

# ARMENIA



## 1. GENERAL GOVERNANCE

Armenia is a semi-presidential representative democratic republic. The president is head of state and appoints the prime minister, who is head of government, which has executive power. It also shares legislative power with the 131-member parliament, which is elected every five years. The country is divided into ten regions, and the city of Yerevan. Regional governors carry out the government's regional policy in areas that include education, commerce and services.

## 2. VET GOVERNANCE

### Key roles and functions

VET mainly covers initial vocational education and training (IVET), which is divided into two levels: preliminary (craftsmanship) and middle vocational education (or middle VET). Both routes offer a vocational qualification and opportunities for a secondary general diploma, so students have the option to pursue higher education. The VET Department in the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for defining vision and strategy and monitoring national VET policies. MoES is also in charge of the network of providers. With the Ministry of Finance (MoF), it plans the budget for vocational schools. The Ministry of Labour and Social Issues (MoLSI) is in charge of employment policy, implemented by its State Employment Agency.

The National Centre for VET Development (NCVETD) provides methodological support for VET, supervised by MoES. NCVETD is accountable for methodological reforms, and developing standards, modular curricula and teacher training, reporting to MoES and to the National Council. NCVETD was set up to advise MoES, so helping to prepare development programmes, make reform effective and deepen social partnership.

The foundations for social dialogue are in place, including a tripartite commission for consultation between government and social partners. MoLSI, the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia (RUEA) and the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia together make up the International Labour

Organisation (ILO). They all use social dialogue to look for consensus on key policy issues. Social dialogue in VET is defined in official documents, which provide for social partners' involvement in working groups and advisory boards. Social partners also take part in meetings of the National Council for VET, and sit on the governing boards of VET colleges. Also, social partner organisations like RUEA and the Chamber of Commerce take part in all activities at central and local level, and are represented on sector skills councils. Despite social dialogue being well defined, both social partners and schools and colleges have raised concerns about the effectiveness of mechanisms to promote it.

### Financing

The main source for VET financing is the state budget. Middle VET has mainly been privately financed (through enrolment fees), and international donors are also important. Donors have helped improve the system. The EU donated around EUR 40 million from 2007 to 2013. EU help has focused on innovation, and on refurbishing colleges which have gone on to become models for developing the system nationwide. EU support has also included technical help for preliminary VET schools, and funding to validate non-formal and informal learning and career guidance, among other initiatives. Until 2013, the United Nations Development Programme helped VET reform through support from the Danish Government.

MoES and MoF plan the budgets for vocational schools. But VET institutions are in charge of managing school budgets. So they have some autonomy for allocating funding. Also, as middle VET has until now been mainly privately financed, college principals have had autonomy in employing teachers, using student numbers as their main criterion.

### Coordination mechanisms for VET policymaking

The 2005 Law on Preliminary (Vocational) and Middle Level Professional Education, and the corresponding strategy, were developed to create a system for producing qualified specialists to meet the needs of the economy and the labour



market. The Armenia Development Strategy 2014-25 confirms that education is seen as fundamental to the sustainable development of the nation, and that increasing its quality, and making it more effective, relevant and accessible are top priorities. The strategy emphasises that increasing employment by creating high-quality, productive jobs is the main objective of the country's overall strategic framework. The VET Reform Programme and Action Plan 2012-16 underlines the achievements of reform so far and sets out more measures, highlighting the need to integrate the VET system into the European Professional Education Area.

A current review of the Law on Education could extend free compulsory education from nine to twelve years from 2015-16, to address the problem of 7.7% of students not enrolling in secondary education. This implies that demand for VET will increase, along with public funding. The same law stresses the importance of supplementary and continuing education to promoting CVET, including new concepts of, and procedures for validating, non-formal and informal learning.

In institutionalised policy advice orientated mechanisms, MoES's VET Department is the main driver for change, responsible for defining the vision and strategy for VET. Its main goals are to spot strategic development trends for VET, approve VET development programmes, and make reform more efficient while strengthening and promoting social partnership. NCVETD is the VET Department's operational arm, promoting VET through a journal, developing training standards and modular curricula, and training staff, school directors and sector skills council members. The sector skills councils offer guidance on training standards and curricula and validate their development, but legislation recognises them mainly for education, not for identifying sectors' skills needs. The National Institute for Labour and Social Research (NILSR) is assessing social needs by interviewing 1,000 households. It has been involved in redefining 120 job profiles, and the decision on the roles to be re-examined was based on NILSR's research on labour market needs. NILSR has started working with MoES and attends sector skills council meetings. This should make sure that future occupational profiles act as the basis for qualification standards upheld by NCVETD.

In knowledge creation orientated mechanisms, NCVETD reports to MoES twice a year and the national Council once a year, while MoES reports

to the government. So there is a system of intra-departmental and inter-ministerial accountability. But there are no mechanisms for assessing institutions' performance. The Armenian National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) has taken the first steps to defining quality assessment standards and criteria. Focusing on higher education, it has defined a three-step process: self-assessment; external assessment; and a written report. A new law on VET, developed with help from donors, has set out a quality control system, but it is still under discussion. For planning, enrolment in VET is based on state orders issued by MoES, considering schools' capacity as well as information on labour market demand received from other institutions like MoLSI or the State Employment Agency. Planning is also based on the Medium-term Expenditure Framework, which covers budget allocation to all public institutions, including MoES and the VET Department.

NCVETD has recently reviewed the reform process, including implementation of new curricula, teacher training and college management boards. Its reports go to the VET Department. Each college is licensed by MoES to deliver training with a specific profile, based on evidence about, for example, teachers' competence, facilities, and labour market demand for qualifications.

### Country typology

VET governance in Armenia is centralised, despite progress towards a more participatory approach. At national level, MoES is in charge of preliminary (craftsmanship), middle VET and continuing education, and so mainly responsible for education. NCVETD is responsible for methodological reforms, and for developing standards, modular curricula and teacher training. VET legislation and new reforms are discussed at National Council for VET development meetings. To make VET more effective and more relevant to regional and local needs, management boards operate in all VET colleges, comprising representatives from the student body, social partner organisations, local institutions, employment offices and other stakeholders. The boards can approve budgets, strategic programmes, and tuition fees, and they can elect a director. They meet four times a year, and their effectiveness seems to depend on the personality and dedication of the director, who is the key player in terms of fostering motivation and commitment in everyone involved.

### Development assessment

VET governance development is defined. The VET Department in MoES is the main driver for change, responsible for defining vision and strategy, while at the same time also taking into account developments in other countries. The department is fully committed to reform and aware of the changes needed to modernise the VET system so it's seen to be more relevant and attractive by society. The department also knows the practical problems, the limitations in terms of resources and staff, and the difficulty of changing entrenched attitudes.

NCVETD provides methodological support for VET, supervised by MoES. The National Council for VET Development advises MoES, preparing development programmes, promoting the effectiveness of reforms in the sector and deepening social partnership. Social partners' organisations like RUEA and the Chamber of Commerce participate in all activities organised at central and local level, and appoint their representatives to the sector skills councils.

Institutional cooperation between MoES, MoLSI, other ministries, trade unions and employers happens at central level through the National Council for VET and at local level through the colleges' management boards. MoLSI carries out annual research through interviews with employers on the qualifications the labour market needs. But the results don't seem to be disseminated widely or used for educational purposes. Similarly, the State Employment Agency carries out a 'barometer' test of labour market needs, but it's unclear how the results are shared.

### Ongoing work in policy development

The National Council for VET, which includes representatives from government institutions, employers' and business organisations and trade unions, is an example of managing public-private partnerships for VET and skills provision. The Armenian National Qualifications Framework, which follows the structure of the European Qualifications Framework, and is seen as a key tool for improving the quality of the education and training system. As such, it's an example of evaluating and reviewing VET policy. As the level descriptors in the national qualifications framework are the basis for developing educational standards, once they're implemented, educational programmes will have to be reviewed in line with them. MoES

has recently set up a working group to review classification of qualifications. The Ministry knows it needs to consider the progression route from general secondary education to preliminary VET and middle VET coherently, and in terms of what skills, knowledge and competencies learners acquire.

The governance function of mobilising financial resources is seen in using the EU's EUR 40 million support over six years to 2013 to improve the VET's system's image by modernising infrastructure and content. Also, EU support has helped NCVETD and the sector skills councils develop 100 training standards.

## 3. POLICY POINTERS

Policy makers may wish to consider the following points for reflection, with a view to working towards their implementation in line with national priorities and in the context of national, regional, and local needs.

### Overall planning and management

1. Speed up implementation of the Armenian National Qualifications Framework to support a more systemic approach to reform.
2. Promote effective partnership between education and business to ease VET graduates' transition from school to work.
3. Implement the new VET law in a more efficient way.
4. Consult all stakeholders, then draft secondary legislation or other regulations on the new VET law to reflect the existing comprehensive vision, and regulate the VET system and governance.
5. Look into developing and adopting a tripartite national agreement on VET.
6. Elaborate a solid mechanism in the VET system for assessing institutions' performance.
7. Make institutional arrangements and give small enterprises incentives (capacity building programmes, tax exemptions etc.), to get them involved in VET decision-making and policy implementation.
8. Strengthen the information database by using analytical tools.



9. Involve VET students more efficiently in decision-making and processes for developing quality.
10. Develop the use of ICT and e-Learning as potential ways to improve the quality of VET, more it more flexible, and increase access.

### **Finance and funding**

1. Consult VET providers and stakeholders on providers' financial autonomy. Then use the results to increase it by drafting and adopting secondary legislation and regulations.
2. Offer enterprises and employers legislated financial incentives, like tax exemptions, for contributing to VET.
3. Consider public-private partnerships as a way to support the financing and governance of CVT, and then develop financing partnerships with business to the develop it further.
4. Strengthen infrastructure in VET institutions with modern educational and laboratory equipment and educational media.
5. Upgrade the system for paying teaching staff.

### **Coordination mechanisms for VET policy making**

1. Improve and reinforce active labour market policies.
2. Run regular labour market surveys and specify employers' criteria for occupational standards.
3. Look to implement a VET policy mechanism supported by all stakeholders.
4. Implement the National Qualifications Framework to help coordinate the education system's supply of labour with businesses' demand.