

WORK-BASED LEARNING IN AZERBAIJAN

Work-based learning in the Azerbaijani VET system

Vocational education and training (VET) in Azerbaijan is mostly school-based. VET programmes include industrial experience that can take place in a company or facilities (e.g. workshop, laboratory or school unit production 'company in school'), where learners are able to work in real-life conditions. Only a few VET institutions currently cooperate with companies to send learners on internships.

The relationship between the VET system and business sectors is weak and not systematic. Most of the VET programmes are held in schools where the quality is not very high due to the lack of workshops/laboratories with adequate equipment and machinery or lack of materials. The programmes are run by 'production masters' who are in charge of practical training and non-teaching staff.

Work-based learning (WBL) initiatives are being piloted in a number of international projects.

- The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ, a German development agency), with financial support from the European Union (EU), has established dual-like VET pilot schemes in agriculture and tourism.
- The British Council in Azerbaijan, in partnership with the State Agency for Vocational Education and hotels, has piloted an apprenticeship model for the hospitality sector.
- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has implemented two EU grants that are indirectly linked with WBL. In both projects, there is an intention to take into account the private sector dimension, either by adjusting VET to the requirements of the companies or by establishing a labour market-oriented VET system (in specific regions).

Recent initiatives include promoting WBL/dual VET through the Action Plan 2018–20, approved by the Ministry of Economy, creating the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (KOBIA) and establishing the Strategic Road Map for VET.

The role of social partners

The State Agency for Vocational Education prepares and implements programmes within the framework of the joint public–private partnership established with employers to improve the efficiency of the VET system. More than 100 agreements have been signed between the agency, schools and the private sector.

Modern curricula (since 2018) are designed to meet labour market needs based on occupational standards and involvement of the employers during curricula development.

The VET Law states the main principles and directions of the state policy in VET as well as the integration of employers into the VET system. The Strategic Road Map for VET highlights the expected participation of the private sector in the VET system by 2020.

The Trilateral Commission on Social and Economic Affairs, created in 2016 with representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Confederation of Entrepreneurs and the Trade Union Confederation, contributes to the preparation and

implementation of the socio-economic policy in the country.

The main challenges

In the last decade, the government has implemented a wide range of laws, initiatives, strategies and concepts aimed at developing and improving the VET system. Specific objectives are related to enhancing cooperation with the private sector, including the WBL/dual system.

Nevertheless, certain problems remain. The reputation of VET remains quite poor. Although its attractiveness is improving, enrolment in VET is still relatively low. There is a lack of private sector interest, with claims that it is difficult to find workers with the necessary skills. The cooperation with employers is improving but still insufficient; the lack of a formalised social partnership mechanism in VET also affects employers' involvement.

The majority of VET institutions have outdated infrastructure that does not correspond to the requirements of a modern VET system.

KEY FIGURES

- **In 2019, there were 76 VET institutions.**
- **In the academic year 2018/19, there were 13 547 students enrolled in VET (of whom 3 743 were female).**
- **A total of 2 559 people attended VET courses organised by the State Employment Service in 2018.**
- **Over the past five years, only around 14% of learners at secondary education level were enrolled in VET, with a particularly low share of girls (around 8%), although the total share slightly increased to 14.5% in 2018.**
- **In the VET sector, there are 1 167 teachers of general education subjects, 634 teachers of occupational subjects, and 1 266 vocational training masters.**

AZERBAIJAN

The various government initiatives, including the VET Law and the Strategic Road Map for VET, demonstrate that the involvement of companies in VET and partnerships with the private sector are considered crucial to the relevance of VET in relation to the needs of the labour market. The State Agency for Vocational Education has initiated cooperation with the private sector over the last few years. However, these agreements are mostly to cooperate and do not bind the parties to specific actions.

How does cooperation between learning venues work?

Cooperation between schools and enterprises is emerging and needs to be developed further. When a partnership exists, most schools limit the cooperation to the placement of interns in industry, allowing them to gain experience.

Although vocational schools have close relationships with local municipalities, they fail to build strong ties with employers. With regard to implementing the VET reforms, schools have a very limited role, either because of a lack of interest in reforms or because of a lack of capacity.

The State Agency for Vocational Education has initiated cooperation with the private sector, and in the last few years, more than 100 agreements were signed between the agency, schools and the private sector.

The involvement of stakeholders in school management should be pursued as it could facilitate further cooperation.

Looking at the future

The political will to improve the match between skills and the needs of the labour market requires enhancement of the partnership agreements with the private sector and the development of a legal framework and WBL standards.

To improve VET quality, mechanisms need to be developed to support the involvement of experts from the companies to become trainers in VET institutions.

The latest developments

The main recent developments are as follows:

- establishment of the State Agency for Vocational Education (2016);
- adoption of the VET Law and Strategic Road Map for VET;
- adoption of the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- shift to modern curricula, based on occupational standards and including employers (since 2018);
- establishment of the National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs (in 2019); the ambition is to put in place a renewed and effective system for anticipation and analysis of labour market dynamics, occupational demand, skills needs and trends in sectors;
- creation of a New Employment Strategy (2019–30) that addresses pre-employment macro-economic policies and supports small- and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurship;
- approval of the standardised contract form for WBL.

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ACCESS TO HOSPITALITY AND APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

The main objectives of the scheme, delivered in partnership with the British Council, the State Agency for Vocational Education and local companies, are (i) to increase employment opportunities for VET graduates by developing their skills and knowledge; (ii) to involve employers in the educational process through the apprenticeship schemes; and (iii) to increase the role of VET in the hospitality sector.

In 2017/18, 60% of programme participants received permanent employment offers from the companies where they did their internship.

The VET learners enrolled in the programme in 2018/19 have taken on internships and apprenticeships at leading five-star hotels in Azerbaijan. A total of 340 participants in the Access to Hospitality and Apprenticeship Scheme have graduated so far.

The State Agency for Vocational Education and the participating hotels have reached an agreement with the British Council to continue the Access to Hospitality and Apprenticeship Scheme in 2019/20.

