

# **UZBEKISTAN'S VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM: STRATEGIC CAPACITY FOR GLOBAL GATEWAY PRIORITIES**

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## **1. Introduction**

Uzbekistan has undertaken one of the most ambitious education and labour market reform agendas in Central Asia. Since 2019, vocational education and training (VET) has been positioned as a strategic instrument for supporting economic diversification, industrial modernisation, employment creation, digital transformation, and the transition towards a greener economy. These priorities closely align with the objectives of the European Union's Global Gateway strategy, particularly in the areas of digital connectivity, sustainable infrastructure, transport corridors, renewable energy, and human capital development.

The importance of skills development is reinforced by Uzbekistan's demographic profile. As of 2025, the country's population exceeded 37.5 million, making it the most populous nation in Central Asia. Approximately 60% of the population is under the age of 30, while nearly 700,000 young people enter the labour market each year. This demographic dividend presents significant opportunities for economic growth but also creates considerable pressure on education and training systems to provide relevant, high-quality skills that match labour market demand.

Over the past decade, Uzbekistan has experienced sustained economic growth, with GDP growth averaging between 5 and 6 percent annually despite global economic disruptions. According to the World Bank, maintaining this growth trajectory will require substantial investments in human capital, productivity enhancement, and workforce skills. At the same time, employers increasingly report shortages of workers with technical, digital, and industry-specific competencies, particularly in sectors linked to industrial development, logistics, information technology, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing.

In response, the Government of Uzbekistan has launched comprehensive reforms aimed at modernising the VET system, strengthening employer engagement, expanding work-based learning, improving quality assurance mechanisms, and aligning qualifications with labour market needs. The establishment of the Vocational Education Agency, the development of a national qualifications framework, the creation of 14 Regional Centres of Vocational Excellence, and growing cooperation with international partners such as the European Training Foundation (ETF), UNESCO, GIZ, and Team Europe demonstrate a strong commitment to building a more responsive and future-oriented skills ecosystem.

These reforms are particularly relevant to Global Gateway priorities. Investments in transport connectivity, renewable energy, digitalisation, sustainable agriculture, and industrial value chains require a workforce equipped with modern technical and transversal skills. Uzbekistan's evolving VET system is increasingly positioned to provide this human capital foundation, making the country an important partner for advancing sustainable economic development and regional cooperation across Central Asia.

## **2. Institutional Capacity for Skills Development**

The reform of the VET system has been accompanied by the creation and strengthening of national institutions responsible for skills governance.

The Vocational Education Agency (VEA) coordinates the national network of vocational schools and technicums and leads reforms related to competency-based education, employer engagement, and international cooperation. Supporting this effort, the Institute for the Development of Vocational

Education (IDVE) serves as the country's primary methodological and research institution, responsible for curriculum development, teacher training, occupational standards, and qualifications development.

A particularly important investment has been the establishment of 14 Regional Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), one in each region of the country. Supported through the ETF DARYA initiative and national reforms, these centres function as demonstration platforms for modern equipment, innovative teaching methods, and stronger cooperation with employers. Their nationwide coverage provides Uzbekistan with a unique institutional platform for scaling reforms and supporting regional economic priorities.

### **3. Evidence of Digital Transformation**

Digitalisation has become a central pillar of national development policy through the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy. The strategy recognises digital skills as essential for economic competitiveness and public sector modernisation.

Evidence of progress includes the introduction of the UNESCO DELTA Framework (Digital Empowerment for Lifelong Learning, Teaching and Andragogy), which supports the development of digital competences among TVET teachers and trainers. In parallel, DIGI-TEACH UZ and other initiatives implemented with international partners have expanded access to digital learning resources and online teaching methodologies.

At the institutional level, IT-focused technicums are increasingly offering programmes in cybersecurity, software development, cloud technologies, and digital design. Pilot initiatives in smart agriculture and industrial automation are also introducing learners to technologies associated with Industry 4.0.

The emergence of the AI Alliance Uzbekistan and AI laboratory initiatives further demonstrates growing national commitment to developing future-oriented skills ecosystems capable of supporting innovation and digital transformation.

### **4. Supporting Regional Connectivity Through Skills**

Uzbekistan occupies a strategic position along the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor), which has become one of the flagship connectivity priorities supported by the European Union.

The growing importance of transport and logistics is reflected in skills development initiatives implemented through institutions such as the Academy of Export and Logistics and specialised transport technicums. Training programmes increasingly focus on multimodal transport operations, customs procedures, freight forwarding, supply chain management, and logistics digitalisation.

Examples of employer engagement include partnerships involving the Tashkent Automobile and Road Technical School, Multimodal Trans Terminal LLC, and the Association of Logistics of Uzbekistan. These collaborations demonstrate efforts to align training provision with evolving labour market requirements in the transport sector.

### **5. Green Transition and Emerging Green Skills Ecosystems**

Evidence suggests that green skills development is becoming an increasingly important component of Uzbekistan's VET reforms.

Government plans foresee the establishment of Green Technicums across all regions of the country. In parallel, green skills modules have been introduced through Centres of Vocational Excellence and DARYA-supported activities. These initiatives focus on skills required for renewable energy, energy-efficient construction, water management, resource efficiency, and environmental sustainability.

This direction is consistent with broader national commitments to climate adaptation, renewable energy expansion, and sustainable economic development. It also reflects growing investment from international partners, including Team Europe, GIZ, AFD, and other development agencies supporting Uzbekistan's green transition agenda.

## **6. Industry Engagement and Labour Market Relevance**

One of the strongest indicators of reform maturity is the increasing involvement of employers in skills development.

Industrial partnerships have been established with major enterprises, including Almalyk Mining and Metallurgical Complex (AGMK), industrial clusters in Navoi region, agricultural producers, textile enterprises, and logistics operators. These partnerships contribute to curriculum development, practical training opportunities, and workforce planning.

Regional Business Councils further support employer participation by providing mechanisms for consultation between education providers and industry representatives. This contributes to improving labour market relevance and responsiveness within the VET system.

## **7. Quality Assurance and International Recognition**

Quality assurance and international alignment have become increasingly important components of Uzbekistan's vocational education and training (VET) reforms. Recent institutional developments demonstrate a growing emphasis on improving educational quality, strengthening qualifications systems, and enhancing the international recognition of skills and credentials.

A major milestone was the establishment of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education in 2025. The Agency is responsible for accreditation and quality assurance across secondary specialised, vocational, higher, and postgraduate education, as well as professional development and retraining programmes. The creation of a unified quality assurance framework reflects broader efforts to align national education standards with international practices and improve the transparency, credibility, and international recognition of qualifications.

A significant step towards international integration was achieved in 2026 when the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education became a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) during the Education World Forum in London. INQAAHE is one of the world's largest international networks for quality assurance, bringing together more than 300 accreditation and quality assurance organisations worldwide. Full membership represents international recognition of Uzbekistan's national accreditation system and its alignment with globally accepted quality assurance standards and practices.

Membership in INQAAHE is expected to strengthen the international recognition of qualifications awarded by accredited institutions, support graduate mobility, facilitate participation in international accreditation processes and global rankings, expand cooperation with foreign universities, and increase opportunities for academic mobility, joint degree programmes, and international expert involvement in accreditation procedures. These developments signal Uzbekistan's commitment to transparency, quality enhancement, and deeper integration into the global education space.

Quality assurance reforms are also extending into the vocational education sector. As of 2026, state accreditation processes are being implemented in 37 vocational education institutions across the country. Institutional accreditation is underway in 30 institutions, while programme accreditation is being conducted in seven institutions. To support these processes, the National Agency organised capacity-building activities for vocational education leaders and quality assurance specialists, focusing

on accreditation procedures, quality management systems, and alignment of educational programmes with labour market requirements and international standards.

International cooperation plays an increasingly important role in strengthening quality assurance capacity. For example, accreditation-related capacity-building activities have been supported by Helvetas, which facilitated the participation of international experts who shared good practices in quality management and institutional development within technical and vocational education systems.

At the same time, Uzbekistan continues to strengthen its qualifications system through the development of occupational standards, competency-based assessment mechanisms, and sectoral qualification assessment centres. Discussions have also begun regarding international accreditation of qualification assessment centres in technical occupations such as welding, plumbing, electrical installation, and construction-related trades. These initiatives seek to improve the international portability of skills and increase confidence among employers, both domestically and internationally.

The country has further expanded cooperation with international partners, including the European Training Foundation, development agencies, and foreign educational institutions to support quality assurance reforms, qualifications development, and recognition frameworks. These efforts are particularly relevant in sectors linked to international investment and labour mobility, where internationally recognised qualifications can facilitate workforce mobility and strengthen participation in global value chains.

Nevertheless, international accreditation within Uzbekistan's VET system remains an evolving area. While recent developments indicate substantial progress, accreditation activities are currently concentrated in selected institutions, programmes, and assessment centres rather than being fully institutionalised across the entire VET sector. International quality assurance should therefore be viewed as a rapidly developing mechanism that supports the broader modernization of vocational education and skills systems.

From the perspective of the **Investment-Oriented Skills Ecosystem (IOSE)** framework, quality assurance and international accreditation perform not only educational functions but also economic ones. They enhance workforce credibility, support employer confidence, facilitate labour mobility, strengthen the attractiveness of Uzbekistan for foreign investors, and contribute to the country's integration into regional and global labour markets. In this sense, quality assurance becomes a strategic instrument linking skills development, productivity growth, competitiveness, and sustainable economic transformation.

## **8. Implications for Global Gateway**

The evidence reviewed suggests that Uzbekistan possesses a growing institutional infrastructure capable of supporting Global Gateway investments and priorities.

The strongest opportunities for future cooperation are concentrated in six areas:

- Regional Centres of Vocational Excellence;
- Institute for the Development of Vocational Education;
- Green Technicums;
- International Programme Technicums;
- Sector-based industrial training hubs;
- Quality assurance and qualifications systems.

Together, these institutions provide the foundation for developing the skilled workforce required to support digital transformation, transport connectivity, renewable energy deployment, industrial modernisation, and sustainable economic growth across Uzbekistan and the wider Central Asian region.

<b>Priority area</b>	<b>Existing national programmes / reforms</b>	<b>Relevant institutions / status</b>	<b>Evidence already available</b>	<b>What still needs official confirmation</b>
<b>Digitalisation / IT</b>	Digital education, AI integration, robotics, digital pedagogy, Coursera cooperation, AI labs, innovation ecosystems	Technicums with IT, computer graphics, robotics, programming, AI, cybersecurity, digital design	DIGI-TEACH UZ and AI-related TVET work are reflected in your DARYA reports; PF-158 supports international programmes in vocational education.	Exact list of IT/digital technicums; labs; equipment; employer partnerships; international IT programmes
<b>Transport and logistics</b>	Labour-market-oriented VET, employer cooperation, connectivity skills	Tashkent Automobile and Road Technical School; technicums in road transport, logistics, railway, multimodal transport	Confirmed cooperation between Association of Logistics of Uzbekistan, Tashkent Automobile and Road Technical School, and Multimodal Trans Terminal LLC.	Full list of transport/logistics technicums; dual education agreements; modern workshops/simulators
<b>Green transition / construction</b>	14 green technicums; green skills; dual education; construction-related skills competitions	Planned green technicums in each region; construction technicums; welding, electrical installation, plumbing and construction programmes	Your March and May reports confirm 14 green technicums and “Yangi O‘zbekiston bunyodkorlari” skills competition.	Names of the 14 green technicums; equipment base; links to GIZ/other projects; construction-sector partnerships
<b>Centres of Vocational Excellence</b>	DARYA-supported peer learning and vocational excellence agenda	14 Regional Centres of Vocational Excellence across Uzbekistan	EU/ETF DARYA launched training for Regional Centres of Vocational Excellence in February 2026.	Official list of 14 CoVEs; sectoral profiles; employer partners; investment history
<b>International programmes in technicums</b>	Expansion of international education programmes in VET	Technicums selected for international or joint programmes	Your March report notes the 2026 target of 100 technicums with international programmes and at least five occupations per region.	Which 100 technicums; countries/partners; occupations; accreditation or certification outcomes
<b>Advanced vocational excellence technicums / Kasblar shaharchasi</b>	Proposed advanced vocational skills technicums and “City of Professions” model	Future advanced technicums / vocational career towns	Your May–June reports note public discussion of advanced vocational excellence	Whether the draft resolution has been adopted; exact institutional list; implementation timeline

			technicums and “Kasblar shaharchasi”.	
<b>International accreditation / quality assurance</b>	State accreditation, external quality assurance, international alignment	National Quality Assurance Agency; VET institutions; qualification assessment centres	NQAEE is responsible for quality assurance, assessment and accreditation based on international standards.	Whether international accreditation applies to technicums, programmes, medical colleges, or qualification centres; which international bodies are involved
<b>Investment / equipment / workshops</b>	Modernisation of material-technical base; dual education; practical training	Technicums with workshops, laboratories, employer-linked training	PF-158 shows focus on practical training, international programmes and modernisation.	Institution-by-institution evidence: equipment, donors, employers, workshops, investment value

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