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Report on Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan

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Imprint

Published by the

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices

Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

Support of the Reform and Modernization Process in the Vocational Education System of Uzbekistan

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As at

October 2023

Design

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The opinions and analyses in this report are whole responsibility of author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and official policies of GIZ.

This publication/report was developed and published within the framework of the Uzbek-German project "Support of the Reform and Modernization Process in the Vocational Education System of Uzbekistan (TexVET)", implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (German federal enterprise for international cooperation) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

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Acknowledgements

This report was produced under the GIZ implemented 'Support of the Reform and Modernization Process in the Vocational Education System of Uzbekistan Project' (TexVET). It could not have been completed without the strong support of the Institute for Labour Market Research of the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The contribution of staff and members of the Sector Skills Councils should also be acknowledged, and in particular, the Sector Skills Councils for the Textiles, Chemicals, Education, Water Management and Tourism industries. Thanks, are also due to the GIZ TexVET project team, in particular Mrs. Kamila Xodjayeva and Mr. Nodir Rakhimov.

1. Background

The main goal of the GIZ project 'Support of the Reform and Modernization Process in the Vocational Education System of Uzbekistan' (TexVET) is the creation of sustainable employment and improved earning opportunities for the population of Uzbekistan. The project aims to achieve this through efforts to strengthen the vocational education system and the promotion of stable green growth and employment creation.

The project strategy incorporates a multi-level approach to support the ongoing comprehensive reform of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system in Uzbekistan. In particular, the project seeks to achieve:

- effective cooperation between relevant actors of the state, business and education to improve understanding of needs of the vocational education and training system;
- cooperation between policy makers, the education sector and employers in formulating a new normative framework for vocational education and training; and
- institutionalized cooperation between the education sector and the established business sector in implementing joint vocational education and training and dual learning approaches.

With these goals, through various activities the project has promoted coordinated cooperation between those with political responsibility, employers, and representatives of educational institutions. Through these efforts, it is expected that the reformed vocational education and training of skilled workers in Uzbekistan will correspond better to the needs of the economy in selected key industrial sectors.

One element of recent reforms in the vocational education system of Uzbekistan has been the establishment of Sector Skills Councils as a key mechanism to strengthen links between the labour market and the VET system. Such reforms reflect wider international interest in this issue and add to the growing number of countries that have established sector skills bodies as the leading institutional mechanism for private sector engagement in technical and vocational education and training and skills development.

This report aims to present and analyse the current status and recent experience of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan. It starts with an overview of international examples of sector skills bodies, introduces the Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan, and then presents the findings of research involving the Sector Skills Councils themselves and the wider group of stakeholders in the VET ecosystem in Uzbekistan. The report concludes with a discussion of key issues affecting the performance of Sector Skills Councils and makes recommendations about how they may be better supported and empowered to improve performance in the future.

2. Industry Engagement in VET and Skills Systems

A key focus of many national VET and skill systems is increasing the participation and engagement of industry in the development and implementation of policies, strategies and programs¹. Such engagement has the broad aim of increasing links between the labour market and the education and training system.

One of the important indicators of an effective VET system is its orientation to the needs of the labor market. That is why countries seeking to build a modern VET system are building their own strategies to integrate labor market requirements into the education and training process. At the same time, countries proceed from the principle that it is important to ensure the participation of employers at all major stages of vocational training, from identifying needs and developing occupational standards to assessing and certifying student competencies.

In Germany, for example, close cooperation between the state and the economy is one of the important principles of the VET system, where the state, employers and trade unions jointly create the framework conditions for vocational education and training. This includes the development of standards and curricula as well as the evaluation, certification, and quality assurance of vocational education and training. Enterprises also participate in implementing and funding initial and continuous education and training measures.

Increasingly, governments and social partners are considering sectoral approaches as an effective way to achieve the goal of bringing the world of work and the world of education and training closer together. This is not necessarily a new concept, but in many countries the idea has only recently taken hold. A sectoral approach to skills development allows key stakeholders to identify the skills challenges in their economic sector and to collectively develop solutions.

It allows greater ownership of the problems and solutions, and enables new partnerships to be formed, often amongst actors that have not worked together before on skills issues. Sectoral approaches typically require some form of institutional set-up that brings together key stakeholders in the sector and carries forward their work. In many countries, these institutions are called sector skills councils or industry skills councils.

As shown in Table 1 overleaf, Sung & Raddon (2021) have developed a typology of ‘employer-led’ sectoral skills bodies to illustrate the different models that have been introduced in different countries as part of a sectoral approach to skills development. According to Sung & Raddon’s typology, the system of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan reflects a Type A model (employer involved), where there is voluntary engagement of employers in sectoral bodies that allows for industry input on a range of policy and program issues.

¹ The term ‘industry’ is used to denote employer and worker representatives across all sectors of economic activity. It can be understood to include professional bodies, industry associations, employer organisations and trade unions.

<p>A. Employer-involved (2 variants)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Voluntary engagement of employers in sectoral skills investment and practice, primarily via consultation (eg: Australia) 2. Statutory engagement of employers in financing sectoral skills delivery and voluntary consultation (eg: South Africa) 	<p>C. Employer-modelled</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uses ‘best practice’ models of skills development used to shape training practice within a sector (eg: Singapore)
<p>B. Employer-owned</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employer-funded sectoral approach which ties into sectoral skills strategies and needs, as identified by employers’ associations and representative groups (eg: Brazil) 	<p>D. Employer-driven (2 variants)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public VET system determined by employer-demand (eg: Netherlands) 2. Private partnerships bring employers together to invest in training (eg: USA)

Table 1: Models of ‘employer-led’ approaches (Source: Sung & Raddon 2021)

The point here is to highlight the fact that different types of sectoral bodies exist which have fundamental differences in terms of their legal structure, membership, their level of autonomy and the extent to which they are perceived to be organs of government. All these factors are key issues affecting the current performance of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider country examples of each of the different models of sector skills bodies (SSBs), when considering their roles and responsibilities, it is important for policy-makers to consider what they want to achieve from the establishment of such bodies and what kind of employer-led (or industry-led) system they wish to establish.

For example, if a main goal of the SSB system is to enhance the supply of entry level skills for an industry sector, an approach that focuses on coordination and collaboration among industry stakeholders and training providers may deliver much of the objective. This is the approach reflected in the National Trade Committees in Denmark whose main role is to control the development of initial VET (IVET) programs and pathways in their sector (CEDEFOP, 2012)

However, if the major goal of an SSB system is to give industry more direct responsibility for the delivery of training, then an approach which provides sector bodies with some control over funding may be a more effective strategy. This is the approach in South Africa and Brazil where sector bodies have a major role in determining how funding is used to deliver training. Another key point to note from the Sung & Raddon typology is that not all countries that seek to increase industry engagement have introduced sector skills bodies. Countries like Singapore, the USA and China use other mechanisms to drive industry engagement. In those countries where SSBs have been established however, it is important to recognise the widely varying roles and responsibilities that SSBs fulfill which as seen in Table 2 below, have been grouped under four main types of roles:

- Advisory functions – where industry provide labour market intelligence, advice on skill needs and inputs to the development of policy and strategy;
- Design functions – where industry are involved in the design and development of occupational standards, curriculum, program pathways and qualifications;
- Support functions – where industry take an active role in various aspects of how the VET system functions in their sector, from training delivery to assessment and certification; and finally
- Management functions – where industry have the overall responsibility for key sub-systems in their sector such as quality assurance, financing or certification.

Advise	Design	Support	Manage
Provide policy advice and feedback	Develop and maintain skill standards	Support quality assurance of training providers, courses and assessors	Manage and promote apprenticeships
Generate and/or interpret labour market intelligence	Develop qualifications	Promote the benefits of training	Co-ordinate training in the sector
	Develop curriculum and learning resources	Promote careers information, advice and guidance	Manage government training initiatives and programs
	Develop apprenticeship pathways	Contribute to training delivery and assessment	Administer levy funds
		Support the professional development of teachers, trainers and assessors	Manage assessment and certification

Table 2: Roles and responsibilities of Sector Skills Bodies (Source: ILO, 2021)

It should be noted that not all SSBs have Advisory, Design, Support or Management functions as part of the roles and responsibilities. Also, whilst there is generally a progression from advisory to management roles amongst SSBs internationally, the terms of reference of SSBs are not necessarily cumulative in that regard. For example, the main roles of the Sector Skills Advisory Committees in Kenya relate to the development of standards, occupations and qualifications under the Design function without any responsibilities under the Advisory function as described in the table above.

Sung & Raddon (2021) also use the typology of ‘employer-led’ SSBs to highlight that the nature of employer engagement in sectoral skills bodies also varies substantially and that this will affect the role of employers in sectoral skills formation and how skills agendas are set. Whilst issues of resourcing and legal mandate are key issues that shape the activities of SSBs, the breadth of roles and responsibilities is also likely to be closely linked to their effectiveness as active agents of change in a VET system.

In the last decade, SSBs have again become a focus of policy attention in many countries, especially in the global south, where countries have explored their potential through pilots or large-scale policy initiatives to adopt sectoral approaches and strengthen industry involvement in VET. In this way, SSBs have become an increasingly common feature of national VET strategies and VET reform initiatives. As a result, a wide variety of countries have established or are in the process of establishing SSBs, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chile, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Armenia, Georgia, India, Jordan, Tanzania and Vietnam.

Whilst there remains few published reviews documenting the national implementation experiences of SSBs, it needs to be recognised that challenges do exist, including the effectiveness of industry engagement and participation of employer and workers representatives in these bodies.

As noted by the ILO, sector skills bodies need to be adequately resourced and supported and given meaningful roles in the VET and skills system to ensure senior industry engagement and leadership in their sector. They also need time to become established and to develop the expertise they need to take on this leadership role and become the trusted broker between enterprises and the education and training system. (ILO 2021)

In the context of this brief introduction to sector skills bodies, let us now consider how they have taken shape in Uzbekistan.

3. Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan

In 2020, a total 29 Sector Skills Councils were established pursuant to the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No: PD-4939: 'On measures to cardinaly improve the system of qualifications assessment and provision of the labour market with qualified personnel'. The Sector Skills Councils are also referred to as Sector Councils for the Development of Professional Qualifications and Competences.

The creation of Sector Skills Councils was seen as a necessary and important complementary action to support the implementation of the National System for the Development of Professional Qualifications, Knowledge and Skills, which was approved in 2020 by a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers (No. 287 of May 15, 2020). This system includes a National Qualifications Framework of eight levels and flexible mechanisms for achieving qualifications, including through the recognition and validation of informally acquired knowledge and skills. Under the same Presidential Decree that established the Sector Skills Councils (PD-4939), the Institute for Labor Market Research was established under the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction of the Republic of Uzbekistan. This institute is responsible for providing methodological, organizational, and informational support for the activities of the Sector Skills Councils.

The main roles and responsibilities of Sector Skills Councils as specified in PD-4939 are as follows:

1. identifying industry skills and knowledge needs and trends based on labor market monitoring;

2. development, implementation and improvement of the Sector Qualifications Framework;
3. coordination of the activities of ministries, agencies and organizations for the development and implementation of occupational standards;
4. formation of the system of recognition, validation and accreditation of the results of non-formal and informal learning, including the organization of the Qualification Assessment Centers activities;
5. organization of work on vocational guidance and development of informational materials; and
6. improvement of classifier of key positions and professions of employees on the basis of the Sector Qualifications Framework and occupational standards. (Government of Uzbekistan, 2020).

To further clarify the responsibilities of Sector Skills Councils related to the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning, an article on Sector Skills Councils and Qualification Assessment Centers was also added to the Law on Employment of the Population (No.LRU-642 of October 20, 2020), and the Cabinet of Ministers Decree (No.616 of September 30, 2021) approved the Model Regulation on Sector Skills Councils and the operation of Qualification Assessment Centres.

Table 3 below groups the six Sector Skills Councils roles according to the main functional groupings highlighted earlier in Table 2.

Advisory Function	Design Function	Support Function	Management Function
Role 1: labour market intelligence	Role 2: sector qualifications framework	Role 3: implementation of professional standards	Role 4: Qualification Assessment Centres
	Role 6: occupational classification system	Role 5: vocational guidance	

Table 3: Key Roles of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan Categorized by ILO Functional Areas

Here we see that the roles of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan span the range of functions typically fulfilled by SSBs and thus can be seen, on this basis at least, as having a broad and potentially substantial role in the VET system of Uzbekistan.

The type of roles of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan can also be compared to the roles of SSBs in other countries as shown in Figure 1 below. This illustrates that by international standards, the Sector Skills Councils have a relatively broad scope of roles, with their role in relation to Qualification Assessment Centres placing them amongst the small group of countries where SSBs are responsible for a major sub system of VET operations in their sector, namely the recognition and validation of prior learning.

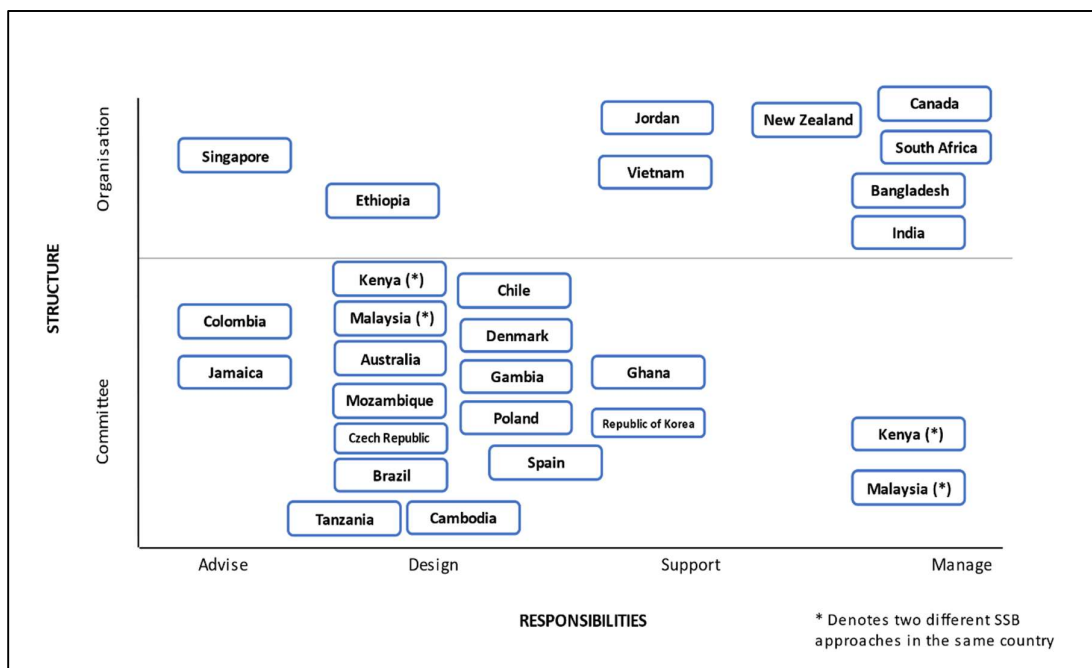


Figure 1 also shows that most SSBs that have roles under the Management function are constituted as independent legal entities rather than government committees as is the case in Uzbekistan.

The Law on Employment of the Population indicates that financial support for the activities of Sector Skills Councils is the responsibility of various line ministries, state committees, departments, associations, companies, and organizations that have established the Sector Skills Council for their sector. According to Presidential Decree No. 4939, the responsibility of host agency for Sector Skills Councils is undertaken by:

- 16 Government Ministries;
- 5 State Committees;
- 2 Agencies;
- 3 Associations; and
- 2 Joint Stock Companies (JSC). (Government of Uzbekistan, 2020).

Of the 29 Sector Skills Councils, 24 are under the auspices of government entities.² This indicates that the Sector Skills Councils of Uzbekistan are not in the whole industry led or strongly linked to industry bodies.

This also raises another differentiating feature of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan, namely their structure and membership. Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan are not legal entities in their own right and thus as shown in Figure 1, are uniquely placed amongst SSBs that have a role under the 'Manage' function. In Uzbekistan the majority of the members of Sector Skills Councils are drawn from the public sector. Whilst there are members from the private sector, they remain in the minority, which differentiates them from other SSBs where the private sector not only lead or host the entity but also make up the majority of members. In that

² Pending changes to the structure of government agencies is likely to result in the amalgamation of several ministries which will affect the composition of the Republican Council and the likely number of Sector Skills Councils.

sense, Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan cannot be genuinely considered ‘industry led’ and are rather simply government committees. Whilst trade liberalisation and private sector development in Uzbekistan is in relatively nascent stages, the lack of industry representation is notable.

Another feature that differentiates Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan from SSBs in other countries is the scope of occupational coverage. There are very few, if any, SSBs that have responsibility for the development of professional or skills standards for occupations that typically require a university education and qualifications at the degree or post-graduate level. Whilst every economic sector includes roles at different levels, it is understood for example that the scope of occupations covered by the Education Sector Skills Council includes teachers, school counsellors and school psychologists which are not occupations typically serviced by the VET sector. A similar situation is understood to exist for the Sector Skills Councils for the Taxation, Justice and Economic Activity ‘sectors’.

Whilst this broad occupational scope can be seen as an ambitious attempt to address qualification pathways and curriculum issues across VET and higher education, the complexity of this work and the limited relevance of this issue for many industry sectors challenges the need for such scope given other perhaps more pressing skills priorities facing industry in these sectors.

Also unique to the Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan is how the concept of economic or industry sectors has been defined. Most countries that introduce sector skills bodies define sectoral coverage with reference to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), value chain groupings or government development priorities.

Uzbekistan is in the unique position of having a discrete sector skills body for ‘sectors’ such as Taxation; Standardisation & Certification; Personnel Work & Labor Safety; Economic Activity; Justice; and Life Safety.

The Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan are clearly still in the early stages of their development. They have been operating for less than three years and have yet to commence work across all of the six main roles identified in their terms of reference. It is also worth noting that the Institute for Labour Market Research, as the main working body of the Republican Council and responsible agency for Sector Skills Councils, is not yet fully operational and does not have the full complement of staff as originally planned. As such, the level of operational support available to Sector Skills Councils is less than ideal.

4. Methodology

The research presented in this report involved a combination of desk top research, a survey of sector skills councils and interviews with key stakeholders. The findings are presented in three ways:

- a summary of the major results of the survey (Section 5);
- short case studies of five Sector Skills Councils (Attachments A-E); and
- discussion of results and issues arising from these sources and the key stakeholder interviews (Section 6).

Survey

The online survey was developed by the TexVET project with inputs from the Institute for Labour Market Research (ILMR). A copy of the survey can be found in Attachment G. The survey was sent by MEPR to each of the 29 Sector Skills Councils in August 2023 with a request that it be distributed amongst Sector Skills Council members. Further formal communication from ILMR and the Republican Council also requested sector skills councils to complete the survey. The survey was available online for 1 month.

During that time 61 survey responses were received. Whilst the exact total number of potential Sector Skills Council members is not known, it is estimated that the total number of possible responses could be more than 500. On that basis, the response rate is low at less than 10%. Of those responses, only 43% were actual members of the Sector Skills Councils, with the balance coming primarily from the affiliated qualification assessment centres or other training providers working in the sector. Of the respondents, roughly 10% were industry representatives. These results can be interpreted in different ways and suggest that either there is:

- limited interest in the performance of Sector Skills Council amongst members;
- limited interest amongst the Secretaries of the Sector Skills Councils; and/or
- insufficient time to complete the survey.

It is also worth noting that of the 29 Sector Skills Councils in existence, only six responded to the survey: Textiles; Water Management; Transport; Measurement & Standardisation; Education and Chemicals.

Case Studies

The five Sector Skills councils considered in more detail through the case studies are:

- Textiles;
- Water Resources;
- Chemicals;
- Education; and
- Tourism.

The case studies were developed through in-depth interviews with staff and members of the Sector Skills Councils. The case studies present more detailed information on the activities and experiences of the five Sector Skills Councils and can be found in Attachments A - E.

Key Informant Interviews

During July – September 2023, interviews were also conducted with other key stakeholders including:

- The Institute for Labour Market Research;
- The Ministry of Employment & Poverty Reduction;
- The Ministry of Higher Education, Science & Innovation;
- The Uzbekistan Confederation of Employers;
- The Uzbekistan Trade Union Federation; and
- The Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

5. Survey Results

The results of the survey have been grouped under six main topics:

- Profile of Respondents
- Sector Skills Council Membership and Industry Participation;
- Sector Skills Council Working Methods;
- Human & Financial Resourcing;
- Number and Scope of Sector Skills Councils; and
- Sector Skills Council Performance.

5.1 Profile of Respondents

As shown in Figure 2 below, the majority of respondents (57%) were not members of a Sector Skills Council. It is also worth noting again that of the 29 Sector Skills Councils that have been established and were requested to complete the survey, only six responded.

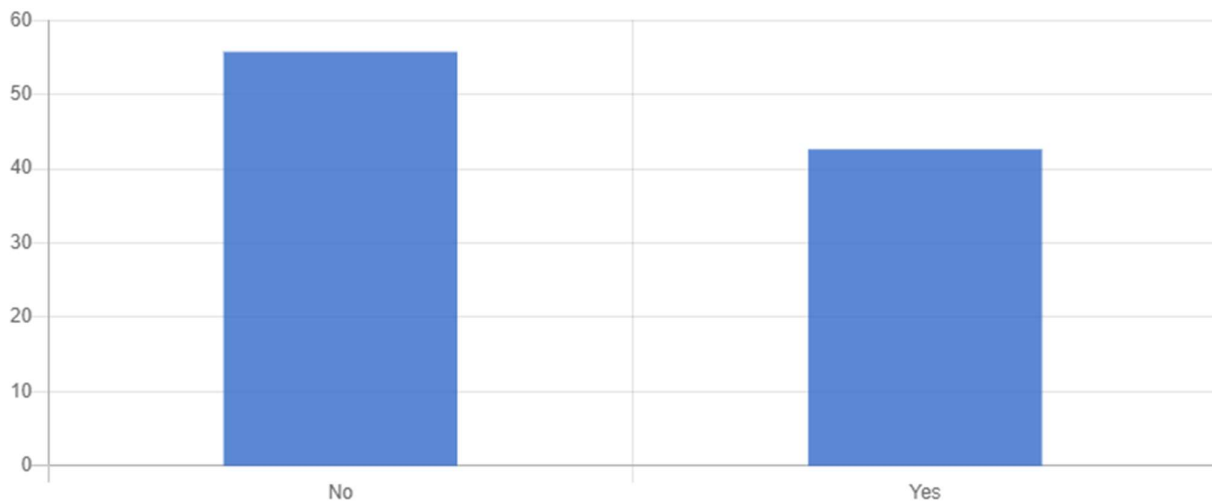


Figure 2: Share of Respondents who are Members of a Sector Skills Council

Of those respondents who were members of a Sector Skills Council, the majority have been members for between 1-2 years.

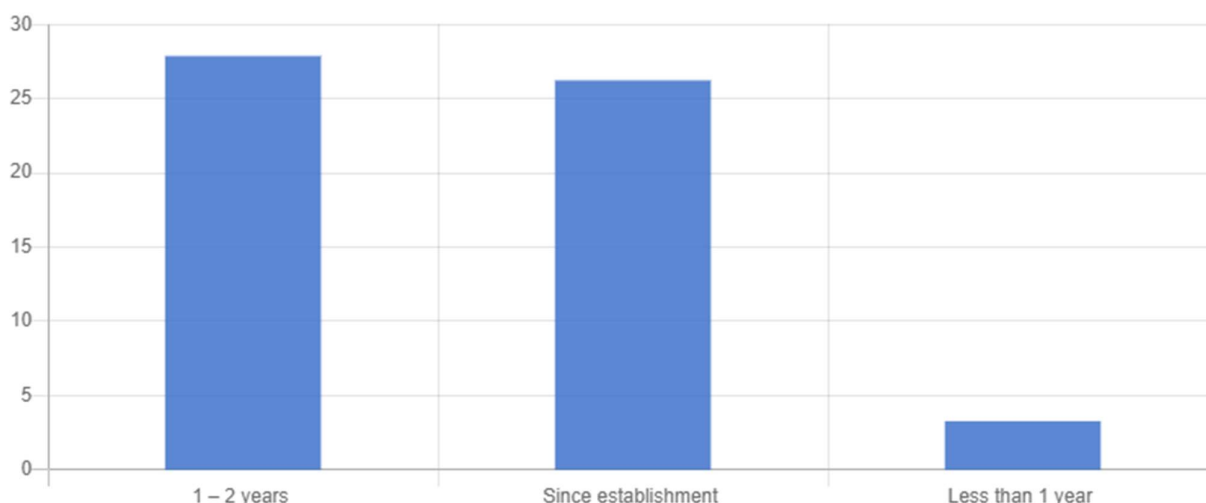


Figure 3: Period of Sector Skills Council Membership

5.2 Sector Skills Council Membership and Industry Participation

The survey asked whether there was sufficient involvement of employers from the private sector in the Sector Skills Councils. As shown in Figure 4, 53% of respondents indicated there was. However, it is worth noting that as only 10% of respondents identified as being from the private sector, the majority of people answering this question were government employees. As there is not a tradition of private sector engagement in VET in Uzbekistan and thus relatively less awareness of the importance of private sector engagement in skills systems, the results for this question should not necessarily be interpreted to mean that there is no need to increase industry participation in the Sector Skills Councils.

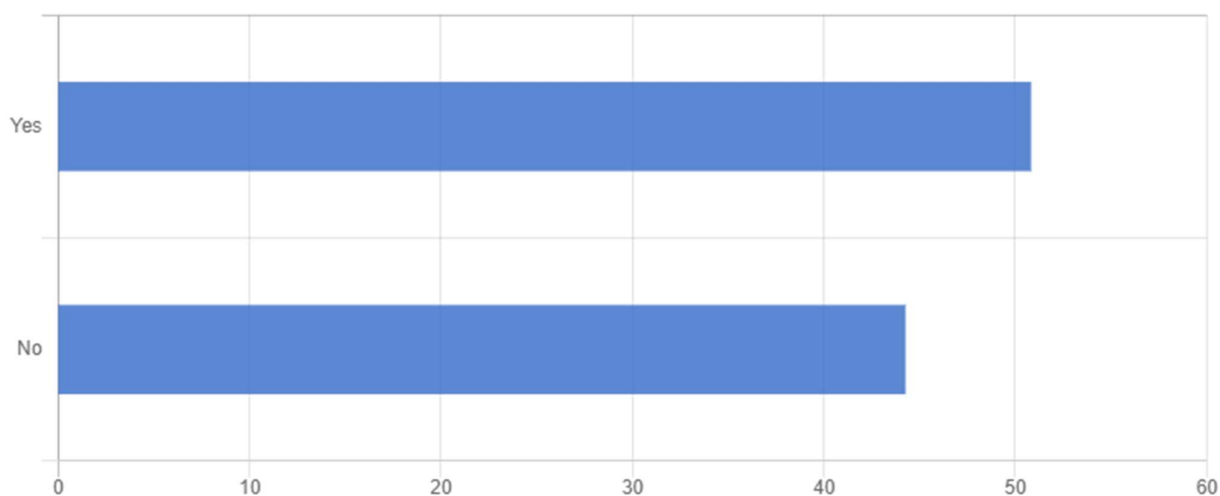


Figure 4: Adequacy of Private Sector Representation

When asked to provide further reflections on this issue, a key issue raised by several respondents was the lack of awareness amongst the private sector, not only of the Sector Skills Councils themselves, but also of competence frameworks and how they can be used as human resource management tools. The lack of promotion and awareness raising by

Sector Skills Councils and the government more broadly was also noted. A number of respondents also referred to the weak link between professional standards and recruitment and wage systems used by employers. It was also noted that the national qualifications framework and the decisions of the Sector Skills Councils do not have any impact on the private sector and that employers do not participate in the because there are no benefits for them to do so.

Respondents were also asked whether there were other organizations that should be members of the Sector Skills Councils. As shown in Figure 5, whilst 61% suggested no other organisations should be involved, 39% did. Other organisations suggested for inclusion were large private enterprises; monocentres; and representatives of statistical or economic divisions.

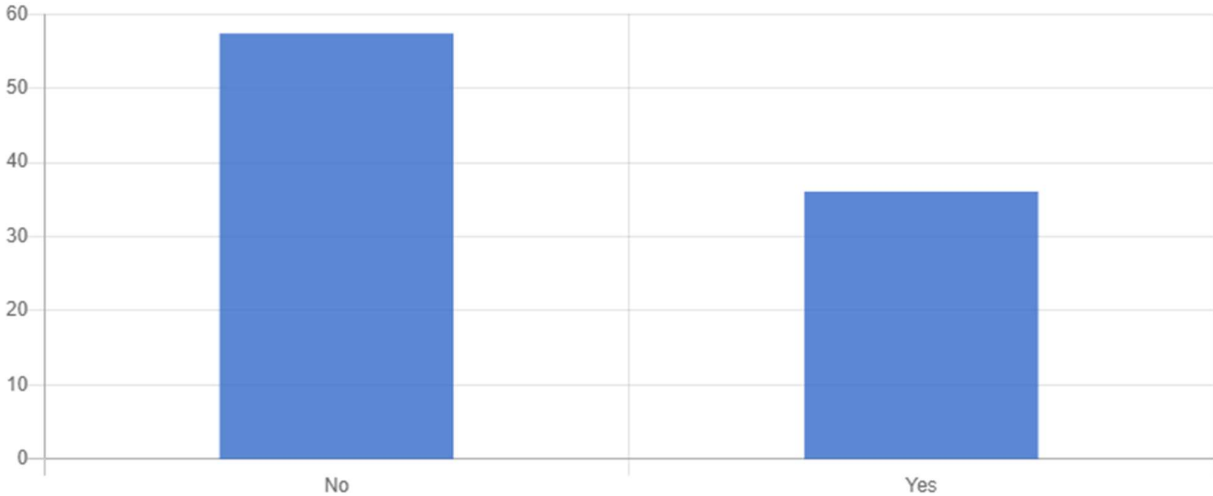


Figure 5: Need for Additional Members

5.3 Sector Skills Council Working Methods

The majority of respondents (69%) indicated that Sector Skills Councils met between 3-4 times per year, although those that indicated a lesser meeting frequency may not have been aware of the actual meeting schedule or may have indicated the number of meetings they had attended during the year.

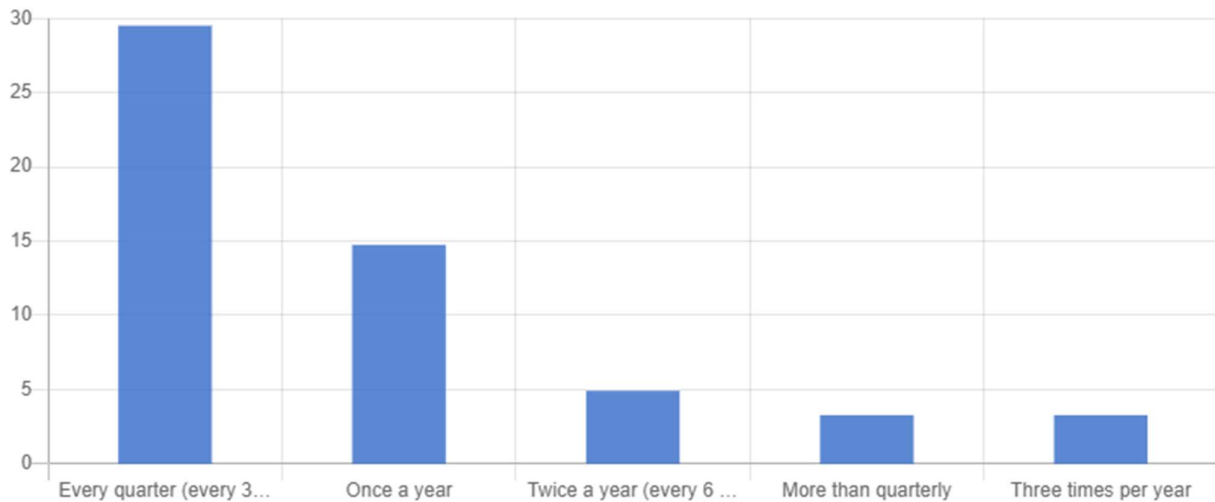


Figure 6: Frequency of Sector Skills Council Meetings

The majority of respondents (80%) also noted that when meetings of the Sector Skills Councils were held, most of the members usually attended.

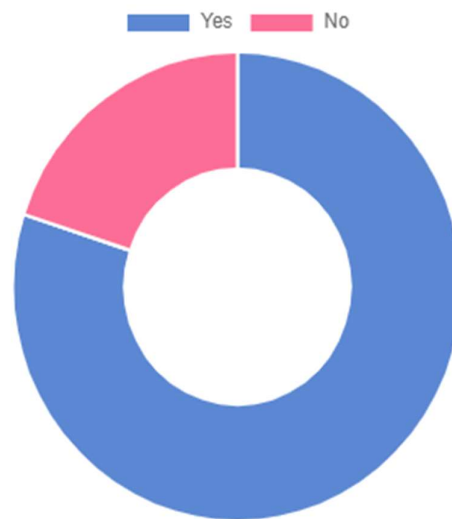


Figure 7: Indication of Meeting Attendance

Of those who suggested that attendance was less than optimal, the reasons given were:

- 'people are not interested in the work of the Sector Skills Council'
- 'there is no meaningful business handled at the meeting'

When asked about the organisation of the work of the Sector Skills Councils, almost all respondents indicated that sub-committees, commissions and working groups had been established. Of those established, the majority were related to the work of the Qualification Assessment Centers, sectoral qualification frameworks and the classification of job roles linked to qualifications and professional standards. The work area which was the least represented was industry skill needs and labour market monitoring.

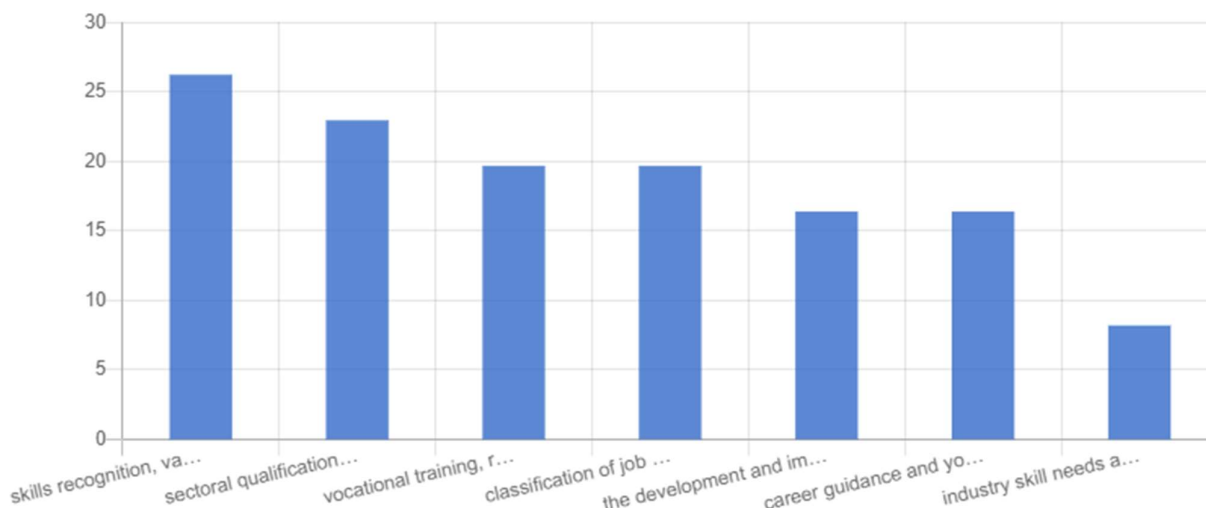


Figure 8: Technical Focus of Working Groups and Sub-Committees

When asked whether there should be changes made to the way Sector Skills Councils are structured and operate, 71% suggested no changes were necessary and 29% suggested that changes were required. When asked to clarify which changes were required, the need for greater industry leadership was mentioned by several respondents. A specific suggestion was also made to change the structure of the Republican Council and increase the participation of industry, including through the participation of the Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

5.4 Human & Financial Resourcing of Sector Skills Councils

When directly asked whether Sector Skills Councils had adequate financial and human resources to complete their work, as shown in Figure 9 below, 59% answered that resourcing was adequate with 41% suggesting it was not.

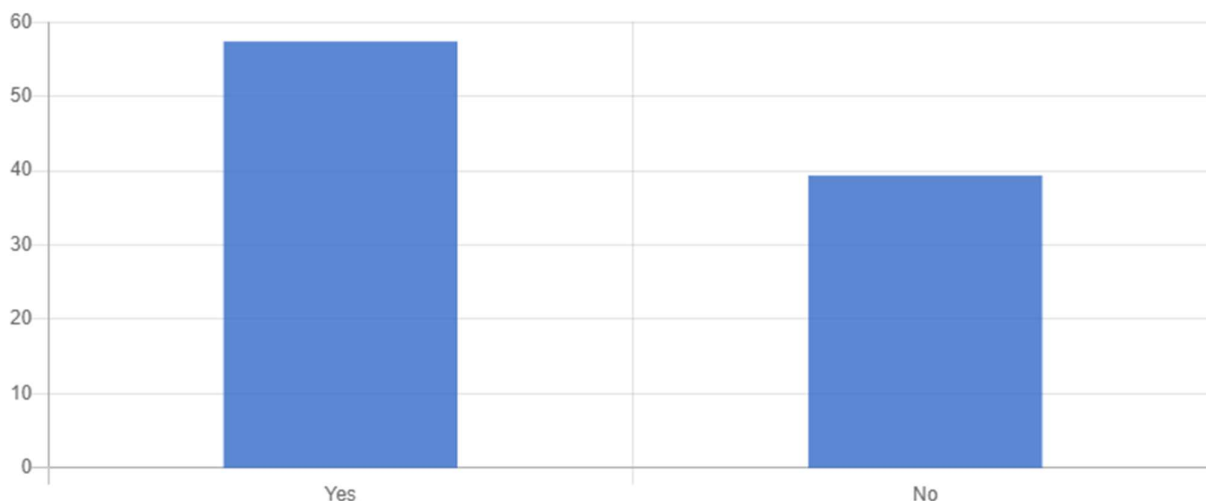


Figure 9: Adequacy of Funding for Sector Skills Councils

When given the opportunity to provide further comments, in addition to specific references to finance, a number of respondents highlighted that the role of Sector Skills Council Secretary is only a part-time role with them also being assigned to another job role within the relevant Ministry or host organisation. It was suggested that the position of Secretary should be defined separately, apart from the general staffing units of the Ministry and that dedicated financial support should be established. Respondents also linked insufficient funding to the lack of available experts to support the development of professional standards and other work priorities of the Sector Skills Councils. It was also suggested that separate financing should be provided for the working groups of the Sector Skills Councils.

When specifically asked whether there is sufficient networking and information sharing between Sector Skills Councils, the results were fairly evenly split, with 52% suggesting there was sufficient networking and 48% suggesting there was not.

5.5 Number and Scope of Sector Skills Councils

Respondents were asked whether the current number of Sector Skills Councils was suitable for Uzbekistan. As shown in Figure 10:

- 57% suggested the number was appropriate
- 29% thought the number should be increased and
- 14% thought the number should be reduced or that some Sector Skills Councils combined.

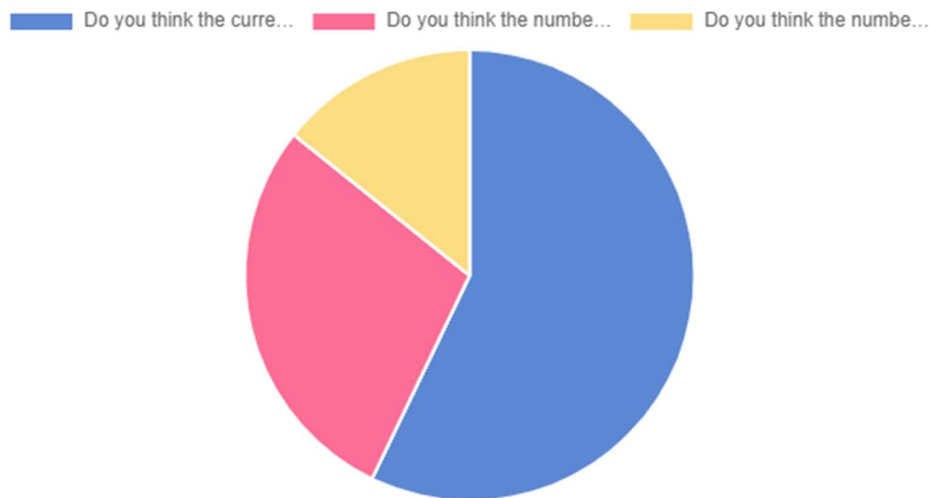


Figure 10: Number of Sector Skills Councils

When asked for any clarifying comments, several respondents noted that the number of Sector Skills Councils was not a major issue compared to the lack of influence, legal basis and normative framework for the decisions of the Sector Skills Councils.

Several respondents also commented that it was more important to increase the human and financial resources of the existing councils rather than increasing the number of councils. As shown in Figure 11 below, when asked whether additional roles and responsibilities should be added to the Terms of Reference of the Sector Skills Councils so they could more

effectively tackle the key skills issues in their sectors, 75% of respondents answered yes and 25% answered no.

When asked which additional roles should be given to the Sector Skills Councils, several respondents suggested a role to ensure there was a closer link between professional standards and the qualifications issued by education and training institutions. More specifically, it was noted that the requirements of Article 34 of the Law on Education was not being complied with as qualification requirements, curricula and subject programs are not being developed on the basis of professional standards. Reference was also made to the need to strengthen the link between professional standards, qualifications and wages.

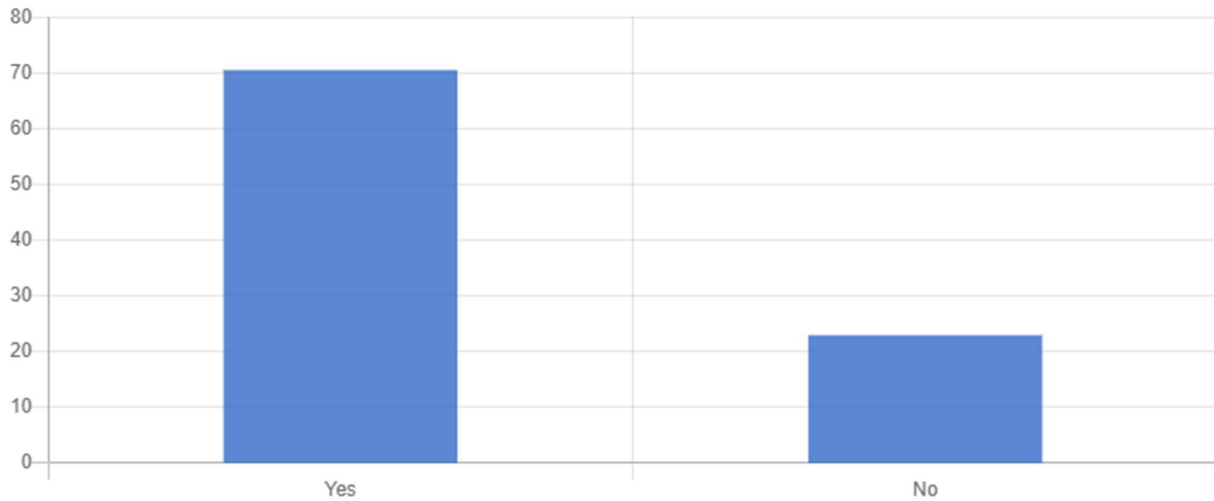


Figure 11: Expansion of Roles & Responsibilities

It is interesting to note that it was also suggested that Sector Skills Councils should directly influence the activities of employers and that they be tasked with expanding relationships with employers, an interesting suggestion given that is a key reason for their establishment. Respondents were also asked whether the roles and powers of Sector Skills Councils are sufficiently recognized by other entities mentioned in the normative documents of the National Qualifications System. 71% suggested the Sector Skills Councils were sufficiently recognised and 29% suggested they were not. When asked which organisations were most actively involved in the National Qualifications System, as shown in Figure 12, respondents highlighted the work of Qualification Assessment Centres, the Republican Council and the Institute for Labour Market Research. When asked which organisations needed to work more effectively with Sector Skills Councils, the Institute for Labour Market Research was referred to by several respondents.

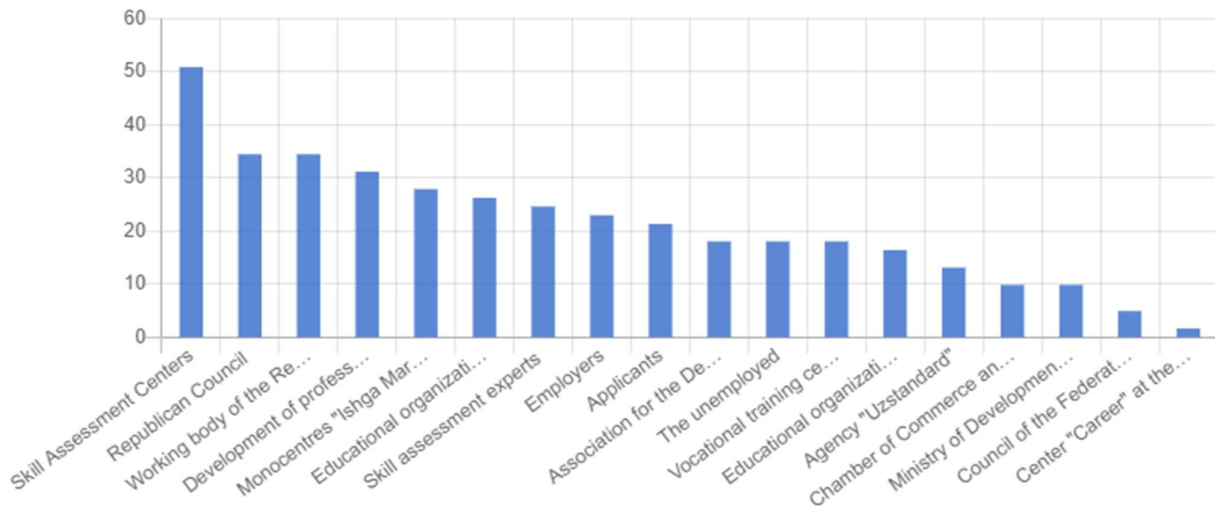


Figure 12: Key Organisations Active in the VET & Skills System

5.6 Sector Skills Council Performance

Respondents were asked to rate how effective they thought Sector Skills Councils have been in undertaking their work. As shown in Figure 13, 84% rated performance as effective or very effective and 16% rated it as not effective or poor.

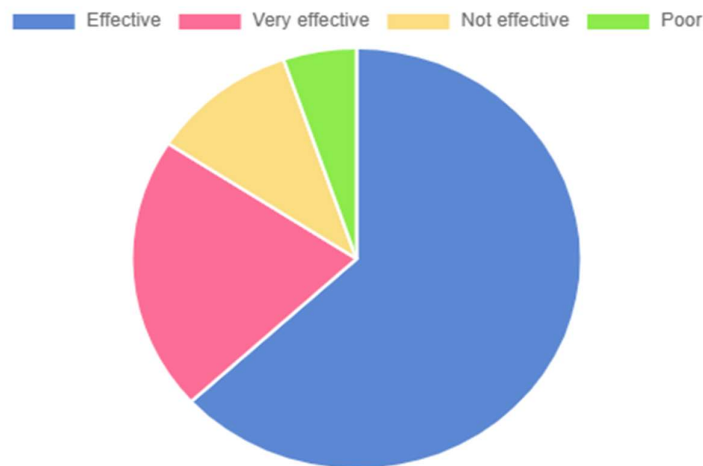


Figure 13: Overview of Sector Skills Council Performance

Respondents were also asked to rate how well the Sector Skills Councils had addressed the different areas of work in their terms of reference. Respondents were asked to rank their performance from 1 (for least progress) to 5 (for most progress). Figure 14 shows the results for work on sectoral qualification frameworks where the majority of respondents rated their progress reasonably highly (26 ratings of 4 and 5). This high rating is perhaps to be expected given that the development of sectoral qualification frameworks is linked to the development of professional standards which has been a priority for Sector Skills Councils since their inception.

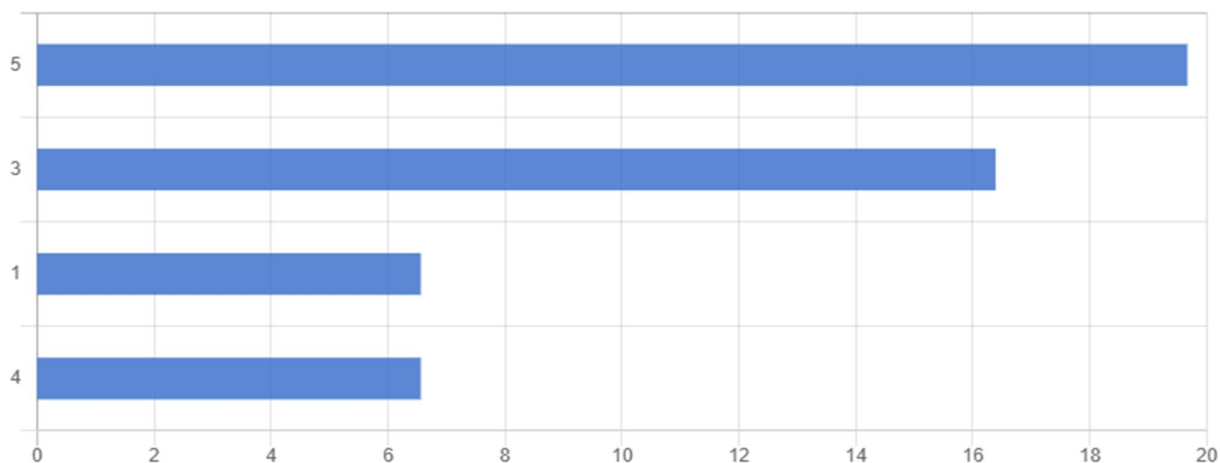


Figure 14: Ratings of progress on sectoral qualification frameworks

Figure 15 shows the results in relation to the development and implementation of professional standards where the majority of respondents rated their progress even more highly (33 ratings of 4 and 5).

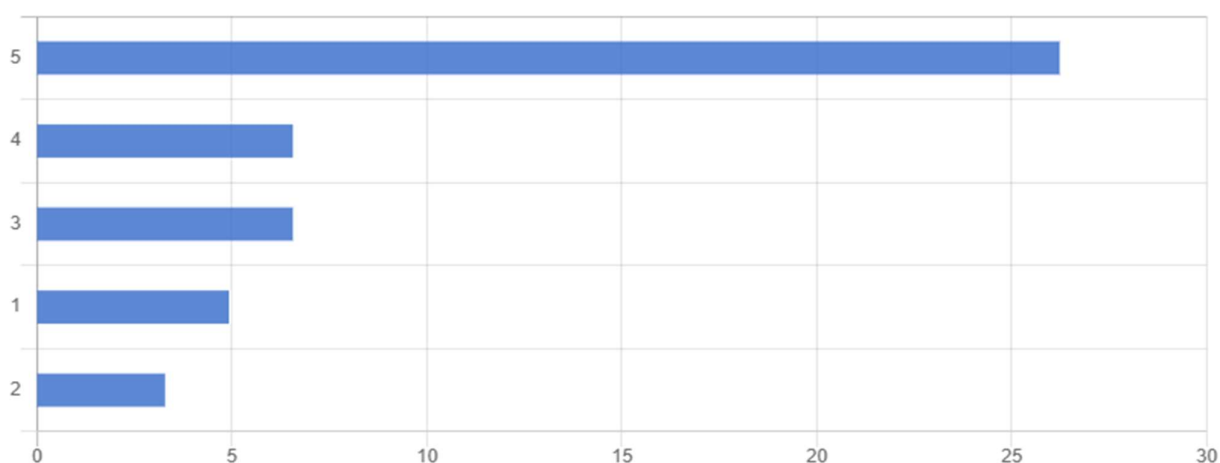


Figure 15: Ratings of progress on the development and implementation of professional standards

Figure 16 shows the results in relation to skills recognition, validation, certification and qualification assessment centres. For this area of work the majority of respondents also rated their progress highly (31 ratings of 4 and 5). This result also reflects the level of priority given by the Republican Council and Sector Skills Councils to the establishment of Qualification Assessment Centres.

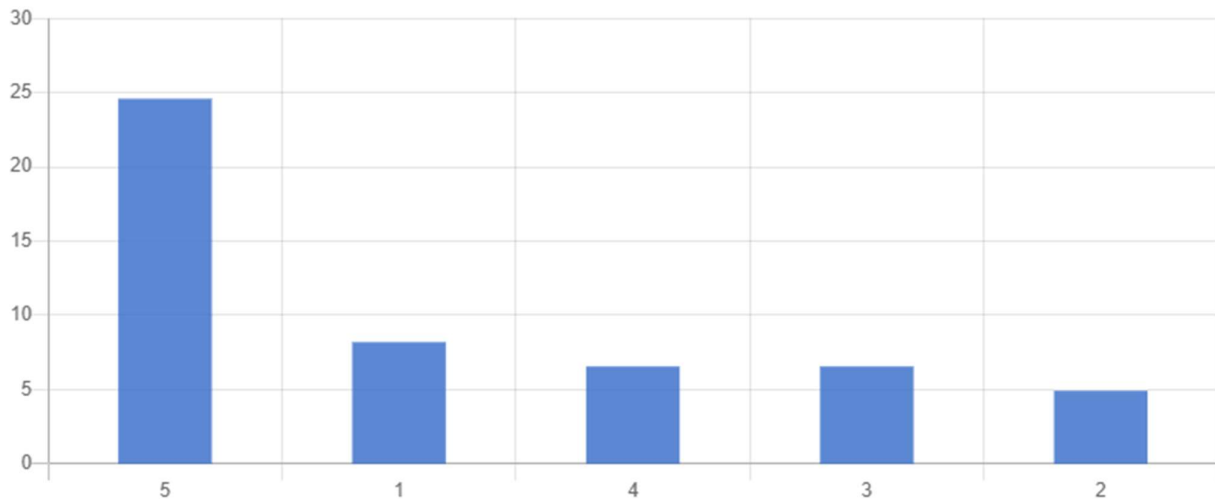


Figure 16: Ratings of progress on skills recognition, validation, certification and qualification assessment centres

Figure 17 below shows the extent of progress on work related to career guidance and youth orientation activities. Again, here the majority of respondents also rated their progress highly (29 ratings of 4 and 5). This result is perhaps a little unexpected given it is understood that the majority of Sector Skills Councils have not done much work in this area.

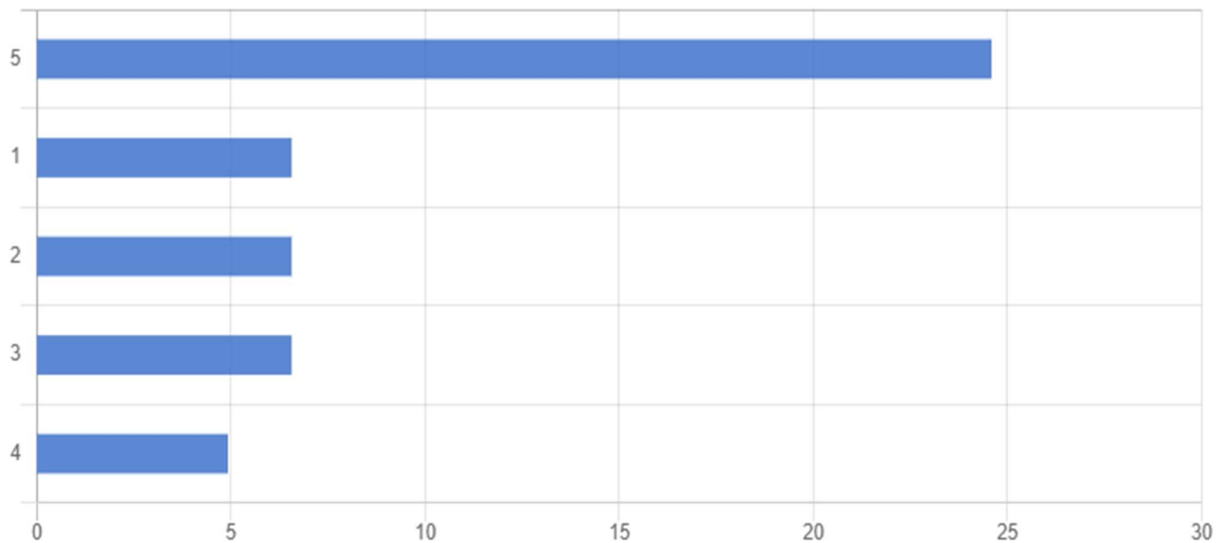


Figure 17: Ratings of progress on career guidance and youth orientation activities

Figure 18 below shows the extent of progress on work related to the classification of job roles linked to qualifications and professional standards. Again, respondents rated their progress highly (30 ratings of 4 and 5). Given the links between this work and the development of sectoral professional standards it is perhaps also not surprising that this area was also rated highly.

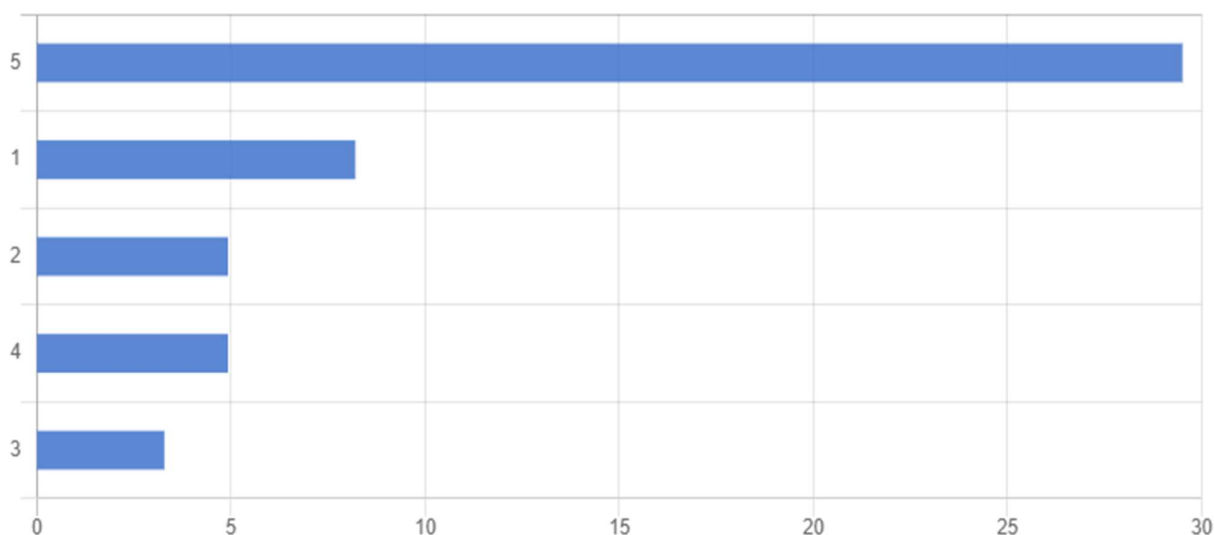


Figure 18: Ratings of progress on classification of job roles linked to qualifications and professional standards

Finally, Figure 19 below shows the extent of progress on work related to industry skill needs and labor market monitoring. Along with the work area related to sectoral qualification frameworks, this area of work was rated less advanced (26 ratings of 4 and 5).

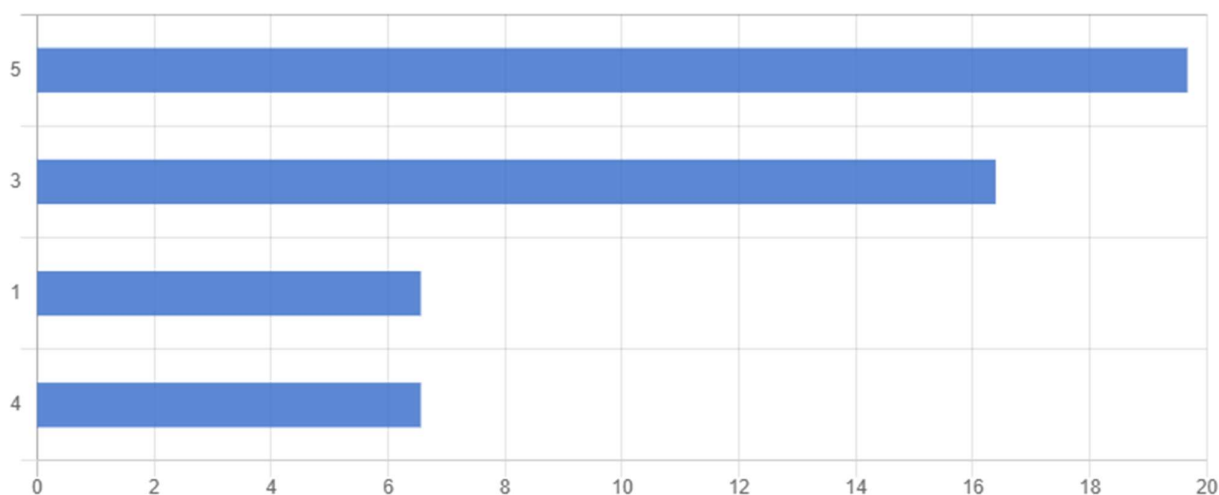


Figure 19: Ratings of progress on industry skill needs and labor market monitoring

On the basis of these results, respondents indicated that progress was made most in the following work areas (from most progress to least progress):

- development and implementation of professional standards (33);
- skills recognition, validation, certification and qualification assessment centres (31);
- classification of job roles linked to qualifications and professional standards (30);
- career guidance and youth orientation activities (29);
- sectoral qualification frameworks (26);
- industry skill needs and labor market monitoring (26).

When asked what were the main issues that had prevented the Sector Skills Council from making more progress, the main four factors were reported as:

- the lack of private sector participation (28%);
- the lack of technical expertise in the Sector Skills Council (28%);
- uncertainty about the future of the Sector Skills Councils (26%); and
- the lack of funding (16%).

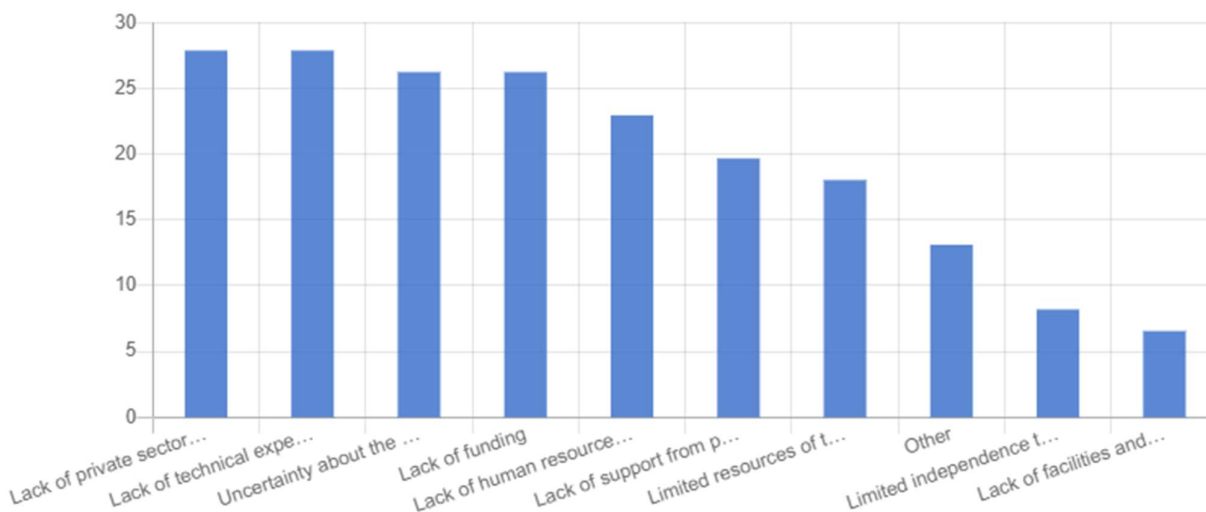


Figure 20: Factors Affecting the Performance of Sector Skills Councils

As shown in Figure 20, amongst other reasons reported, several respondents mentioned the lack of support from the parent ministries or agencies (20%) and the limited power to tackle key skills issues affecting the sector (9%).

Respondents were also asked whether the establishment of Sector Skills Councils has been a positive development for the education and training system of Uzbekistan. In response, an overwhelming 93% answered positively with only 7% in the negative. When asked to explain a negative response, several respondents highlighted the ongoing need to better integrate the education system with the system of professional standards.

When specifically asked for suggestions on how the functioning and effectiveness of Sector Skills Councils could be improved or what other measures could be introduced to improve cooperation between the education and training system and the labour market, the following key issues and recommendations were made and are shown here as paraphrased direct quotations:

- “It is necessary to allocate funds from the budget for specialists (experts) to accelerate the activity and increase the efficiency of the Sector Skills Councils; they must have a source of funding; they should have a separate office and organizations should be able to contact them; They should promote innovative ideas.”
- “Communication between the councils needs to be improved; A roadmap for the improvement of Sector Skills Councils needs to be developed.”
- “It is necessary to increase the knowledge of those who work in Sector Skills Councils and attract specialists who fully understand the activities of the Councils.”

- “Sector Skills Councils should work more closely with employers and qualification assessment centres; They have little influence on the private sector. More private sector representatives need to be added; The influence of Sector Skills Councils on the private sector should be increased as quickly as possible. It may be necessary to privatize the activities of Sector Skills Councils.”
- “It is necessary to introduce mechanisms for influencing the national system of qualifications by all employers (including private ones) with equal force; The relevant legislation must be changed.”
- “It is necessary to expand the list of occupations for which professional standards are being developed. These include professions that exist in the labor market but are not included in the classification of professions such as men's hairdresser, nail stylist, massage therapists, beauticians.”
- “The Sector Skills Councils should analyze the labor market with the support of the Ministry, and based on the results, make proposals for the vocational education system.”

6. Discussion

The discussion in this section responds to the findings from the online survey, stakeholder interviews and the micro case studies of five Sector Skills Councils.

Whilst the survey results in the previous section provide a snapshot of the views of stakeholders involved in the work of the Sector Skills Councils, the other data sources provide a broader frame of reference for the analysis. It is worth noting however that the author of this report did not have access to any data that exists on how well individual Sector Skills Councils have or have not met any performance targets that may exist. It is also worth noting that the only survey is effectively a self-assessment of Sector Skills Council performance and cannot be considered a fully objective assessment.

The discussion in this section is divided into three different sections that address:

- the broader policy context in which the Sector Skills Councils operate;
- the structural issues affecting how Sector Skills Councils function; and
- the particular operational constraints that Sector Skills Councils face.

This discussion of issues is then followed by a brief overview of the results of a validation workshop held in Tashkent on 11 October 2023, where the key findings of this report were presented and discussed by key stakeholders.

Policy Developments

The ongoing program of government reform and associated restructure has affected the number and mandates of a number of ministries represented on the Republican Council, such as Construction and Municipal Utilities Ministries which will in turn impact on the number and memberships of Sector Skills Councils. It is understood that this will lead to the number of Sector Skills Councils potentially being reduced from 29 to around 24.

Despite the opportunity this presents, no other changes to the structure or mandate of Sector Skills Councils appear to be on the agenda. However, it should be noted that this restructure has affected the work of Sector Skills Councils and has led to substantial delays in the formal

approval of a number of new professional standards and related curriculum. It is understood that a number of Sector Skills Councils have not met at all in 2023 due to the pending restructure situation that can only have negatively affected their operations and strategic focus.

Another important development likely to affect the future operations of Sector Skills Councils is the introduction of a new system of occupational licensing to Uzbekistan.

The Ministry of Employment & Poverty Reduction (MEPR) is in the process of introducing a limited system of occupational licensing. A list of 50 occupations has been drawn up which require mandatory certification. This list is expected to be formally approved before the end of 2023. In 2024, promotion and awareness raising will occur and provide time for assessment centres and to be established and become operational in the relevant sectors. The system is then expected to become operational in 2025. This system is likely to substantially increase the demand for the validation and certification of skills in the labour market and thus the work of the Sector Skills Councils and Qualification Assessment Centres. Whilst Sector Skills Councils were requested to propose occupations from their sectors for inclusion, at the time of writing, the final list has not been published. As the system becomes established, the list of occupations requiring mandatory certification however is expected to grow, and with it, the work of the Sector Skills Councils.

Whilst policy development for Sector Skills Councils is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment & Poverty Reduction (MEPR) under Direction of the Republican Council, the working body of the Republican Council and key support agency for Sector Skills Councils is the Institute for Labour Market Research (ILMR). The Director of the ILMR is also the Secretary of Republican Council. The research highlighted the operational constraints being faced by ILMR and the impact this has on the support provided to Sector Skills Councils. Ensuring the ILMR has the necessary staff and resources do fulfill its mandate will increase the level of support available to Sector Skills Councils and enable them to expand their work to include the fundamental area of labour market information and skills intelligence which to date has not commenced in earnest.

Structural Issues

A key issue related to the current Sector Skills Council model is the legal status of the councils. Whilst use of the term 'council' suggests a more formal entity, the Sector Skills Councils are not legal entities and are not able to manage funds. Given the calls for increased financing and the potential for an expanded role for Sector Skills Councils to support the operation of Qualification Assessment Centres, the question of legal status and organisational structure should perhaps be revisited.

This issue is also linked to the degree of influence that Sector Skills Councils have in the VET system of Uzbekistan. A number of stakeholders have highlighted that decisions of Sector Skills Councils are not binding and do not have any legal standing. Calls for the mandatory use of professional standards for recruitment and wage fixing in industry will require a stronger legal basis for the Sector Skills Councils and the decisions they make. It was noted that the decisions and the work of the Sector Skills Councils has no formal status and it was suggested that Sector Skills Councils should have authority to issue regulatory orders or issue documents that go through a body that has such regulated powers. It was

suggested that with that potential change, Sector Skills Councils could further regulate the number of employees requiring skills certification at different levels.

Whilst some stakeholders agreed that Sector Skills Councils should be given more organisational and financial independence, they were uncertain about how best to achieve that. It was also noted that in each industry sector there is a fund in place which could be used to provide more financial resources to Sector Skills Councils but that with the exception of the Tourism Sector Skills Council, these had not been utilised.

Stakeholders also highlighted the regulatory difficulties associated with establishing Sector Skills Councils as legal entities given the likelihood that government funding would then be expected to flow to the restructured councils, thus necessitating some form of public tender process. Changes to the legal structure of Sector Skills Councils and the ongoing relationship between them and government was also linked to the 2005 government order on interference in the private sector which was identified as possible regulatory barrier to a move in this direction. Any decision to make changes to the legal structure of Sector Skills Councils should also consider whether industry bodies or JSC could take up the role currently filled by government entities and effectively take on the hosting role, the provision of secretariat support and the management of funds on their behalf.

The ability of Sector Skills Councils to receive funds is clearly linked to their roles and the nature of the relationship that government wish to have with them. If the Sector Skills Councils are expected to generate income from their activities and move towards being more financially independent by generating income for services such as the affiliation of assessment centres, training of trainers and government funded sector specific skills research, then they will need to be separate legal entities. However, if it is clear that the intention of stakeholders is not to take Sector Skills Councils in that direction, then their legal status is less of an issue.

This raises another issue related to the current arrangements, namely the degree of autonomy from government the Sector Skills Councils have. It is understood that in early stage of development and establishment, putting the councils under the responsibility of line ministries was the preferred option. Whilst this model is not unique to Uzbekistan, the overarching goal in most countries where sector skills bodies have been established is to have them develop a degree of industry ownership and independence from government as they mature. In Uzbekistan, as in other countries, there are varying views about whether the private sector is 'ready' to take greater responsibility.

It was suggested that the private sector in Uzbekistan is not well organised along sectoral lines and there are limited examples of independent sector associations or industry organisations which could take on the role of host for Sector Skills Councils, a legacy of the centralised state controlled economic system and the fact that export oriented firms and foreign trade are still being developed. The program of privatisation and trade liberalisation in Uzbekistan is ongoing and as such the economy cannot be considered as a fully market-based economy, perhaps with the exception of the major 'exporting' sectors such as textiles, light manufacturing and agriculture.

This issue of industry engagement is also illustrated by the apparent lack of connection between the Sector Skills Councils and the major organisations of workers and employers in Uzbekistan. Whilst the Confederation of Employers is actively engaged in social dialogue on

a range of issues related to employment, it appears they have not been actively engaged with the various work items of the Sector Skills Councils or approached to see how they can contribute to enhanced industry engagement in VET and skills issues, including through the direct participation of their members in the Sector Skills Councils.

A similar situation exists with the Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry which is arguably the largest industry body in Uzbekistan. With a system of 21 sector committees in place and more than 160,000 enterprises as members, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry should also more effectively involved in the work of the Sector Skills Councils. This involvement could also extend to the operation of Qualification Assessment Centres which could be collocated with the network of business incubators that the chamber is establishing. The leading workers' organisation, the Uzbekistan Trade Union Federation, or its member sector-based unions, also appear to not be members or actively engaged with the work of the Sector Skills Councils. Given their potential role in the promotion qualification assessment and skills recognition to workers, and their role in collective bargaining and wage setting in Uzbekistan, the lack of formal engagement of trade unions in the membership and activities of the Sector Skills Councils is an oversight that should be addressed. It is understood that whilst training and retraining issues are often included in collective agreements at the sectoral and enterprise levels, it appears that these provisions do not typically include reference to professional standards nor the options for qualification assessment and skills recognition.

As noted earlier, the current financing and resourcing model for Sector Skills Councils has come under some criticism. It could be argued that as a minimum, supporting line ministries and host organisations should be compelled to provide a dedicated annual budget and resourcing through staff appointed to the Sector Skills Council in a full-time capacity. Whilst it is understood that additional financial resources can be allocated to Ministries by the Republican Council, it is believed that this does not occur. As an alternate option, it is also understood that the Institute for Labour Market Research (ILMR), as the working body of the Republican Council, also has the potential to fund Sector Skills Councils directly but cannot do so due to government funding regulations and the legal status of Sector Skills Councils.

It appears that the potential for the Sector Skills Councils to raise revenue from Qualification Assessment Centres has not been fully explored. This options would follow the example of India and Turkey where industry bodies receive fees through the process of affiliation and quality assurance of assessment centres. If councils were to become legal entities they would have to participate in public tender processes to obtain government funding but this would allow government to move towards a performance based funding model where sector specific deliverables and work plans could be negotiated with each Sector Skills Council.

Another key structural issue relates to the number of Sector Skills Councils and the sectoral scope they have. Uzbekistan is a unique example of sector skills bodies that have responsibilities for all occupations in a sector, including those that require higher education qualifications. Also unique is how the concept of economic or industry 'sector' has been defined. Most countries that introduce sector skills bodies define sectoral coverage with reference to International System of Industrial Classification (ISIC), value chain groupings or government development priorities. Uzbekistan is in the unique position of having a discrete sector skills body for Taxation; Standardisation & Certification; Personnel Work & Labor Safety; Economic Activity; Justice; and Life Safety which is not an approach evident in any

other country that operates sector skills bodies and reflects a unique approach to the definition of sectors.

Given such an arrangement, it is not clear the extent to which the Sector Skills Councils have been established to address the most pressing skills issues facing priority industry sectors in Uzbekistan or whether they are simply government run committees established to implement key government decisions.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the membership of Sector Skills Councils is also dominated by government. It is understood that limited consultation with the private sector occurred during the development of the Sector Skills Council concept. As such, there is relatively low and limited private sector membership across councils. Whilst mandatory industry participation is guaranteed by virtue of Presidential Decree 493, the minimum membership is fixed by government. Councils can invite additional members but these need to be approved by Republican Council. This means in effect that individual Sector Skills Councils cannot determine themselves who should be members, who should be Chairperson and, due to the lack of work to determine skill needs, what skills issues need to be addressed as a priority in their sector.

Operational Issues

The terms of reference and associated roles & responsibilities of Sector Skills Councils are set out in Presidential Decree 4939. As noted earlier, there are six major roles. The research indicates however that to date, the operations of Sector Skills Councils have only focussed on three: sectoral qualification frameworks; the development of professional standards and the establishment of qualification assessment centres. In particular, work related to the collection of labour market intelligence and career guidance and promotion have yet to be substantially taken up.

In relation to the operationalisation of Qualification Assessment Centres, several issues can be identified. One is simply that there appears to have been less progress with the establishment of assessment centres than there has been with the work to develop professional standards. Whilst this may simply reflect the limited capacity that exists within Sector Skills Councils, it may also reflect a broader lack of awareness or need for such centres in all of the sectors covered by the 29 Sector Skills Councils. At the time of writing, no data was available on the number of assessment centres which have been established and/or are operating, nor on the number of candidates that had been assessed. On this basis, and despite the positive self-assessment presented through the online survey, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of Sector Skills Councils in establishing Qualification Assessment Centres. From the experience of the five case study Sector Skills Councils, clearly much work remains to be done to establish and operationalise Qualification Assessment Centres in Uzbekistan so they provide recognised alternate pathways to formal qualifications for the workers of Uzbekistan.

Awareness and take-up amongst employers and workers seems very low and there is evidence of scepticism amongst stakeholders of the value of the credentials to be issued. Whilst demand is currently low, it was noted that the adoption of ISO certification by employers in Uzbekistan was an example of how the value of formal certification has been slowly recognised by industry and thus could shape the future demand for competency certification. It is also worth noting however that Sector Skills Councils do not appear to have

a priority list of occupations or skills for assessment, an indication perhaps of the lack of work that has been done to gather labour market information and skills intelligence for their sectors. As such there is no focus on occupations or skills in demand in the sector and the choice of occupations for assessment simply seems to reflect those occupations that have the greatest share of employment in the sector.

Another issue relates to the development and application of criteria used to establish the centres. Whilst it is understood that centres are registered by the Ministry of Employment & Poverty Reduction (MEPR) on advice from the Sector Skills Councils and relevant line ministry, It is not clear how those criteria compare with the criteria used to establish formal education and training institutions. This is relevant because it impacts directly on the status of qualifications issued by the Qualification Assessment Centres and whether they are comparable and equally recognised as qualifications issued by other formal institutions.

The ongoing quality assurance of Qualification Assessment Centres also appears to be unclear. Whilst it is understood that this will be the responsibility of Sector Skills Councils who are expected to make site visits, it is unclear which quality standards will be applied and whether they will be similar or equivalent to the standards used to guide the operations of other education and training institutions that issue formal educational qualifications. The creation of a centralised online database of exam results will no doubt provide transparency and greater confidence amongst employers and other stakeholders of the value of credentials issued by the centres. The use of industry verified assessors will also build trust in the system. However, if the credentials issued by the Qualification Assessment Centres are to have the same status and value in the labour market as credentials issued by formal VET and skills training institutions, then the centres should operate under the same quality standards that include scrutiny of the assessment tools used to inform assessment decisions. At this stage, it is not clear how this will occur or what exact role the Sector Skills Councils will have in that process.

In relation to the development of professional standards, it is understood that initial development work followed a Russian model of occupational standards which, it has been claimed, resulted in too many specialisations and occupations being identified. Whilst it is understood that a new model is now being considered, the lack of technical expertise in standards development is considered a major obstacle to the development of standards and the guidance these documents are able to provide to the developers of curriculum and assessment tools. Whilst language barriers have limited the greater use of existing standards from other countries, it may be worth considering the targeted translation of competency-based standards from those countries where they are specifically used to inform the design of competency-based training and assessment materials for priority occupations.

However, as noted earlier, neither the Sector Skills Councils or ILMR have taken steps to collect and report on labour market information and skills intelligence to guide their current and future operations or shape programming and planning within the wider VET and skills sector. In those countries that have established sector skills bodies, the first and most important task given is the development of a sector skills plan based on sector-specific skills research and analysis. This should be addressed as a priority if Sector Skills Councils are to develop into genuine sector skills bodies.

As noted earlier, the level of support provided by ILMR is considered to be less than required, as are the opportunities for networking amongst the Sector Skills Councils themselves. Whilst

interaction between councils and MEPR and consultation occurs mainly through a dedicated Telegram Group and formal correspondence, the potential for coordinated donor support to address the capacity building needs of Sector Skills Councils has yet to be fully explored. Such support however should take into account any potential changes to the number, structure role and legal basis of the Sector Skills Councils that might arise from this research. It is also worth noting at this point the nature of working methods and culture of communications that appears to exist within some Sector Skills Councils. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the secretaries of some Sector Skills Councils are not permitted to invite or communicate directly with industry representatives without the express approval of more senior staff in the Ministry. There are limited direct working arrangements with most communication achieved through the formal exchange of correspondence from the Ministry or another senior official. This lack of working communication is also understood to exist in some cases between institutions under the same ministry. Such highly formalised and bureaucratic systems are not conducive to active industry engagement and proactive action on skills issues by the Sector Skills Councils.

The scope of work of Sector Skills Councils and their capacity to respond directly to the specific skills issues in their sector is also effectively constrained by the existing performance monitoring arrangements for Sector Skills Councils. It is understood that general targets are set but only against two major work areas, the development of professional standards and the establishment of Qualification Assessment Centres. Annual targets for these work items are set by the Republican Council and Sector Skills Councils submit quarterly report to Republican Council. It is understood however that these reports only contain the minutes of council meetings and information on progress against the targets set. After each quarterly reporting cycle it is understood there is typically a meeting between the Institute and all Sector Skills Councils, led by the chair of the Republican Council, where it is assumed that other operational issues can be discussed.

However, the lack of specific targets, agreed actions and incentive mechanisms for each Sector Skills Council is likely to impact negatively on the potential performance of these bodies. The introduction of sector specific project initiatives, funded by government in response to identified needs, would provide the incentive for Sector Skills Councils to engage more effectively with employers and obtain more resources to address the key skills issues in their sectors.

The limited performance monitoring framework for Sector Skills Councils is also linked to the apparent lack of a strategic plan for the future development of Sector Skills Councils.³ The lack of a clear strategic direction for Sector Skills Councils is understood to contribute to uncertainty about the status and ongoing significance of the Sector Skills Councils in the Uzbekistan VET and skills system.

Stakeholders also suggested that there should be an operating manual developed for Sector Skills Councils and their members on how to conduct their work as it appears that different councils have different working methods. It was also suggested that such guidelines should set out the different roles of council members.

³ The current status of the 2021 Roadmap for Sector Skills Councils (Government of Uzbekistan, 2021) is unknown.

Validation Workshop

The findings and recommendations contained in this report were presented to key stakeholders at a validation workshop held in Tashkent on 11 October 2023. Participants included representatives of the Institute for Labour Market Research; the Ministry of Employment & Poverty Reduction; the Ministry of Higher Education, Science & Innovation; the Uzbekistan Trade Union Federation; the Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and 16 of the 29 Sector Skills Councils.

During the workshop, participants were presented with a summary of key issues and asked to rank them in order of importance, which was as follows:

- Financing, structure, autonomy;
- Industry engagement;
- Staffing, expertise, networking, technical support;
- Clarifying current roles and responsibilities and future mandate; and
- Operation of Qualification Assessment Centres.

Participants were also presented with a set of draft recommendations and given the opportunity to review them and suggest additional actions. Their suggestions are included in the final set of recommendations presented in the next section.

7. Recommendations to Strengthen the Future Performance of Sector Skills Councils

The previous sections of this report have highlighted various issues that may influence the future operation of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan. These include issues of industry representation, financing, structure and legal mandate.

However, what steps are taken to respond or not to them depends entirely on what future direction stakeholders wish the Sector Skills Councils to develop and what roles and responsibilities they wish the organisations to have. On that basis, the following recommendations have been made for action over the short and medium term.

Short Term (12 months)

Despite the options for Sector Skills Council operations that the future holds, in the short term it is clear that some immediate steps should be taken to strengthen the operation of Sector Skills Councils. It is recommended that the Republican Council and social partners work together to:

- Reinforce the staffing and resourcing of Sector Skills Councils to establish more effective secretariats with full-time staff and dedicated budgets so Sector Skills Councils can fulfill their existing mandate more effectively;
- Review the industry membership of each Sector Skills Council and undertake fresh industry consultations to increase industry participation including through representation of key industry bodies such as the Uzbekistan Confederation of Employers, the Uzbekistan Trade Union Federation and the Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry;

- Review the governance structure of Sector Skills Councils to ensure that in those sectors where the private sector are the largest employer, the positions of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are from the private sector;
- Undertake fresh consultations with industry to review the provision of Secretariat support to Sector Skills Councils with the aim of increasing the number of Sector Skills Councils that are hosted by industry associations and Joint Stock Companies in order to increase industry ownership and engagement and ensure they are genuinely led by the private sector;
- Request Sector Skills Councils to develop sector skills plans for their sector and provide them with funding to undertake the sector specific research and analysis of skills and labour market issues to do so;
- Strengthen the capacity of the Institute of Labour Market Research to provide enhanced methodological and capacity building support to Sector Skills Councils and to provide leadership on labour market analysis and skills intelligence;
- Develop an Action Plan for operationalisation of the Qualification Assessment Centres which details the future role of Sector Skills Councils in the quality assurance of the centres and outlines steps to promote and raise awareness of the assessment and certification options amongst employers and workers; and
- Identify and act on the measures required to ensure the credentials issued by Qualification Assessment Centres have the same standing as qualifications issued by other education and training institutions.

Medium Term (1-2 years)

With a strategic perspective over the medium term, it is recommended that the Republican Council and social partners work together to:

- Review the number and sectoral coverage of Sector Skills Councils with the aim of strengthening links with economic sectors, consolidating their number further and establishing a single public sector skills council to combine those that focus solely on government employees such as the current separate Sector Skills Councils for ‘Justice’, ‘Taxation’ and ‘Economic Activity’;
- Review the potential future roles, responsibilities and funding options for Sector Skills Councils and take the necessary regulatory steps to ensure that Sector Skills Councils have the necessary legal and normative basis upon which this new mandate can be implemented;
- Develop an Operating Manual for Sector Skills Councils and their members; and
- Revise the performance management framework for Sector Skills Councils and developing sector specific action plans for each Sector Skills Councils that set out actions to address the key skills challenges facing the sectors.

8. References and Further Reading

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9. Attachments

- A. Chemical Sector Skills Council Case Study
- B. Education Sector Skills Council Case Study
- C. Tourism Sector Skills Council Case Study
- D. Textile and Leather Sector Skills Council Case Study
- E. Water Sector Skills Council Case Study
- F. Interview Questions on Sector Skills Councils
- G. Sector Skills Councils Online Survey Questionnaire

Chemical Sector Skills Council

The Chemicals Sector Skills Council is comprised of individual state-owned enterprises which operate as joint stock companies (JSC) with same status as a government ministry. Members also include a number of limited liability companies LLC which have JSC as founding members alongside the private sector. All chemical companies in Uzbekistan are thus to some extent state owned. Members of the Sector Skills Council include the six largest JSC which employ between 2,000 and 8,500 staff each. Members also include the heads of the qualification assessment centres operating in the sector.

The Sector Skills Council has developed an occupational map for the sector based on the national register of occupations. From the full list of occupations, which number in the thousands, the council identified 96 main occupations and have developed professional standards for these and a further 91 auxiliary occupations, covering 187 in total. They plan to develop an additional 30 standards and to review a number of existing ones to reflect recent technological changes and their experience to date with assessment.

The work to develop the standards was done by Sector Skills Council members and led by specialists from different departments in various companies. The template used was developed by the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction. The draft standards were sent to all other companies who provided feedback and validated the final drafts. The secretary noted that he received good support from members, the majority of whom were HR staff and technical specialists from large firms with dedicated training departments. It was also noted that good support was provided by ILMR which included more than 10 workshops in 2022 covering various issues related to standards development and assessment.

The Sector Skills Council has affiliated 6 qualification assessment centres, one in each of the main member JSC. As of August 2023, five assessment centres were fully operating. The assessment centres affiliated with the Chemical Sector Skills Council are not separate legal entities and have been established in workplaces. These JSC enterprises have established separate bank accounts to enable them to receive and expend funds, and have amended their JSC charter to allow them to be established.

Fees have not been paid for assessment centre services to date as all candidates have been employees of the JSC that operates the assessment centre. For candidates that may be from other firms, a fee policy has been developed and is currently awaiting approval by the Ministry of Employment & Poverty Reduction.

The Sector Skills Council has not developed a priority list for skills or occupations in demand in the sector and has tools and assessors in place for 20 occupations. Assessment tools follow an ILMR template and have been developed by council members with inputs from assessment centres. No data on the number of candidates was provided.

All candidates are existing or new employees of the JSC and to date there have been no candidates from firms who are not assessment centres. It is not mandatory for new employees to undertake assessments. For some existing workers, it is understood that for some specialist occupations, a skills attestation is required every 6 months which also drives demand.

Assessment centres are also used by firms to attest their own firm specific training and it is understood that in the past there was a firm-based skills assessment system which has been transferred to the assessment centres. Assessments are also undertaken to increase the qualification rank of candidates in an existing job role. It appears however that assessment centres in the chemicals sector are only focussing on the needs of firms where the assessment centres are based rather than the wider sector.

The Sector Skills Council noted that some promotion had taken place with reference to the use of posters, websites and other media notices, but it is not clear the extent to which this has occurred. Certificates were based on a standard template but are only a company credential. These credentials are registered by the Ministry of Employment & Poverty Reduction but are not issued on behalf of the ministry.

Assessors are JSC staff where the centres operate and a five person team of specialists undertake the practical assessment. The Sector Skills Council indicated that some moderation and quality assurance of the assessment process has taken place through a number of online and face to face workshops.

The Sector Skills Council observed that their biggest challenge they faced was that despite the support from ILMR, they did not have local examples of functioning centres and did not have a clear picture or model of the type of arrangements or system they were looking to establish. The Sector Skills Council has expressed interest in international experience of assessment centres and suggested twinning arrangements with centres located in Russia and Kazakhstan.

The Sector Skills Council noted that they were collaborating with several education and training institutions and the Ministry of Employment & Poverty Reduction to ensure curriculum was better linked to the professional standards they had developed.

The Sector Skills Council also indicated that they had commenced work on developing career guidance materials such as brochures and booklets directed at young people, but it is unclear whether this is the work of the different JSC or an initiative of the Sector Skills Council itself.

When asked about the issue of human and financial resources available to the sector, they expressed the view that whilst additional administrative staff were required, they did not require additional finance as the JSC members provided the resources they required. They did however call for more training on the roles and responsibilities of Sector Skills Councils.

Education Sector Skills Council

The Education Sector Skills Council is jointly led by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation and the Ministry of Preschool and School Education and claims to be the largest Sector Skills Council in terms of membership which includes the different education ministries, research institutions and individual public and private universities.

As with all Sector Skills Council, they have undertaken work to develop professional standards and have completed those for 26 occupations in the higher education sector. A unique challenge facing this Sector Skills Council is the fact that all professional roles require higher education qualifications, occupations that are not typically described through competency based occupational standards.

The Ministry however noted that they did maintain a similar framework of standards but that Presidential Decree 4939 has encouraged them to a new and revised them and develop new standards for occupations that had not previously been documented. The ministry also examined similar professional standards for education in other countries including Germany and Kazakhstan.

The Sector Skills Council is currently working on a generic standard covering pedagogy that will be integrated into the professional standards of numerous roles that have this function across the different education sectors including higher education, vocational education, secondary education and preschool education. They also expect that the standards will be adopted by the various teacher training institutions in the country.

Representatives of the Sector Skills Council also referred to a new decree from the Ministry on curriculum development which mandates the participation of the Sector Skills Council, and the new updated law for education which explicitly refers to the educational and occupational standards been developed by the Sector Skills Council. They see these developments as evidence of the ongoing sustainability of the Sector Skills Council in the education sector.

This Sector Skills Council faces some unique challenges related to the establishment and operation of Qualification Assessment Centres. The education sector includes a large number of teachers working in kindergartens and pre-schools in more rural and remote areas that do not have formal qualifications and there is a demand to recognise the skills of these employees. This however present a particular validation challenge due to be high level of qualification involved.

The Sector Skills Council has collaborated with the Republican Education Centre to develop the assessment and validation model. Six Qualification Assessment Centres have been established with coverage across the regions that will have the status of legal entities so they can receive fees for the services they offer. The Sector Skills Council is yet to finalise and approve the fee policy. It is envisaged that the assessment centres will focus more on intermediate occupations from the vocational education, secondary education and preschool education sectors.

The Sector Skills Council noted that the mandate of member institutions means that there are various departments in the different ministries that are working on labour market analysis and career guidance so these aspects of the terms of reference for sector skills councils are being addressed. However it is worth noting that this work is not done under the banner of the Sector Skills Council but rather under the auspices of some of its members. Council members also noted that they felt the scope of work currently assigned to Sector Skills Councils was adequate and there were no additional responsibilities that they felt should be given to Sector Skills Councils.

Council members also addressed the question of the legal status of the Sector Skills Council and whether or not it required greater independence. They commented that whilst the issue has been discussed in the Council it is less of an issue than it might be for other sectors because the public

sector remains the greatest employer and the work of the Sector Skills Council is best taken forward by those large public sector organisations.

Tourism Sector Skills Council

The secretary of the Tourism Sector Skills Council is the Head of the Education Department within the Committee for Tourism Development which has been established under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. The Deputy Head of the Committee for Tourism Development is the chairperson of the Sector Skills Council. Members of the Sector Skills Council include the hotels Association, the Association of cooks and the Association of tourist guides. The Sector Skills Council has developed 34 professional standards for tourism and are currently working on a further 12 for the culture sector. The work has been led by the research Institute under the Ministry but as such professional standards did not exist previously in this sector, the process of development and validation has been one of trial and error. Some of the standards developed have been revised and rewritten based on practical feedback from employers in the hotel sector.

It was noted that the work of the Sector Skills Council was complicated by the limited number of active employers and that industry input was limited to those members of the Sector Skills Council. There was no regional engagement of employers during the standards development process. Because of this, it is understood that Presidential Decree 268 included an article allowing the Committee for Tourism Development to pay employers to dissipate in the standards development process. It is understood that this provision only applies to the Tourism Sector Skills Council.

It was also observed that whilst for staff had been trained and certified in standards development by the Institute for Labour Market Research (ILMR), these facilitators were teachers and trainers from education and training institutions who did not necessarily have current industry knowledge or experience. This led to substantial revisions having to be made to the standards at the different stages of development. They noted that there was only minor financial costs related to standards development which was covered by the Ministry but that additional costs could be claimed from the Committee for Tourism Development as was the case when the council's office was established.

The Council has established its first Qualification Assessment Centre in Tashkent as a pilot. As the Committee for Tourism Development operates 10 training centres, the Sector Skills Council plans to establish further assessment centres in these facilities which are undergoing a review to determine the refurbishment needs. The final plan is to establish one assessment centre in each of the 14 regions in the country and whilst the ministry also plans to establish for assessment centres in private hotels, it is understood this plan has yet to be discussed with industry representatives.

The council noted that employer members of the Council are supportive of the concept of skills recognition and validation. They also noted however that of standardised wage rates that link certification and wages is weak in the sector and that employers in general do not place substantial value of skills certification.

The Sector Skills Council has not undertaken any work on labour market analysis as they have no mechanism or working method to do so although it is understood that ILMR has provided some methodological guidance. There has not been any awareness raising or promotion of the Council and its work to the wider industry.

There has been one monitoring visits to the tourism Sector Skills Council since establishment. It was also noted that in the tourism sector there was a separate Experts Council with 27 members which was an industry initiative to provide inputs to government on the development of the sector it is understood that this expert Council has made various recommendations and observations about industry development which include matters relating to skills development. It is understood however that there are no links between this Expert Council and the Tourism Sector Skills Council.

Textile and Leather Sector Skills Council

The Textile and Leather Sector Skills Council is one of the few Sector Skills Councils that is not housed in a government ministry, in this case being hosted by the industry association 'Uztekstilprom'.

The sector faces a lack of specialists in the middle level skilled occupations and suffers from a lack of training opportunities, particularly in the leather goods sector which has a small number of providers. The sector is also still in a growth phase with many firms still establishing themselves and their management systems. The Sector Skills Council gave some emphasis to labour market analysis to priorities for the development of occupational standards and to identify potential changes to the classifications of some occupations. Whilst the council used the template provided by the Institute for Labour Market Research, it was also able to benefit from the support of the GIZ TexVET project which enabled industry working groups to lead the process.

This contrasts with more traditional approaches led by education and training providers. The draft standards were published for comment for 20 days, with feedback and suggested revisions obtained from employers outside the sector skills council membership. The support of the GIZ in project complemented the meagre funds otherwise available from line ministries. 70-80 professional standards have been developed by the Sector Skills Council.

The textiles Sector Skills Council has commenced work to establish Qualification Assessment Centres which are being established as independent legal entities. They will be established in key regional centres but also in production facilities. The Sector Skills Council has accredited the centres and the experts who will work in them to conduct the theoretical and practical assessments. In the first phase the accreditation was linked to their status as educational institutions although different criteria were used.

Will initially focus on providing skills recognition services to existing workers and then expand to certification services for the graduates of vocational colleges. The assessment centre in Tashkent will start with three occupations: sewers, cutters and machine operators. The Sector Skills council expects a wider range of occupations to be assessed once assessment centres are established in textile firms. The Sector Skills Council was of the view that they did not have the power to prioritise particular occupations for certification.

The Sector Skills council recognise that there are low levels of awareness about the new assessment system amongst employers and workers in the sector. They also observed that employers in the sector prefer to hire uncertified staff and do not value formal qualifications for the majority of occupations typically serviced by the VET system. Whilst the media and communication sections of the industry associations have started some work on awareness raising and promotion, they believe more widespread social marketing is required. They called for greater links between certification and the recruitment process in firms, a strategy that has been adopted by government through their plans to introduce mandatory certification requirements for 50 occupations in 2024.

Industry specialists have been identified to participate in the assessment process which can be initiated on request from of the firm or individuals. The Sector Skills Council for textiles has established an expert working group within the council which will receive reports from the assessment centres and will be responsible for quality assurance. They will have the right to visit and inspect the operations of the assessment centre. The results of theoretical assessments will be available online and can be viewed at any time.

The council has however, experienced difficulties in establishing an assessment for the leather sector and the centre proposed to the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction has now withdrawn due to some compliance issues raised by the Ministry. In the textile sector, individual assessment centres were given the right to set their fees so variations will exist across the country.

Each occupation to be assessed has an expert group of three assessors involving representatives of industry, training providers and the research institute. Experts will be compensated for their time undertaking assessments. Experts have undergone training and are certified as assessors. Each assessment centre will form an expert group for each occupation. They recognise the need for substantial promotion and awareness raising across the industry. Assessments will include a theoretical and practical component.

Candidates visit the centre and nominate which level and rank they wish to be assessed for. The centre is bound to respond within 10 working days and fix a date for the assessment.

Water Resources Sector Skills Council

The Water Resources Sector Skills Council is led by the Ministry of Water Resources and includes amongst its members representatives of the major water consumer groups such as farmers. The Sector Skills Council has received support from UNESCO as part of a project funded by the European Union to improve education and training related to irrigation. This support has included equipment and material for the offices of the Sector Skills Council along with support of the development of some occupational standards and related curriculum.

The Sector Skills Council is in some way a large ad hoc group of representatives from the major departments of the Ministry. Whilst there are some public-private partnership arrangements in place for pumping stations, there is limited private sector presents in the sector. Regardless, the council intends to add additional private sector representatives in the future.

One point made by the secretary was that the Sector Skills Council did not have the status of a legal entity and did not have permanent working staff which has led to some challenges and difficulties in implementing their work. As it is an ad hoc group that is not permanently sitting, it has no resources and struggles to secure the participation of members due to its perceived temporary status.

The council has developed 54 professional standards which cover all the roles identified in the water resources sector.

Sector Skills Council has plans to establish for qualification assessment centres and whilst they are not yet legal entities the aim is for them to be financially independent. As a temporary measure, three of the centres have been established under colleges operated by the regional water authorities. A fourth has been established in a vocational college run by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation. However financing and equipping the centres remains a challenge and proposals have been sought to identify infrastructure needs. The fee policies of the different centres have been discussed by the council was also taking a coordinating role. However the ongoing quality assurance of these centres remains an open question.

Council is aware of the need to undertake promotion and marketing of the assessment process and the opportunities it presents to workers and whilst there has been some awareness raising and regional centres they recognise that more work will be required to popularise the new assessment system.

Secretary commented that the other elements of the terms of reference for Sector Skills Councils were still in the early stages of development. They have yet to do any substantial work on labour market analysis and highlighted that this required additional resources to conduct the research, again highlighting the issue of the legal status of the Sector Skills Councils and their ability to independently manage funds. It was also noted that UNESCO had undertaken some skill needs analysis as part of their support along with some activities related to career and vocational guidance

Uzbekistan Sector Skills Councils Online Survey Questionnaire

Basic Information	
Name
Employer/Organisation
Position
Gender

Questions

1. Are you a member of a sector skills council?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If yes, which sector skills council are you part of?
If no, please move to question 9.	
2. For how long have you been a member of your sector skills council?	Since establishment <input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 2 years <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year <input type="checkbox"/>
3. How often does your sector skills council meet?	Once a year <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a year (every 6 months) <input type="checkbox"/> Three times per year <input type="checkbox"/> Every quarter (every 3 months) <input type="checkbox"/> More than quarterly <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do all the members of the council usually attend the meetings?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If no, why do think people do not attend?
5. Has your sector skills council established any sub-committees or working groups to advance any items of work?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6. If yes, what sub-committee or working groups have been established? Please select which areas of work they are progressing:	industry skill needs and labour market monitoring <input type="checkbox"/> competency frameworks <input type="checkbox"/> the development and implementation of professional standards <input type="checkbox"/> skills recognition and skills assessment centres <input type="checkbox"/> career guidance and youth orientation activities <input type="checkbox"/> classification of job roles linked to qualifications and professional standards <input type="checkbox"/>
7. More specifically, how effective do you think your sector skills council has been in	

<p>fulfilling its terms of reference in relation to the main roles and responsibilities outlined in Law 4939: (Please rate on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being for no progress and 5 being substantial progress)</p>	<p>industry skill needs and labour market monitoring 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>competency frameworks 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>the development and implementation of professional standards 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>skills recognition and skills assessment centres 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>career guidance and youth orientation activities 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>classification of job roles linked to qualifications and professional standards 1 2 3 4 5</p>
<p>8. What do you think are the main issues that have prevented your sector skills council from making more progress? Please select at least three key factors and rank them from 1 as the most significant to 3 as less significant? If you think more than three factors are important, you can select and rank more.</p>	<p>Lack of funding <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Lack of support from parent ministry/agency <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Lack of private sector representation of involvement <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Lack of human resources and support staff <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Lack of technical expertise amongst staff and members <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Limited expertise and support from the Labour Market Research Institute <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities of the sector skills council council <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Limited independence to tackle key skills issues affecting the sector <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>9. Do you think the councils have adequate financial and human resources to complete their work?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If not, why not?</p>
<p>10. Do you think there is sufficient networking and information sharing between sector skills council about the work they are doing and the challenges they are facing?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>11. Do you think there is sufficient involvement of employers from the private sector employers in the sector skills council?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If not, why not?</p>
<p>12. Are there are other organisations that you think should be a member of the sector skills council?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please indicate which organisation should be involved?</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>13. The government has established 29 sector skills council covering key areas of the labour market. Some of the sector skills council have a relatively narrow focus in terms of numbers of occupations and % share of the labour force (for example</p>	<p>Do you think the number of sector skills council should be reduced and that some councils might be combined?</p> <p>or</p> <p>Do you think the number of sector skills council should be increased?</p>

<p>Taxation; Education) whereas others have a relatively wider scope (for example Tourism; Health).</p>	<p>or Do you think the current number of sector skills council is suitable for Uzbekistan?</p> <p>Please add any comments you would like to make to explain your response:</p>
<p>14. Do you think additional roles and responsibilities should be added to the Terms of Reference of the sector skills council to tackle the key skills issues in their sectors?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please describe what additional roles you think they should have: If no, please explain which roles you think should be removed and why?</p>
<p>15. Do you think the roles and responsibilities of the sector skills council are accepted and respected by other key institutions in the national skill system?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If not, which institutions do not work effectively with the sector skills council and why?</p>
<p>16. Do you think that there should be changes made to the way sector skills council are structured and operate?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please state the changes you think are necessary and why?</p>
<p>17. In general terms, how effective do you think sector skills council have been in undertaking their work?</p>	<p>Very effective <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Effective <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Not effective <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Poor <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>18. In general terms, do you think the establishment of sector skills council has been a positive development for the education and training system of Uzbekistan?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If no, why not?</p>
<p>19. What suggestions can you make to improve the functioning and effectiveness of the sector skills council in Uzbekistan?</p>	<p>.....</p>
<p>20. Are there any other comments would like to make about sector skills council or the overall functioning of the VET and skills system in Uzbekistan</p>	<p>.....</p>

Questions for Interviews on Sector Skills Councils

1. I understand 29 councils have been established:
 - How many of those would you consider to be actively functioning?
 - Who has operational control of the councils? Who do they report to?
 - What is the role of Council for the Development of Professional Qualifications and Knowledge in relation to the councils?
2. The decree sets out the main roles and responsibilities of the councils:
 - providing labour market intelligence and skill needs assessments
 - developing competency standards for professions/occupations
 - coordinating implementation of the system of professional standards
 - supporting operation of assessment centres
 - development of careers resources
 - development job descriptions and classifications
 - In general terms, which of these areas do you think has been advanced more effectively and what have been the main issues for lack of progress in the other areas?
 - Please provide information about how the sector skills council has undertaken work under each of these six main roles.
3. Councils of this type often face similar challenges so these questions seek to understand how important these issues are in Uzbekistan:
 - Do you think there is sufficient involvement of private sector employers in these councils? If not, why not?
 - Do the councils have adequate financial and human resources to complete their work? If not, why not?
 - Do you think the roles and responsibilities of the councils are realistic and have the backing of all key institutions in the national skill system?
4. A number of the councils cover fields where there are few occupations relevant to vocational education and training (VET). For example, Education; Taxation; Physical Culture & Sports. These councils are led by Ministries or agencies that traditionally have little involvement in VET or are part of the higher education system:
 - To what extent do you think the involvement of these different ministries and agencies is affecting the work of the councils either in a positive or negative way?
5. You may know that the project will conduct research into the operations of the councils with a view to make recommendations on how they can be strengthened in the future:
 - In addition to some of the points raised above, what other questions or issues do you think we raise or ask questions about?

This report aims to present and analyse the current status and recent experience of Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan. It starts with an overview of international examples of sector skills bodies, introduces the Sector Skills Councils in Uzbekistan, and then presents the findings of research involving the Sector Skills Councils themselves and the wider group of stakeholders in the VET ecosystem in Uzbekistan.

The report concludes with a discussion of key issues affecting the performance of Sector Skills Councils and makes recommendations about how they may be better supported and empowered to improve performance in the future.

This report was produced under the GIZ implemented “Support of the Reform and Modernization Process in the Vocational Education System of Uzbekistan Project (TexVET)”.