

IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPING FUTURE-ORIENTED VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS IN ARMENIA

Elaborated by CRRC-Armenia

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRRC	The Caucasus Research Resource Centers
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DF	Dialogue Forum
FG	Focus Group
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH)
ICT	Information and communication technology
IDF	Industrial Development Fund of RA
ILO	International Labor Organization
MoE	Ministry of Economy of RA
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science of RA
MLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of RA
NCVETD	National Center for Vocational Education and Training Development
NILSR	National Institute of labor and Social Research
NSS	National Statistical Service
NTF	National Training Fund
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
PE	Precision Engineering
RA	Republic of Armenia
RUEA	Republican Union of Employers of Armenia
SESA	State Employment Service Agency
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UMBA	The Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen (Employers) of Armenia
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VQ	Vocational qualifications
YPOC	Youth Professional Orientation Center

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The high level of unemployment, the mismatch between demand and supply for qualified labor, and the efforts of government of RA to develop and implement optimal policies for raising the competitiveness of the private sector require labor market participants to acquire new competencies and Vocational Qualifications (VQs), as well as the abilities to further develop the ones they have.

The growing need for skilled labor is becoming a challenge for the diversification, competitiveness, and sustainable development of the private sector. It is obvious that in Armenia there are constraints to building qualifications that recognize current and future skills needs. These constraints include poor labor market data, the long time period required to develop qualifications, weak methods for collecting and analyzing information on future qualifications needs, the insufficient involvement of the private sector in the elaboration and implementation of vocational education programs, etc. Thus, for Armenia it is critical to (i) identify future VQs and assess the needs for those VQs; and to (ii) simultaneously enhance the responsiveness of education and training systems to the changes in VQs requirements and to improve access to training and skills development.

The Caucasus Research Resource Center-Armenia (CRRC), within the GIZ's Private Sector Development in South Caucasus program, conducted a study on "Improving the Conditions for Developing Future-oriented Vocational Qualifications in Armenia." The study attempts (i) to identify future-oriented VQs that are critical for private sector competitiveness, diversified and sustainable growth; and (ii) to produce recommendations for the "Roadmap for Improving Conditions for Developing Future-Oriented VQs."

To achieve the objective—produce a "Roadmap"—the following methodology was applied:

- (i) Relevant studies and surveys were reviewed (desk study) to assess the current situation in terms of future-oriented VQs needs; to identify contributing factors and the challenges of meeting private sector needs in creating required qualifications, to understand how the demand in VQs may change and whether the education system is capable of rapidly anticipating labor market changes;
- (ii) To complement the desk study findings, focus group (FG) discussions were conducted, which contribute to the identification of challenges in respect to developing the required VQs and developing a future-oriented VQ catalog;
- (iii) A dialogue forum (DF) was organized to present and validate the findings from the desk research and FG discussion, provide a platform for joint discussions on future-oriented VQs needs from different perspectives, identify and prioritize factors contributing to the development of future-oriented qualifications and the challenges the private and educational sectors face.

It is recognized that competitiveness is a major challenge faced by decision makers in the private and public sectors in Armenia and that the quality of the workforce is a contributing factor. The Armenian economy faces a shortage of the required VQs, which hinders the expansion of the economy: according to some survey results it is the second most important constraint for expansion of some sectors, following "limited market size" factor. According to the results of the 2013 employer survey (conducted by SESA), about 43% of employers faced shortages in corresponding qualifications and therefore were not able to fill vacancies for long periods. The next most common reason for not being able to fill vacancies was the lack of relevant experience—12%.¹

The predominant belief is that graduates are, in general, unprepared to work in their fields of study, as they have low levels of both theoretical and practical knowledge and skills. Thus, there is a significant gap between the level of sophistication of the educational system and the actual needs of the economy.² The majority of employers participating in the different studies highlighted the existence of a discrepancy in educational curricula and market requirements, meanwhile stressing the need to support educational institutions to focus on preparing required qualifications.

One step undertaken by employers in anticipating the need of VQs is supporting the professional development of their own staff on a regular or a case-by-case basis. Companies simultaneously use several methods in order to improve their staff's professional qualifications: organize regular trainings at the corporate training centers (using their own resources), invite specialists to conduct on-the-job training, provide opportunities to participate in appropriate seminars, etc. However, it should be mentioned that the level of understanding of the necessity of supporting staff professional

¹ SESA, Sample Survey of Employers, 2013, page 24.

² EV Consulting, *National Competitiveness Report of Armenia 2013–2014*, page 33; <http://ev.am/competitiveness/armenia-competitiveness-report#sthash.z4w8ykTR.dpuf>

development increases with the growth of company size or company profit: in some sectors only one-third of small companies consider the provision of training to their employees necessary for company development.

The development of an effective feedback mechanism between educational, business, and state institutions will contribute to the improvement of conditions for the future identification and development of VQs. The active involvement of private sector companies in educational curriculum and program development could serve as a good source of information for education providers to update and adjust their programs to fit business needs. There are diverse ways of bridging the educational and private sector and thus improving conditions for VQ development: beginning from raising awareness of professional orientations, the implementation of practice/internship-oriented education, and the establishment of a full-fledged multilateral open dialogue between all stakeholders (the government, the educational system, businesses, trade unions, etc.).

As a result of study, FGs, and DF discussions, two priority measures were identified that could improve the conditions of future-oriented VQ development: (i) create an efficient professional orientation system and (ii) establish and develop effective cooperation between the state, educational institutions (including high schools), and private-sector companies to bridge education and business.

Taking into consideration all findings derived from the desk study, FG, and DF discussions, recommendations on Roadmap and Action Plan for *Strengthening and Further Development of Effective Cooperation between the State, Educational Institutions (Including High Schools), and Private-Sector Companies* are developed and presented.

I. INTRODUCTION

A well-educated workforce is a cornerstone of competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven economy. For a strong and growing economy, among other key factors, it is critical that the education and training system be aligned with future skills and qualifications and ensure that people can fully capitalize on opportunities that arise.

The high level of unemployment (16.2% in 2013),³ the mismatch between demand and supply for qualified labor, and the efforts of the government of RA to develop and implement optimal policies for raising the competitiveness of the private sector require labor market participants to acquire new competencies, vocational qualifications, and the ability to further develop those they have. According to research findings, Armenia's educational-services market is disconnected from the labor market, there is a mismatch between demand and supply for qualified labor, and there is little up-to-date information on actual demand. The last factor makes it even harder for educational institutions to respond to market signals and supply the needed skills and qualifications. Incentives for many specializations, even in areas of high demand in the private sector (e.g., IT, business services), are missing; what is needed is better information on the labor market, policies that promote economic growth and labor absorption, and more academic counselors to advise on career choices or act as liaisons between industry and the institution.⁴

The growing need for skilled labor is becoming a challenge for the diversification and sustainable development of the private sector, where both knowledge of technical fields and action-oriented skills are largely missing. It is obvious that there are constraints to building qualifications that recognize skills needed in the workplace now and in the near future. These constraints include poor labor market data, the long time period needed to develop qualifications, weak methods for the collection and analysis of information on future qualifications needs, the insufficient involvement of the private sector in the elaboration and implementation of vocational-education programs, etc.

The Caucasus Research Resource Center-Armenia (CRRC), within the GIZ's program Private Sector Development in South Caucasus, conducted a study on "Improving the Conditions for Developing Future-oriented Vocational Qualifications in Armenia." The study provides insight into the current status of vocational qualifications required by the private sector, identifies challenges to the development of required vocational qualifications, and offers recommendations for developing a "roadmap" to improve conditions for developing future-oriented vocational qualifications in Armenia by bridging the gap between the private sector and providers of education and training.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OBJECTIVE, APPROACH, AND METHODOLOGY

The current study aims at providing: (a) some information on the needs of vocational qualifications that are critical for promoting flexibility and diversification, further development, and the growth of private sector in the current economic

³ NSS, Statistical yearbook of Armenia, 2014, page 73, <http://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99489183.pdf>.

⁴ National Competitiveness Report Armenia 2010: The Higher Education Challenge, EV Research Center, Yerevan, 2010, p. 53.

environment and other changing factors and (b) some workable solutions on how to develop modern qualifications required by business.

The objective of the study is, based on both desk research and FG discussion results that are validated and summarized during the DF, to produce a “roadmap” for improving the conditions for developing future-oriented vocational qualifications in Armenia by bridging the gap between the private sector and education and training providers.

The approach is based on reviewing the relevant studies and surveys, conducting FG discussions, and organizing a DF to understand in what vocational qualifications there are supply-demand gaps, how well those qualifications match the ones suggested as future-oriented within this particular study, what are the factors hindering development, and what could be done to develop future-oriented qualifications in Armenia.

In working on this issue, we assumed that supply and demand for competitive vocational qualifications is private-sector driven and that interventions in terms of improving conditions for developing future-oriented qualifications should facilitate communication between the government (as policymaker), business (as the driver of decent, quality jobs and demand for a qualified labor force), and educational institutions (as the core player in human capital and workforce development).

The methodology

Desk study. In order to assess the current situation in terms of VQ needs categorized as future-oriented, reveal and analyze the relevant information on the topic of interest, identify the contributing factors and challenges to meeting the needs of the private sector in required qualifications, and understand how the demand in VQs is changing and whether the educational system is able to rapidly anticipate labor-market changes, desk research was conducted. We looked at relevant surveys and studies conducted within last two to three years. Unfortunately we found a very limited number of relevant sources. However, combined and supplemented with FG discussions and DF results, it allowed us to draw important conclusions and submit recommendations on improving the conditions for developing future-oriented VQs.

Our desk research, in particular, included the following:

- Review of literature on international practices for identifying specific future needs for VQs in key sectors of the economy and assessing current skills and qualifications shortages and solutions to overcome these problems;
- Review of available surveys on the demand for qualifications in different sectors of the Armenian economy to analyze the current situation concerning professionals and their VQs, the need for improvement in vocational education and training to meet the labor market demand, and the readiness of employers to support the professional development of their staff;
- Study of the national classifications to understand how the VQs referred as critical for business development match the national classifiers or codes of occupations used.

Four FG discussions and four in-depth interviews: In order to complement desk-study findings, contribute to the development of a future-oriented qualifications catalog, which is critical for business (to facilitate and stimulate improvement, optimization, development and innovation process), analyze the current situation in regard to the VQs required by the private sector, and identify challenges in the development of required VQs, four FG discussions were conducted among the following specific target groups:

- a) Entrepreneurs that are highly experienced and have an interest in human resources development and/or corporate social responsibility (CSR);
- b) Selected members and representatives of business membership organizations;
- c) Representatives of responsible ministries and subordinate institutions and service providers; and
- d) Experts on corporations, employment, and vocational qualification promotion, think tanks, business development service providers, consulting, private training providers, etc.

Four specific FG guides were developed for each target group. The questions were constructed in such way that allowed us to highlight the focus of the particular group and to identify the perspectives of different groups on the availability and relevance of the modern qualifications demand and their approaches on how to improve the conditions for developing those qualifications.

In-depth interviews with three representatives of large companies and one educational expert were conducted using the same approach as with the FGs. The in-depth interviews were conducted to fill the gap in getting information from representatives of educational institutions and representatives of large enterprises (having 500 or more employees), as it was difficult to ensure their presence in FG discussions.

Dialogue forum: a one-and-a-half day dialogue forum was organized to:

- Present a summary of desk research on the current situation of the demand for vocational qualifications and challenges in the economy and selected sectors;
- Validate the findings produced by focus group discussions and in-depth interviews;
- Provide a platform for mutual discussions on future-oriented professional qualification needs from different perspectives;
- Identify and prioritize factors contributing to the development of future-oriented qualifications and the challenges the private sector and education face; and
- Develop recommendations for the production of a “Roadmap for Improving the Conditions for Developing Future-Oriented Vocational Qualifications in Armenia” by applying the findings of the forum.

FG discussions, in-depth interviews and the DF, combined with desk research results, provided a basis for describing the situation in terms of the needs for modern vocational qualifications and identifying challenges and possible actions that would contribute to improving conditions for developing and anticipating current and future needs. The results of the FG discussion and DF have been included in the research paper to complement the literature review and provide grounds for developing the catalog of qualifications on both the sides of demand and supply, describing the availability and relevance of the existing qualifications, making conclusions concerning the current situation and existing gaps and bottlenecks in terms of the availability and relevance of future-oriented VQs and, finally, to drive recommendations on how to improve conditions.

III. FUTURE-ORIENTED QUALIFICATIONS: DEMAND AND CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

1. MAKING QUALIFICATIONS FIT THE FUTURE: INTERNATIONAL APPROACH

It is internationally recognized that vocational education and training (VET) is a significant accelerator for the social and economic development of all national economies. In a globalized world, increases in efficiency and product quality and the extension of the value chain are only possible with a highly qualified workforce. Such a workforce is comprised of individuals who have high and broad-ranging qualifications and are capable of working independently and responsibly in accordance with the highest quality standards.

Countries, enterprises, and persons all perceive skills development as strategic, and consequently seek to step up investments in skills and in order to face common challenges. In globalized markets new occupations are emerging. Within each occupation, required skills, qualifications, and competencies are evolving, as the knowledge content of production processes and services is rising. *Therefore, a major challenge in all countries today is simultaneously enhancing the responsiveness of education and training systems to these changes in skill and VQ requirements and to improve access to training and skills development.*

The Europe 2020 strategy puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities:⁵

- Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- Sustainable growth: promoting a more resource-efficient, greener, and more competitive economy; and
- Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

One of the seven flagship initiatives catalyzing the progress under each of these three priorities of smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth is “The agenda for new skills and jobs.” The aim is to create the conditions for modernizing labor markets with a view to raising employment levels and ensuring the sustainability of social models. This means empowering people through the acquisition of new skills to enable our current and future workforce to adapt to new

⁵ Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, p.5.

conditions and potential career shifts, reduce unemployment, and raise labor productivity. Therefore, good-quality primary and secondary education, complemented by relevant vocational training and skills-development opportunities, prepares future generations for their productive lives, endowing them with the core skills that enable them to continue learning. The logic then continues in the following way: if VQs recognize the right skills, and people are inclined to obtain the qualifications, positive effects on the career of individuals and the supply of skills to the economy will follow, as well as economic-sector and international competitiveness, will follow.⁶

Based on the reviewed literature, we can state *that it is critical to first identify selected drivers of longer-term changes that challenge the national systems of development of skills and vocational qualifications and provide motivation for improving them.*

The conclusion based on the literature review, therefore, is that the strategy and policy for the development of skills and qualifications require a number of building blocks, such as:⁷

- *Anticipating future skills needs:* it is no longer sufficient to train workers to meet their specific current needs; access to training programs that support lifelong skills development and focus on future market needs should be ensured;
- *Participation of social partners:* a strong partnership between the government, employers, and workers is an essential feature of an effective and enduring bond between the world of learning and the world of work. This involves sound funding arrangements in order to provide the right incentives to all parties to invest in the right skills mix at the right time;
- *Sector approaches:* regular sectoral workshops to discuss the current situation and development trends focusing on future skill requirements, looking into selected sectors of the economy to identify the latest trends in skill needs to create relevant information necessary for future-oriented policies, defining and validating skills, knowledge, and competencies and implementing them in curricula, training regulations, and qualification standards as well as using them for vocational guidance;
- *Labor-market information and employment services:* not only is it important to generate, update, and disseminate information on current and future skill needs, but it is also critical to have viable transmission mechanisms that will make this continuous flow of timely information available to educational and training institutions, private market trainers, employers, trade unions, and young people and their families;
- *Training quality and relevance:* it requires a serious effort to ensure that skills-development systems deliver both the quantity and the quality of training needed. This assumes first the existence of qualified teachers, trainers, directors of training institutions, and master craftspeople available to take on apprentices; the provision of opportunities for them to periodically upgrade their own skills; and working conditions comparable with those in the industry so as to attract the most talented staff;
- *Financing training:* the initial education and training, as well as lifelong learning, benefit individuals, employers and society as a whole. Therefore, costs for services with public and private benefits should be shared between public and private funding, or else too little training will be provided or taken up; and
- *Assessing policy performance:* measuring the outcomes of skills development systems and policies is essential in order to monitor and improve their effectiveness and relevance.

CONCLUSION

• Smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth requires prioritizing the agenda for new skills and jobs; urges simultaneous enhancement of the responsiveness of education and training systems to changes in skill, VQ requirements and improvement the access to training, and skills development.

⁶ Mike Coles, *Identifying Skills Needs for the Future: From Research to Policy Practice*; CEDEFOP Reference Series, 52, page 88.

⁷ *A Skilled Workforce for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth: A G20 Training Strategy*; International Labour Office Geneva, 2010, page 23-33.

2. VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ARMENIA

2.1. RELEVANT SURVEYS/STUDIES REVIEW

As is stated in almost every strategic policy document or study, competitiveness is a major challenge faced by decision makers in both the private and public sectors in Armenia. The greatest challenge here is not only the ability to create and preserve decent jobs and enhance productivity, but also the quality of the workforce: the VQs of the existing workforce, as well as that of graduates, are widely discussed by local business owners and executives.

A literature review suggests that in 2013, 90% of surveyed company executives agreed that *the current state of the professional workforce may hinder the expansion of their sectors*. The predominant belief is that graduates are, in general, unprepared to work in their fields of study, as they have low levels of both theoretical and practical knowledge and skills. Thus, there is a significant gap between the level of sophistication of the educational system and the actual needs of the economy.⁸

Another survey on growth constraints, conducted in 2013 among 48 local companies, reveals that *the lack of a highly qualified labor force is the second most important constraint for their enterprise expansion*. This factor accounted for 15% of responses, following only “limited market size” with 20% of responses.⁹

Armenia’s peculiarity is that although the enrollment rate in education is relatively high, the quality of the education is estimated to be low: the results of an employer survey (2011)¹⁰ suggest that 52% of graduates applying for jobs have a low level of both theoretical knowledge and practical skills and qualifications, 24% have average theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and only 20% of graduates are estimated to have sound theoretical knowledge, but only weak practical knowledge.

According to the *National Competitiveness Report of Armenia 2013–2014*, the relatively weak management of local companies serves as a growth constraint for the economy as a whole. The study of management practice in Armenian companies identified significant deviations from global best practice.¹¹ Although management, particularly in the areas of innovation, HR, quality, and environment management, is a qualification considered as future-oriented, the lack of required qualifications in these particular areas of management already hinders the competitiveness and sustainable development of the private sector. The study, which was carried out among approximately 50 manufacturing companies, assessed their operational, target, and talent management practices. Armenia lags behind the benchmarked 21 countries with an average score of 2.46, compared with a global average level of 2.99.¹² It is worth mentioning that the results of studies carried out by the London School of Economics (2011) on management evaluation, conducted in 21 countries, suggest that an improvement by 1 point in management score results in a 6% increase in productivity, a 2.3% increase in sales growth, and a 2.8% in return on capital employed.¹³

The government of Armenia, driven by the imperative to increase the competitiveness of the economy and ensure continuous economic growth in 2011, adopted the Strategy of the Export-Led Industrial Policy of Republic of Armenia. The RA Export-Led Industrial Policy is a set of balanced and phased activities aimed at increasing international competitiveness of industry sectors with export potential and targeted at export growth and diversification¹⁴ and developed for the period of 2011–2020.¹⁵ Based on the policy framework, sectoral strategies were developed and in 2012 the Industrial Development Foundation (IDF) was established to implement those strategies. One of the seven key support tools to be used for implementing the policy is the “capacity development/increasing competitiveness,” supported by co-financing workforce retraining programs and providing financial and technical assistance to firms to introduce internationally recognized quality management systems. *Thus, it is well recognized that the creation of a skilled workforce will be a challenge and the action plans developed for the relevant sectors of economy address issues related to relevant vocational education and training to meet the sector’s current and future needs.*

⁸ EV Consulting, *National Competitiveness Report of Armenia 2013–2014*, page 33; <http://ev.am/competitiveness/armenia-competitiveness-report#sthash.z4w8ykTR.dpuf>

⁹ EV Consulting, *National Competitiveness Report of Armenia 2013–2014*, page 33.

¹⁰ EV Consulting, *National Competitiveness Report of Armenia 2013–2014*, page 33.

¹¹ EV Research Center, 2012. *National Competitiveness Report of Armenia 2011–2012: Agenda for Upgrading Management Practices*.

¹² EV Consulting, *National Competitiveness Report of Armenia 2013–2014*, page 35.

¹³ EV Consulting, *National Competitiveness Report of Armenia 2013–2014*, page 35.

¹⁴ Strategy of the Export-Led Industrial Policy of Republic of Armenia, 2011, page 3.

¹⁵ Eleven sectors within the Export-Led Policy Framework are each chosen as priority once: the diamond industry; the gemstone industry; watch manufacturing; cognac production; pharmaceuticals and biotechnology; cannery; wine production; mineral-water and juice production; the textile-production industry; and precision engineering.

Although general human-capacity development is prioritized in all export-led sectors, the detailed VQ needs that industries may face and the gap between the demand and supply are not assessed and addressed in the policy. However, careful examination of sector strategies allowed us to conclude that *production and quality assurance, HR, resource, innovations and environment management, export and marketing in domestic and foreign markets, logistics and sales* are the VQs that the export-led sectors of economy demand currently and will need in the future to assure dynamic and competitive growth.

Few sectoral studies financed by donor organizations provide insights to current and future needs in VQs in sectors such as precise engineering (PE), information and communications technologies (ICT), tourism, and the food and winemaking industries, or grounds for developing actions to improve conditions for qualifications development.

The *Baseline Study of Precision Engineering and Tourism in Armenia* (2014)¹⁶ reveals employment- and human-capital-related challenges in both PE and the tourism sectors. One of the important summary conclusions (derived from the study) is the following: *human capital is seen as the main prerequisite for the development of the sector, thus the importance and need to support educational institutions to focus on preparing required qualifications is highlighted.*

According to the above-mentioned study, the situation in regard to the availability of professionals in PE tourism sectors is quite good: around 40% of surveyed companies in the PE sector and one-third in the tourism sector stated that they have not encountered any difficulties in recruiting required staff, but finding individuals with knowledge matching industry standards is a challenge.¹⁷ Sector experts mentioned that there are vacancies that are difficult to fill (see the table below):

Table 1. The job positions most difficult to recruit appropriate staff for, %¹⁸

	PE	Tourism
Skilled worker	34%	
Engineers	29%	
IT specialist/Software developer	13%	
Architect	8%	
Sales and marketing staff	5%	13%
Administrative staff	5%	
Production managers	3%	
Tour managers		8%
Guide		8%
Translator		8%
No difficulties incurred		33%
Others	3%	30%

Source: Ameria CJSC, *Baseline Study of Precision Engineering and Tourism in Armenia*, 2014, pages 42 & 91.

So, if the PE sector experiences the most difficulty in trying to hire skilled workers, followed by engineers and IT specialists/software developers, in tourism sector most often the issue arises in regard with sales or marketing staff, followed by tour managers, guides and translators.

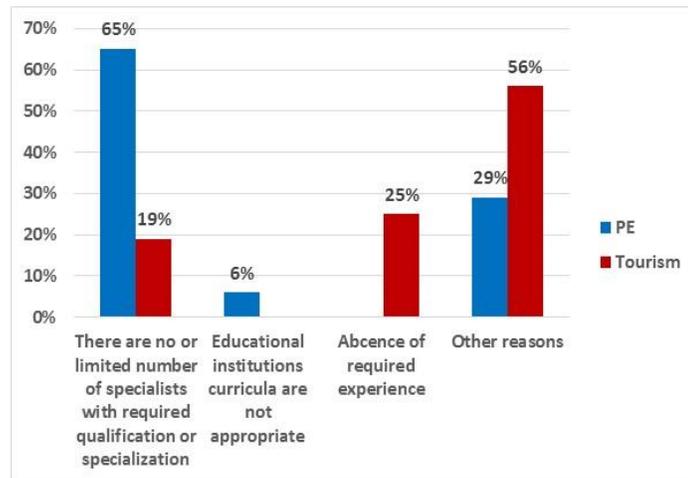
¹⁶ Conducted by Ameria CJSC in 2014.

¹⁷ Ameria CJSC, *Baseline Study of Precision Engineering and Tourism in Armenia*, 2014, pages 41 and 90.

¹⁸ Highlighted in bold here and hereafter means a match with VQs categorized as future-oriented.

The shortage of a qualified workforce as a challenge hindering the development of the sector in both PE and tourism sectors is mentioned by 11% of employers. However, the challenge in both the PE and tourism sectors is not only the shortage of specialists in the market with the required qualifications or specialization, but also educational-institution curricula that are not appropriate and do not match market requirements (see Figure 1). For example, although there are a few universities and colleges (for example, the Armenian Institute for Tourism [a Branch of the Russian International Academy for Tourism], the Armenian State University of Economics, Yerevan State Armenian–Greek College of Tourism, Service and Food Industry, the Russian–Armenian University, etc.) that provide courses especially designed for the tourism industry, the demand and the supply in this area qualitatively do not coincide in the labor market. On the one hand, this situation can be explained by a problem with the academic staff, which was specifically mentioned during in-depth interviews by some experts; on the other, the educational standards of these courses do not match the actual requirements of the industry.¹⁹

Figure 1. The reasons for the difficulty to recruit appropriate staff to fill job positions, %

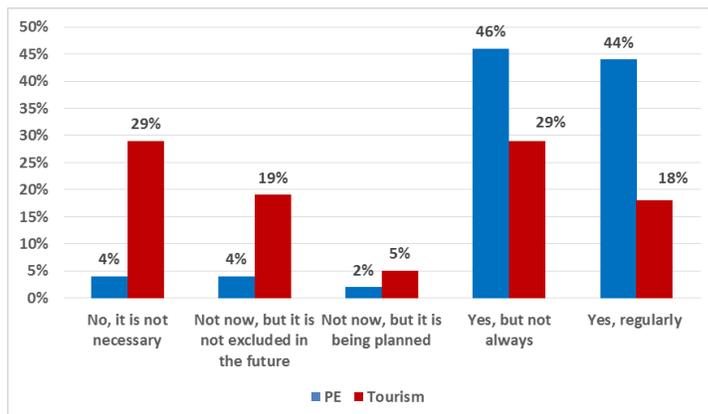


Source: Ameria CJSC, *Baseline Study of Precision Engineering and Tourism in Armenia*, 2014, pages 41 and 91.

The State Employment Services Agency (SESA) has conducted a regular employer sample survey (of 2500 employers)

over the last four to five years in order to assess the demand for labor, forecast the number of new jobs to be created within the next one to three years and, accordingly, the qualifications required to fill the newly created job positions. According to the 2013 survey results, a large majority of employers—about 43%—faced a shortage in corresponding qualifications, and therefore, were not able to fill the vacancies for a long period. The next most-cited reason for not being able to fill vacancies was the lack of relevant experience—12%.²⁰

Figure 2. Willingness of surveyed companies to support staff on professional development, %



Source: Ameria CJSC, *Baseline Study of Precision Engineering and Tourism in Armenia*, 2014, pages 43 and 93.

The vast majority of surveyed PE and tourism companies support the professional development of their staff on a regular or a case-by-case basis (see Figure 2). The level of understanding of the necessity to support the professional development of the staff increases along with growth in the company size or company profit: in both the PE and tourism sectors the larger the company is, the more likely it is that it will organize

regular trainings for its staff:

¹⁹ Ameria CJSC, *Baseline Study of Precision Engineering and Tourism in Armenia*, 2014, page 92.

²⁰ SESA, *Sample Survey of Employers*, 2013, page 24.

- In the PE sector all large companies (with 141 or more employees) are willing to support the professional development of their staff, while only 81% of small companies (less than 5 employees) considered it necessary for company development;
- In the tourism sector 89% of large companies (51 or more employees) are willing to support the professional development of their staff, while only 33% of small companies (less than 5 employees) considered it necessary for company development.

Thus, some employers are willing and attempt to develop the required VQs and simultaneously use several methods in order to improve the professional qualifications of their staff. In the PE sector, in 47% of cases, employers organize regular trainings at corporate training centers (using their own resources), and in 15% of cases, they invite specialists to conduct on-the-job training. In the tourism sector, internal training is used in 48% of cases, on-the-job training by outside training providers and participation in appropriate seminars are the next two widely used ways to improve the situation in the sector.

The competencies foresight conducted by ILO in 2014 for the food, PE, and ICT sectors²¹ of Armenia for a horizon up to 2030 (divided into short-term, mid-term, and long-term horizons) suggests that in Armenia the environment in which businesses operate in the food, PE, and ICT sectors will change under the influence of trends in the development of the industry.²² Such changes, in turn, will entail a change of requirements for the knowledge and competence of employees. Below (in Table 2) the key competencies and knowledge of workers in the food industry that will be needed in the next decade are indicated.

For the food industry, according to the above-mentioned forecast, the future competencies and vocational qualifications are the following:²³

Table 2. Future competencies and VQs in food industry

Food industry		
For workers	For technicians and managers	For the most demanded professions of the future
<p><u>Key competencies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of at least one foreign language; - Internet and computer literacy; - Self-learning ability; - Initiative; - Caring for the environment: green consciousness <p><u>Professional competencies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to manage modern technology; 	<p><u>Key competencies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of at least one foreign language; - Internet and computer literacy - Self-learning ability; - Initiative and leadership; - Caring for the environment: the green consciousness; - General knowledge; - Systematic thinking; - Teamwork <p><u>Professional competencies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding of global market context and main trends in industry; (for instance, quality management, introduction of 	<p><u>The following VQs will be needed:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing in domestic and foreign markets; - Support export operations (export, transport, logistics, etc); - Assurance of production safety to ensure the high quality and environmentally friendly production; - Quality assurance; - Product design and packaging to enhance consumer quality (especially important in the production of dried fruit, canned food, wine and brandy, mineral water); - Support the introduction of modern technologies and methods of production automation (innovation management);

²¹ ILO, *Results of the Foresight of Competencies for Food Industry*, 2014 and *Results of the Foresight of Competencies for Precision Engineering and Information and Communication Technologies*, 2014.

²² Trends were identified based on an analysis of current situation in sectors and technologies, then the changes in technologies, business processes and managerial practices due to technological progress and social innovations were analyzed. Based on such analyses a competence foresight was done for a time horizon up to 2030: defining needs for changes in curriculum and format of TVET and higher education for growing tech-driven sectors.

²³ Red indicates a match with the future-oriented vocational qualifications suggested within this Project ToR.

Food industry		
For workers	For technicians and managers	For the most demanded professions of the future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An understanding of the whole production process technology; - Assurance of sanitary standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> certification, etc); - Innovation management; - Risk management; - Marketing technologies; - Assurance of sanitary standards; production safety and the production process; - System managements; - Communications; - Product design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Product certification; - Corporate social responsibility

In the ICT and PE industries the forecast of future competencies and vocational qualifications is presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Future competencies and vocational qualifications in ICT and PE

ICT		PE	
<i>Key professional competencies</i>	<i>The following VQs will be needed</i>	<i>Key professional competencies</i>	<i>The following VQs will be needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of at least one a foreign language; - Self-learning ability; - Technological literacy; - Internet and computer literacy; - An understanding of information safety; - Knowledge of logic and algorithms; - Knowledge of algorithmic programming languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information security; - Mobile applications development; - Development of interactive (online and distant) training programs; - Development of architecture for electronic document circulation; - Legal support for new technologies; - Operations with Big Data; - Logistics: <i>this is currently considered one of the main barriers to the development of the ICT sector, at least in the field of e-commerce (due to the fact that e-commerce needs to have quality work-logistics systems to ensure reliable and timely delivery of goods to customers)—as a result, logistics solutions largely determine effective development of the industry;</i> - “Smart environments” architecture development; - Training, socialization and integration of people with disabilities - HR management; - Adaptation of legislation in changing technological environment; - Architecture and management of IT competence centers (IT-hub) 	<p>“Smart worker”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with robotics (including its programming); - Knowledge of international standards of production and safety; - Lean manufacturing and “continuous improvement” <p>“Engineer of the Future”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competence of work in the open-format innovation, the ability to play in the global order, to find a common language with foreign players, integrated into the global chain of division of labor; - Knowledge of specifics of national and global high-tech markets, industrial policy; - Lean manufacturing, continuous retraining; - other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing (including technological); - Develop a system of quality control: quality assurance; - Ensuring compliance with environmental, production, and occupational safety; - Standardization, including for international markets; - Legal support of high-tech industries; - Protection of intellectual property: design, support, including in international markets

For the sectors of the food, ICT, and PE industries to be able to satisfy the demand in qualified professionals with VQs identified by the above-mentioned study, recommendations have been developed to introduce changes in the training process:

- For the ICT sector the challenge in preparing professionals, according to field experts, is the long period of the professional-preparation cycle and the gap between educational institutions and employers. Therefore, it is suggested to: (a) implement a practice/internship-oriented education; (b) implement a university-ranking system based on the indicators of how successful are the graduates in finding employment in the specialty; and (c) accelerated training by transferring programs from universities to colleges.
- For the PE sector to meet future needs for “engineers of the future” (capable of ensuring the creation and manufacture of competitive products in the sector) tangible efforts are needed to engage students in scientific and technical creativity, support of interested students at the bachelor's level, as well as to ensure the right path to bring those students to the graduate level.
- One of the most important steps towards improving the situation and resolving personnel challenges in the food industry today and in the future, according to foresight-session participants, should be the establishment

of a full-fledged multilateral open dialogue between all stakeholders: the government, the educational system, business, and trade unions. The aim of such a dialogue should be to clarify the stakeholder expectations and build consensus among them, as at present, this dialogue is not imposed and the system of interaction between education and business does not function effectively, instead leading to mutual dissatisfaction.

And finally, studies in winemaking industry suggest²⁴ that during the last few years, new jobs have been created in the sector, however in the future it will become an issue to prepare *winemaking technologists (production)* ready to replace the middle-aged and older winemakers who are currently working in wineries. Moreover, the sector currently faces a shortage in this vocational qualification: most of wineries today are already in need of additional winemakers. In addition to winemakers, companies also need other specialists, for example, laboratory specialists, mechanics, etc.

Research on the winemaking industry reveals the priority areas in the wineries where winemakers need to be trained (see Table 4), based on which it could be concluded that among the VQs needed in the sector today are the ones that are characterized as future-oriented and are important for sector development and competitiveness. These qualifications are:

Table 4. Rating of training fields according to priority

Target field of training/consultancy	Coincidence with future-oriented VQs	Number of companies ranked 5 **
Raw product control and acceptance	Production/quality assurance	8
Control of microbiological and sanitary hygienic situation in wineries		14
Availability of equipment necessary for the products produced and application thereof		12
Modern technologies used in the production	Innovation management	13
Furnishing of laboratories with modern equipment and related specialists		12
Application of modern accessories in the wineries	Innovation management	9
Expert examination of sensory assessment indicators		10

* The author's conclusion

** 1 = unimportant fields, 5 = primary fields

Source: ICARE, *Assessment of Training Needs and Skill Development of Armenian Winemakers*, 2013, page 19.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- **Lack of a highly qualified labor force is one of the constraints hindering growth.**
- **The economy faces shortage in required VQs.**
- **Most companies support the professional development of their staff on a regular or a case-by-case basis.**
- **The level of understanding of the necessity to support the staff professional development increases along with company size or profit.**
- **There is a discrepancy between education curricula and the market requirements.**
- **Among other measures, one of the most important steps towards improving the situation is the establishment of a full-fledged multilateral open dialogue between all stakeholders namely: the government, the educational system, business, and trade unions, to clarify the expectations of stakeholders and build efficient cooperation.**

²⁴ ICARE, *Assessment of Training Needs and Skill Development of Armenian Winemakers*, 2013, page 29.

Based on findings from desk research we created a catalog of future VQ demand: in most cases it coincides with the catalog offered by the ToR of this particular study. Both lists of future-oriented VQs are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Vocational qualifications catalog based on desk research

<i>Future-oriented VQs (stated by the ToR)</i>	<i>Future-oriented VQs identified through desk research</i>
Planning	
HR management and development	HR management
Innovation management	<u>Innovation management</u> Support the introduction of modern technologies and methods of production automation
Production	<u>Production</u> - Product certification - Production managers - Product design and packaging to enhance consumer qualities (especially important in the production of dried fruit, canned food, wine and brandy, mineral water)
Quality assurance	<u>Quality assurance</u> Development of systems of quality control- quality assurance
Quality management	Quality management
Procurement and sales/distribution	Sales
Resource efficiency	
Environmental management	<u>Environment management</u> Assurance of production safety to ensure high quality and environmentally friendly production; ensuring compliance with environmental, production and occupational safety
Transport and logistics	<u>Transport and logistics</u> Support export operations (export, transport, logistics, etc)
Export	
	Tour management (tourism sector)
	Guide & Translator (tourism)
	<u>Marketing</u> Marketing in domestic and foreign markets, including technological
	Skilled workers
	Engineers, IT specialist/Software developer, Architect
	CSR
	Standardization, including for international markets
	Legal support of high-tech industries
	Protection of intellectual property: design, support, including in international markets

The review of relevant surveys and studies reveals that in the production-related sectors of economy the VQs referred as future-oriented currently are needed as well, and the demand in these qualifications will increase along with sector development, the requirements for these qualifications will change as well making necessary provision of ongoing trainings coupled with preparation of highly qualified professionals for the future.

2.2. FOCUS GROUP AND IN DEPTH INTERVIEW FINDINGS

FG discussions were organized to contribute to the development of a future-oriented qualifications catalog, which is critical for business (to facilitate and stimulate improvement, optimization, development, and the process of innovation), and analyzing the current situation in regard of the VQs required by private sector, identify challenges in respect of developing required vocational qualifications. Four FG discussions were conducted with the following specific target groups:

1. With representatives of business organizations, unions, and associations (5 people);
2. With experts and consultants (15 people);
3. With private-sector representatives (6 people); and
4. With representatives of state institutions (6 people).

The low number of participants in three out of four target groups can be explained by time constraints and the limited possibility of adjusting FG discussion deadlines. To fill the gap in information, particularly from private sector

companies, three in-depth interviews were done with representatives of large enterprises (having 500 or more employees).

Based on FG discussions and in-depth interviews, the following list of VQs the private sector needs currently and will demand in the future was developed:

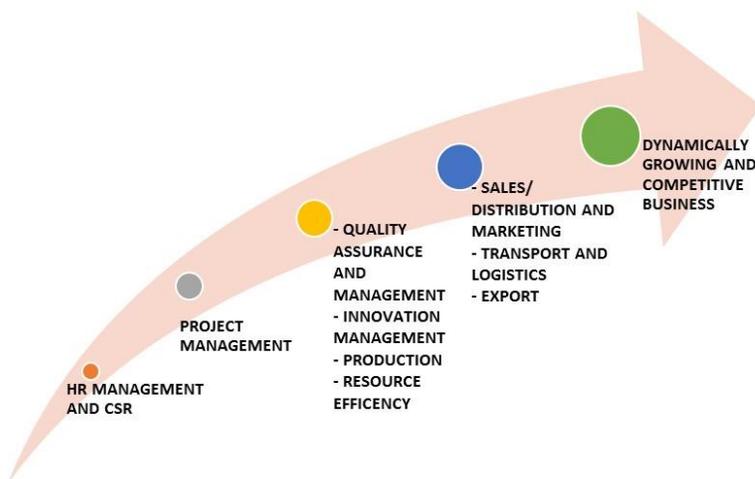
Table 6. Future-Oriented VQs and VQs identified by FG participants

<i>Future-oriented VQs</i>	<i>Associations</i>	<i>Private sector representatives</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning - HR management and development - Innovation management - Production - Quality assurance - Quality management - Procurement and sales/distribution - Resource efficiency - Environmental management - Transport and logistics - Export 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Logistics - Quality and environmental management (ISO standardization) - Innovation management - HR management - Tourism management - Programming–robotics, smartphones - Marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hospitality specialists - Quality management - Logistics - Digital marketing - HR management
	<i>Experts</i>	<i>State institutions</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental management - Production chain specialist - Logistics - CSR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR management - Quality management

The FG participants emphasized that the VQs categorized as future-oriented are currently highly demanded as well, particularly VQs such as logistics, quality and environmental management, innovation management, HR management and development, and production (production-chain) management. Moreover, the following VQs could be added to the catalog: digital marketing, tourism management, project management, and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The VQ catalogs derived as result of desk study and FG discussions basically coincide with the one categorized as future-oriented. Moreover, the boundaries between current and future-oriented VQs are loose, as most qualifications categorized as future-oriented are required currently and the private sector faces difficulties in recruiting qualified professionals with required VQs. For industrial sector companies to grow dynamically and become competitive in local and international markets, all else being equal, it is critical to have a team that possesses almost all VQs categorized as future-oriented. This perception is reflected in the graphic below:

Scheme 1. The role of future-oriented VQs in the development of the company



Source: author’s construction.

VQs related to management, whether HR, quality, innovation, environmental, or other types of management, are highly demanded by private sector. This is not surprising, as the results of desk research presented above also suggest that management, particularly operations and target management, is relatively weak in local companies and serves as a serious growth constraint.

Due to the fact that the local market is small, many private sector companies, particularly the ones that are relatively competitive and operate in the export-led industrial sectors of the economy, are looking for export opportunities. This fact leads to a high demand for VQs such as export, logistics, and marketing in domestic and foreign markets, including technologic or targeted marketing paired with VQs of sales/distribution; quality assurance and quality management are also very important and are highly demanded by companies engaged in production: the development of a system of quality control and quality assurance is a priority for these companies.

After analyzing the VQs mentioned by FG participants as highly demanded and comparing them with the catalog developed based on the results of desk study, we finalized the catalog of future-oriented VQs (see Table 7):

Table 7. Finalized catalog of future-oriented VQs

<i>Future-oriented VQs (stated by the ToR)</i>	<i>Future-oriented VQs identified through desk research</i>	<i>Future-oriented VQs identified by FG</i>
Planning		
HR management and development	HR management	HR management
Innovation management	<u>Innovation management</u> Support the introduction of modern technologies and methods of production automation	Innovation management
Production	<u>Production</u> - Product certification - Production managers - Product design and packaging to enhance consumer quality (especially important in the production of dried fruit, canned food, wine and brandy, mineral water)	<u>Production</u> - Programming–robotics, smartphones - Production chain specialist
Quality assurance	<u>Quality assurance</u> Development of systems of quality control/quality assurance	
Quality management	Quality management	Quality management
Procurement and sales/distribution	Sales	
Resource efficiency	Resource efficiency	
Environmental management	<u>Environment management</u> Assurance of production safety to ensure the high quality and environmentally friendly production; Ensuring compliance with environmental, production and occupational safety	Environmental management
Transport and logistics	<u>Transport and logistics</u> Support export operations (export, transport, logistics, etc.)	Logistics
Export	Export	
	Tourism management	Tourism management
	Guide & Translator (tourism)	
	<u>Marketing</u> Marketing in domestic and foreign markets, including technological	<u>Marketing</u> Digital Marketing
	Skilled workers	Hospitality specialists
	Engineers, IT specialist/Software developer, Architect	Project management
	CSR	
	Standardization, including for international markets	
	Legal support of high-tech industries	
	Protection of intellectual property: design, support, including in the international markets	

FG discussion results prove and complement the findings of desk research. Accordingly, the FG participants also think that education does not provide the professional qualifications that are required by the public sector. Despite the high level of unemployment, the vocational qualifications of job seekers do not correspond to the current demand. Formally, universities offer professional qualifications that meet state quality standards, and no one can question the diplomas from this perspective. However, it is a fact that there are cases where the best university or college graduates do not meet

employers' requirements—there is a large gap between the quality expected by employers and that offered by educational institutions. In this regard the most specific issues are: (i) obsolete curriculum and teaching materials; (ii) while private-sector companies do have some input in curriculum development, this process has started very recently and is only proceeding gradually; (iii) inadequate level of professional qualifications among teaching instructors (at any level of education) and lack of motivation to change, which negatively reflects on the whole educational system; (iv) graduates lack practical skills, as educational institutions do not possess internal opportunities for skill development. Internships are very often not perceived as opportunities to gain skills, and the value of this experience is not presented properly; and (v) inefficient cooperation between education and business, whereas this is very important when it comes to the strengthening of the practical knowledge of graduates.

For the private sector, challenges include not only the shortage or lack of required VQs, but also the lack of skills such as imagination, creative thinking, initiative, structured thinking, and self-presentation; candidates accept innovations with difficulty, tend to be implementers rather than leaders or initiators, and teamwork is also a lack regularly encountered among job seekers generally.

Short-term trainings could be a valuable supplement in terms of filling gaps in required VQ, as well as developing the key professional skills mentioned above. One of the most explicit examples of how to overcome this challenge could be the case of Synopsis (expert example), which offers additional opportunities for interested students to increase their knowledge and skills before they applying for a job at the company. Another example again comes from the IT sector: a large number of companies are developing a curriculum that would help education providers to prepare students with the required qualifications and skills.

Although FG participants did not provide a direct answer to the question, based on what type of information the education or training should providers adjust their education programs, they emphasized that obtaining timely and reliable labor-market information is important for them.

Thus, the key conclusion here is that one way of bridging education and business and improving the situation with qualified specialists with required VQs is the increase of the role and efficacy of internship. Similar to the desk research findings, the FGs showed that one of the ways of improving the situation with VQs and increasing the quality and professionalism of staff employees is to consider strengthening the practical part of curriculum and developing appropriate internship programs for junior professionals.

The absence of an effective feedback mechanism among education, business, and state institutions was highlighted by FG participants, complementing the desk research findings: the active involvement of private-sector companies in curriculum and educational-program development would help education providers to update and adjust their programs to fit business needs.

It is recognized by participants that the availability of up-to-date surveys and sector research is critical for educational institutions to be able to assess and address business needs for VQs, which will allow education to become more flexible.

FG participants also emphasized that the root of the problem is in the lack of or inadequate professional-orientation activities for youth. Cultural stereotypes compel the parents to force their children to enter university for the sake of getting a diploma. This statement of the participants can be proved by the results of a 2010 survey on “High School Student’s Orientation to Higher Education. Motives and Values in the Example of Yerevan.”²⁵ According to survey results, in 59.3% of cases parents had a huge impact on high school student decision making, while information on professions, VQs, and labor-market needs plays a decisive role in the 6.3% of cases only.²⁶

Some FG participants expressed the opinion that, on the one hand, the educational system lacks a functional orientation, as the offered courses are very general: management, general law, etc., so that the graduates know nothing about everything. On the other hand, the companies lack job analysis to understand what kind of professional qualifications are required to accomplish a particular job.

The methodological approach at educational institutions is obsolete: it is mainly based on knowledge transfer and is not geared to skill development. The active involvement of the private sector in education will contribute to keeping education and training providers up to date.

25 Conducted by CRRC–Armenia and implemented in the scope of CRRC–Armenia Research Fellowship Program in 2010, <http://www.mycareer.am/arm/resources/>

26 CRRC-Armenia, “High School Student’s Orientation to Higher Education. Motives and Values in the Example of Yerevan”, 2010, page 5.

What could be done to improve the conditions for developing future oriented VQs? The most-often suggested measures were the following:

First of all there is a need for a paradigm shift in perspective toward education in society and the strengthening of professional orientation, especially in high schools; this will motivate high-school graduates and enable them to make decisions on their future profession for themselves, and even start entrepreneurship activities.

- Strengthening the role of continuous education and its recognition, as well as training/retraining opportunities by employers and in society as a whole can effectively contribute to the improvement of the situation.
- Increasing the role and opportunities for on-the-job and internal training using the internal capacity of a company, participation in open trainings, corporate trainings provided by training companies, and involving foreign professionals.
- Strengthening cooperation between the stakeholders from the educational, private, and governmental sectors.
- Organizing short-term courses for educational-institution decision makers to develop their skills in seeking important information, analyzing it, and finding opportunities to assure financial inflow through the provision of up-to-date professional qualifications.
- The development of a well-thought-out state strategy for educational development, which would be connected to the economic, production, and scientific-development strategies and would supply those industries with the professional qualifications demanded, etc.
- Some future-oriented professional qualifications could be acquired through non-formal educational providers, including consulting and/or training companies, associations, and unions. If the latter develops their offers mainly based on demand (quality management, marketing and sales, HR management) as part of their business operations; the second group mostly implements different educational activities with donor funding, based on identified need. Assessment of the demand is done through daily interactions while implementing consulting assignments, rather than formal surveys. Unfortunately not all training providers have the same level of trust among private companies. The poor performance of some training companies or freelance trainers carries over to other players and puts an additional challenge on the sale of training.

**KEY CONCLUSIONS
COMPLEMENTING
THE DESK RESEARCH
STUDY FINDINGS**

- ***For the private sector not only the shortage or lack of required VQs are challenging, but so too are the lack of skills such as imagination, creative thinking, initiative, structured thinking, self-presentation, teamwork, etc.***
- ***The short-term trainings and informal education could be a great supplement in terms of filling gaps in required VQs, as well as developing key and professional skills.***
- ***Bridging the education and business is very important in terms of improving VQ development conditions.***
- ***Increase of the role and efficiency of internship may contribute to strengthening the practical part of curriculum and close graduates practical knowledge gap.***
- ***The root of the problem is in the lack of or inadequate professional orientation activities for youth.***

2.3. CATALOG OF QUALIFICATION AND MATCH WITH CLASSIFICATION OF OCCUPATIONS

One challenging issue mentioned during FG and DF discussion was the fact that, on the one hand, the education system lacks a functional orientation (the subjects of offered courses are very general, i.e., management, general law, etc., so graduates know everything and nothing). On the other hand, companies lack the analysis to understand what kind of professional qualifications are required to accomplish a particular job.

Given this particular position as stated by FG discussion participants, we took a job announcement to fill the position of a *Marketing and Sales Manager* at www.careercenter.am and compared the employer's requirements with what is offered at

the middle vocational-education level according to professional educational standards and what is required from this particular professional according to the Classification of Occupations (see Table 8 below):

Table 8. VQs required for the Marketing and Sales Manager position

VOCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS		
Employer	According to educational standards (middle VET)	According to the Classification of Occupations
<p>Job responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and revise marketing and sales policy when necessary; - Analyze, plan, coordinate, and efficiently implement marketing and sales processes; - Trace market trends; - Report monthly on the marketing events and approaches on local and international markets; - Identify target client groups and their needs, conduct client outreach; - Participate in the development of advertising concepts and edit advertisement texts; update information posted to the websites of the group; render editorial assistance; - Analyze the monitoring results of marketing/advertising campaigns and report on their efficiency; - Coordinate the activity with the advertising agencies and suppliers on the content and text of promo and printed materials, drafts, and other marketing collateral; their design, order, printing, production and distribution. <p><u>Required qualifications:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University degree in Economics, Management, Finance, or Marketing; - At least 4 years of work experience, including 2 years of work experience in marketing and sales; - Project development and management skills; - Strong critical thinking; - Planning and organizational skills; - Strong commitment to work; - Communication skills and creative thinking; - Team-player skills and ability to cooperate; - Negotiation skills; - Ability to multitask and meet tight deadlines, result-driven performance; - Excellent command of the Armenian, Russian, and English languages. 	<p>On the websites of Yerevan State University and State Economic University, we couldn't find any description of any professional qualification characteristics.</p> <p>As for the middle vocational education, at the National Center for Vocational Education and Training Center (NCVETD) website middle vocational standards are provided with qualification detailed description. While looking at relevant standards, we found the two qualifications, or better to say the mix of the following two qualifications, could better fit the employer's requirements:</p> <p>(i) The manager (code 0602):</p> <p><u>Occupation description:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leads the analysis of new markets; - Organizes the sales process; - Planning, management, and coordination of trade-related activities; <p><u>Professional knowledge:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychology; - Mathematical statistics; - Marketing, economics; - Business basics; - Basics of management and optimal decision-making in economics and management using computer technologies; - Staff management; - Financial management; - Logistics; - Quality management <p><u>Skills:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decision-making and reasoning in dynamic and uncertain situations, - Resource management - Time management - Ability to formulate ideas clearly and in a convincing way - Organize the planning and forecasting - Possess management effectiveness increasing methods - ICT literacy 	<p>In the Classification of Occupations there is no exact occupation of "marketing and sales manager." The announced position more or less corresponds to the occupation under the code 1224 "Manager of wholesale and retail trade companies' specialized subdivision."</p> <p>The manager plans, manages, and coordinates trade related activities.</p> <p><u>Responsible for:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize, plan, and coordinate trade-related activities; - Identify and propose trade objectives and related issues; - Organization and planning of trade; - Trade-activity results analysis and service-quality assurance; - Reporting, etc.

VOCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS		
Employer	According to educational standards (middle VET)	According to the Classification of Occupations
	<p>(ii) The marketing specialist (code 0607):</p> <p><u>Occupation description:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing research; - Market analysis; - Participation in trade policy; - Participation in pricing policy; - Participation in sales process; - Participation in promotion activities; - Marketing logistics management; <p><u>Professional knowledge:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic theory; - Management; - Business planning; - Psychology; - Consumer psychology; - Mathematics; - ICT technologies; - Standardization; - Entrepreneurial activity planning; - Macroeconomic regulation <p><u>Skills:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing management; - Monitoring of marketing activity; - Decision making; - Experience exchange; - Time management; - Foreign language; - ICT - Inductive- and deductive-reasoning ability 	

Based on the above-presented information, it could be noticed that the employer requires a highly skilled and qualified professional with “dual” qualifications: with the qualification of manager and qualification of marketing specialist. Only an experienced professional with continuous training background or self-learning might meet the employer’s needs.

As for educational institutions, in this particular case the offered qualifications of two different professions meets employer requirements and state quality standards are met. The only issue in this case is whether graduates, with their real knowledge and skills, meet the employer’s requirements.

CONCLUSION

• Special attention should be paid to the formulation of VQs requirements (based on classifications used in Armenia, such as ISCED and Classification of Occupations) to ensure a common understanding of requirements by educational institution, employers, and individuals.

2.4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The desk research and FG findings are summarized as follows:

- Smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth requires prioritizing an agenda for new skills and jobs and urges the simultaneous enhancement of the responsiveness of education and training systems to changes in skills, VQ

requirements, and improvement of access to training and skills development. The findings of desk research and FG discussions suggest that Armenia lags behind in this regard, as the private sector faces a shortage of the VQs necessary for its growth and competitiveness. To overcome this challenge, some companies, mostly large ones, support the professional development of their staff on a regular or a case-by-case basis. The smaller the company, the lower is the understanding of the importance of the provision of training for company development.

- Besides the shortage of required VQs, employers emphasize the existence of discrepancies in educational curricula and market requirements: the obsolete curriculum and teaching materials, the inadequate level of professional qualifications among teaching instructors (at every level of education), and the lack of motivation to change, graduates are missing practical and general skills, such as self-learning ability, initiative, and leadership, system thinking, team work, creativeness, etc. Short-term training and informal education are seen as good supplements, in terms of filling gaps in required VQ, as well as developing key and professional skills.

- Partially the current situation is conditional on the absence of a full-fledged multilateral open dialogue and cooperation between all stakeholders: the government, the education system, business, and trade unions. Thus, bridging educational and business sectors is very important in terms of improving the development conditions of VQs. Such cooperation will help us to update and improving existing education programs/curriculum, develop new ones in line with private sector requirements, may enlarge internship opportunities to increase graduates' practical knowledge—once the value of this experience is presented properly, internship will be perceived as an opportunity to gain skills and will contribute to the strengthening of the practical part of the curriculum.

- The root of the problem, according to some employers and experts, is the lack of or inadequate professional orientation activities for youth. Cultural stereotypes compel the parents to force their children to enter university for the sake of getting a diploma—in 59.3% of cases parents had a huge impact on high school student decision making, while information on professions, VQs and labor market needs plays a decisive role in 6.3% of cases only.

- Special attention should be paid to the formulation of VQ requirements (based on classifications used in Armenia, such as the ISCED and Classification of Occupations) to ensure a common understanding of requirements by educational institutions, employers, and individuals.

- The absence of an effective feedback mechanism among educational, business, and state institutions is obvious and well recognized. The active involvement of private sector companies in curriculum and educational-program development, the availability of timely and reliable labor market information, as well as regular assessment and addressing of business needs for VQs through regular surveys and sector researches will allow education providers to become more flexible and update/adjusting their curricula to meet business's needs for current and future VQs.

The main recommendations in terms of improving conditions for future oriented VQs development are the following:

- Encourage cooperation among stakeholders involved in the development of future-oriented VQs: state institutions/organizations, private companies, professional associations, unions, business development support providers, and educational institutions. Maintain ongoing communications with employers so that they are kept informed on where they can find appropriate training and what types of qualifications they will need. This will allow the alignment of the current provision of education and training with VQs and the skills needs of business.

- Put special focus on the orientation of high-school students for selecting adequate professional qualifications for themselves, based on market demand. Strengthen career-orientation activities and communicate attractive career opportunities.

- Promote the concept of continuous education countrywide to motivate youth to take responsibility for their career planning and development.

- Provide short term online and offline courses for the development of specific professional qualifications demanded in private companies currently and in the near future.

- With business assistance, build up expertise in specific Universities/Colleges for new modules and qualifications and then share these modules within the system.

- Create and provide well-structured internship and graduate-placement opportunities.

- Allocate appropriate levels of funding to improve vocational education and training materials and facilities that will underpin a more flexible training offer (including the provision of blended and work-based/dual learning).

- Develop and promote continuing professional-development courses (CPD) for professors and tutor so that they maintain an up-to-date awareness of new technologies and trends as they develop.

IV. SUMMARY OF DIALOGUE FORUM FINDINGS

According to the methodology proposed for this particular study, after completing desk research and FG discussions, a one-and-a-half day DF (See annexes for DF narrative) was organized in order to present the desk research and FG discussion findings on the current situation with VQ demand and challenges related to meeting the demand in economy and its selected sectors and validate the identified findings.

The DF provided a platform for joint discussions on future-oriented VQs needs from different perspectives. DF participants have been divided into three groups based on their areas of operation:

- Training/educational service providers (associations, unions, training companies)
- Private sector companies
- State organizations

Three rounds of discussions were organized, and groups were given an opportunity to discuss the factors contributing to and factors hindering the development of future-oriented VQs (for a detailed description, see the annexes, DF narrative).

As a result of the multi-step group discussions the obstacle for VQ development, identified by DF participants, were narrowed down to the following three, which were considered both urgent and realistic to overcome:

- High-school students lack professional orientation
- Lack of state-private sector dialogue
- Lack of cooperation between the state, educational providers, and employers.

From the suggested list of measures that could help to improve conditions for VQ development, two priority measures were identified to be taken:

- Create an efficient professional orientation system at schools through short courses, excursions, exchange of success stories, visits to the enterprises, organization, and increase the awareness of high-school students in existing qualifications, largely required by the economy.
- Establishment and development of effective cooperation between the state, educational Institutions (including high school), and private-sector companies to bridge education and business and with state support (policy, funding, etc.), develop labor-market relevant knowledge and skills for future-oriented VQs.

Based on further group discussion as the key priority (from the above-mentioned two) was recognized as the second one, and corresponding measures were suggested to overcome the challenge (see the narrative on the dialogue forum in the annexes).

Thus, considering measures identified in the final round of DF as starting point, within this particular study recommendations for developing the “Roadmap for Improving the Conditions for Developing Future-Oriented Vocational Qualifications in Armenia” are suggested for the following key constraint:

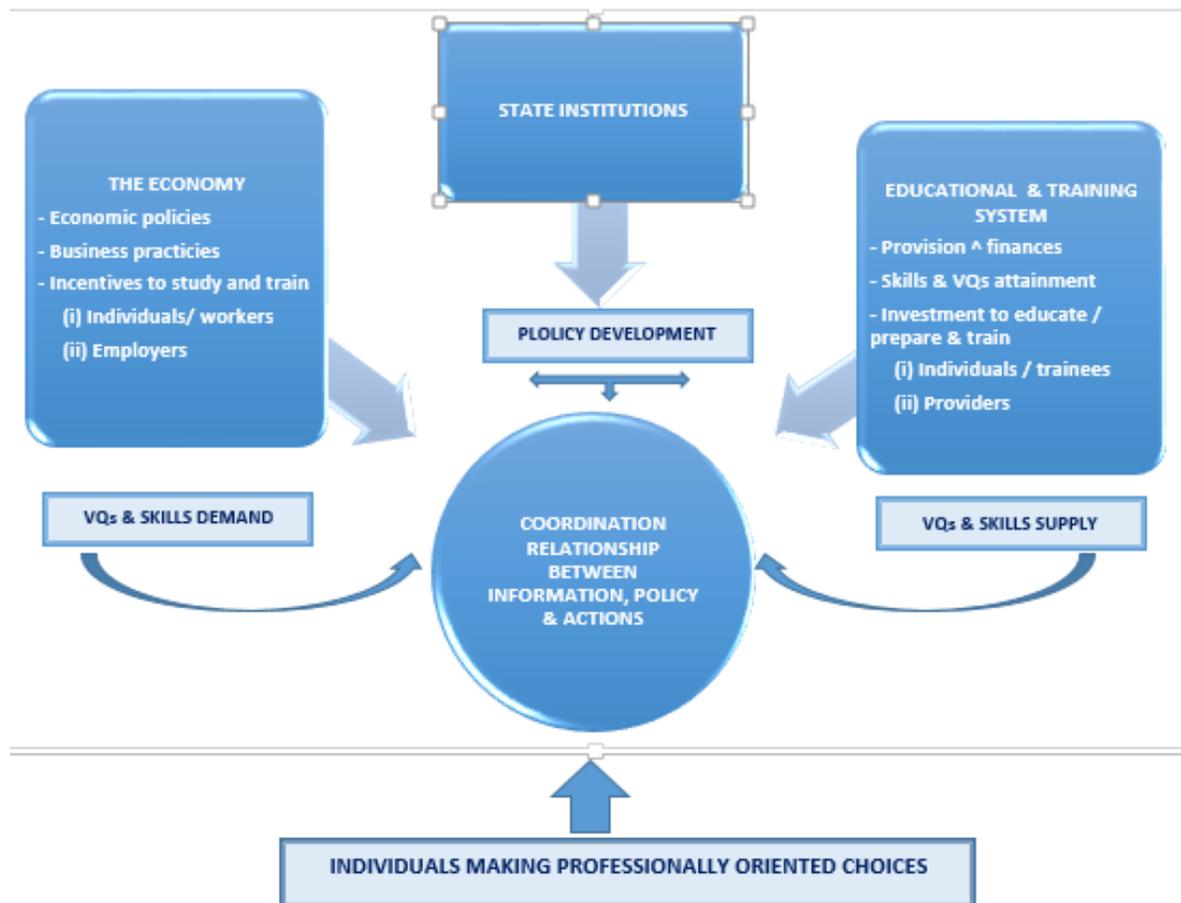
Strengthening and further development of effective cooperation between the state, educational Institutions (including high school), and private sector companies to bridge education and business and, with state support (policy, funding, etc.), develop labor-market relevant knowledge and skills for future-oriented VQs

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROADMAP FOR IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPING FUTURE-ORIENTED VQs

The current document provides recommendations on the Roadmap and Action Plan for improving conditions for developing future-oriented VQs. The roadmap is developed based on FG discussions and DF findings, which were enhanced further. A roadmap and action plan has been developed only for one key challenge that is “Strengthening and further development of effective cooperation between the state, educational institutions (including high school), and private-sector companies.”

The roadmap is developed based on the following conceptual approach:

Graphic 2. Policy and action coordination for developing current and future VQs



Source: author’s construction.

The expected result of strengthening and further development of stakeholder cooperation is ensuring a good match between VQ demand and supply, as well as a timely anticipation of future needs for VQs. If this match is quite high, society can expect to have a more-productive workforce contributing into growth that is:

- Smart: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- Sustainable: promoting a more resource-efficient, greener, and more competitive economy;
- Inclusive: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.²⁷

The outcome will be dependent on the actions and interactions among four sets of actors:

²⁷ Europe 2020 Strategy, page 10; <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

- State institutions: the vision and policies of public officials influence the overall and sector-specific direction of economic development and the nature of incentives for the other actors;
- Employers who are a source of job creation and demand formation for VQs;
- Education/training providers who offer pre-employment, on-the-job, and targeted training services as well as a pool of potential recruits for employers and networking among trainees;
- Individuals who have a dual role as trainees and as incumbents for future workers.

The productive relationship and cooperation between stakeholders is likely to bridge education and business and with State support (policy, funding, etc.) develop labor-market relevant knowledge and skills for future oriented VQs.

**TABLE 9. ROADMAP AND ACTION PLAN
ON STRENGTHENING AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE COOPERATION
BETWEEN THE STATE, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (INCLUDING HIGH SCHOOL), AND
PRIVATE SECTOR COMPANIES**

<i>Objective 1: Productive relationship and cooperation between stakeholders with agreement on goals, clarity on roles and accountability, and routine interaction among key stakeholders established</i>		
ACTIONS	RESOURCES & OTHER INPUTS	TIMING
Establish a well-designed coordinating body, for example, the Expert Group on Future VQ Needs (EGFVQN) ➤ <i>The aim:</i> Advise the government on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - projected VQ requirements at national and sectoral levels and make recommendations on how best to address identified needs; - on priority vocational education and training requirements and the most cost-effective ways of responding to those requirements; - how existing vocational education and training systems and delivery mechanisms might be adapted to better meet the business needs in current and future VQs. ➤ <i>Functions:</i> advice to government on VQ issues that impact the growth and competitiveness of business is provided through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VQ and skill foresight & benchmarking; - strategic advice on building skills and VQs through education and training; - regular data collection and analysis on demand and supply of VQs; - influencing and monitoring implementation of targeted policies and actions. <i>Members:</i> representatives of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - state institutions - employers - education & training providers - trade unions, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The government leads the process; - the EGFVQN, unions/professional associations, employers, and educational/training providers play important role; - Financing source: all stakeholders 	Shot-term (urgent) priority
<i>Considerations:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should be taken into account that such experience exists in the VET system; we think it should be enhanced and exercised for the entire educational & training system to succeed in bringing the behavior of individuals and vocational education & training providers into close alignment with the areas of emerging demand. 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires functioning mechanisms to motivate stakeholders. 		
Objective 2: Directions of stakeholder cooperation established		
ACTIONS	RESOURCES & OTHER INPUTS	TIMING
<p>➤ <i>The aim:</i> Identification of directions of cooperation with specifying stakeholder's roles and degree of accountability.</p> <p><i>Measures:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze country economic or sectoral strategies from the perspective of (a) current and future needs for skills and VQs and (b) anticipated barriers to meeting those needs; Identify and anticipate future VQ needs and potential VQ mismatches by undertaking various levels of research activities; While investigating VQ needs, regular enterprise surveys on changing VQ needs should be employed; Produce reports on <i>Future VQ Needs</i> on a regular basis (to be decided) with the aim of identifying future VQ requirements by business and proposing a range of measures to ensure that the identified VQs will drive employment and business growth and sustain competitiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government leads the process; the EGFVQN, unions/professional associations, employers, and education/training providers play important role; financing source: all stakeholders 	<p>Short- to mid-term (urgent) priority and should be considered on an ongoing objective</p>
<p><i>Considerations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timely identification of needs for future-oriented VQs is critical in taking actions towards adjusting and anticipating those needs. Enhanced market research and future VQ needs should be practiced by both businesses and education/training institutions, as well as looking at information systematically, are required to produce regular VQ-supply and -demand forecasts for Armenia and analyze potential labor-market imbalances. Timely and reliable information, along with counseling vocational education/training providers will allow the adjustment and/or development of new vocational, educational, and training programs to meet the needs. 		
Objective 3: Effective links between vocational-education and training providers and private sector established and well-functioning		
ACTIONS	RESOURCES & OTHER INPUTS	TIMING
<p>➤ <i>The aim:</i> To contribute to adjusting and/or developing appropriate vocational education and training programs to meet future VQ needs.</p> <p><i>Measures:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Align current educational and training provision with the VQs and skills needs in business; With business assistance build up expertise in specific Universities/Colleges for new modules and qualifications and then share these modules within the system; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government leads the process; the EGFVQN, unions/professional associations, employers, and education/training providers play an important role; Financing source: all stakeholders—may be considered creation of a special fund 	<p>Short to mid-term (urgent) priority and should be considered as an ongoing objective</p> <p>For this objective in general the monitoring should be linked to the numbers of individuals that achieve new or updated VQs required currently or for the future.</p> <p>For the action (7) under this objective the monitoring should be linked to the evaluation of revised materials/facilities based on</p>

<p>3. Provide well-structured internship and graduates placement opportunities; 4. Communicate attractive career opportunities; 5. Develop and promote additional training courses to be embedded into existing qualifications; 6. Allocate appropriate levels of funding to improve vocational education and training materials and facilities that will underpin a more flexible training offer (including the provision of blended and work-based/dual learning); 7. Training providers will need to identify the changes required to materials and facilities. The EGFVQN and employers, professional associations, etc. play an important role in supporting development of relevant materials; 8. Develop and promote continuing professional-development courses (CPD) for professors and tutor so that they maintain up-to-date awareness of new technologies and trends as they develop; 9. Maintain ongoing communications with employers so that they are kept informed where they can find appropriate training and what types of qualifications they will need.</p>		<p>business feedback and levels of uptake.</p>
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Considerations:

- The activities under this objective should be completed by education/training providers in close cooperation with employers.
- Vocational education and training will need to give consideration to developing flexible offers; there will be a need for more blended and work-based learning, and a greater proportion of practical teaching as opposed to theory.
- Investment will be required in the form of time, resources, and potentially updating education/training facilities. The level of investment will depend on the baseline position and the extent of change needed.
- The success of new or updated vocational education/training and VQs is reliant on promotion and effective channels of communication so that employers are aware of a) what training they require and b) how to find and fund it. The government, EGFVQN, unions/professional associations and employers play an important role in supplying accurate information to their sectors and in promoting relevant training provision to employers.

Objective 4: Awareness and understanding of importance of VQ development measures among employers, education/training providers and individuals raised

ACTIONS	RESOURCES & OTHER INPUTS	TIMING
<p>➤ <u>The aim:</u> Education/training providers are unlikely to invest in developing new or updated flexible education courses/trainings offerings and students are unlikely to make informed and professionally oriented choices unless there is clear evidence of demand from business. It is clear that stimulating demand is a vital priority and it could be done through professional orientation and awareness raising.</p>	<p>- Government needs to take primary responsibility for awareness rising (awareness raising strategy); - Funding: all stakeholders should contribute—the establishment of a special fund establishment could be a solution.</p>	<p>- Short- to mid-term (urgent) priority and should be considered an ongoing objective. - Monitoring of progress should include an evaluation of levels of awareness (high school, university students, employers, associations, education & training providers, etc.)</p>

<p><u>Measures:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raise awareness on current and future demand for VQs. <p><i>Awareness raising could be achieved via:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Career orientation in high schools (empowering the YPOC); - Career-orientation center role activation in universities and colleges; - Major national/local promotional campaigns; - Via social media campaigns, etc.; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Raising awareness of the integration of work and market behavior in order to act more strategically—enhance involvement of business in education/training activities; 3. Raise awareness of lifelong learning as a strategically important resource to stay up to date with social and economic developments; 4. Link the perspectives of business, market development, labor market and educational/training systems through joint (stakeholder) awareness initiatives. 		
<p><u>Considerations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline data may be gathered through research. 		

ANNEXES

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2. FG GUIDES (in Armenian and English)

FG Guide BMOs, Unions, Associations	  FGGuide_ BMO_Unions_Associa FGGuide_ BMO_Unions_Associa
FG Guide Experts	  FGGuide_ Experts&Consulting.c FGGuide_Ministries_ OtherState_ENG.doc

FG Guide Private	  FGGuide_Employers.doc FGuide_Employers_ENG.doc
FG Guide State Representatives	  FGGuide_Ministries_OtherState.doc FGGuide_Ministries_OtherState_ENG.doc

3. FG DISCUSSIONS

FG Invitation Letter	 FG Letter of Invitation.doc
FG Participant Lists	    List of participants (FG 1).doc List of participants (FG2).doc List of participants (FG3).doc List of participants (FG4).doc
FG Summary Report	 FGSummaryReport.docx

4. DIALOGUE FORUM DISCUSSION

DF Invitation Letter	 DialogueForumInvitation.doc
DF Agenda	 GIZ_CRRC_Dialogue ForumAgenda_Englist
DF Participant List	 DialogueForumParticipantList.xlsx
DF Moderation Guide	 DFModerationGuide.docx
DF Evaluation	 Dialogue Forum_EvaluationSun
DF Summary Report	 DialogueForumSummaryReport.docx