



Co-funded by
the European Union



FACTUAL ANALYSIS ON THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS IN VET INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

The research was carried out within the framework of the Erasmus+ project "Implementing Mock Accreditation for supporting quality assurance in Armenian VET institutions" (QA4VET).

The project was co-funded by the European Union. The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the European Commission, or EACEA. The European Union cannot be held responsible for any use of the information contained herein.

Yerevan 2025

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	Error! Bookmark not defined.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER 1. VET SYSTEM IN ARMENIA	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER 2. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND MECHANISMS IN THE RA VET SYSTEM	8
CHAPTER 3 –ACCREDITATION PRACTICE, STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IN ARMENIAN VET INSTITUTIONS (SURVEY RESULTS)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CONCLUSIONS	Error! Bookmark not defined.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	33

INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted as part of the Erasmus+ “Implementing Mock Accreditation for Supporting Quality Assurance in Armenian VET Institutions” (QA4VET) project. The main focus is to study the impact of the accreditation process, particularly self-evaluation, on the enhancement of education quality in Armenian VET institutions. The research also examines the quality culture formed following accreditation, the factors ensuring continuous enhancement processes, identifying the key challenges encountered in institutional development.

The research results are intended to provide a substantive and methodological basis for training specialists from VET institutions and National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA) as part of the Erasmus+ QA4VET project, supporting the system’s continuous enhancement.

The research aims to:

- to analyse the organisation of quality assurance processes in VET institutions and challenges faced in the effective development of institutional self-evaluation and enhancement strategies.

Key research objectives are as follows:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the distribution of roles and responsibilities among those involved in the self-evaluation process.
2. To identify the extent of stakeholder involvement in the self-evaluation process.
3. To analyse the stakeholders’ understanding of the self-evaluation and identify the primary challenges in its implementation.
4. To assess the level of integration of digital and green¹ skills in the academic programmes (Aps).

¹ Green skills refer to the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes that contribute to environmental protection, responsible use of resources and sustainable development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively examine the accreditation process and the challenges encountered. The research intends to:

- analyse the accreditation process based on quantitative data, particularly, in terms of the effectiveness of self-evaluation and enhancement strategies developed on its basis;
- to identify the perceptions, positions and experiences of the participants involved in the process through qualitative data, while also highlighting existing challenges and possible solutions.

Quantitative method

An online questionnaire survey method was used to collect quantitative data. Out of 87 VET institutions, 61 participated in the survey, yielding a 66.67% participation rate that ensures the necessary representativeness and analytical reliability. Of the participating institutions, 53 (87.93%) were public, while 8 (12.07%) were private. The survey comprised several thematic blocks designed to examine the self-evaluation process, stakeholder involvement, creation of enhancement strategies, methodological perceptions and practical implementation of results.

Most respondents, 58.62%, reported 0–2 years of experience in the accreditation processes, while 22.41% had 3–5 years, 12.07% had 6–10 years, and only 6.90% had over 10 years of experience. The vast majority of participants, approximately 81%, reported up to 5 years of experience in accreditation processes, which ensures the survey's representativeness, affecting the effectiveness and depth of the result analysis.

Qualitative Method

To collect qualitative information, the focus group discussion method was used, targeting an in-depth analysis of the needs, perceptions and current challenges of ANQA's representatives.

Data analysis

The analysis of the collected data was carried out through MS Excel and SPSS software. Both content and comparative analysis were conducted to pinpoint the similarities and distinct approaches in the experiences of different education institutions. This allowed for a multifaceted and systematic depiction of the accreditation process.

CHAPTER 1. VET SYSTEM IN ARMENIA

The secondary vocational education (VET) system plays a strategic role in the sustainable development of each country's economy, preparation of specialists in line with labour market requirements and the socio-economic integration of young people. In recent years, the Armenian VET system has undergone a series of structural and substantial reforms, prompted by the redefined role of VET institutions and their significance in the economic development.

Currently, the Armenian VET system is in the reform process, with the main goal of aligning vocational education with industry needs. These reforms aim to ensure the alignment of academic programmes' content with the current and projected demands of the labour market, enhancing the alumni's employability and supporting the country's economic development.

The Armenian VET system includes both state and non-state education institutions that prepare specialists in various fields, corresponding to levels 4-5 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Currently, the country has 23 state primary, 63 state secondary, and 24 non-state secondary vocational education institutions in operation.

A total of 1,189 students are enrolled in primary vocational academic programmes, while the number of students in secondary vocational academic programmes is 4,118. In recent years, the student number in the VET institutions has shown a growing tendency, which may be attributed to the application of state policy and incentive mechanisms supporting the sector development. The VET system has established priority areas, encompassing professions in industry, construction, and agriculture, with a scholarship of AMD 50,000 provided for these fields.

The recent reforms in the Armenian VET system are driven by strategic initiatives and legal frameworks designed to enhance the quality, accessibility, and relevance of vocational education to meet labour market requirements. The goals and objectives of the development of the VET system are outlined in the "RA Education development plan until 2030". The main strategic goal of the state policy of Armenia's vocational education and training system is to **increase the professional employment rate of alumni to at least 90% by 2030**. This measure is considered a key indicator of improving the connection between education and the labour market, while boosting economic competitiveness.

Considering the structural, substantive, and organisational challenges in the sector, the new Law on Vocational Education and Training entered into force on May 22, 2024. It is a legal basis for systemic reforms to modernise the VET system, increase its efficiency and establish an educational environment aligned with the requirements of the labour market.

Currently, a number of sub-legislative acts are developed in accordance with the provisions of the new law to ensure its full and practical implementation, covering areas such as academic programme structure, quality control, teaching methods and institutional management.

The adoption of the new law aims to ensure:

- modernisation of academic programmes and an outcomes-based approach to prepare alumni in line with the requirements of the modern labour market;
- development of institutional capacities of the teaching and administrative staffs;
- promotion of work-based learning opportunities;
- structural transformation of the vocational education system through the merging of institutions and integration of programmes;
- promotion of the involvement of specialists through financial and non-financial incentives to attract highly qualified professionals to the education system;
- expansion of international cooperation through the study and localisation of best practices;
- enhancement of the legal framework, with a focus on the promotion of entrepreneurial activity and strengthening of connections between employers and education institutions, among other measures.

Thus, the VET system is in the reform stage, and it is necessary to demonstrate greater consistency in this process. To achieve the set goals, it is important to establish well-defined strategies and practical steps that will guide the system toward the intended direction and deliver tangible outcomes.

CHAPTER 2. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND MECHANISMS IN THE RA VET SYSTEM

Armenia promotes the quality assurance culture through two key principles: accountability and continuous enhancement. The goal of external quality assurance is to align primary and secondary vocational education with the needs of stakeholders and society.

In the VET sector, external quality assurance is implemented through accreditation. External quality assurance includes two types of accreditation: institutional and programmatic. It is based on the “fitness for the set purposes” principles. The accreditation process is carried out by ANQA.

External quality assurance primarily focuses on the achievement of the objectives set by education institutions and determines the level of their compliance with the quality assurance criteria and standards established by the RA Government.

Institutional accreditation

Institutional accreditation focuses on the governance of VET institutions, management of the academic programmes and effective implementation of teaching, learning and assessment processes. Institutional accreditation is mandatory for all VET institutions.

Thus, institutional accreditation is carried out according to 10 areas, which include:

1. Mission and purpose
2. Governance and administration
3. Academic programmes
4. Students
5. Faculty and staff
6. Research and development
7. Infrastructure and resources
8. Societal responsibility
9. External relations and internationalization
10. Internal quality assurance.

The criteria include 56 standards.

The first steps related to quality assurance at the VET system level were initiated in 2009. In 2011-2017, pilot institutional accreditation processes were carried out at several VET institutions. This

was a preparatory phase for the development of a new quality culture. Regular workshops and training sessions for the management, administrative and teaching staff were implemented to support the preparation of internal and external quality assurance processes at VET institutions.

In 2018, ANQA launched institutional accreditation processes in 4 agricultural colleges, which was a condition of the EU budget support programme “Better Skills for Better Jobs”. Since 2019, state funding has been allocated to state VET institutions for the implementation of institutional accreditation processes. State funding for the institutional accreditation of VET institutions has increased each year (5 in 2020, 5 in 2021, 5 in 2022, 15 in 2023 and 20 in 2024, 15 in 2025). The RA Government strategy envisions that by 2025 all state VET institutions should have undertaken institutional accreditation. It is planned that by 2026 all state VET institutions undergo institutional accreditation. In 2025, the programme accreditation process was also launched in the medical field, specifically for 5 "Nursing" APs.

Programme accreditation

Programme accreditation is the state recognition of correspondence of the academic programmes, the quality for the preparation of specialists with state accreditation standards and programme accreditation criteria. Programme accreditation is targeted at separate academic programmes. This process allows for a regular assessment of the effectiveness of the educational program of the specialty, as well as to assess whether it ensures the full achievement of the expected learning outcomes by students. This process allows to periodically review the effectiveness of the academic programmes as well as to evaluate whether it ensures the students’ full achievement of intended learning outcomes. Programme accreditation is conducted at the initiative of the VET institutions on a voluntary basis, with the exception of medical academic programmes, for which the accreditation is mandatory. By 2025, only institutional accreditation was carried out in VET institutions. In 2025, programme accreditation was launched. Specifically, it was launched in 5 VET institutions as part of the state-funded AP "Nursing".

Programme accreditation is based on seven criteria, which include the following areas:

1. Academic programme design and approval
2. Teaching staff
3. Teaching and learning practices

4. Student assessment
5. Research and development
6. Learning environment
7. Quality assurance.

These criteria encompass 31 standards.

Stages of the accreditation process

The accreditation process in the Republic of Armenia takes place in 3 stages:

1. **Self-evaluation** is an evaluation process of the institution or its academic programme, which is followed by a written report based on the criteria adopted by RA Government.
2. **External evaluation** is a process whereby an expert panel carries out desk-review of self-evaluation, supporting documents, electronic questionnaire attached and has a site visit to education institution. During the visit, meetings are held with representatives of administrative and academic staff, students, as well as alumni and employers. Accordingly, the expert panel prepares a written report, which includes evaluation and recommendations for enhancement.
3. **Decision-making** is a process of reviewing facts, reaching a decision, and identifying areas in need of urgent solutions. The accreditation decision could be one of the following:
 - to grant institutional accreditation for a period of 4 years with conditions;
 - to grant institutional accreditation for a period of 4 years;
 - to grant institutional accreditation for a period of 6 years;
 - reject accreditation.

ANQA's institutional accreditation policy for VET institutions

In 2020, ANQA developed VET approaches for institutional accreditation to support VET institutions in the evaluation of their key activities based on guiding principles.

According to the latter, accreditation will become a tool for the following processes:

- effective strategic management and performance-based funding;
- review of the sector's development policy;
- increase in the transparency, accountability, visibility, autonomy and recognition of VET institutions' qualifications.

The principles also guide the implementation of joint strategy development with local employers, ensuring the long-term investment prospect for both parties.

These principles include:

1. supporting VET institutions in addressing local labour market needs, contributing to the implementation of strategic management in partnership with employers;
2. aligning academic programmes with the needs and economic opportunities of the region;
3. encouraging VET institutions to jointly use the resource bases of sectoral employers for the effective implementation of academic programmes, thereby addressing the issue of resource provision and fostering the development of practical skills among students;
4. increasing the involvement of employer teachers;
5. promoting the analytical data collection in institutions and decision-making based on them.

Institutional accreditation is also a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of state policy implementation in VET institutions.

Internal quality assurance (IQA) in VET institutions

Currently, the VET institutions' IQA system is in the development stage. Most of these institutions have IQA managers. Internal quality assurance processes are an integral part of the institution's academic performance and provide a basis for its enhancement and reinforcement. Internal quality assurance processes are aimed at and contribute to the development and enhancement of a quality culture in VET institutions.

Quality assurance processes are implemented based on established quality plans. A crucial component of the IQA system is the evaluation of the effectiveness of academic programmes. IQA managers collect and analyse data on the satisfaction of employers, students, teachers and other stakeholders. However, the enhancement of the quality assurance managers' capacities remains a significant challenge. The main mechanisms for the implementation of internal quality assurance processes are currently limited to surveys and class observations. There is a need to diversify these mechanisms to increase the system efficiency.

CHAPTER 3 –ACCREDITATION PRACTICE, STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IN ARMENIAN VET INSTITUTIONS (SURVEY RESULTS)

Distribution of roles and responsibilities in the accreditation process

The Armenian VET institutions' institutional accreditation process includes several stages, starting from preparing self-evaluation and collecting data to analysing, organising site visits and developing enhancement strategy. To manage the process, VET institutions and ANQA appoint coordinators who are responsible for the organisation and implementation of all stages of the accreditation process. A study was conducted to clarify the roles of individuals responsible for organising and coordinating the self-evaluation process in VET institutions. The survey results indicate that, in both public and private institutions, the education quality assurance manager holds primary responsibility. In some state education institutions coordinating committees are established to implement the self-evaluation process, comprising teachers, heads of various divisions (heads of chairs, head of the academic department, career manager, accountant and students. The involvement of such committees in non-state education institutions is relatively limited. The general picture is provided in the attached table:

Table 1. Role of responsible groups involved in the self-evaluation in public and private VET institutions

Manager	State VET institutions	Private VET institutions
QA manager	Mostly	Mostly
Committees of different divisions	Widely popular	Less popular
Heads of separate divisions	Rarely	Rarely
External advisors	Almost never	Almost never

According to the survey results, the main functions of the groups responsible for the preparation of self-evaluation are as follows:

1. Data collection

Respondents most frequently indicated that the groups responsible for the preparation of self-evaluation carry out data collection, which is the key stage of the process in nearly all education institutions. This entails gathering necessary information from various departments and criteria, including documents, reports, digital statistics, survey analyses, etc.

2. Analysis

The survey results underscored that the second key function of the groups responsible for preparing the self-evaluation is analytical work, the most crucial stage of data processing and evaluation. It was noted that the group members conduct SWOT, textual and comparative analyses. Moreover, the analysis results also serve as a basis for the development of conclusions and recommendations for enhancement.

3. Stakeholder engagement

The responses also indicated a wide scope of stakeholder engagement. The process involves both internal and external stakeholders participating in various formats, including surveys, meetings, discussions, and focus groups. The primary goal is to elicit and integrate stakeholders' perspectives, experiences and suggestions into the self-evaluation process.

4. Conduct of surveys

Surveys were among the most commonly used data collection methods in Armenian VET institutions, which is why these institutions place special emphasis on them and view self-evaluation as a particularly important factor in the identification of the stakeholder needs.

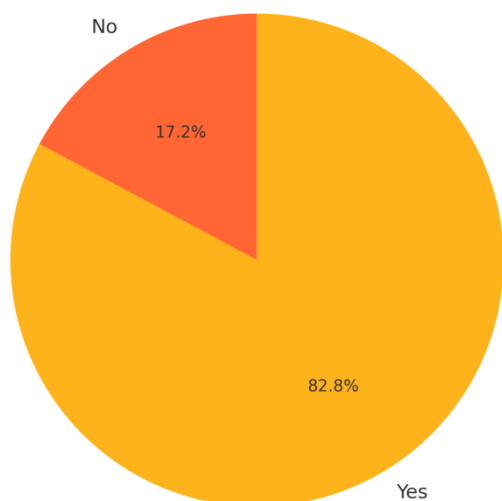
5. Document collection and technical support

Some responses focused on document digitisation, data entry, scanning, and proper collection and storage of documents and information. These activities are considered essential components of the technical support necessary for the documentation and subsequent use of the process.

External stakeholder engagement in the self-evaluation process

The VET institutions highlighted the importance of the engagement of external stakeholders (employers, community representatives, alumni, etc.) in the self-evaluation process, while also emphasising their role in evaluating the academic programme quality, ensuring compliance with the labour market requirements, building students' practical knowledge and creating job opportunities. The external stakeholders' involvement in the self-evaluation process ensures a more objective evaluation of VET institutions and helps identify areas for further enhancement. The survey results show that the majority of participating education institutions, 82.76%, involved external stakeholders in the self-evaluation process, while only 17.24% reported no such involvement.

Figure 1. External stakeholders’ involvement in the self-evaluation process



The study results show that the external stakeholders were primarily involved in the self-evaluation process through the following formats.

Table 2. Stakeholder engagement

Engagement types	Percentage
Receiving feedback from stakeholders (employers) on academic programmes	36.38%
Meeting with employers and alumni, identifying their needs	25.46%
Identifying external stakeholder needs through surveys	16.36%
Holding discussions with internship mentors, pinpointing current issues	12.74%
Other	9.06%

The table shows that the most common type of stakeholder engagement was providing feedback for the AP revision. Employers, alumni, and community representatives offered suggestions, evaluating the relevance of academic programmes and their alignment with the requirements of the labour market. The next most common response involves meetings and discussions with employers and alumni. The education institutions employed a variety of meeting formats:

- Round table discussions

- Employer council meetings
- Focus groups
- Individual interviews.

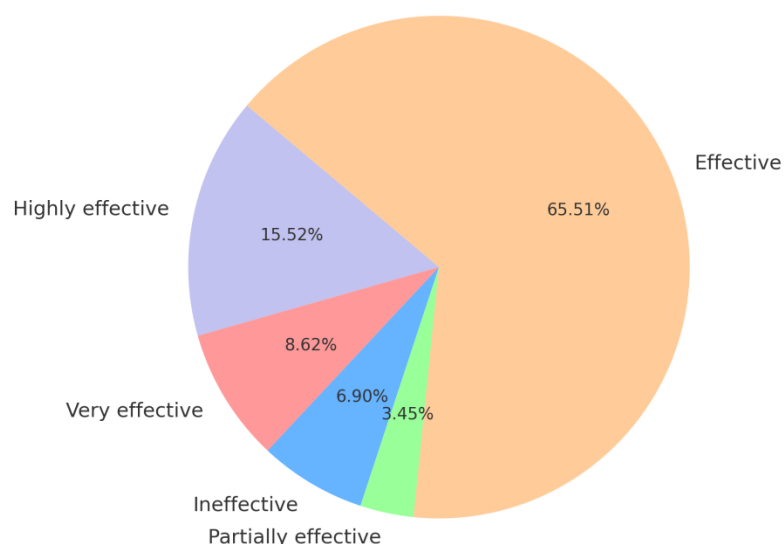
These meetings addressed academic programmes, the organisation of student internships and labour market trends. Stakeholders actively contributed to the organisation of student internships, evaluated students' practical skills and supported their professional development. Surveys were conducted regularly to gather stakeholders' views and observations on the education quality, the organisation of the learning process, as well as the modernisation of the academic programmes. According to the survey, external stakeholders also contributed to the self-evaluation process by supporting the development of student assessment criteria.

Thus, it can be concluded that the external stakeholders' involvement in the self-evaluation processes was primarily indirect, focusing on the enhancement of APs and providing feedback. The VET institutions analysed this data, which then became part of the self-evaluation.

Communication and collaboration as part of the self-evaluation process

Collaboration has a fundamental and significant role in the self-evaluation process, ensuring effective performance and well-defined responsibilities among those involved in the process. For accurate data collection, proper analysis, and meaningful generalisation of results, it is necessary to ensure iorganised and well-coordinated activities within the institution. The research also examines how effectively and clearly the institution defined and communicated the roles and responsibilities of participants in the accreditation process. The survey results present the following picture.

Figure 2. Distribution of stakeholder roles involved in the self-evaluation process



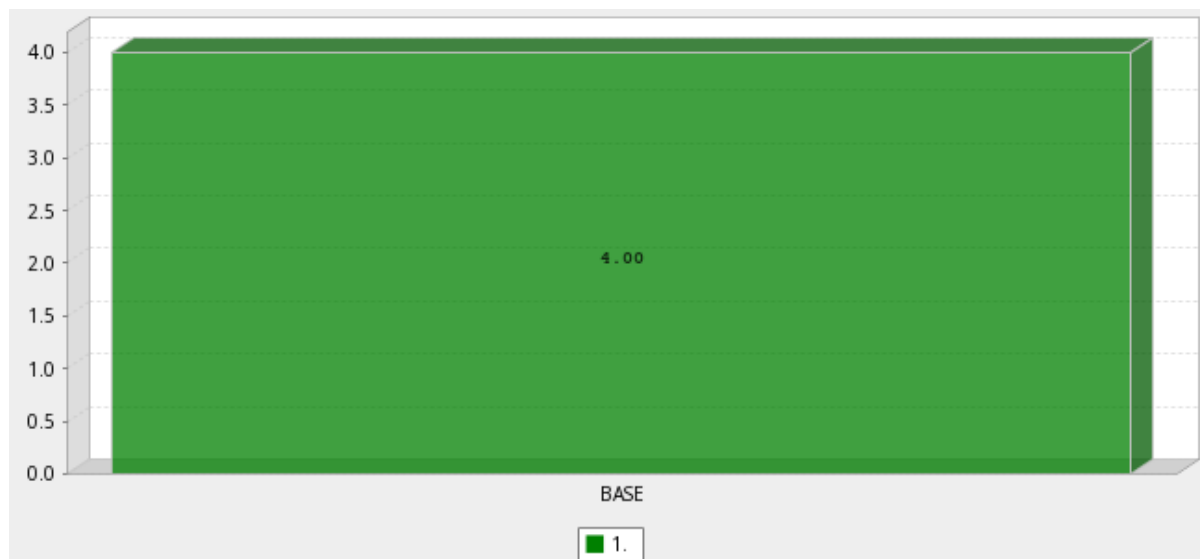
The data demonstrates that the majority, 65.51%, considered their institution "Effective" in presenting the responsibilities of the individuals involved, which highlights the coordinated and organised nature of the process. Meanwhile, 8.62% indicated that the process was "Very effective". This was due to the fact that not all respondents have huge experience with self-evaluation and take their first steps in this direction. Thus, they were not able to fully grasp the scope of the process and were unable to carry out proper planning.

The survey results indicate that to ensure ongoing communication among those involved in the accreditation process, VET institutions arranged regular meetings, including both group and individual sessions, as well as working group discussions. These meetings aimed to facilitate discussions, update data, perform SWOT analyses and sum up the conducted activities. Communication was conducted through both face-to-face meetings and digital tools, including email, social media and dedicated online platforms, enabling interaction, feedback collection and the smooth circulation of documents and data.

Understanding of the methodology for self-evaluation

For the self-evaluation process to be effectively organised, it is crucial that staff have a clear understanding of both the self-evaluation methodology and the accreditation requirements. When questioned on how well education institutions grasped the methodology and requirements for self-evaluation, the respondents gave an average rating of 4 on a 1–5 scale.

Figure 3. VET institutions' understanding of self-evaluation methodology and accreditation requirements, rated on a scale from 1 (no understanding) to 5 (full understanding).

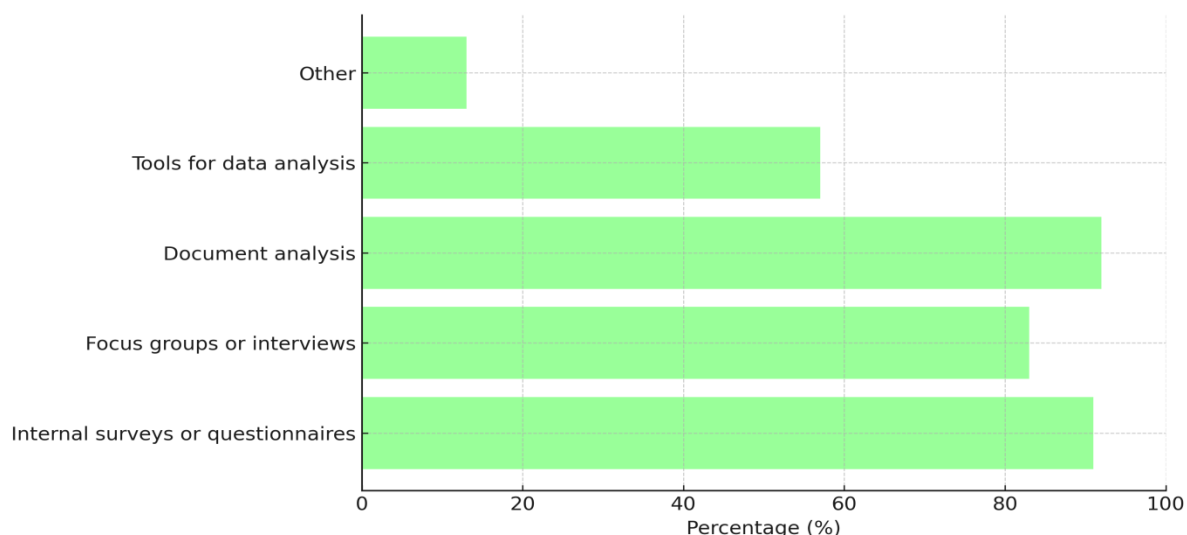


The survey results indicate that a significant portion of the staff either fully or almost fully understands the process and has the necessary knowledge about the process. As part of this research, the aspects considered most challenging by VET institutions were studied and analysed, revealing that institutions primarily face difficulties in data collection and analysis. The main challenges reported include consolidating and organising data in a single location, as institutions lacked unified platforms for data centralisation prior to the accreditation process. In many cases, challenges also emerged at the data analysis stage, given that institutions did not have much experience in this field. Another common challenge concerns institutional accreditation standards and their understanding. Participants pointed out that the formulation and requirements of the standards were at times too complex, causing challenges in proper understanding. Other challenges include engaging external stakeholders, mastering new terminology and tools and managing time effectively, which also hindered the accreditation process.

Selection of data collection methods and tools

To organise the self-evaluation process more effectively, it is essential to apply methods that allow the analysis to generate objective data reflecting the real state of the VET institutions. Taking this into consideration, the survey also highlighted the importance of identifying which methods VET institutions applied in the self-evaluation process. The results showcase the following picture.

Figure 4. Application of self-evaluation methods and tools



The survey results indicate that "Internal surveys or questionnaires" were the most frequently used method, accounting for 93.10%. This is followed by "Document analysis" (curriculum, policies, strategic plans) at 94.83%. "Focus groups or interviews" were noted by 82.76% of respondents, while "Tools for data analysis" were reported by 56.90%. The "Other" option was indicated by 12.07%. The survey also addressed the tools that VET institutions used to conduct their analyses:

- MS Excel
- Google Forms
- Google Analytics
- IBM SPSS
- AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT)
- Use of hybrid intelligence

Development of an enhancement strategy based on self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a key tool for VET institutions, enabling them to evaluate different aspects of their activities, recognise their strengths, and pinpoint areas that require enhancement for their development. This process not only boosts the internal efficiency of institutions but also fosters the enhancement of academic programmes, management, teaching and other important processes.

The self-evaluation results can be used to develop and implement strategies or follow-up plans, providing a more accurate and informed basis for decision-making. Considering these factors, the

research also underscored the extent to which VET institutions were able to develop an enhancement strategy based on their self-evaluation results.

The results present the following picture:

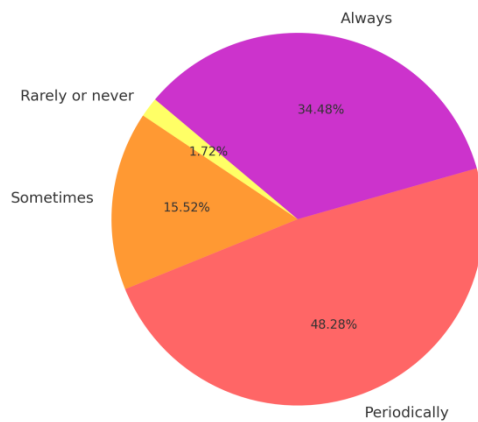


Figure 5. Application of self-evaluation results in the development of an enhancement strategy

The survey analysis shows that VET institutions applied self-evaluation results in the development and implementation of institutional strategies or follow-up plans with varying frequency. 1.72% of respondents noted that self-evaluation results were "Rarely or never" used in the planning processes, suggesting that some institutions have not yet fully integrated self-evaluation into the strategic planning processes. 15.52% stated that self-evaluation results were "Sometimes" used in the planning processes, while 48.28% indicated that these results were "Periodically" applied in the development of institutional strategies and follow-up plans. Moreover, 34.48% of respondents reported that the self-evaluation results were "Always" used in the planning and strategy development processes. Overall, the survey indicates that the self-evaluation results were regularly used in approximately 82.76% of cases, highlighting the significance of self-evaluation and its great impact in institutional follow-up plans. This indicator demonstrates that self-evaluation is a key tool in the strategic planning process, enhancing the efficiency of education institutions and guiding them towards more sustainable development paths.

Regarding enhancements in VET institutions as a result of the self-evaluation, the respondents noted that the self-evaluation significantly contributed to the enhancement of the management and

educational processes. Particularly, the respondents highlighted the following areas for enhancement.

Table 3. Enhancement areas based on the self-evaluation

Examples of recent enhancements or changes resulting from the self-evaluation process	Percentage of responses
Modernisation of academic programmes	21.0%
Enhancements in the strategic planning and governance processes	17.0%
Enhancement of resources and infrastructure	16.0%
Expansion of cooperation and participation in international activities	14.0%
Improved document circulation	10.0%
Training and professional development	9.0%
Strengthening of research and analytical skills	7.0%
Development of a quality assurance culture	7.0%

Therefore, the survey results indicate that, according to the majority of respondents, self-evaluation results had a great impact on the enhancement of the following areas.

1. Modernisation of academic programmes

Academic programmes and teaching methods were revised to align them with the needs of the labour market. These enhancements also involved the expansion of cooperation with employers and reinforcement of joint dialogue.

2. Enhancements in the strategic planning and governance processes

In a number of education institutions, strategic plans, management structure, employees' position passports and employee functions were made more specific.

3. Enhancement of resources and infrastructure

Activities were carried out to improve resources and infrastructure, including the addition of new laboratories, the introduction of digital technologies, the creation of new simulation

rooms, the inventory of the library collection and the assessment of teachers' and students' needs.

4. Expansion of cooperation and participation in international activities

As a result of the self-evaluation, great emphasis was placed on the external stakeholder engagement, leading to the development of educational processes.

- New memoranda of understanding are signed between VET institutions, alongside attempts to conduct benchmarking.
- Trainings are organised to enhance the foreign language proficiency of stakeholders, including both teachers and students.
- Steps are taken to establish foreign partnerships and participate in Erasmus+ projects.

5. Improved document circulation

The VET institutions reviewed and streamlined the documentation, ensuring the coordinated nature of the implemented processes.

6. Training and professional development

VET institutions started to initiate the organisation of new professional training courses for the teaching staffs, as part of which many institutions have close cooperation.

7. Strengthening of research and analytical skills

VET institutions work to integrate a research component into academic programmes, aiming to stimulate research activities among both teachers and students.

8. Development of a quality assurance culture

VET institutions introduced quality assurance positions and actively carry out data collection and evaluation processes, including evaluation of teachers, resource satisfaction, and etc. A quality culture is introduced in the divisions.

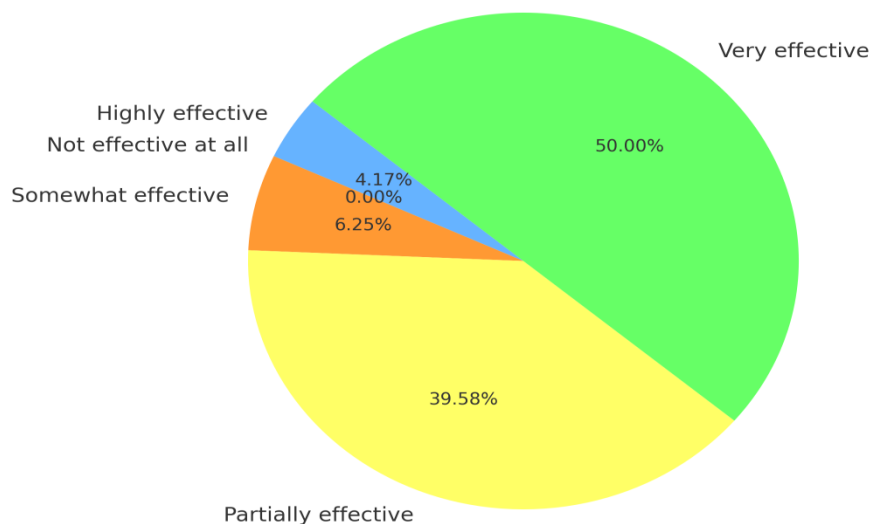
Recommendations for the implementation of self-evaluation

The self-evaluation is a complex and multi-layered process, often requiring external consulting support. This requirement is particularly evident in the preparatory phase of accreditation, when it is necessary to clearly understand the criteria, establish a documentation framework and conduct a

comprehensive situational analysis. To make the process systematic and effective, ANQA organises four-day training sessions prior to the self-evaluation process. During these sessions, ANQA presents the criteria set for the self-evaluation, the list of necessary documents attached, the methodology for SWOT analysis, and etc. Additionally, coordinators appointed by VET institutions have the chance to maintain constant contact with ANQA's staff, receiving ongoing assistance with the technical aspects of the process, including the interpretation of the templates for institutional questionnaire, clarification of criteria, etc. It is important to note that support does not apply to the content of the analysis or influence its direction.

In addition to ANQA's recommendations, VET institutions receive some receive some recommendations from education institutions with accreditation experience. Regarding external recommendations on the enhancement of the self-evaluation process and the degree of their effectiveness, the majority of respondents, 83.03%, reported receiving such recommendations, whereas 18.97% stated they did not. The latter indicator may also occur due to the fact that some VET institutions still lack experience with accreditation processes. Concerning the effective and guiding nature of the provided recommendations, the following picture emerges:

Figure 6. Effectiveness of external recommendations



Regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of the recommendations, the most common answer was "Very effective", representing 50% of the responses. This indicates that the recommendations, overall, contributed to a more structured and effective self-evaluation process. The next most common response, "Partially effective", 39.58%, indicates that for some institutions the

recommendations were useful, but with limited applicability or partial clarity. Meanwhile, only 4.17% of respondents chose “Highly effective,” which may suggest that the recommendations lacked depth or were not fully aligned with the specific needs of institutions. A positive trend is that no respondents rated the recommendations as "Not effective at all" (0%), and only 6.25% indicated "Somewhat effective".

Development of an enhancement strategy

The main goal of the self-evaluation is to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the VET institutions’ activities to determine their current state, identify existing gaps and areas in need of enhancement. Particularly, it provides an opportunity to identify the VET institutions’ weaknesses and issues, justifying the directions in which relevant enhancement strategies should be developed and implemented. Regarding the question to what extent the VET institution developed an enhancement strategy based on the self-evaluation results, the vast majority of surveyed institutions, 84.48%, indicated that they did develop. This indicator represents a positive trend, reflecting that institutions have an action plan aimed at not only identifying issues, but also addressing them. Meanwhile, 15.52% confirmed that they do not have such a strategy yet. Regarding the areas that primarily underwent improvements, the following data is available.

Table 4. Enhancements resulting from the self-evaluation

Areas for enhancement	Percentage of responses
Revision and enhancement of academic programmes	41.86%
Capacity development of the staff	23.26%
Enhancement of cooperation with employers	20.93%
Development of international cooperation	4.65%
Enhancement of external relations	2.33%

The analysis shows that the priority area in the VET institutions’ enhancement strategies is "Revision and enhancement of academic programmes", accounting for 41.86% of the responses. This trend indicates that the modernisation of educational content is considered a strategic priority for institutions. This process involves revising the modular structure of curricula, updating learning outcomes, and ensuring their alignment with labour market requirements. The second most commonly mentioned area, "Capacity development of the staff", (23.26%), highlights the

fundamental role of human resources development. Particularly important is the development of professional capacities of the teaching and administrative staff through training, continuous education and the formation of digital and innovative skills. The third most frequently noted area "Enhancement of cooperation with employers", which received 20.93%, complements the previous two areas. The primary goal of this area is the employers' systematic involvement in the educational process, which contributes to the realistic design of programmes, the enrichment of practical components and the alignment of alumni's skills with labour market needs. Effective cooperation with employers is regarded not only as a way to enhance the education quality, but also as an important factor in the placement and career development of alumni. Though "Development of international cooperation" (4.65%) and "Enhancement of external relations" (2.33%) areas were mentioned far less frequently, their presence indicates that some institutions are aiming to broaden partnership initiatives at both local and international levels. These areas are particularly important in terms of introducing educational innovations, exchanging international practice and ensuring institutional recognition of institutions.

The implementation of enhancement strategies is a crucial step towards quality management in VET institutions. However, the successful implementation of this process often encounters obstacles of various kinds that can reduce the effectiveness and impact of the strategies.

Table 5. Obstacles in the development of enhancement strategy

Obstacle	Percentage (%)
Limited financial resources	62.07%
Weak stakeholder engagement	50.00%
Insufficient staff capacity and limited time	32.76%
Resistance to changes	15.52%
Insufficient or unclear data	13.79%
Other (details below)	10.34%

The majority of respondents, **62.07%**, noted the "**Limited financial resources**", pointing to the low financial stability of institutions. The lack of funding hinders both the expansion of infrastructure and the development of human resources. In such circumstances, strategic initiatives often fail to reach the implementation stage, or are carried out slowly and incompletely.

50.00% of respondents identified "**Weak stakeholder engagement**" as the next most important obstacle. The low level of participation of employers, students, alumni and other stakeholders hinders the comprehensiveness and practicality of strategy development and implementation. Passive involvement reduces the relevance of strategies, depriving them of the opportunity to rely on the real needs of the sector.

32.76% of respondents identified "**Insufficient staff capacity and limited time**" as obstacles. The gap in professional capacities, combined with heavy workloads and restricted time, hinder the development and implementation of enhancement initiatives.

Respondents also indicated "**Resistance to changes**" at 15.52%. In some institutions, a conservative attitude towards change is observed, which complicates the implementation of reforms. "**Insufficient or unclear data**", noted by 13.79%, were also considered as obstacles. This implies that the lack of quality data hinders the justification of strategic planning and impact evaluation. Data-driven decision-making is an integral part of strategic management, and in its absence, strategies may turn into unrealistic or irrelevant initiatives.

In addition, 10.34% of respondents identified "**Other**" factors that complement the key areas. Under the "Other" option, institutions highlighted a number of specific obstacles, including:

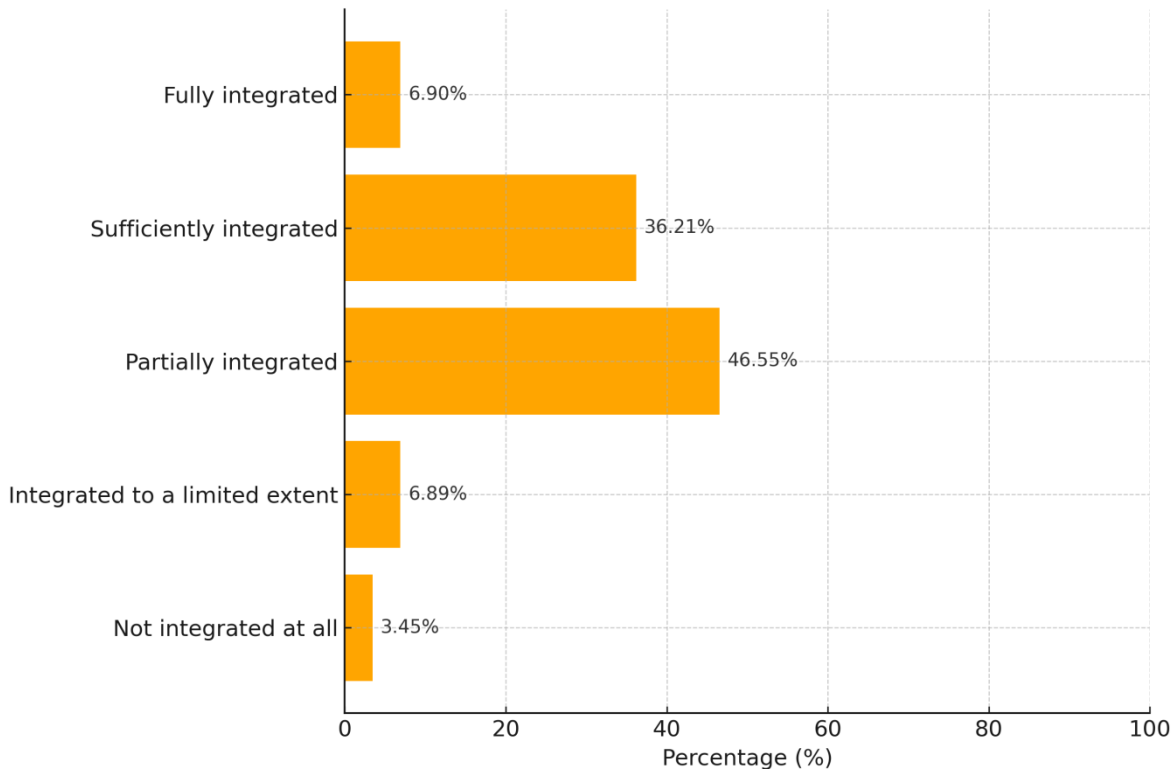
- Lack of well-defined methodologies, as the development of enhancement strategies, remains a relatively new practice for a number of education institutions. It was part of the accreditation process and VET institutions lack the relevant experience. In some cases, full implementation the strategy development is is not possible due to methodological constraints.
- Lack of employer motivation, which reduces the effectiveness of external engagement.
- Difficulty in attracting sponsors, which is due to limited access to external financial sources.

Integration of digital capacities and skills into academic programmes

In today's digital era, educational effectiveness goes beyond subject knowledge. Today, the development of digital skills is very important for students, including the use of technological tools, data analysis, digital communication, and media literacy. These skills are necessary not only for learning, but also for further professional development. For this reason, it is important to evaluate the

extent to which academic programmes contribute to the formation of students' digital skills. The survey results show the following picture:

Figure 7. Development of digital competences and skills in academic programmes



The most common response, "Partially integrated", (46.55%), indicates that digital aspects are implemented in education institutions. However, their introduction is not yet complete and systematic. "Sufficiently integrated" was noted by 36.21%, implying that learning mechanisms with a technological component are already formed in a number of institutions. Meanwhile, only 6.90% of respondents chose "Fully integrated", suggesting that digital transformation has not yet been fully realised. It is also noteworthy that 10.34% (total of "Not integrated at all" and "Integrated to a limited extent") reported the digital component is nearly absent in the educational processes. These indicators generally point to the need for the integration of digital aspects into the education system and ensurance of its continuous development.

To identify the main obstacles that hinder the use of digital technologies in VET institutions, the analysis led to the following conclusions:

1. Shortage of infrastructure

One of the most common reasons is the insufficient number or quality of computers and relevant equipment, as well as the lack of digital resources. This circumstance significantly limits students' opportunities to apply and develop digital skills in the educational process. In addition, the infrastructure available in VET institutions does not always meet modern technological requirements.

2. Financial constraints

A significant portion of the responses indicates that the primary obstacle is the insufficient financial and material resources. This includes not only technical support, but also human resource development, for instance, challenges in attracting highly qualified specialists due to uncompetitive salaries.

3. Limited capacities

It is also mentioned that teachers do not receive sufficient training on the application of digital tools. This circumstance hinders the effective and targeted use of technological solutions in the teaching process.

4. Peculiarities of academic programmes

The limited inclusion of digital components is also attributed to the content of state academic standards or programmes. Some responses indicate that digitalisation depends on a specific programme or field, and not all educational areas require thorough technological integration. Some of the responses highlight that certain professional fields. Particularly, art and music, do not require in-depth proficiency in digital tools.

Recommendations for the enhancement of the accreditation and self-evaluation process

Referring to the further enhancement of the accreditation and self-evaluation processes, the respondents offered their recommendations for the increased efficiency of the processes.

Table 6. Recommendations for enhancement of the accreditation and self-evaluation process

Enhancement areas	Percentage /%
Training and capacity building	32.1%
Exchange of practice and recommendations	19.2%

Development of institutional accreditation criteria according to sector peculiarities: in arts, medicine, etc.	10.3%
Clarification of the methodology for self-evaluation and revision of criteria	9.0%
External stakeholder engagement	7.7%
Localisation of international practice and cooperation	7.7%
Enhancement of infrastructure	7.7%
Technological solutions and tools	6.4%

According to the analysis, the most frequently recommended area concerns "Training and capacity building" (32.1%) for VET staff. This highlights the fact that the effective implementation of the process largely relies on the capacities, knowledge of the processes and methodological expertise of the specialists involved. Institutions need both local and centralised training, which should include both theoretical and practical components.

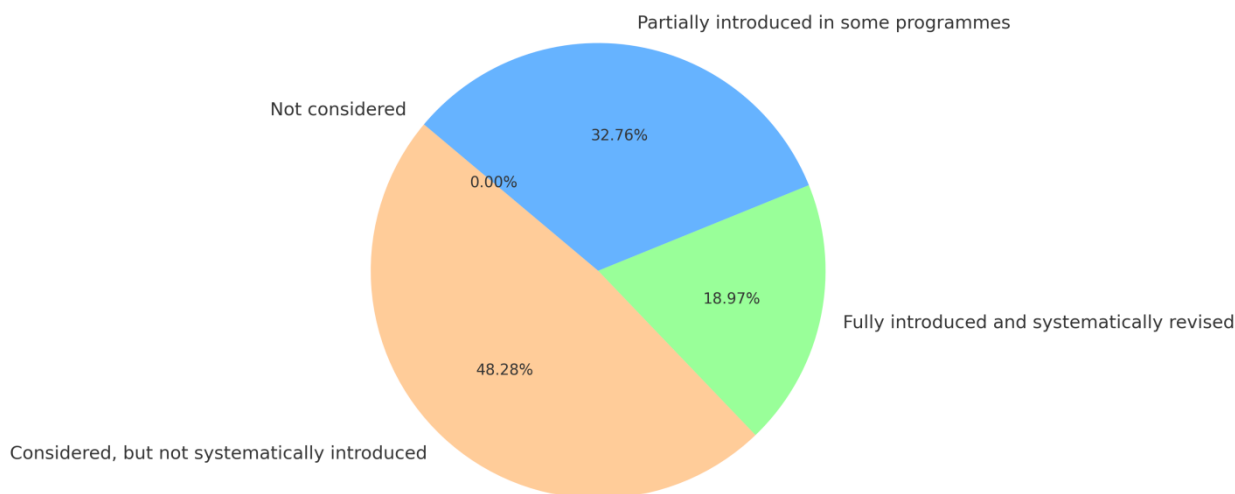
"Exchange of practice and recommendations" (19.2%) are considered the most important factor, with the aim of developing a common approach, disseminating best practices and clarifying methodologies. The involvement of experts and ANQA representatives in works with institutions, through recommendations and visits, is particularly important.

Meanwhile, a number of systemic issues are raised. Some respondents emphasised the need of the "Development of institutional accreditation criteria according to sector peculiarities in arts, medicine, etc." (10.3%), considering the sectoral peculiarities of institutions in medicine, art, etc. This implies the application of a differentiated approach to state level requirements and clarification of methodologies. Some responses also raised the need of "Clarification of the methodology for self-evaluation and revision of criteria" (9%). The self-evaluation is often perceived as complex and insufficiently defined process, especially by institutions in specialised fields. In this context, both the simplicity of methodological guidelines and the development of skills for their application are important. In addition, respondents offered recommendations on "Localisation of international practice and cooperation" (7.7%), "Enhancement of infrastructure" (7.7%) and "Technological solutions and tools" (6.4%).

Development of students' green, analytical and critical thinking as part of academic programmes

Under the conditions of real-world ecological, economic and social challenges, the role of education in the promotion of sustainable development is becoming more and more important. Education institutions have a key role in the formation of students' green mindset, responsible consumption and environmental awareness. Accordingly, it is particularly important to incorporate green skills components—such as efficient resource use, waste management, and environmental responsibility—into academic programmes. Regarding the extent to which academic programmes incorporate components focused on responsible resource use, waste reduction, or enhancement of the efficiency of professional activities, the following results emerge.

Figure 8. Integration of green skills in academic programmes

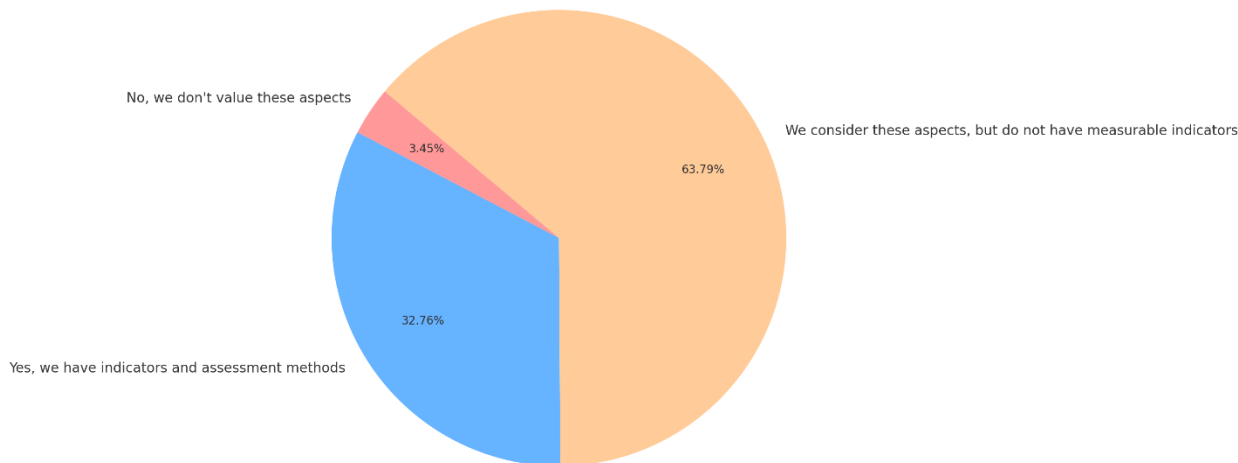


48.28% of the respondents stated that these areas are "Considered, but not systematically introduced", implying the lack of methodological tools and clear policy for the implementation of green skills. 32.76% believe that these components are "Partially introduced in some programmes", reflecting their presence in certain areas but not fully implemented. Only 18.97% indicated that these principles are "Fully introduced and systematically revised". A positive trend can be seen in the fact that no one mentioned that these components are "Not considered", pointing to an increase in general awareness.

The development of students' analytical and critical thinking is also important in academic programmes, as highlighted in the level 5 of the Armenian National Qualifications Framework.

Regarding the extent to which VET institutions value the development of these abilities, the following picture emerges:

Figure 9. The importance of the development of analytical and critical thinking skills among students



Based on the results obtained, it can be noted that the majority of respondents acknowledge the significance of critical thinking, digital skills, and sustainability components. However, they have not yet been systematically integrated into the academic programmes, as evidenced by the fact that more than half of the respondents indicating that these aspects are merely considered, without clear assessment methods. Only a limited number of respondents indicated that they have clear indicators or systematic revision mechanisms. A positive trend is that almost no one noted absence of these elements, reflecting broad recognition of their importance.

Thus, it can be concluded that though there is an awareness of the need to develop digital, green and analytical skills in education institutions. However, their full, systematic and measurable integration is s yet to come. This highlights the need to develop strategic, methodological and institutional approaches to modernise academic programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

Generalising the research results, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The institutional accreditation process in the Armenian VET institutions is implemented systematically, involving quality managers, professional groups and external stakeholders. The primary responsibilities focus on data collection, analysis and stakeholder engagement. While most institutions have clearly assigned roles and responsibilities, some still require further enhancement. Overall, the process is regarded as effective.

2. The self-evaluation results are widely used in VET institutions in the development and implementation of enhancement strategies. This process led to the modernisation of academic programmes, the updates to management practices and strategic plans, the enhancement in infrastructure and document circulation, the expansion of international cooperation, the organisation of trainings and the development of a quality assurance culture. The results indicate that self-evaluation has become an effective tool for the continuous enhancement and sustainable development of institutions.

3. Though VET institutions generally recognise the importance of digital and green skills, their integration today is still unsystematic and partial. Several obstacles affect progress in this area, including structural and capacity-building challenges, as well as resource constraints such as insufficient infrastructure, inadequate staff training, lack of well-defined methodologies and limited professional development opportunities. Therefore, the full and effective introduction of digital and sustainability skills into the VET system requires a comprehensive and systemic approach, encompassing programme reviews and comprehensive training initiatives.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

1. **AP** – academic programme
2. **VET institutions** – Professional Education Program Vocational Education and Training institutions
3. **SWOT** – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
4. **ANQA** – National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation