THE CONCEPT OF VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES IN UZBEKISTAN

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PREFACE

This Concept describes the ways of implementing quality assurance mechanisms for validation and certification of professional competencies.

The Concept was prepared under the GIZ Project "Support of the reform and modernization process in the vocational education system of Uzbekistan". The document includes the study results of national experience and best practices concerning the validation and certification processes in the field of vocational education and training.

International and national experts were engaged in the Concept design. The design process encompassed the following main steps:

- Study on «Validation and Certification in Uzbekistan» (August – September, 2022). As part of the study, the validation and certification development stages were studied, a brief overview of the legislative framework was made, the existing achievements and challenges were described, and recommendations were worked out.

- Coordination Meeting of the TexVET Project on «Validation and Certification of Professional Competences» (September 21st, 2022). Participants of the Meeting were introduced the study results on: «Validation and Certification in Uzbekistan», and discussed the future concept structure.

- Coordination Meeting of the TexVET Project (November 28th, 2022). The Meeting was dedicated to learning the international experience and presentation of the draft «Concept of Validation and Certification», as well as to development and implementation of a Road Map.

- Receiving the official feedback on the updated draft of the Concept from the stakeholders (December, 2022).

Thus, it was ensured that the stakeholders were engaged in preparation of this version of the Concept, namely - the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations, the State Inspectorate for Supervision of Education Quality under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Institute for Labor Market Research under the Ministry of Health and Labor Relations, "Uztekstilprom" Association, etc.

The development process was facilitated by: Mr. Hans Schustereder, Director, «NOVUM CONSULTING» (Austria) and Mr. Nodir Rahimov, Education Consultant (Uzbekistan).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who were involved in the process of developing this document. I am sure that the concept will be useful not only to decision makers, but also to a wide range of experts and stakeholders.

Matthias Klingenberg,
TexVET Project Manager

JUSTIFICATION

The reforms in the education sector implemented within the period from 2017 to 2020 laid the foundation for the National Qualifications System, which marked a shift towards the results-oriented education.

The National Qualifications System has 8 levels and provides for flexible ways to achieve qualifications through validation and certification mechanisms, and the new law "On Education" has included definitions of such concepts as non-formal and informal education. Lifelong learning has been proclaimed as one of the principles in the education system.

As evidenced by the international experience, recognition and validation mechanisms are particularly important for different cohorts:

- Young people who dropped out of school early, with undeveloped skills in the process of studying or working and who do not have a certificate;
- Migrants and immigrants;
- People who want to work in a certain profession, but do not have the required qualifications, only the necessary skills and experience.

European countries do the validation in order to make the mobility of citizens higher and give them a "second chance" to fully unfold their potential in education, as well as to promote equal opportunities for all socially disadvantaged groups of the population, and to establish equality both in the education system and in the labor market.

Validation of the results of non-formal education and informal learning is an integral part of the general evaluation and certification system of professional skills/competencies. For this reason, it is difficult to consider the validation outside the general evaluation and certification system framework. That is why this Concept considers the validation and certification system as interrelated parts aimed at assessing the professional skills/competencies.

The vocational education system in Uzbekistan does not yet have a national quality assurance framework that includes (among other things) validation and certification processes. The lack of quality assurance mechanisms can have a negative impact on the level of trust of key stakeholders (society, employers, students, etc.) in the VET system as a whole.

As evidenced by the international experience, the national systems of quality assurance, validation and certification of professional skills are built at three levels:

- Macro-level - the VET system level with its legislative and regulatory provisions and recommendations;
- Meso-level - the VET institutions and such institutions such as schools, companies and examination committees where certification is carried out and macro-level rules are implemented;
- Micro-level - where the real evaluation (examination) by teachers, evaluators (examiners) and instructors from enterprises is conducted[1].

This Concept aims to ensure the authenticity, reliability, impartiality and transparency of the validation and certification of professional competencies through the development and implementation of quality assurance mechanisms.

BASIC DEFINITIONS

The following basic definitions are used in this Concept:[2]

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[1]Cedefop (2015). Ensuring the quality of certification in vocational education and training. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 51 (p.25). http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/25991

Accreditation (State Accreditation) - is the process of state recognition of compliance of the activities of public educational institutions and organizations, non-governmental educational organizations (hereinafter referred to as educational organizations) with national educational standards, national educational requirements and curricula, as well as granting the right to issue academic certificates to their graduates.

Performance evaluation of educational organizations – is the main form of government control for evaluating the activities of educational organizations and determining the content, level and quality of training in accordance with the national educational standards, national educational requirements and curricula.

Validation of non-formal and informal education outcomes (hereinafter – the validation) - is the evaluation process when a person's non-formal and informal learning is evaluated in order to determine to what extent that person has achieved the required learning outcomes or competence (UNEVOC).

Evaluation evidence - is information collected in the evaluation process that determines whether a person or group is competent. In competency-based education evaluations, evidence is directly related to demonstrating the learner's competence and ability to perform to a specific standard..

Informal education - is purposeful, but not institutionalized (does not embody certain rules and norms), less organized and structured than formal or non-formal education and may include learning activities in the family, at workplace, in the community and in everyday life.

Qualification - is the level of knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies characterizing the readiness of a person to perform a certain type of professional activity, confirmed by the relevant educational certificate.

Competence – is a set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes necessary for the high-quality performance of professional tasks.

Non-formal education – is institutionalized (embodying certain rules and norms), purposeful and planned by a person or organization delivering educational services, and is a supplement and/or alternative to formal education in lifelong learning of an individual.

Competency-based training - is a structured training and evaluation system that enables people to acquire competencies for the qualitative performance of work-related activities in accordance with the established standard.

Evaluation - is the process of determining to what extent a learner has acquired certain knowledge, skills and competencies (related to part of a qualification or to the entire qualification).

Skills evaluation and certification - is a systematic process of collecting information, evaluating and documenting the level of competence of an individual or group in accordance with specific criteria for a specific qualification.

Quality assurance – means activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting and quality improvement carried out to ensure that education and training (program content, curricula, evaluation and validation of learning outcomes, etc.) meet the quality requirements expected by stakeholders.

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[2] Based on recommendation by the participants of the Coordination Meetings, the Concept uses terms from the Law on Education and other existing regulatory and legal acts. Some terms are borrowed from European sources, as they have not yet been introduced into local practice.

Learning outcomes - are the statements on what a learner knows, understands and is able to do upon completion of the learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies.

Certification - is the process of issuing a certificate that formally certifies that the set of competencies acquired by an individual has been evaluated and validated by the competent authority in accordance with a predetermined standard.

Certificate - is an official document issued by the awarding body, which records the person's accomplishments after being evaluated according to a predetermined standard.

Specialty — is a title of the specific type of professional training, upon completion of which a certain qualification is given.

Formal education - is institutionalized (embodying certain rules and norms), purposeful and planned with participation of public educational institutions and accredited non-governmental educational organizations.

Establishment of the validation system and the stakeholders' contribution

The previous Law on Education (1997) did not include such concepts as non-formal, informal and lifelong learning. Until 2020, there has not been a single government document that provided for the recognition of learning outcomes obtained "outside the formal sector." All of this had greatly complicated the issues of lobbying for the introduction of modern approaches into the education system of Uzbekistan.

The analysis showed that validation issues were clearly visible in the activities of two organizations in Uzbekistan – the UNESCO Office and the Branch of DVV International in Uzbekistan. These two organizations, within the framework of joint projects, have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the validation development in Uzbekistan. Below is a list of these activities and their objectives:

Date	Title	Objective / link with validation
2015	Workshop on "European experience in recognition and validation of professional competencies obtained as a result of non-formal and informal learning"	introduction to a wide range of specialists and representatives of the stakeholders from Uzbekistan and other countries of the Central Asian region the experience of the EU countries in the field of recognition and validation of professional competencies.
2016	Round Table on «Priority tasks for the development of a National Strategy to further strengthen continuous and high-quality non-formal education in Uzbekistan»	One of the recommendations in the final document was to: "Develop and implement the National Qualifications Framework to ensure the recognition of learning outcomes and competencies acquired through all forms of learning (formal, non-formal and informal)".
2017	Workshop on «Prospects for introduction of the systems for recognition and validation of professional competencies obtained as a result of non-formal and informal learning in Uzbekistan»	introduction to a wide range of specialists and representatives of stakeholders in Uzbekistan with the experience of the EU countries in the field of recognition and validation of professional competencies obtained as the result of non-formal, informal training and practical activities; to share with participants the findings of the report on situational analysis conducted on this topic in Uzbekistan; to discuss possible necessary steps to create recognition, validation and accreditation mechanisms in the country..
2017-2018	Subregional study on «Lifelong learning»	As part of the study, the country report of Uzbekistan was prepared, in which a special section was devoted to the issues of recognition, validation and accreditation of previous experience. The results of the sub-regional study were presented in a series of regional events held in offline and online formats.
2018	Workshop dedicated to the presentation of the Project on the «Lifelong Learning Promotion Concept in Uzbekistan»	The draft Concept included recommendations for the development of recognition, validation and accreditation of previously acquired knowledge and skills in Uzbekistan.

The above-listed activities show that the UNESCO Office and the Branch of DVV International in Uzbekistan have carried out various activities to lobby for validation issues at the national level through raising awareness of decision makers, and through conducting studies. Meanwhile, the study of existing experience showed that in Uzbekistan there was not a single case of applying validation mechanisms in practice.

Legislative Framework and Validation Providers

The adopted Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers «About the measures to organize the activities of the National System of Professional Qualifications, Knowledge and Skills in the Republic of Uzbekistan» (№287 dated May 15th, 2020)[3] was the first document describing not

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only the functions and tasks of the agencies (Qualifications Assessment Centers), but also the validation procedures/rules.

The above Resolution approved the Regulation «On measures to develop the National System of Professional Qualifications, Knowledge and Skills», which describes the basic concepts, basic components, goals and objectives of the National Qualifications System, the Republican Council for the Development of Professional Qualifications, the Sector Council for the Development of Professional Knowledge and Qualifications, Competence Assessment Center, as well as procedures for training the professions to unemployed and unoccupied population, procedures for conducting qualification exams, and monitoring compliance with approved quality assurance requirements.

Activity base of the Competence Assessment Centers[4]

Competence Assessment Center is an independent body for assessing competences, established as an independent legal entity or a structural subdivision of a legal entity.

The Competence Assessment Center is established for the purpose of an impartial and independent assessment of the professional competence of applicants who have undergone training, retraining and advanced training in vocational training centers, vocational education institutions, or received in service training or through self-learning.

The Competence Assessment Center carries out its activities on self-sustaining basis.

The main tasks of the Competence Assessment Center are as follows:
- assessment of on-fire (demanded on the labor market) professional competencies of applicants, regardless of the method of acquisition;
- confirmation of jobseekers' compliance with the requirements to the professional competencies and professional standards when applying for a job, and for the professional career growth;
- engagement in preparation and development of proposals on regulatory documents and standards for professional qualifications;
- development and implementation of effective competency models that define the appropriate development scale for each competence and clear behavior indicators that form clear and adequate requirements for employees holding certain positions and working in relevant industry/enterprise;
- development of corporate development programs for the professional competencies and entrepreneurial qualities.

The main functions of the Competence Assessment Center are:
- independent and impartial assessment of the competence of jobseekers;
- assignment of qualification grades and qualification categories to employees of major and particular specialties;
- identifying whether the existing competence of a jobseeker meets the established professional standards;
- engagement in the development of regulatory documents for professional qualifications and standards.

The Law "On Employment of the Population" also includes articles related to the Qualification Assessment Centers (Article 81), the procedure for accreditation of Qualification Assessment Centers (Article 82), the procedure for assessing qualifications, competencies and skills (Article 83), and the results of assessment of qualifications, competencies and skills (Article 84).

Article 81. Qualification Assessment Centers

Qualification Assessment Centers assess the professional qualifications, competencies and skills of persons who want to undergo an assessment of their professional qualifications, competencies and skills.

Qualification Assessment Centers are established as an independent legal entity or a structural subdivision of a legal entity.

Qualification Assessment Centers must meet the following requirements:

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[4] Competence Assessment Center in later documents is referred to as the Qualification Assessment Center.

- to have at least one employee in the staff (dual jobholding is allowed) with higher education and at least three years of practical work experience in each of the areas that a jobseeker applies for the assessment of his/her qualifications, competencies and skills, and who had been trained at the Republican advanced training courses for employees of labor authorities;
- to own, on the basis of economic management rights, operational management or on any other legal basis, the material and technical base, including evaluation tools for assessing qualifications, competencies and skills in each of the areas that a jobseeker applies for the assessment of his/her qualifications, competencies and skills.

Qualification Assessment Centers shall:
- provide persons who want their professional qualifications, competencies and skills be assessed with necessary information about the rules and procedures for assessing qualifications, competencies and skills;
- organize and perform the assessment of qualifications, competencies and skills for compliance with the requirements of professional standards through examination for assigning a qualification grade to workers and qualification category to specialists and, if necessary, through qualifying trial work;
- generate information on the results of assessment of qualifications, competencies and skills, process and issue the qualifications passport in the form approved by the Republican Council;
- make a record of the issued qualification passports in the the National Register of Persons with Verified Qualifications;
- submit a report on their activities to the labor authorities.

A person who has the higher education and have completed the extension courses at the Republican advanced training courses for employees of labor authorities can be the Director of the Qualification Assessment Center.

The organizational structure of the Qualification Assessment Center must include the Expert Qualifications Commission.

The activity of the Qualification Assessment Center is financed from the:
- funds of the founders;
- fees paid for the assessment of qualifications, competencies and skills;
- funds allocated within the framework of the government order for vocational training;
- voluntary donations and targeted contributions from legal entities and individuals, funds of trustees and other sources not prohibited by the law.
- The amount of the fee paid for the assessment of qualifications, competencies and skills is set by the Qualification Assessment Centers independently.

Qualification Assessment Centers, in order to ensure the recognition of qualification passports issued by them in foreign countries where the citizens travel for temporary employment, enter into the partnership agreements with agencies authorized to assess qualifications, competencies and skills, or with employers of the relevant foreign countries.[5]

The Law "On Employment of the Population" also regulates the accreditation procedures for the Qualification Assessment Center (Article 82), where the key authority is the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations. According to the Law it is allowed the accreditation of one Qualification Assessment Center for several types of professional activity (professions).

Applicant — a Qualification Assessment Center (hereinafter — the Applicant), applying for accreditation, shall submit:
- ✓ application for accreditation;
- ✓ documents proving that it has in the staff a specialist (specialists) with higher education employed under the labor or civil law contract in each of the areas that the applicant applies for the assessment of qualifications, competencies and skills;
- ✓ documents proving the possession on the right of economic management, operational management or other legal basis of the evaluation tools necessary for the assessment of qualifications, competencies and skills, as well as the material and technical base designated to organize and conduct the qualification examination.
- ✓ Evaluation tools for assessing qualifications, competencies, and skills, and assessment methods, including the material and technical resources used and software for online testing, are determined by the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

[5] The Law "On Employment of the Population" of the Republic of Uzbekistan https://lex.uz/acts/5055696

Decision on accreditation or refusal of accreditation of Qualification Assessment Centers is made by the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan based on recommendation by the Republican Council. The accreditation is issued for a period of 5 years.

The Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measures for fundamental improvement of qualifications assessment system and providing the labor market with qualified human resources" (No. 4939 of December 31, 2020) has established the Council for the Development of Professional Qualifications and Competencies, accountable to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers, which, along with other functions, is responsible for "*the introduction of flexible, transparent and objective mechanisms of recognition, validation and accreditation (certification) of qualifications and competencies based on not only the received education, but also professional experience, skills, as well as personal and business qualities of employees*"[6]

The Resolution assigned on the sectoral councils the task to "*form the system for recognition, validation and accreditation (certification) of the outcomes of non-formal and informal education, including the organization of activity of the Qualification Assessment Centers*", as well as approved the program for establishment of Qualification Assessment Centers at large enterprises in priority sectors of the economy for 2021 (see Appendix 2). In this respect, the "Uztextilprom" Association was designated as the responsible organization for the establishment of QAC in the textile industry.

The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers «On additional measures for further improvement of the professional skills and knowledge development system» (No. 606 of 30.09.2021) is the most relevant document aimed at further development of the National Qualifications System and its main actors. It approved the It approved model regulations on the Labor Market Research Institute, Sector Councils and Qualification Assessment Centers. Based on this document and the above framework documents, the following structure of the bodies responsible for validation can be built:

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[6] The Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "About measures for fundamental improvement of qualifications assessment system and providing the labor market with qualified human resources" (No. 4939 of December 31, 2020): https://lex.uz/docs/5203492

Council for the Development of Professional Qualifications and Competences

✓ introduction of flexible, transparent and objective mechanisms for recognition, validation and accreditation (certification) of qualifications and competencies

Labor Market Research Institute

✓ participates in forming the system for recognition, validation and accreditation (certification) of the outcomes of non-formal and informal education, including in organization of the activities of Qualification Assessment Centers;

✓ implements, maintains and organizes the development of the register of legal entities engaged in competence assessment activities and the National Register of individuals with verified qualifications;

✓ studies and analyzes the level of real compliance with the qualifications by persons who have received the qualification.

Sector Councils

✓ participates in forming the system for recognition, validation and accreditation (certification) of the outcomes of non-formal and informal education, including in organization of the activities of Qualification Assessment Centers;

✓ selects organizations to perform the functions of the Competence Assessment Centers (CACs), vesting them with authority of objective assessment of qualifications and verification of information provided by them in the selection and authorization process;

✓ determines the professional qualification naming for each Qualification Assessment Center;

✓ develops evaluation tools for specific qualifications and performs their expert assesstment;

✓ controls the activity of the Qualification Assessment Centers;

✓ establishes an appeals commission to address grievances related to the qualification assessment results, and arranges its activities;

✓ organizes the placement of information on an impartial assessment of qualifications in the appropriate register.

Qualification Assessment Centers

✓ Conducts the assessment of on-fire (demanded on the labor market) qualifications, regardless of the method of their acquisition

From the above information, it can be concluded that Uzbekistan has taken effective steps to create the National Qualifications Framework, one of the important components of which is the validation system. The country has established legislative and regulatory frameworks for validation, as well as institutions responsible for validation.

CONCLUSIONS

The validation system is still in its infancy and has both strengths and weaknesses. This is clearly demonstrated by the SWOT analysis table.:

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Favorable legislative framework - Availability of national qualification frameworks; - Institutions responsible for validation have been established.	- National validation principles (including guidelines) that take into account the best practices have not been developed; - Lack of validation experts; - There are no cases of practical application of validation in the QACs; - Weak validation funding mechanisms; - Weak information support for validation; - Lack of consultations for the public on validation issues.
Opportunities	**Threats**
- High demand (strong migration flows, developed informal sector of the economy); - Availability of large projects in VET sector (funded by GIZ, UNESCO, HELVETAS, ADB); - There are sectors with highest need and favorable conditions for validation; - Strong political support.	- Loss of trust in validation mechanisms by the public and decision makers; - Government abandoning the idea and further development of the QACs.

The threats appear to be a loss of trust in validation mechanisms by the public and decision makers, which may lead to the government abandoning the idea of further development of the QACs. This may negatively affect the incentives for the population to study throughout their lives, using flexible ways of mastering qualifications. To eliminate such threats, it is necessary to use the available opportunities, namely: to use the factor of strong political support and the availability of large international projects in VET secor (funded by GIZ, UNESCO, HELVETAS, ADB) to pilot and introduce the validation mechanisms in certain sectors where there is the greatest need for human resources and flexible mechanisms for recognition of qualifications.

Preparatory work has been carried out in the country to establish QACs, but they have not yet started practical activities on the assessment of qualifications. By the end of 2022, there were 14 QACs in the country based in the premises of "Ishga Marhamat" ("Welcome to a Job") monocenters. Decision on accreditation of additional QACs in 22 priority sectors of the economy has been anticipated.

Professional standards (including structure and content) development mechanism requires improvement and needs appropriate arrangements to ensure their quality and regular updating. Professional standards themselves are difficult to consider as a basis for validation and certification, since they describe the process and do not have evaluation indicators .

The current rules for qualification assessment are general, superficial and do not focus on the validation and assessment of competencies. In order to conduct high-quality and transparent validation/certification, the QACs need technical and methodological support, as well as trained evaluators (examiners).

CHAPTER 3: THE SYSTEM FOR ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES IN UZBEKISTAN

Currently, the following types of educational institutions operate in the system of vocational education:

Vocational school - a primary vocational education institution that provides training for the secondary school (9th grade) graduates on the basis of two-year integrated curricula of general subjects and specialty subjects in full-time studies and on a free of charge basis.	**College** - a secondary vocational education institution that provides training on the basis of general secondary, secondary special and primary vocational education in full-time, evening and correspondence forms of studies within the period of up to two years, based on the complexity of professions and specialties, on the basis of a government order or a paid contract.	**Technical school** - a secondary specialized vocational education institution that provides training on the basis of general secondary, secondary specialized, primary vocational and secondary vocational education in full-time, evening and correspondence forms of studies within the period of at least two years, based on the complexity of professions and specialties, on the basis of a government order or a paid contract.

There are 339 vocational schools, 162 colleges and 214 technical schools in the country. The following organizations are responsible for the certification:

Bodies, responsible for the certification

Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan
- ✓ sets the procedure for certification and state accreditation of educational organizations, certification of teaching personnel and scientific staff, and licensing of non-governmental educational organizations to provide educational and training services,
- ✓ approves the state-recognized documents of education and establishes the procedure for issuing of state-recognized documents of education;

State Inspectorate for Supervision of Education Quality	**Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education**
✓ implements the government policy in the field of quality control of the educational process, teaching personnel, training, retraining and advanced training of human resources in the education system;	✓ ensures the development and approval of national educational standards (including the national standard for preschool education) and the national educational requirements;
✓ conducts certification and state accreditation of educational organizations (excluding non-governmental educational organizations providing extracurricular educational services), as well as certification of the teaching personnel in educational organizations;	✓ establishes the procedure for assessing the knowledge, skills and abilities of students;
✓ monitors the quality of the education and training process in educational organizations.	✓ develops measures aimed at improving the quality of vocational training for human resources in educational organizations, improves curricula;
	✓ approves regulatory and legislative acts on the assessment of academic performance, organization of the educational process, the final national evaluation of students, as well as determines the categories of students of external degree programs.

Vocational education institutions
- ✓ Conducts skills assessment and certification.

Certification rules and regulatory documents

Certification of graduates of vocational schools, colleges and technical schools is carried out on the basis of the Regulations on the procedure for the final national certification in secondary, special, vocational institutions (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan on October 6, 2009, Registration number 2011). This regulation (October 16, 2018) was amended in accordance with the Resolution of the Center for Vocational Education under the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education and the State Inspectorate for Supervision of Education Quality under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan.[7]

It is worth noting that the Regulation was developed and updated before the decision to split the vocational education institutions into three types (vocational school, college and technical school), however it is still in force. It describes the general rules of final qualifying examinations, the structure of the State Qualification Committee, the procedure for organizing and conducting final qualifying examinations, as well as the procedure for organizing and conducting national examinations in academic lyceums and vocational colleges.

Employers' engagement in certification process

In vocational colleges the State Qualification Committee (hereinafter – the SQC) is formed from the staff of specialists of employers' organizations, teaching personnel of similar higher educational institutions, industry specialists of ministries and departments, as well as experienced, and qualified specialist teachers from related vocational colleges and the same educational organization.

Teachers of special subjects in vocational colleges are included in the SQC members composition based on the recommendation by the Deputy Director for Cooperative Education. In vocational colleges, at least 40% of the SQC members must be the representatives of employer organizations. Representatives of the National Testing Center under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan can also participate in the final qualification examination.

Organization and conduct of state examinations

Final certification in the vocational educational institutions is carried out for the following purposes:
- certification of compliance of the level of knowledge, qualifications and skills of students with the requirements of the national educational standards;
- making a decision on assignment to students of junior specialist qualification;
- making a decision on awarding the students with Ordinary National Diploma upon their graduation.

The final certification is carried out by the final SQCs which are established in educational institutions in the areas of allied education.

State examinations in the vocational colleges include the history of Uzbekistan, practical exams on professions, defense of qualification work or, instead of it, exams on a set of professional subjects.

A set of test assignments shall be formed by the teaching staff of an educational institution fully covering the content of educational programs and discussed in relevant departments (chairs).

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[7] Resolution on Amendments to the Regulation on the procedure of Final State Certification in Secondary Specialized, and Vocational Educational Institutions: https://lex.uz/docs/3998392

In total the test assignments will include 72 questions. 2 astronomical hours will be given to answer the questions and additional 10 minutes to copy the marked answers into the answer sheet.

If at the final certification upon completion of test assignments the ratio of correct answers is 86-100%, the State Academic Commission awards 5 points, for 71-85% of correct answers - 4 points, for 56-70% of correct answers - 3 points, and 2 points for correct answers below 56%.

Practical examination on professions determines whether students of a vocational college had formed qualifications and skills, as well as the level of professional training (tariff category).

Practical examinations in professions are held after the completion of the on-the-job training according to the curriculum and after passing the state examination on the history of Uzbekistan, before defending a thesis or state exams on a set of professional subjects.

According to the curriculum, in the first week of the two weeks allotted for the final certification, a practical examinations on the history of Uzbekistan and professions shall be planned, and in the second week - the state exams that include the defense of a qualifying work or a set of professional subjects.

The form of practical examinations in professions, the content of assignments are determined based on the specifics of a profession and the content of professional activity. Practical exams in professions are organized on the basis of training workshops, laboratories of an educational institution or industrial enterprises.

Versions of practical examination assignments for professions are selected by specialists of employers' organizations, deputy director for cooperative education of a vocational college, senior master, teachers of special subjects and masters of industrial training in the form of complex works, and the list of raw materials, drawings, technological maps, measuring and cutting equipment necessary for practical work is determined.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of existing experience has shown that the system of assessment and certification of professional skills retains the features of traditional approach, and the key elements of the competency-based approach have not yet been formed. The table below reflects the results of the SWOT analysis of local experience through the prism of the basic principles of the competency-based approach:

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Favorable legislative framework; - Availability of national qualification frameworks; - A wide network of VET institutions; - Relatively well developed material and technical base; - Administrative and human resource potential; - Sustainable financing of the VET system.	- Mechanism for the development of professional standards and educational programs does not meet modern requirements and does not provide an adequate level of needs identification and their transfer to educational programs; - Outdated Regulations on the State Final Certification; - National certification principles (including guidelines) that take into account best practices have not been developed; - Lack of skill assessment experts - Weak mechanisms for involving employers in the skills assessment process; - Imperfection of mechanisms for monitoring/evaluating the results of the certification process.
Opportunities	Threats
- Availability of large projects in VET sector (funded by GIZ, UNESCO, HELVETAS, ADB); - Well established system of professional development for VET staff.	- Loss of trust in certification mechanisms by the population and employers; - Preservation of insufficient understanding of the principles of competency-based education among VET workers.

As can be seen from the table above, the regulation governing certification processes in Uzbekistan requires updating. It is important to note here that within the GIZ "PECA" project a draft Regulation "On the Procedure for Conducting the State Final Certification in Vocational Educational Institutions" was developed. The approval of this document may create a new framework conditions for certification and engagement of employers in VET. However, this will create only general framework conditions, but does not imply the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms in skills assessment and certification.

The structure can be described as an input-oriented curriculum with an emphasis on the content and the number of hours spent on each section. In sections defining knowledge and skills the focus is on knowledge rather than on learning objectives. In other words, the focus is on what the student should know, but not what he should be able to do[8].

In general, it can be stated that in the practice of local experience, a logical connection is still not seen between the main links of VET, such as: needs assessment > professional standard> educational program> curriculum > skills assessment / certification.

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[8]Skills development in Uzbekistan – a sector assessment (2022, ADB)

CHAPTER 4: PRIORITY AREAS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION

Effective validation and certification processes can be implemented only if certain "inputs" are provided for, for example, provisions on certification and/or validation, technical and human resource infrastructure, trained evaluators/examiners, guidelines and materials, evaluation standards.

With this in mind, the following are recommended as priority areas of the validation and certification development concept[9]:

- Providing clear benchmarks for assessing professional competencies;

- Providing information on validation and certification procedures to the stakeholders;

- Creating requirements for evaluators, selection and training mechanisms;

- Improving the quality of assessment methods and procedures;

- Improving the practice of documenting, evaluating and monitoring the results of validation and certification.

- Creation of formal mechanisms for quality assurance of validation and certification.

The above areas can be implemented with due account of the recommendations, descriptors and indicators of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).

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[9] The areas are selected taking into account the recommendations reflected in the publication Cedefop (2015). Ensuring the quality of certification in vocational education and training. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 51 (p.25). http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/25991

CHAPTER 5. MECHANISMS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIORITY AREAS FOR VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION DEVELOPMENT

Providing clear benchmarks for assessing professional competencies

In developed countries, there are legal norms that define the validation and certification standards, which indicate what should be evaluated. Standards or criteria for assessing competencies are expressed in terms of learning outcomes.

This priority area will cover the development of validation and certification standards covering the content and process (for example, general principles, timing, permits to repeat some parts or the entire assessment, description of learning outcomes, prescribed methods or frameworks for assessment, standardized and/or non-standardized examinations, appeal procedures).

The list of priority actions is as follows:

- Identification of priority sectors and institutions for piloting new approaches in validation and certification;

- Establishing a working group composed of leading specialists from relevant ministries, VET institutions, international projects and independent experts;

- Organization of events (workshops, trainings, conferences and study tours) to strengthen the capacity of the working group members in quality assurance of validation and certification;

- Analysis of the national experience and identification of areas requiring improvement;

- Description of processes and creation of guidelines for the development, updating and approval of professional standards. This document should describe the main stages of development / updating, define the requirements for the competencies of responsible persons, as well as quality assurance and control mechanisms for each stage;

- Description of processes and creation of guidelines for the development, updating and approval of educational programs. This document should describe the main stages of development / updating, define the requirements for the competencies of responsible persons, as well as quality assurance and control mechanisms for each stage It is necessary to develop mechanisms/ tools that ensure the transfer of the professional standards content into educational programs;

- Description of processes, stages and creation of guidelines for the organization and and implementation of professional competencies validation;

- Description of processes and creation of guidelines for the organization and implementation of professional competencies certification.

Providing information on validation and certification procedures to the stakeholders.

It is critical to inform the stakeholders (e.g., learners, evaluators/examiners, teachers, staff of VET institutions/Qualification Assessment Centers), engaged in the validation and certification.

Candidates, evaluators, teachers and instructors are the main stakeholders who need to know the requirements for the assessment of competencies to be able to comply with national, regional regulations. Generally, it is information related to methods, procedures and criteria for admission, evaluation and certification. The goal of all information efforts is to create a common understanding of certification requirements to support transparency.

The list of priority actions is as follows:

- Development of manuals and other information materials adapted for applicants, evaluators, examiners, teachers and instructors;

- Creation of websites to cover validation and certification issues (benefits of validation, application procedures, evaluation methods/criteria, etc.).

Creating requirements for evaluators, selection and training mechanisms

The work of evaluators is central to the quality assurance of validation and certification. It is important to develop requirements for the evaluator's profile, define procedures for their selection and accreditation, as well as mechanisms for training and advanced training of evaluators.

It is necessary to define the roles and responsibilities within the certification processes – not only the required competencies of evaluators, but also the composition of the examination commission, the responsibilities for quality management at the level of educational institutions / Qualification Assessment Centers.

The list of priority actions is as follows:

- Development of requirements for the selection and competence profile of an evaluator-examiner;

- Identification of organizations responsible for the accreditation of evaluators-examiners;

- Development of requirements for the examination commission's composition;

- Creating and piloting the courses for training and advanced training of evaluators (including creation of platforms for the experience exchange);

- Identification and training of persons responsible for the quality assurance of validation and certification at the organizations level (Qualification Assessment Centers, VET institutions).

Improving the quality of assessment methods and procedures

There are different approaches towards the assessment methods and procedures. Some countries regulate the use of certain assessment methods, while others provide a general methodological framework, and addressing practical issues is still with VET providers and examination boards.

Within the scope of this area, approaches will be developed to guarantee the quality of assessment methods.

The list of priority actions is as follows:

- Standardization of final examinations in VET institutions;

- Standardization of validation processes in Qualification Assessment Centers;

- Improvement of mechanisms for verification/approving examination assignments;

- Development and piloting of various methods for assessing skills and competencies;

- Preparation of methodological manuals and guidelines for validation and certification.

Improving the practice of documenting, evaluating and monitoring the results of validation and certification.

Certification process monitoring is an important task at the macro (system), meso (supplier) and micro (evaluator) levels. Collection and analysis of information on certification results can provide important information at different levels and for different purposes.

In particular, information from students and evaluators, including labor market participants who are engaged in the assessment, can be in the form of:

- feedback from individual students (for example, regarding the process of developing their competence, their strengths and weaknesses);
- feedback from VET providers (for example, regarding the development and organization of the certification process, as well as other processes, such as pedagogical and didactic approach, training sites, etc.);
- feedback at the system level (for example, regarding standards based on learning outcomes, requirements for teachers and evaluators, stakeholders engagement).

The list of priority actions is as follows:

- Development and implementation of methodology for internal and external monitoring and evaluation covering content (e.g. compliance with standards based on learning outcomes) and certification process;

- Development of mechanisms ensuring the stakeholders engagement at all levels of monitoring and evaluation regarding validation and certification;

- Implementation of certification indicators (e.g. EQAVET 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 indicators adapted to the national context) at different levels.

Creation of formal mechanisms for quality assurance of validation and certification.

Uzbekistan has not yet created the VET quality assurance system. As it is known, validation and certification are the key components of such a system. Within the scope of this area, an attempt will be made to create the formal quality assurance mechanisms in Uzbekistan for the validation and certification of professional competencies.

Recommendations, descriptors and indicators of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) can lay a foundation for this work.

The list of priority actions is as follows:

- To sum up the results of the work carried out within the scope of the above listed areas;
- To draf a resolution on implementation of quality assurance mechanisms for validation and certification at macro, meso and micro levels (including the description of roles and responsibilities at all levels and a roadmap development for their phased implementation).

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