Support to VET Reforms project in Uzbekistan (VET4UZ)

ASSESSMENT OF CAPACITY NEEDS OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET

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ASSESSMENT OF CAPACITY NEEDS OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET

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List of abbreviations

CNA	Capacity Needs Assessment
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance Framework in Vocational Education and Training
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQA	External Quality Assurance
FG	Focus Group
VET	Vocational Education and Training
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
EQA	External Quality Assurance
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LO	Learning Outcomes
MHESI	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation
MoE	Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SES	State Educational Standards
SISQE	State Inspectorate for Supervision of Quality in Education
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
ToT	Training of Trainers
TQM	Total Quality Management
VET4UZ	Swiss project "Support to VET reforms in Uzbekistan"
WB	World Bank

Introduction

The study deals with the capacity needs assessment (CNA) and identifies what and whose capacities need to be strengthened to ensure effective and efficient modernization of the quality assurance system in the VET sector as a whole.

The CNA is a vital phase before the capacity building activities are planned and organized, since it guarantees that the identified gaps between the actual and desired competencies are successfully closed and the defined targets are achieved.

The VET reforms have been a very dynamic process in Uzbekistan for a few years now. It is crucial to conduct CNA because overall reforms in the VET system are taking place with the introduction of new priorities, restructuring of the current system, administrative reforms in public management and optimization of the role of the state in the governance of the VET sector. Moreover, Uzbekistan has expressed its commitment to align QA system with European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).

All new policies in VET require certain capacities from the main stakeholders (national and regional management bodies, VET providers and individuals working in the VET sector) in order to implement reforms as planned. For this reason, this is recognized as an essential step to improve the QA system in VET.

The study is aimed to identify which capacities are needed to meet VET reforms with a focus on setting up a new QA system at all levels and propose capacity building activities appropriate for the implementation of reforms (e.g. develop new competencies, strengthen underdeveloped ones).

QA system in Uzbekistan includes multiple levels of governance and implementation, involving the participation of both private and public sectors. For this reason, it is necessary to improve the capacities of five groups of key stakeholders:

- National government (ministries, line ministries, councils, research institutes);
- Regional governments (regional divisions of ministries);
- Employer associations (sector skills councils, professional associations);
- VET providers (VET institutions and training centers as well as higher education institutions attached to VET providers).

The study is organized in the following way. *First*, we describe the methodology of CNA, the survey design and data in the next session. *Second*, we analyze the existing QA system in the VET sector based on the results of desk research, survey and interviews. *Then*, we analyze capacity building needs in quality assurance. *Finally*, we make conclusions and produce recommendations on the planning and organization capacity building activities in QA.

Method and data

Approach to capacity needs analysis

Capacity needs assessment identifies capacity gaps that exist between a current and future state. It is important to understand that both the capacity needs assessment and capacity building activities are treated as integrated parts of the overall capacity development process which identifies key capacities that already exist as well as key capacities that need to be built on during the reform process, change management or under other similar circumstances. Furthermore, during the CNA process, the desired capacities are usually analyzed against the existing capacities which generates an understanding of the capacity needs. It serves as the most important input for formulating a capacity development response and addresses those capacities that could be strengthened and how the existing capacities that are already strong and well-founded could be further optimized.

Figure 1 describes the whole process of CNA and approaches used for CNA in this study.

Figure 1. The process of capacity needs analysis

Capacity needs analysis process			
Types of needs & CNA levels	Individual needs	Strategic needs	Organisational needs
Methods	▪ Surveys	▪ Desk research ▪ Analysis of strategic & sector programs	▪ Desk research ▪ Focus groups & interviews

OUTPUT 1	**Collection of data from different levels**
OUTPUT 2	**Results of capacity needs analysis**
OUTPUT 3	• **Prioritisation of the capacity needs** • **Programme for capacity building activities**

The different data collection methods are utilized to gather information from all relevant sources to analyze the capacity needs of stakeholders:
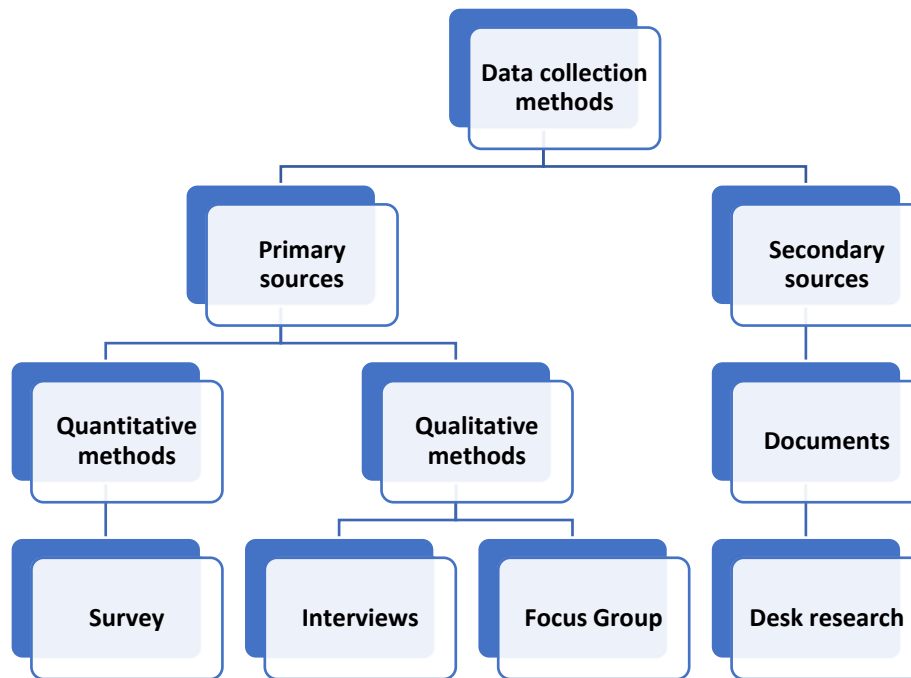
While desk research is used to collect information through analysis of legal documents, national and sector strategies, development programs, relevant reports and other documents, other methods such as interviews and surveys are used to obtain in-depth information from a first-hand source.

Survey and respondents

Since the VET QA system of Uzbekistan is based on the collaborative work of multiple actors at multiple levels, we surveyed stakeholders belonging to three groups:

1. National VET organizations: ministries involved in VET governance and skills development, national authorities, agencies and institutes

2. Regional government: 14 regional departments of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation

3. VET training providers: public vocational schools, professional colleges and technicums.

National and regional government act as external actors while VET providers act as internal actors in ensuring the quality in VET.

Tables 1 provides information about the survey sample within each groups.

Online survey tool (i.e. Kobo Toolbox) is used to collect survey data.

The survey is complemented by documentary analysis, interviews of key stakeholders and focus group discussions.

Table 1. Target audience for the survey and respondents

Key actor groups in VET	Key stakeholders	Responses
National government	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation	65
	Ministry of Culture and Tourism	
	Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction	
	Pedagogical Institute for VET	
	Institute of Labour Market Research	
14 Regional governments	14 Regional divisions of MHESI on VET	30
VET providers	Vocational schools	800
	VET Colleges	
	Technicums	
TOTAL		**895**

Results of capacity needs assessment

The analysis of the current QA system in Uzbekistan is done in the following chapters distinguishing IQA and EQA, and dealing with the different roles of the Uzbek actors as well. Furthermore, findings of capacity needs assessment are presented, needs for building different capacities are prioritized and recommendations for the development of programme of capacity building activities are produced. It should be noted that IQA and EQA are naturally interlinked and build on each other. Thus, they evolve as a system and a change in one of them naturally has an impact on the other.

Existing QA system

The QA system in Uzbekistan has been reformed over the years since the independence. The most recent paradigm shift started in 2019 with the introduction of a new VET system, quality assurance framework, national qualifications framework and promotion of the use of learning outcomes. The adoption of three legal documents has formed the basis of a new institutional system of VET and QA in VET:

#	Legal documents	System level changes
1.	Presidential Decree No. PF-5812, dated September 6, 2019 "On additional measures for further improvement of the professional education system"	• Introduction of a new system of professional training differentiated at three levels: primary, secondary and secondary special professional education; • Alignment of the national professional education system with NQF and ISCED; • Introduction collaborative governance system of VET through the distribution of VET institutions to relevant ministries and agencies representing the particular sector of the national economy.
2.	Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 470, dated from June 7, 2019 "On improving the procedure for attestation and state accreditation of state educational institutions and non-state educational organizations"	• Introduction of a new external QA system including quality criteria and standards, processes and procedures; • Introduction of linkage between internal and external quality assurance, and self-assessment; • Quality enhancement and accountability measures.
3.	Law on Education, dated from September 24, 2020	• Update and consolidation of fragmented decrees and legal covenants into a unified Law;

		• Incorporation of new educational initiatives; • Clear roles and responsibilities of key actors (Cabinet of Ministers, Education ministers, other line ministers and agencies); • "Right-based" approach to education; • Legal basis for newly introduced concepts such as adult education, lifelong learning, inclusive education, public-private partnership, licensing of private providers; • New norms directed to making education more contextual and adaptable addressing the specific needs and contexts.

The rationale for reforms is to build a resilient vocational education system that is responsive, flexible and able to meet the current and future demands of the labour market.

It is important to note that there is a high dedication to foster changes in the quality assurance system in line with the best international practices among stakeholders, however these changes require time until they are fully implemented. Furthermore, recent administrative reforms directed at the optimization of the role of the state in the economy accompanied by decentralization and consolidation of governance structures have created room for further improvement[1].

The current QA system in VET is in the transition period from the old Soviet top-down control system focused on inspection and compliance towards a new system with the introduction of several new standards directed to increase the responsibility of VET institutions in quality enhancement. However, the structure and procedures of QA still reflect the system driven by the State and its policies.

The concept of quality and quality assurance

The concepts of quality and quality assurance have not been explicitly formulated and elaborated in legal-normative acts. According to the Law on Education, state educational standards define and establish the set of state requirements on the content and quality of education (article 3).

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[1] Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-269 dated from December 21, 2022 "On measures to implement the new Uzbek administrative reforms", https://lex.uz/docs/6324756 (accessed February 15, 2023).
Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-14 dated from January 25, 2023 "On the priority organizational measures of effective organization of the activities of republican executive bodies of the Republic", https://lex.uz/docs/6324756 (accessed February 15, 2023).

The character of the QA system is formulated in articles 3, 58 and 59 as "Attestation is the main form of state control over the evaluation of an educational organization and is the assessment of the content, level and quality of education in educational organizations against the state educational standards and state requirements (Article 3), "…Attestation is conducted in two stages – internal and external assessment. Internal assessment is a self-assessment conducted by an educational organization. State accreditation status is awarded to educational institution based on the results of attestation…" (article 58) and "Before the external assessment of educational institutions, they conduct independently internal evaluation of their activities on the basis of attestation criteria and indicators developed by the State Inspectorate on Supervision of Quality in Education…" (Article 59).

It indicates that the QA system in VET is shaped and managed by external state control. This requires VET providers to fully comply with the state educational standards and other regulations and does not adequately recognize the purposes of the internal QA, hence VET institutions still do not feel an ownership of their IQA.

The current QA system aims to assure the quality of professional education primarily by setting educational standards and assuring compliance with state educational standards through:

- licensing of new private VET providers;
- approval of new programmes;
- state attestation and accreditation of VET providers.

Thus, the existing concepts of quality and quality assurance are predominantly defined by the state and less by educational institutions and other stakeholders (e.g. employers). For this reason, upcoming trainings on the enhancement of competencies of stakeholders in the field of quality assurance should focus on the modern concepts and principles of quality and quality assurance.

The involvement of different stakeholders in QA

The VET system in Uzbekistan is highly centralized and there are multiple actors involved at different levels (i.e. national, subnational and VET levels). Table 2 provides information about actors and their role in ensuring the quality of VET education.

Table 2. Key players in quality assurance of VET

#	Actors	Responsibilities
1	Cabinet of Ministers	- implements the unified state policy in the field of education; - approves state programs in the field of education and ensures their implementation; - coordination of activities of relevant ministries and agencies in teacher quality policy;

		- sets up rules and procedures for external quality assurance (i.e. attestation and accreditation, licensing, monitoring, teacher appraisal, recognition of qualifications); - formulates state admission quotes for the training of personnel in educational organizations based on the forecast and analysis of labour market requirements; - approves admission rules and procedures in educational organizations; - implements teacher policy; - establishes material-technical, infrastructural and parametric requirements for educational organizations.
2	Council on the development of professional skills and knowledge[2]	- satisfying the current and future demand for the skilled workforce through monitoring of skills-occupation structure of the labour market, improving strategic planning and evaluation system in labour market; - organizing the work on the development and revision of professional standards, sectorial qualification frameworks and qualification requirements; - ensuring the recognition of the national system of the assessment of knowledge and skills; - ensuring the flexible, consistent and continuous development of skills; - implementation of validation and accreditation (certification) system of skills and knowledge; - enhancing the quality of education through strengthening the labour market relevance of study programmes.

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[2] Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-4939 dated from December 31, 2020 "On measures to improve the skills assessment system and provide the labour market with well-qualified workforce", https://lex.uz/docs/5203490 (accessed February 19, 2023).

3	Sector Skills Councils[3]	- determination of skills and knowledge needs and trends of sectors of the economy; - development, implementation and improvement of sectorial qualifications frameworks; - coordination of activities on the development and implementation of professional standards; - recognition of prior learning (i.e. development of a system of recognition, validation and accreditation of learning outcomes of nonformal and informal education, including the organization of activities of centers for the assessment of qualifications); - organization of activities related to career guidance of the youth, development of materials for an information campaign on professions; - preparation of proposals for the improvement of the classifier of occupations and professions and determination of standards for labour remuneration.
4	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation	- running state policy in professional education - coordination of the educational activities of professional educational organizations and providing methical guidance - development, revision and approval of state educational standards of professional education, qualification requirements, study plan and curriculum; - approval of the classification of training fields, specialties and professions of professional education; - approval of study programmes; - determines the procedure for assessing the knowledge, skills and abilities of students - ensures the introduction of advanced forms of teaching, new pedagogical technologies, and

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[3] Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 616 dated from September 30, 2021 "On additional measures for further improvement of the system of the development of professional skills and knowledge", https://lex.uz/docs/566446 (accessed February 10, 2023).

		technical and informational means of teaching into the educational process; - organizes training, in-service training and retraining of managerial and pedagogic personnel of professional educational organizations; - development activities for teachers of VET; - determining the register of vocations and professions; - monitoring and evaluation of teacher quality: determining qualification levels of teachers, teacher attestation and awarding categories to teachers, making decisions about teachers' salary promotions based on teacher appraisal*; - external quality assurance of VET institutions, teacher training and retraining institutions and programmes (accreditation, licensing, audit)*.
5	Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction	- training and retraining of unemployed people; - coordination of training activities of monocentres and vocational training centres in the structure of the Ministry; - development of a classifier of the main positions of employees and professions of workers; - monitoring of the system of development of professional skills and knowledge; - accreditation and monitoring of activities of skills' assessment centres; - approval of professional standards and running the national register of professional standards.
6	Other line ministries[4]	- providing material and financial support to technicums; - providing students of technicums with work-based learning conditions and taking measures towards employing them in companies;

[4] Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 466 dated from August 7, 2020 "On the approval of normative-legal documents regulating the system of primary, secondary and secondary special professional education in the Republic of Uzbekistan", https://lex.uz/uz/docs/4945840 (accessed February 10, 2023).

			-	creating appropriate conditions for the formation of professional competences in students; - determining training specialties (together with attached higher education institutions); - development of study programmes (together with attached higher education institutions).
7	Higher educational institutions[5]	-	managing technicums attached to the higher educational institution; - recommending candidates for the principal position of a technicum; - creating appropriate conditions for the formation of professional competencies in students; - determining training specialties of a technicum (together with responsible ministry or agency); - development of study programmes of a technicum (together with a responsible ministry or agency).
5	Pedagogical Institute for VET	-	delivery of in-service training and retraining courses for managerial and pedagogical staff of VET institutions; - development of the curriculum of training and retraining courses; - running an electronic portfolio of professional development activities of managerial and pedagogical staff of VET institutions; - organizing activity of attestation commissions.
6	Local authorities (regional khakimiyats)	-	determination of the number of admission quotes and list of professions based on the analysis of the local labour market; - development of public-private partnership in VET and support the expansion of the network of private providers; - assist in the employment of VET graduates.
7	Employers	-	participates in the development and revision of curriculum; - cooperates with educational organizations to organize work-based learning and teaching

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[5] Ibid

		through providing practical training and internship opportunities to students; - takes part in the assessment of students.
8	VET institutions	- organizing educational process, school-based and work-based learning; - development and approval of the educational process; - setting up tuition fees in agreement with attached ministry or agency and MHESI; - organizing school-based and work-based learning; - engaging employers in the educational process, development and revision of study programmes; - coordinating professional development activities of teachers and practice teachers.

new functions transferred from the State Inspectorate on Supervision of Education Quality

Due to recent public administration reforms in Uzbekistan, the State Inspectorate on Supervision of Education Quality, an independent quality assurance body, is dissolved and its functions are transferred to two education ministries – the Ministry of Preschool and School Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation[6].

Although the quality assurance system involves a network of multiple stakeholders with clear roles and responsibilities with some overlaps, the level of satisfaction in the network is relatively low due to high fragmentation in cooperation, absence of across-group (between actors) collaboration and high level of input-orientation in the governance of VET system (Renold, Caves & Zubovic, 2022).

The roles and responsibilities of the current actors in the QA system need to be reconsidered in order to guarantee a better separation according to the functions of external quality assurance and in order to reduce the spread of responsibilities among too many actors, and strengthen the position of one responsible independent quality assurance agency instead.

Quality criteria and standards

The existing quality criteria, standards and indicators support VET institutions to cooperate with employers in the development of curriculum, the introduction of modern pedagogical

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[6] Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-269 dated from December 21, 2022 "On measures to implement the new Uzbek administrative reforms", https://lex.uz/docs/6324756 (accessed February 15, 2023).
Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-14 dated from January 25, 2023 "On the priority organizational measures of effective organization of the activities of republican executive bodies of the Republic", https://lex.uz/docs/6324756 (accessed February 15, 2023).

and technological innovations, self-evaluation and its efficiency. On the other hand, it remains concentrated on external quality control and compliance mechanisms. External quality assurance criteria and procedures do not offer any tools or guidance to assist VET institutions in developing their own system of internal quality assurance. Although the introduction of self-evaluation is an important step to move towards modern quality assurance, it purely reflects the external QA, serves for reporting purpose and preparation for the site visit of external experts, thus it doesn't motivate VET institutions to independently exercise to assess all their activities, analyze the achievements, identify shortcomings and inaccuracies, develop suggestions for improvements, eliminate the identified deficiencies and continually improve the quality of their educational and other activities.

Features of the QA system

The current Uzbek QA system is clearly in a transitional period from a (post-)Soviet top-down control system to a more modern system. While the first steps towards EQA through attestation and accreditation have been decided, the structure itself, the development and the procedures still have too many characteristics of a system driven by the State and its policies. Therefore, the current system still lacks real independence and transparency. **The QA system should be reformed into an independent and transparent system owned by its stakeholders, a system in which there is a good balance between developing a quality culture oriented towards continuous enhancement and accountability based on (earned) trust.**

In a more sustainable future QA system, VET institutions should be given room and be empowered by knowledge transfer to formulate their own missions, make their own strategic choices and develop their own IQA systems linked to EQA with their internal and external stakeholders. In that way they would be more owners of the quality and the QA generated by them and would involve their own internal and external stakeholders in both setting objectives and the functioning of the IQA.

Quality assurance: definition and objectives

Quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered.

(Church, 1988)

Quality assurance is set of measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place to ensure the quality and quality improvement of VET.

(ETF, 2015)

QA is an important tool:

- to inform the labour market about graduate skills and competencies
- to guarantee that certain minimum standards are met
- to ensure that the qualification awarded meets its stated purpose
- to demonstrate that public funds are spent effectively
- to support VET providers in enhancing the quality of their operations
- to create trust among stakeholders

The quality assurance measure does not assure quality per se. The **ultimate goal** is to assure and enhance quality in VET. The quality VET (i) responds to labour market, societal and individual needs; (ii) leads to nationally recognized qualifications; (iii) provides access to decent jobs; (iv) is attractive, inclusive and (v) accessible and fosters capabilities for lifelong learning (ETF, 2015).

It is important to note that translation of the term "Quality Assurance" into other languages requires some caution. The translated term could acquire different meanings and may cause to a different understanding of the whole process. We advise that the right term to be used in the Uzbek language in the case of "Quality assurance" would be "Сифатни таъминлаш" and not "сифатни кафолатлаш" or "сифатни назорат қилиш".

EQA & capacity building needs

The quality of professional education is primarily assured by Uzbek authorities by setting state educational standards and assuring compliance with those standards through processes of:

- Licensing private VET providers;
- State attestation (i.e., external evaluation) and accreditation of VET providers;
- Monitoring of performance of VET providers;
- Approval of new study programmes.

> **External quality assurance** refers to the actions of an external body, which may be a quality assurance agency or any other entity that assesses operations or programmes of VET institutions, in order to determine whether VETs comply with agreed or predetermined standards.

State educational standards for professional education are developed for each field of education[7] and set general state requirements for the content and organization of study programmes of VET in Uzbekistan (Article 3 of Law on Education). The structure of State educational standards includes the description of a particular education field, the profile of skills and competencies of graduates, general requirements for training of specialists and the structure of curriculum including the scope of study workload, and the assessment of student learning outcomes. State educational standards are developed based on professional standards of occupations and serve as a basis for the development of qualification requirements, core study plan and curriculum (syllabi) of an education field. VET providers develop their own study plan based on a core study plan approved by the MHESI: they are allowed to change hours distributed across blocks of modules and modules within blocks up to 20% while keeping a weekly workload unchanged. VET providers have the autonomy to develop calendar of education process and timing of work-based practice and internships in agreement with employers.

The current Uzbekistan EQA system consists of three main processes: licensing, approval of new programmes, state attestation and accreditation, as shown in the table below:

	Licensing	Approval of new programmes	State attestation and accreditation
Purpose of EQA	Establishment of VET institution	Implementation of new study programme	Assessment and recognition by the state of compliance of VET institution with the state educational

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[7] There are total 22 fields of education in the Classification of training fields, specialties and professions of professional education approved by the decree #131 of MHESI on 20.02.2020

			standards and state requirements
Responsible state body	• MHESI	• Cabinet of Ministers • MHESI	• MHESI
Result	Right to operate	Right to implement study programme and award degrees	• Right to admit students; • Right to provide graduates with a document on education in a state-approved format

The external quality assurance system of VET is analyzed through the prism of six dimensions that constitute the main components of the external quality assurance system: recognition and support of internal quality assurance at the national level, design of EQA standards and processes, implementation of EQA processes, peer review process, outcomes of EQA, reporting and follow-up actions for further improvement of quality.

Each dimension is composed of items (i.e. statements) measuring important aspects of that dimension. Respondents are asked questions about to what extent they agree with statements describing particular external quality assurance processes and procedures. Table 3 provides information about dimensions and items of external quality assurance.

Table 3. Dimensions of external quality assurance

Dimensions	Items
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
Role of internal quality assurance	
	External quality assurance is more control-oriented process focusing on compliance with requirements set by Ministry and Government
	External quality assurance is more enhancement-oriented process focusing on increasing institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision
	External quality assurance addresses the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes
	There are clear requirements for institutional responsibility for quality assurance and accountability of institutions
Design of EQA standards and processes	
	Quality standards are set nationally and implemented sub-nationally
	Minimum standards are set for VET quality
	External quality assurance is designed and defined to ensure its fitness to national aims and objectives

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	All stakeholders including employers are involved in the design and continuous improvement of EQA procedures
Implementation of EQA processes	
	EQA processes are reliable, useful, pre-defined and consistent for all stakeholders
	External reviews result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up
	External quality assurance is carried out professionally, consistently and transparently
Peer review	
	External quality assurance is carried out by groups of external experts that include employers and students
	Experts involved in external quality assurance have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their tasks
Outcomes	
	Outcomes of external quality assurance are based on pre-defined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based
Reporting and follow-up	
	A functional monitoring and follow-up system is implemented to ensure the effectivee realization of the quality assurance policy
	External quality assurance and in particular its outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated and judged

The current Uzbek QA system is still in a transitional period suffering from the lack of a systemic approach to modernize it across all dimensions constituting together the effective EQA system. The current condition of EQA system is not satisfactory across all dimensions (Diagram 1): the average performance score is 2.94 out of 5 and scores of each dimension range from 2.9 to 3.1 on a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). Respondents have different perceptions on key dimensions of EQA: they expressed more satisfaction with policies related to the recognition of internal quality assurance, design of EQA standards & processes, and outcomes of EQA processes.

Diagram 1. Differences across dimensions of EQA
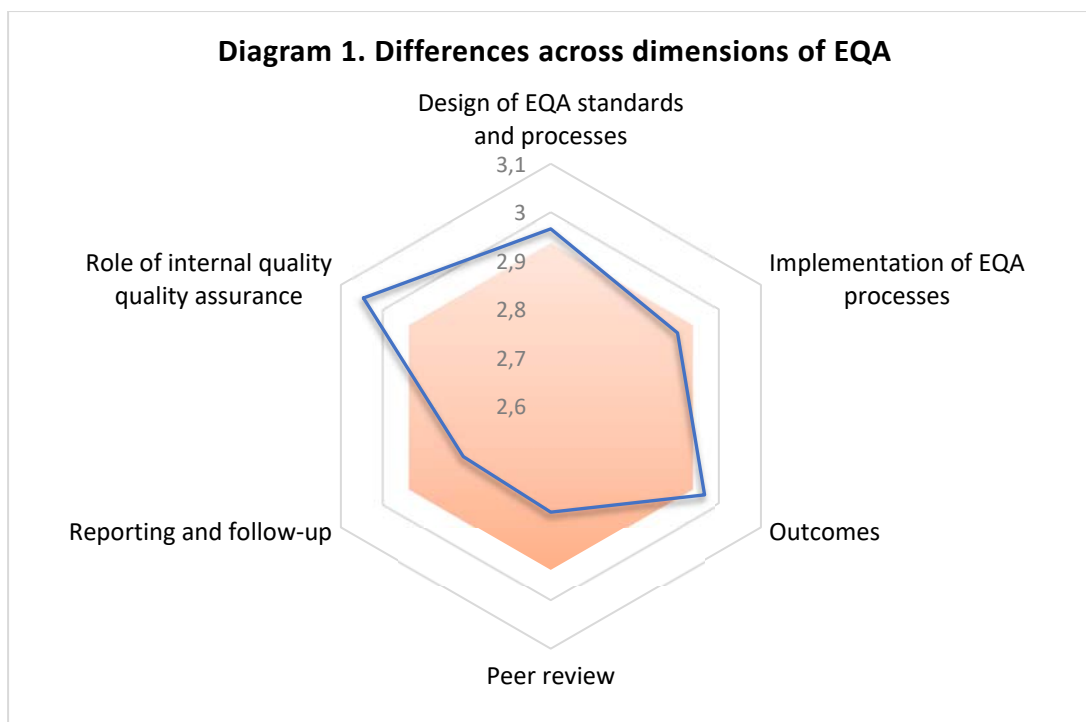
Although external quality assurance methodologies (standards and processes) have been modernized several times in the last five years, they still remain concentrated on external quality control and compliance and there is low involvement of stakeholders in continuous improvement. The existing quality criteria, standards and indicators support VET institutions to cooperate with employers in the development of curriculum, the introduction of modern pedagogical and technological innovations, self-evaluation and its efficiency. On the other hand, it remains concentrated on external quality control and compliance mechanisms, inspection of documents and data (external assessment of students' knowledge, employment rate of graduates) and misses important standards promoting the empowerment of VET institutions to take over ownership for quality such as the development of mission, goals, strategies, work-based teaching and learning, engagement of employers in all phases of training and internal quality assurance system which can continuously monitor the effectiveness of study programmes by using multiple sources of evidence to assess the achievement of learning outcomes (Diagram 2).

Diagram 2. EQA standards and processes
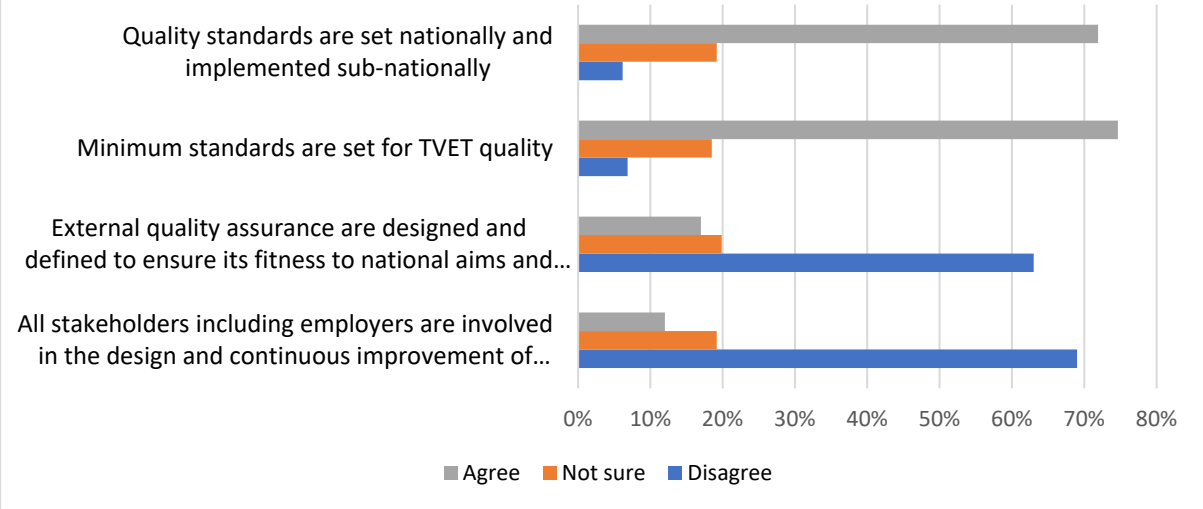
Thus, EQA standards and processes are not designed to fit for purpose and the current EQA methodologies don't promote the empowerment of VET institutions to take over ownership for quality.

External quality assurance recognizes the internal quality assurance procedures of VET institutions and there are clear requirements for institutional responsibility for quality assurance (Diagram 3). It is mandatory for VET institutions to conduct self-evaluations regularly and submission of self-evaluation reports is a prerequisite to apply for state accreditation.

Diagram 3. EQA standards and processes
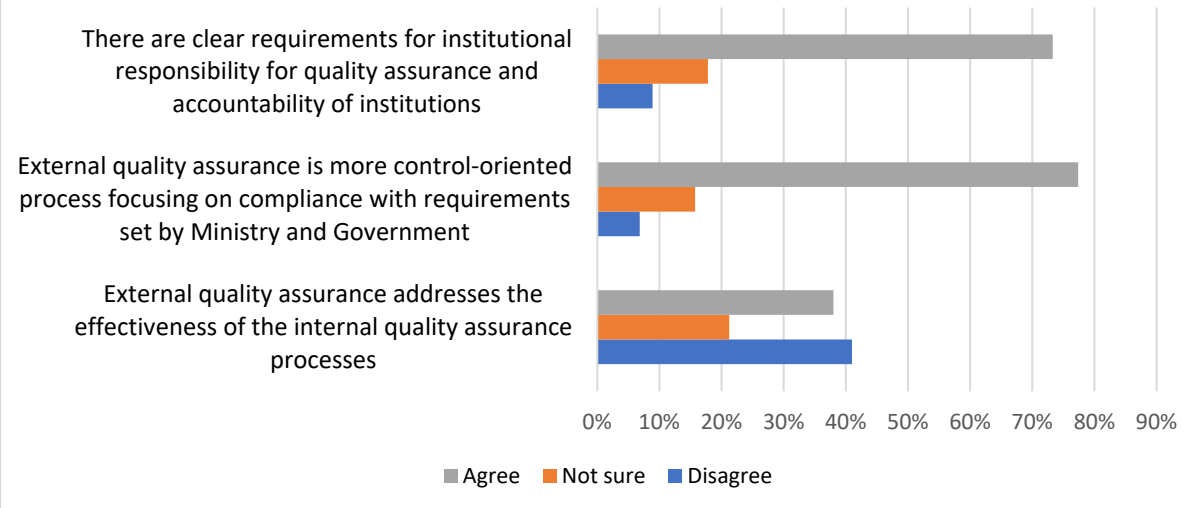
However, the link between IQA and EQA seems to be more theoretical. In practice, the methodology, tools and frameworks are governed by the EQA since IQA purely reflects the external QA (i.e. self-evaluation must be exercised according to the criteria and standards of state accreditation, self-assessment reports are only submitted to external quality assurance agency and not published anywhere for public use), serves for reporting purpose and

preparation for the site visit of external experts, thus it doesn't motivate VET institutions to independently exercise to assess all their activities, analyze the achievements, identify shortcomings and inaccuracies, develop suggestions for improvements, eliminate the identified deficiencies and continually improve the quality of their educational and other activities. In addition, external quality assurance criteria and procedures do not offer any tools or guidance to assist VET institutions in developing their own system of internal quality assurance.

It is important to note that the external quality assurance body takes most responsibilities regarding QA due to the fact that VET institutions don't yet have sufficient experience and expertise because they are used to working in a highly centralized VET system before in which educational processes and procedures were highly standardized and developed by the Ministry. Moreover, quality assurance is all about reality checks and any kind of window-dressing and fraud with data don't allow making evidence-based unbiased decisions and would destroy an independent quality assessment. Therefore, it gives the impression that the external quality assurance body plays a major role in the QA and there is little independence of IQA and a substantial reliance on EQA as a driving force.

Although criteria for outcomes are clear, pre-defined, published and transparent, outcomes made as a result of external reviews are not evidence-based and applied consistently, not motivating for quality enhancement. External quality assurance and its outcomes have an insignificant impact on institutions (Diagram 4). There is narrow and weak expertise provided by peer experts because experts usually lack appropriate skills and are not supported by proper training. Groups of experts are usually formed from representatives of management and teaching staff of VET institutions and don't involve important stakeholders such as employers and students.

Diagram 4. EQA processes and outcomes
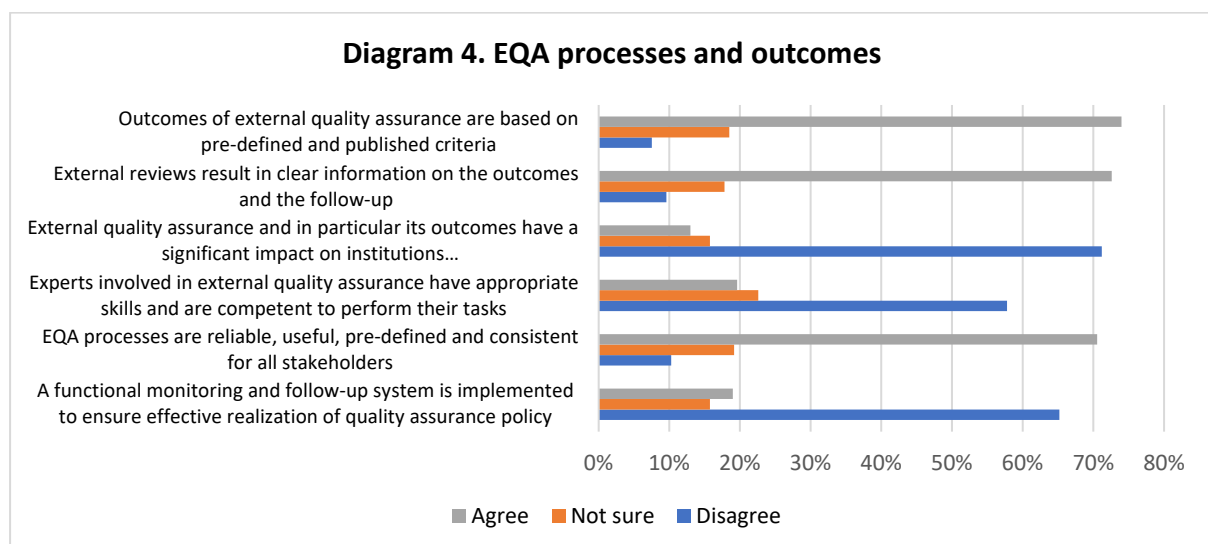
For this reason, a group of experts cannot provide inputs from various perspectives. In addition, working as an independent expert is not attractive due to the fact that the work of

European context for quality assurance in VET

Various regions across the world, including Europe, the Pacific and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have established their own regional quality assurance frameworks to improve VET systems in the region, so that they can help increase employability, social inclusion and improve access to lifelong learning for all.

European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) is one of the successful initiatives to establish common reference points to help European countries to promote and monitor the continuous improvement of their VET systems.

In June 2009 European Parliament and Council of the EU adopted "**Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)**".

EQAVET **aims** to establish common quality assurance framework for improving the quality in VET through increasing the **transparency, consistency and transferability of VET providers** across Europe. It provides a common reference framework to VET providers to improve, monitor and evaluate their quality assurance policies and practices.

EQAVET consists of:
- Quality assurance framework throughout the cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review;
- Quality criteria, indicative descriptors and reference indicators (as measuring tools to provide evidence of effectiveness).

The framework is applied at the system level, provider level and qualification-awarding level. EQAVET gives a strong emphasis on monitoring and improving quality by combining internal and external evaluation, review and processes for improvement, supported by measurement and qualitative analysis.

The framework is based on the quality assurance cycle of four stages (Deming's Plan – Do – Check – Act (PDCA)) each supported by quality criteria, descriptors and indicators:

- Planning (Plan);
- Implementation (Do);
- Evaluation (Check);
- Review (Act).

4. ACT Take action on assessment results for improvement: continue cycle

1. PLAN Set quality goals

3. CHECK Assess quality goals: is it working?

2. DO Implement quality goals

experts is not remunerated by an external quality assurance agency[8]. Organizations are not interested to nominate their representatives for such processes, as this means their employees devote part of working time to the external evaluation and they have to pay travel costs of employees associated with external evaluation. All these factors contribute to the weak role of experts in quality assurance and the low satisfaction of VET institutions from the expertise provided by peer experts.

The external evaluation report is the basis for follow-up action for a VET institution. The poor quality of expertise provided by experts produce reports with a narrow range of conclusions and recommendations for follow-up action. Evaluation reports are usually sent to the Ministry and VET institution and they are not published and accessible to the external partners. This practice causes a decrease in the transparency and trust in EQA.

According to legislation, quality assurance is a continuous process that does not end with the external feedback. However, in practice, the external quality assurance process usually ends with a report and development of an action plan for VET institutions to eliminate shortcomings identified during external evaluation and to further enhance the quality of educational services based on the recommendations of experts. The follow-up processes within the institution and progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is rarely monitored by the external quality body due to a shortage of staff and resources to hire additional experts for this task.

We can conclude that the development of a reliable, efficient and transparent EQA system in line with EQAVET principles and standards requires:

- to define the role of external quality assurance in the professional education system;
- to find a good balance between accountability and enhancement in quality assurance;
- to nominate one agency to be responsible for all procedures of external quality assurance;
- to provide trust in the internal quality assurance of VET institutions;
- to involve all stakeholders in quality assurance processes;
- to take the EQAVET as the guiding standards and principles for the functioning of the system;
- to develop an up-to-date monitoring system for the main indicators of the professional education system.

The table below gives an overview of the capacity building needs/activities that one could take into consideration during the reform process.

Principles of modern EQA system	Capacity building needs/activities
VET institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance	▪ Raising the autonomous responsibility of VET providers for their own missions and strategies including for the quality of their own provisions

	▪ Assessment of the level of involvement of the stakeholders in the process
Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture	▪ Enhance capacities of MHESI and other central bodies in designing EQA system so that it will contribute towards the quality culture, quality enhancement and quality control mechanism
Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, employers, all other stakeholders and society	▪ Enhance capacities needed for MHESI and other national bodies to evaluate and assess VET providers whether all stakeholders are involved in the IQA processes
The EQA system is characterized by independence, stakeholder involvement, peer-review, transparency and publicity	▪ Building an independent EQA system characterized with strong stakeholder involvement, peer-review, transparency and publicity ▪ Broadening the scope EQA by balancing accountability and enhancement, and providing valuable recommendations to the VET institutions on how to improve activities as well as provide independent information to the society on the quality of provision of professional education
QA agency is independent and acts autonomously. It has full responsibility for its operations and the outcomes of those operations without third-party influence	New organigram of QA system with clear responsibilities and roles characterized by: • Independent decision-making body with responsibility for the core decisions in quality assurance, namely the design of the processes, and final decisions, that comprises experts from different viewpoints of professional education • Responsibilities, organizational structure, funding etc. of the national QA agency • New organigram of the QA system with clear responsibilities, roles and avoid overlapping (the roles and

	responsibilities of the current actors in the QA system need to be reconsidered in order to reduce the spread of responsibilities among too many actors, and strengthen the position of one responsible independent quality assurance agency instead)
EQA processes are transparent, reliable, useful, implemented consistently and their outcomes have a significant positive impact on institutions	▪ Revising the current processes related to accreditation, the nomination of external experts, site visits, expert report, decision-making, follow-up, and appeals in line with best international practices
EQA is a continuous process that includes follow-up processes within the institution and progress made since the last external quality assurance activity	▪ Development of an up-to-date monitoring system for the main indicators of the professional education system in which responsibilities and procedures are clear

IQA & capacity building needs

Internal quality assurance system is analyzed through the prism of seven dimensions that constitute the main components of the quality assurance system at institutional level: institutional quality assurance policy, development and approval of study programmes, teaching and assessment, teachers, learning resources, monitoring & review and cooperation with employers. Each dimension is composed of items (i.e. statements) measuring important aspects of that dimension. Respondents are asked questions about to what extent they agree with statements describing particular quality assurance processes and procedures. Table 4 provides information about dimensions and items of internal quality assurance.

Table 4. Dimensions of internal quality assurance

Dimensions	Items
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
Policy for quality assurance at institutional level	
	Institution has a policy for quality assurance policy
	VET institution has implemented a transparent and functional quality assurance policy
	Quality assurance policy supports the continuous improvement of quality

|	
	All internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the VET institution
Development and approval of study programmes	
	Study programmes are designed and developed by involving employers and other stakeholders
	VET institution has a capacity (qualified staff) to develop its study plans and curriculum
	VET institution has processes for the design and approval of their programmes
	Programmes benefit from external expertise (employers and/or employers' associations, authorized bodies for external expertise)
Teaching and assessment	
	Assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved
	Students earn diplomas when they master clear learning outcomes and standards
Teaching staff	
	Teachers have industry experience in the subject they teach
	Institution follows fair and transparent processes for staff recruitment and development
	Institution encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies
Learning resources	
	Learning resources are fit for purpose, accessible and students are informed about them
Cooperation with employers	
	Employers are involved in VET curriculum development
	Employers to cooperate are clearly identified
	Companies cooperate with VET providers to offer training
	Training combines classroom education and workplace training
	There is a training syllabus for workplace training containing clear learning objectives
	Training syllabus/plan is implemented in practice
Monitoring & periodic review	
	There is a well-established KPI system to monitor effective realization of policies

The overall pattern of quality assurance at institutional level seems to be concentrated on a few dimensions rather than distributed uniformly across all key dimensions. Diagram 5 shows the comparison of the scores across seven domains of IQA. The scores of each dimension range from 2.9 to 3.3 on a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). Respondents have different perceptions on key dimensions of IQA: they expressed more satisfaction with policies related to the development and approval of study programmes, teaching staff and teaching & assessment. On the other hand, other key dimensions such as cooperation with employers, monitoring & periodic review and learning resources got relatively low scores meaning that quality assurance policies at the institutional level are not comprehensive.

Diagram 5. Differences across dimensions
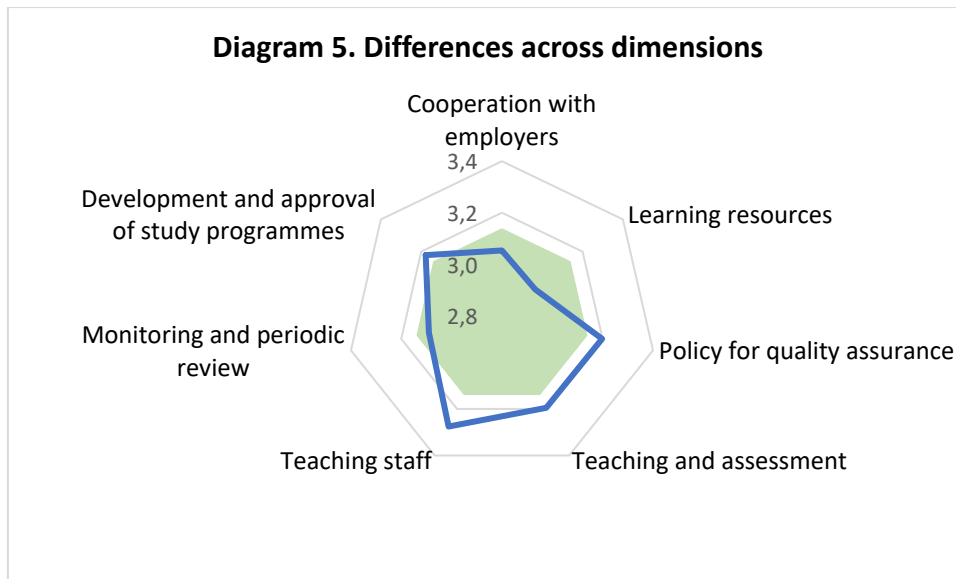
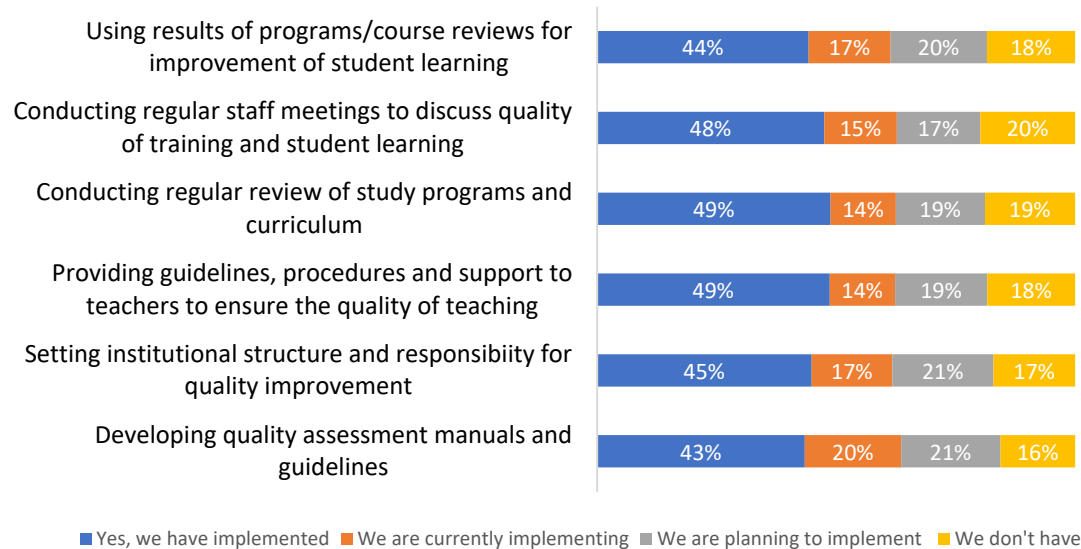**Although the majority of VET providers claim that have quality assurance policies, they understand it in a narrow sense and these policies are not translated into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes and structures.** Diagram 6 indicates that 90% of respondents claim that VET institution has a quality assurance policy and it is implemented by a responsible person (**57%**) and/or a responsible body (**34%**) through forming working groups.

Diagram 6. Quality assurance policy

Does your institution have quality assurance policies?

90%
6% 4%

■ Yes   ■ Not sure   ■ No

Is there a responsible body for the implementation of quality assurance policy in your institution?

57%
34%
6% 3%

■ Yes, there is a responsible person
■ Yes, there is a responsible body (working group, unit)
■ I don't know
■ No
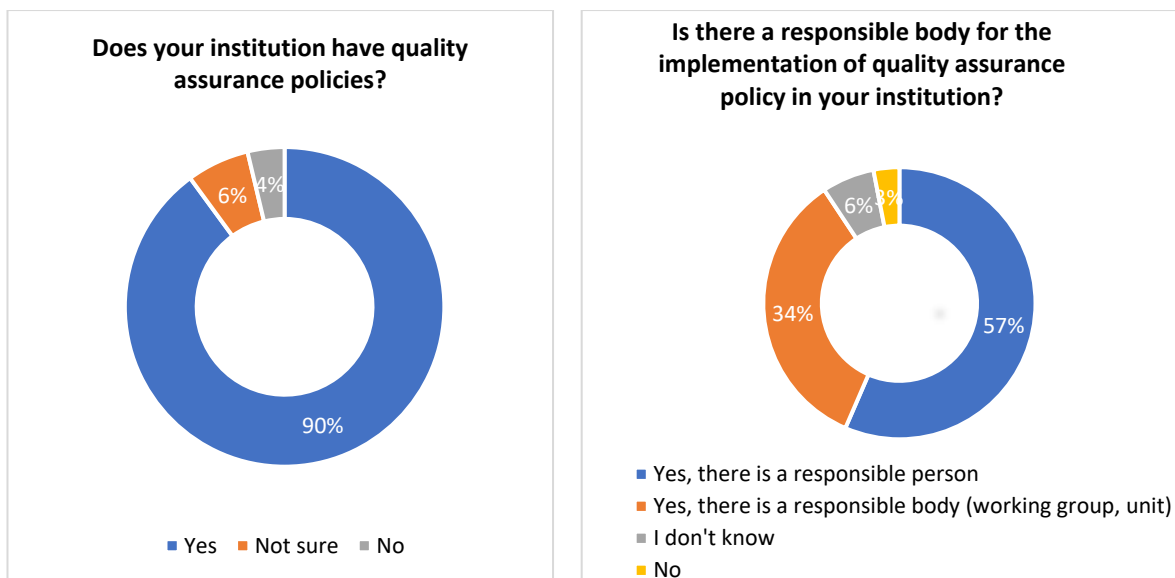
When respondents were asked to provide information about the state of implementation of basic internal quality assurance policies, more than half of them think that those policies haven't been implemented yet (Diagram 7). For example, 16% of respondents stated that they don't have quality assessment manuals and guidelines while 21% stated that they are planning to do it.

Diagram 7. If there is a quality assurance system in your institution, please evaluate the state of art of implementation of quality assurance in your institution

	Yes, we have implemented	We are currently implementing	We are planning to implement	We don't have
Using results of programs/course reviews for improvement of student learning	44%	17%	20%	18%
Conducting regular staff meetings to discuss quality of training and student learning	48%	15%	17%	20%
Conducting regular review of study programs and curriculum	49%	14%	19%	19%
Providing guidelines, procedures and support to teachers to ensure the quality of teaching	49%	14%	19%	18%
Setting institutional structure and responsibility for quality improvement	45%	17%	21%	17%
Developing quality assessment manuals and guidelines	43%	20%	21%	16%

As the results of CNA will be translated into capacity building activities (seminars with lectures, presentations, trainings and hand-outs), the main priorities in the development of IQA can be summarized with the following points:

- From external obligation to internal motivation;
- From external control to internal ownership;
- From external oriented managerial approach to an internal quality culture of continuous improvement;
- From narrow responsibility to everybody's concern;
- From ministerial prescriptions to stakeholders' involvement at all levels;
- From ad hoc measures and actions to systematic and structured synergy through TQM;
- From window-dressing to observing and analyzing reality;
- From showing off to self-critical reflection and action;
- From theory on paper to living practice throughout the institution;
- From mistrust to trust.

The development of effective IQA within professional education system requires to create an environment that will enable VET providers to feel ownership for quality. A crucial area for reform will be to promote VET institutions' autonomy in the design and revising of study programmes, as well as autonomy in the establishment of their own internal quality assurance system aligned with the specific needs of VET schools. Under these conditions, VET institution in cooperation with employers can reflect on what constitutes quality of education and define the aims of IQA. Ultimately, strengthening the IQA system with the involvement

of stakeholders will enhance quality culture that is vital for assuring and improving the quality of VET.

Based on the analysis, we can conclude that the following paradigm shifts that need to occur in the VET system:

Opinions on quality and QA	New views on quality and QA	Capacity building
Quality is absolute and fixed	Quality is a relative and multi-layered changing concept	Capacity building activities on developing common understanding of quality and QA should be considered
One standard is dominant…	Quality assessment has many aspects	The capacity building activities should address each aspect of the QA
and determined by the provider	Starting point is the customers'/stakeholders' needs	The capacity building activities should address how to bring the external stakeholders closer to education processes and strengthening capacities of key stakeholders
The final product is central	The service processes are vital	there are procedures and processes in place to ensure the desired quality, and make learning outcomes labour market relevant
and should be inspected	Quality is the result of processes to be efficiently managed	Build the capacities to increase the understanding that QA is collective effort
Quality is controlled by the quality unit	Quality is everybody's business	Develop capacities of every single individual in the process

The table below gives an overview of the capacity building needs/activities that one could take into consideration during the building of an effective IQA system in line with best practices in the world:

Steps to develop and implement effective IQA system	Capacity building needs/activities
Engage top management in developing IQA system	▪ Describe the scope of the IQA system (institutional, programme, etc.); ▪ Strategy development, setting objectives, SWOT analysis; ▪ Understand the total quality management principles; ▪ Define a QA policy and its goals; ▪ Link the QA policy and its goals with other policies such as education policy, finances, human resources management.
Identify key processes of setting-up IQA system	▪ How to formulate learning outcomes, why and how to design a study programme, why and how to design a course with the congruent teaching, learning and assessment methods, etc; ▪ Identify (key) indicators, responsibilities, actors, and timing in order to measure the realization of the intended quality goals of the processes; ▪ Determine the risks and opportunities applicable to the processes.
Plan your IQA system	▪ Identification of gaps in the existing system compared to the new system; ▪ Definition of working environment; ▪ Definition of resources, skills and facilities.
Documentation of the IQA system	▪ Process management & documentation according to the stakeholders' needs; ▪ Streamlining the IQA and EQA requirements.
Implement your IQA system	▪ Coordinate and manage the QA cycle processes i.e. implementation, monitoring and evaluation measures; ▪ Continued training of staff to pay attention to maintaining the effectiveness and efficiency of QA system.
Manage the QA system and evaluate its efficiency	▪ Monitor and manage performance; ▪ Audit the effectiveness of process; ▪ Focus on stakeholder satisfaction; ▪ Perform IQA and EQA reviews.

Improve your IQA system	▪ Seek peer reviews/EQA evaluation; ▪ Strive for improvement; ▪ Consider implementing excellence in service provision.

How best to approach the capacity building activities

It is important that trainings take into consideration various ways adults learn. Diagram 8 indicates that most people (53.7%) want to do practical exercises to understand and process knowledge, while others prefer to reflect to the learning and to get more theoretical inputs (49.2%) whereas some people need to try out what is learned.

Diagram 8. Preferred capacity building techniques that should be used during the delivery of the trainings
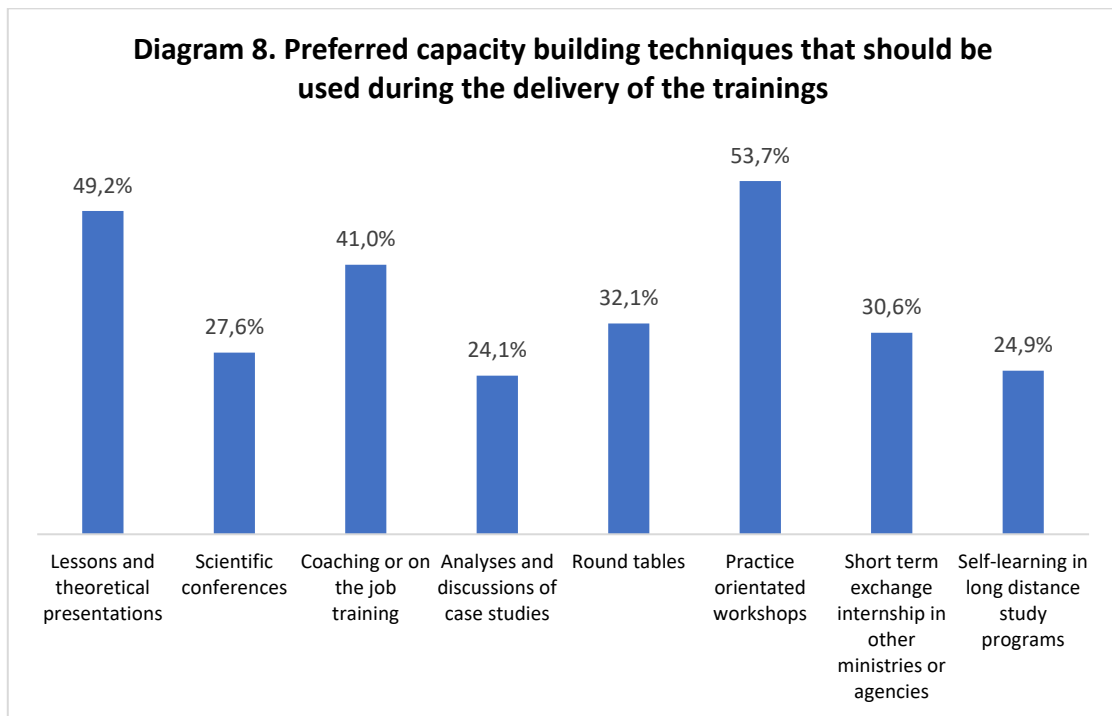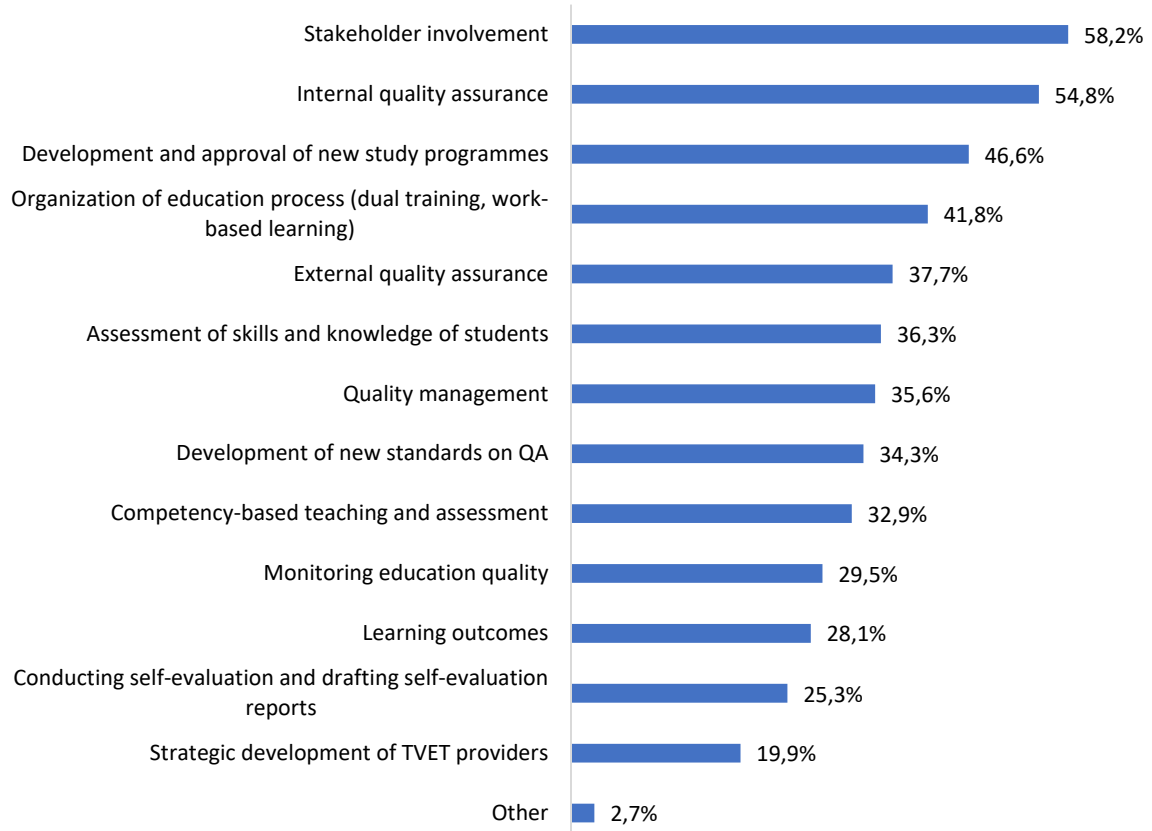

Diagram 9 helps to decide which areas to focus training on. It shows the areas of quality assurance that should be taken into consideration in the development of capacity building activities. The respondents prefer to gain more knowledge and skills in almost all important areas of quality assurance, and the top five topics are stakeholder engagement (58,2%), internal quality assurance (54,8%), development of new study programmes (46,6%), organization of educational process (41,8%) and external quality assurance (37,7%).

Diagram 9. Preference for capacity building activities

Activity	Percentage
Stakeholder involvement	58,2%
Internal quality assurance	54,8%
Development and approval of new study programmes	46,6%
Organization of education process (dual training, work-based learning)	41,8%
External quality assurance	37,7%
Assessment of skills and knowledge of students	36,3%
Quality management	35,6%
Development of new standards on QA	34,3%
Competency-based teaching and assessment	32,9%
Monitoring education quality	29,5%
Learning outcomes	28,1%
Conducting self-evaluation and drafting self-evaluation reports	25,3%
Strategic development of TVET providers	19,9%
Other	2,7%

Since all groups of people are usually present in a group training, all parts of the learning cycle should be properly blended in trainings as illustrated in the figure below.
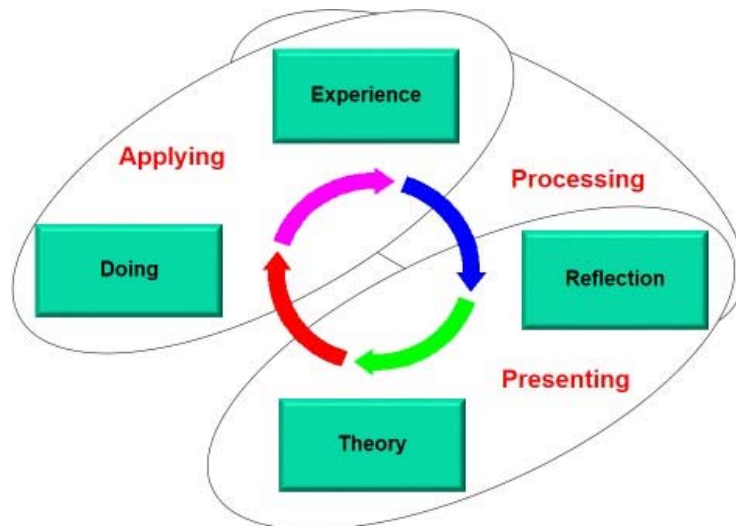

Survey findings confirm that training participants should go through all stages of the experiential learning cycle to create a complete the learning experience. Following all learning

cycles make learning experience meaningful in the sense that it leads to action and to new behavior.

In addition, learning by experience is also about social relationships. By sharing views and knowledge with colleagues at work or in training programs, participants gain some new insights and knowledge about the way they act and also react to other people.

Diagram 10. Keeping in mind your preference and availability, what event length is most appropriate for you to attend?
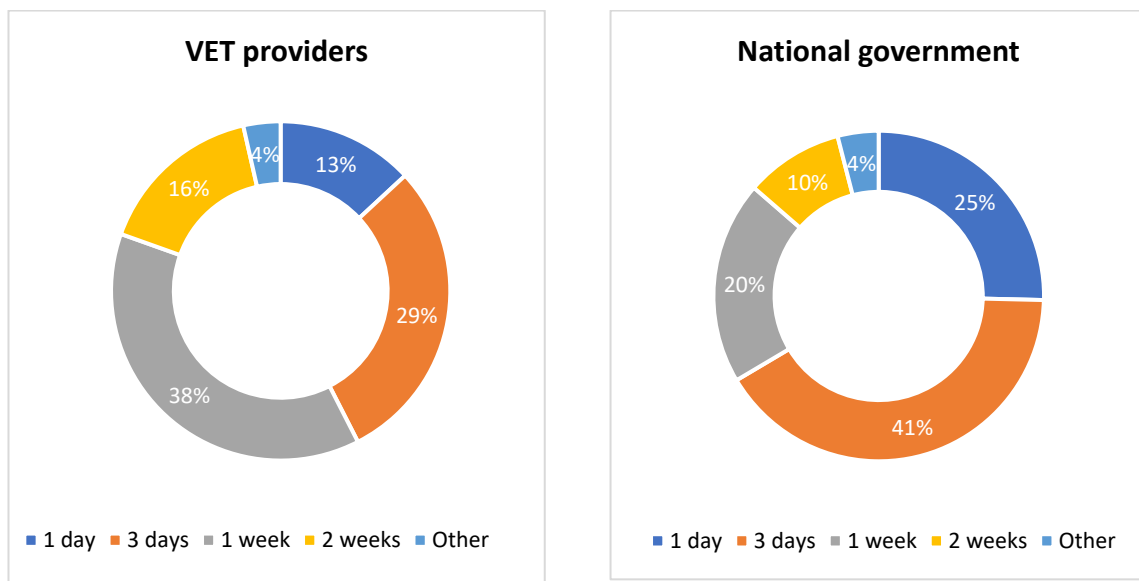
The preferred length of capacity building activities varies across groups of VET actors (Diagram 10). VET providers and teachers prefer to have activities length of one week (38%) and three days (29%), while representatives of VET actors at the national and regional level prefer to have training activities length of 1 day and 3 days.

Conclusions and recommendations

It can be concluded from the analysis that Uzbek QA system has primarily been shaped and managed by external state control and compliance with state educational standards and other regulations.

In recent years, there have been attempts to modernize the QA system shifting from quality-control and input-oriented type towards a quality-enhancement and output-oriented type of QA system in which primary responsibility for the quality of education, its provision and assurance are with VET institutions. QA systems, both internal and external quality assurance, have been linked to each other and assumed to provide a balance between enhancement and accountability.

However, these attempts require further paradigm shifts in the system. *First*, the current IQA is mainly mirroring the frameworks and priorities of EQA. Although there is some room for IQA in the system, the framework and methodology of it are governed by EQA and VET institutions don't feel ownership for quality. *Second,* the independence of both EQA and IQA, another most important feature of a sustainable QA system, is the major challenge for building a sustainable QA system. It assumes that the system and its major actors are independent of any third party. QA system should guarantee that evaluations of education quality are objective, and decisions are unbiased, fair and well-informed. *Third,* QA system, its aims, methodologies and outcomes should be shared by all stakeholders (students, teachers, management of VET, employers and national authorities) and take into account the needs and expectations of all stakeholders and society. *Finally*, a full QA cycle should be established at all levels of the VET system. QA system has to look at the entire process of generating quality as the added value between input and output.

The findings indicate in which areas capacity building activities and trainings are actually needed and what areas ask for immediate attention.

Line of intervention no. 1: Exploring and aligning to international QA standards (i.e. EQAVET)
The capacity building activities with regard to the quality assurance system should be compliant with the global best practices (in particular with the EQAVET). Main stakeholders of the VET system still lack a good understanding of modern quality assurance (both internal & external). Although the system works quite well and is in line with the national legislation, some aspects of the QA still seem to be organized in a top-down manner, where the national level provides control mechanisms for the IQA and VET institutions just need to follow them. In order to develop IQA system, a VET institution has to have both the capacity and the room to take its own strategic responsibility for the quality of its provisions. As long as QA is regarded and felt as a primarily external obligation, the internal motivation can hardly be developed. In a modernized approach the link between IQA and EQA maintains to exist through national standards, criteria and threshold learning outcomes. From this point of view, there is a clear need to organize capacity building for a mixed group of participants from

national and VET level where they will work together to develop a better understanding of the contemporary principles of the QA.

Line of intervention no. 2: Developing and implementing IQA systems in institutions
VET institutions shall be supported to develop and embed an effective IQA system (vision, mission, strategic planning and KPI, etc.) via conferences, seminars, trainings, coaching, partnerships in international networks, and peer exchange of good practices.

Line of intervention no. 3: Strengthening VET institutions in self-assessment practices
VET providers should be supported to build competencies in conducting self-reflection, producing self-assessment report and making a follow-up after some time to improve practices and check whether they work better.

Line of intervention no. 4: Capacitate VET staff in developing demand-driven training content
Labour market relevance of the education programmes should be addressed through different types of capacity building activities, which shall involve teachers and train both the theoretical background and relevant skills on how to develop a training programme that includes learning outcomes in line with National Qualification Framework and professional standards.

Line of intervention no. 5: Comprehending EQA rationale and how it blends with IQA into a coherent QA national system
Principles and purpose of contemporary EQA system and how this could be built within the QA system of Uzbekistan should be addressed in capacity building activities. This part of the capacity building programme could offer basic knowledge and principles so everyone at national level (MHESI, EQA experts) and subnational level (representatives of VET providers) could go through this training and learn about their roles and responsibilities, since QA is everybody's business. The participants could learn about the modern features of the EQA system and the mandate of the key players:

- Autonomy of VET providers to develop their own visions, missions, strategies, KPIs;
- Independent QA agency runs the national EQA system, develops procedures and indicators, coaches their implementation;
- Rationale of EQA in the VET sector in combination with principles of quality enhancement (i.e. supporting VET institutions in delivering good quality), accountability (i.e. assuring the wider public, stakeholders and authorities that the expected types and levels of quality are provided) and access to information for the wider public, stakeholders and authorities about the quality of VET.

Line of intervention no. 6: QA experts should build knowledge, skills, behaviours and values (quality, trust, transparency, accountability, unbiased attitude).
Capacity building of experts in charge should focus on building broad and profound competencies in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors and experience in modern EQA. Moreover, the experts shall be trained to report in a clear, concise, easy to grasp way to

be sure that VETs management, staff, students and other stakeholders can easily understand the results. Their competencies should ensure correct reporting based on principles of transparency and accountability as well as providing useful feedback for further learning and improvement of the QA processes.

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Appendix

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

VET institutions	
Professional school	65,8 %
Vocational college	22,0 %
Technicum	12,2 %
Age of respondents	
<30	27,9 %
30-40	33,7 %
41-50	19,6 %
>50	18,8 %
Gender	
Male	48,6 %
Female	51,4 %
Education	
general secondary	1,1 %
secondary special	9,1 %
higher education	88,7 %
PhD	1,1 %
Occupation	
Teacher	58,1 %
Trainers	18,1 %
Deputy director	13,2 %
Head of unit	5,9 %
Director	3,2 %
Other	1,6 %
Years of service in the current position	
Average	8,2
Mode	3,0
Median	1,0
Pedagogical experience, in years	
Average	11,5
Mode	1,0
Median	10,0

National and regional government	
Age of respondents	
<30	21,9 %
30-40	38,4 %
41-50	14,4 %
>50	25,3 %
Gender	
Male	49,3 %
Female	50,7 %
Education	
general secondary	-
secondary special	2,7 %
higher education	92,5 %
PhD	4,8 %
Occupation	
Chief/Director of organization	8,2 %
Head of structural unit	6,9 %
Specialist	76,0 %
Other	8,9 %
Years of service in the current organization	
Average	7,2
Mode	1,0
Median	4,5
Years of service in the current position	
Average	6,8
Mode	1,0
Median	3,0