant areas of study).

The institutional separation of initial and secondary professional education described above reflects a conceptual separation regarding the purpose of each of these alternatives. This sets an additional challenging framework for the development of VET as a truly attractive offer, credible for all users, whether students or employers. Other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries were able to minimise this contradiction by unifying the institutional umbrella administering both initial and secondary professional education programmes (the case of Kazakhstan and Armenia). Some Baltic states have progressively promoted the best secondary professional education establishments to a tertiary technical level, while other such establishments have been associated with initial VET. This has removed the uncertainty of an intermediate kind of education programme that is neither truly secondary nor post-secondary and obviously not tertiary. Currently the system of secondary professional education in Kyrgyzstan finds itself in this intermediate situation.

The features and interactions amongst these levels will be discussed later in the chapter. For the sake of simplicity, we use the following terms in the chapter:

- VET I (primary vocational education and training): initial professional education as designated in the Education Law;
- VET II (secondary vocational education and training): secondary professional education as designated in the Education Law.

3.2 Educational attainment

Kyrgyzstan managed to improve the overall educational attainment of its population in the transition years, despite widely acknowledged hardship for households and the state as a whole. Table 1 shows that the share of population over 15 years of age with tertiary education grew by nearly 4% between 1999 and 2006, taking into consideration both complete and incomplete higher education.⁴ The share of the population with VET II has been decreasing over time, having fallen by 4% between 1989 and 2006. It is important to highlight the substantial contraction in the population with lower educational attainment and basic and primary education—by 7.6% between 1989 and 2006. In 2006 one fifth of the population aged over 15 years had basic or primary education; however, the share of 5%-6% with no education or incomplete primary education represents a challenge for policy makers.

⁴ Note that in Table 1 the educational categories used for 2006 differ, as reforms in the structure of education and related statistical representation led to changes over time. Thus, holders of VET I diplomas are included in the data for 2006. Data for 1989 reveal inconsistencies, as the total is seven percentage points below 100%.

According to the head of the Labour Statistics Department of the National Statistical Committee,⁵ two contradictory trends in education emerged and became consolidated in the transition years:

- a growing numbers of students in higher education;
- a growing number of dropouts in primary and basic school.

Table 1. Educational attainment of people aged 15 years and older (%)

Education	1989	1999	2006
Higher	9.4	10.5	13.2
Incomplete higher	1.6	1.5	2.9
Secondary professional	15.7	10.8	11.6
Primary professional			7.8
Secondary	39.1	50	43.7
Basic	18.4	18.3	11.9
Primary	9.1	6.3	8

Sources: 1) National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, p. 14. Calculations: author of report. National Statistical Committee, *Educational Level of the Population*, extract.

3.3 Key VET data

3.3.1 Overall VET I and VET II trends

The network of VET I schools collapsed in the transition years, as the economic basis (in the large enterprises) partly underpinning these establishments was restructured, lost vigour and were negatively affected by demand patterns. In Kyrgyzstan, however, unlike in other CIS countries, the VET Law of 1999 (amended in 2008, Article 22) protected VET schools from privatisation. At present the country has 111 initial VET schools, including the Tokmok Pedagogical-Industrial College (Table 2).

Table 2. VET I key data

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of educational institutions*	113	112	112	112	111
Number of students	25,972	27,698	28,481	28,623	29,319
Admitted students	21,204	21,344	21,344	22,114	22,802
Graduates	20,099	18,764	19,379	20,617	20,711
Number of teachers	3,036	3,101	3,228	3,228	3,281
Student/teacher ratio	8.6	8.9	8.8	8.9	8.9

* Professional schools and lizei

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, p. 9.

Statistics on course completion by levels of education in the period 1990-2007 show considerable changes in the proportions for the three professional education programme levels. In 2006 the total number of graduates from higher education exceeded total graduates from the two non-tertiary levels of professional education, representing a complete turnaround compared with the situation in the early transition years; in

⁵ Tamara Tlei Abubakirova, in a meeting on 30 April 2009 with the author of the chapter.

1990, for instance, there were five graduates from both non-tertiary professional levels for every one tertiary graduate.

The number of graduates in initial VET programmes declined from 33,200 students in 1990 to a low of 18,800 in 2003, recovering slightly to 21,700 in 2007.

Table 3. VET II key data

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Number of educational institutions*	66	66	75	78	80	82
Of which private	3	4	3	5	10	12
Number of students	25,989	27,154	31,178	35,580	40,254	43,413
Students in private VET	445	643	658	908	1,064	3,327
Admitted students	10,477	12,106	14,053	15,705	15,843	16,447
Graduates	8,634	8,021	7,316	8,343	7,745	8,647
Number of teachers	3,714	3,019	2,984	3,273	3,680	3,410
Student/teacher ratio	7.0	9.0	10.4	10.9	10.9	12.7

* *Colleges and technikum*

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, p. 9.

In secondary VET programmes, the lowest number of graduates was attained in 2004, at 7,200, down by almost 50% from 2000. In higher education the trend is opposite; the number of graduates grew by over 2.3 times between 1990 and 2006, reaching 30,800 in 2006 (26,400 in 2007). In the same period, the number of students completing basic education grew from 85,100 in 1990 to 101,200 in 2007, while the same figure for secondary education grew almost in the same proportion (over 18%), from 58,800 to 69,600 students.

Initial VET is essentially public, as the totality of schools is public and financing is largely public as well. VET II programmes are provided in 82 schools (colleges and *tekhnikum*), 12 are private. According to verbal information from the Ministry of Education and Science, the total number of secondary VET establishments is 90, including the colleges established by some higher professional education institutions.

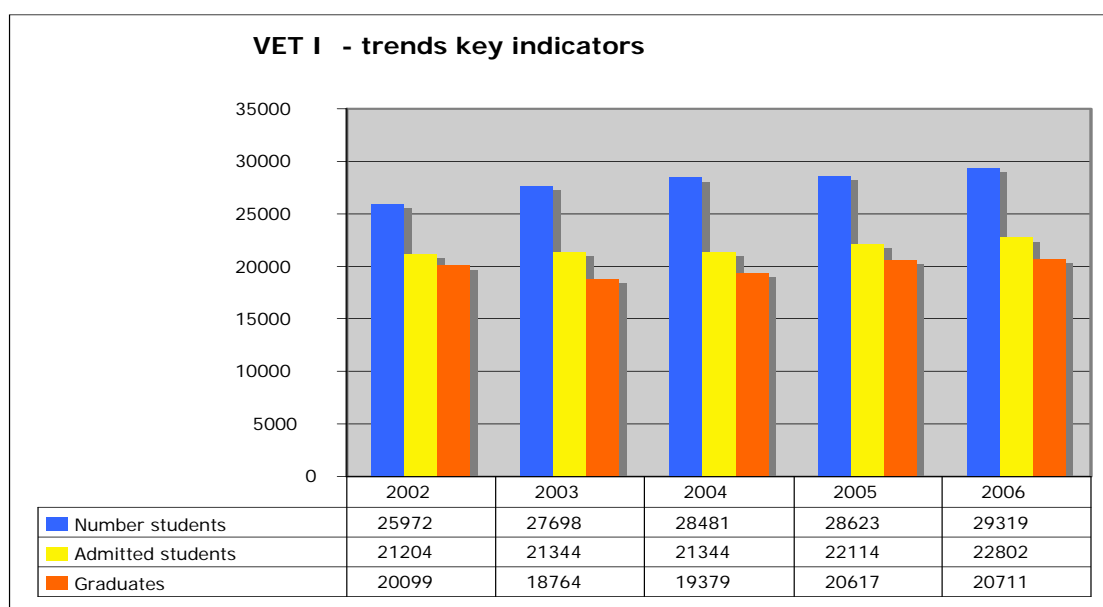
A number of universities have started, in fact, what could be called a process of vertical backward integration, by offering secondary (college) and even initial VET programmes. This trend towards multi-level education has substantial advantages, as it extends VET capacity in educational institutions that have a relatively good public image and so could attract more young people into VET pathways. The same trend may also hide threats; in particular, there is a risk of the commercialisation of VET programmes (already with the case with tertiary education programmes), with the consequent denial of the social role and responsibility of public VET. Universities with multi-level programmes also risk becoming self-contained islands, failing to develop close links with the world of work but following the academic traditions of the sub-sector.

For the purposes of this report we use official statistics reflecting licensed establishments.

3.3.2 Initial VET

Figure 4 and Table 4 offer an overview of trends in student participation in both VET I and VET II programmes in the period 2002-06. While total participation in VET I programmes grew only slightly (13%) in the given period, VET II presented steep growth of over 65% between 2002/03 and 2007/08. The year 2006/07 showed the most substantial increase in the total number of students, at 20%.

Figure 4. VET I student data



Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, p. 9.

Closer analysis of student flows and entrance characteristics, in particular for VET I, is necessary. This analysis highlights a number of issues that can be the subject of policy measures.

It is important, first of all, to examine the educational attainment of the students entering VET I programmes (Table 4).

Table 4. Admissions to VET I by entrance education level

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Kyrgyzstan, total	21,204	21,498	21,344	22,114	22,802
With secondary education	5,934	6,233	6,436	6,460	6,782
% of total	28.0	29.0	30.2	29.2	29.7
With basic education	5,027	5,225	5,200	5,686	6,423
% of total	23.7	24.3	24.4	25.7	28.2

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, pp. 106-107.

The data show that fewer than 60% of entrants are school leavers, indicating that VET I is already used by other categories of the population, primarily the unemployed, (under state active labour market programmes), fee-paying enterprises and individuals and other social groups. This can be considered as positive, as it shows that initial VET is opening up to various user groups and their needs and expectations. Further analysis of the various users of VET I is provided in Table 6.

This same figure shows that a priority group for education policy (youth after basic education out of the system) is only to a limited extent covered by the VET offer. Young people who have completed basic schooling represent 30% of entrants and the share is similar for graduates from secondary school. Comparing these data with the large number of youth out of the education system (after basic schooling), an immediate conclusion is that VET I is unable to provide the much-needed opportunities for learning and obtaining qualifications for this growing category of youth out of education—recognised as a key mission of VET I in the education continuum.

Table 5 estimates how well VET absorbs students from the education system who did not complete secondary education. In the absence of accurate data, as a proxy for the dropout rate for basic education, we estimated the difference between graduates from basic and from secondary education. According to our estimates, VET I absorbs only 20% of these young people. More of these basic education graduates enter VET II establishments. The fate of the remaining substantial proportion should be a matter of concern, as it is known that most of them have acquired only limited basic skills according to international and national student performance surveys. Students who drop out of education after (or before) completing basic schooling are more vulnerable in a tight labour market and tend to be segregated to poorly productive activities and jobs.

Table 5. Young people out of education after basic education

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Basic education graduates (A)	102,263	101,034	102,248	101,218
Secondary education graduates (B)	73,327	78,802	74,291	69,668
Basic education graduates who did not enter secondary education (A-B = C)	28,936	22,232	27,957	31,550
C as % of A	28.3	22.0	27.3	31.2
Admissions to VET I from basic education (D)	5,225	5,200	5,686	6,423
D as % of C	18.1	23.4	20.3	20.4
Admissions to VET I from secondary education (E)	6,233	6,436	6,460	6,782
E as % of B	8.5	8.2	8.7	9.7
Admissions to VET II from basic education (F)*	8,474	9,837	10,994	11,090
F as % of C	29.3	44.2	39.3	35.2
Basic education admissions to VET I + VET II as % of the basic education graduates who did not enter secondary education ((D+F)/C)	47.3	67.6	59.7	55.5
% of basic education graduates out of education (C-D-F)	52.7	32.4	40.3	44.5

*Assumption: 70% of VET II admissions

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*. Calculations: author of report.

The situation of graduates from secondary education raises less concern from the point of view of continuity, as most of them either enter higher education or VET I or VET II programmes, according to estimates based on official education statistics.

These data tend to coincide with estimates provided by the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, which refers to 30,000 students leaving school after basic education. This is a clear signal for VET policy in terms of improved measures to ascertain that attractive learning pathways and VET content will ensure greater participation in education and training. This significant challenge will inevitably lead to changes in teaching, curricula and learning organisation, so as to transform rigid and traditional VET programmes for youth into an education and training offer that is flexible and relevant from the point of view of student characteristics and potentialities, in particular when the target is vulnerable youth groups.

VET I schools are underutilised by day student programmes (mostly young people studying full three-year curricula), according to data provided by the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education in the Annex (p. 73) of the Strategy for VET Consolidation and Modernisation adopted in April 2009. Thus, of a

total of 111 schools, 74 (67%) have between 100 and 250 day students; of the remainder, seven schools have fewer than 100 students, 17 have 250-350 students, 11 have 350-450 students and only two have over 450 students. However, many of these schools have the capacity to admit larger numbers of students. Visits to VET schools often leave the tangible impression that student activity is low.

VET I schools do have untapped capacity to receive larger numbers of students, provided funds are available and school/learning organisation is adequate. According to the director of a VET school in Jalalabad (capital of the oblast of the same name in southern Kyrgyzstan), his school could admit larger numbers of basic school graduates from neighbouring villages and towns—with many parents expressing interest—except that more teachers and other resources would be required. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education could finance this expansion, but VET schools are not necessarily keen to educate basic school students with poor skills, who represent a challenge affecting school performance. In our opinion, based on discussions in the field, basic education graduates are a challenging group for further education, but the VET school system has only a limited interest in being a second-chance pathway. This seems to be particularly true for the mixed secondary-professional education programmes (lizei groups), where these poorer performing students have substantial difficulties; according to one VET school director, many cannot even read or write properly. The same director explained that, since the school's resources did not permit extra teaching and tutoring, those who wanted to succeed had no option but to spend long nights in the student residence catching up with biology, maths and English in order to overcome the gaps in their education.

In Jalalabad, general education school directors recommended increasing VET capacity and quality, given that many basic school graduates do not pursue studies in secondary school but leave school after completion of compulsory schooling, with many parents sending such children to workshops for on-the-job learning. Several directors of general schools have stated that more VET schools, with student hostels and good practical teaching, are needed and that rural children need vocational education and training.

Notwithstanding, VET I schools are called on to deal with vulnerable, poorly performing young people, particularly young people without parental support or living in poverty. In 2007-08, 17 VET I schools had special centres for young people with very disadvantaged backgrounds and placed into so-called rehabilitation groups; over 400 orphans studied in VET I schools in the same period. A female director of a VET school nearby Bishkek stated as follows: "I have received several 14-year old young people who had only had two years of schooling. Such pupils require special attention, primarily to build their confidence and trust in society. I tried various ways to break the ice and reach their soul. A breakthrough moment occurred when I took them to a classical music concert. They were moved to tears. Afterwards I started a school theatre in one of the unused spaces in my school. These children have started opening up and now we can start teaching them. I had to do all this with very reduced support from the state, but the fact is, I prefer to innovate without barriers."

Asked about the challenges regarding properly integrating general education with technical training for basic school graduates, many of whom do not possess sufficient basic skills, the director of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education confessed: "We are now confronted with challenges much worse than that. We have to teach hundreds of young people with very low educational attainment, many having just a few years of schooling. They are in the markets and the fields, out of the school system. That is another big challenge for our VET schools. Can we offer them a standard education programme? With them what else can we do but teach them basic vocational skills to allow them to do a job with a minimum level of competence?"

Going beyond perceptions and opinions is the evidence. An official Ministry of Education and Science report from 2008 on adult education in Kyrgyzstan states as follows: "Unemployment, growing poverty levels, alcoholism and drugs are leading to a situation in which the number of children given over to the care of the state in boarding and special schools has tripled in a decade. Hardship affects large numbers of families and many children have to work to earn a living, in markets, washing cars and so on. This disrupts schooling and leads to poor attendance. As a result, according to the Ministry of Education and Science,⁶

⁶ Ministry of Education and Science, Analytical Note on the Status of the Adult Education System and Development Prospects in the Framework of the draft Adult Education Law, undated and unpublished. pp. 3-4.

the overall educational attainment of the population is negatively affected and labour force members with low skills and no qualifications is increasing.

VET I is faced with a challenging mission, complicated by the fact that its user universe is very diversified as are the needs and potential of the various user categories. Vulnerable young people with below-basic education have needs and expectations that differ from those of secondary graduates seeking a qualification for work in modern enterprises. Higher education graduates unsuccessful in their job search may be able to obtain a job in demand by taking up a flexible but recognised course in one of the good VET schools in Bishkek or Jalalabad. Young farmers and rural residents are a large category of potential users of short-term flexible innovative training for rural on- and off-the-farm activities, which VET schools could and should develop in partnership with village administrations. Furthermore, the many unemployed people supported by State Migration and Employment Committee active labour market programmes have very different individual profiles, life experiences, skills and education. These adults require adapted training methods and student-centred approaches that take account of learner interests and competences acquired in previous professional experiences. Finally, corporations represent another highly demanding group of users.

Is VET I already open to various kinds of user needs? A quick look at the data reveals that VET I schools are indeed already offering training to non-traditional groups. Table 6 summarises official statistics from the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education that might or might not include non-formal training taking place in some VET schools and some rare partnerships with local authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the framework of projects sponsored by international donors.

Table 6 indicates that 64% of all students admitted in 2006 were day students (a proxy for the basic and secondary education graduates), whereas a third of admissions were adults. Within the latter group, most were staff members of enterprises and individuals paying for their own training (48%). The unemployed represented a third of the group and 20% were learners from Ministry of Justice penal establishments.

Secondary VET schools substantially increased student numbers over the period 2003-08, particularly in the academic year 2006/07, when year-on-year growth was 20%. A curious observation regarding the trends in Figure 5 concerns the discrepancy in the dynamics of admitted versus total students, much steeper than the dynamics of graduations, which demonstrate slower growth than admissions.

This growth in student intake to VET II is remarkable in view of the fact that only a minority of places are financed from the public budget and so most students are fee-payers. However these tuition fees in secondary professional education student are significantly lower than those for higher education; the expectation of benefiting from accelerated higher education programmes may indeed enhance the attractiveness of VET II for young people.

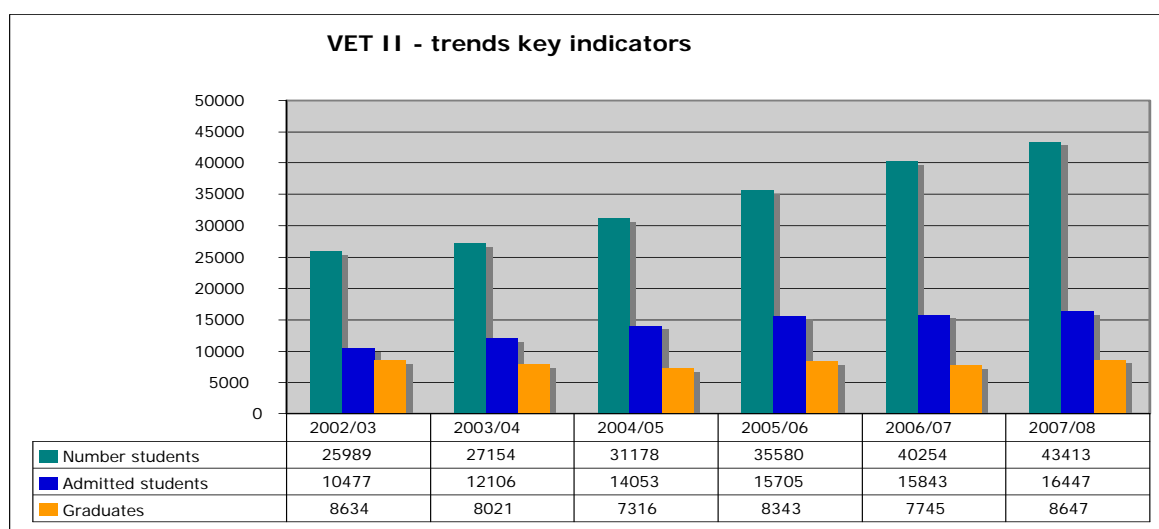
Table 6. VET I students in various categories

	Total students 1 Jan 2006	Planned		Actual		Total students 1 Jan 2007
		Admissions 2006	Graduates 2007	Admissions 2006	Graduates 2006	
Total	29,166	24,260	21,559	23,108	20,916	29,897
Of which day students	24,542	14,555	12,462	14,763	12,752	25,525
Basic education	14,289	5,895	4,784	6,423	4,761	15,345
Secondary education	6,706	7,026	6,284	6,782	6,311	6,909
Youth progr. without general educ.	3,548	1,634	1,394	1,558	1,653	3,275
Tekhnikum (Tokmok)	580	276	266	306	205	578
Ministry of Justice	1,605	1,620	1,620	1,614	1,482	1,611
Special VET school	63	50	10	16	44	33
Unemployed training	341	3,842	3,426	2,561	2,590	287
Paid training	1,663	3,917	3,812	3,259	3,209	1,593
Enterprise-paid training	372			589	661	270

Source: Strategy for VET Consolidation and Modernisation and Action Plan (2009-11), Annex, p. 63

3.3.3 Secondary VET

Figure 5. VET II student data

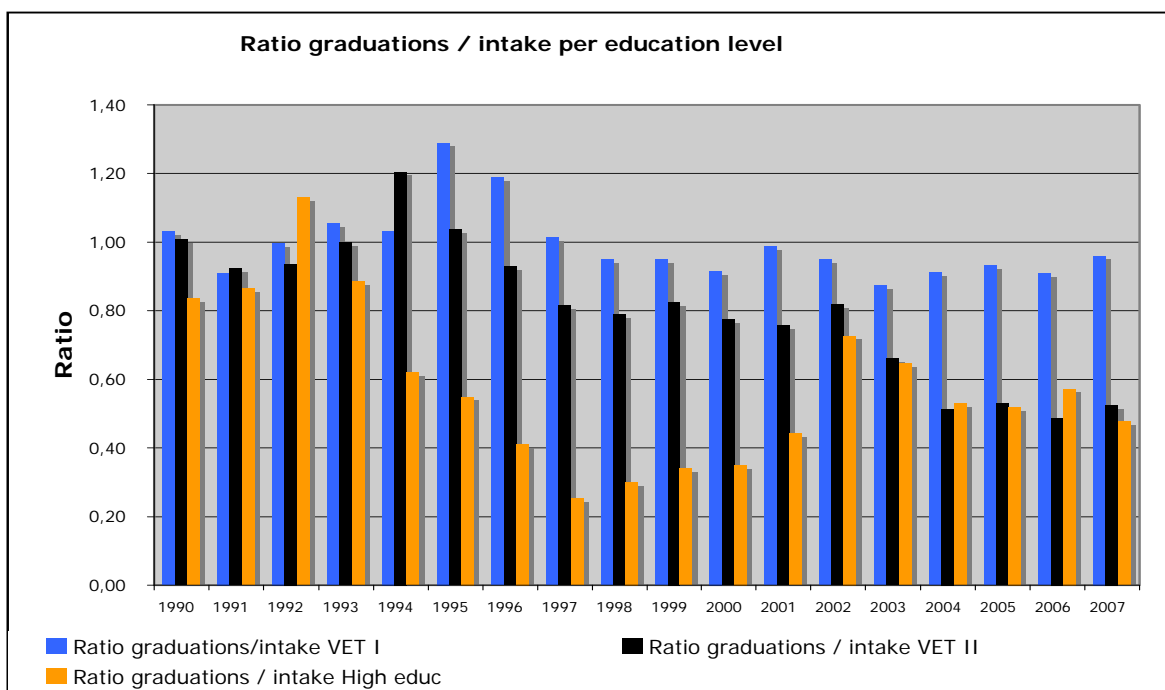


Source: National Statistical Committee, Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008, p. 9.

Graduates from VET II declined in number in 2004/05 and again in 2006/07. There is no logical or obvious explanation for this volatility in graduate numbers against a background of increasing student intake. One possible explanation could be linked with failed expectations regarding future entry to higher education. In the absence of a verified explanation, seeking a possible common denominator we compared this observation with analogous results for the other two levels of professional education.

Analysis of historical data for the period 1990-2007 shows a similar decline in the ratio for number of graduates to student intake in higher education. Figure 6 illustrates this ratio for the three levels of professional education: VET I, VET II and higher education. VET I shows a less significant decline, with the ratio tending to stabilise at 0.9 in the last four years of the series. VET II shows a steep fall from 2003, to 0.5. In higher education the decline started much earlier (in 1994), showing a tendency to stabilise at around 0.5 in the last four years of the series—an improvement compared with the 0.25-0.3 ratio of 1997-98.

Figure 6. Graduations versus intake for all VET categories



Source: www.stat.kg/rus/part/obr.htm. Figures 5.03.00.11 and 5.03.00.14. Graph: author.

We carried out this analysis in the framework of the VET chapter for the OECD review of education in Kyrgyzstan. In the absence of a clear explanation for the phenomenon, the OECD team suggested consulting the Ministry of Education and Science. In September 2009, on the occasion of an ETF mission to Kyrgyzstan, the Ministry of Education and Science expressed interest in its analysis of student flows (graduations vs admissions) showing a significant discrepancy between admissions and graduations in both higher and secondary professional education over more than a decade. This discrepancy is sizeable as the ratio of graduates to intake is 0.5 or slightly less. In fact, the deputy head of the Department of Secondary and Higher Professional Education expressed concern for the message behind these data, which would appear to indicate a substantial dropout rate. The Ministry of Education and Science only sporadically analyses the messages transmitted by these trends in education statistics. However, the most recent statistics referring to secondary professional education for 2008/09 indicate that over 5,400 students were excluded from public colleges for reasons linked with poor performance (33%), non-attendance (30%), loss of contact with the school and other social reasons. This figure of 5,400 excluded students corresponds to about 65% of the total difference between admissions and graduates—thus providing a reasonable partial explanation for above-mentioned discrepancy. We confirmed the accuracy of the data analysed in Figures 5 and 6 (student intake and graduations) with the education unit of the Department for Social Statistics of the National Statistical Committee.

Table 5 (above) estimates VET II coverage of students leaving school at the basic education level (difference between total graduates from basic and from secondary education). Assuming that 70% of all students admitted to VET II do so after basic education, this intake corresponds to a maximum share of 44% for the mentioned group and an average of around 35% for the indicated period. This theoretical estimate confirms our assumptions that there remains a large share (between 32% and 53%) of basic (compulsory) school graduates who are out of formal education (whether VET I, VET II or secondary general education). Education policy needs to consider ways to offer education and training opportunities to this population sector, both in view of their employability and further personal development.

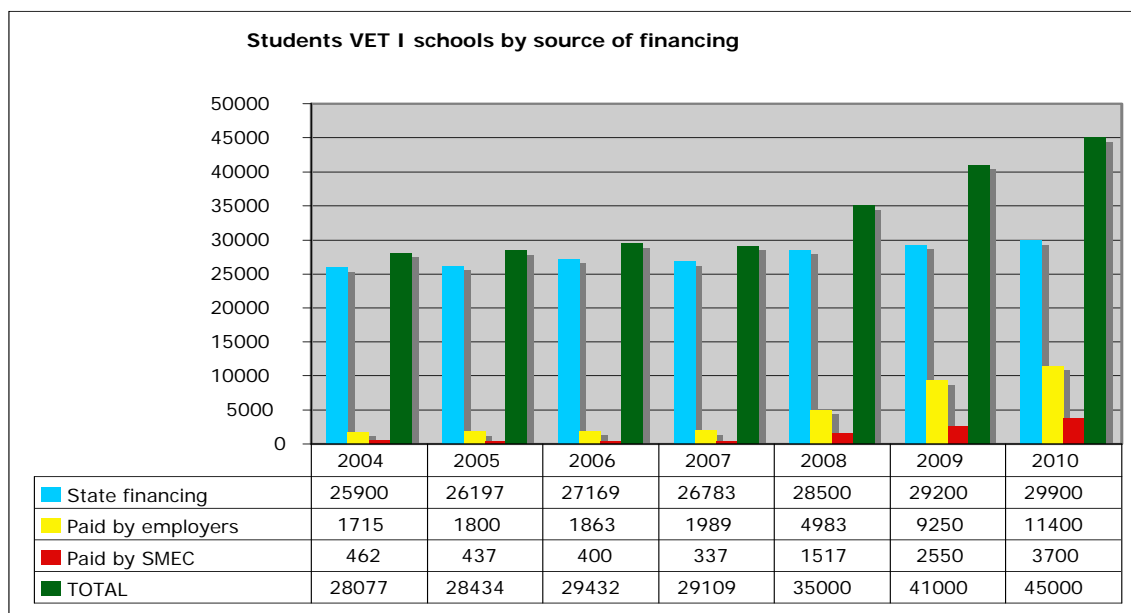
In terms of comparisons with data for students in VET pathways in the EU, on average the share of students in vocational programmes at ISCED 3 level (as a proportion of all ISCED 3 students) is significant, at over 50% in 2006. Note, however, that the situation tends to vary across countries and shares have evolved differently. Thus, 13 countries witnessed a considerable increase (among them, Italy, Malta, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Portugal). In other countries (France, Lithuania, Poland, and the UK) the share of students in VET programmes fell by more than 20% between 2000 and 2006. Vocational programmes are predominant at ISCED level 4, with over 90% of full-time equivalent students following vocational programmes. The share of students is very low or non-existent for pre-vocational and vocational programmes at the ISCED 2 level in most EU member states.⁷

3.4 Financing

VET I is largely state-financed, while VET II has come to largely rely on private financing (tuition fees).

Over 90% of students in VET I were financed from the state budget in the period up to 2007 (Figure 7). The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education has endeavoured to increase the share of students financed by other sources (multi-channel financing), such as individual fees, contracts with enterprises and the budget of the State Migration and Employment Committee (training for the unemployed).

Figure 7. VET I students by financing source*

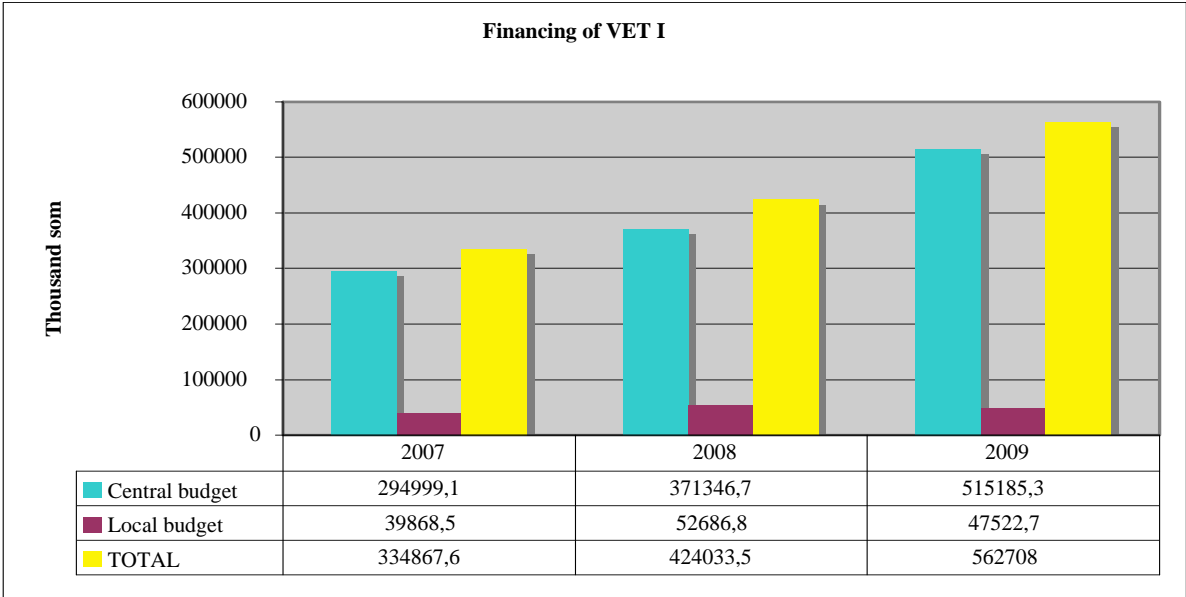


*SMEC, State Migration and Employment Committee; 2008, planned; 2009 and 2010, forecasted
Source: Strategy for VET Consolidation and Modernisation 2009, Annex, p. 67.

⁷ Commission of the European Communities, Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training: indicators and benchmarks 2008 (Commission staff working document).

Central and local public financing of VET I registered substantial growth in the period 2007-09, as depicted in Figure 8. The central budget grew by 75% in the period, and its share in total public financing became predominant (92% in 2009 against 88% in 2007). This trend is associated with institutional reforms that separated the leading authority in the sector from a ministry and upgraded it to quasi-ministerial level in the government while enhancing its autonomy. The role played by the local budget declined in the same period. It would be worthwhile exploring the potential of local resources to fund local VET projects and initiatives.

Figure 8. Public sources of VET I financing



Source: State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, data provided at author's request (June 2009).

Analysing changes in the various spending categories (Table 7) for the period 2007-09, it is worth noting that the total wage bill increased substantially (85%) and the food bill more than doubled (117%). In 2009 salaries represented approximately 46% of the total central budget; food represented 27.3%, up from 22% in 2007. Remarkably, spending on building repairs declined from a tiny 2.9% to 2.3%, and a similar trend can be observed with spending on equipment, which fell from 4.4% to 0.5% in the period 2007-09.

Table 7. VET I central budget by spending category (thousand KGS)

	2007	2008	2009
Total central budget	294,999.1	371,346.7	515,185.3
Per-student budget	11,014.4	13,029.7	17,643.3
Salaries	126,987.9	166,542	235,330
Salaries as % of total	43.0%	44.8%	45.7%
Social contribution	26,026.3	31,883.8	44,813.7
Current expenditure	55,670.3	56,588.7	80,048.7
Food	64,755.9	99,523	140,585
Food as % of total	22.0%	26.8%	27.3%
Building repairs	8,466.8	14,833	11,607.9
Equipment	13,091.9	1,976	2,800
Equipment as % of total	4.4%	0.5%	0.5%

Source: State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, data provided at author's request (June 2009).

The theoretical per-student budget sharply increased, by 60%, in 2007-09. This calculation is based on the ratio of the total central budget to the total number of students financed from state resources. The data on state-funded students are given in Figure 7. According to verbal information from a representative of the Planning and Financing Unit of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, per-capita funding varies according to the area of study, fluctuating between 12,000 and 15,000 KGS.

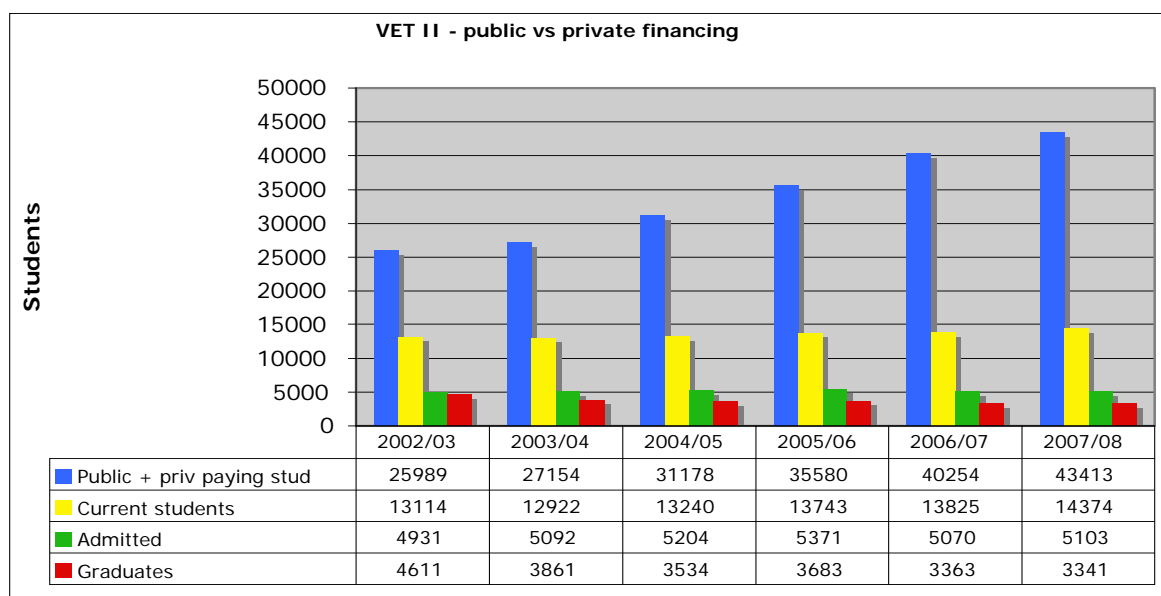
The share of study places in VET II financed from the state budget declined from 50% in 2002/03 to 33% in 2007/08 (Table 8).

Table 8. Publicly versus privately financed VET II students

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
All students	25,989	27,154	31,178	35,580	40,254	43,413
PUBLIC						
Students	13,114	12,922	13,240	13,743	13,825	14,374
Admitted	4,931	5,092	5,204	5,371	5,070	5,103
Graduates	4,611	3,861	3,534	3,683	3,363	3,341
% of all students	50.5	47.6	42.5	38.6	34.3	33.1
PRIVATE						
Students	12,875	14,232	17,938	21,837	26,429	29,039

Source: National Statistical Committee, Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008, p. 116.

Figure 9. Total, admitted and graduated publicly financed VET II students*



*The yellow, green and red bars refer to publicly financed student.

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, p. 116.

Although this distribution of state versus privately funded study places in VET II is far from that in higher education, where over 85% of students pay fees, the trend is likely to head in a similar direction. However, VET II is in the secondary education area, which worldwide is increasingly becoming the minimum compulsory educational attainment level and, as such, part of the public service.

Table 9, based on documents kindly provided by the Ministry of Education and Science, shows the structure of and trends in extra-state revenues flowing to secondary professional schools. Revenues from fees are projected to grow substantially (58%) in the upcoming years, largely as a consequence of the substantial growth in total student numbers. The average per-student revenue (reflecting the average tuition fee) is relatively low, at slightly over 1,500 KGS in 2009. This average is based on official data of Ministry of Education and Science.

Table 9. VET II revenues from private fees (thousand KGS)

	2007 (actual)	2008 (final)	2009 (projected)	Change 2007-09 (%)
Total revenues	31,128.6	47,447.1	49,201.7	58.1
Contracted studies (student fees)	29,883.5	45,549.3	47,233.6	58.1
Rent	55.6	237.2	246.1	342.6
Other	1,089.5	1,660.6	1,722	58.1

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, *Summary Special Resources for 2009 for Secondary Professional Education Schools*, data provided at author's request.

A tax of 20% on the extra-budgetary revenues of all educational institutions was established in 2009. During the OECD mission of April, intensive negotiations were taking place within the government and the Parliament to cancel this new tax, although the chances were considered somewhat weak.

3.5 Careers, study choices and links with skills anticipation

A student's choice of study area is a function of information and the influence of relatives but also due to the provision of education and training pathways. Information resources on available VET studies and qualifications, providers and their performance are yet to be developed in Kyrgyzstan in order to offer open and reliable sources for informed choices. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education has undertaken several advertisement campaigns promoting VET and VET schools, using traditional channels such as the media, advertisement boards and promotional materials. But no proper career guidance service is offered to users of VET schools (young people and adults).

Existing websites specialised in VET include:

- State Agency for Professional-Technical Education: www.kesip.gov.kg or www.kesip.in.kg
- Donors: www.helvetas.kg
- Local VET management: www.kojo.kg

These websites contain general information on ongoing and planned activities by promoters, but not information and guidance resources for students, employers and other end users. They should, in fact, provide detailed information on VET providers, professional profiles, curricula and assessment of the various study modalities and areas of study, employment prospects, etc.

The State Migration and Employment Committee's Information and Counselling Centre of Bishkek is the main provider of career guidance and information for youth. It operates in Bishkek only, providing guidance and running information sessions for groups of students from upper secondary programmes. These groups are accompanied by the school psychologist; the guidance session comprises a group discussion and brainstorming on career choice factors, the consultation of career/profession description leaflets, video and documental information on available VET and higher education and training offers and computer-based testing of personal characteristics. Students receive the test results on the spot and can exchange views with the staff of the Information and Counselling Centre or come back for a more in-depth interview. The State Migration and Employment Committee is trying to expand this service to other regions. Career guidance in the framework of the school curriculum is limited to these sessions. The main weakness of this approach is the sporadic and brief nature of these sessions, although interested students can return, including with friends and relatives, for closer interaction with the ICC. Most of the information on existing education paths and providers relates to higher education institutions only. Although the professional profiles available for consultation are based on extensive research efforts by the ICC, they too need updating and transformation into more user-friendly sources of information. These services are free of charge for users.

A system of skills anticipation is used to guide the supply of state-financed education and training at the initial, secondary and higher professional education levels. This system is based on State Migration and Employment Committee forecasts based, in turn, on data from regional and local authorities (*akims*) and Bishkek and Osh city councils. The new forecast for the qualified labour force for the period 2009-14 encompasses a total of 252,002 places, distributed across some 70 professions at various qualification levels. The forecast indicates growth in qualified labour demand in the sectors of health and social services, transport and communications, finance, hotels and restaurants, construction and energy, and, above all, in industrial production as the largest group.

The Ministry of Education and Science uses this forecast to programme state-financed study places in higher education, but reportedly the system is less controlled in admissions to secondary professional education. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education follows yearly forecasts from regional authorities and regional State Agency for Professional-Technical Education departments in steering the admission programmes by study areas and by VET school.

However, given the limited possibilities and capacity to rapidly react to demands for new education and training areas, which require adjustments in curricula, teachers, training materials and equipment, it is clear that supply largely determines the training profiles on offer in the public sector. Small non-public training providers more open to non-formal training are certainly more flexible and can adjust their training offer by recruiting trainers and teachers on a project-by-project and non-permanent basis. However, these providers tend to specialise in study areas related to services and administration which require less costly training premises and equipment and are easier to reorient to new profiles.

VET I programme graduates have remained stable at approximately 20,000 persons per year. Table 10 summarises data for the study areas with the largest numbers of graduates. Unlike the picture given of students choices in VET II, VET I is relatively balanced across numerous areas of study, with only welding and sewing equipment operation showing some slight predominance. A few new areas emerged in the statistics for 2006, namely, office managers, housekeepers (domestic work), hospitality workers and hotel and restaurant operators. Other professions were disrupted in 2005 and 2006, e.g. a number of narrow occupations in agriculture and construction.

Table 10. VET I graduates by areas of study

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Computer operators	224	213	181	318	320
Electricians	989	1,034	535	1,342	1,104
Metal workers	818	805	803	835	660
Lathe operators	251	255	260	266	302
Power and gas welders	1,062	998	1,181	1,462	1,871
Sewing equipment operators	1,624	1,526	1,735	2,049	2,168
Tailors	1,403	1,222	1,180	1,319	1,323
National souvenirs and handicraft makers	365	363	367	218	302
Tractor drivers	327	277	264	325	342
Car drivers	1,189	1,318	1,255	1,247	1,373
Automobile repair workers	335	371	497	511	530
Joiners and carpenters	377	392	493	487	574
Plasterers	163	174	197	146	112
Waiters, bartenders and barpersons	365	282	376	343	348
Pastry cooks	627	626	772	668	510
Cooks	686	582	507	699	666
Hairdressers (men, women)	620	426	645	556	727
Secretary-assistants	349	199	171	287	304
Bookkeepers	820	703	237	696	477
Total selected areas (table)	12,594	11,766	11,656	13,774	14,013
Total graduates	20,099	18,764	19,379	20,617	20,711

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, p. 109.

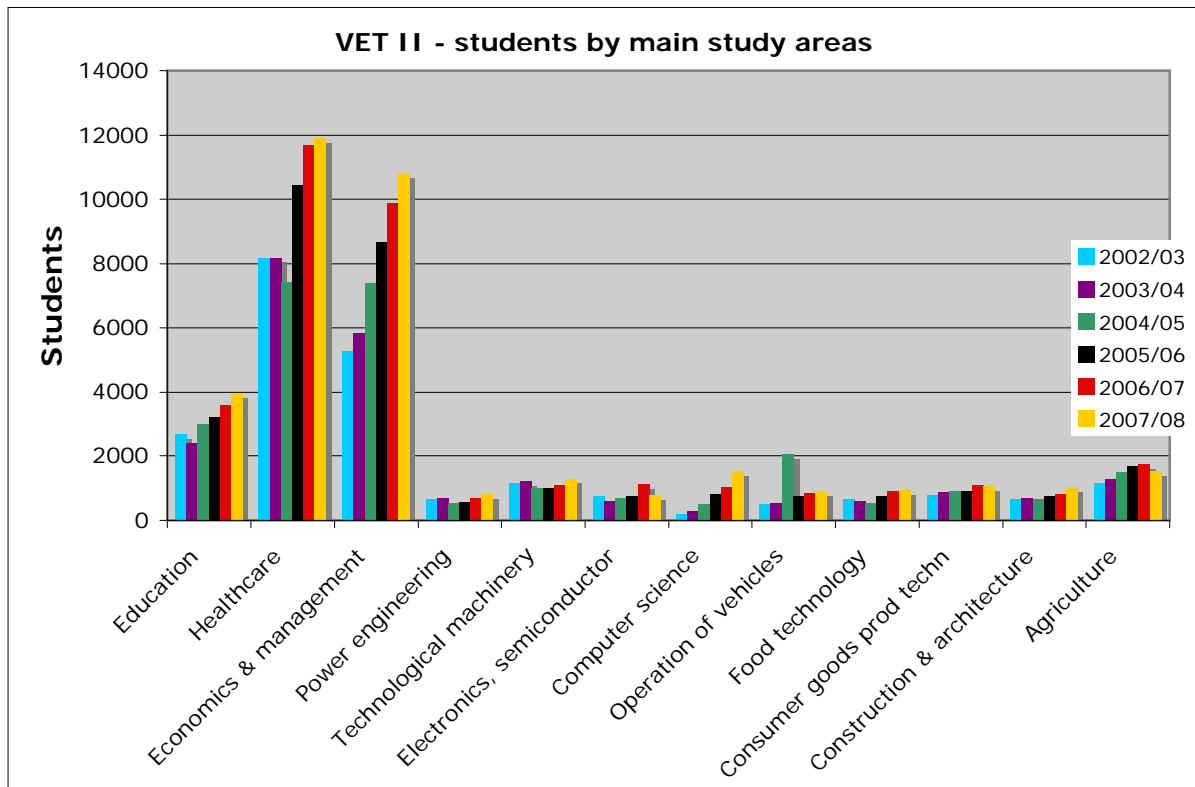
An analysis of choices of study areas in VET II (Table 11 and Figure 10) shows the predominance of healthcare, first of all, followed by economics and management and education. The figure is self-explanatory: a growing trend is clear in healthcare and especially in economics and management, whereas education shows low growth, possibly reflecting the low attractiveness of the career. Amongst the remaining areas of study, there seems to be a tendency to equilibrium in the numbers of students. Areas of growth are computer science, where growth was 10-fold, construction and architecture (40%), vehicle operation (80%) and consumer goods production technologies. Agriculture—the sector providing revenues to over a third of households—attracts relatively limited interest from students. Another career that theoretically could enjoy larger student interest is energy/power, as Kyrgyzstan is an important producer of hydropower and exporter of electricity.

Table 11. VET II students by areas of study

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Kyrgyzstan total	25,989	27,154	31,178	35,580	40,254	43,413
Education	2,673	2,401	2,989	3,208	3,573	3,957
Healthcare	8,166	8,187	7,427	10,439	11,685	11,903
Economics and management	5,276	5,861	7,373	8,674	9,866	10,823
Power engineering	657	696	539	575	680	826
Technological machinery	1,165	1,216	1,013	987	1,083	1,294
Electronics and semiconductors	743	615	708	763	1,122	788
Computer science	188	278	495	828	1,045	1,538
Vehicle operation	495	547	2,059	753	839	897
Food technology	653	593	563	766	901	950
Consumer goods production technologies	778	874	912	920	1,092	1,077
Construction and architecture	664	693	678	744	815	1,038
Agriculture	1,166	1,309	1,491	1,675	1,739	1,531
Total areas of study in table	22,624	23,270	26,247	30,332	34,440	36,622
% of total students	87.1	85.7	84.2	85.3	85.6	84.4

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, pp. 118-119.

Figure 10. VET II students by areas of study



Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, pp. 118-119

3.6 PISA 2006

The comparison below is merely indicative and should be read bearing in mind the background of differing sample sizes, among other issues.

Kyrgyzstan performed poorly in PISA 2006, ranking last, e.g. in science (322 points on average, with 58.2% of participants below level 1 and 28.2% in level 1). In reading literacy, the results were also dissatisfactory, with 70.5% of Kyrgyz participants included in the lowest level (below 1) and 17.8% in level 1. Similar results were obtained in mathematics, where Kyrgyzstan obtained only 311 points on average, with 72.9% of pupils in the lowest level (below 1).

The Centre for Educational Attainment and Teaching Methods, entrusted with implementing and reporting PISA 2006 (and 2009) for Kyrgyzstan shared an extract from PISA 2006 with the author that showed that the scores of participants from vocational *lizei* (integrated initial VET schools) were not, on average, any worse than the scores of students from secondary schools.

4. Findings for education and labour market outcomes

4.1 Key labour market and employment data

This paragraph is built on data from the National Statistical Committee reports on integrated household surveys for 2008, hence do not correspond to unemployed registered in the relevant structures of the State Migration and Employment Committee. All concepts (employment, unemployment, under-employment) used in this chapter comply with International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions.

The employment rate was close to 60% between 2005 and 2008, but the breakdown by gender for 2008 showed a substantial difference between men (70.9%) and women (49.7%).

The unemployment rate floated between 8.1% in 2005 and 8.2% in 2008, with no significant increase in 2008 despite the crisis.

Unemployment rates are higher in rural areas (9.8%, against 7.3% in urban areas), and females are more affected (9.4%, against 7.3% for men), according to the preliminary data for 2008 released by the National Statistical Committee.

The agriculture sector is the largest employer by far in Kyrgyzstan, accounting for over 36% of the employed population in 2006. It is followed by the retail trade and repair (15%), construction (9%), manufacturing (8.5%) and transport (5.7%). Employment in education exceeds 7%.

In 2007 the share of total employment in agriculture fell to 34%, while the share of construction grew to over 9.5%. Net employment growth was registered in the following sectors in 2007: manufacturing, production and distribution of gas, energy and water, construction, trade and repair, hotels and restaurants, transport and communications, education and public administration.

Another significant feature of employment relates to the large degree of informal employment. According to the National Statistical Committee, the share of informal employment in total employment is around 70% (69.1% in 2005 and 70.4% in 2007). Informal employment was much greater in rural zones, in a proportion of 2.8 to 1. Another fact worth mentioning is the continuous growth in the number of employed in the informal sector. Finally, the majority of those employed in the informal labour market (over 96%) declared having this activity as their sole employment,⁸ which is worth noting for employment and VET policy purposes.

Analysis of the educational attainment of the employed population shows that there is a predominance of people with secondary education and lower educational attainment in general in informal employment, comparatively with the picture for total employment. Of those employed informally, 65% have general education (secondary and basic), a trend that remained consistent over 2005-07. The share of employed with this level of education in total employment is lower, at around 48%. The share of those with higher education is much lower in informal employment (7.9% in 2005 and 8.8% in 2007) than in total employment (17% in 2005 and 17.7% in 2007). In 2007, 17.7% of the employed population had higher education, 13.7% had secondary VET, 9.9% had initial VET and 48% had secondary education. The largest share of the employed with higher education were absorbed by education and public administration (42% of all employed people with this level of education). The next largest employers of people with higher education are the trade and repair services (14.7%) and manufacturing (8%).

⁸ National Statistical Committee, Employment and Unemployment. Results of the Integrated Household Survey 2007. pp 68-70.

4.2 Labour market indicators by education level

The figures and graphs in this paragraph are based on published National Statistical Committee data. Data for unemployment are based on household surveys based on the ILO conceptual framework, rather than on registered unemployment records.

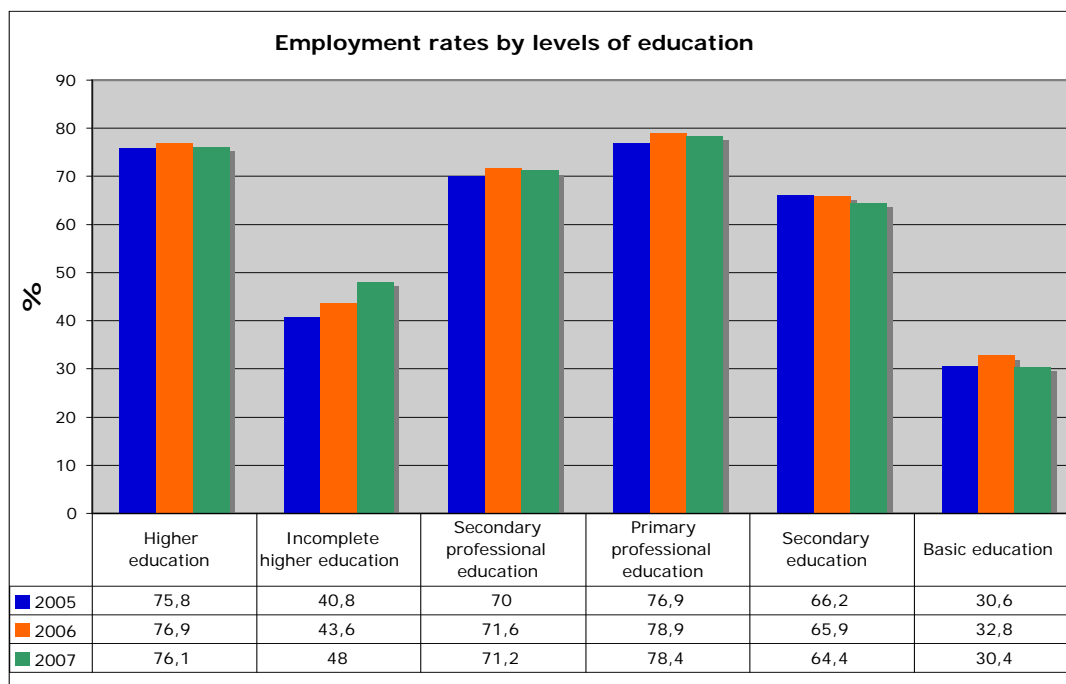
The highest employment rates occur among the population with initial VET qualification, followed by those with complete higher education. The employment rate of the population with low educational attainment (basic and primary) is extremely low (Table 12 and Figures 11 and 12).

Table 12. Employment and unemployment rates by education level (%)

Rates	2005		2006		2007	
	Employ.	Unemploy.	Employ.	Unemploy.	Employ.	Unemploy.
Higher education	75.8	6.7	76.9	4.9	76.1	6.3
Incomplete higher education	40.8	12.1	43.6	16.3	48	8.1
Secondary professional education	70	7.1	71.6	6.3	71.2	6.3
Primary professional education	76.9	7.5	78.9	7.5	78.4	6.7
Secondary education	66.2	8.2	65.9	9	64.4	8.7
Basic education	30.6	15.9	32.8	12.7	30.4	13.7
Primary basic/ no education	17.1	6.3	16.9	9.5	16.6	11.8
TOTAL	59.5	8.1	60.1	8.3	59.8	8.2

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Employment and Unemployment, Results of the Integrated Household Survey 2007*, Bishkek, 2008.

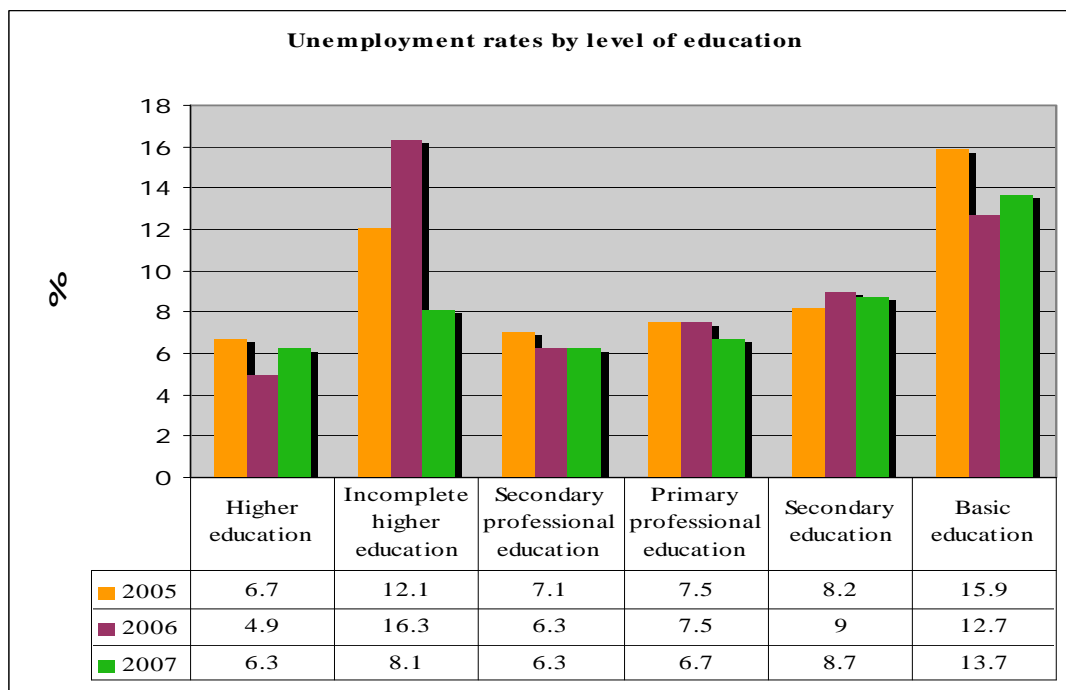
Figure 11. Employment rates by education level



Source: National Statistical Committee, *Employment and Unemployment, Results of the Integrated Household Survey 2007, Bishkek, 2008.*

The highest unemployment rates occur among the active population with low educational attainment (basic and primary) and with secondary (general) education.

Figure 12. Unemployment rates by education level



Source: National Statistical Committee, *Employment and Unemployment, Results of the Integrated Household Survey 2007, Bishkek, 2008.*

4.3 Labour supply at different education levels

Using a simple methodology proposed by William Bartlett,⁹ we compared the distribution of educational attainment across the employed and unemployed populations in Kyrgyzstan, using the same data sources. The rough indicator of an excess supply of persons from different education levels was calculated by subtracting the share of persons in employment in each education attainment category from the share of persons unemployed in the same category. Tables 13 and 14 show the distribution of the population aged over 15 years by educational attainment and the estimated excess supply in 2006 and in 2007 (positive figures indicate excess supply).

Table 13. Distribution of population aged over 15 years by educational attainment (shares - %) and estimated excess supply in 2006

2006	Shares (of population aged over 15 years)				
	In total population	Active population	Unemployed	Employed	Excess supply
Higher education	13.2	16.3	9.6	16.9	-7.3
Incomplete higher education	2.9	2.3	4.6	2.1	2.5
Secondary professional education	11.6	13.5	10.3	13.8	-3.5
Primary professional education	7.8	10.2	9.3	10.3	-1
Secondary education	43.7	48.3	52.8	47.9	4.9
Basic education	11.9	6.8	10.4	6.5	3.9
Primary basic / no education	8	2.4	2.7	2.4	0.3

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Employment and Unemployment, Results of the Integrated Household Survey 2007*, Bishkek, 2008. Calculations: author of the report.

⁹ Economic Restructuring, Job Creation and the Changing Demand for Skills in the Western Balkan Area, William Bartlett, 2007.

Table 14. Distribution of population aged over 15 years by educational attainment (shares (%)) and estimated excess supply in 2007

2007	Shares (of population aged over 15 years)				
	In total population	Active population	Unemployed	Employed	Excess supply
Higher education		17.3	13.4	17.7	-4.3
Incomplete higher education		2.4	2.4	2.4	0
Secondary professional education		13.5	10.4	13.7	-3.3
Primary professional education		9.7	8	9.9	-1.9
Secondary education		48.3	51.7	48	3.7
Basic education		6.3	10.6	5.9	4.7
Primary basic / no education			3.5	2.4	1.1

Source: National Statistical Committee, Employment and Unemployment, Results of the Integrated Household Survey 2007, Bishkek, 2008. Calculations: author.

Workers with higher education and secondary and initial VET attainment are in demand and supply is likely to grow further. Workers with secondary and basic education are clearly in excess supply in the current economic context. This large predominance of workers with general education not oriented to professional profiles may be one of the factors explaining the predominance of informal labour market activities, which usually do not require higher professional and technical competences and, even less so, certified qualifications.

4.4 Urban-rural skills distribution

Analysing the rural-urban distribution of the labour force by labour market status and educational attainment, the working age population with secondary education predominates in rural areas, at 49.2% of the total. This level of education is also largely predominant in the active population (55.7%) and the employed population (55.2%). Of the unemployed, 62.3% are also holders of secondary education diplomas.

In urban areas, the distribution of education levels by labour market status shows a much lower predominance of holders of secondary education diplomas (35.4% of the active population, 34.5% of the employed and 42.4% of the unemployed). In urban areas, holders of higher education represent 27.1% of the active population, 28.7% of the employed and only 13.9% of the unemployed.

In urban and rural areas, holders of initial VET diplomas perform similarly in the labour market, representing 8.5% of the total population aged over 15 years (7.4% in rural areas) and 11.1% of the active population (9.7% in rural areas). Initial VET diploma holders represent 11.2% of the employed and 10.6% of the unemployed (9.8% and 8.1%, respectively, in rural areas).

The VET II population represents 14.7% of the population aged over 15 years in urban areas (9.7% in rural areas) and a large share of the inactive population in urban areas (10.8%). The percentage of the VET II population amongst the unemployed is relatively high in urban areas, at 14.7%.

4.5 Youth unemployment

The entry of youth in active life is not easy, as indicated by the higher than average unemployment rates for younger age groups (Figure 13). However, Kyrgyzstan has better youth unemployment indicators than many other transition economies.

Figure 13. Youth unemployment rate*



*The unemployment rate is computed as the ratio between the numbers of unemployed in the active population (total, or within the same age group or within the same educational attainment level).

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Employment and Unemployment, Results of the Integrated Household Survey 2007*, Bishkek, 2008. Calculations: author.

The ratio of unemployment for the age group 15-19 years to average unemployment is 1.84 in Kyrgyzstan; in Azerbaijan and Georgia, these ratios are 2.35 and 2.09, respectively. The unemployment rate for the age group 20-29 years was 10.2% in 2007, against an average rate of 8.2%. In general, Kyrgyzstan has displayed reasonable unemployment rates over time—in the range of 8% to 8.3% for 2005-07.

Unemployment rates are more favourable in Kyrgyzstan, compared with the Caucasus countries, Moldova and the Western Balkans.

5. Policy and institutional analysis

This chapter addresses key VET policies in the context of an analysis of the policy and legal framework. The topics covered include the dilemmas posed by reform, quality in VET, the qualifications system, reforms and institutional capacity. The overall legal status of recruitment and career progression for VET teachers is not addressed in this report.

5.1 A VET policy crossroads

Kyrgyzstan is currently witnessing a vibrant debate on the role and relevance of VET in the education continuum and in overall socioeconomic development. TV programmes, donor events, employer satisfaction surveys and the emergence of new projects funded by different international partners all combine to give the external observer the impression that many new developments are taking place, both at the school and policy-making level.

Our main impression, based on documents and opinions, is that VET is at a crossroads and faces various dilemmas. Deciding a suitable direction and the right tradeoffs will require strategic judgement, but such decisions are featured by significant complexities under pressure of an economic, financial and social nature.

Another aspect of this crossroads relates to changing policies and approaches. Changes are happening with the qualifications system, with practices gradually diverging from the established legal basis, given the adoption of new qualifications, new designations of professions, new assessment and certification methods and new competence-based curricula. To understand the qualifications system at present, it is not enough to know regulations and classifiers of professions; it is also necessary to understand what is being piloted and practised in experts groups, schools and sector associations.

Finally, the crossroads becomes clearly visible when more conservative leaders confront changes and innovations with the question: but is this legal? In the same institution more flexible leaders reply that: the law allows all sound forms of innovation and new practices partnerships and organisation of training; what matters is creativity and initiative; and more innovative VET managers who want to develop new forms of relevant training are needed.

For many parents the trade-off is to pay for higher education that gives social status or to opt for a professional education that is not prestigious but may offer better chances in the labour market.

For a director of the State VET Agency these are daily concerns linked with negotiating and lobbying for sector interests at a government level and also with negotiations with the bigger donors whose projects and programmes can influence the VET system.

For a department head at the Ministry of Education and Science dealing with issues affecting the development of secondary professional education, the great challenge is to manage very scarce human resources and finance most of the system improvements by creatively deploying limited resources from private and public sources.

The challenges are different for directors of VET schools, as great variations in capacity, infrastructure and quality assurance tools have segmented the schools into (1) those that lag behind and face possible gradual disruption of public support within a scenario of preferential development of the stronger schools; (2) those that are managing to survive and may improve; and (3) those that have jumped forward and are considered models. The challenges thus vary across the network of VET schools. But variations in quality also exist within the same school, often built on the donor-supported introduction of oases of modern and well-equipped facilities for certain purposes—welding and the information and communications

technologies (ICT)—in schools that, in parallel, have old approaches and obsolete facilities for their main target groups: young students in mainstream VET programmes.

Divergent views separate representatives of the world of work from the above-mentioned leaders of the VET system, fuelled by the new rhetoric that employers should determine VET content, whereas employers are only rarely ready to cooperate effectively and in a sustained manner with initiatives to support policy makers and schools. The debate on the content of education vs labour market requirements has led some parties to advocate for shorter training courses focused on current employer requirements.

This represents one of the key dilemmas. Should initial VET further develop the option of integrated education and training¹⁰ programmes for youth, offering an opportunity for continuing studies? Should initial VET gradually disrupt this integrated option and focus on profession-technical training? Are the expected benefits of such an option commensurable with the pitfalls linked with possible dead-ends for students admitted after basic education? How to maintain an integrated programme of secondary and vocational education with enhanced quality in terms of better responsiveness to the requirements of employers, while ensuring sufficient general knowledge and basic social skills to students?

Innovation in VET schools is taking place with greater ease on what we call here the margins of the system, i.e. in non-standard adult training programmes of various categories, as this part of the VET school portfolio is less (or not at all) subject to standards imposed by the education legislation and so can experiment with new curricula, focus on integration with programmes for livelihood development and test various innovations. The dilemma of VET managers is how to fertilise standard programmes with these innovations. For now the reply usually is that it is not really possible as schools are bound by the standards. This reaction shows that objective disincentives to innovation exist, but also shows that VET school managers are often not motivated to try.

International donors hesitate between directing their relatively short-term projects to assisting leading sector organisations and assisting the more manoeuvrable and innovative partners, i.e. the schools. Donors direct their interventions to varied areas and themes, but very few work hands-on to strengthen analytical, planning and evaluation capacities of the leading state agencies and bodies. Donors tend to work directly with VET schools, where they implement various innovations and construct new curricula, train specific social groups, strengthen capacity of VET schools staff and, in certain cases, leave behind costly model modern VET centres whose sustainability becomes an additional concern for the public administration.

So, what is missing in this dynamic context? Each stakeholder defends a different agenda.

- Sector leaders call for a reasonable scale of public funding, more and better social partnerships and contribution from employers.
- Employers want well-trained staff to start operations immediately almost without induction.
- Students need warm premises, with modern equipment, a sound curriculum and a job or to the opportunity to enter university.
- Teachers call for decent remuneration and better teaching conditions, while school managers require more adequate infrastructure for training and greater autonomy in management.
- Local government leaders want to satisfaction for their constituents, appropriate training for local farmers and small businesses to raise productivity, household earnings and wealth.

In our view, however, other elements are missing, namely, communication and linking elements for dissemination, information, management, dialogue and analysis.

¹⁰ 'Integrated' as used in this report refers to the joint curriculum that combines general education (two years) with professional education (one year), totalling three years. The level of actual integration is questionable, as this curriculum is more a parallel (concomitant) sequence of two separated curricula.

According to a young national specialist, there are too many new ideas and new developments going on in VET in Kyrgyzstan. What is needed is evaluation, is consolidation and analysis of the bottom line. Otherwise all efforts to innovate are wasted, as they do not really serve to develop the system.

We propose further action lines that can add value to the already existing assets of the VET system and contribute to eliminating waste and inefficiency, based on communication elements as follows.

- A functioning platform where good practices, innovations, ideas, resources and methods are shared and analysed, and contribute to the development of all schools and of the system. The transition years have witnessed the development of substantial and appropriate innovation in VET, fuelled by international partnerships, amongst other factors. But a substantial share of these innovations are lost for the system, as they are not shared, not disseminated and often also not endorsed by the bodies that retain approval rights over curricula, text books, methods, etc. In a context of scarce resources and an urgent need to improve the system and its building blocks, such continued waste is simply not affordable.
- A structured observatory involving state and private players. Based on inter-sectoral logic, it should communicate with the many donors that shape most of the innovations in VET through a council with an observatory and analytical function that is capable of evaluating and reviewing policies and programmes.
- A strong VET information, guidance and communication tool for all users. Based on new technologies, but also adapted to local rural contexts and to regions and groups deprived of modern communications, this tool—a wide portal into VET—would inform potential students and learners, parents, teachers, school managers and employers about the strengths and weaknesses of the system, the performance of VET schools against clear indicators, the various study pathways and training courses on offer and professional profile and curriculum information for student guidance.
- A clear recognition that VET is one, even if diversified in forms of training (formal, non-formal), institutional setting (initial, secondary) and reporting hierarchy. The separating factor is not the substance but the form; and this can be solved by adopting a common agreement on areas of qualification, levels of qualification, assessment rules, quality assurance tools and flexible links with the education continuum. This is the substance that forms the service that is due to the population and the economy. Students do not care if their VET school responds to the Ministry of Education and Science or to the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and employers do not want to know whether the curriculum has 20 or 30 subjects. They all care, however, about the final outcome of the youngster's effort and the parent's investment and about the ability, autonomy, responsibility and reliability demonstrated at work.

Much is being done, written, piloted and learned in VET. But how can all these efforts and inputs lead to convincing results and added value? Are policies coherent and coherently implemented? What other ingredients are needed? Is VET policy addressing the issues of equity, access, linked education pathways, quality, credibility for the labour market and internal efficiency? Do the objectives set in the sector strategy documents address the real problems? Is the role of VET duly discussed and defined/redefined in its various social, economic and technological aspects?

5.2 Policy framework

Like other CIS countries, Kyrgyzstan cares for laws and regulations. Although an excellent premise for sustained development and rule of law, sometimes this is used as justification for refraining from solutions and decisions. VET schools transformed into centres for professional development? Sounds good—but since the law does not foresee that kind of entity (centre), it is not possible, said a leading policy-maker.

Discussions with leading public institutions on barriers to innovation and legal constraints on flexibility in VET usually reveal the openness of policy makers to school initiatives and new solutions. According to the

official vision, the law permits school initiatives as better responding to the needs of their regions and local enterprises, by engaging in new types of training activities and participating in partnerships for training and production-training. Hence, policy and decision makers at the macro-level believe that all key premises for micro-level (school) initiatives are possible and admissible by law. The other half of the premise for school initiatives and innovations is not necessarily available however, namely capacity. This wide gap between what is possible by law and the effective capacity (human, financial, institutional) of the players at the micro-level represents a permanent source of tension. It also shows the narrow understanding of the role of policy making, reduced to the enactment of legal texts and regulations, and largely ignoring the role of the public service in strengthening capacity, minimising waste and supporting an efficient use of system knowledge.

The policy framework for the VET sector is based on a number of legal acts and strategic documents (described below). The list is not exhaustive, in particular in what concerns secondary professional education.

An Initial VET Law was approved in 1999 and amended in 2008 to reflect adjustments in a number of areas: definition of initial vocational education, citizen rights to VET guaranteed by the state, promoters and shareholders of VET schools, qualification documents, types of VET schools, licensing and accreditation of VET schools, VET teachers and the financing of VET schools. The Initial VET Law refers to initial vocational education, whereas the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education charter of August 2008 refers to professional-technical education. The latter might express a broader concept of VET.

The Initial VET Law defines initial vocational education as the enhancement of qualifications and the preparation and retraining of qualified labour workers/employees on the basis of a basic and general education. When necessary, training for a professional qualification is also organised for people without basic education. Access to initial VET is guaranteed to all citizens by the provision of (partial or total) public funding for VET schools, scholarships and material support to students, assistance with the organisation of systematic training in enterprises and with the establishment and operation of private VET schools. Citizens are entitled to one initial VET qualification funded from the public budget. This position of initial VET as a public service reflects its social inclusion function, which goes beyond the function of the formation of a qualified labour force.

According to discussions with leading staff at the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, the policy priority currently is not only to train qualified workers/employees, but to train them effectively for employment. This review of the VET policy mission implies several measures, mostly linked with involving relevant stakeholders (social partners, experts, users) in various stages of the VET cycle, as well as enhancing access by students to guidance and counselling. The Initial VET Law and the new strategy documents issued in 2008 and 2009 do not explicitly develop the various dimensions of guidance and information for students. Only the State Migration and Employment Committee has included in its policy documents explicit measures and programmes for guidance and counselling for various groups of users, including for secondary education students. The main provider of these services is the Information and Consulting Centre in Bishkek and outreach is basically limited to Bishkek.

To ensure that VET capacity is maintained and strengthened, the Initial VET Law stipulates that: (1) public VET schools cannot be privatised or used for purposes other than VET; (2) private promoters/investors/donors may establish private VET schools, provided they comply with state standards for VET; and (3) public funding for training in non-public VET schools from local resources is possible if there is a respective state order.

Public VET schools, which have a common standard regulation and charter, are funded from the public budget. They are also entitled to offer paid services to the market and retain the property over these extra-budgetary revenues and other assets and intellectual rights formed as a result of their activity.

As an illustrative example, the Tokmok Pedagogical-Industrial College informed our mission on the scale of extra-budgetary revenues from training and other services. The amounts involved varied from 600,000 to 900,000 KGS (projected) per year in the period 2007 to 2009. VET schools use these revenues to top up teacher salaries, finance minimal repair works and purchase equipment. Complementary remuneration and

prizes to outstanding teachers who participate in research activities and innovation represent a major use of these extra-budgetary revenues, enabling these colleges to retain a good teaching community. This example is not representative for the whole network of VET schools, as many remain exclusively dependent on public financing.

VET I governance is based on the combination of a central sectoral policy and administration authority (the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education) with three regional directorates¹¹ in charge of methodological support to VET schools and updating regional skill and labour market needs. Public financing of VET schools is centralised, a trend that has been reinforced in recent years.

Social partnership is also mentioned in Article 18 of the Initial VET Law, concerning tripartite coordinating commissions for VET. These commissions, which should be established at all levels—central, regional, city and local—operate on a voluntary (unpaid) basis and are expected to elaborate recommendations and proposals for public VET policy, the involvement of employers in VET and the introduction of modern and effective training approaches and methods. These coordinating commissions share a standard type of regulation approved by the government. This explicit mention of a structured social partnership model in the Initial VET Law is highly positive and, if implemented, could bring considerable benefits for coordinated development of the system at various levels and for duly considering labour market needs in their real territorial dimension. However, during the mission we had no contact or information regarding such commissions and never saw any signs of their operations. What we repeatedly heard from State Agency for Professional-Technical Education leadership, from VET schools and from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry were references to the poor links between VET and employers. Currently the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education is launching what they call VET regional platforms, aimed at coordinating the efforts of donors and social partners interested in VET development.

A) General laws:

- Education Law No. 92 of 30 April 2003
- Initial VET Law No. 53 approved in 1999 and amended on 5 April 2008.

B) Strategic programmes and action plans:

- Strategic Programme for VET Development to 2011
- Action plan for the Strategic Programme for VET Development to 2011
- Strategy for VET Consolidation and Modernisation and Action Plan 2009-2011 (Asian Development Bank project).

C) Establishment, mandate and functioning of leading sectoral bodies:

- Regulation governing the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, approved by Government Decree No. 484, of 28 August 2008
- Structure of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, approved by Prime-Ministerial Order No. 306, of 8 August 2008.

D) Elements of quality assurance in VET:

- Regulation governing Internal Control of Initial VET Institutions
- Regulation governing Accreditation of Initial VET Schools, approved by Government Decree No. 245, of 25 April 2003, amended by Government Order No. 508, of 8 July 2004

¹¹ Southern Directorate (Osh, Batken, Jalalabad), Northern Directorate (Naryn, Issyk-Kul), and Bishkek Directorate. The VET schools of Chui and Talas report to the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education headquarters. Source: Management scheme of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, approved 28 August 2008 by decree of GoK, Nr 484.

- Regulation governing Accreditation of General Education Teachers and Managers, registered with the Ministry of Justice, No. 17-08, 14 March 2008
- Regulation governing the Licensing of Selected Types of Entrepreneurial Activities, approved by Government Decree No. 260, of 31 March 2001.

E) Qualifications framework:

- Standard Learning Duration for Secondary Professional Education Professions, approved by Government Decree No. 702, of 5 November 2003
- List of Initial VET Professions and Specialisations
- Unified Tariff-Qualification System and List of Professions and Grades.

F) Legislative-regulatory employment framework:

- Employment Promotion Law
- National Employment Policy to 2010
- Regulation governing Professional Training Organisation for Unemployed Citizens
- Regulation governing the Information and Counselling Centre
- Regulation governing the Youth Labour Exchange.

G) Agreements:

- Social partnership agreements with certain VET schools (textiles, construction)
- Agreement between the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and the State Migration and Employment Committee on training for unemployed.

5.2.1 Teachers

The vocational education teaching career faces similar challenges as elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan: aging staff, poor salaries and motivation and difficulties with recruiting quality teachers and instructors.

The ratio of average wages for education employees to average wages overall is around 0.5 in secondary education, 1.1 in higher education and 0.7 in adult training, although data for the period 2004-06 show a tendency to declining ratios.¹²

The organisation of learning processes in VET I schools differs compared with secondary professional education. The former includes learning in workshops and laboratories, whereas the latter tends to be more academic, with less time spent in practical learning environments. Tables 15 and 16 reveal that the share of teaching staff with higher education is much lower in VET I than in VET II schools. Thus, for instance, only half of the chief masters have higher education, a roughly similar figure for the category of educators. Amongst training masters there has been a significant increase in the number of holders of higher education in recent years, with their share doubling in the period 2002-06 (40% in 2006). The category of managers and teachers displays a high share of holders of higher education, at 80% in 2006.

¹² National Statistical Committee, Education and Science in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2008. p. 23.

Table 15. VET I administrative and teaching staff

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total	3,036	3,101	3,228	3,228	3,281
Directors and deputy directors	334	330	332	332	342
Chief masters	83	87	89	89	91
Training masters	1,435	1,460	1,519	1,519	1,512
Educators	90	91	90	90	93
Managers / teachers	1,094	1,133	1,198	1,198	1,243
Of which: with higher education	859	912	956	956	989

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, p. 108.

Surprisingly, not all VET I schools have a chief master and an educator: according to the data, this is the case in 20 such schools (18% of total). Interestingly, in VET I schools, male staff predominate, unlike in other education sub-sectors.

The Tokmok Pedagogical-Industrial College is the main pre-service teacher-training institute serving VET I. The college has the statute of a VET II institution and reports both to the Ministry of Education and Science and the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education. The college has relatively good and well-maintained academic and practical learning premises and equipment and maintains various initiatives to develop pedagogic knowledge and innovation. This college benefited from long-term cooperation with German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and maintained most of the assets and knowledge basis of that experience, e.g. a modular curriculum. One of the key issues in teachers-training policy in Kyrgyzstan is effectiveness: how to ensure that public spending on teacher training benefits schools. To ensure that the majority of graduate teachers teach in their communities, Tokmok Pedagogical-Industrial College has adopted the following approach: admit student teachers from various regions/villages and motivate them to return to their respective origins to teach. According to the director, this approach is yielding positive results, even if 100% of graduates do not embrace the teaching profession. It is much easier to convince a student from Jalalabad or Narin to return to his/her village or city to teach than to persuade him/her to be geographically mobile in a career that is not financially rewarding and may not compensate the costs of mobility.

VET I schools have the possibility of paying more to certain teachers with special profiles, as these schools manage their extra-budgetary revenues with a certain degree of management autonomy. Directors tend to consider the limits of this financial management autonomy to be restrictive, but these schools are in a much better position than general education schools, wholly confined to budgetary financing and some resources from community participation. High salaries (top-ups) are paid to the best qualified teachers, as otherwise they will not be retained and, without them, private students and enterprises will not trust the quality of training and modern workshops will be idle, said the director of a VET I school in Jalalabad, in which an international donor recently established modern welding workshops and ICT training facilities.

In the period 2006-08, various in-service teachers training activities were organised, but the coverage remains low; the total number of beneficiaries was only 192 and 104 in 2006 and 2007, respectively, although in 2008 the figure almost doubled to 273 persons. The majority of staff trained in 2008 were educators, managers and particularly instructors in the areas of construction, farming and ICT.

Table 16. VET II teaching staff

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Total	3,714	3,019	2,984	3,273	3,680	3,410
With higher education	3,499	2,800	2,755	3,038	3,502	3,253
Of which:						
Full-time	2,782	2,250	2,172	2,465	2,672	2,426
Full-time with higher education	2,643	2,096	2,008	2,301	2,550	2,311
Part-time and combining jobs	932	769	812	808	1,008	984

Source: National Statistical Committee, *Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, p. 115.

The number of teachers decreased by 9% in 2007/08 in comparison with 2002/03. But this observation is irrelevant given the volatility over the whole period, with large falls in 2003/04 and 2004/05. This occurred against a background of rapidly growing enrolment, hence the student-teacher ratio almost doubled in 2007/08 (12.7) compared with 2002/03 (7). The share of full-time teachers was 71% in 2007/08, slightly down (by four percentage points) from the figure for 2002/03. This may indicate a trend towards greater flexibility in contractual arrangements and increased teachers mobility. Financial data from the Ministry of Education and Science show a trend towards savings in the wage bill of teachers in VET II, as projected for 2009 and compared with 2008. Over 95% of all teachers in VET II have higher education, which indicates substantial available potential.

Teacher assessment

Two different regulations define the framework for teacher assessment:

- Regulation governing Accreditation of General Education Teachers and Managers (2008)
- Regulation governing Internal Control of Initial VET Institutions (undated).

The Regulation governing Internal Control of Initial VET Institutions exclusively refers (in Article 1.1 and 1.2) to the performance and skills of teachers of various categories and spheres of activity (teachers and instructors). Internal control is defined as purposeful, systematic and objective control of the work of teachers and one of the forms of leadership of the teaching community. The main objectives of internal control are further development of the teaching-educational process, corrective measures, support to teacher capacity building, all aimed at raising the quality of training and education of students in initial VET. Internal control is exercised by the school director, assisted by deputies in charge of teaching and methods, and covers education and social work, professional training and economic activity and the leading master. Internal control can be organised as deep and comprehensive analysis of the teaching process, thematic analysis of a specific subject or issue, analysis of the work of individual teachers or instructors, analysis of the work of all teachers of a certain subject or as a study of the work of all teachers dealing with one student group. The main recommended methods are visits to classes, interviews and briefings with teachers, verification of the quality and condition of teaching and learning materials and plans and direct assessment of student knowledge in the classroom. Observations are reported in a diary kept for the purposes of internal control by school management and shared with the teacher during the control period. This diary summarises recommendations and corrective measures. Besides internal control, teachers are also subject to attestation.

5.2.2 Quality assurance

Public and private VET schools are subject to common state standards, licensing and attestation/accreditation. Licensing enables schools to exercise educational activities, whereas attestation reviews education programmes and their compliance with state educational standards, allowing the accredited school to award state-recognised diplomas.

Article 19 of the VET law is dedicated to state control over the quality of initial VET. The objective of this state control is to raise the quality of the qualification (preparation) of VET graduates, ensure rational use of budget resources in the system of public VET schools and guarantee compliance with state standards for initial VET.

The central body in charge of administration of the VET system (the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education since 2007) exercises VET quality control. The same body controls actual compliance with the conditions stipulated in the license, which may be withdrawn in the event of breach by the Inspectorate for Licensing and Accreditation attached to the Ministry of Education and Science in accordance with the legislation on licensing (Chapter 25, amended in 2004 and 2007).

Licensing of initial VET schools is the prerogative of the Inspectorate for Licensing and Accreditation, as is licensing for any other educational establishments stipulated by the law.¹³ Three elements are essential in the licensing process: (1) infrastructure and equipment; (2) teachers; and (3) materials (textbooks, methodological material, manuals).

Licenses state the areas of study in which the VET school may operate and deliver state diplomas and certificates. The licensed school is obliged to act within the terms of the license, as far as education and training offer as well as maximum number of students are concerned.

The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education has a Department of Inspection and Accreditation with five staff exercising control functions and school accreditation processes. The latter is a relatively new concept, introduced in the Initial VET Law in 2008, although the 2004 regulation on attestation of initial VET schools already referred to accreditation as the final output (award) of the attestation process.

According to this regulation of 2004, initial VET schools are to undergo attestation every five years, and newly established schools in the year after the first graduation. Attestation, defined as state control over the effectiveness of VET school activities, is based on a comparison with requirements (state standards) of the results of the activities of the VET school undergoing attestation. Hence, the benchmarks are the state standards for initial VET. Besides control, comparison with standards and review of the school learning conditions, attestation aims at helping the school correct shortcomings and supports creative initiatives. Finally, attestation protects students of all social and age categories from educational services of poor quality. The attestation process is requested by the interested school and covers every single area of study (professions). The report of the attestation commission contains details on the various findings, opinions and recommendations for improvement. This report is disseminated to all the staff of the school. A positive outcome is the basis for awarding accreditation to the VET school, a decision taken at a higher level by the collegial body of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education. In case of failure, a second application is admitted.

Is accreditation important and necessary? The accreditation document specifies the statute of the VET school (*lizeum*, school) and offers a number of benefits such as: (1) the right to deliver initial VET diplomas recognised by the state; (2) curricular autonomy for the accredited school; (3) career progression for the staff (higher categories); and (4) preferential participation in state and international programmes. In many countries accreditation entitles private VET schools to receive public financing and thus largely determine their competitive position in the market. In Kyrgyzstan, public financing goes mainly (or totally) to public VET schools. In fact, statistics do not mention private initial VET schools at all, even though a number of community or other learning centres offer courses that can be categorised as initial VET programmes.

¹³ Only public pre-schools and public general (basic and secondary) education schools are exempt from licensing.

The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education's Department of Inspection and Accreditation performs random controls of admissions and attendance. This kind of control is done in combination with thematic or other verification visits to VET schools, focusing on the issue of student performance. Data on admissions is collected in July-September and consolidated in October for statistical reporting.

In secondary VET, both licensing and attestation (accreditation) are performed by the Inspectorate for Licensing and Accreditation of the Ministry of Education and Science once every five years. Accredited colleges are entitled to deliver diplomas recognised by the state.

The Inspectorate for Licensing and Accreditation attached to the Ministry of Education and Science recognises weakness in the attestation process and a ministry representative has expressed the hope that the Ministry of Education and Science is now open to preparing for the introduction of *independent* accreditation. The Ministry of Education and Science is cooperating in this area—certification for VET—with international organisations such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and GTZ. The introduction of autonomous accreditation would then separate licensing (a state function) from accreditation.

The Education Law recognises the financial management autonomy of educational institutions, namely of professional education programmes. Thus, VET schools are allowed to offer paid services to the market and to manage these revenues in the interest of the development of the school. Revenues from the rent of school premises are not transferred to the state budget but are used by the school for its regular activities. Secondary VET schools decide the direction of spending of all kinds of resources (budget and earnings from services to the market), in coordination with the school boards. Purchases of equipment and spending on maintenance are not subject to ceilings other than the existing resources. However, revenues and expenditure must conform with the approved yearly school budget and plan.

The relevant state bodies exercise control over financial management.

Implementation of such a regulatory framework may represent a burden for VET schools, and sometimes fail to achieve the goal of quality and quality assurance.

In fact VET schools do not use a system of performance indicators, but they do have objectives, and are rewarded for performance against these objectives, usually related to enrolment figures. Self-assessment is also not applied, but VET schools do have a regulation regarding internal control. This regulation is also used for external control. The concept and practice of school evaluation, with analysis and dissemination of synthetic results, are yet to be developed.

Initial VET schools are rewarded for good performance in the following cases: (1) results of teaching-educational activity in the year (based on results in terms of admissions, completion, dropouts); and (2) results of teaching-productive activities (fulfilment of learning-production goals, maintenance of productive assets such as livestock in rural schools, extra-budgetary revenues from training for unemployed and private students). The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education rewards directors and accountants, and schools reward the staff.

5.2.3 Curricula

State standards for initial VET include:

- general requirements for the main initial vocational education programmes;
- minimal content requirements for these programmes, implementation conditions, final assessment of students and their level of qualification (preparation);
- duration of learning;
- maximal workload (hours of study).

The Initial VET Law stipulates four main VET formats that range from integrated VET on the basis of basic education (three years minimum) to courses for professional training lasting less than a year. The law recognises the right to shorten training duration whenever a student is able to acquire the professional skills more rapidly. Interestingly the law allows programmes geared towards partial qualifications. Students may work on the basis of the partial qualification, and add to it with new levels based on widening range of knowledge and skills.

Curriculum and education programmes in initial VET are developed in a centralised manner by the Science and Methods Department of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education. However the Ministry of Education and Science standards for the secondary education component of the curriculum are compulsory for all integrated courses.

Initial VET has innovated in curricula for adult training, i.e. short-term courses where the state standards have lesser application, hence, where there is greater room for change. To date, the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education has developed new curricula for 17 professional areas adapted to short-term training (2-3 months) without a general education component. These programmes are built on a modular approach. In addition, in 2008-09 the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education strengthened cooperation with the ILO and is studying the advantages of the ILO modules of skills for employability, already prepared for 25 professional profiles. Other international organisations that have been involved in the development of modular training and building capacity of national staff for many years seem ready to adapt the ILO approach.

The introduction of modular training has specific requirements for teacher skills and organisation of the learning processes; according to the Science and Methods Department, only a few VET schools are prepared to adopt modular training.

The quality of textbooks is an issue, but their availability is perhaps a more pressing problem. The same Science and Methods Department reports that textbook coverage is not satisfactory, at only 32% for the professional cycle and 60% for the general education cycle (Ministry of Education and Science standards). According to an official from this department, most of the textbooks are old, so they buy new ones where possible, with the expectation of assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) project.

One reiterated observation during the mission concerned the availability of books in schools. Libraries do exist, but in most cases they are kept closed and students are certainly not encouraged to enter and look around or intensively use the libraries. Electronic libraries are very rare. A teacher of literature in a VET school reported that her unique successful method to reinforce student contact with literature was through videos and films that she showed in the classroom. Their library had a relatively good stock of Russian literature but was kept closed during the working hours of the school.

In secondary VET, the development and management of curricula and textbooks are functions of the colleges. Based on general parameters given by the Ministry of Education and Science regarding key aspects such as number of study hours, colleges designated as profile colleges develop curricula and education plans. These profile colleges play a role of model or resource college in specific areas: architecture, agriculture, humanities and others. Ministry of Education and Science analyses and approves submitted curricula, which can then be disseminated to other colleges. Colleges and teams of teachers may initiate the development of new textbooks, while the Ministry of Education and Science intervenes in the final stages of review and approval and can award the Ministry of Education and Science brand to the best products.

5.2.4 The qualifications system

Considerable debate, led by expert groups supported by international specialist organisations, is taking place in respect to qualifications. The ETF¹⁴ has played a key role in this area of VET policy, having started in the early 2000s with new conceptual and technical work on occupational standards, continued since

¹⁴ www.etf.europa.eu

2004 with a specific project dedicated to support national debate, capacity and methods on a national qualifications framework (NQF). The NQF has contributed to fostering genuine employer involvement in the debate and the building of national capacity on such subjects, as the European qualifications framework (EQF), learning outcomes and functional map and occupational profiles design within particular sectors. Tourism was selected as a pilot sector and benefited from both the international expertise deployed to assist in developing national capacity and the dynamics created in the national expert group. In 2009 these contributions are beginning to influence reforms in national/sectoral policy for qualifications. To start, the State Committee for Tourism stated, in its development programme, a priority related to preparing a sectoral qualifications framework. Amendments to the Education Law are in preparation, aimed at reflecting the new paradigms on qualifications and occupational standards. Finally, a special regulation on occupational standards for the tourism sector is in discussion by the government.

Other parallel developments are contributing to reinforcing the need for reforms in the qualifications system and its relationship with sectoral qualifications and learning outcomes. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education has approved a Strategic Programme for VET Development (2008-11), in which the first measure planned under the first priority (modernisation and consolidation) is the introduction of new approaches to training that satisfy the requirements of the NQF. The newly approved strategy of the large ADB project assisting the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education also dedicates a line of action to developing professional standards of competence for the areas that will be supported by the project.

However, all these approaches and standards are still in the future. Education and training for now continue with the delivery of competences based on curricula of more or less relevance to modern enterprises, but not based on assessment by independent entities and connected to a framework of qualifications.

At present the VET qualifications system is based on the following:

- a general classifier of professions for workers and employees and tariff categories (two volumes) covering all three levels of professional education; this document, which provides the basis for the list of professions in initial VET, has a very restricted and narrow definition of professions;
- a general classifier of occupations (1998);
- a list of professions for initial VET (approved in 2003, published in 2006);
- standard duration of secondary VET areas of study (professions) (2003);
- 17 occupational standards which have been approved in initial VET along with modules and training standards (for short-term training) (2008).

The list of initial VET professions is structured according to 22 sectors, divided into groups of professions and specialisations.

The standards for areas of study (professions) for secondary VET include 28 groups, some of which are common with initial VET areas (construction, mining, metallurgy). However, the qualification awarded by secondary VET is that of 'technical specialist', whereas the previous system of categories subsists in initial VET, namely, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, most frequently awarded in initial VET programmes. The former are entitled to supervise and manage at the intermediate level, whereas the latter are conceived as workers (operators).

One of problems of these lists of professions for VET is the fact they are not updated and reviewed as frequently as necessary and so contain many designations of professions that are outdated in labour relations, enterprises and the rural economy. The narrow specification of professions and specialisations in certain sectors represents another problem for VET programmes.

5.3 Variability in VET system quality

Interaction with donors and new methods and training programmes deriving from international experiences are one of the main sources of change in VET schools. These changes concern the soft and hard learning environments: curricula, teaching methodologies, textbooks, school management and strategic thinking and infrastructure and equipment.

The fact that such projects and programmes are piloted in selected VET schools, or in selected regions/sectors, and run in parallel with mainstream standard VET programmes leads to the creation of islands that are not connected through bridges to the remaining islands and to mainland, because public funding cannot afford dissemination of similar infrastructure across the network of VET schools. Soft innovations—particularly curricula and textbooks—are often accepted, but not officially approved, and are not susceptible to being combined with standard curricula for integrated VET programmes, for instance.

This is a serious source of variation in the quality of VET. The positive effect of this variation is the influence and the precedent of the good practice example. A less positive effect is rather associated with variations in learning outcomes and the possible segmentation of schools without a chance to benefit from this fertilisation.

5.4 Reforms

At present a strategic reform programme for 2008-11 for initial VET is being implemented that was approved in 2008 as an overarching sector development document. An action plan supports this programme, but its implementation depends on the availability of financial and technical resources that are promised in the framework of the ADB VET project.

The strategy for consolidation and modernisation of the VET system in Kyrgyzstan (2009-11) was developed by international experts and supports the ADB project. Both strategies share a number of objectives and activities. Table 17 schematically compares the strategic lines of both strategic documents.

Table 17. Strategic objectives of the existing strategy papers

	State Agency for Professional-Technical Education strategy (overarching, national)	ADB project strategy
1	Modernisation and consolidation of the VET system	Optimising the network of VET schools
2	Formation of efficient VET financing system, economic relations	Bringing training quality in line with professional competence requirements
3	Staff development	Raising economic independence of VET schools
4	Development of social and public-private partnerships	Promoting participation of private organisations in implementing VET programmes
5	Social guarantees and modernisation of VET content (competence-based learning)	Modernising organisational structure management structure
6		Setting up multi-level system of partnership
7		Comprehensive plan for staff development for VET system (managers, teachers)

Sources: *Strategic Programme for VET Development to 2011, unpublished. Strategy for VET Consolidation and Modernisation 2009-2011, Bishkek 2009, unpublished.*

None of the strategies proposes one very important element: the establishment of a monitoring system based on agreed indicators at various levels and a statistical system able to provide analyses and reports on VET sector performance. The strategies are not explicit as to the strategy review process, but we assume that the ADB project has clear provisions regarding steering and monitoring of the project.

A critical element in the ADB project strategy is optimisation of the network of VET schools. The aim is to develop a system with fewer but more effective and efficient schools capable of being multi-profile and multi-level providers. The implementation approach is still under discussion, as the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education is careful about the possible negative effects of a large reduction of the number of VET schools for rural and distant regions; the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education is likewise conscious of the risks linked with the resistance that these measures may prompt among the VET community. Finally, as another critical moment in the implementation path of these measures, the legal basis will require considerable amendments.

The ADB grant is worth 10 million USD, to be disbursed up to end of 2011 and the contribution of the government amounts to 3 million USD; 70% of ADB funds are planned for infrastructure and equipment, 5% for textbooks and the remainder for staff training and technical assistance.

The project has basically 2.5 years to implement its complex action plan—another aspect presupposing that implementation and institutional capacity are appropriate.

The modernisation of secondary VET planned in the draft concept shared with the author targets a wide range of objectives, namely:

- improved legal basis;
- structural reform of secondary VET (transparency of licensing and accreditation, part self-financing of colleges, systematic staff development, decentralisation of certain functions to the local level);
- reform of framework governing the teaching profession, including wages policy;
- improved quality and competitiveness of secondary VET graduates;
- development of scientific research in secondary VET (experiments, seminars and conferences, support to researchers);
- reformed financing system;
- development of adapted VET system in the regions, particularly in rural areas.

As mentioned elsewhere, this programme is not supported yet by a financial package. The available documents do not propose any performance indicators in terms of a sector monitoring system, missing in both strategies.

5.5 Institutional capacity and mandates

The formation of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education in early 2007 added significant institutional capacity and autonomy to ensure new dynamism in the sector of initial professional education. The staff of the former department under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection transferred to the new agency. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education's charter and new functional structure were only approved in August 2008, leaving activities and decision-making capacity somehow uncertain for over 18 months.

The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education's charter defines its purposes as follows: implementation of the unified policy to supply the labour market with a qualified labour force, based on the initial VET standards and satisfaction of the needs of society in professional training, based on the interest

and potentialities of citizens. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education is entrusted with a wide range of functions: (1) implementation of sector policy; (2) provision of training services; c) regulatory functions; (3) coordination, control and monitoring of programme implementation; and (4) assistance and support to the development of sector staff, and information for the mass media. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education is responsible for and implements all components of the policy cycle, designing measures for improvement of VET in line with labour market needs, implementing reforms on the basis of strategic programmes, ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in VET, consolidating the regulatory-legal framework, ensuring effective use of resources allocated to VET schools, implementing measures to guarantee access to VET and developing the information basis for VET.

The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education currently has a statute corresponding to the ministerial level, reports to Prime Minister, has its own budget and has 56 staff members, including directors and the collegial body (Annex 1 shows functional structure and staffing by department). In general terms, the direct management responsibility of each director can be agglomerated as follows: (1) teaching, education and methods under the deputy director; (2) organisation, information, analysis, international relations and social partnership under the state secretary; and (3) budget, accounting and inspection under the director.

Despite this institutional capacity, the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education recognises considerable capacity building needs, namely in the monitoring and analytical areas and in adult training methods, amongst others. Another area where improvements are needed is in-service teacher training and overall staff development. A special centre for staff training is operational, but its overall capacity and awareness of modern technologies and approaches is considered weak.

The Department of Secondary and Higher Professional Education of the Ministry of Education and Science dedicates four staff members, including the corresponding director, to all matters related to secondary professional education. The department is not in charge of licensing and attestation processes, which are managed and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science's Inspectorate for Licensing and Accreditation. In this context of tight human and technical resources, a number of key functions are shifted to the schools, namely, curriculum and education programmes and even textbooks.

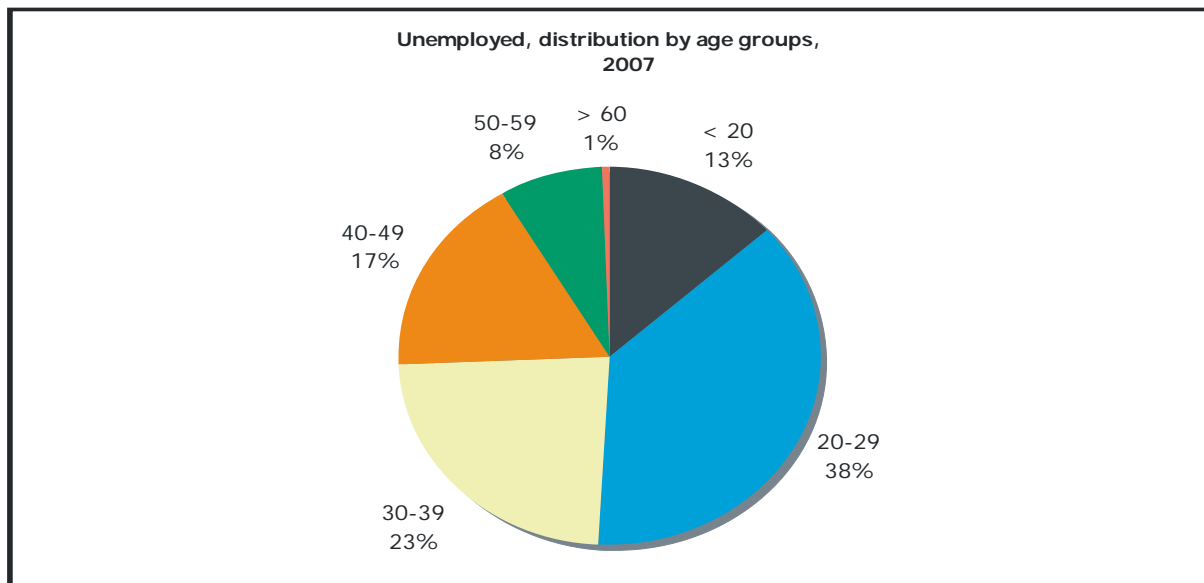
6. Adult education and training

6.1 Challenges

A growing population and share of young adults with higher education, along with the emerging phenomenon of vulnerable young people dropping out of education will mark education (and VET) choices and employment policies in the near future. Access to training of that layer of population with poor or no qualifications will require no less attention and, likewise, the quality of higher education of the other share of the working age population. Whereas the existence of a population with higher education may not affect the pace of economic growth in a decisive manner, the persistence of a substantial layer of unskilled working age population is likely to hamper economic growth, as adaptation to new technologies is surely much slower or unaffordable for the poorly skilled.

Another challenge is certainly set by the transition into the labour market of young entrants. Younger age groups (15-29 years) have the largest unemployment rates (Figure 14). This age bracket represents only 37% of the active population but over half of the unemployed—a clear indicator of the relative inefficiency of the transition into active life of the thousands of young job seekers, despite the fact that the majority possesses secondary and tertiary education. Longer transitions to work raise the risk of skills and productivity losses among young job seekers, particularly when the duration of the period of settling into work is longer than required by what is known as wait unemployment (when young people wait out the best job offer).

Figure 14. Unemployment distribution by age group 2007



Source: National Statistical Committee, Employment and Unemployment, 2008.

The age groups at the top of the population pyramid will increasingly become a target group for education and training policies, as changes in technology and work organisation will continue to widen and deepen; entrepreneurship will become a needed feature of all life projects in the various populations: urban and rural areas, young and mature population groups, technical-industrial and service-oriented sectors. Permanent access to new skills, information and new qualifications will become a new area in education and training policies which, more than ever, ought to go hand-in-hand with the relevant policies: economic and business development, rural and local development and innovation and investment.

In the two sub-systems concentrating the majority of future entrants in the labour force, namely secondary VET and higher education, the technical study areas have been gradually losing share of total students.

This will affect the skills mix of the labour force, in which a growing imbalance in favour of areas such as law, management, health and pedagogy will produce a constraint on retraining and even re-qualification of some of these graduates sooner or later, given that the economy will not offer matching jobs.

Mobility will become another crucial area of responsibility for education and training policies. Lifelong transitions in labour market status and mobility across jobs and sectors will determine many life projects. Kyrgyzstan has witnessed great job mobility in the generation directly affected by the transition to a market economy, as the enterprises of before entered decline and traditional jobs and required skills vanished or changed. Mobility in various forms and areas will remain a permanent challenge to youth and adults, and education and training policy will need to adapt its solutions and vision accordingly.

Both education and active labour market policies are affected by the challenges of lifelong learning. Although dialogue and actual interactions are not always as productive as they should be, sound cooperation has now been established and formalised between leading VET and employment agencies (the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and the State Migration and Employment Committee). Education, as represented by the Ministry of Education and Science, is less involved in this cooperation; likewise the secondary VET institutions that could theoretically deliver relevant training to the population groups targeted by the National Employment Policy.

The labour market currently has an excess supply of the population aged over 15 years with secondary and basic education, confirming that the economy requires professional skills and qualifications at the intermediate and higher levels.

Access to such skills and qualifications is possible via the formal education system reviewed exhaustively in this report, but also via non-formal education and training and through informal learning.

During the transition period, a substantial decline in the previous adult education and training structure (called continuous education) accompanied the overall restructuring of the economy, to be gradually replaced by numerous non-public providers of new training, often linked with donors and international organisations drawn from the wider community of development partners.

Many aspects of this training were in fact new: subject areas (management, civil society, human rights, empowerment, local initiatives, project planning and others), organisational aspects (small learner groups, trainers/facilitators instead of teachers, flexible arrangements with trainers and trainees) and funding (often more or less directly linked with donor projects). No less important were innovations in training methods, more or less based on interactive technologies, dialogue and the extensive use of modular programmes.

Practically every project dealing with socioeconomic and community development issues, independently of the scale, incorporated training components and activities, directed at the target populations and the organisation's staff. But only few such organisations were sustainable and fewer were training organisations complying with official licensing criteria. Temporary projects gave birth to new training capacity and made these skills available— although on a limited scale—in parts of the country severely affected by the hardship of the transition.

Rarely did these new training capacities enter into cooperation and partnership with the public training providers that formed the formal education and training network. Differences in education and training culture and a certain mistrust have continued to hamper cross-fertilisation of both sides. This separation affects the final output that is also a public service. As a result, public providers (VET in particular) retain the largest capacity to offer professional training (for employment and self-employment and especially in technical profiles); they are slow, however, in adapting to new models of financing and to more interactive methods. In contrast, the NGO training providers and projects that offer training as part of their portfolio are more agile with innovations but are, in general, weak in training for employment and productive activities. This basically indicates that reasons for cooperation and mutual learning do exist. According to a director of a non-public market skills organization, VET schools were weighty organisations and it was difficult to work with them because they were rather inflexible.

In a world of positive challenges and of issues to be resolved, education and training in a lifelong context will require a wide range of partnerships, to create synergies, multiply resources and create the necessary cross-fertilisation between formal and non-formal learning, public and private interests and the economy and education at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels.

6.2 Policy

The Education Law recognises the principle of a systemic and permanent education process. This law and other education policy documents emphasise the fact that the strategic guarantee of progress lies in the human factor, namely, natural and multiple human activity, moral position, education, professional competence and culture. Human beings are social and formed by society and the determining role in this formation corresponds to education.

In this new stage of societal development, the socially relevant aim of education is the development of the human being in terms of talents, potentialities and capacities. Education has a personality-oriented character and policy is based on the principle that education is the bridge between all the elements in the development process: poverty reduction, gender equality and the dissemination of democratic principles (Ministry of Education and Science¹⁵).

Kyrgyzstan is a signatory of relevant international documents referring to adult education and training and is a participant in key international debate forums. These processes have contributed significantly to drawing the attention of society and the government to issues of adult learning. Thus, the International Forum on Education brought Kyrgyzstan into the Education for All agenda and the country committed to all its objectives. In the follow-up in June 2002, the government approved the Education for All National Action Plan, which includes a specific section dedicated to adult education. This action plan is reflected in a number of country development documents, such as the National Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003-05, the National Development Strategy 2007-10, among others. The relevant objective set in these strategic documents relates to the quality skills that are indispensable in the complex knowledge society.

Kyrgyzstan also endorsed a number of other international declarations, namely:

- Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education (1997);
- Sofia adult education conference (2002) resolution, which recommended policy makers to upgrade adult education to the level of an indispensable element of education policy and practice;
- Agreements among CIS countries on cooperation in the field of dissemination of knowledge and of adult education;
- Decision on the development of the adult education system in CIS (2003);
- Concept paper on the development of the adult education system in CIS (approved by the CIS heads of governments in May 2006).

It is also a leading member in the adult education area within the activity of the analytical Forum on Education for Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

The Education Law adopted in 2003 recognises the principle of continuing adult education and makes the first steps towards recognition and validation of prior learning. The systemic articulation of formal and non-formal learning is in construction but a number of issues remain open in terms of institutional coordination, policy and practice.

¹⁵ Ministry of Education and Science, Analytical Note on the Status of the Adult Education System and Development Prospects in the Framework of the draft Adult Education Law, undated and unpublished. p. 4.

Non-formal education and training is associated with courses of varied duration, without officially recognised certification or formal graduation documents, implemented mostly for a fee and frequently playing a role in the compensation or adaptation of the individual. Non-formal education is available in professional, technical, cultural and other areas of interest. The multitude of institutional players and providers reflects the extremely high permeability of non-formal education, and the roles it plays in the society, the economy and individual development. Providers of non-formal education are subject to licensing, a function of the Ministry of Education and Science's Inspectorate for Licensing and Accreditation.

The Kyrgyz Adult Education Association represents the interests of providers and lobbies for more effective policies in favour of the adult education agenda. It issues certificates recognised by the members of its network.

The training of trainers has seen considerable development in the transition years, frequently assisted by donors and NGOs and included in most of the projects that include training components. However, these training-of-trainer programmes and initiatives often remain on the margins of the system of teacher training. The Kyrgyz Adult Education Association organises, mostly on the basis of donor funding, training-of-trainer courses oriented to adult training. This Association has been successful with training and retraining programmes in various professional areas, implemented throughout the country and based on flexible approaches to reaching out to distant towns.

According to various State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and Ministry of Education and Science officials responsible for adult education, the methods and contents represent innovative territory, but only very little of these novelties and knowledge are integrated in a coherent and well-disseminated body of knowledge for all practitioners and providers. Basically, the islands of innovation are not yet connected to a harbour that would be known and accessible to all users. Hence, many VET providers that offer courses for adults continue to use training methods that are largely not adapted to these learners, do not build on the active learning that is required for adults and contribute to the demotivation of adult learners. To develop the adult learning agenda further, sustained efforts will be required to build the capacity of public VET providers regarding adult education methods and to support the dissemination of good practices and innovation among licensed providers.

Annex 2 provides an overview of licensed provision of adult education and training services and also shows the share of non-formal training. The areas with the largest shares of non-formal learning are foreign languages, the ICT, technical-professional areas, economy and finance and sewing. According to this information, over 50,000 adults per year enrol in formal and non-formal courses in the various areas of study (Ministry of Education and Science¹⁶). However, since there is a large number of unregistered providers without licences, the estimates of users and provision remain incomplete.

Estimating the tendency and scale of financing of adult education and training is a complex matter. The above-indicated source provides the following breakdown of public financing of the various sub-sectors of education in 2007:

- pre-school education: 7.5%
- basic and secondary education: 64.2%
- other: 11.4%
- youth and adult professional education: 16.9% (initial, 7.6%; secondary, 3.4%; and higher education, 5.9%).

¹⁶ Ministry of Education and Science, Analytical Note on the Status of the Adult Education System and Development Prospects in the Framework of the draft Adult Education Law, undated and unpublished. pp. 9-10.

Yearly per-student spending by sub-sectors in 2007 (Ministry of Education and Science¹⁷) was estimated as follows:

- basic and secondary school: 4,126 KGS
- initial VET: 10,852 KGS
- secondary VET (*tekhnikum*): 11,849 KGS
- higher education: 12,569 KGS.

6.3 State Migration and Employment Committee programmes

The State Migration and Employment Committee is entrusted with the task of implementing employment policy. In its current format, which includes both the issues of employment and migration, the State Migration and Employment Committee exists since 2005.

The Employment Promotion Law (adopted in 2000 and amended in 2002-05) represents the core of the legal basis for employment and social protection of the unemployed. The State Migration and Employment Committee prepares strategic documents and short- and medium-term programmes, e.g. the National Employment Policy for the period to 2010.

Current thinking in the State Migration and Employment Committee is to prioritise active labour market policy and measures. Passive measures will rapidly become a minor element in employment policy. Behind these changes are reasons linked with public finance constraints, but also concerns about effectiveness as they are considered ineffective and inefficient in the short-term and their cost is not justified.

The State Migration and Employment Committee is currently reforming its main policy documents to reflect this change in thinking. Training and skills development will occur on a larger scale and will assume a new role in the new policy. But this will also require new approaches and certainly a corollary modernisation of the training provision system with which State Migration and Employment Committee programmes cooperate.

In the total portfolio of State Migration and Employment Committee services, the proportion of passive measures has declined substantially in the last five years, accompanied by growth in the proportion of training and public works. Although micro-credits have tended to vary, an increase was registered in 2008.

The State Migration and Employment Committee does not provide training; it fully outsources through tenders and agreements. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and its VET schools represent the most important providers for the State Migration and Employment Committee in quantitative terms. However, since a number of private providers and small centres that function within the premises of the public VET schools are better prepared to offer tailored courses, flexible organisation of courses for very small groups and new training programmes oriented to new professional profiles, the State Migration and Employment Committee also cooperates with such providers.

In 1991, the State Fund for Employment Promotion was established, integrated in 1993 with the newly created Social Fund. From 2005, financing of active and passive labour market programmes has been based on different sources, such as the state budget, special funds, donors, sponsors and others.

Active labour market measures include training, micro-credit provision, public works and professional guidance. In 2007, 17.3% of the budget allocated for active labour market measures was spent on training of the unemployed. For comparison purposes, public works received 42.8% and micro-credits 11.4% of this

¹⁷ Ministry of Education and Science, Analytical Note on the Status of the Adult Education System and Development Prospects in the Framework of the draft Adult Education Law, undated and unpublished. p. 7.

budget. A total of 5,150 unemployed people were sent for training in 2007, against 19,932 persons employed in public works and 1,548 beneficiaries of micro-credits for business projects.

In 2008 the trained unemployed population grew to over 6,200 persons, representing a wide variety of professions (over 70 profiles). The highest concentration of trainees was reached in the professions of welding (650 persons), driving (530 persons), personal computer operation (450 persons), computer literacy (434 persons), hairdressing (415 persons), bookkeeping (550 persons), cookery (235 persons), sewing machine operation (470), secretarial work (300), massage-cosmetics workers (150), veterinary services (132), tractor driving (105) and others. These professions register high employment rates.

Table 18 provides an overview of the training programmes for the unemployed offered through the State Migration and Employment Committee. According to the data, the effectiveness of the programmes is high, with 77%-80% employment after training. However, to better assess effectiveness it would be important to know more of these jobs, their duration and the period of settling into work.

Table 18. State Migration and Employment Committee training

Year	People sent for training	People trained	Trained people employed	% employed
2006	5,085	4,880	3,883	80
2007	5,150	4,563	3,685	81
2008	6,238	6,202	4,765	77

Source: State Migration and Employment Committee, Information on Unemployment Training Activities 2009, unpublished, p. 4.

According to the State Migration and Employment Committee, over 4,800 (77%) of trained users in 2008 found a job. The State Migration and Employment Committee aims to create the best possible conditions for the effectiveness of its training programmes, measured on the basis of employment after training.

Two thirds of the registered unemployed are young people aged 16-35 years, many with professional education (higher, secondary and initial). To assist youth with career and study choices, the State Migration and Employment Committee provides guidance services. But due to a lack of resources in the regional committees, these services are mostly concentrated in Bishkek and so have limited coverage.

The State Migration and Employment Committee actively participates in international projects aimed at developing modern VET, as the State Migration and Employment Committee is a particularly interested stakeholder and policy shaper in VET. The State Migration and Employment Committee has commented on the quality of VET for unemployed/adults, summarised as follows.

- Adults and unemployed people require individual approaches and so should not be mixed with young people in the same training programmes. Active learning and building on adult life experiences ought to be an essential part of the training method.
- Practical learning needs to be strongly reinforced in the approach and curriculum.

The State Migration and Employment Committee is the only public institution that offers career guidance services to youth, mostly through the ICC to students from upper-secondary classes. However, the State Migration and Employment Committee does not provide vocational guidance services to adults (unemployed and job seekers), not even to those engaged in training funded by the State Migration and Employment Committee. This is an important gap that the State Migration and Employment Committee is trying to fill, with the support of the ETF, in a project launched in 2009.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Dilemmas of the change process and vision

The analysis performed in this report puts the spotlight on two aspects that characterise VET and largely determine the complexity of its issues, representing both strengths and challenges for coherent public policies:

- unity of purpose: the development of personal and professional potential and the acquisition of qualifications throughout life;
- diversity of forms and approaches: the response to the diversity of individual needs and starting points, target professional profiles, types of economic organisation (formal, informal), openness to global technological and investment trends, local demands, social pressure and other issues.

Mobility will become a crucial area of responsibility for education and training policies. Lifelong transitions in labour market status and mobility across jobs and sectors will determine all life projects. Kyrgyzstan has already witnessed great job mobility by the generation directly affected by the transition to the market economy, as former enterprises entered into decline, traditional jobs vanished and associated skills changed. Mobility in various forms and areas will remain a permanent challenge for young people and adults and education and training policies will have to adapt solutions and perspectives accordingly.

Both education and active labour market policies are concerned with the challenges posed by lifelong learning. Education and active labour market policies are concerned with the challenges of lifelong learning. Although dialogue and actual interactions are not always as productive as they should be, a sound basis for cooperation has been established and formalised between the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and the State Migration and Employment Committee,¹⁸ as the leading VET and employment agencies. The Ministry of Education and Science is less involved in this cooperation—also the secondary VET institutions that could, theoretically, deliver relevant training to population groups targeted by the National Employment Policy.

In the last quarter of 2009, the reformed Kyrgyzstan government responded to one of the key questions raised by this report: what is the future position of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education (and of initial VET) in the institutional setting? Indeed, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection has emerged with a reinforced mandate, as both the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and the State Migration and Employment Committee were merged within this ministry. The hope is that the lessons learnt in the last three years will avoid a return by the government to poor VET and employment leadership.

Adapting education and training to such a wide range of needs and expectations requires strategy, client orientation and flexible training services and teachers; but it also requires social responsibility. VET in this transition economy needs to grow new branches, as each user category needs adapted training approaches. Can traditional inward-looking VET schools cope with this challenge? And, if potential demand from user groups—from urban and rural environments, wage-employed and self-employed, employed in the formal and informal economy, young people without experience and adults with experience—is so wide, can the country afford to substantially reduce existing VET capacity and focus investments and technical assistance on a small group of strong VET schools, as is being recommended by some important donor organisations? What criteria will guide such options? Can the social responsibility role of VET be ignored? Is not the key to efficiency in the VET sector linked with better management and with quality of outcomes and services in a relevant and necessary number of VET schools?

¹⁸ Both institutions were incorporated in the restructured Ministry of Labour, Employment and Migration from December 2009.

The core objectives of VET require economic productivity and competitiveness to be combined with equity and inclusion. This purpose is of particular relevance in a context dominated by informality in employment, small and very small farming activities in the large agricultural sector and informal rural economic activities. In parallel urban areas have a modern service sector and the mining and energy sectors are featured by large industrial enterprises. The constructive interactions between the different economies may be facilitated by mobility of human resources, sustained by lifelong learning policies.

7.2 Effectiveness of the change process

Change is taking place, innovations are being developed and tested, and in some areas the old is being replaced smoothly and effectively. Many building blocks in VET can be modernised and improved, through the logic of new kinds of learning and modern innovations to replace the obsolete. This is the case of developments in social partnership or in curricula for areas/population groups less regulated by education standards. Legal and regulatory barriers to innovation and change do exist, but in most areas the mainstream policy welcomes change.

Nonetheless, purposeful and sustainable change needs resources and motivation. When several layers of control and auditing take up a considerable share of the useful time of VET schools, or when poor funding displaces potential creativity with survival strategies (which could be the source of new solutions under certain circumstances), there is a greater likelihood that schools will refrain from change. What can justify the adoption of new methods and approaches when the sector hierarchy may not understand the choices?

Kyrgyzstan has developed a large number of reform strategies and concepts in education and training, including the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education strategy of 2008 (a broad national reference strategy), the ADB strategy of 2009 (in support of the ADB project) and a draft concept paper regarding development of secondary VET in 2009, amongst other valid and newly drafted strategic papers. In our view, most of these documents have been drafted with only limited consultation of key stakeholders; furthermore, they are only to a limited extent based on comprehensive studies and analyses of sector trends, of problems and their causes, of scenarios and their possible effects. Thus, it is not clear why this or that option or package of solutions is preferred. To save scarce resources and time, it is crucial to use strategic planning and programming methods that ensure the objective adoption of the most coherent options that respond to socioeconomic objectives, while meeting with economic and financial feasibility and efficiency criteria.

It is also important to link sector strategies with mid-term macro-economic and expenditure frameworks. In other words, the intellectual benefit of strategic planning alone does not justify the effort of drafting a document and circulating it for formal consultation and official approval if no consideration is given to the cost of the programme and future funding to support its implementation and monitoring.

The two indicated strategies for the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education are based on widely known logical frameworks, with indications of objectives, results, activities, indicators, key milestones and responsible entities. As such, these documents respond to the requirements of international organisations and government bodies.

Nonetheless, both strategies aim at structurally reforming the VET system, which is more complex and risky than simply introducing innovations and good practices in VET. The implementation of reform programmes that touch structures and laws and regulations, as well as established habits, need substantial institutional capacity. The concept paper for the development of secondary VET is close to being approved, but there is no funding to support implementation other than expected revenues from tuition fees. The reliance on the individual efforts of the VET colleges to improve the system is an interesting approach in a context of limited resources. However, the activities planned in the concept paper are largely oriented to system development measures, which go beyond the reach and capacity of the individual VET colleges.

Institutional capacity needs to be backed by reliable monitoring and evaluation procedures and by political support to enforce measures that have social implications; they should also build on good stakeholder

consultation and information. Rumours about liquidation and mergers of VET schools circulate easily; only structured stakeholder information can avoid risky levels of disenchantment and misunderstanding about the reforms and their benefits.

Information and guidance for young people and adults need to be given much more attention in policies. Currently only the State Migration and Employment Committee implements guidance programmes, and in Bishkek mainly, where the Information and Counselling Centre is located. More systematic guidance for young people should also be organised at the general education level, and using the Internet and ICT tools. VET schools could develop toolkits for vocational guidance and organise seminars and debates with enterprises as part of the curricula. These are relatively affordable measures with promising outcomes.

In our opinion, there is insufficient leadership and coordination of developments at the national level. An example is the NQF area: the tourism expert group works in good interaction with some relevant sector enterprises and with the leading tourism body. But the link with the education authorities (the Ministry of Education and Science and the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education) is more based on mere exchanges, with the bridge with developments in new learning-outcome-based curricula and the provision of training, as yet, uncertain and weak. This also reflects uncertainties among education policy makers about the merits of the proposed NQF approach. From another perspective, employers and experts involved in the NQF project are still seeking adapted approaches to translating occupational standards into learning outcomes.

We also are of the opinion that coordination of the various VET lines of action based on qualification requirements and competence-based learning and connected with an NQF is weak. The newly launched ADB project at the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, which has large resources, will benefit the system if there are exchanges with other projects and experts groups regarding objectives and approaches of the NQF agenda and if activities are oriented to competence-based training so to avoid conceptual and technical contradictions with other proposals.

Our recommendation to the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, relevant social partners and the donors working on competence-based training and the NQF is to set up a coordination platform that will promote exchanges of experiences and approaches between all the involved parties and projects, encourage technical debates on all significant topics and proposals, advise the parts on coordinated approaches and advise the government on how to proceed with reforms and with adjusting the legal basis for technical and policy proposals negotiated in this platform. There is a sound national capacity that can be mobilised for this platform, but it is essential to ensure leadership that represents the general issues at stake and that overrides the vested interests of small groups.

In our opinion it is important to transfer the NQF debate and technical developments and competence-based training from one occurring within a narrow expert group to one taking place in the national and policy arena. This statement should not be understood as synonymous with a concentration of reforms driven by politicians and state bodies. Rather, experts outside state bodies are powerful brains for innovation and reforms. But brains need hands, feet, resources, legal bases and implementation capacity in order to reach out to the truly important target: the population to whom the public service is due. From our observations, many experts groups are genuinely committed, but mainly to intellectual exercises, reports and recognition in academic communities. Policy-making entities need to draw on the results of expert research and good practices for system development. Converting good research and practices into policy development is certainly an important, but not sufficiently developed, line of action in a sector as dynamic as education and training.

Relevant policy and decision makers need to progressively understand what is at stake and what knowledge has already been accumulated. But, as said elsewhere in this report, the development of a national notion of NQF and a definition of how it will affect education and training will be contradictory and inefficient without soft coordination and leadership. A national notion of NQF can become the bridge between two levels of VET and also can create a crossover with the diversified supply of formal and non-formal education and training.

Three main suggestions at this level recapitulate some of the issues discussed in this chapter:

- a. connect policy development with research, analysis and evidence;
- b. consult and inform key stakeholders in a structured and sustainable manner;
- c. monitor and evaluate policies and strategy and programme implementation.

7.3 Conclusions and recommendations

The problems in VET have their roots in the wider education and training system, of which VET is a sub-system.

By recognizing the **interdependency**—of problems as well as of their solutions—of sub-sectors within the wider system of human capital development, policy makers might find the necessary leverage for more effective and systemic change.

The tree of competences in life has its roots in early education and culture. Basic competences form the trunk, generic and key competences structure the branches and the leaves represent professional competences. Leaves fall more or less periodically and need to be renewed. And they depend on flexible branches, a strong trunk and vibrant roots.

This illustration of the interdependency of the various types of competences acquired over a lifetime was used in an admirable presentation by Fernando Vargas (from the ILO) at the World Technical Vocational Education and Training Forum in Brasilia in November 2009. In real life the loops of interdependency move in various senses and directions. The renovation of professional competencies to accompany changing production and organisation modes, not to mention flexibility in working structures, may well influence the branches and the trunk.

What VET system is to be developed? In the studied context it is not redundant to recommend viewing VET as part of the education continuum for young people and as an important element for lifelong competence and professional development that yields employment security and productivity. VET in its diversity is called on to respond to the personal and professional development needs of various user groups. Recognition of this wider mandate and possibilities of VET represents additional leverage in the path to reform.

The key question, in the context of Kyrgyzstan's scarce resources, is what format of VET is the right basis for the labour market as well as for education policy?

- A format that focuses on short-term skills training or that is adapted to the needs and potential of both young people after compulsory education and young people with competences acquired in secondary education? And what about young and mature adults with varied skills development objectives and with profiles linked with seeking a first job, unemployment and redundancy?
- A format that is closer to immediate employment or one that is closer to further development and expectations?
- A format that is well grounded in apprenticeships or more school-based?
- A format that is primarily financed by the state or increasingly by fees and the private sector?

Only serious case-by-case analysis can resolve these issues. The new system should probably combine a wide range of schemes and approaches that ensure the flexibility, responsiveness and relevance that is so necessary for quality education and training, i.e. quality that meets with the expectations of user of all kinds.

What should one learn in a VET I programmes? A combination of general knowledge and professional and technical skills? Professional skills and competences for specific occupations? Broad-based competences or sets of narrowly defined technical skills? Is broad-based competence building incompatible with

specialised knowledge? Who should provide specialisation to fit the needs of enterprises and organisations?

We consider that public VET I should contribute to the lifelong development of citizens and, as such, anchor its approaches on the combination of science, technology and sound key competences.

Ongoing reforms should, in no circumstances, transform VET I into a dead-end path for young people graduating from compulsory education. Workers, employees and the self-employed are all, first and foremost, citizens and individuals. The current lengthy duration of integrated VET (secondary and professional) programmes is increasingly criticised for its inefficiency and poor appeal to young people. But the reform needs to improve curricula and the organisation of provision rather than cut out the general knowledge (science, communication, literacy) that is indispensable for professional competence and for further progression in education, in active life and in lifelong learning.

One of the reforms announced by the restructured Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, but not yet known in detail, concerns one of the key questions discussed in this report: the perspective of the integration of general and professional education for lifelong learning for young people. While our recommendations underline the need for VET programmes that build on broad professional competencies and key skills to permit further personal and professional lifelong development, the announced reform points to the exclusion of general education from VET curricula in initial VET schools. In a context of uncertainty about the future solution, the question remains, for now, open: will VET schools now cater only for training of adults of various age groups, i.e. individuals with experience and education? Will these schools offer short-term courses (up to 1 year) focused on technical skills? For young people enrolled after compulsory education in VET schools, what will be the bridging education pathways that will allow these students to achieve continuous educational progression and lifelong professional development?

The introduction of modular learning and a credit system for vocational education, the recognition and certification of prior learning and the development of an NQF are all measures that can support the objective of building shorter vocational pathways that also ensure individual accumulation of competences and transparent and flexible pathways for progression in education and professional development. Development of these policies will take time and will require substantial expertise and capacity. These are the big challenges that can be resolved only through inter-sector and inter-institutional cooperation as well as participation by the relevant social forces.

What strategy for VET system development? Kyrgyzstan has a good number of reform strategies and concepts in education and training: the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education strategy of 2008 (wider, national reference strategy), ADB strategy of 2009 (to support the ADB project) and the draft concept for development of secondary VET (2009), amongst other valid and newly drafted strategic papers. Our review leads us to consider that most of these documents have been drafted on the basis of limited consultation with key stakeholders outside governmental circles and that they are only to a limited extent based on comprehensive studies and analyses of sector trends, of problems and their causes and of scenarios and their possible effects; it is not clear why one or another option or package of solutions is preferred. To save scarce resources and time, it is important to use strategic planning and programming methods that allow objective adoption of the most coherent options responding to socioeconomic objectives and reflect economic and financial feasibility and efficiency constraints—in brief, that reflects a progressive shift to evidence based policy making.

The institutional capacity required to steer and implement a sector strategy needs to be backed by reliable monitoring and evaluation, transparent reviews, political support to enforce measures that have social implications and adequate stakeholder consultation and information. Rumours about liquidation and mergers of VET schools circulate easily; only structured stakeholder information can avoid risky levels of disenchantment and misunderstanding about the reforms and their benefits.

It is also important to link sector strategies with mid-term macro-economic and expenditure frameworks. In other words, the intellectual benefit of strategic planning alone does not justify the effort of drafting a document and circulating it for formal consultation and official approval if no consideration is given to the cost of the programme and future funding to support its implementation and monitoring.

Bridges for policy effectiveness. The two VET levels (I and II) are under different institutional authorities. Many share the opinion that one sole institutional authority would contribute to better interaction between the two systems and greater efficiency in reforms, legislative changes and investments. However, in our view, such institutional restructuring may create more risks than immediate benefits and could disrupt many ongoing positive developments.

What could be truly useful, in the short and medium term, is the formation of an operational platform for reform cooperation and coordination, to showcase new technical developments that are relevant and important for initial and secondary VET. Such a platform could take the traditional form of a VET council unifying the leading ministries and offering new room for sustained social dialogue. Alternatively it could emerge in flexible open formats, with regional extensions and thematic groups with clear work plans.

The Kyrgyz Republic has a sound national capacity that can be mobilised for this platform, but it is essential to ensure leadership that represents all stakeholders and eventually the wider public interest, which depends on credible outcomes of education and training. In a context of scarce resources the solution is to join forces to reach out to wider objectives, rather than tear forces apart in order to secure a tiny territory.

One of the immediate conclusions regarding the commercialisation of programmes offered by **public secondary professional education programmes** (VET II)—as evidenced by the strong growth in fee-based study places against a strong fall in state-financed study places—points to growing demand for education and training for young people. This trend justifies the increased private household expenditure and investment. Recognition of this fact should prompt an adequate reaction from policy makers in order to effectively create the conditions to build quality and relevance in the system and ensure equitable access conditions. Secondary professional education is in the sphere of secondary education and, as such, is a public service remit.

From another point of view, the analysis of students' flows showing a very substantial number of dropouts from secondary professional programmes raises questions on the credibility of the sub-system or some of its schools (colleges).

The team in charge of managing this sub-system at the Ministry of Education and Science has commenced a reflection process on the future concept, vision and mission for secondary professional education. As a new initiative related to the national education project, a draft concept paper, started in the last quarter of 2009 but as yet incomplete), is redirecting efforts to new priorities.

This sub-sector is in need of a participative debate on the role and prospects of this professional education pathway, which operates largely separated from VET I. Such a debate needs to consider and involve both sub-systems and discuss commonalities in terms of human and professional development. The existing ministerial and institutional divides could be managed constructively through a **sound inter-ministerial strategic alliance on human resources**, based on an agreement as to common objectives and purposes. A partnership approach between education and labour ministries can lead to a resolution of old inefficiencies through the sharing of capacities and resources. A pragmatic instrument to bridge the space between the two sub-systems could be a clear and well adapted NQF.

The issue of a modern and broad **qualifications framework** has been in discussion for several years and some national expertise and experience has now been accumulated. Development of technical and policy proposals applied to a sector of economic activity (tourism) within expert and employer groups and supported by international organisations is now gradually being followed up by the complex phase of transferring this innovation into the field of policy decisions and future applications. Beyond the merits of a newly conceived sector qualifications framework, we consider that consistent progression towards a wider qualifications framework that allows mobility and smooth transitions between the various VET levels will be particularly relevant in minimising the divide between initial and secondary VET, especially as it would focus on learning outcomes rather than on school types. As the leading authorities seem to readily recognise this unifying role of a common qualifications framework, the issue will be how to proceed and make appropriate use of some of the available international financial and technical resources.

VET for diverse skills development needs. VET can be flexible and diverse, and, in our view, this is an advantage. VET cannot be rigid and bound to monolithic approaches, since its target population is so diverse: young students, young adults, adults with work experience, older adults, women entering active life, young owners of a plot of land, employees of enterprises, redundant employees and young people experiencing social inequity or without education. In a responsive and humane VET system, there is room for individual approaches to learners and abilities and a willingness to leave no student behind. For many low-achieving students VET can offer a way to learn that is different from the standard programmes offered by general education schools.

There is considerable potential in the existing network of VET I and VET II schools and colleges and there are large numbers of people with skills development needs: yet the two sides do not seem to meet as often as they should. Many rural VET I schools are largely under-utilised, yet there are adults and young rural workers looking for appropriate training to make them better and more productive farmers. Considerable numbers of pupils who leave basic school cannot find a VET school in their *rayon* where they can acquire employable skills. VET II colleges could offer a more open-door approach to serving their communities, while making more effective use of their resources and teaching staff.

To revitalise the **adult learning agenda**, sustained efforts will be required to help public VET providers adopt suitable adult education methods. Their management initiatives need to be guided and motivated so that they can engage in relevant training services and projects with the community and employers.

Financing of continuing training and adult education is a sensitive issue. Public funding available for training the unemployed is scarce—although some growth was registered in 2009. Sustained and widely accessible skills development for small farmers and rural residents is hampered by legal limitations; this population is not entitled to enter existing active labour market public programmes.

In a medium-term perspective of human capital development, the country needs to adopt a sustainable approach to financing lifelong learning, by involving central and local budgets, private actors and the beneficiary communities themselves.

Information and guidance for young people and adults need to be given much more attention in policies. Currently only the State Migration and Employment Committee implements guidance programmes, and in Bishkek mainly, where the Information and Counselling Centre is located. More systematic guidance for young people should also be organised at the general education level, and using the Internet and ICT tools. VET schools could develop toolkits for vocational guidance and organise seminars and debates with enterprises as part of curricular activities. In the regions, the outreach of the State Migration and Employment Committee guidance services could be multiplied by operating in partnerships with VET schools, NGOs and community centres, amongst others.

More systematic guidance for young people should also be organised at the general education level, and using the Internet and ICT tools. VET schools could develop toolkits for vocational guidance and organise seminars and debates with enterprises as part of the curricula. These are relatively affordable measures with promising outcomes.

It is known that innovations in training were built up substantially in the transition years. But without well organised knowledge management, sharing and dissemination, much of this effort reaches only a limited number of schools and beneficiaries or is simply forgotten. **Resource centres** to manage, develop and disseminate good practices can be established on the basis of dynamic VET schools. Such resource schools already exist, but their model, role, activity and funding schemes can be further developed as a basis for future partial decentralisation of methodology and teaching support.

VET schools that engage in projects and studies with donors and enterprises should be publicised and the results of such endeavours shared through the network of VET schools. A modern network and web portal where VET schools could share information on the VET system, performance data for VET schools and colleges, VET courses and qualifications and existing VET resources throughout the country could add substantial transparency and visibility to the VET sector.

VET school management could benefit from the introduction of boards with the participation of social partners and parents. Boards can create a structured link between the school and the socioeconomic environment and can represent stakeholder interests in strategic and business planning and school performance reviews. Under recently launched structural reforms in the network of initial VET schools, it should be possible to study the possibilities for piloting the introduction of boards.

VET school management is a broad agenda and the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and the Ministry of Education and Science need to have the capacity and resources to jointly plan, with schools, a range of reforms that include activity planning and monitoring and school self-assessment. Important aspects to be developed are the gathering of evidence of performance against objectives and indicators and the communication of performance to the wider public. We recommend a participative and transparent approach to planning, design and implementation of such reforms, where school teams and management are taken into due consideration and assisted.

Updated and reliable **information on labour market trends and skills needs** based on geographic and economic sector specificity is indispensable to be able to support options for policy makers, employers, learners and job seekers. The State Agency for Professional-Technical Education is investigating a suitable approach and solution for this great need. We recommend that the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education and the Ministry of Education and Science coordinate the search for a practicable mechanism for labour market monitoring with the State Migration and Employment Committee and employer associations and, furthermore, to use lessons from other countries. The currently used system to gather information on jobs and skills needs should be reformed in order to offer results that combine the qualitative and quantitative aspects of skills anticipation.

Finally, **partnership** is crucial—private-public and public-public partnerships at the macro-, intermediate and local levels. Partnerships create synergies in a context of scarce resources, as responsibilities and inputs are shared. Above all, partnerships eliminate irrelevant but persistent barriers to achieving common objectives. In practice, managing partnerships between public and non-public organisations is no easy matter, so mutual trust and a common language need to be developed first. It is important to pursue current efforts for more dynamic and purposeful collaboration between businesses and VET. The successful establishment of this kind of cooperation will depend on trust and ongoing dialogue and consultation, which, however, should be institutionalised so as to go beyond current ad hoc and sporadic exchanges.

The capacity of sector or professional associations and councils needs to be supported by state policy, through exchange and twinning programmes with international peers and through training and training partnerships co-funded by donors and the state (the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education, sector ministries). These associations need assistance to become the recognised partner for VET programmes and VET policy dialogue that all sides wish to have.

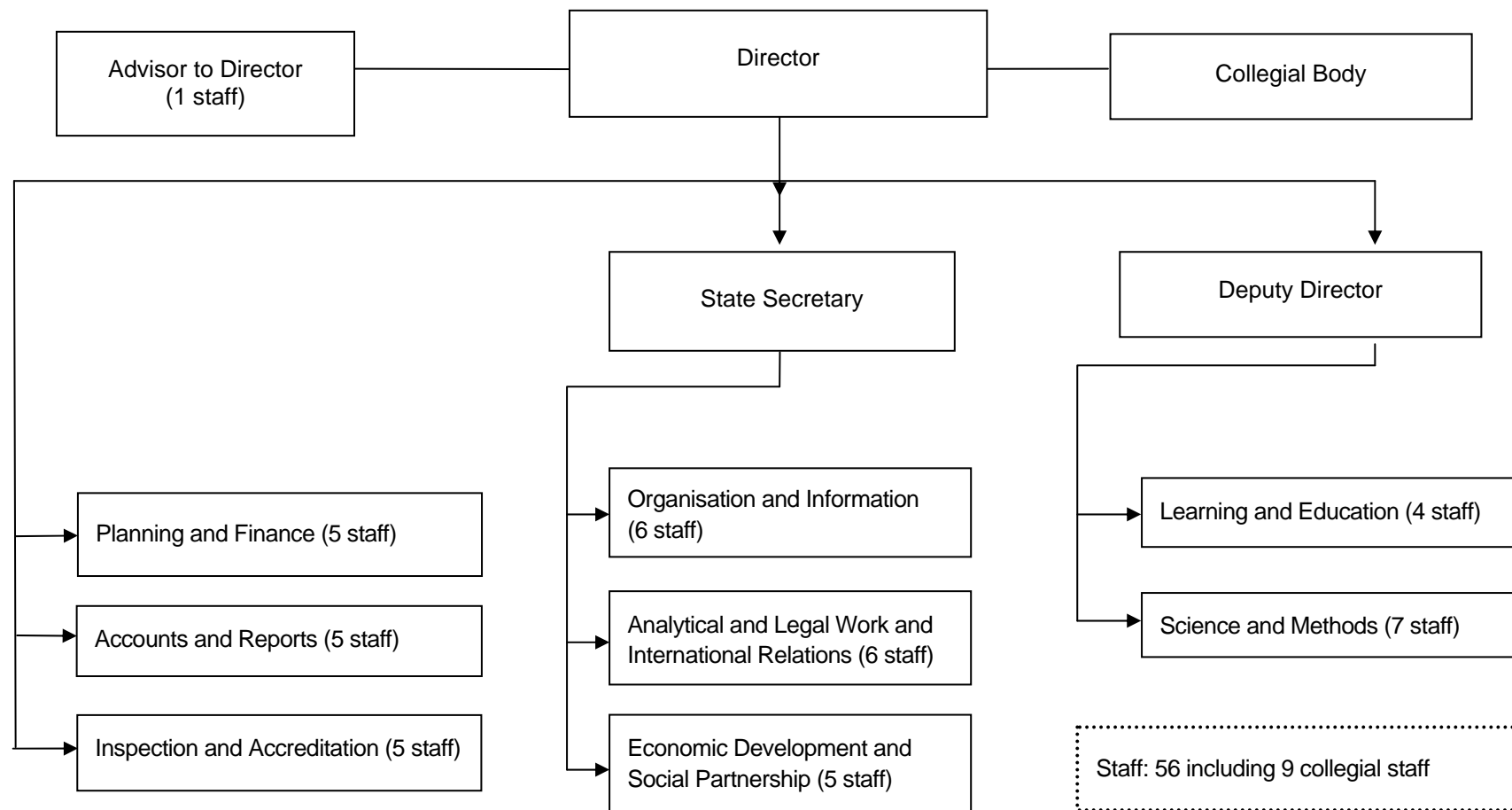
The notion of VET for the labour market is frequently echoed in debates and discussions. But active, dynamic and consistent social partnerships are needed to link VET with the labour market. At present, only employers are considered relevant social partners, with other partners simply ignored. We formed the impression that the key interests of students and parents, civic organisations and employees are largely ignored by the state and by task forces and expert groups; this lack of dialogue may distort future VET policy.

Joint projects between VET providers and enterprises and NGOs are another feasible and rewarding approach to linking education with economic and social activity in the local context and offering students and teachers the missing links with innovation in VET. These measures have potential for producing promising outcomes, which is important to break the persisting image of VET as the weakest link in the education system.

Annexes

Annex 1. Organigram of the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education

Prime Minister Decision No.306, approved 8 August 2008



Annex 2. Licensed Adult Education and Training Providers

Area of study	Providers	Annual adult population coverage	Share in non-formal education (%)
Languages	157	5,000	14.3
Multi-functional centres, various profiles	147	8,077	13.4
Technical-professional	140	9,450	12.7
ICT	116	3,420	10.5
Driving	72	5,783	6.5
Economy and finance	71	3,504	6.4
Sewing	55	2,398	5
Beauty, cosmetics, hairdressing	46	705	4.2
Catering (cooks to restaurant managers)	38	1,640	3.4
Repair services	34	1,517	3.1
Management	2	900	2.4
Arts (music, dance, handicrafts)	25	968	2.2
Retraining	23	1,501	2.1
Social skills, civic education, culture	19	1,400	1.7
Secretaries	18	473	1.6
Medicine	13	1,475	1.2
Communication	14	370	1.2
Pedagogy and training methods	12	830	1
Security (training for security bodies)	10	260	0.9
Legal literacy	9	230	0.8
Transport	8	598	0.7
Domestic / personal services	7	470	0.6
Tourism	6	320	0.5
Events organisation	5	745	0.4
Psychology	5	105	0.4
Mass media, information	3	75	0.2
Religion	11	80	0.09
TOTAL	1,131	Approx 51,000	

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, Analytical note on the Status of the Adult Education System and Development Prospects in the Framework of the draft Adult Education Law, undated and unpublished. pp. 9-10.

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