Chapter 8

Vocational education and training and adult education

This chapter gives a thorough overview of initial and secondary professional and adult education in the Kyrgyz Republic. It discusses options for raising the efficiency of the sector and its quality, its responsiveness to the needs of the labour market, and its significance as a pathway which should be transparent and permeable to the education continuum for a growing number of youngsters and adults in Kyrgyzstan, ensuring lifelong professional and personal development.

Overview

Basic data

All sources of data and information used in this chapter are listed under references, but the following are highlighted because of their particular relevance:

- Strategy for consolidation and modernisation of professional-technical education in the Kyrgyz Republic and Action Plan (2009-2011), and Annexes (unpublished).
- Standard duration of learning for professions of the secondary professional education, approved by decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 5 November 2003, No. 702.
- National Report of the Kyrgyz Republic on adult education within the framework of the preparation for the sixth international conference dedicated to adult education (CONFITEA VI), MOES 2008 (unpublished).
- Analytical note on the status of the system of adult education in the Kyrgyz Republic and development prospects in the framework of the order of government "On the draft Law of on adult education". MOES. (Undated, unpublished).
- List of professions and specialisations of initial vocational education in the Kyrgyz Republic. 2006. Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Directorate of Initial Vocational Education, Scientific-Methodological Centre.
- National Statistical Committee, 2008. Employment and unemployment, results of the integrated household survey in 2007.

Vocational education and training within the framework of the education system

The *Law on Education* (2003) sets out a range of professional programmes, which "… aim at sequential enhancement of the professional level, and preparation of specialists of the respective qualification". These include:

- *Initial professional education* (integrated programmes correspond to ISCED level 3): "Preparation of labourers of qualified labour (workers, employees) for the main areas of social useful activity, on the access level of basic or of secondary general education".
- *Secondary professional education* (can be classified as ISCED level 4): "Preparation for acquisition by the learners of professional knowledge,

skills related to an area of specialisation, on the basis of basic, secondary or initial professional education"…: "People with secondary professional education of the respective profile may receive higher professional education via accelerated programmes";

- *Higher professional education:* "Training, preparation and re-training of specialists of the respective level of education programmes and standards";
- *Post-university professional education (post-graduate programmes)*: "Professional qualification level related to full higher education programmes of the respective area of specialisation, giving the right to raise the qualification in the respective forms of post-university education"; and
- Complementary education.

This chapter deals uniquely with two sub-sectors: "initial" and "secondary" professional education. In this report the term "initial VET" (or VET I) refers to the specific level of the Kyrgyz system. Internationally, initial VET has a wider definition.

Administration and links

At the time of the review visit *Initial professional education* (VET I) was administered by the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education (SAPTE), established in early 2007 and reporting to the government. At the time of completion of this report Initial Professional Education was put under the responsibility of the newly created Ministry of Labour, Employment and Migration, through a dedicated Directorate *Secondary* (VET II) *and higher professional education* are administered by the MOES, by the Department of Secondary and Higher Professional Education. This shows that secondary professional education tends to be closer to higher education, and this is reflected in the principle of accelerated higher programmes for graduates of secondary professional education (in the relevant areas of study).

The institutional separation of initial and secondary professional education reflects a conceptual separation of the purposes of each of these, and underlines the dichotomy between manual and intellectual work and functions. This framework does not, therefore, promote the development of VET as a truly attractive offer for all users – students and employers alike. Other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries (*e.g.* Armenia, Kazakhstan) have avoided this problem by unifying the administration of both initial and secondary VET. Some Baltic states have progressively promoted the best establishments of secondary professional education to tertiary technical level, while other establishments are associated with initial VET.

This simplified structure eliminates the ambiguous status of programmes that are neither really secondary, nor really post-secondary, and obviously not tertiary. In Kyrgyzstan, this ambiguity still persists.

Pathways and qualifications

Although the required entrance level is similar for both initial and secondary professional education, continuity of pathways and interactions are largely absent between them. Higher professional education covers all tertiary education programmes.

Graduates from the integrated programme of VET I (3 years) receive a secondary education diploma and a professional qualification for the respective area and level. Consequently, access to higher education is possible, depending on grades and performance in entrance procedures. Although the *Law on Education* allows entrance of graduates of initial professional education into secondary professional education, this is not a common occurrence.

Graduates from VET II (3 years and 10 months) are entitled to enter the second or even third year of the relevant programmes in higher professional education, bypassing common entrance examinations and procedures. VET II can be classified as ISCED level 4. According to the classification criteria of ISCED 4, paragraph 74:

> It requires as a rule the successful completion of level 3, *i.e.* successful completion of any programme at level 3A or 3B, or, for 3C programmes, a cumulative theoretical duration of typically 3 years at least. However, the criterion of successful completion of ISCED 3 should be interpreted in the context of the duration of the programme. For example, a programme that builds on a 2-year programme at ISCED 3 and has a duration of 4 years, would normally be classified at ISCED 4 even though the preceding 2-year programme at ISCED 3 does not qualify for the completion of ISCED 3.
>
> (*http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/doc/isced_1997.htm*)

Educational attainment of the population

Despite the hardships experienced by households and by the country as a whole during the early years of transition, Kyrgyzstan has managed to improve the overall educational attainment of its population. Table 8.1 shows that the share of the population over 15 years of age with tertiary education grew by more than 4% between 1999 and 2006, taking into account both complete and incomplete higher education.

Table 8.1. **Educational attainment of the population aged 15 years and above (in %)**

	1989	1999	2006
Higher education	9.4	10.5	13.2
Incomplete higher education	1.6	1.5	2.9
Secondary professional education	15.7	10.8	11.6
Primary professional education			7.8
Secondary education	39.1	50.0	43.7
Basic education	18.4	18.3	11.9
Primary	9.1	6.3	8.0

Note: Education categories used for 2006 differ as reforms in the structure of education and related statistical representation changed over time. In 2006 the statistics capture holders of VET I diplomas. Data for 1989 reveals inconsistencies, the total is 7% short of 100%.

Sources: 1. Education and Science in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2008, pg 14. Calculation: Review team. 2. NSC, Educational level of population (in Russian), extract.

The share of the population with VET II level decreased by about 4% between 1989 and 2006. Furthermore, it is important to note the substantial contraction of the share of the population with lower educational attainment (basic and primary education) by approximately 7.6% between 1989 and 2006. By 2006, approximately one-fifth of the population over 15 had at least basic or complete primary education; this does, however, leave a share of about 5 to 6% who have no education or have only incomplete primary education.

The review team learned that, during the years of transition, two contradictory trends in education emerged and grew stronger:

- Growing numbers of students in higher education;
- Growing numbers of early school leavers, dropping out of primary and basic school.

Vocational education in the Kyrgyz Republic: key figures and trends

The network of VET I Schools shrank in the years of transition, as the economic basis (large enterprises) that supported part of these educational establishments was restructured or lost its vigour and demand. But in Kyrgyzstan, unlike some other CIS countries, the VET Law of 1999 protected VET schools from privatisation (VET Law 1999, amended in 2008, Article 22), and at the time of this review the country had 111 initial VET (VET I) schools (this figure includes the Pedagogic-Industrial College of Tokmok).

Trends

Statistics on students' completion by levels of education in the period 1990-2007 show considerable changes in graduation numbers from the three levels of professional education (VET I, VET II and higher education). In 2007, the total number of graduates from higher education exceeded the total number of graduates from the two non-tertiary levels of professional education. This is a radical change compared with 1990, when the ratio of graduates from both non-tertiary professional levels to tertiary stood at 5:1 (also dealt with in Chapter 10).

The number of graduates from VET I programmes declined from 33 200 students in 1990 to a low of 18 800 in 2003, recovering slightly to approximately 21 700 in 2007. In secondary VET (VET II) programmes, the lowest number of graduates was reached in 2004, with 7 200, down by almost 50% from the year 2000. In higher education, the trend is the reverse: the number of graduates grew by more than 2.3 times between 1990 and 2006, and reached approximately 30 800 in 2006 (26 400 in 2007). In the same period, the number of students completing basic education grew from 85 100 in 1990 to 101 200 in 2007, while secondary education completion grew almost by the same percentage (over 18%), from 58 800 to 69 600 students.

Structure

VET I is basically public, as all schools are public and financing is largely public as well. Programmes of VET II are provided in 82 schools (colleges and *tehnikums*), of which 12 are private. According to verbal information from MOES, there are 90 VET II establishments, including the colleges established by some higher professional education institutions.

In fact, a number of universities have started what could be called a "*process of vertical backward integration"*, by establishing VET II (colleges) and even VET I programmes under their jurisdiction. This trend towards multi-level education has substantial advantages; it extends the VET capacity under educational institutions that have a relatively good public image, and thus could help attract more youth and young adults to VET pathways. On the other hand, there are certain dangers, in particular a risk of extreme commercialisation of VET programmes (as has already happened with tertiary education programmes), and a consequent loss of the social role and responsibility of public VET. Universities with multi-level programmes may also tend to become self-contained "islands", not necessarily developing close links with the world of work, following the academic traditions of the sub-sector.

Figures 8.1 and 8.2 offer an overview of trends in student participation in both VET I and VET II. While total participation in VET I programmes grew only slightly (13%) in the given period, VET II shows a steep growth of more

than 65% between 2002/03 and 2007/08. The year 2006/07 showed the most substantial increase in the total number of students (by 20%).

It is important to understand who the entrants in VET I programmes are in terms of their entrance educational attainment as shown in Table 8.4.

These figures show that less than 60% of entrants come straight from general school. This is a signal that VET I is already used by other categories of the population, namely the unemployed supported by active labour market programmes of the state; enterprises and individuals paying a fee; and other groups. This can be considered positive: it means that initial VET is opening up to various user groups and their needs and expectations. Further analysis of the user groups of VET I schools is provided in Table 8.5.

Table 8.2. **VET I – key figures**[a]

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of education institutions	113	112	112	112	111
Number of students	25 972	27 698	28 481	28 623	29 319
Admitted students	21 204	21 344	21 344	22 114	22 802
Graduates	20 099	18 764	19 379	20 617	20 711
Number of teachers	3 036	3 101	3 228	3 228	3 281
Student/teacher ratio	8.6	8.9	8.8	8.9	8.9

Note: a. These are official statistics, reflecting the situation only in licensed establishments.

Source: NSC, 2008a, p. 9.

Table 8.3. **VET II – key figures**[a]

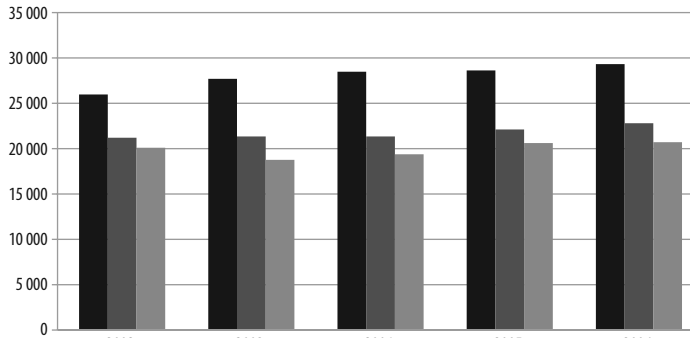
	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Number of education institutions	66	66	75	78	80	82
Of which private	3	4	3	5	10	12
Number of students	25 989	27 154	31 178	35 580	40 254	43 413
Students in private VET	445	643	658	908	1 064	3 327
Admitted students	10 477	12 106	14 053	15 705	15 843	16 447
Graduates	8 634	8 021	7 316	8 343	7 745	8 647
Number of teachers	3 714	3 019	2 984	3 273	3 680	3 410
Student/teacher ratio	7.0	9.0	10.4	10.9	10.9	12.7

Note: a. These are official statistics, reflecting only the situation in licensed establishments.

Source: NSC, 2008a, pg. 9.

However, Table 8.4 also shows that agroup in most urgent need of policy support (youth who leave the education system after basic education) is only to a limited extent covered by the VET offer in the country. 30% of entrants are youngsters after basic school, and a similar share are graduates from secondary school. When comparing these figures with the large number of youth

Figure 8.1. **VET I – students**



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number students	25 972	27 698	28 481	28 623	29 319
Admitted students	21 204	21 344	21 344	22 114	22 802
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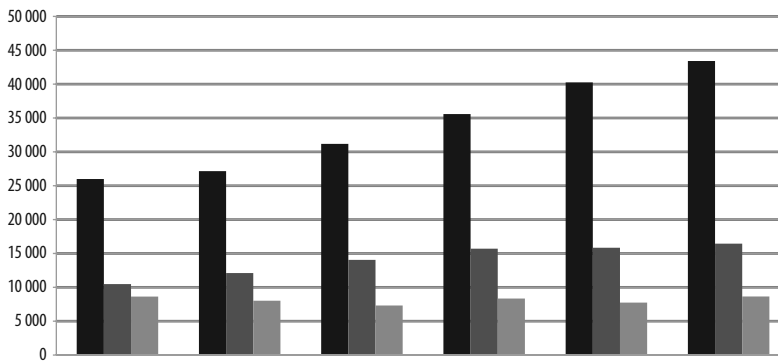
Source: NSC, 2008a, p. 9.

Figure 8.2. **VET II – students**



	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Number students	25 989	27 154	31 178	35 580	40 254	43413
Admitted students	10 477	12 106	14 053	15 705	15 843	16447
Graduates	8 634	8 021	7 316	8 343	7 745	8647

Source: NSC, 2008a, pg 9.

out of education (after basic school), one of the immediate conclusions is that VET I has insufficient ability and capacity to provide much-needed opportunities for learning and qualifications for this growing number of young people.

Table 8.5 is an attempt to estimate how well VET I absorbs students who did not complete secondary education. In the absence of accurate data, the estimate is a proxy of the drop-out after basic education, taken as the

Table 8.4. **Number of admissions in VET I schools – by level of education at entrance**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Kyrgyzstan total	21 204	21 498	21 344	22 114	22 802
With secondary education	5 934	6 233	6 436	6 460	6 782
% of total	28.0%	29.0%	30.2%	29.2%	29.7%
With basic education	5 027	5 225	5 200	5 686	6 423
% of total	23.7%	24.3%	24.4%	25.7%	28.2%

Source: NSC, 2008a, pp. 106-107.

Table 8.5. **Youth out of education after basic school**

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Basic school graduates	102 263	101 034	102 248	101 218
Secondary school graduates	73 327	78 802	74 291	69 668
Difference	28 936	22 232	27 957	31 550
Difference in % of basic school graduates	28.3%	22.0%	27.3%	31.2%
Admissions in VET I from basic school	5 225	5 200	5 686	6 423
% of difference of basic school graduates	18.1%	23.4%	20.3%	20.4%
Admissions in VET I from secondary school	6 233	6 436	6 460	6 782
% from secondary school graduates	8.5%	8.2%	8.7%	9.7%
Admissions in VET II from basic school (assumption: 70% of VET II admissions)	8 474	9 837	10 994	11 090
% of difference of basic school leavers	29.3%	44.2%	39.3%	35.2%
Total coverage of difference of basic school leavers in VET I and II	**47.3%**	**67.6%**	**59.7%**	**55.5%**
Share of difference of basic school leavers out of education	52.7%	32.4%	40.3%	44.5%

Source: NSC, 2008a. Calculation: review team.

difference between the number of graduates of basic education and those of secondary education. According to these estimates, VET I absorbs only about 20% of these youngsters. Another share of basic school leavers enter VET II establishments.

The fate of the remaining substantial proportion of youngsters out of education (after basic school) should be a matter of concern, as international and national measurements show that most of them have only limited basic skills. They are therefore more vulnerable in a tight labour market, and usually limited to low-level activities and jobs. The situation of graduates from complete secondary education raises less concern, as most of them either enter higher education or VET I and VET II programmes, according to estimates based on official education statistics.

These figures tend to coincide with estimates provided by SAPTE, indicating that about 30 000 students leave school after basic education. This is a clear signal that stronger VET policy is required to create attractive VET opportunities that will keep more of these youngsters in education and training.

Initial[1] *Vocational Education and Training (VET I)*

VET I: schools and students

VET I schools are under-utilised by day-student programmes (mostly for youth with the full 3-year curriculum), according to the data provided by SAPTE (Annex to the *Strategy for Consolidation and Modernisation of VET,* April 2009, p. 73). Two-thirds of VET schools have between 100 and 250 students, seven schools have fewer than 100 students, 17 have between 250 and 350 students, 11 have between 350 and 450 students, and only two have more than 450 day-students. These schools do, however, have the physical capacity to admit much larger numbers of students. Review team visits to VET schools often left a clear impression that student participation is low. But financing is inadequate, and the organisation of learning leaves much to be desired. According to the Director of a VET school visited in Jalal-Abad, his school could admit more students after basic school from neighbouring villages and cities, as many parents express interest. But this would require more teachers and resources; moreover, while (SAPTE could finance the increment), VET schools may not be keen to take on young school-leavers who often enter with poor basic skills and who may negatively affect the school's performance.

Based on discussions in the field, it is the review team's view that leavers of basic education are in serious need of additional help, but the VET I schools have only limited interest in being a second-chance pathway. This seems to be particularly true for the mixed secondary-professional education programmes (*licei* groups), where these lower-performing students have substantial difficulties:

"Many of them cannot really read or write", the review team was told. "But our resources don't allow the school to offer proper extra teaching and tutoring, so those who want to succeed, sit long nights in the student residence and try to learn by heart some biology, maths and English. What else can we do?"

In Jalal-Abad, directors of general education schools recommended increasing the capacity and quality of VET, as a substantial number of basic school leavers do not continue into grade 10. But what is their future? Several directors of general schools told the review team: "Many parents send their children after basic school to workshops to learn on-the-job. We should have more VET schools, with student hostels and good practical teaching. Our rural children need vocational education and training".

Low-achievers and children at risk in VET I

The current reality is that VET I schools are expected to take care of vulnerable low-performing youngsters, particularly those without parental support or living in difficult economic conditions. In response, by 2007/08 a total of 17 VET I schools had special centres for disadvantaged youngsters: these are the so-called "rehabilitation groups". In addition, more than 400 orphans studied in VET I schools in the same year. One director of a VET I school near Bishkek told the review team:

> I have received several 14-year-old street children who had hardly two years of schooling. They require special attention, first to build up some confidence and trust towards society. I tried various ways to break the ice and reach their soul. A breakthrough moment occurred when I took them to a classical music concert. They were moved to tears. Afterwards I started a school theatre in one of the un-used spaces in my school. These children have started to open up; now we can start teaching them. I have to do it all with very little support from the State; but actually I prefer it this way because I can innovate without having to ask permission.

Asked about the challenge of combining catch-up basic education with technical training for entrants who do not possess adequate basic skills, the director of SAPTE stated: "It is actually worse than that. We have to teach hundreds of youngsters with very low educational attainment, many having just few years of schooling. They are working in the markets and the fields, and they are out of schooling. How can we give them a standard education programme? What else can we do but teach them some basic vocational skills, to enable them to find a job with some decency?"

Beyond these perceptions and opinions, there is evidence. An official MOES report (2008) on adult education in Kyrgyzstan states: "Unemployment, growing poverty levels, alcoholism and drugs lead to a situation, in which the number of children left under care of the State in boarding and

special schools has increased by more than three times in a decade. Hardship affects large numbers of families, and many children must work to earn their living: in markets, washing cars and so on. This leads to disruption of schooling, and poor attendance. As a result, the overall educational attainment of the population will be negatively affected, and increase the share of the labour force with low skills and no qualifications". (MOES, Analytical note on the status of the system of adult education in the Kyrgyz Republic and development prospects in the framework of the order of Government, p. 4)

Who is being served by VET I?

The users of VET I are a diverse group, as are their needs and potential. Vulnerable youngsters with education below basic have needs and expectations that differ from those of students who have finished secondary education and are now looking for qualifications that permit them to work in modern enterprises. Young adults with higher education but unable to find a job may be interested in acquiring additional skills through flexible but recognised courses in one of the good VET schools, for example in Bishkek, or Jalal-Abad. Young farmers and rural residents are a large category of potential users of short-term, flexible, innovative training for rural economic activities that VET schools can (and should) develop in partnership with village administrations. And the many unemployed who are supported by active labour market programmes of the State Migration and Employment Committee all have different individual profiles, life experience, skills and education. These adults need training that is adjusted to their interests and their previously acquired competences. Finally, competitive enterprises that are keen to improve the skills of their staff, represent another highly demanding group of users.

Is VET I already open to various users' needs? A quick look at figures shows that VET I schools are indeed already offering training to non-traditional groups as well. Table 8.6 conveys official statistics from SAPTE that might not include non-formal training taking place in some VET schools and some rare partnerships with local authorities and NGOs in the framework of projects sponsored by international donors.

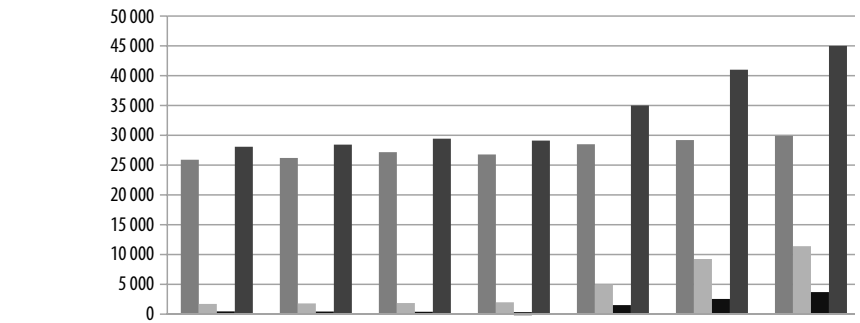
The figures in Table 8.6 demonstrate that 84% of all students admitted in 2006 were day students (proxy for traditional groups of youngsters after basic and secondary education). Thus, a fourth of admissions in 2006 were adults. Within this group, the larger part were staff of enterprises and individuals paying for their training (48%), the unemployed represented approximately a third of the group, and 20% were learners in the penal establishments of Ministry of Justice.

Table 8.6. **VET I – students of various categories**

	Total students 01/01/06	Planned		Actual		Total students 01/01/07
		Admissions for 2006	Graduations for 2007	Admissions for 2006	Graduations for 2006	
Total	29 166	24 260	21 559	23 108	20 916	29 897
Of which: day students	24 542	14 555	12 462	14 763	12 752	25 525
Access with basic education	14 289	5 895	4 784	6 423	4 761	15 345
Access with secondary education	6 706	7 026	6 284	6 782	6 311	6 909
Youth programmes without general education	3 548	1 634	1 394	1 558	1 653	3 275
Tekhnikum (Tokmok)	580	276	266	306	205	578
Penal establishments Ministry of Justice	1 605	1 620	1 620	1 614	1 482	1 611
Special VET school	63	50	10	16	44	33
Training for unemployed	341	3 842	3 426	2 561	2 590	287
Paid training	1 663	3 917	3 812	3 259	3 209	1 593
Training paid by enterprises	372			589	661	270

Source: Strategy for Consolidation and Modernisation of VET and Action Plan (2009-11), Annex, pg 63.

Figure 8.3. **VET I – students by source of financing (2008: planned figures; 2009 and 2010: forecast)**



	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
State financing	25 900	26 197	27 169	26 783	28 500	29 200	29 900
Paid by employers	1 715	1 800	1 863	1 989	4 983	9 250	11 400
Paid by SMEC	462	437	400	337	1 517	2 550	3 700
TOTAL	28 077	28 434	29 432	29 109	35 000	41 000	45 000

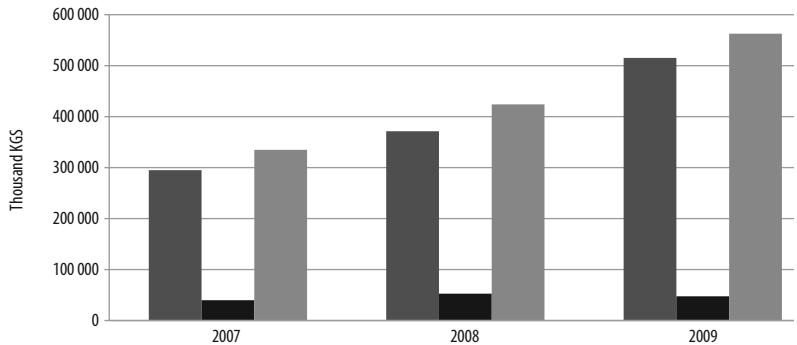
Source: Strategy for Consolidation and Modernisation, 2009, Annex, p. 67.

Financing of VET I

More than 90% of students in VET I were financed by the state budget in the period up to 2007, but SAPTE now seeks to increase the share of students financed by other sources ("multi-channel financing"), such as individual fees, contracts with enterprises and budget of the State Migration and Employment Committee (training for the unemployed).

Public financing of VET I has grown substantially between 2007-2009, as shown in Figure 8.4. The central budget grew by 75% in this period, and its share of total public financing rose to 92% in 2009, against 88% in 2007. This trend is certainly associated with the reform that separated the leading sector institution (SAPTE) from the ministry, and upgraded it with autonomy and a quasi-ministerial level in the government.

Figure 8.4. **Public sources of financing of VET I**



	2007	2008	2009
Central budget	294 999.1	371 346.7	515 185.3
Local budget	39 868.5	52 686.8	47 522.7
TOTAL	334 867.6	424 033.5	562 708.0

Source: State VET Agency, data provided upon request by the review team in June 2009.

The role of local budget declined in the same period. It would be worth exploring the potential of local resources to fund local VET projects and initiatives.

Analysing the evolution of various spending categories (Table 8.7) between 2007-2009, it is worth noticing the strong increase of the total wage bill (by 85%), and of the food bill by (by 117% or more than double). Thus in 2009 salaries represent approx 46% of total central budget, and food – 27.3% (up from 22% in 2007). Remarkably, the share of spending on repair of buildings has *declined* from a tiny 2.9% to an even tinier 2.3%, and a similar trend can be observed with the share of spending on equipment, which fell from 4.4% to 0.5%.

Table 8.7. **VET I – central budget by spending categories (thousand KGS)**

	2007	2008	2009
Central budget	294 999.1	371 346.7	515 185.3
Per student ratio	11 014.4	13 029.7	17 643.3
Salaries	126 987.9	166 542	23 533.0
% of total	43.0%	44.8%	45.7%
Social contribution	26 026.3	31 883.8	44 813.7
Current expenditure	55 670.3	56 588.7	80 048.7
Food	64 755.9	99 523	140 585
% of total	22.0%	26.8%	27.3%
Repair of buildings	8 466.8	14 833	11 607.9
Equipment	13 091.9	1 976	2 800
% of total	4.4%	0.5%	0.5%

Source: State VET Agency, at request of the review team, June 2009.

The theoretical per-student budget increased sharply over the period 2007-2009, by 60%. This calculation is the ratio of total central budget by total number of students financed by State resources. The figures on state-financed students are given in Figure 8.3. According to verbal information shared with the review team by the Planning and Financing Unit of SAPTE, per-capita financing varies according to the area of study, and fluctuates from KGS 12 000 to KGS 15 000.

SAPTE aims to promote diversified, or multi-channel financing, namely co-financing from enterprises. However, there are no policies or incentives to attract enterprises to invest in training, neither in initial nor in continuing training. A new regulation introduced in 2009 penalises also providers of education and training who are successful in extra-budgetary operations, and hence does not encourage efforts to plan and increase income generating income activities.

Teachers and staff in VET I

The teaching profession in vocational education faces the same challenges as elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan: ageing staff, low salaries and motivation, difficulty to recruit and retain good teachers and instructors.

Teaching and learning are organized differently in VET I schools than in VET II. The former includes learning in workshops and laboratories, whereas the latter tends to be more academic, with less time spent in practical learning environments. VET I has far fewer teachers with higher

education qualifications; for example, only half of VET I principals have higher education. Among teachers of practical vocational skills, there has recently been a significant increase in holders of higher education qualifications; their number doubled between 2002 and 2006. Interestingly, in VET I schools there are more male than female teachers, unlike other sub-sectors of education.

Pre-service training of VET I teachers

The Tokmok Industrial-Pedagogic Tekhnikum is the main pre-service teacher-training institute serving VET I. The college has the status of a VET II institution, and reports both to the MOES and to SAPTE. The college has relatively good and well-maintained academic and practical learning premises and equipment, and takes part in various initiatives to improve VET I pedagogy and innovation. This college benefited from a long-term co-operation with *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (German Technical Co-operation – GTZ), and has retained most of the assets and knowledge of that experience – for example, it has a modular curriculum.

One of the key issues in teacher training policy in Kyrgyzstan is the concern about effectiveness, or how to ensure that public spending on teacher training benefits the schools. To ensure that the majority of its graduates will agree to teach in their communities, Tokmok Tekhnikum tries to motivate student-teachers from various regions/villages to return there to teach. The review team was told that this approach is working: although not all graduates stay in the teaching profession, a substantial number of them do, especially those who come from rural areas even though salaries and career prospects are unfavourable.

In-service training of VET I teachers

In the period 2006-2008, various in-service teachers training activities were organised, but the coverage remains low: in 2006 it included only 192 teachers and in 2007, participation was even lower at 104 teachers, although in 2008 the figure almost doubled to 273 persons. The majority of staff trained in 2008 were educators, managers and, particularly, instructors oin the areas of construction, farming and ICT studies.

Graduations by professional areas

Graduates of VET I programmes have maintained a stable figure of approximately 20 thousand persons per year. Table 8.8 shows the study areas with larger number of graduates. Unlike the students choices in VET II, in VET I there is a relative balance across a range of areas of study, and only

welding and the operation of sewing equipment show some predominance that is not substantial. A few new areas emerged in the statistics for the year 2006, namely; office managers, housekeepers (domestic work), hospitality and operators in hotel and restaurant business. The demand for human resources in other professions was disrupted in 2005 and 2006, for example in a number of narrow occupations in agriculture and construction.

Table 8.8. **VET I – graduates by areas of study**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Computer operators	224	213	181	318	320
Electricians	989	1 034	535	1 342	1 104
Metal workers	818	805	803	835	660
Lathe operators	251	255	260	266	302
Power and gas welders	1 062	998	1 181	1 462	1 871
Sewing equipment operators	1 624	1 526	1 735	2 049	2 168
Tailors	1 403	1 222	1 180	1 319	1 323
National souvenirs and handicraft makers	365	363	367	218	302
Tractor drivers	327	277	264	325	342
Car drivers	1 189	1318	1 255	1 247	1 373
Automobile repair workers	335	371	497	511	530
Joiners, carpenters	377	392	493	487	574
Plasterers	163	174	197	146	112
Waiters, bartenders, barmen	365	282	376	343	348
Pastry cooks	627	626	772	668	510
Cooks	686	582	507	699	666
Hairdressers (men, women)	620	426	645	556	727
Secretary-assistants	349	199	171	287	304
Book keepers	820	703	237	696	477
Total selected areas (table)	12 594	11 766	11 656	13 774	14 013
TOTAL graduates	20 099	18 764	19 379	20 617	20 711

Source: NSC, 2008a, p. 10.

Future directions for VET 1

Adapting education and training to such a varied range of needs and expectations requires strategy, client orientation, flexible training services and teachers, but also social responsibility. VET in Kyrgyzstan's transition economy needs to branch out, as each user category wants a specific training product or approach. Can the traditional inward-looking VET system cope with this challenge?

If potential demand from varied groups of users is so wide, the second question is whether the country can afford to substantially *decrease* its existing VET capacity, and focus investments and technical assistance on a small group of "strong" VET schools – as is being recommended by some important donor organisations. What criteria will guide such options? Can the *social* responsibility of VET be ignored? In the view of the review team, the key for efficiency in the VET sector is better management, improved responses to labour market signals, and better quality of outcomes and services across the VET system. *Economic competitiveness should go together with equity and with social inclusion – these are the big objectives of VET.*

Secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET II)

VET II: schools and students

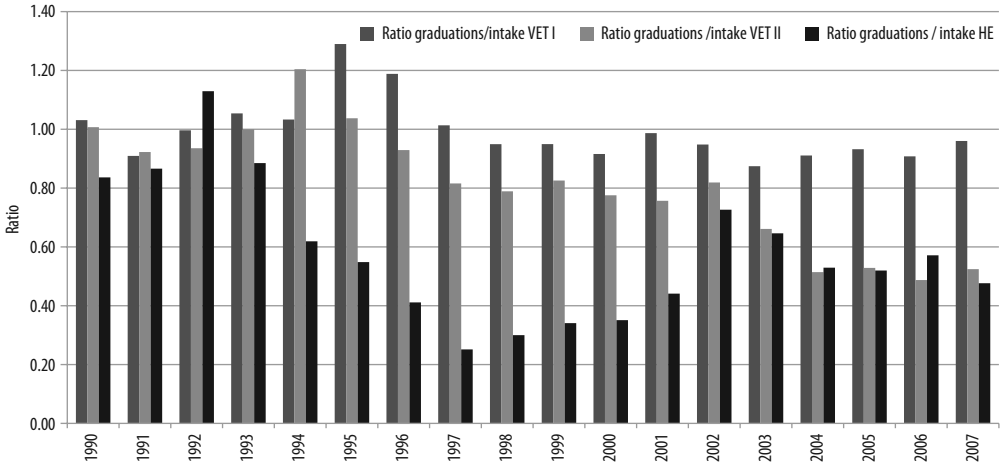
Secondary VET schools substantially increased their number of students in the period 2003-2008, particularly in the academic year 2006/07 when growth reached 20% year-on-year. A curious feature is the discrepancy between admissions and total number of students, which are much higher than the number of graduations (see Figure 8.2).

This growth of student intake in VET II is remarkable, considering that only a minority of places are financed by the public budget, which means that most students are fee-paying. However, the tuition in secondary professional education is significantly lower than tuition in higher education. This factor, together with the expectation that VET II offers access to accelerated higher education programmes, may indeed make VET II attractive for some students.

As seen in Figure 8.2, graduations from VET II declined in 2003-2005, and again in 2006/07. Against a background of increasing student intake, the review team has no explanation for this volatility in the number of graduates, which might be equally due to students' performance, drop-out or other reasons. One possible reason could be failed students' expectations regarding future transition to higher education. This observation was compared with similar results for the other two levels of professional education, seeking for possible commonalities.

Analysis of historical data for the period 1990-2007 shows a similar decline of the ratio number of graduates / student intake in higher education. Figure 8.5 depicts the behaviour of this ratio in the three levels of professional education: initial (VET I), secondary (VET II) and higher education. Only VET I shows a less significant decline and the ratio tends to stabilise at over 0.9 in the last four years of the series. However, VET II shows a steep fall of the ratio since 2003, to levels approximately 0.5. In higher education this decline started much earlier, in 1994, and tends to levels around 0.5 in the last four years, which is certainly better than the 0.25 – 0.3 ratio reached in 1997/98.

Figure 8.5. **Graduations vs. intake in the three levels of professional education, 1990-2007**



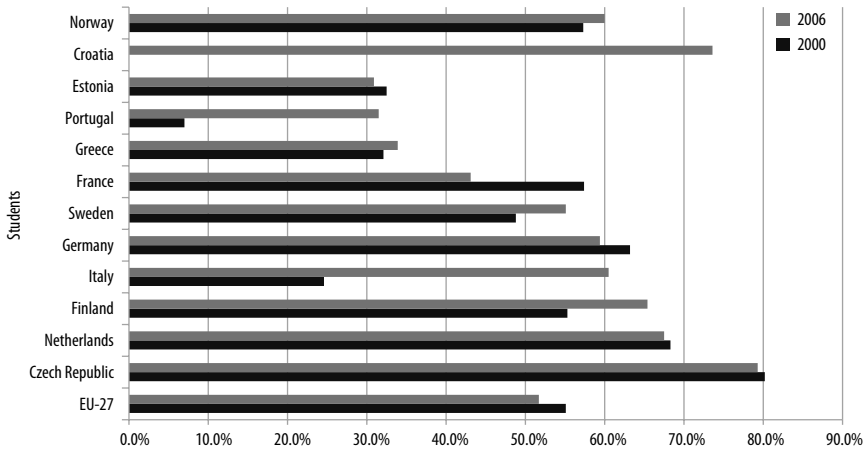
Source: http://www.stat.kg/rus/part/obr.htm, tables 5.03.00.11 and 5.03.00.14. Graph: review team.

Who is being served by VET II?

Table 8.5 seeks to estimate the coverage by VET II of students in Kyrgyzstan who have left school at basic education level (*i.e.* the difference between total graduates from basic and from secondary education). Assuming that 70% of all those admitted to VET II enter after basic school, then this intake corresponds to a maximum share of 44% of this group, but on average to around 35% in the indicated period. This is only a theoretical estimate, but it confirms the review team's assumption that there remains a large share (between 32% and 53%) of leavers of basic school who are out of formal education – *i.e.* VET I *and* VET II; and obviously also out of secondary general education.

An overview of students in VET in countries of the European Union, plus Norway and Croatia shows that the share of VET students (as percent of all ISCED 3 students) in Europe is significantly higher than in Kyrgyzstan. The situation varies across countries, but the share of students in vocational programmes at ISCED level 3 (as % of all ISCED 3 students) is significant at more than 50% in 2006. The evolution of this share has been different, as the 13 countries featured in Fig. 8.6 show a considerable increase (Italy, Malta, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Portugal), while some others (France, Lithuania, Poland, the United Kingdom) reduced their share of students in VET programmes by more than 20% during the period 2000-2006. Vocational programmes are predominant at ISCED level 4, where over 90% of full-time equivalent students follow vocational programmes. As for pre-vocational and vocational programmes at ISCED level 2, the share of such students is very low or non-existent in most EU Member States.

Figure 8.6. **Students in vocational programmes at ISCED level 3 as % of all ISCED 3 students**



Source: Commission of the European Communities, Commission staff working document," Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training, indicators and benchmarks 2008", p 56.

Financing of VET II

In VET II the share of study places financed by the State budget has declined from 50% (2002/03) down to 33% (2007/08) (Table 8.9). Although this distribution of state-financed *vs*. privately-financed study places in VET II is still far from the picture in the Kyrgyz Republic's higher education system, which is largely predominated by students' fees, the trend could go in a similar direction.

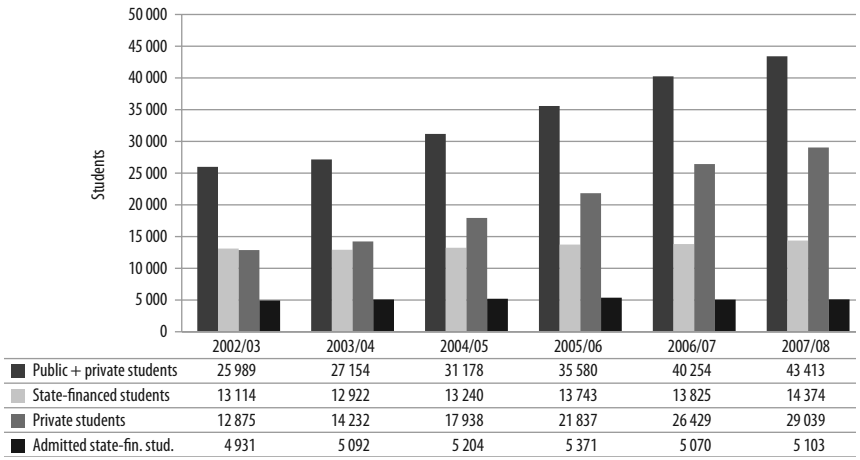
One immediate conclusion is: demand for education and training for youth justifies the growth of private household expenditure/investment in education. In the view of the review team, this should prompt policy makers to create the conditions to build up the quality and relevance of the VET II system.

Table 8.9. **VET II – State vs. private financing of students**

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Public + private financed students	25 989	27 154	31 178	35 580	40 254	43 413
Financed by state budget						
Current students	13 114	12 922	13 240	13 743	13 825	14 374
Admitted	4 931	5 092	5 204	5 371	5 070	5 103
Graduates	4 611	3 861	3 534	3 683	3 363	3 341
% of total students	50.5%	47.6%	42.5%	38.6%	34.3%	33.1%
Fee paying students						
Current students	12 875	14 232	17 938	21 837	26 429	29 039

Source: NSC, 2008a, pg 11.

Figure 8.7. **VET II: students by source of financing (public budget and private fees)**



Source: NSC, 2008a, pg 116.

Table 8.10. **VET II – revenues from private fees (KGS thousands)**

	2007 (actual)	2008 (final)	2009 (projected)	Change 2009-2007 (%)
Total revenues	31 128.6	47 447.1	49 201.7	58.1%
Contract studies (students' fees)	29 883.5	45 549.3	47 233.6	58.1%
Rent	55.6	237.2	246.1	342.6%
Other	1 089.5	1 660.6	1 722.0	58.1%

Source: MOES, Summary plan of special resources for 2009 of secondary professional education schools, provided by MOES at review team's request, June 2009.

Revenues from student fees are projected to grow substantially in two years (by 58%), which is mostly due to the substantial growth in the total number of students. In fact, the average per student revenue (which should approximate the average tuition fee) is relatively low: slightly over KGS 1 500 (EUR 27) in 2009.

A tax of 20% on the extra-budgetary revenues of all educational institutions was established in 2009. During the review team's mission in April 2009, intensive negotiations in Parliament and within the government were taking place to cancel this new tax, but the current tight public finance does not offer a favourable context to withdraw such a source of additional budget revenue.

Teachers in VET II schools

The number of teachers decreased by 9% in 2007/08, compared with 2002/03. But this is irrelevant given the wide fluctuations during the period, with large drops in 2003/04 and 2004/05. This occurred against a background of rapidly growing enrolment, hence the student/teacher ratio almost doubled in 2007/08 (12.7), compared to 2002/03 (7).

Table 8.11. **VET II teachers**

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Total	**3 714**	**3 019**	**2 984**	**3 273**	**3 680**	**3410**
With higher education	3 499	2 800	2 755	3 038	3 502	3253
Of whom:						
Full-time teachers	2 782	2 250	2 172	2 465	2 672	2426
Full-time with higher education	2 643	2 096	2 008	2 301	2 550	2311
Part-time and combining jobs	932	769	812	808	1 008	984

Source: NSC, 2008a, pg. 115.

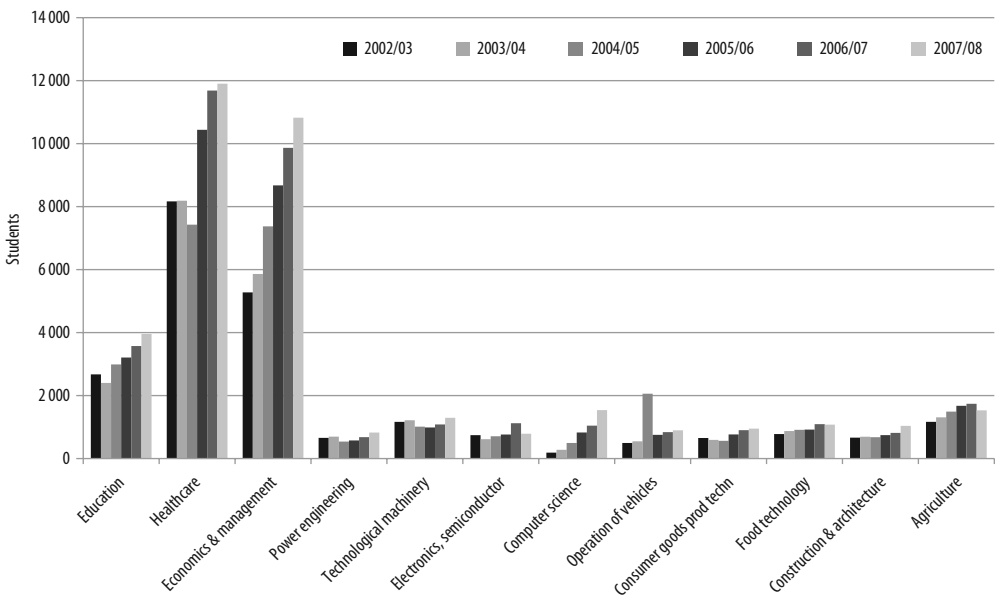
Approximately 71% of VET II teachers were full-time in 2007/08, slightly down by 4% from 2002/03. This may indicate a trend towards greater flexibility in contractual arrangements, and increased teacher mobility. Financial data from MOES show a trend towards savings in the wage bill of teachers in VET II, as projected for 2009, compared with 2008. More than 95% of all teachers have higher education, which shows that the sector has substantial potential.

Graduates of VET II and their specialisations

Analysis of students' study choices in VET II shows a strong predominance of three areas: education, economics and management, and – as the top priority – healthcare. Figure 8.8 is self-explanatory. Growth trends are clear in healthcare, but particularly in economics and management. Education shows low growth, which may reflect the low attractiveness of the career.

Among the remaining areas of study, the numbers of students seem to be better balanced. Areas of strong growth are: computer science (by approximately 10 times during the period), construction and architecture (approximately 40% growth), operation of vehicles (80% increase), and consumer goods production technologies. In agriculture, the sector providing revenues

Figure 8.8. **Student specialisations in VET II**



Source: NSC, 2008a, pp. 118-119.

to over a third of Kyrgyz households, there is relatively limited interest from students. Kyrgyzstan is a producer of hydro-power and an exporter of electricity, so that another career that (at least theoretically) could attract greater student interest is power engineering.

Labour market outcomes

Summary information on labour market indicators in relation to educational attainment

The employment rate was close to 60% between 2005 and 2008, but the breakdown by gender shows substantial differential – 70.9% for men, and only 49.7% for women (2008).

The unemployment rate floated between 8.1% (2005) and 8.2% in 2008, and despite the crisis this indicator shows no increase in 2008. Unemployment rates are higher in rural areas (9.8% against 7.3% in urban areas), and according to the preliminary figures for 2008 released by NSC, women are more affected (9.4% unemployment rate, against 7.3% for men),.

The largest employer in Kyrgyzstan is by far the agriculture sector, which retained, in 2006, over 36% of the employed population. Retail trade and repair followed with approximately 15%, and construction with less than 9%. Manufacturing employs approximately 8.5%, transport 5.7%. Employment in education exceeds 7%.

In 2007 the share of total employment in agriculture fell to 34%, while the share of construction grew to over 9.5%. Net employment growth was registered in the following sectors (2007): manufacturing, production and distribution of gas energy and water, construction, trade and repair, hotels and restaurants, transport and communication, education and public administration.

Another significant feature of the labour market is the very large share of informal employment. According to NSC, the share of informal employment in total employment reached approximately 70% (69.1% in 2005 – 70.4% in 2007). The size of informal employment was much larger in rural zones, in a proportion of 2.8 to 1. Another fact worth mentioning is the continuous growth of the number of employed in the informal sector. Finally, the majority of those employed in the informal labour market declared having this activity as sole employment (over 96% of total of informally employed) (NSC, 2008b, pp. 68-70).

Analysis of the educational attainment of the employed population shows that informal employment has a predominance of people with secondary education and in general, a lower educational attainment, comparatively with the

picture of total employment. Approximately 65% of the population in informal employment have general education (secondary and basic), a consistent trend in 2005-2007. The share of employed with this level of education in total employment is lower – approximately 48%. The share of employed with higher education is much lower in informal employment (from 7.9% in 2005 to 8.8% in 2007) than in total employment (17% to 17.7% in the same period, as presented below).

In 2007, 17.7% of the employed population had higher education, 13.7% had secondary VET, 9.9% had initial VET and 48% secondary education. The largest share of employed with higher education were absorbed in education and public administration (42% of total employed with this level of education). The next largest employer of people with higher education is trade and repair services (14.7%) and manufacturing (8%).

Labour market indicators by levels of education

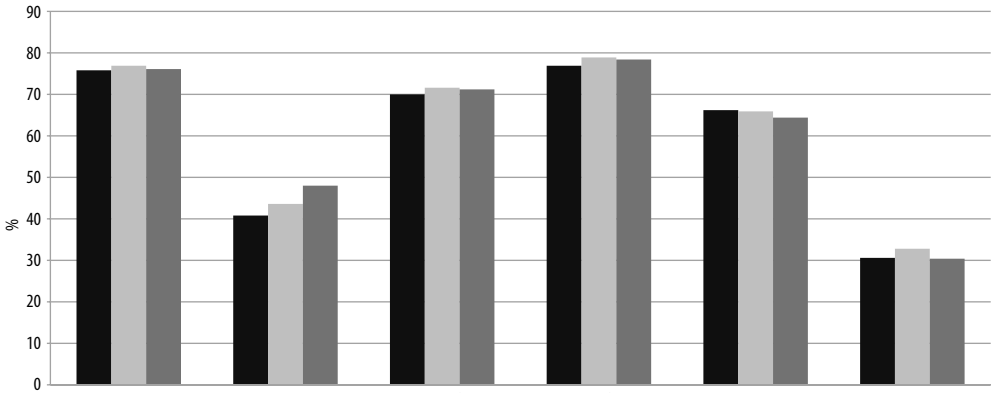
The review team analysed the labour market status of the labour force by educational attainment levels, using the figures of integrated sample household budget surveys and labour force published by the NSC and listed in the bibliography. The used concepts – employed, unemployed, active and inactive population – are compliant with the framework of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Data on unemployment are not based on registered unemployed, but on household surveys.

Table 8.12. **Labour market indicators by levels of education: rates of employment and unemployment (%)**

	2005		2006		2007	
Rates	Employment	Unemployment	Employment	Unemployment	Employment	Unemployment
Higher education	75.8	6.7	76.9	4.9	76.1	6.3
Incomplete higher education	40.8	12.1	43.6	16.3	48.0	8.1
Secondary professional education	70.0	7.1	71.6	6.3	71.2	6.3
Primary professional education	76.9	7.5	78.9	7.5	78.4	6.7
Secondary education	66.2	8.2	65.9	9	64.4	8.7
Basic education	30.6	15.9	32.8	12.7	30.4	13.7
Primary basic / none	17.1	6.3	16.9	9.5	16.6	11.8
Total	59.5	8.1	60.1	8.3	59.8	8.2

Source: NSC, 2008b.

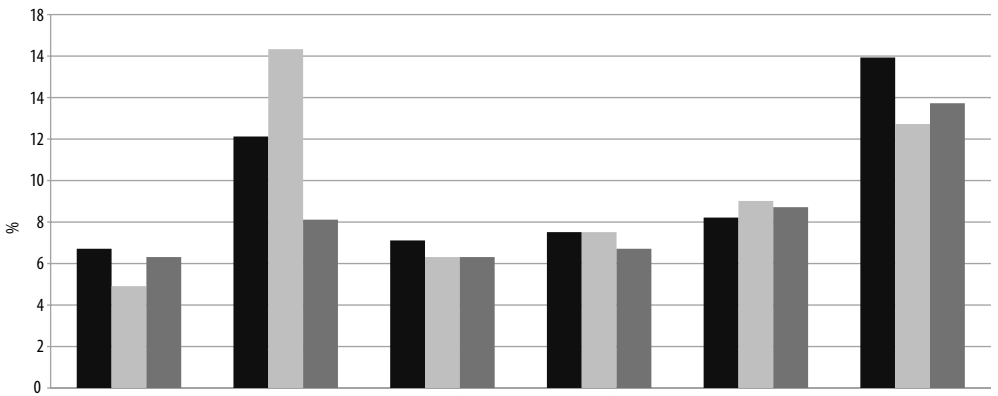
Figure 8.9. **Employment rates by levels of education, 2005-2007**



2005	75.8	40.8	70.0	76.9	66.2	30.6
2006	76.9	43.6	71.6	78.9	65.9	32.8
2007	76.1	48.0	71.2	78.4	64.4	30.4

Source: NSC, 2008b.

Figure 8.10. **Unemployment rates by levels of education**



2005	6.7	12.1	7.1	7.5	8.2	15.9
2006	4.9	16.3	6.3	7.5	9	12.7
2007	6.3	8.1	6.3	6.7	8.7	13.7

Source: NSC, 2008b.

The population with initial VET qualification has the highest employment rates, followed by those with complete higher education. The employment rate of the population with lower educational attainment (basic and primary education) is extremely low and clearly raises a challenge for designing better adult training policies and programmes.

The highest unemployment rates are registered among active population with lower educational attainment (basic and primary), as well as with secondary education. This fact is coherent with the analysis in Tables 8.13 and 8.14, which shows continuous excess supply of the workforce with this level of education.

Table 8.13. **Distribution of population over 15 years age by educational attainment level (shares, %) and estimated excess supply, 2006**

	In total population	Active population	Unemployed	Employed	Excess supply
Higher education	13.2	16.3	9.6	16.9	-7.3
Incomplete higher education	2.9	2.3	4.6	2.1	2.5
Secondary professional education	11.6	13.5	10.3	13.8	-3.5
Primary professional education	7.8	10.2	9.3	10.3	-1
Secondary education	43.7	48.3	52.8	47.9	4.9
Basic education	11.9	6.8	10.4	6.5	3.9
Primary basic / none	8.0	2.4	2.7	2.4	0.3

Source: Calculations of the review team based on NSC (2008b).

Table 8.14. **Distribution of population over 15 years of age by educational attainment level (shares) and estimated excess supply, 2007**

	In total population	Active population	Unemployed	Employed	Excess supply
Higher education		17.3	13.4	17.7	-4.3
Incomplete higher education		2.4	2.4	2.4	0
Secondary professional education		13.5	10.4	13.7	-3.3
Primary professional education		9.7	8.0	9.9	-1.9
Secondary education		48.3	51.7	48	3.7
Basic education		6.3	10.6	5.9	4.7
Primary basic / none			3.5	2.4	1.1

Source: Calculations of the review team based on NSC (2008b).

Supply of labour with different education levels

Using a simple methodology proposed by Bartlett in 2006, the distribution of educational attainment across employment and unemployment in Kyrgyzstan can be compared using the same source of data (Bartlett, 2006). The rough indicator of *excess supply of persons of different education levels* is derived by subtracting the *share* of persons in employment in each category from the *share* of persons unemployed in the same education attainment category. Tables 8.13 and 8.14 show the distribution of the population over 15 years by levels of educational attainment, and the estimated excess supply in 2006 and in 2007, whereby the positive figures indicate excess supply.

Labour force with higher education, with secondary and initial VET attainment is in demand and supply can further grow. But labour force with secondary and basic education, on the other hand, is clearly in excess supply.

Urban-rural distribution of skills (levels of education)

Analysing the rural-urban distribution of the labour force by labour market status and levels of educational attainment, one can see that in rural areas secondary diplomas predominate, with 49.2% of the working age population having secondary education. This level of education is also largely predominant among the active population (55.7%), and the employed population (55.2%). And 62.3% of the unemployed are also holders of secondary education diplomas.

In urban areas, the distribution of education levels by labour market status shows a much less visible predominance of holders of secondary education diplomas (35.4% of the active population, 34.5% of the employed and a lion's share of the unemployed: 42.4%). In urban areas, holders of higher education represent 27.1% of the active population, and 28.7% of the employed, and only 13.9% of the unemployed.

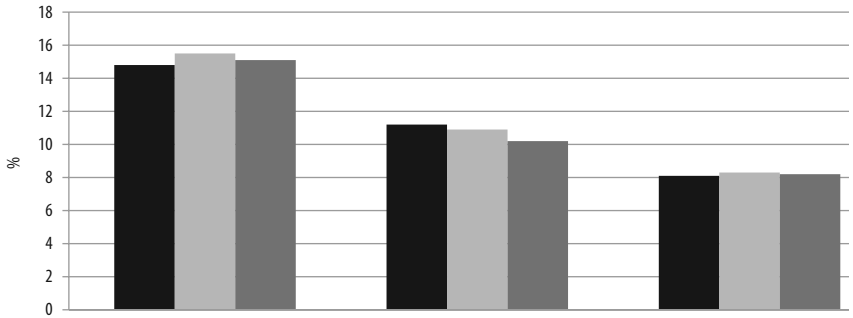
In urban and rural areas, holders of initial VET diplomas perform similarly in the labour market: they represent 8.5% of the total over 15 years age population (7.4% in rural areas), and 11.1% of the active population (9.7% in rural areas); but they have a share of 11.2% of the employed and 10.6% of the unemployed (respectively 9.8% and 8.1% in rural areas).

VET II population represents 14.7% of the population over 15 years in urban areas (9.7% in rural), but a large share in the inactive population in urban areas (10.8%). The percentage of this level of education amongst the unemployed is relatively high in urban areas as well: 14.7%.

Youth unemployment

The entry of young people in the labour market is not easy, as visible in the higher-than country average unemployment rates for younger age groups. However Kyrgyzstan displays better indicators of youth unemployment than many other transition economies (Figure 8.11).

Figure 8.11. **Youth unemployment rate**



Note: Unemployment rate is computed as the ratio between the numbers of unemployed in the active population (total, or within same age group or within same educational attainment level).

Source: NSC, 2008b.

In Kyrgyzstan the ratio of the unemployment rate of age group 15-19 to the country average unemployment rate is 1.84, while in Azerbaijan this figure reaches 2.35 and in Georgia – 2.09. The unemployment rate of the age group 20-29 was 10.2% in 2007, against an average rate of 8.2%. In general, Kyrgyzstan displays reasonable unemployment rates over time, in the range of 8 to 8.3% (2005-2007). Compared with the Caucasus countries, Moldova and the Western Balkans, these figures are less challenging.

Issues in Vocational Education and Training

VET at the crossroads

There is a lively debate in Kyrgyzstan about the role and relevance of VET in the education system, and in the country's overall socio-economic development. Television programmes, donors' events, surveys of employers' satisfaction and the emergence of new projects funded by different international partners all come to give external observers the impression that there are many new developments, both at policy level and in the schools.

The review team's main impression, based on many documents and interviews, is that VET is at the crossroads. Deciding on the proper direction and the right trade-offs will require strategic judgment, but under the pressure of economic, financial and social difficulties, such decisions are hard to make.

Changes are already happening in the qualifications system. New diplomas, new designations of professions, new assessment and certification methods, and new competence-based curricula are no longer in line with the established legal framework. To understand the current qualification system, it is not enough to know the formal rules; it is also necessary to understand what is being *piloted* and *innovated* by expert groups, schools, and sector associations. Choices have to be made, between what is legally prescribed and what is innovative and creative but may need a more flexible approach.

A key question is, should VET I continue to develop integrated education and training programmes that provide a route to further study? Or should VET I gradually abandon the integrated approach, and focus on practical, technical training? What are the benefits and pitfalls, especially for youngsters leaving basic education at the age of 15? How can Kyrgyzstan improve its integrated system of secondary and vocational education, while also being responsive to employers' needs?

Innovation in VET schools is easier at "the margins of the system" – *i.e.* non-standard training programmes for adults of various categories, as this part of the VET school portfolio is less (or not at all) subject to standards imposed by the Law, and can experiment with new curricula. For VET managers, the question is how they can "fertilise" the standard programmes with these innovations while remaining within the bounds of the state standards.

For donors, the question is whether they should direct their relatively short-term projects towards assisting the main sector authorities, or assist directly the more manoeuvrable and innovative VET schools, where they could test various innovations, construct new curricula; train specific social groups and strengthen the capacity of VET school staff, rather than the costly "model" centres for modern VET that are, in some cases, supported but not replicated in the system. In this context, each stakeholder has a different

agenda: VET system officials, employers, students, teachers, and local governments seeking to satisfy their constituencies and create appropriate training for local farmers and small businesses so that they can help raise productivity, household earnings and the region's wealth.

What is missing here are links and connections. Or, in the words of one national specialist: "There are too many new ideas and new developments going on in VET in Kyrgyzstan. What we need now is to evaluate and consolidate, and analyse the bottom line. Otherwise, all efforts to innovate are wasted, as they do not really serve systemic development".

There are, however, ways to improve communication and reduce waste and inefficiency. For example:

- A functioning platform where good practice, innovation, ideas, resources, and methods are shared, analysed, and contribute to the development of all VET schools. The years of transition have seen the development of important and appropriate innovation in VET, often fuelled by international partnerships. But a substantial share of these innovations are lost because they are not shared, not disseminated, and often also not endorsed by the bodies that have the authority to approve curriculum, textbooks, and teaching methods. In Kyrgyzstan's context of scarce resources and urgent need to improve the system and its building blocks, such waste is simply not affordable.
- A structured observatory, involving State and private players, within inter-sector logic, and in close communication with the many donors that shape most of the innovations in VET. Such an observatory could analyse and evaluate programmes, and review policies accordingly.
- A strong information, guidance and communication tool on VET for all users, based on new technologies, but also adapted to local rural contexts, as well as to regions and groups deprived of modern communications. The tool would serve to inform potential students and learners, parents, teachers and managers, but also employers. It will help point out the the strengths and weaknesses of the system, the performance of VET schools against clear indicators, the various study pathways and training on offer, the professional profiles and curriculum information for students' guidance. In other words, the tool would be a nation-wideportal into VET.
- A clear recognition that VET is a unified system, even if diversified in forms of training (formal, non-formal), institutional setting (initial, secondary), and reporting hierarchy. *What separates is not the substance, but the form*. This can be resolved by adopting a common agreement on areas of study, levels of qualification, assessment

rules, quality assurance tools and flexible links with the education continuum. For this is the *substance* of a good VET service, and the population and the country's economy are entitled to it. For students it doesn't make a difference whether their VET school reports to MOES or to SAPTE; and employers do not want to know whether the curriculum had 20 or 30 subjects. They do, however, all care about the final outcome of the student's effort, the investment of parents, and about the ability, autonomy, responsibility and reliability a young person demonstrates at work.

Policy framework

Like other CIS countries, Kyrgyzstan is fond of formulating laws and regulations. This is, of course, an excellent premise for sustained development and the rule of law – but sometimes it is used to maintain the *status quo.* One policy-maker said: "VET schools transformed into Centres for professional development? Sounds good, but the Law does not mention that kind of entity, so it is impossible."

Legal foundations

The VET sector policy framework is based on a number of legal acts and strategic documents. First of all, the Law on initial vocational education ("VET Law") was approved in 1999, but amended in 2008, reflecting adjustments in a number of areas, such as: definition of initial vocational education, citizens' rights to VET guaranteed by the State, promoters and shareholders of VET schools, qualification documents, types of VET schools, licensing and accreditation of VET schools, teachers of VET schools, financing of VET schools. The Law refers to "initial vocational education", whereas the Regulation (Charter) of SAPTE (August 2008) refers to "professional-technical education". The latter might express a broader concept of VET.

As noted earlier in this Chapter, the VET Law defines initial vocational education as "preparation, enhancement of qualification and retraining of workers / employers of qualified labour (…), on the basis of basic and general education. When necessary, training for a professional qualification is organised also for people without basic education". The Law guarantees the access of all citizens to initial VET, by providing public funding to VET schools (partial or total), scholarships and material support to students, assistance to organisation of systematic training in enterprises, assistance to establishment and operations of private VET schools. Citizens are entitled to one initial VET qualification funded by the public budget. This position of initial VET as *a public service* gives it a role in social inclusion, which goes beyond the mere formation of a qualified labour force.

According to the team's discussions with leading staff at SAPTE, the policy priority now is not only to train qualified workers/employees, but to train them *for employment*. This implies a need for better career guidance and counselling; however, the VET Law and the new strategy documents issued in 2008 and 2009 do not explicitly address this issue. Only the policy documents of the State Migration and Employment Committee (SMEC) include explicit programmes for guidance and counselling for various groups of users, including students of secondary education.

To ensure that VET capacity is maintained and strengthened, the VET Law stipulates: *(i)* public VET schools cannot be privatised or used for purposes other than VET; *(ii)* private promoters/investors/donors may establish private VET schools, under the condition of compliance to state standards of VET; and *(iii)* public funding from local resources, for training in non-public VET schools is possible if there is a respective state order.

Public VET schools are subject to a common standard regulation and charter. These schools are funded by the public budget, and are entitled to offer paid services to the market, and retain the property over these extra-budgetary revenues and other assets and intellectual rights formed as a result of the school activity.

Governance

As noted, the governance of VET I is based on a combination of a central sector policy and administration body (SAPTE) with three regional directorates[2] (Southern Directorate [Osh, Batken, Jalal-Abad], Northern Directorate [Naryn, Issyk-Kul] and Bishkek Directorate) in charge of methodological support to VET schools, and of providing updates on regional labour market needs. Social partnership is also mentioned in the VET Law, under Article 18 on tripartite co-ordinating commissions for VET. These commissions should be established at all levels: central, regional, city and local. The commissions operate on a voluntary basis and are expected to elaborate recommendations and proposals for public VET policy, on involvement of employers in VET, and introduction of modern and effective training approaches and forms. The co-ordinating commissions function according to a standard set of regulations that has been approved by the government.

This explicit mentioning of a structured social partnership model in the Law is highly positive, and if implemented, it could bring considerable benefits for co-ordinated development of the system, and clear interactions with the world of work, and businesses. However, the review team had no contact with or information about such commissions, and saw no sign of their operations. What the team did hear repeatedly (from the SAPTE leadership, from VET schools, and from Chambers of Commerce and Industry) were

comments about poor links of VET with employers. SAPTE now seeks to establish so-called regional platforms on VET, aiming to co-ordinate efforts of donors and social partners.

Quality assurance

Public and private VET schools are subject to common state standards, licensing and attestation/accreditation.[3] Licensing gives schools permission to exercise educational activities, whereas attestation reviews their educational programmes and their compliance with state educational standards, allowing the accredited school to issue state-recognised diplomas.

The central administrative body in charge of the VET system (SAPTE, since 2007) exercises the quality control of VET. The same body controls the actual compliance with the conditions stipulated in the license, which may be withdrawn by the Inspectorate of MOES according to the Law on Licensing (Chapter 25, amended in 2004 and 2007), in case of breach of these conditions by the VET school.

Licensing of initial VET schools is the prerogative of the relevant Inspectorate in MOES, as are licenses for any other educational establishments as required by law. Three elements are essential in the licensing process: *(i)* infrastructure and equipment; *(ii)* teachers; *(iii)* information basis (textbooks, methodical material, manuals).

Licenses state the areas of study in which the VET school may operate and issue state diplomas and certificates. The licensed school is obliged to remain within the terms of the license, as far as education and training offer as well as maximum number of students are concerned.

SAPTE has a department of Inspection and Accreditation, with a staff of five that exercises control over the processes of school accreditation. The latter is a relatively new concept and was introduced by the VET Law in 2008, although the 2004 regulation on attestation of initial VET schools already referred to accreditation as the final outcome (award) of the attestation process.

According to this regulation of 2004, VET I schools undergo attestation every five years, and newly established schools – in the first year after graduating their first students. Attestation is defined as: "…a type of state control over the effectiveness of VET schools activity, and is based on the comparison with requirements (state standards) of the results of the activity of the VET school undergoing attestation". Hence, the benchmarks are the state standards of initial VET. Besides control, alignment with state standards and review of the school's learning conditions, attestation aims to help the school correct any shortcomings, and supports creative initiatives.

Is accreditation important and necessary? The accreditation document specifies the status of the VET school (*lyceum*, school) and offers a number of benefits such as: *(i)* the right to issue initial VET diplomas recognised by the State; *(ii)* curricular autonomy for the accredited school; *(iii)* career progression for the staff (higher categories); and *(iv)* preferential participation in state and international programmes. In many countries, accreditation entitles private VET schools to receive public financing, thereby largely determining their competitive position in the market. In Kyrgyzstan, public financing goes mainly (or totally) to public VET schools.

SAPTE's department of inspection and accreditation carries out random checks on admissions and attendance. This kind of inspection is done in combination with thematic or other verification visits to VET schools, focussed on student performance. Data on admissions is collected in July-September and consolidated in October for statistical reporting.

In VET II, both licensing and attestation (accreditation) are conducted by the Inspectorate of MOES, once every five years. Accredited colleges are entitled to issue diplomas recognised by the State.

The State Inspectorate for Licensing and Accreditation of the MOES recognises that the attestation process is weak, and expressed the hope that MOES would now be willing to introduce independent external accreditation. MOES is working on this with international organisations, such as USAID and GTZ. Introduction of autonomous accreditation would then separate licensing (which is a state function) from accreditation.

VET schools do not use performance indicators, but they do have objectives, and are rewarded for performance against these objectives. Self-assessment is also not used, but VET schools do have a regulation on internal control. This regulation is used also for external inspections. The concept and practice of school self-evaluation, with analysis and dissemination of summarised results, are yet to be developed.

Curriculum

The VET Law stipulates four main formats for VET, ranging from integrated VET for basic education (3 years minimum) to professional courses lasting up to one year. The Law allows a shorter course if a student is able to acquire the professional skills more rapidly. Interestingly, the Law also allows programmes geared towards partial qualifications. Students can work if they have a partial qualification, adding more skills and knowledge along the way.

Curricula for initial VET are developed by SAPTE; however, for the secondary education component of the curriculum MOES standards must be observed. To date, SAPTE has developed new modular curricula for 17

professional areas adapted to short-term training (2-3 months), without a general education component. In 2008-2009 SAPTE was working with the ILO to consider the advantages of using ILO modules of "skills for employability", already prepared for 25 professional profiles. Other international organisations with long experience in introducing modular training are ready to adapt the ILO approach for Kyrgyzstan.

Books, materials and libraries

For VET I, the quality of books and materials is an issue, but their availability is perhaps a more pressing problem. The SAPTE Methods Department reports that textbook coverage reaches only 32% for the professional cycle and 60% for the general education cycle (MOES standards). Most of the textbooks are old, and no longer in line with modern approaches to learning.

One frequent observation during the review mission was that schools do not have a range of books and materials in addition to textbooks. Libraries do exist everywhere, but in most cases they are kept closed and students are certainly not encouraged to look around, read, or use the libraries for studying. Electronic libraries are very rare. A teacher of literature in a VET school reported that her only successful method to introduce students to literature is through videos and films that she shows in the classroom. Her library has a relatively good stock of Russian literature, but was also kept closed during the working hours of the school when it should be available to students and teachers.

In secondary VET, development and management of curriculum and textbooks is the task of the colleges. Based on general parameters given by MOES regarding such key aspects as number of study hours, colleges that are designated "*profile colleges"* develop curriculum and education plans. These profile colleges function as model or resource colleges in specific fields such as architecture, agriculture, humanities etc. MOES analyses and approves submitted curricula, which can then be disseminated to other colleges. Colleges and teams of teachers may initiate the development of new textbooks, although the MOES controls the final stages of review and approval, and gives its *imprimatur* to the best books.

Teacher evaluation

Two main regulations form the framework for the evaluation of teachers:

- Regulation on attestation of teachers, management and other staff of general education organisations (2008);
- Regulation on internal control of educational institutions of initial VET (not dated).

The regulation on internal control concerns exclusively the performance and skills of teachers of various categories and types of activity (teachers and instructors). Internal control is defined as: "purposeful, systematic and objective control of the work of teachers, one of the forms of leadership of the teaching community". The main objective of internal control is "a further development of the teaching-educational process, corrective measures, support to teachers capacity building – aiming to raise the quality of training and education of students in initial VET" (Articles 1.1 and 1.2). Internal control is exercised by the school director, assisted by the deputies in charge of teaching and methods; education and social work; professional training and economic activity; and senior teachers. Besides internal control, teachers also are subject to attestation.

Learner achievement in VET: PISA 2006 – a comparison

The comparison below is merely indicative, and should be read in the context of different sample sizes, and other conditions.

The Centre for Educational Attainment and Teaching Methods (CEATM), which implemented and reported on PISA 2006, provided the review team with data from PISA 2006 that show that the scores of participants from vocational *lyceum* (integrated VET I) were not, on average, worse than those of students from secondary schools. In mathematics, scores of vocational *lyceum* students were below those of secondary school (287.1 against 294.9), but in reading with understanding the situation was the reverse: 301.3 for vocational *lyceum* students, compared with 295 for those in secondary schools. Natural sciences also showed a slight advantage in favour of the vocational *lyceum:* 296.7 against 294.3.

Of course, these results need to be interpreted in the light of two factors: *(i)* the number of students from vocational *lyceum* participating in PISA was much lower than the number from general schools (14 to 3 985 in mathematics, 10 to 2 779 in reading with understanding, 17 to 5 174 in natural sciences); and *(ii)* 100% of the sample from vocational *lyceum* scored below 360 points, *i.e.* none exceeded the scores of the fourth group (300-360 points). This indicates less variation than among students of secondary schools. By contrast, general school students showed wide variations with a considerable share of low performers (5% in the lowest group for mathematics, 25% in the second group for reading with understanding, 11% in the second group for natural sciences). But they also had high performers (10% in the fifth group, for mathematics as well as for natural science; 11% for reading).

Variation of quality across the VET system

Interaction with donors, and new methods and training programmes based on international experience are the main drivers of change in VET schools. However, such projects and programmes are piloted in *selected* VET schools, or in *selected* regions/sectors, and run in parallel with mainstream standard VET programmes. This creates "islands" of innovation that are not connected to other islands or to the mainland, as public funding cannot afford the replication of such pilot schemes across the VET network. Only the "soft" innovations – particularly curricula and textbooks – are sometimes accepted, but not officially approved, and not suitable to be combined with standard curricula.

This is a serious source of variation in the quality of VET. The positive effects of this variation are the influence of good practice and the creation of precedent. The less positive effects are that many schools and students do not have a chance to benefit from these new approaches, and that learning outcomes will suffer by comparison.

Reforms

VET I had started a strategic reform programme (2008-2011), approved in 2008 to serve as an overarching sector development document. An Action Plan supports this programme, but its implementation depends on availability of financial and technical resources that are expected to be available in the framework of the new ADB project. The size of the ADB grant is USD 10 million, to be disbursed up to the end of 2011. The contribution of the government amounts to USD 3 million. About 70% of ADB financing is intended for infrastructure and equipment, 5% for textbooks, and the remainder for staff training, as well as for technical assistance. The project has 2.5 years to implement its complex Action Plan.

A critical element of the ADB project is the optimisation of the network of VET schools. The aim is to form a system with fewer but more effective and efficient schools which should be, able to be multi-profile and multi-level providers. The implementation approach of this objective is still under discussion, as SAPTE is careful about the possible negative effects of a large reduction of the number of VET schools for rural and distant regions: SAPTE is likewise conscious of the risks linked with the resistance that these measures may prompt in the VET community. Finally, the legal basis will require considerable amendments, another critical moment in the implementation path of these measures.

The Strategy for Consolidation and Modernisation of the VET system in Kyrgyzstan (2009-2011) is a parallel strategy that supports specifically the ADB project started mid-2009. This document was developed with international expertise. Both strategies share a number of objectives and activities. The strategic lines of both documents are schematically compared in Table 8.15.

Table 8.15. **Comparison of strategies for VET reform**

	Strategy of ADB project	SAPTE strategy (overarching)
1	Optimise the network of VET schools	Modernisation and consolidation of the VET system
2	Bring training quality in line with the requirements of professional competence	Formation of efficient VET financing system, economic relations
3	Raise economic independence of VET schools	Staff development
4	Promote participation of private organisations in implementing VET programmes	Development of social, and public-private partnership
5	Modernise organisational structure management structure	Social guarantees and modernisation of VET content (competence based learning)
6	Set up multi-level system of partnership	
7	Comprehensive plan for staff development for VET system (managers, teachers)	

Source: Review team.

Both strategies omit proposes a very important element: establishment of a sector monitoring system, based on agreed indicators at various levels, and a statistical system able to provide analysis and reports on the VET sector performance. The strategies are not explicit on the strategy review process, but one can assume that the ADB project has clear provisions regarding steering and monitoring implementation.

Institutional capacity and mandates

The VET system in Kyrgyzstan is regulated by two main bodies – the State Agency for Professional-Technical Education (SAPTE) and the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES).

1. State Agency for Professional-Technical Education: VET I

The formation of SAPTE in 2007 added significant institutional capacity and autonomy to revitalise VET I. The staff of the former Department under the Ministry of Labour moved to SAPTE, but it took another 18 months for the Charter and the organisational structure of the Agency to be approved (August 2008), delaying its authority to make decisions and start work.

SAPTE's Charter states that the purposes of the Agency are "implementation of the unified policy to supply the labour market with qualified labour force, based on the standards of initial VET; and satisfaction of the needs of the society in professional training, based on the interest and potentialities of citizens". In practical terms, SAPTE is in charge of: *(i)* implementation of VET sector policy; *(ii)* provision of

training services; *(iii)* regulatory functions; *(iv)* co-ordination, control and monitoring of programme implementation; and *(v)* assistance and support to development of the VET sector staff, and information for mass media. At the time of preparation of this report, the Agency has ministerial-level status; it reports to the Prime Minister, has its own budget, and has a staff of 56 including directors and *Collegium*.[4]

2. Ministry of Education and Science: VET II

The Department of Secondary and Higher Professional Education of MOES has only four staff to deal with all matters related to VET II. The Department is not in charge of licensing and attestation, which are managed and implemented by the State Inspectorate for Licensing and Accreditation under the MOES. Given the Department's limited human and technical resources, a number of key functions are shifted to the VET II schools themselves: curricula, education programmes, and even textbooks.

Qualifications system

At the time of this review, the VET qualification system was based on the following elements:

- General classifier of professions for workers, employees and tariff categories, 2 volumes, for all 3 levels of professional education. This document provides the basis for the list of professions of VET I. The classifier has a very detailed and narrow definition of professions;
- General classifier of occupations, 1998;
- List of professions for VET I, approved in 2003 (booklet published in 2006); and
- Standard duration of areas of study (professions) of VET II, 2003

One serious problem with these tightly defined lists of professions for VET is that they are not updated and revised as often as they should be. They therefore contain many descriptions of professions that are outdated.

In 2008 initial VET approved 17 new vocational standards, which combine modules and learning programmes for short-term training.

The Chamber of Commerce, in co-operation with some donors, is pilot-testing an independent certification of professional competences in a limited number of profiles, based on judgement of external to VET school entities (employers and experts). For now this independent certification concerns only short-term professional courses, and involves a few initial VET schools. One of the problems though faced by this endeavour remains the absence of modern professional standards and outcome based curricula.

Considerable debate, led by expert groups supported by international organisations, is taking place with respect to *qualifications*. For example, the European Training Foundation has played a key role in this area of VET policy, having started in the early 2000s with new conceptual and technical work on occupational standards, and continued since 2004 with a specific project dedicated to support national debate, capacity and methods on a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF was instrumental in engaging employers in the debate, and in building national capacity in relation to the European Qualifications Framework, learning outcomes, design of functional maps and occupational profiles.

Parallel efforts to reform the qualification system and improve learning outcomes include SAPTE's strategic programme for VET development (2008-2011); its first priority (modernisation and consolidation of the system) is the introduction of new approaches to training that meet the requirements of the NQF. The new ADB project also includes the development of "professional standards of competence" for the professions targeted by the project.

Adult education and training

Main issues

A growing population, a growing number of young adults with higher education, and a growing number of vulnerable youth dropping out of education require urgent new policy directions for Kyrgyzstan. Training for people with low or no qualifications also needs attention, as does the quality of higher education. While the number of higher education graduates may not have a decisive effect on the pace of economic growth, the existence of large numbers of unskilled people of working age *is* likely to have an effect, as new technologies require a skilled and adaptable work force.

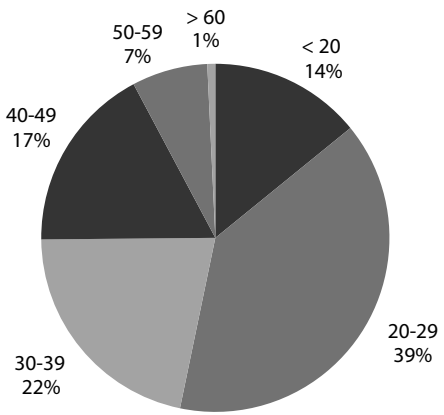
Another concern is access to the labour market for young school leavers. Unemployment rates are highest among young age groups (15-29 years). They represent only 37% of the active population, but over half of the unemployed. This clearly indicates the relative inefficiency of the transition into active life for thousands of young entrants, despite the fact that the majority have completed secondary and even tertiary education (see Figure 8.12).

In secondary VET and higher education – the two sub-systems where most of the labour force entrants come from – the technical fields of study have been gradually losing their share of students. This will affect the "skills mix" in Kyrgyzstan's labour force, with the balance shifting to areas such as law, management, health and education. Because job opportunities in these fields are still limited in the country's economy, many of these graduates will sooner or later need re-training or re-qualification.

Mobility across jobs and sectors also requires re-training. In Kyrgyzstan, the transition to a market economy led to a decline in state-owned enterprises and the loss of traditional jobs. Mobility in various forms and areas will remain a permanent challenge for youth and adults, and education and training policy will have to adapt accordingly.

Both education and active labour market policies are connected with lifelong learning. Although the dialogue is not always as productive as needed, a sound co-operation has now been established and formalised between two partners: VET-SAPTE, and employment agencies such as the State Migration and Employment Committee (SMEC). The MOES is less involved in this co-operation, as are the secondary VET II institutions that could, theoretically, deliver relevant training for the population groups targeted by Kyrgyzstan's national employment policy.

Figure 8.12. **Unemployed, distribution by age groups, 2007**



Source: NSC, 2008b.

The labour force

At present, the labour market in Kyrgyzstan has an excess supply of people over the age of 15 with general secondary and basic education, although the economy requires professional skills and qualifications of intermediate and higher level. Access to such skills and qualifications is possible via the formal education system, but also via non-formal education and training, as well as informal learning.

During the transition period, the previous system of adult education and training (also called "continuous education") declined substantially, and its

services were replaced by numerous non-state providers, often linked to donors or international organisations. New subject areas were introduced (management, human rights, local initiatives, project planning), new ways of teaching (small groups, trainers or facilitators instead of teachers) and new sources of funding (often directly linked with donor projects). Equally important were new ways of organising training, *e.g.* using interactive technologies and modular programmes. But only a few of these providers were sustainable, and even fewer were able to comply with official licensing criteria.

Rarely did these new ways of training engage with the state providers that form the network of formal education and training. Differences in education and training culture, and a certain mistrust still continue to hamper cross-fertilisation between the two. As a result, the state providers continue to offer most of the formal training, but are slow to adopt interactive methods, while non-state providers are more agile and innovative, but weak in systematic training for qualifications and employment. Nevertheless, lifelong education and training requires a wide variety of partnerships – partnerships that will create synergy, multiply resources and create much-needed synergies between formal and non-formal learning.

Law and policy

The Law and other education policy documents recognise the importance of lifelong learning, and adult education policy is based on the principle that education is the bridge between all elements of national and human development: poverty reduction, gender equality, and dissemination of democratic principles. (MOES, Analytical note on the status of the system of adult education in the Kyrgyz Republic and development prospects in the framework of the order of Government, p. 4).

Kyrgyzstan is signatory to international agreements related to adult education and training, and a participant in key international discussion forums. This has helped to draw attention to the importance of adult learning. For example, the International Forum on Education brought Kyrgyzstan into the Education for All (EFA) movement, and the country is now committed to its objectives. In the 2002 follow-up, the Government approved the EFA National Action Plan, which includes a section specifically dedicated to adult education. This action plan is reflected in a number of national development documents, such as the *National Strategy for Poverty Reduction 2003-2005*, the *Country Development Strategy 2007-2010*, and others. Kyrgyzstan also endorsed a number of other international declarations, including:

- The Hamburg Declaration on adult education, 1997;
- Agreements among CIS countries "On co-operation in the field of dissemination of knowledge and of adult education";

- The Decision "On development of the system of adult education in CIS", 2003; and
- The "Concept of Development of Adult Education in CIS", approved by the heads of all CIS governments in May 2006.

Kyrgyzstan is a leading member of the analytical Forum on Education of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Nationally, the Kyrgyz Association of Adult Education represents the interests of providers and lobbies for more effective policies in favour of the adult education agenda. Its associate members issue certificates recognised by the network of the Association.

However, according to SAPTE and MOES, innovative methods and curricula are not yet integrated into a coherent system that is accessible to all users. Many VET providers that offer courses for adults continue to use training methods that are not suited to these learners, do not offer the kind of active learning that they require, and do not motivate or encourage them. Sustained efforts are needed to build the capacity of State VET providers in appropriate adult education methods, and to disseminate good practice to all licensed providers.

Participation

More than 50 000 adults per year enrol in courses, formal or non-formal. In non-formal training, the most popular subjects are foreign languages, ICT, technical-professional skills, economics and finance, and dressmaking. (MOES, Analytical note on the status of the system of adult education in the Kyrgyz Republic and development prospects in the framework of the order of Government, pp. 9-10). However, since a large number of providers are not registered or licensed, estimates of users and provision remain incomplete.

Financing of adult education and training

For the same reason, it is not easy to determine the sources and scale of funding. In 2007, it was reported that *public* financing of the various subsectors of education was as follows:

- 7.5%: pre-school education;
- 64.2%: basic and secondary education;
- 11.4%: others; and
- 16.9%: education for youth and adults within the professional education system (initial, secondary and higher, with respectively: 7.6%, 3.4% and 5.9% of the total).

Yearly per-student spending by sub-sectors, as reported in 2007, was as follows:

- Basic and secondary school: KGS 4 126
- Initial VET: KGS 10 852
- Secondary VET *(tehnikum)*: KGS 11 849
- Higher education: KGS 12 569

(MOES, Analytical note on the status of the system of adult education in the Kyrgyz Republic and development prospects in the framework of the order of Government, p. 7)

Programmes of the State Migration and Employment Committee (SMEC)

SMEC is responsible for implementing the employment policy of the Kyrgyzstan Republic. It has been working in its current format, which includes both employment and migration, since 2005. The *Law on Employment Promotion* (adopted 2000, amended in 2002-2005) provides the legal basis for SMEC's work on issues of employment and social protection of the unemployed. SMEC prepares strategic documents and programmes (short and medium-term), for example the *"National Employment Policy of the Population of the Kyrgyz Republic, up to 2010"*.

Current thinking in SMEC is that active labour market policy and measures are a priority, and that passive measures will rapidly become a minor element of employment policy. The reasons for this change are the constraints on public finance, but also the need to be more effective. At the time of this review, SMEC was revising its main policy documents accordingly. Training and skills development will play a more prominent role, but this will also mean that the training providers that work with SMEC must modernise their approach and the courses they offer.

SMEC provision

SMEC itself does not provide training; it outsources training through tenders and agreements. SAPTE and its VET I schools are the most important provider for SMEC, in quantitative terms. However, a number of private providers and small centres that function within the premises of public VET schools are better prepared to offer tailored courses, flexibly organised for very small groups, and new training programmes oriented to new professional profiles; SMEC also co-operates with these.

Two-thirds of the registered unemployed are young people aged 16-35 years, many with professional education (higher, secondary and initial). To assist youth with career and study choice, SMEC provides guidance services. Due to lack of resources in the regional committees, these services are mostly concentrated in Bishkek, and thus have limited coverage.

SMEC financing

In 1991 the State Fund for Employment Promotion was established and, in 1993, it was integrated with the newly created Social Fund. From 2005, financing of active and passive labour market programmes is based on different sources such as the State budget, special funds, donors, sponsors, and others.

Active labour market measures include: training, micro-credits, public works and professional guidance. In 2007, 17.3% of the budget allocated for active labour market measures was spent on training of the unemployed. By comparison, public works received a 42.8% share, and micro-credit – 11.4% of this budget. A total of 5 150 unemployed were sent for training in 2007, against 19 932 persons involved in public works, and 1 548 beneficiaries of micro-credits for business projects.

SMEC's involvement in training for the unemployed

By 2008, the number of trainee unemployed persons served by SMEC had grown to more than 6 200, in a wide variety of professions (over 70 profiles). The highest number of trainees was concentrated in the professions of welder (650 persons), driver (530 persons), personal computing (450 persons), computer literacy (434 persons), hairdresser (415 persons), bookkeeper (550 persons), cook (235 persons), operator of sewing machines (470), secretaries (300), massage-cosmetics (150), veterinary services (132), tractor driver (105) and others. These professions have high rates of employment for those completing the training.

Table 8.16. **Training organised by SMEC**

Year	Sent for training (persons)	Trained (persons)	Employed trained persons	% employed
2006	5 085	4 880	3 883	80%
2007	5 150	4 563	3 685	81%
2008	6 238	6 202	4 765	77%

Source: SMEC, Information on activity of SMEC on training of unemployed, unpublished, 2009, pg. 4.

Table 8.16 provides an overview of the training programmes for unemployed people offered by SMEC. According to the figures, the effectiveness of the programme is high, with 77-80% of trainees finding employment after training. However, to better assess effectiveness, it would be important to know more about these jobs, their duration, and how long it took for trainees to find them.

Conclusions and recommendations

- What VET system is to be developed? In the studied context it is not redundant to recommend viewing VET as part of the education continuum for youth, as well as an important element for lifelong competence and professional development for security in employment, and for productivity. VET in its diversity is called to respond to personal and professional development needs of various users groups, and the recognition of this wider mandate and possibilities of VET as a system may represent additional leverage in the path of the reform.

  The key question, in the context of Kyrgyzstan's scarce resources, is what format of VET is the right basis for labour market as well as education policy? To focus on short skills training, or to offer diversified formats adapted to needs and potential of youth after compulsory education, as well as to youth after secondary and adults with varied training objectives? One that is closer to employment, or one that is closer to academic expectations? One that is well connected with apprenticeships, or one that is more school-based? One that is primarily financed by the State, or increasingly by fees and enterprises? Only serious analysis can resolve these issues, and probably the new system should combine a wide range of schemes and approaches.

  What should one learn in VET I programmes? Integrated general knowledge and professional skills? Professional skills and competences for specific occupations? Broad-based competences or sets of narrowly defined technical skills? Is broad-based competence building incompatible with specialised knowledge? Who should provide specialisation to fit the needs of enterprises and organisations? The review team considers that public VET I should focus on lifelong development of citizens.

  This means, firstly, that ongoing reforms should not transform VET I into a dead-end path for youth after compulsory education. Workers, employees, self-employed are all, first and foremost, citizens and individuals. The long duration of integrated VET I (secondary and professional) is increasingly criticised for its inefficiency and low appeal for youth, but the reform needs to improve curriculum and

organisation of provision rather than withdraw general knowledge and basic skills that are indispensable for professional competence, as well as for further progression in education and lifelong learning.

Box 8.1. **Open questions**

In the last quarter of 2009 the reformed structure of the Kyrgyz Government has given a response to one of the question marks underlined in this report: what will be the future position of SAPTE (and of initial VET) in the institutional setting of the country? Indeed, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Migration emerges with a reinforced mandate, as both SAPTE and SMEC were merged within this Ministry. The hope is that lessons learnt in the last three years will not permit a return to a poor leadership in the VET and employment sector by the Ministry of Labour.

One of the reforms announced by this reformed Ministry, but not yet known in detail, concerns one of the key questions discussed in this report: the quality of integration of general and professional education for lifelong learning for youth. While the team's recommendations underline the need for VET programmes that build on wide professional competencies and key skills to permit further personal and professional lifelong development, the announced reform points to exclusion of general education from VET curricula in initial VET schools. At the time of drafting of this report additional and comprehensive information on possible accompanying measures (such as reform of VET curriculum based on competencies) was not yet available. Hence the question remains, for now, open: will VET schools now cater only for training of adults of various age groups? Will these schools focus on short-term courses (up to 1 year) to train technical skills only? What will be the bridging education pathways considered for youth enrolled after compulsory education in VET schools, to allow these students a continuous education progression?

Introduction of modular learning, a credit system for vocational education, recognition and certification of learning and a national qualifications framework are measures that can support the objective to built vocational pathways that can be shorter, while ensuring individual accumulation of competences and transparent and flexible pathways for progression in education and professional development. Development of these policies will take time, and require substantial expertise and capacity. But currently the authorities tend to overlook these challenges.

- **What strategies for VET system development?** Kyrgyzstan has a good number of reform strategies and concepts in education and training: SAPTE strategy of 2008 (wider, national reference strategy), ADB

strategy of 2009 (to support the ADB project) and the draft concept for development of secondary VET (2009), amongst other valid and newly drafted strategic papers. Most of these documents have been drafted with limited consultation of key stakeholders outside closely related governmental circles, and these are only to a limited extent based on good comprehensive studies and analysis of sector trends, of problems and their causes, of scenarios and their possible effects. In other words it is not clear why this or the other option or package of solutions is preferred. To save scarce resources and time, it would be important to use methods for strategic planning and programming that would allow for objective adoption of the most feasible options for addressing the social and economic needsBriefly said, there is a need for a progressive shift to evidence based policy making.

The steering and implementation of a sector strategy needs to be backed by reliable monitoring and evaluation, transparent reviews, political support to enforce measures that have social implications, and build on good stakeholders' consultation and information. Rumours about liquidation and mergers of VET schools circulate easily and only structured stakeholder information can avoid risky levels of disenchantment and misunderstanding about the reforms and their benefits.

It is also important to link sector strategies with mid-term macro-economic and expenditure frameworks. The intellectual benefit of strategic planning alone does not justify the effort to draft a document, circulate it for formal consultation and official approval, if the cost of the programme and future funding to support its implementation and monitoring are not considered.

- **Bridges for policy effectiveness**: the two VET levels (I and II) are under different institutional authorities. Many share the opinion that one sole institutional authority would contribute to better interaction between the two systems, and a greater efficiency in reforms, legislative changes and investments. However, in the view of the review team such institutional restructuring may create more risks than immediate benefits, and could disrupt many ongoing positive developments.

  What could be truly useful, in the short and medium term, is the formation of *an operational platform for co-operation and co-ordination* of reforms, and of new technical developments that are relevant and important for initial and secondary VET. Such a platform can take more traditional forms, as a VET Council unifying the leading ministries as well as offering new room for sustained social dialogue; or emerge in flexible open formats, with regional extensions, and thematic groups with clear work plans.

The Kyrgyz Republic has a sound national capacity that can be mobilised for this platform; but it is essential to ensure a dialogue with all stakeholders and eventually the wider public interest, which rests with credible outcomes of education and training. In a context of scarce resources the solution is in joining forces to reach out to wider objectives, rather than tearing forces apart securing a tiny territory.

- There seems to be a trend to centralise governance of initial VET, while the contrary seems to be true in secondary VET. Initial VET is essentially state-owned and state funded, while secondary VET is still primarily dependent on state funding but increasingly funded also by other sources (fees paid by individual students, as well as by enterprises). VET I focuses on preparing students for employment, while the latter looks for closer links with higher education. Connections among these disparate components of the VET system are crucial for governance, but usually they are poorly organised, and overlooked in strategies. The review team would like to see **permeability and articulation**, starting with co-ordinated and linked sub-sector strategies and policies. For example, none of the VET strategy documents known to the review team mentions the need for career and vocational guidance and counseling for potential and current users of the VET system.
- **Information and guidance** for youth and adults need to be given much more attention in education and employment policies. Currently only SMEC policy documents refer to guidance and counselling and only SMEC implements guidance programmes, and this is mainly done in Bishkek, where the Information and Counselling Centre is located. More systematic guidance for youth should also be organised at general school level, and through Internet and ICT tools. VET schools could develop tool kits for vocational guidance, and organise seminars and debates with enterprises as part of curricular activities. In the regions, the outreach of SMEC guidance services could be multiplied by operating in partnerships with VET schools, NGOs and community centres, amongst others.
- The issue of a modern and wide **qualifications framework** has been in discussion for several years and some national expertise and experience has now been formed. Development of technical and policy proposals applied to a sector of economic activity (tourism) within experts and employers' groups, supported by international organisations is now gradually followed by the complex phase of transfer of this innovation into the field of policy decisions and future application. Beyond the merits of a newly conceived sector qualifications framework, the review team considers that consistent progression

towards a wider qualifications framework that allows mobility, and smooth transitions between the various VET levels will be particularly relevant a step to minimise the divide between initial and secondary VET, by focusing on learning outcomes rather than on school types. As the leading authorities in question seem to readily recognise this unifying role of a common qualifications framework, the issue will be how to proceed, and make appropriate use of some available international financial and technical resources.

- **VET for diverse skills development needs:** VET can be flexible and diverse and, in the team's view, this is an advantage. VET cannot be rigid and bound to monolithic approaches, since its target population is so diverse: young students, young adults, adults with work experience, older adults, women entering active life, young owners of a plot of land, employees of enterprises, redundant employees, and youngsters who are victims of social inequity or who are without education. In a responsive and humane VET system there is room for individual approaches to learners, ability and willingness to leave no student behind. For many low-achieving students VET can offer a different way to learn, different from the standard programmes offered by general education schools.

  There is considerable potential in the existing VET I schools network, and there are large numbers of people with training needs – but the two do not seem to meet. Many rural VET I schools are under-utilised, while adults and young rural workers are looking for appropriate, good quality training to help them cope better with their farms and livestock and make them more productive. Considerable numbers of pupils who leave basic school cannot find a VET school in their *rayon* to acquire relevant skills.

  To revitalise the adult learning agenda, sustained efforts will be required to help public VET providers adopt suitable adult education methods, and to support dissemination of good practice and innovation to all licensed providers.

- It is known that innovations in training were built up substantially in the years of transition. But without well-organised knowledge management, sharing and dissemination, much of this effort reaches only a limited number of schools and beneficiaries, or is simply forgotten. **Resource centres** to manage, develop and disseminate good practice can be established on the basis of dynamic VET schools. Such resource schools already exist, but their model, role, activities and funding schemes can be further developed, as a basis for future partial decentralisation of methodology and teaching support.

VET schools that engage in projects and studies, with donors and enterprises should be known and the results of such endeavours shared through the network of VET schools. A modern network and web portal of VET schools to share information on the VET system, performance of all VET schools/colleges, VET courses and qualifications and existing VET resources throughout the country can add substantial transparency and visibility to the VET sector.

- **VET schools management** can benefit from the introduction of Boards with participation of social partners and parents. Boards can create a structured link of the school with the socio-economic environment, and represent stakeholders' interests in strategic and business planning and review of school performance. Under recently-started structural reforms in the network of initial VET schools, it could be possible to study the possibilities and ways to pilot the introduction of Boards.

  VET school management is a wide agenda, and SAPTE and MOES need to have the capacity and resources to plan together with the schools a range of reforms that include activity planning and monitoring, and school self-assessment. Gathering of evidence on performance against objectives and indicators, and communication of performance to the wider public are important aspects to be developed. The review team recommends a participative and transparent approach to planning, design and implementation of such reforms, where school teams and management are taken into due consideration, and are assisted.

- Updated and reliable **information on trends of the labour market** and skills needs with geographic and economic sector specificity is indispensable to support options of policy makers, employers, learners, and job seekers. SAPTE seeks adequate approach and solution for this big need. The review team recommends SAPTE and MOES to co-ordinate the search for a practicable mechanism for labour market monitoring with SMEC and employers associations, and to use lessons from other countries. The current system of gathering information on jobs and skills needs could be reformed, in order to offer results that combine the qualitative and quantitative aspects of skills anticipation.

- Finally, **partnership** is one of the relevant keys – private-public and public-public partnerships at macro, intermediate and local levels; partnerships that create synergy of scarce resources, that share responsibility and inputs, and above all, eliminate irrelevant but persistent barriers to reaching common objectives. In practice, managing partnerships among public and non-public organisations is not easy; mutual trust and a common language will have to be built first. It will be important to pursue current efforts for a more dynamic and purposeful collaboration between businesses and VET. The successful

establishment of this collaboration will depend on trust and permanent dialogue and consultation that need to be institutionalised and go beyond the currently existing *ad hoc* and sporadic exchanges.

Capacity of sector or professional associations/councils need to be supported by state policy, through programmes of exchanges and twinning with international peers, training, training partnerships co-funded by donors and state funding (SAPTE, sector ministries). These associations need to be helped to become the recognised partner for VET programmes and VET policy dialogue that all sides wish to have.

"VET for the labour market" is an often-heard statement. But active, dynamic, and consistent social partnerships are needed to link VET with the labour market. At present, only employers are considered relevant social partners, while other partners are simply ignored. The review team formed the impression that that the key interests of students and parents, civic organisations, and employees are underestimated by the state, as well as by task forces and expert groups; and that this lack of dialogue may distort future policy on VET.

Joint projects of VET providers with enterprises and NGOs are another feasible and rewarding approach to link education with economic and social activity in the local context and offer students and teachers the missing links with innovation in VET. These measures have potential for promising outcomes, which is important to break the persisting image of VET as the weakest link in the education system.

Notes

1. This term reflects the terminology of the Kyrgyz system. It is narrower than the international definition of "initial" VET.
2. VET schools of Chui and Talas report to SAVET Central. (Management Scheme of SAVET, approved 28 August 2008 by Government Decree No. 484).
3. Only public pre-schools and public general education schools (basic, secondary) are exempt from licensing.
4. In the course of the political changes of 2010 in the country, SAVET was integrated in the structure of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Migration.

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