

Analysis of Labour Market Needs and Vocational Education and Training (VET) Provision in the Ajara Tourist Sector



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List of Abbreviations

EBC	Euro Business College
EPI	Economic Prosperity Initiative
EU	European Union
BTM	Batumi
CESO/SACO	Canadian Executive Service Organization
GEL	Georgian Lari
Geostat	National Statistics Office of Georgia
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IT	Information Technology
LEPL	Legal Entity in Public Law
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MECS	Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions
PAM	Parkstad Aachen Marketing
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PR	Public Relations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VAT	Value Added Tax

Executive Summary

Tourism in Ajara is growing rapidly. According to the Ajara Department of Tourism, the number of tourists visiting the region has gone up from 147,000 visitors in 2005 to around 1.3 million in 2011. According to the Ajara Regional Government, tourism is responsible for 43% of the region's investments.

However, tourism companies still complain about difficulties in finding appropriately trained staff. Three main publicly funded institutions provide professional training for the tourism sector: The Professional College of the Black Sea (commonly referred to as 'Batumi VET Centre'), Kobuleti "New Wave" Community College and Batumi, Shota Rustaveli State University. These institutions are supported by the Georgian central government and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara (hereafter MECS).

The objective of this research is to assist in the ongoing development of professional skills training in Ajara by providing detailed information about the labour market needs of the tourism sector in the region. This research is part of GIZ's support of Vocational Education and Training (VET) development in Georgia within the context of its *Private Sector Development Programme*. This research project also builds on two pieces of VET analysis that GIZ have already conducted with GeoWel Research.¹ However, this research gives a far more detailed analysis of the demands and the skill mismatches as they relate to a particular sector, place and even to individual professions within the sector.

The research comprised of preparatory desk work in Tbilisi and a 98-business survey of the tourism sector in Ajara, with 98 questionnaires for the general tourism sector and 197 profession-specific questionnaires completed. It also included a 40-person survey of Ajara VET graduates, a focus group with VET instructors and around 40 expert interviews in Tbilisi and Ajara.

To develop an understanding of different professions across multiple businesses we needed to use several different questionnaires for each business. One questionnaire was answered by everyone and another 10 questionnaires were developed and answered by different businesses as appropriate. These 10 profession-specific questionnaires were based on professional standards that have been developed by the Georgian Government to guide training in each profession.

Research involved close collaboration and detailed discussions with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara (MECS) at every stage of development and implementation.

Recruitment, Salaries and Seasonality

The general questionnaire provided detailed information on levels of recruitment in different professions, seasonality in different sectors and general engagement of the sector with VET in several ways. The profession-specific questionnaire and the graduate questionnaire focused more intensively on specific skill deficiencies.

Waiters, cooks and cleaners have seen the largest amount of recruitment in the last 6 months. Most recruitment, as we also know from many other surveys, takes place informally via personal contacts or family and friends. Only around 7% of the businesses we interviewed used VET centres for recruitment. Consistent with other polls, 80-90% found recruitment to be difficult or very difficult. Cleaning was the only profession in which recruitment was not difficult.

¹ GTZ (conducted by GeoWel Research) (2010), *Matching Vocational Education in Georgia with Labour Market Needs* (http://www.geowel.org/files/vet_mismatch_study_english.pdf) and GTZ (conducted by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, with the assistance of GeoWel Research), *Pilot Survey of Labour Market Needs in Georgia* (2012)

Also, salaries are fairly varied and fairly modest, with the highest salaries going to cooks and restaurant staff (average of GEL 450-500) and the lowest to cleaners (GEL 260).

Seasonality of employment is a problem, but less of a problem than some commentators suggest. Employment levels drop by 30-35% across sectors between on- and off-seasons (though more in some professions than others). Seasonality is most pronounced in large companies: companies with fewer than 10 employees only see employment drop by an average of 14%, whereas companies with more than 30 employees see it drop by an average of 36%.

Interaction with VET

Only 14% of the large companies and 3% of the smaller companies (with less than 10 employees) used VET interns. Around half of the companies we spoke to said that they have hired a VET graduate at some point, though 80% said they might be interested in doing so. Again, these percentages were far higher for large companies than for smaller ones.

For any specific given profession, the percentage of companies who had employed VET was lower. Although 60% of companies who hire bartenders said they had employed from VET centres at some time, most of the professions had lower rates, with 36% of companies who had hired receptionists, 29% who had hired tour guides and 22% who had hired cooks. The rest were all under 20%.

Consistent with the results of many other surveys, businesses are generally not impressed with the VET students, but there was considerable difference across sectors. Hotels were generally the most positive, with 31% seeing VET graduates as 'good' or 'very good'. In restaurants, 2/3 said they were 'average', with 25% 'weak' or 'very weak' and only 4% 'good'. Tour operators had the most negative view. Around 2/3 said the graduates were 'average', but all of the rest said they were bad.

Analysis of Skill Demand and Skill Mismatch

Probably the most important objective of the surveys that we conducted was to assess the exact skill deficiencies that seem to exist in the Georgian market-place and which areas the VET centres should probably pay closest attention to. To do that, the analysis produced 10 profession-specific questionnaires (8 of which were ultimately used) that listed the main skills as shown in the professional standards. The questionnaire then asked the businesses, "How important is the skill?" (answers: essential, useful and useless) and "Do VET graduates and entry level staff have this skill?" (answers: yes, partially yes and no). We also asked if any skills needed to be listed in the professional standards list that are not currently listed.

It is hard to summarize these results in an executive summary since they provided an overview of the structure of many skill-needs in many different professions. Nonetheless, one can draw a few general conclusions. The first is that the professional standards are, if anything, overly comprehensive and list too many skills, as the employers failed to offer additions to the list provided. The problems with the standards are, therefore, that some of the listed skills are considered unimportant (so that the standards are unnecessarily long, confusing and unrealistic), and some skills are considered important, but under-provided.

Most of our analysis focused on looking at those skills that are considered important but under-provided. Personal characteristics like motivation, sociability and professionalism are considered essential in almost all professions and many of the people we spoke to said that they were the most important things they look for when recruiting.

All of these characteristics were at least partially provided in VET trainees and entry-level recruits. However, both in the survey and in more general discussions, it became clear that there is room for improvement and VET training should try and emphasize the importance of these soft skills.

The demand for general work-skills like IT, communication and management were much more profession-specific. IT skills are very important for a hotel administrator, receptionist or tour operator but much less so for a bartender or a waiter, and unimportant for a cook. According to businesses, all of the VET/new recruits in the sectors that need them have at least some of these skills (hotel administrator 84%, receptionist 90%, tour operator 75%). However, in each of these categories 25-40% (depending on the profession) said that the skill was only 'partially' developed, implying that more training would be useful.

Communication skills are considered universally essential for anyone who has contact with clients and almost none of the businesses considered these skills to be entirely absent in new employees. But the skill was only partially developed in bartenders (according to the 70% who responded), hotel administrators (60%), operators (50%) and waiters (38%).

Management skills were the least essential of all, with some demand amongst the category called 'hotel administrators' and tour operators. This is further supported when one reviews the answers to the profession-specific skills, as many of the very specific skill-sets deemed 'useless' by businesses relate to management skills.

In terms of background, 'experience' was the one of the most essential characteristics for potential employees. This did not translate into a demand for VET students, even though VET training involves internships, which should equate to 'experience'. The research takes considerable time to reflect on this issue. Part of the problem seems to be that the internships provided are either not long enough or not good enough to expose students to work-like conditions and therefore to be treated as genuine 'experience' by employers.

One part of the answer to this problem is probably the management of the internships. One section of our general questionnaire asked about companies who take VET interns, to find out their level of interaction with the VET centres. The results suggest that the internships are under-managed. More research probably needs to be conducted into this issue in order to identify how to make the VET internships more effective.

Similarly, if it is important to understand why VET is under-regarded, it is similarly important to understand why university education is so important in some cases. 60% of tour operators and 75% of guides considered university education to be essential whilst none of them considered VET education essential. Since university degrees and VET training are usually exclusive of one another in Georgia (students very rarely do both), the people who said that university education was essential are particularly interesting in terms of our analysis because they are essentially picking university education over VET education. The reason for this seems to be that university students are simply considered better and more widely educated in a way that tour operators and guides consider important for customer interaction.

We also asked about the need for and provision of language skills. From all of our preliminary discussions with stakeholders, language skills came up regularly as the most important skill that employers were looking for in client-oriented positions (therefore, not cleaners or cooks). Deficiency in language skills emerged as a criticism of VET from both businesses and students.

When we asked about language in relation to specific professions we found that there is not much difference in the demand for Russian/English. 70%-80% of client-oriented positions considered Russian to be

essential, and around 5% more considered English to be essential. Also, while the survey suggested 43% of entry level people spoke English and 45% spoke Russian, the results were ambiguous because it is always hard to know what people mean when they say that their employee can speak a language.

However, from all of our more general discussions there has been little question that language skills are probably the skill-set that guarantees employment more than any other in the tourism sector. In multiple discussions with hotel managers and tour operators (but not with restaurateurs) they have commonly stated that they would rather have an individual with no experience or training but good language skills than someone with high-level training and experience but no language skills. The feeling is often that 'we can teach them how to wait tables/receive guests/provide a tour/operate the right computer software etc' but 'we cannot teach them English, Russian or Turkish'.

Finally, the most profession-specific part of our surveys asked about skills that only make sense in relation to a given profession. From these surveys we have created two tables. The first table lists all of the skills characterized as 'useless' by more than 25% of the respondents in each given profession. This list identifies skills on the professional standards that might not be necessary. The second table lists all of the skills characterized as 'essential' where the VET students/entry-level employees either do not have the skill at all or only partially have the skill. This list indicates the skills that the VET centres should pay particular attention to.

While there is so much detail in both of these lists that there is not space enough to review it all in an executive summary, there are two general conclusions that one can draw from the two lists. First, the skills deemed 'useless' are generally higher level skills or managerial skills. This confirms suggestions made in several different ways in this research that tourism companies are simply not looking to VET centres for management skills at this time. This conclusion has been confirmed by more open-ended discussions with tourism companies.

Conversely, the general conclusion that can be offered about under-provided skills is that they are usually the most basic of practical skills. In the case of receptionists, they are skills relating to receiving guests and taking payment. In the case of cooks, hygiene and food-safety are considered under-provided and in the case of bartenders, mixing drinks and maintenance of bar equipment is often seen as only partially provided. Altogether this, once again, seems to suggest that VET centres should focus on basic practical training rather than widening the range of skills provided or aiming for higher level management skills.

Recommendations

Marketing of VET and VET Connections with Businesses

- Large businesses are aware of VET, small and medium businesses far less so. Therefore there is an opportunity to target small and medium operations.
 - As seasonality is lower in smaller companies, targeting these companies would have other beneficial consequences for employees.
- It is important to ensure that VET training can genuinely market itself as providing effective on-the-job training.
 - Internships should involve greater oversight and quality management to ensure that they provide a genuine work-like experience.

Professional Standards

The professional standards can be shortened and clarified by taking the following steps:

- Remove repetition,
- Remove unnecessary detail and concentrate on clearly expressed core skills,
- Remove unrealistic skills. At levels 1-3 there is little value in any management component,
- Ensure that identified skills are clearly and simply expressed.

General skills worth focusing on

- Language skills are the most universally demanded and under-provided skill. Russian is as important (and as poorly provided) as English. Turkish is also valuable.
 - It is essential that all elements of the educational system work together to ensure that there are opportunities for all ages and educational levels to gain good, reasonably priced foreign language training.
- Soft skills like motivation, communication, professional presentation, punctuality and politeness are considered essential by most professions and should be a core part of any VET training.
- Communication skills are considered essential for client-oriented jobs.
- IT skills need development in the case of:
 - Administrators,
 - Receptionists,
 - Tour operators.

Profession-specific skills

- The research shows an extensive list of very detailed skills that are on the professional standards list and are not needed, or that are on the list, considered 'essential' and underprovided. For specific skill training modifications, see that list.
- The most common 'essential' skills that are underprovided are core skills like health and safety for cooks, receiving guests for receptionists and maintaining bar equipment for barmen. Therefore VET should focus on ensuring that these skills are trained effectively, rather than expanding the range of skills taught.
- The most common skills considered 'useless' by employers are management and theoretical skills. Therefore, there is little point in providing any skills oriented towards management and there is little need for theory.

1 Methodology

The objective of this research was to gather detailed information about the labour market needs of the tourism sector in the Autonomous Republic of Ajara (hereafter Ajara) and to give initial impressions about the degree to which these needs are provided by the VET system. This project builds on two pieces of research that GIZ have already conducted with GeoWel Research that have focused on VET and labour market needs.² However, this research goes further, by looking in great detail at the skills demanded rather than merely the sector where demand exists.

The research was conducted between July and September 2012. Field work was conducted in Ajara from the 1st to the 25th August. The research comprised of preparatory desk work and interviews with VET centres, government officials and experts in the VET and tourism field in Tbilisi as well as extensive survey work with businesses and students.

During the field-work in Ajara, we met with government/businesses/NGOs and finalized the tourism business questionnaire. We then conducted 80 interviews with tourism-related businesses in Ajara and one focus group with VET trainees. Upon returning to Tbilisi, we also conducted follow-up discussions with a wide range of stakeholders by phone and interviewed a further 18 Ajara-based tourism businesses, as well as 40 graduates from Ajara VET centres.

Research involved close collaboration and detailed discussions with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara (MECS) at every stage of development and implementation.

Out of the total of 98 businesses interviewed, all but 7 were from Batumi. The 7 outside Batumi included 2 from Kobuleti and one each from Chakvi, Keda, Khulo, Kvartati and Shuakevi. This geographic bias was explained by MECS (who provided the list of businesses) as a reflection of the geographic bias of medium and large tourism companies in Ajara.

Initial desk research included a review of materials relating to Tourism/VET/Ajara and is summarized in the 'background' section below. This research was particularly important in this case as extensive research has already been conducted on Adjara, VET and tourism.

At the same time as conducting the desk research, the research team also met with tourism/VET experts in Tbilisi to gather preliminary insights and help to shape the research project. This included four large hotels, four development organizations working in tourism, the government agency responsible for VET and a HR company that advises the government on employment issues.

To try and gain an extremely fine-grained understanding of the exact skill needs as they related to both sectors and individual professions we decided to generate a total of 11 different questionnaires: one general questionnaire for all tourism companies and 10 additional questionnaires (almost one for each of the professional standards in tourism).³ 186 of these questionnaires were completed, averaging almost two per company.

² GTZ (conducted by GeoWel Research) (2010), *Matching Vocational Education in Georgia with Labour Market Needs* (http://www.geowel.org/files/vet_mismatch_study_english.pdf) and GTZ (conducted by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, with the assistance of GeoWel Research), *Pilot Survey of Labour Market Needs in Georgia* (2012)

³ There are actually 11 different professional standards developed, but out of these 11 there are three for 'guide': 'guide', 'mountain guide' and 'hiking guide'. We consolidated 'mountain guide' and 'hiking guide' into one questionnaire. This was never actually used as companies that used guides in Ajara did not distinguish between different types of guides.

The general questionnaire asked about recruitment, relations between the business and the VET centre, assessment of the skills of employees and broad skill-set priorities. This was developed in close discussion with MECS and was tailored to answer the questions they considered most important.

The professional standard questionnaires took the professional standards produced by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement and abbreviated them so that they became a list of skills which could be discussed in a short interview. This was an incredibly difficult process as the standards were far too long for us to interview businesses about them in detail. Therefore, they had to be severely abbreviated. Once we have abbreviated the standards, they were then circulated among a range of experts to ensure that we had not missed any key skill-set. In the process of translating and compressing the professional standards we were also able to conduct provisional analysis of the standards themselves.

In addition, during the test interviews we came to understand that the labels of the professional standards created considerable confusion. In particular, two skills were labeled 'hotel manager' and 'restaurant administrator' but none of the hotels/restaurants we spoke to said they would hire a manager straight out of VET school and almost none of the businesses would employ an administrator. The VET centres themselves also said that they did not expect their trainees to be employed at that level and they accepted that these course titles were principally a marketing strategy. Therefore, when we conducted the interviews we were clear that we were asking what skills would be expected of an entry level employee. To avoid confusion amongst interviewees we also relabeled two 'managerial' questionnaires. Instead of 'restaurant manager' we relabeled the questionnaire 'hotel administrator' and instead of 'restaurant administrator' we relabeled the questionnaire 'waiter' because these were the roles that VET students trained in these professions usually started in. This would usually correspond to level 2 or 3 in VET.

For each skill listed in the questionnaire, we asked the business/interviewee how important they thought the skill was and whether they thought it was provided by the current system. This identified mismatches between listed skills and VET provision.

In addition to the questionnaires developed for the businesses, we also developed a much shorter questionnaire for former students from VET centres and conducted phone interviews with students when we returned.

A total of 324 questionnaires were completed: 98 general questionnaires, 186 professional questionnaires (completed by the 80 businesses in the face-to-face interviews in Ajara) and 40 former VET students. In the case of businesses, there was no need to sample as the MECS provided us with a list of tourism businesses and we tried to contact all of them. In the case of students, we randomly sampled 40 students, 20 from Batumi VET centre and 20 from Kobuleti. This random sample came from a total list of 175 students provided by the VET management (101 for Kobuleti and 74 for Batumi).

2 Background

2.1 Profile of Tourist Sector

Ajara, with Batumi as its administrative centre, is located in southwestern Georgia. The region connects the country to the Black Sea (with 57 km of coastline) and to Turkey to the south. As of January 1st 2012, Ajara had a population of a little fewer than 394,000.⁴

Ajara's current tourism industry is largely structured around its beach resorts in Batumi, Kobuleti, Makhindjauri, Mtsvane, Kontskhi, Gonio, Kvartati, Sarpi and Tsikhisdziri. As beach resorts, they generally thrive in the summer season from June-September.

According to the Ajara Department of Tourism, the number of tourists visiting the region has gone up from 147,000 visitors in 2005 to around 1.3 million in 2011.⁵ As one can see from figure 2, the profile of these visitors has been changing. While Georgians still constitute an overwhelming majority of the group, the number of foreigners has risen from 18% in 2005 to 36% in 2011.

Figure 1: Total number of tourists to Ajara (2005-2011)⁶

Years	Total	Domestic	Foreigners
2005	147 000	120 000	27 000
2006	250 000	182 523	67 477
2007	352 085	239 786	112 299
2008	285 000	208 782	76 218
2009	554 150	392 091	162 059
2010	974 563	662 288	312 275
2011	1 319 513	838 661	480 852

The composition of international visitors has also been changing, as one can see in the table below.

Figure 2: Number of foreign tourists to Ajara by country of origin (2005-2011)⁷

Years	Azerbaijan	Turkey	Iran	Israel	Armenia	Ukraine	Poland	Russia	Others
2005	1 700	2 369	230	55	20 000	250	3	820	1 573
2006	2 498	10 062	514	105	46 273	1 349	108	1 713	4 855
2007	4 628	39 588	634	956	54 996	1 785	180	2 595	6 937
2008	3 757	30 804	330	1 740	26 130	1 704	155	2 371	9 227
2009	12 811	70 476	232	405	60 636	2 309	204	1 410	13 576
2010	43 970	136 341	4 536	967	98 995	7 706	582	5 514	13 664
2011	56 178	232 506	27 021	10 064	104 561	10 657	2 198	9 384	28 283

⁴ GeoStat (2012). *Number of Population is Increasing (Annual publication: population)*. http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/files/english/population/31.05.2012_eng.pdf (Reviewed August 20, 2012)

⁵ Department of Tourism and Resorts of Ajara (2012) *The number of foreign tourists in the Autonomous Republic of Ajara in 2005-2012 according to countries* http://www.tourismAjara.ge/new/admin/editor/uploads/files/visitors_by_country_2005-2012en.pdf (Reviewed August 20, 2012)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

As an analysis of tourism, one probably does not want to rely too heavily on these numbers as they do not distinguish between different types of visitors, treating everyone as a tourist. Most obviously, these figures probably give an exaggerated count for Turkish tourists, because they probably count Turkish construction workers and truck drivers as 'tourists'. However, the general picture given by the statistics – ie. the importance of Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Ukraine and Russia – is consistent with our conversations with hotel and restaurant owners as well as tour operators.

In addition, the efforts to market Ajara by the government seem to have been successful, as the dramatic increases in tourists arriving from Israel and Poland attest to. Due to the adoption of a visa-free regime last year (and the limited travel options for most Iranians) there has been a tremendous increase in the number of Iranians visiting the region, from 4.5 thousand in 2010 to 27 thousand in 2011.

2.2 Efforts to develop tourism

The development the tourism sector has been supported by improvements in the overall business environment and by specific reforms in Ajara and the country as a whole. As is often cited, Georgia has become an easy place to do business in recent years, gaining 16th place in the World Bank's 'Ease of Doing Business' rating.⁸ It also has visa-free regimes for more than 70 countries.

Ajara enjoys a rapidly developing tourism infrastructure and a business environment specifically tailored to encourage tourism. There are no licenses required for operating a company in the tourism industry. There are no license fees for opening casinos in hotels with more than 100 rooms⁹ and no VAT for incoming tourist revenues.

These efforts have brought an increase in tourist numbers and investors in the sector. According to the investment agency of the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Ajara, the sector so far has attracted 43% of the region's total investments.¹⁰

Several investment packages are being offered to potential investors by the Batumi investment agency, including the development of ski resorts (in Gomarduli, Goderdzi, and Kedlebi), recreational complexes (in Tcharnali and Kedkedi), a hunting club in Tikeri forest, development projects as part of the Kobuleti Free Tourism Zone and a golf course.¹¹

Part of the government strategy is therefore to develop new tourism activities in an effort to diversify its products and extend the tourist season, which now spans only a few month in the summer. New avenues include the development of MICE tourism, cultural and historical tourism, ecotourism and cruise tourism. Gambling is supported and set to expand since it is banned in Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran and is heavily restricted in Russia. Events like the Black Sea Jazz Festival, the Symphonic Music Festival and other musical events are also organized.

Finally, the government also aims to improve the current tourism products and services and is putting considerable effort into improving the hospitality culture in the region. They are also trying to provide

8 World Bank/IFC (2012). *Doing business in a more transparent world*.

<http://www.doingbusiness.org/-/media/FPKM/Doing%20Business/Documents/Annual-Reports/English/DB12-FullReport.pdf> (Reviewed August 21, 2012) p97

9 Owners of a newly built hotel with at least 100 rooms can acquire a casino license free of charge for the first 10 years of operation.

10 Invest in Batumi/ Ministry of Finance and Economy of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara (2012). *Economic Sectors: Tourism*. <http://www.investinbatumi.ge/economic.php?id=2> (Reviewed August 21, 2012)

11 Ministry of Finance and Economy of Ajara (2012). *Overview of tourism sector in Ajara*. <http://www.investinbatumi.ge/pdf/pre/tourism.pdf> (Reviewed August 21, 2012)

adequate information and assistance to tourists by establishing a network of information centres where trained and qualified staff are able to assist visitors. Also, a campaign called “keep our beaches and our boulevard clean” aims to raise the awareness of the local population about the need to reduce litter.

Ajara enjoys a greater degree of autonomous government and financing than other regions in Georgia (with the exception of Tbilisi). As a result, the tourism development efforts are supported by a number of agencies inside Ajara. These include the Department of Tourism and Resorts of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, which includes the Batumi Tourism Agency and the Batumi Investment Agency. We will briefly consider their activities below.

2.2.1 Department of Tourism and Resorts of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara and the Batumi Tourism Agency

The Department of Tourism and Resorts of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara is responsible for the sustainable development of tourism in Ajara through the implementation of its strategic plan. It has a total budget of GEL 3.4 million for 2012.¹²

The department’s activities largely focus on marketing tourism in Ajara at home and to target markets, though it also supports the development of tourism services and engages in the collection of data and analysis of the sector.

Marketing is GEL 600,000 of their budget. The department markets the region through its website and through direct-marketing campaigns that target particular countries such as Armenia (in 2011), Azerbaijan (in 2011) and Turkey (in 2012). In targeting other areas they have been even more directly involved. For example, in marketing to Poland and Israel they supported charter flights as well as advertising.

The department also works to improve tourism products and services. The department has offered several training sessions to professionals in the tourism industry in the past. Last May, for example, they organized the training of 127 mid-level managers from hotels and restaurants.

To direct their activities, the department keeps statistics about the number of visitors to the region and carries out surveys to monitor guests’ appreciation of their stay in the region.

Working under the Department of Tourism, the Batumi Tourism Agency was created two years ago. It carries out functions that one would more usually expect from a travel agency or tour operator, including helping tourists book flight tickets, hotels and find guides.¹³

The agency is also involved in organizing training and works in collaboration with the tourist information centres that were recently created. There are currently 6 of these centres across the region. Three are located in Batumi and the others are in Khulo, Sarpi and Kobuleti.

2.2.2 Batumi Investment Agency

This agency was established in 2011 by the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Ajara and acts as a one-stop shop for investors coming to the region. The agency performs four main tasks:

- Informs the business community and potential investors about opportunities in Ajara,

12 Phone interview with Rauli Abuladze (October 2012), Deputy Head, Department of Tourism and Resorts

13 Interview with Eka Tchanishvili (August 1st, 2012) Director of the Batumi Tourism Agency

- Provides information about the regulations and legal framework, trade and tax regulations, and other economic and financial information to investors,
- Facilitates contact between investors and different local stakeholders,
- Arranges meetings and site visits.¹⁴

The agency attracts investments by participating in business forums in places like Kiev, Dubai, Qatar, Armenia and Iran, and by sending promotional materials to Georgian embassies abroad that then disseminate them. According to officials in the agency, most investors come from neighboring countries although there is a growing trend this year of investors coming from Iran, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.¹⁵

2.3 VET in Georgia

Georgia's education system is comprised of general education (primary, basic, secondary), professional education (or Vocational Education and Training – VET) and higher education. Initial developments affecting the VET system began in 2005 when the prime minister approved the concept of vocational education.¹⁶ In 2007, the law on vocational education set the basis for the consolidation in 2007-2008 of 17 vocational schools and 64 elementary vocational education and training centers into 38 VET centres with the status of legal entities in public law (LEPLs).¹⁷

The main goals of the VET reform strategy for 2009-2012 were to prepare students to compete on local/international labour markets and to bring the system closer to European and international education standards.¹⁸

At the heart of the current VET system are the professional standards. Amendments to the law on VET in 2010 required that VET institutions have to abide by the professional standards set by the state in order to gain accreditation.¹⁹ The standards documents define the levels associated with each profession being taught, the number of credits and the knowledge/skills/values associated with each level of different professions.²⁰ Standards are being developed in sector committees and working groups in which professional associations, employers, business representatives, representatives of VET institutions and higher education institutions, government representatives and other interested individuals participate.²¹

There are 14 sector committees and one is dedicated to the elaboration of professional standards for tourism. To date, 11 professional standards have been developed for tourism: bartender, cook, guide, hiking guide, mountain guide, hotel manager, pastry cook, receptionist, waiter, sommelier and tour operator.

Vocational education programs are based on the professional standards and approved by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement. The development of the standards is in line with the *National Qualifications Framework* that was adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia on December 10, 2010.²²

14 Invest in Batumi/ Ministry of Finance and Economy of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara (2012). *About Batumi Investment Agency*. <http://batumiinvest.ge/bia.php?id=1> (Reviewed August 24, 2012)

15 Interview with Zaal Chaghalidze (August 1st, 2012) Batumi Investment Agency

16 USAID/IOM (2011) *Supplying Workforce to the Georgian Labour Market*. p19

17 GTZ (prepared by GeoWel) (2010) *Matching Vocational Education in Georgia with Labour Market Needs*. p13

18 National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (2012) *Vocational Qualification Framework: Occupational Standards*. <http://eqe.ge/uploads/VocationalEducation/e-bookletonOSandQFENGforwebfinal.pdf> (Reviewed August 27, 2012)

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 USAID/IOM (2011) *Supplying Workforce to the Georgian Labour Market*. p22

The framework encompasses all qualifications in Georgia and is based on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (LLL). The document ‘defines what type of knowledge, skills and values an individual should have in order to receive a certifying document of completion at a corresponding level – School Certificate, Vocational Diploma, and Diploma’.²³

Throughout Georgia, there are currently 19 public vocational and community colleges, 54 private vocational and community colleges and a limited number of higher and secondary education institutions accredited to teach vocational education programs.²⁴

2.4 VET in Ajara

Ajara currently has three publicly financed institutions providing professional training in tourism: The Professional College of the Black Sea (commonly referred to as ‘Batumi VET Centre’), Kobuleti Community College and Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport is the direct beneficiary of the research conducted here by GeoWel/GIZ as the ministry is involved in the development of the vocational education system, with a particular emphasis on tourism. The ministry is also currently running a program with finances from the regional budget in collaboration with the Salzburg Tourism School. The project focuses on curricula and faculty development of VET centres.²⁵

2.4.1 Batumi VET Centre (professional college Black Sea, LEPL)

The Batumi vocational centre is the result of successive mergers that brought together three colleges five years ago and the industrial college in 2010. It provides programs in tourism, construction, IT, medicine and service (sewing). At the time this research was conducted, it accommodated a total of 450 students. 252 students have graduated this year, according to director Giorgi Gogitidze.²⁶

Courses are being taught for bartenders, hotel managers, restaurant managers, waiters, guides, receptionists and cooks. The centre is accredited to teach the first three levels and cannot teach the more management-oriented 4th and 5th levels. Like most VET centres, courses are divided between 40% theory and 60% practice.²⁷

For any profession, VET students have to undergo an internship. According to Giorgi Gogitidze, this had in the past created problems, because internships clashed with the tourism season. The goal of the centre is now to offer training in the winter and make sure students are ready to start working in the summer. The trade-off is that it is harder to find internships for students in the winter.

As in other VET centres, the length of the courses depends on the professions and the levels being taught. They can have 20 people in one class and they can run two classes simultaneously if necessary.

For bartenders, the entire course (level 3) takes 5 1/2 months and is equally divided between theory and practice. It also includes 6 weeks of practical courses.²⁸ When professions have several levels, students have to

23 National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (2012) *Vocational Qualification Framework: Occupational Standards*. <http://eqe.ge/uploads/VocationalEducation/e-bookletonOSandQFENGforwebfinal.pdf> (Reviewed August 27, 2012)

24 Ibid

25 Interview with Nazibrola Beridze Gabaidze (August 1st, 2012) Head of Department at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Ajara

26 Interview with Giorgi Gogitidze (August 2nd, 2012) Director of the professional college Black Sea, LEPL (Batumi VET centre)

27 Note here that ‘practice’ here refers to the practical part of their class-based training and should be distinguished from the internships they receive.

28 Interview with Giorgi Gogitidze (August 2nd, 2012) Director of the professional college Black Sea, LEPL (Batumi VET centre)

work through the different levels. In some cases, students with sufficient professional experience can start at a higher level without completing the lower levels.

In Kobuleti, most students prefer to finish the first two levels of a given profession and then move on to the job market. In the priority economic sectors of tourism, construction and agriculture, courses are subsidized by the state GEL 1000 VET voucher system. In most cases, this is enough to cover the cost of the first two levels of a given course.²⁹

According to the director, all of the tourism students find work in the summer and roughly 83% of them are employed in the winter.³⁰ This was not confirmed by our research, which suggested that there is some unemployment amongst graduates.

The teachers working at the centre include a mix of academics and professionals. For instance, their bartending teacher is the vice-president of the Georgian Bartender Association and some of the teachers for guides have their own tourism companies. Some of the staff members received training from UNDP. The average salary for teachers is GEL 5 per hour.

Their board includes a restaurant owner and a large company financier and they have provided us with a list of 40 'social partners' who provide internships for the students. However, it is unclear how many of these 40 are regular partners.³¹

The centre benefitted greatly from the help and expertise of donor organizations. With the help of the IOM and the financing of USAID, they developed sewing courses and opened a career development centre. USAID's economic prosperity initiative allowed them to add to the programs by offering two sewing courses. The centre has been working with UNDP since 2008. They have collaborated on several projects and UNDP has developed training manuals for certain professions.

The budget for the centre consists of the state contribution (GEL 210,000), and an additional GEL 80,000, money provided by donor organizations (UNDP - GEL 35,000 and IOM - GEL 45,000). The centre also won a tender from the municipality to the amount of GEL 45,000.

2.4.2 Kobuleti Community College (public college New Wave, LEPL)

The Kobuleti community college has recently been accredited to teach classes of the 4th and 5th level and offers programs in tourism, IT and transportation. General VET colleges can only teach levels 1-3. It is one of the main institutions nationwide that prepares students to work in the tourism industry.

The programs offered in tourism are wide-ranging: hotel and restaurant manager, tour operator, guide (general, local, mountain and hiking guide), bartender, cook, pastry cook, waiter, housekeeper and receptionist.³²

The length of the courses and the different levels offered vary depending on the professions. For instance, receptionists only go through one level (3rd level) which takes 6 months. Typically, the first two levels take

29 The existing voucher system provides 1000 GEL financing of VET for socially vulnerable persons courses seems to create some hurdles to the improvement of courses in VET colleges. It has been suggested that if colleges try to improve the programs, by adding subjects or increasing the hours, then programs can end up costing more than 1000 GEL, and those colleges can remain uncompetitive situation relative to other colleges. This creates a disincentive for development of the VET courses.

30 Interview with Giorgi Gogitidze (August 2nd, 2012) Director of the professional college Black Sea, LEPL (Batumi VET centre)

31 Our discussion with many of the listed 'social partners' as part of this research would suggest that some of them had short-lived relationships with the VET centre.

32 Interview with Davit Mtchedlishvili (August 2nd, 2012) Director of the Kobuleti Community College

less than a year to complete, the third level takes around 8 months and the 4th and 5th level combined take approximately one year.³³ For instance, cooks willing to go through the entire process take 8 months to complete the 1st and 2nd levels (4 months each), 8 months for the third level and then approximately one year for both the 4th and 5th levels.

However, most students who go through the entire process have to gain some significant work experience, either in Georgia or abroad, which increases the actual length of the process. According to director Davit Mtchedlishvili, students usually finish the first two levels of a given course (since it is financed by the government with the GEL 1000 voucher) and then spend some time on the job market. After gaining some experience, a significant number of students come back to the centre and go through the upper levels of training. In the near future, the centre aims to receive 600 students for the 4th and 5th levels.³⁴

In order to finish a given program, students must go through an internship, exams and presentations. In their internships, each student has a personal journal where their practical knowledge is evaluated (employers also use the journal). Each group supervisor prepares a final evaluation for each of their students, who then must also pass a final exam in which employers also participate.³⁵

Courses are aimed to offer as much practical skills as possible so programs are designed to offer 40% theory and 60% practice (plus the necessary internship). A typical week in the VET centre means three days of practical in-class training and two days of theory.

Internships entail a minimum of 25 days and can last as long as a month and a half. Students are evaluated by their direct supervisors in the workplace who then provide feedback to the community college.

According to the centre, most students find employment after the completion of their studies. During the year, approximately 82% of their graduates are employed and that number comes close to 100% during the summer.³⁶ Students usually work in hotels and restaurants as housekeepers, bartenders, cooks, and waiters.

Teachers working at the college include both academics and professionals. According to Davit Mtchedlishvili, the teachers are well qualified but the college is still eager to keep them involved in training.³⁷ The college cooperates frequently with the Department of Tourism of Ajara, which provides training for its staff.

On average, a permanent teacher receives GEL 600-700 per month and this can go up to GEL 1000 in some cases. This is the equivalent of a rate of GEL 7 per hour for regular teachers and GEL 12 per hour for invited professionals.

The centre works in close collaboration with several businesses. Business representatives are on the advisory and monitoring board of the college, and the Batumi employment agency. The college aspires to involve businesses as much as possible in the whole process through invited teachers, the preparation of exams and the practical skills taught to students on the internships. According to its director, the college also organizes a business forum and advertises its services to reach out to potential social partners.³⁸

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

That said, engaging with businesses continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing VET centres both in Georgia and abroad. This problem is explained at length in the previous piece of VET research that GeoWel Research conducted for GIZ.³⁹

Last year, the college had a budget of approximately GEL 600,000. Money comes from students' tuition fees, occasional contracts (Georgian Palace gave the college GEL 20,000 to set up a fence around its premises), catering contracts and the participation in tenders (sending students to two school cafeterias).⁴⁰

This year, the college plans to start operating its own newly built hotel (including bar/terrace and restaurant) which is located on the same lot as the college. More funds are required to buy appliances, some furniture and to finish the kitchen. Once completed, the project will not only provide a venue for students to put their skills into practice but also the possibility of increasing the revenues of the college.

The Kobuleti Community College received government support to finance the renovation of the building, which also includes a dorm for students. It also benefitted from the support of international organizations such as USAID (purchased school material, offered training to teachers, offered two-month retraining programs for students and bought appliances and equipment), GIZ (offered training to teachers and managers)⁴¹, and the Norwegian Refugee Council (financed some programs for IDPs and socially vulnerable people).⁴²

The centre's director is the coordinator of an exchange program for teachers and students financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, which allowed representatives of 8 colleges to go to Estonia and enhance their managerial skills. The college also cooperates with organizations from the Netherlands (PAM)⁴³ and Canada (CESO/SACO)⁴⁴ on projects designed to invite trainers to Georgia.⁴⁵

2.4.3 Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

The Batumi State University offers several programs to students in the field of tourism. The tourism faculty has been operating since 2010. In its first year no new students were accepted and the places available were filled by bachelor student in business management who changed to the four year tourism program instead.

New students started the various programs in September 2011. Traditional university programs include a 4 year bachelor program in tourism (approximately 150 students), a master and a PhD program.

In terms of professional education, the university offers a 10 month course in hotel management (20 students and 16 graduates) and a short-term 3 month course in tourism management (15 students). The shorter course is offered to both foreign students and Georgian students with work experience.⁴⁶

The longer professional course in hotel management is open to non-Georgian nationals and this year will include students from Bangladesh who were brought in by the Ministry of Education.⁴⁷ Entry to this fourth level program in hotel management is restricted to students who have passed the national exam and the government's general

39 GTZ (conducted by GeoWel Research) (2010), *Matching Vocational Education in Georgia with Labour Market Needs* (http://www.geowel.org/files/vet_mismatch_study_english.pdf)

40 Interview with Davit Mtchedlishvili (August 2nd, 2012) Director of the Kobuleti Community College

41 This has been conducted through "InWent" an organisation that has been part of GIZ Human Capacity Development. The project was called 'Employment-oriented qualification in key sectors of economic development in Georgia (2009-2012)'

42 Interview with Davit Mtchedlishvili (August 2nd, 2012) Director of the Kobuleti Community College

43 See http://www.parkstad-aachen.com/index.php?url=-hotel_recreation_tourism-index.htm (Reviewed August 29, 2012)

44 See <http://www.ceso-saco.com/Home.aspx> (Reviewed August 29, 2012)

45 Interview with Davit Mtchedlishvili (August 2nd, 2012) Director of the Kobuleti Community College

46 Interview with Rostom Beridze (August 2nd, 2012) Dean of the tourism faculty at Batumi State University

47 Ibid.

ability test. The completion of the previous three levels from VET centres is not required, nor is professional experience. If there is a lot of competition, an interview process allows for the selection of the best candidates.

The ten month program includes the following classes: professional foreign language (English-4 credits), tourism and hospitality basics (4 credits), hotel management (5 credits), hotel management system 'Opera' (3 credits), restaurant operations management 'Micros' (3 credits), event management MICE (3 credits) and business ethics and etiquette (2 credits).⁴⁸

The course lasts from September until June and comprises of 60 credits distributed between theory (24) and practice (36).

The tourism faculty employs international experts and Georgian professionals as lecturers. They have benefitted from the expertise of Kurt Heinz Reitz, an expert from the German 'Centre for International Migration' (CIM), who has been working with the faculty for the last three years. They have also worked with David Harrison of the Peace Corps and Charlotte M. Vaillancourt of the Teach and Learn with Georgia program.⁴⁹ Georgian lecturers receive a salary of GEL 8 per hour.

The social partners of the University mostly include larger hotels in the region including the Sheraton, Radisson, Era Palace and Georgian Palace as well as some restaurants. The 16 students who graduated from the 10 month hotel management program have found work as receptionists in hotels and as restaurant employees.⁵⁰

The university offers international exchange programs to students through partnerships with foreign universities. Bachelor students are given the opportunity to spend a year at the Telemark University in Norway to study tourism management (financed by the government of Norway, USD 1.3 million). PhD students also take part in internships in Norway and are sent for one month in the autumn to the EBC Hochschule in Hamburg, Germany. Other partner universities include the Fachhochschule Eberwalde University in Germany and the Mugla University in Bodrum, Turkey.

The faculty has its own tourism agency which has won some tenders including the organization of wine tours. With financing from the Ministry of Education of Ajara, they have brought 280 children from Ajara to the old Georgian region located in eastern Turkey. They have won a tender from the city of Kobuleti to bring school directors to Turkey and one from the city of Zugdidi to bring school children to the same destination. According to Rostom Beridze, the dean of the Faculty of Tourism, these activities are beneficial for students since they act as guides during the trips.⁵¹ Finally, the faculty will carry out training for tourism specialists from 5 municipalities (10 recipients in total).

The faculty draws funds from the university budget and also uses students' tuition fees for their daily activities.

2.5 Structure of Employment of VET Graduates

Following our meetings, we gained contact information for some of the students from the two main VET centres and conducted a small poll of those students. The 40 students we called (20 from each centre) were selected randomly from the list provided. We do not claim that the results are representative, as it is impossible to know how the student list we were provided relates to the overall population of graduates. However, the results may be indicative.

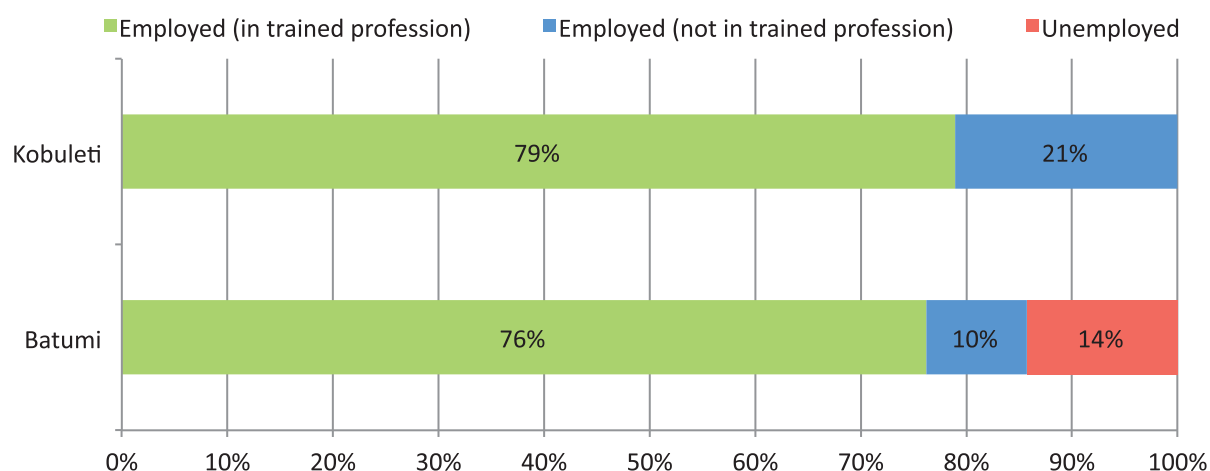
⁴⁸ Material provided by the Faculty of Tourism at Batumi State University (August 2012)

⁴⁹ Interview with Rostom Beridze (August 2nd, 2012) Dean of the Faculty of Tourism at Batumi State University

⁵⁰ Ibid.

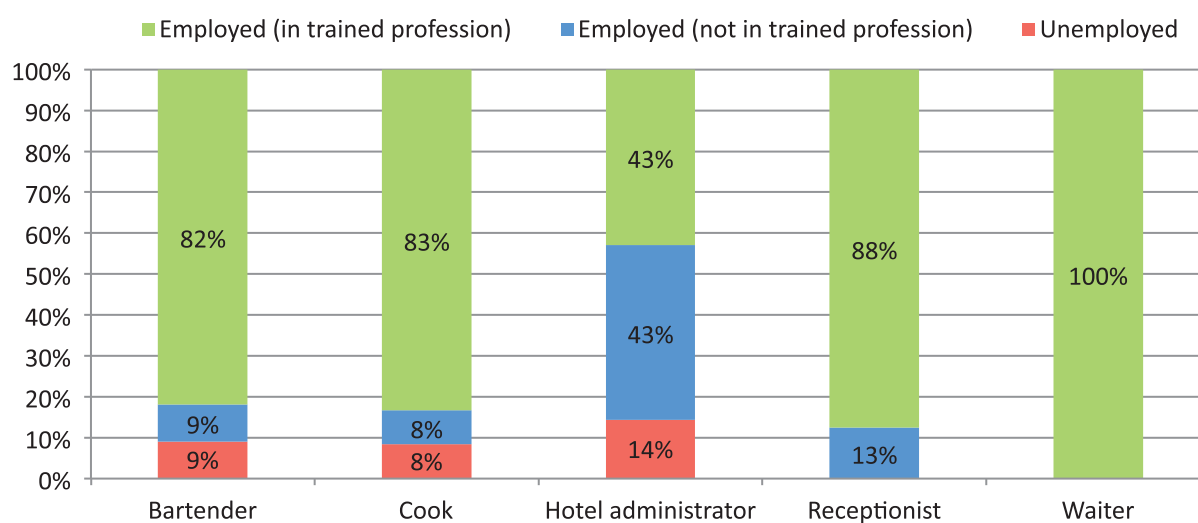
⁵¹ Ibid.

Figure 3: Employment rate of graduates by VET centre



Broken down by profession, the picture is similar, with all groups experiencing low unemployment.

Figure 4: Employment of interviewed graduate students by profession



Given the small sample size, unemployment was fairly consistent across all professions. Hotel managers are the one group that stands out for not being employed 'in their trained profession'. This is not surprising. None of the hotels we spoke to hired VET students directly for management roles or for management trainee positions. Most are hired as cleaners, receptionists and, occasionally, hotel administrators.

3 Professional Standards

11 professional standards have been developed for the tourism industry. Courses taught in different vocational centres have to abide by these standards and the skills listed in the standards should reflect students' capacities, knowledge and aptitudes once they graduate from any given level.

Figure 5: Different levels taught according to professions based on the professional standards⁵²

Professions	Levels
Bartender	3 rd level only
Cook	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , 5 th
Hotel administrator	3 rd , 4 th , 5 th
Guide	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th
Hiking guide	3 rd , 4 th
Mountain guide	5 th
Pastry cook	2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , 5 th
Receptionist	3 rd level only
Restaurant manager/waiter	2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , 5 th
Sommelier	3 rd level only
Tour operator	3 rd , 4 th , 5 th

Some of these professions, such as bartender, receptionist, sommelier and mountain guide, have only one level. Usually, vocational institutions are accredited to teach the first three levels. The first two levels provide students with the basics of the tourism industry (service and hospitality) and enough specific theoretical and practical knowledge to enter the job market. The first two levels, or the single level required for bartenders and receptionists⁵³, allow students to find entry-level jobs in hotels and restaurants. Most work as waiters, housekeepers, bartenders, receptionists and in lower positions in the kitchen. These students are expected to work under the close supervision of their immediate supervisor. With time, training and work experience, they can climb up the hierarchy and occupy more important positions.

The 4th and 5th levels included in the professional standards are designed to teach business and managerial skills to students. Usually, students wishing to complete these levels have had considerable work experience at home or abroad since there is a considerable gap in what is expected of them in comparison with graduates of the previous three levels. Technically, 4th and 5th level students are expected to be able to hold higher positions in the work place, whether it is in the kitchen or elsewhere, and to be in charge of other employees.

The table below provides an abbreviated overview of the skills and aptitudes of a 4th and 5th level cook according to the professional standard.

52 According to the professional standards designed by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement. Again, note that the names of these professions do not necessarily accurately represent the skills or likely positions. The 'hotel manager' is often employed as a cleaner or, at best, a 'hotel administrator'. The 'restaurant manager' is usually someone trained and hired as a waiter. For most of the text we use the more accurate descriptions of the positions rather than the formal title provided by VET. See methodology section for further explanation.

53 Please note that none of the businesses interviewed employed a 'sommelier' and none of the educational institutions had specific programs designed to train students to become sommeliers either. Although some businesses have shown interest in the profession, it seems that both demand and supply are restricted at the moment. However, some of the larger businesses opt to deal directly with wine companies who offer wine training and seminars. Consequently, some food and beverage specialists, along with bartenders and waiters from larger hotels and restaurants, attend such activities.

Figure 6: Different skills listed for 4th and 5th level cook according to the professional standard⁵⁴

4 th level cook	5 th level cook
<p><i>Knowledge and comprehension</i></p> <p>Organization and management of the restaurant kitchen; Basics of sales/marketing, HR management, PR, entrepreneurship and business; Thorough knowledge of the principles of preparing/decorating dishes of both national and international cuisine.</p>	<p><i>Knowledge and comprehension</i></p> <p>Has multifaceted theoretical and practical knowledge of processes, principles and concepts related to the food and drinks sector; Knows principles and methods of training, preparing, choosing and assessing staff.</p>
<p><i>Knowledge in practice</i></p> <p>Assists the chef, oversees the functioning of the kitchen; Takes part in hiring staff, trains staff; Prepares dishes of national and international cuisines.</p>	<p><i>Knowledge in practice</i></p> <p>Manages kitchen staff, coordinates culinary activities; Hires kitchen staff, determines their functions and working scheme; Trains and retrain staff; Establishes the standard rations for the dish, plans and compiles the menu; Ensures quality of food and customer service; Controls and analyzes prices of dishes; Creates kitchen budget, analyzes revenues and expenditures of the kitchen together with the food and drink manager; If needed, helps cooks in preparing dishes; cooks all types of dishes (e.g. those for special guests).</p>
<p><i>General work skills</i></p> <p>Good team worker; Ability to work independently; IT and communication technologies.</p>	<p><i>General work skills</i></p> <p>Leadership skills; Good time management.</p>

With slight variations depending on a given profession, the courses taught at those levels include sales and marketing, entrepreneurship and management and financial management. 4th and 5th level graduates are also expected to be able to coordinate activities in the workplace, supervise/train staff, participate in the hiring process and even elaborate business plans.

The professional standards documents themselves are fairly large and explain what a particular profession involves, the number of credits required to attain each standard and the skills that one is expected to learn on each level.

⁵⁴ According to the professional standard for cooks.

These skills are broken down into:

- knowledge and comprehension (theoretical knowledge),
- knowledge in practice (practical skills),
- Ability to make conclusions (general analytical skills),
- Communication ability,
- Learning ability,
- Values.

3.1 General comments on the professional standards documents

The main reason why we worked with the professional standards was to provide a list of skills around which to develop questionnaires. The professional standards provided us with a pre-prepared list of skills, pertinent to a particular profession, so that we could see how businesses felt about the skills (were they useful or necessary?) and whether they thought the skills were provided by VET centres.

However, in the process of producing condensed standards, we also spent a lot of time working with the standards and talking with employers and experts about them. A number of concerns were commonly expressed about the standards. Our analysis provides a summary of these concerns.

First, there is a strong consensus that the lists are simply too long. This occurs because they are repetitive, overly detailed and unfocused. As an example of their repetitiveness, in the hiking guide professional standard, the need to ‘read maps and ‘follow a trail’ is listed as a skill in 5-10 different ways. Similarly, the professional standard for waiter repeats ‘taking an order’ and ‘waiting tables’ in many different ways.

The fact that they are overly detailed is clear from some of the subdivisions of skills they list. For example, the hotel manager standard includes ‘using a credit card machine’, ‘using a payment terminal’ and ‘using a receipt machine’. All of these seem like they should be covered under ‘cash and non-cash payment operations’.

The lack of focus not only makes them too long, but makes it hard to see which elements trainers should really focus on when developing a curriculum. This problem is most clearly present in the unrealistic skills that are listed for many professions. In the professional standards, entry level cooks are required to know accounting and mountain guides are supposed to be able to ‘independently arrange mountain-rescue operations’.

None of these problems is insurmountable in and of itself. However, taken together they make the professional standards unnecessarily onerous so that the essential basics are often lost in the detail and the document as a whole is extremely hard to manage or understand. In an ideal form, a professional standard would be extremely useful in helping to shape a template curriculum/syllabus. If they were shorter and simpler and avoided repetition and too much detail, then they would provide an excellent template for developing a curriculum. That is not the case at the current time.

Another major and commonly reported problem is that, particularly at the higher levels, the standards have far too much emphasis on higher level management skills when in fact VET students almost never need to have such skills. As already mentioned, the standards go from levels 1-5, with 1-3 generally encompassing basic, entry level or assistant positions – but levels 4 and 5 orient more towards management. The problem is that almost everyone we spoke to considered it unrealistic to teach management skills at VET centres. As demonstrated below, the most commonly cited ‘not useful at all’ category of skills related to the managerial training.

The reason for this is simple. None of the tourism companies we spoke to were interested in hiring VET students for managerial positions. Until recently, VET centres in Ajara only taught to level 3 and thus the managerial component was minimal anyway. In Ajara, the Kobuleti VET centre has just started training levels 4 and 5 in some tourism professions. However, in Tbilisi, where levels 4 and 5 do exist, there was still a strong consensus that, at best, a new recruit may have some minor administrative function.

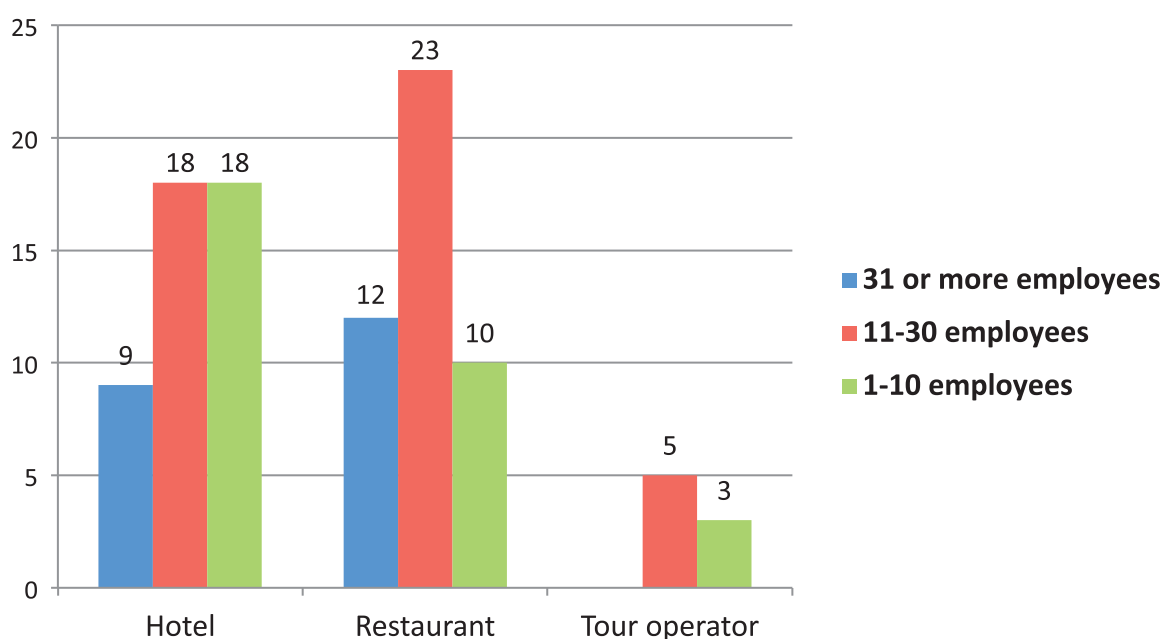
This tendency against using VET for managerial positions is partly a bias against VET centres and the assumptions that employers have about the skills of VET graduates. VET centres do not have a particularly good reputation, even for providing entry level people, and so are likely to be less trusted to provide higher-level staff. In addition, there is a strong sense that the better students generally go to university, and so VET centres are an unlikely recruiting ground for management. Finally, when it comes to management, a lot of the hotels and restaurants seem to be strong advocates for internal promotion and on-the-job training, and thus they will select managers from the pool of their existing staff and rarely recruit directly for management positions.

Therefore, one of the key findings of this research is that it is far more important to get the practical training of the different groups up to a high level than it is to teach higher-level/managerial skills.

4 Nature of Survey Responses

Three different types of questionnaires were used in this survey. First, a general questionnaire was sent to 98 businesses with questions relevant to all tourism businesses relating to the nature of their company, recruitment and experience of VET.

Figure 7: Profile of businesses interviewed, by type and size of business⁵⁵

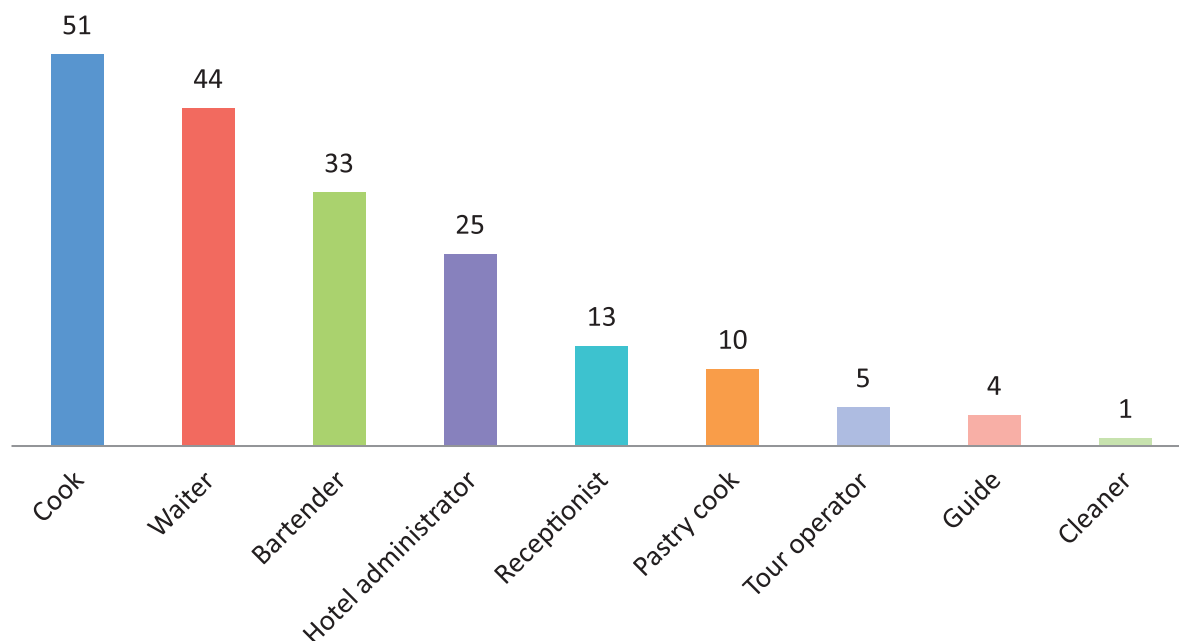


⁵⁵ Note that for our purpose, small employers have fewer than 10 employees, medium employers have 11-30 employees and large employers have more than 30 employees.

Secondly, we developed 10 different professional questionnaires⁵⁶ which asked questions about the business's attitude towards particular professions. These questions were based on the professional standards and, as such, tried to get a sense of the exact skills that organizations looked for and found/failed to find in new employees.

In total we received replies to 186 professional questionnaires.

Figure 8: The number of respondents for each professional standard⁵⁷



Note that there is a wide variation in the number of questionnaires completed for each of these professions. The small number of receptionists, pastry cooks, tour operators and guides simply reflects the smaller number of the businesses we were provided with that hired staff in those professions. However, it does mean that in the bottom four of the listed professions, the results should be seen as extremely impressionistic rather than representative.

We developed 10 different professional standards questionnaires, but only 8 out of the 10 different professional standards questionnaires were used, as almost no hotels had sommeliers and none of the companies treated 'guide' and 'mountain guide' as different categories. 'Cleaner' is also shown here, even though we did not have a professional standard for a cleaner, because in one of the interviews a respondent chose to give abbreviated answers (see footnote 57) relating to a cleaner.

Finally, there was a short questionnaire developed for VET graduates who were interviewed by phone. This interview asked questions of 20 students from Batumi VET centre and 20 students from Kobuleti. The analysis below integrates all three sets of results in order to draw conclusions about how VET should develop in the tourist sector.

⁵⁶ We formulated 10 questionnaires by consolidating professional standards for 'mountain guide' and 'hiking guide'. However, this consolidated questionnaire was not used as all of our respondents treated the category of 'guide' as generic.

⁵⁷ Note that this does not mean the number of completed questionnaires. In 37 cases, the respondents did not have the time to fill out the questionnaires completely and so, in those cases, they simply listed the three most important skills for that given profession.

5 Professional Employment and Recruitment

From the 98 companies we spoke to, we asked which professions they currently have employed in their establishment and which they recently recruited.

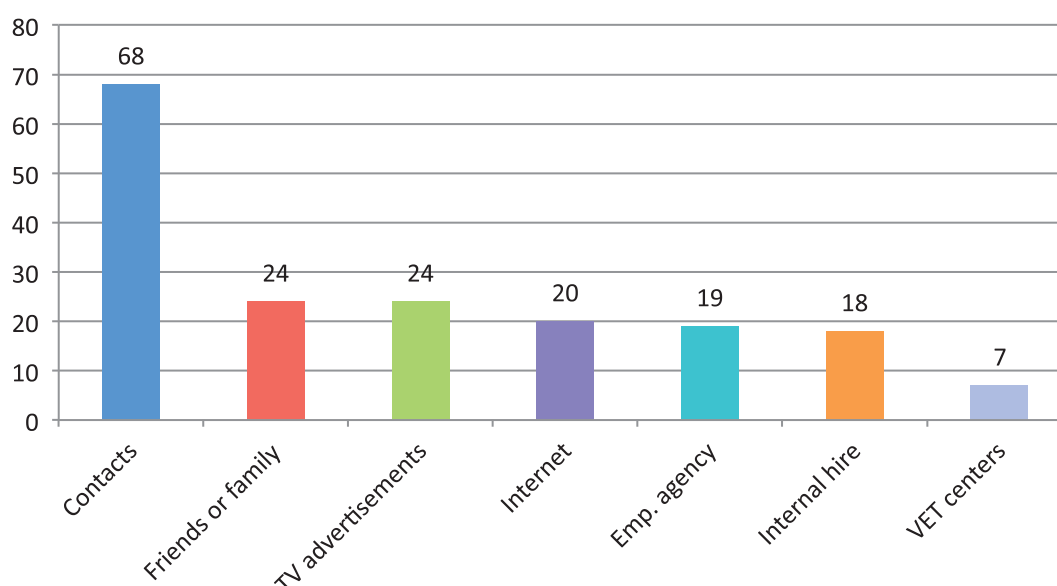
Figure 9: Number of interviewed companies employing a given profession or recruiting last 6 months

Profile	No. with given profession	No. who recruited in last 6 months ⁵⁸	Percentage of companies who recruited in last 6 months
Cleaner	83	27	33%
Cook	77	28	36%
Waiter	65	39	60%
Hotel administrator	42	17	40%
Restaurant administrator ⁵⁹	38	9	24%
Pastry cook	19	4	21%
Bartender	19	9	47%
Receptionist	14	5	36%
Tour operator	8	4	50%
Guide	7	2	29%

As one can see, most respondents employed a cleaner, a cook and/or a waiter, as these are the categories that operate across sectors (particularly restaurants and hotels). Most of the hotels had a hotel administrator and a lot of the restaurants and hotels have restaurant administrators. The largest 'new-employee' group is waiters.

We asked people about their experience with recruitment. We started by asking them how they recruit.

Figure 10: Employee recruitment methods

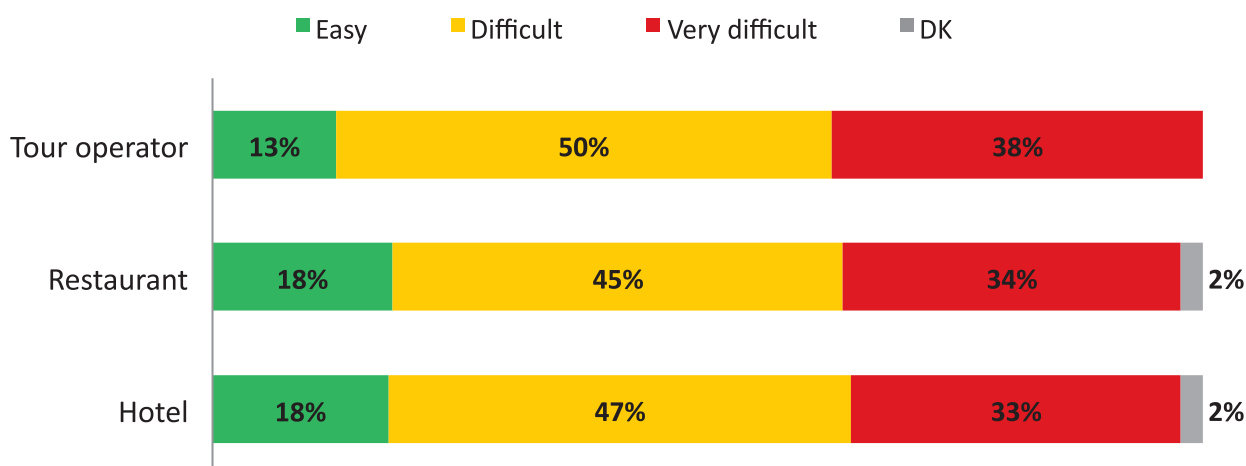


⁵⁸ Note that as this project was undertaken midway through the high season, this number is probably close to the hiring level for the whole year.

⁵⁹ Note that in the general questionnaire we asked about both restaurant administrators AND waiters. But in our discussion with hotels we understood that level 1-3 'restaurant managers' are really best understood simply as waiters and so that is what we asked about in the professional questionnaires.

As one can see, new staff are usually recruited informally and the use of VET centres for recruitment is low. A number of businesses use the Batumi Employment Agency as a vehicle for employment. The agency has a memorandum of understanding with both Batumi and Kobuleti VET centres.⁶⁰

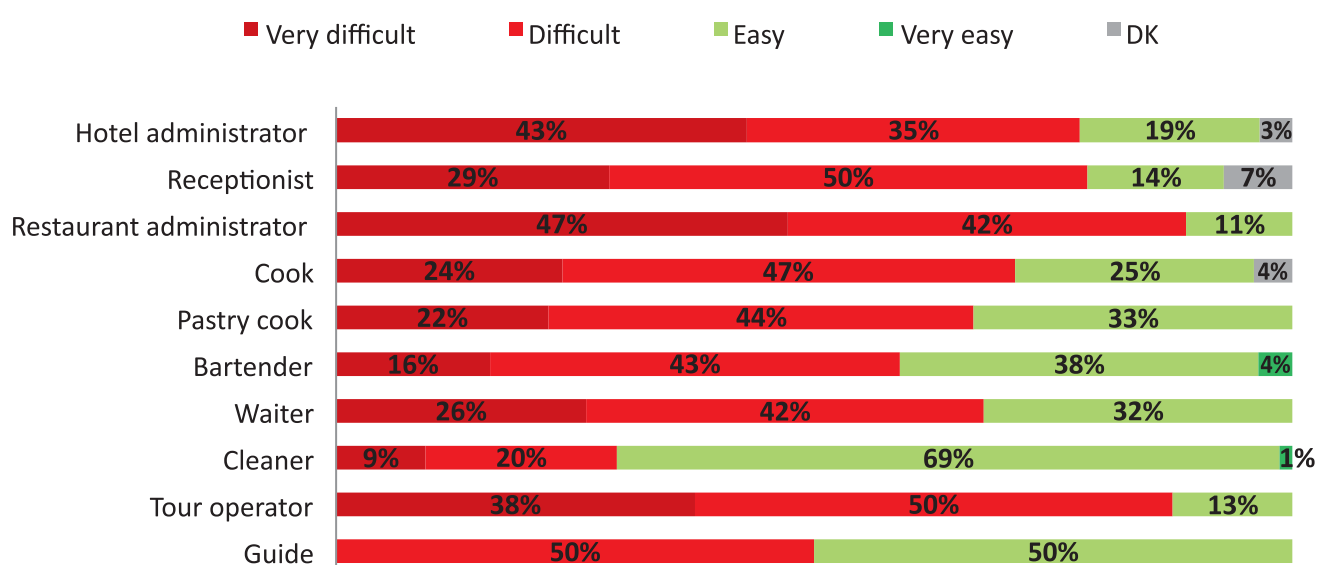
Figure 11: How easy is it to recruit employees in your sector



Consistent with almost all of the labor market surveys that we have seen, particularly in tourism, recruitment of qualified staff remains a problem.

We also asked about the difficulty of recruiting specific professions.

Figure 12: Difficulty of recruiting staff, organised by profession



60 Interview with Gocha Gabrushidze (August 3, 2012). Batumi Employment Agency.

As one can see, the consensus regarding the difficulty of recruiting is also fairly standard across professions. Cleaners are the one group that the organizations seem to say that they have little difficulty in recruiting. In the other professions, around 2/3 at least have difficulty in recruitment. The most difficult areas appear to be recruitment for the professions of restaurant administrator and tour operator.

Of course, part of this could simply be a question of salary. We asked employers to give a sense of their salaries for given professions.

Figure 13: Tendencies of average salary by profession (based on employers' answers)⁶¹

Profession	Salary (GEL)
Cook	493
Restaurant administrator	480
Pastry cook	463
Tour operator	430
Bartender	428
Receptionist	418
Waiter	375
Hotel administrator	323
Guide	300
Cleaner	262

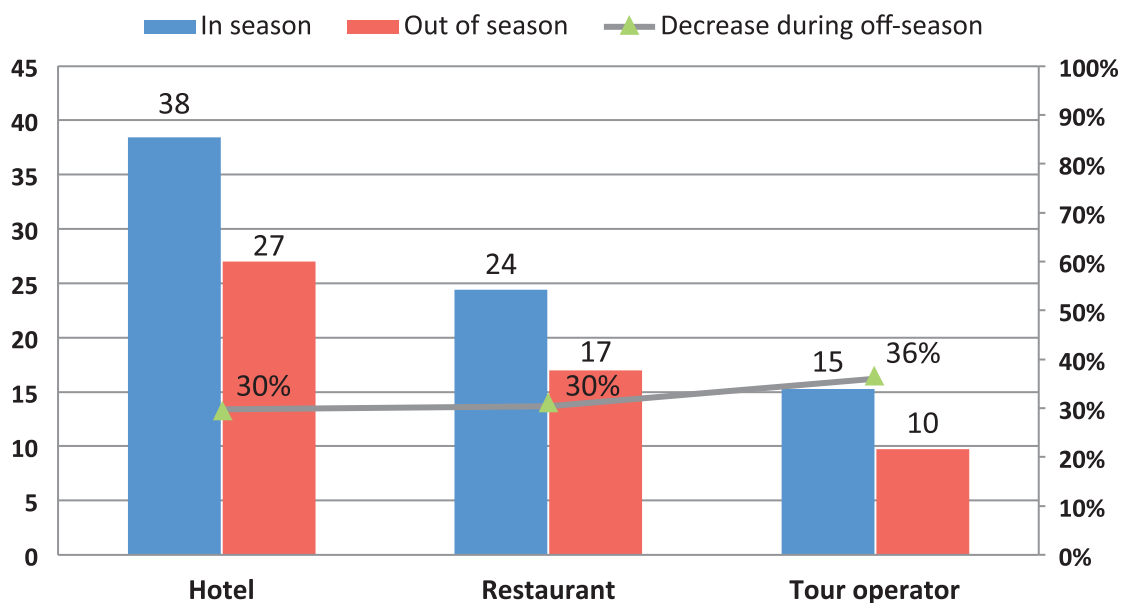
As one can see the salaries are not very high, though people who have some expertise in cooking or preparing food seem to do better than everyone else.

6 Seasonality

One recruitment issue that emerged in many discussions with experts was the seasonality of employment and recruitment in Ajara. It was often suggested that a barrier to attracting people into the sector is that it is difficult to find full-time, year-round employment. In order to try and understand the seasonality of the business of the group we were talking to, we asked respondents to estimate the number of employees they would expect their business to have in January (low season). We then compared that to the number of employees they said they had at the time of the interview, which was August (high season). This gave us a numerical estimation of the level of seasonality.

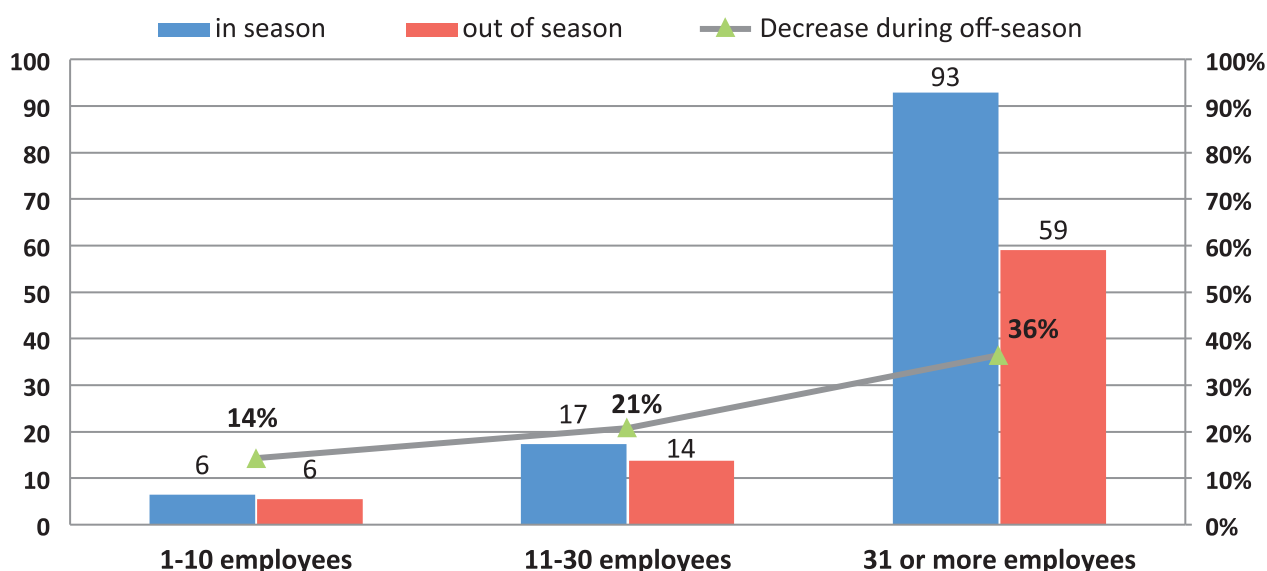
⁶¹ While this simple average is a reflection of the answers collected, discussions with experts has suggested that the figure may be higher and that respondents may have been systematically under-reporting for a range of reasons.

Figure 14: Average number of employees in season and out of season by business type



As one can see, the level of decline in the number of employees across seasons is about the same in each of the three sectors, with a reduction in employees of around 1/3 off-season. However, this average hides a lot of variation. Around half of the companies said that they would experience no variation in staffing levels. To see one dimension of the variability, one can break down seasonality by size of company.

Figure 15: Average number of employees in or out of season by business size

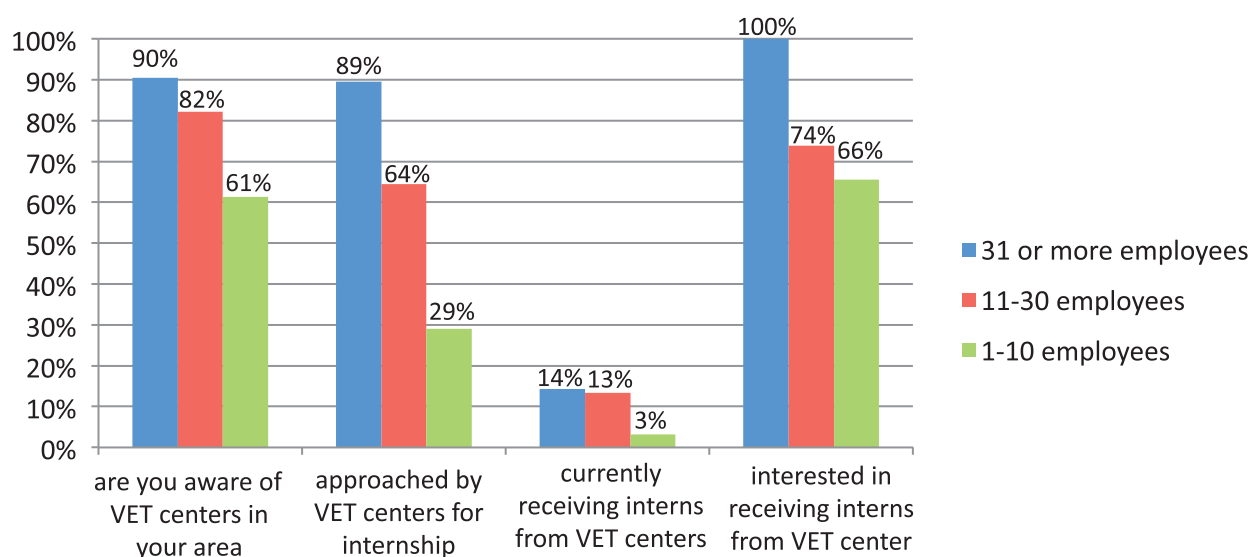


As one can see, the larger companies experienced far greater levels of seasonal variability than the smaller companies.

7 Interaction with VET

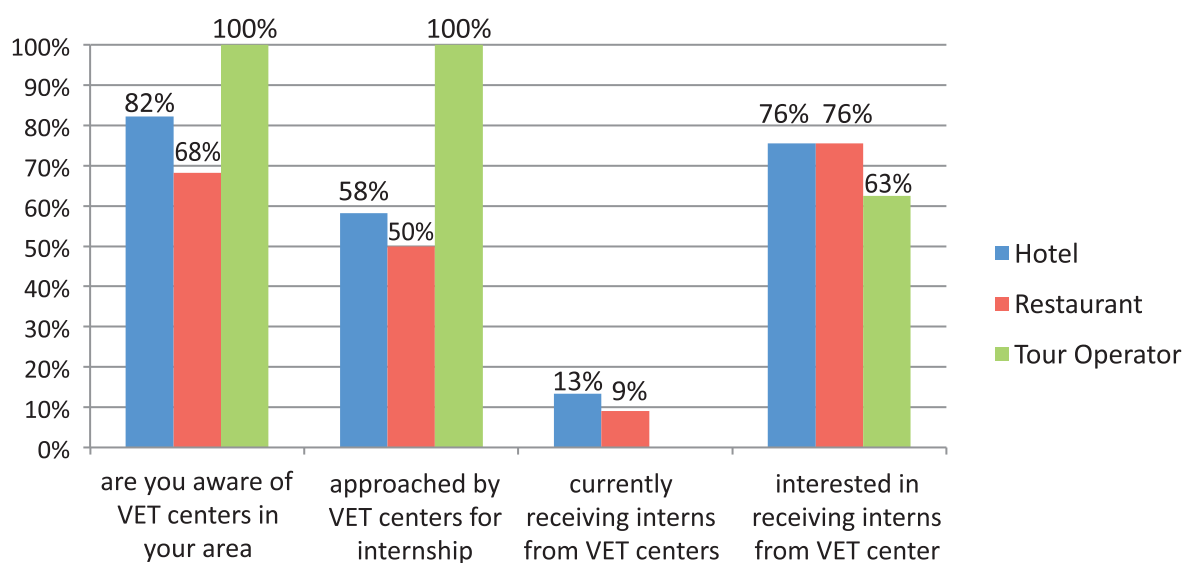
We asked the businesses about their knowledge of, and involvement with, the VET sector.

Figure 16: Relations with VET centres by business size



The larger companies are more aware of VET centres, are more interested in hiring VET interns and are far more likely to have been approached by VET centres than small companies. However, very few of any of the groups actually used VET interns and only 3% of the smaller companies (with less than 10 employees) used them. As these questions are so important, we also looked at them by sector.

Figure 17: Relations with VET centres by business type (where answer is 'yes')

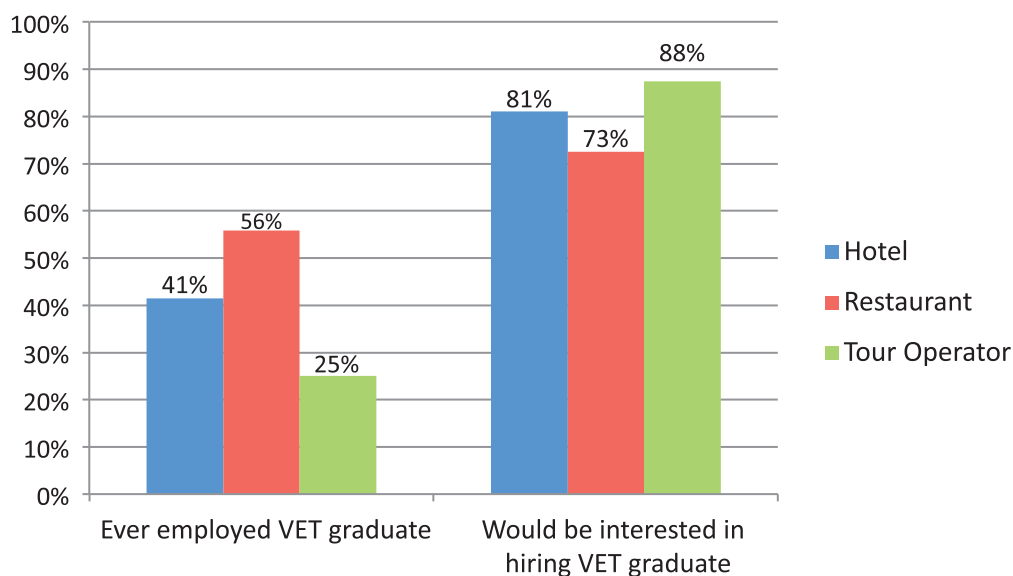


As shown in the table above, awareness of VET centres is lower in restaurants than in hotels and tour operators. They are also less often approached by VET centres for internships. No tour operators interviewed had interns at the time of the interview.

Probably the most significant discrepancy in these answers across company size and sector is between the number who use VET interns and the number who say they would be interested in doing so. There is no simple way to explain this discrepancy. If true, it would seem to suggest that an opportunity exists for business/VET collaboration which has not, so far, been exploited.

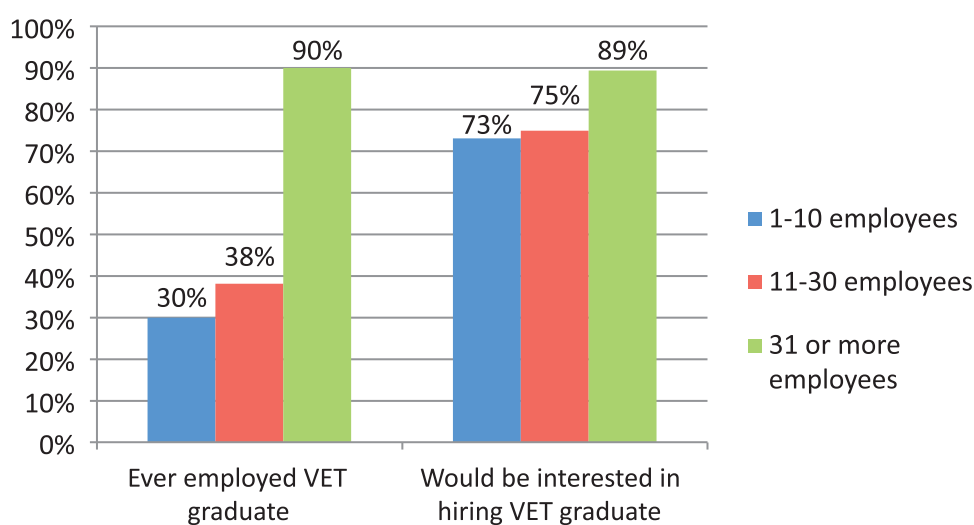
We also asked about the number of companies who hired VET graduates.

Figure 18: Percentage of businesses who employ a VET student or who would like to by business type (where answer is 'yes')



Around half of the hotels and restaurants had, at some time, hired a VET graduate, though far fewer of the tour agencies had done so. Many more, around 80%, expressed an interest in hiring VET students. We also looked at these answers in terms of the size of business.

Figure 19: Percentage of businesses who employ a VET student or who would like to by business size (where answer is 'yes')



In line with their knowledge of VET, large companies were far more likely to have used VET students than medium or small companies. 90% of the large companies reported employing VET graduates at some point, while the same is true for about 1/3 of small and medium sized businesses. The vast majority of businesses of

all sizes say they are interested in VET graduates. However there is still a trend: the larger the business, the higher the interest in VET graduates.

If we look at levels of VET involvement, by profession, the levels are quite a lot lower.

Figure 20: The number of companies who used certain professions and the number who recruited from VET or had VET interns

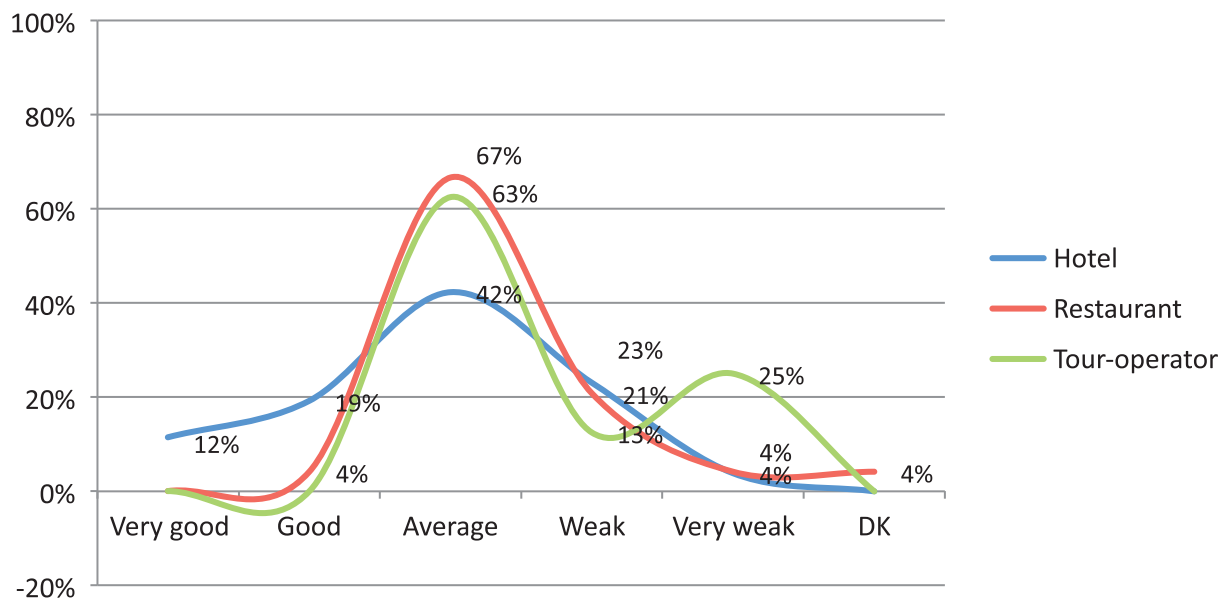
Profile	Companies with employees in the given profession	Companies who have recruited from VET centres	% of Companies who have recruited from VET	Companies who have VET interns	% of companies who have VET interns
Waiter	65	21	32%	9	14%
Cook	77	17	22%	10	13%
Bartender	19	12	63%	5	26%
Hotel administrator	42	7	17%	13	31%
Receptionist	14	5	36%	2	14%
Cleaner	83	3	4%	3	4%
Restaurant administrator	38	2	5%	1	3%
Guide	7	2	29%	2	29%
Pastry cook	19	1	5%	0	0%
Tour operator	8	1	13%	3	38%

Generally speaking, the number of professions where companies said they hired from VET or had VET interns was fairly low. Only bartenders (which were only used by 19 of the companies) had more than a majority of their recruitment(63%) coming from VET.

8 Assessment of VET students

In the general questionnaire we asked the businesses about their assessment of the VET students.

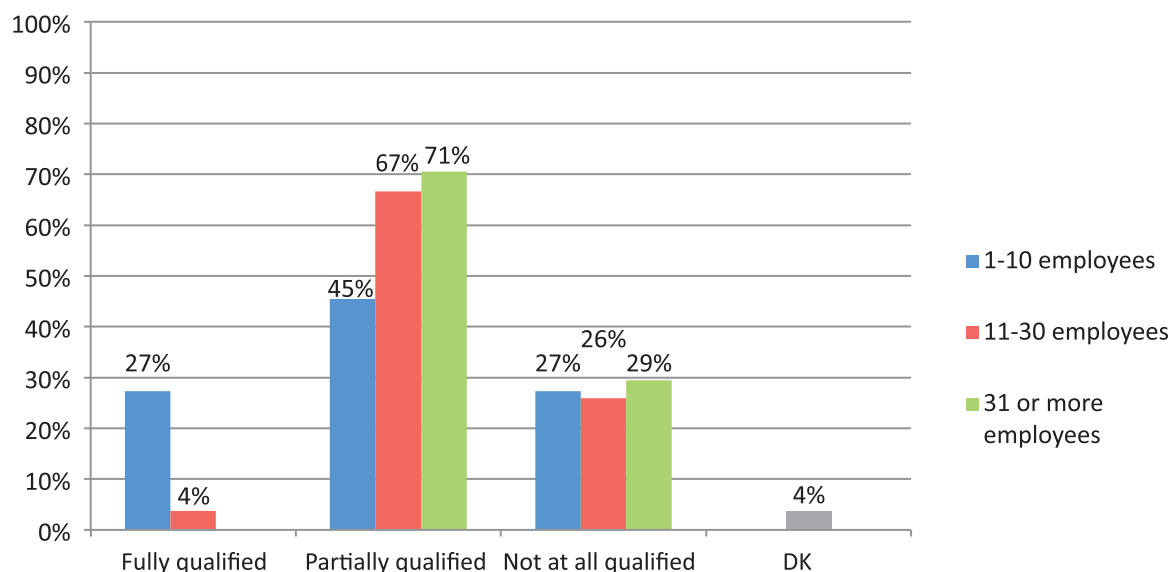
Figure 21: Assessment of the quality of VET students



Consistent with the results of many other surveys, the businesses were not generally impressed with the VET students, but there was considerable difference across sectors. Hotels were generally the most positive, with 31% seeing them as 'good' or 'very good'. In restaurants, 2/3 said they were 'average', with 25% saying 'weak' or 'very weak' and only 4% saying 'good'. Amongst tour operators, around 2/3 also said they were 'average', but all of the rest said they were bad.

This characterization operates in an environment where employers are generally not impressed with the quality of recruits across the board. We asked the companies to assess their own staff in terms of level of qualification.

Figure 22: Businesses' assessment of all their own staff



As we see, most businesses of all sizes are either partially unhappy or unhappy about the level of qualifications of their staff. Only small businesses reported that more than a quarter of their staff are fully qualified to their standards. This may result from lower skill expectations on the part of smaller businesses.

9 Skill Deficiencies

One of the main objectives of the research was to document skill-sets identified as important by businesses for particular professions. The hope was to quantify demand in order to help VET centres clarify where their training should focus. To do that, we had to ask the businesses about different professions individually, as the skill demands for a chef are likely to be different from the skill demands for a receptionist. Therefore, we developed 10 profession-specific questionnaires.

Each profession-specific questionnaire first asked about a range of characteristics and skills which are general and therefore could be asked of all professions (for example the importance of ‘communication skills’). The second section asked about more specific skills that would only relate to one profession (for example, for a cook, ‘preparing Georgian dishes’). We then asked the businesses, in the case of each skill/profession, ‘How useful is the skill?’ and ‘Do new recruits tend to have that skill?’.

The first four parts of the analysis below relate to general characteristics. The final two sections identify profession-specific skills. In section 9.5: Unneeded Profession-Specific Skills, we look at the skills listed in the professional standards that may *not* be needed. In section 9.6: Under-provided Profession Specific Skill Sets, we try to identify if there are any particular skills that are both needed and not being provided.

Before presenting all of these results, it is worth offering an explanatory note on the presentation of the data. The data below represent the results from ten different questionnaires, which are essentially ten different surveys. To make the results comprehensible it was necessary to present a significantly simplified version of them. In the first four sections below, the presentation of data focuses on the ‘essential’ skills and the discussion that follows looks at which of those essential skills new recruits are considered to possess.

In the final section, such a summary is not possible because the skills asked about differ across professions. In this case, we have simply listed the skills that were identified as ‘essential’ and ‘not provided or only partially provided’.

Together, this allows the research to demonstrate the main findings in terms of skill deficiencies without generating a level of detail that would make it extremely hard to draw practical conclusions or policy recommendations.

9.1 Personal Characteristics

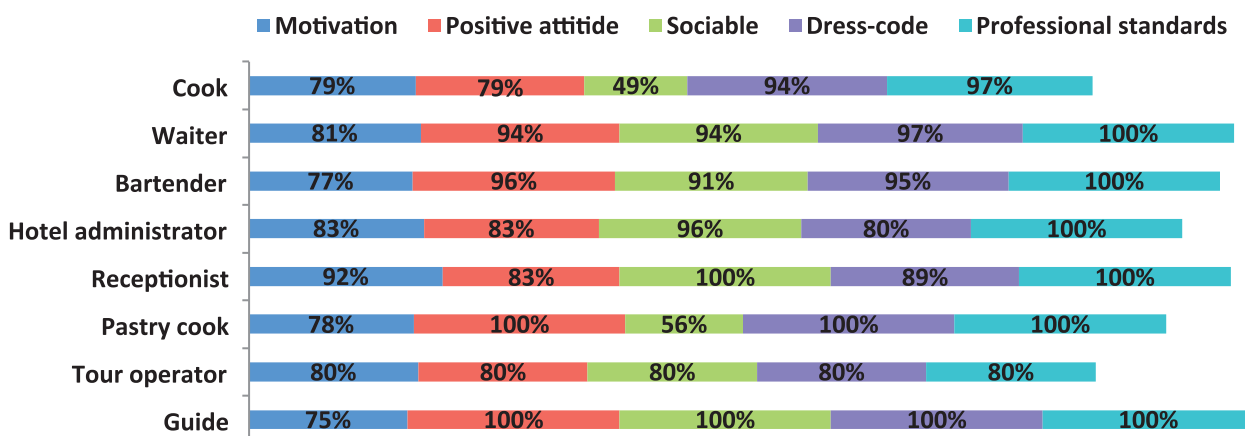
The first set of characteristics we asked about might be considered characteristics of a person, but could also be described as a combination of personal attitude and ‘soft skills’. Specifically, we asked how important it was that the employees in the given profession were:

- Motivated,
- Positive in their attitude,
- Sociable,
- Professionally dressed,
- In possession of good general professional standards.

Professional standards (we explained to respondents) meant punctuality, being hard-working, being polite and paying attention to detail.

While the survey asked if this skill was ‘essential, useful or useless’, one can get a good sense of the overall responses by simply looking at the percentage of respondents who for each profession/characteristic described it as ‘essential’.

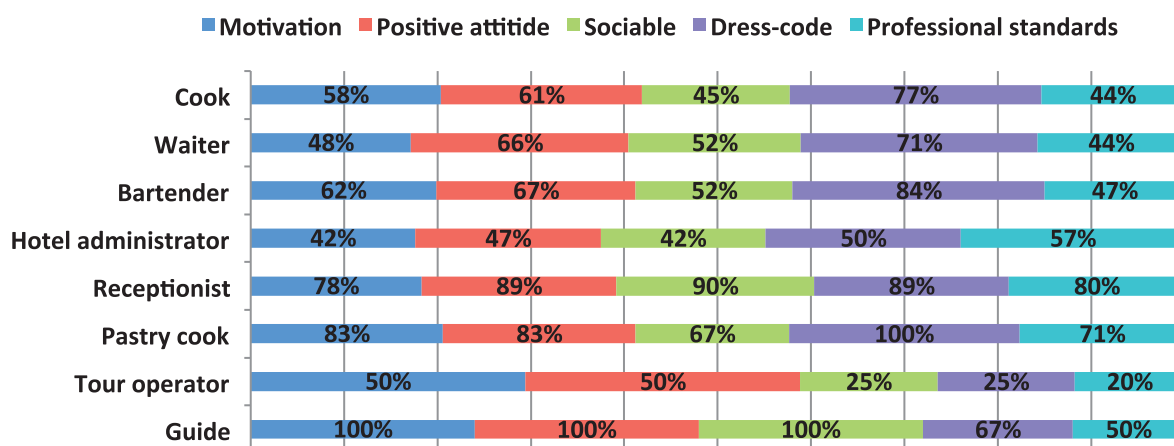
Figure 23: Percentage of respondents who considered the listed personal characteristics ‘essential’



As one can see, in this set of characteristics the interpretation is fairly uniform. All of the characteristics (except sociability for cooks) were considered essential by an overwhelming majority of the people we spoke to. This agrees strongly with all of our more open-ended discussions with people running tourism businesses that we spoke to in Tbilisi and Ajara.

To get a sense of whether this set of characteristics was present or absent we also asked whether new recruits had these characteristic or not. There were three possible options: ‘yes’, ‘partially’ or ‘no’. Below we list only the people who answered ‘yes’, which we interpreted as meaning ‘this skill is fully present’.

Figure 24: Percentage of respondents who considered the listed personal characteristics fully provided



As one can see, the response was generally fairly positive. In all of the categories of ‘motivation’, ‘positive attitude’, ‘sociability’ etc listed above, the majority of respondent businesses said that their new employees did have those characteristics. Almost none of the respondents (below 2% on average) said that their new recruits lacked the characteristic entirely.

However, a significant minority (between 1/3 and 1/2) did say that these characteristics were only partially present. Also, it is worth noting that in our interviews, the interviewers generally noted that respondents were far more likely to identify a skill as present in new recruits if that skill was very general. This may reflect a positive bias through which the respondents wanted to identify skill deficiencies but did not want to suggest that the recruits/potential recruits were ‘bad guys’.

In this respect, qualitative discussions with hotel businesses gave a far clearer and more negative response on the difficulty of finding these ‘soft skills’. In more broad-ranging discussions with employers, the right set of ‘personal characteristics’ were often identified as the most important element that potential employers looked for, and were identified as a difficult set to find. Therefore, in this case, we still feel that developing these ‘soft skills’ should be a priority for VET centres.

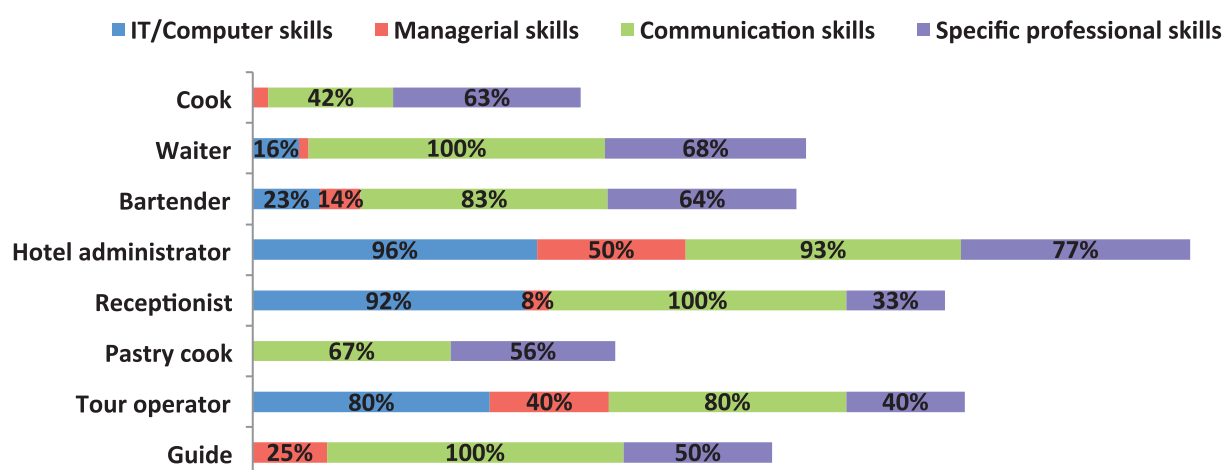
9.2 General Work-Skills

We asked about a number of general work-skills:

- IT/computer skills,
- Managerial skills,
- Communications skills,
- Specific professional skills.

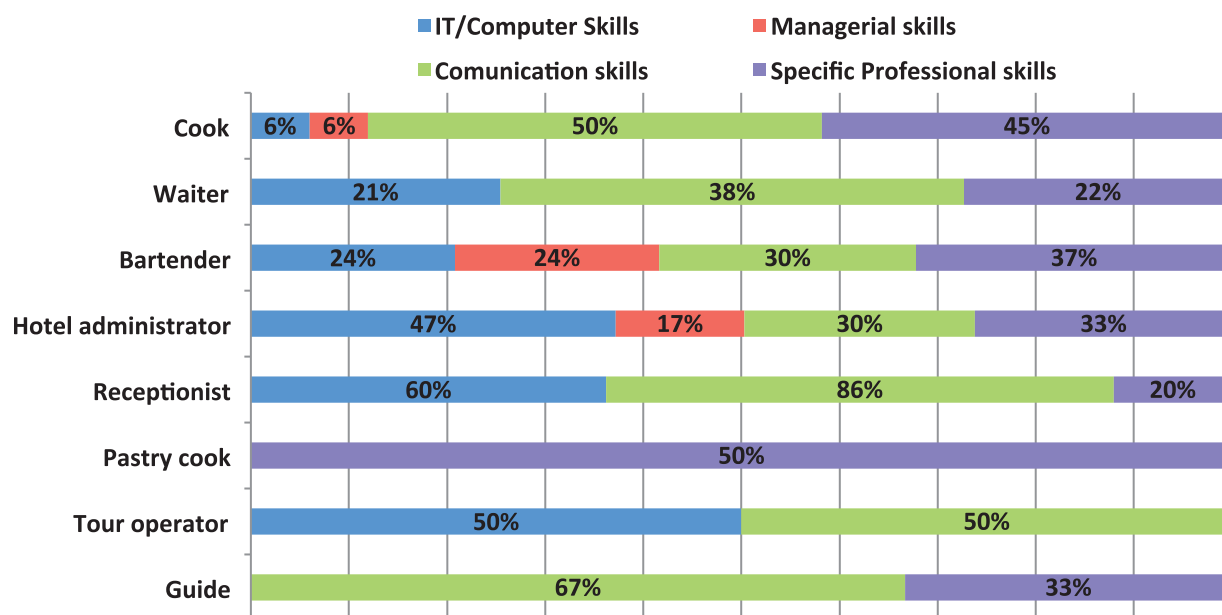
The general category of ‘specific professional skills’ was intended to highlight the relative importance of training for the particular job - for example, the importance of mixing drinks for a bar-tender. We later asked about this in far more detail.

Figure 25: Percentage of respondents who considered list of work skills ‘essential’



The picture is nowhere near as uniform as in the case of personal characteristics and only a few skills are considered universally essential. Again, by combining this with answers about the nature of new recruits, we can draw some conclusions about the gaps.

Figure 26: Percentage of respondents who considered list of work skills to be fully provided



IT and computer skills are incredibly important for a hotel administrator, receptionist or tour operator but very much less so for a bartender or waiter, and unimportant for a cook. In the most in-demand three sectors IT skills are pretty highly developed, with over 50% in the first category. But 37% of hotel administrators, 30% of receptionists and 25% of tour operators have only partial IT skills so there is clearly room for improvement. In addition, in the comments from VET trainers, students and some of the larger hotels and tour operators, there was a significant minority who identified the need for training in very particular profession-specific computer software. In hotels in particular, this was generally a reference to the booking and room management software that is commonly used.

Communication skills, like sociability in the last section, are considered universally essential for anyone who has contact with clients and almost no-one considered these skills to be entirely absent in new employees. But the skill was only partially developed in 70% of bartenders, 60% of hotel administrators, 50% of tour operators and 38% of waiters. Therefore, some improvement could be made in the professions that have a dimension of client contact.

As interesting as identifying the skills that are in demand is noting that there are some skills which are very much not in demand from employers. According to the general overview, managerial skills are considered the least important as a general category, though they are more important in hotel administrators and tour operators.

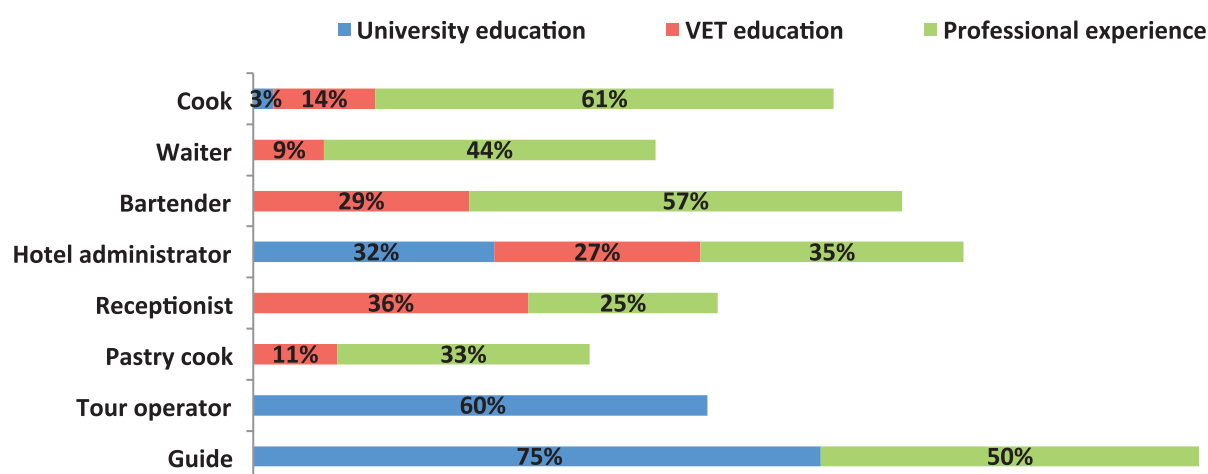
This was also supported by the review of the skills that were tailored to the more individual professions. In section 9.5: Unnecessary Skills, we provide a list of the skills which respondents claimed were 'entirely useless'. In that section, one of the most consistent messages across most of the professions is that at the level where businesses are hiring VET, they are not looking for very comprehensive 'managerial skills'. This will be discussed in more detail later.

9.3 Background

We asked what background, educational or professional, was considered essential for an entry-level employee. The different education/background requirements were:

- Higher education (University undergraduate degree)
- VET education
- Professional experience

Figure 27: Percentage of respondents who considered a listed background to be essential



If we first look at the answers to the question of educational background, a reasonably high percentage considered VET training ‘essential’ across a range of disciplines. It was considered ‘useful’ by even more, and less than 20% of people in all of the professions considered it ‘not useful at all’.

However, 60% of tour operators and 75% of guides considered a university education to be essential and none of them considered VET education essential. Since university degrees and VET training are usually exclusive of one another in Georgia (students very rarely do both), the people who said that university education was essential are particularly interesting to us because they are essentially picking university education over VET education.

The reason for picking university education in these situations seems to result from general ideas that employers have about what they can expect from a university graduate versus a VET graduate. Employees of tourism companies have to interact with customers frequently and it is essential to give a good impression. As a study of tourism companies across Georgia (that GIZ/GeoWel conducted with the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development) shows, owners and managers are often looking for employees with a university education because they believe that these people will have a better general education and will be in a better position to attract and service customers.⁶² This is consistent with the common perception that intelligent and capable people in Georgia go on to higher education rather than VET centres.

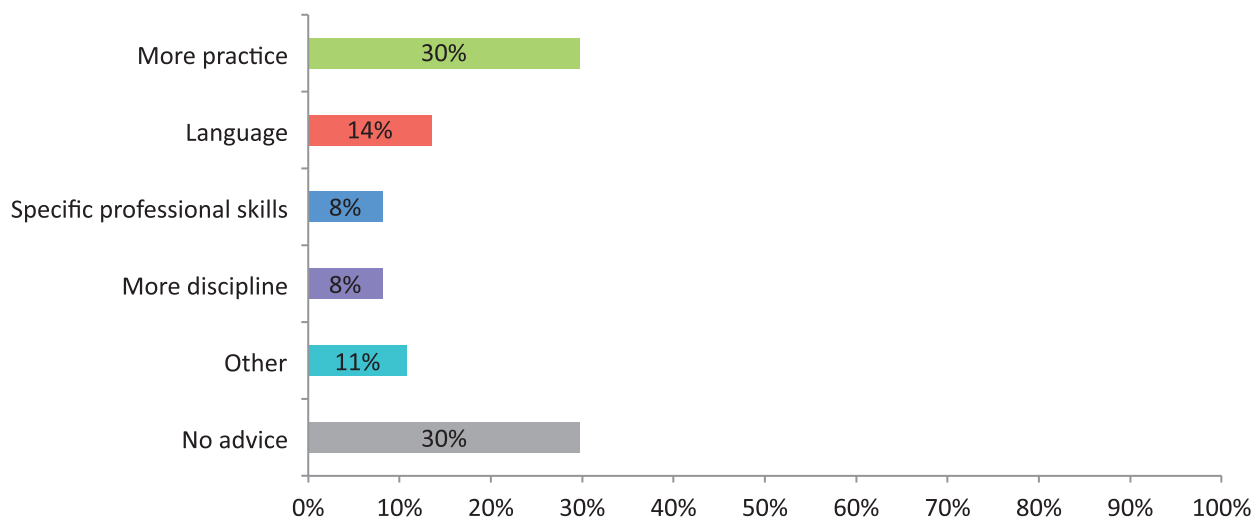
⁶² Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (2012), Pilot Surveys of Labour Market Needs in Georgia: Tourism, Apparel, ICT, Food Processing, prepared with support of GIZ and GeoWel Research, p12

All of that said, perhaps the most interesting aspect of Figure 27 is that professional experience is far more important than any kind of training in most professions. This finding is consistently supported by more or less all of the employment research that we have reviewed for this project and by most of our interviews with employers across the tourism sector. It is deemed 'essential' by more than half of the people we spoke to, and 'useful' by the majority of the rest. It is also supported by results from our general questionnaire. The only characteristic considered more important than experience (depending on sector) is language skills (see Figure 31: What skills would you prioritise in a staff member who had to interact with clients?).

However, given that VET education is supposed to specifically emphasize practical training and professional experience, it is surprising that, if professional experience is so highly prized, VET training is not highly prized also. There are a number of possible explanations for this. First, it is possible that the employers simply do not know that VET includes practical training and internships. This seems unlikely given that, as we saw in Figure 16: Relations with VET centres by business size, the majority of companies have been approached by VET centres to take interns at one time or another.

The second possibility is that the VET students are not getting enough genuine practical experience, or at least that the businesses do not think that they are. If they are simply not getting enough (or the right kind of) experience, then the answer would be that they either need longer or differently structured internships. This seems to be supported by the students themselves. In our interviews with VET graduates we asked them if they had any particular piece of advice that they would suggest to the institution they graduated from regarding how to change the course curricula.

Figure 28: Changes you would suggest in curricula/practical lessons to ensure development of useful skills in your courses

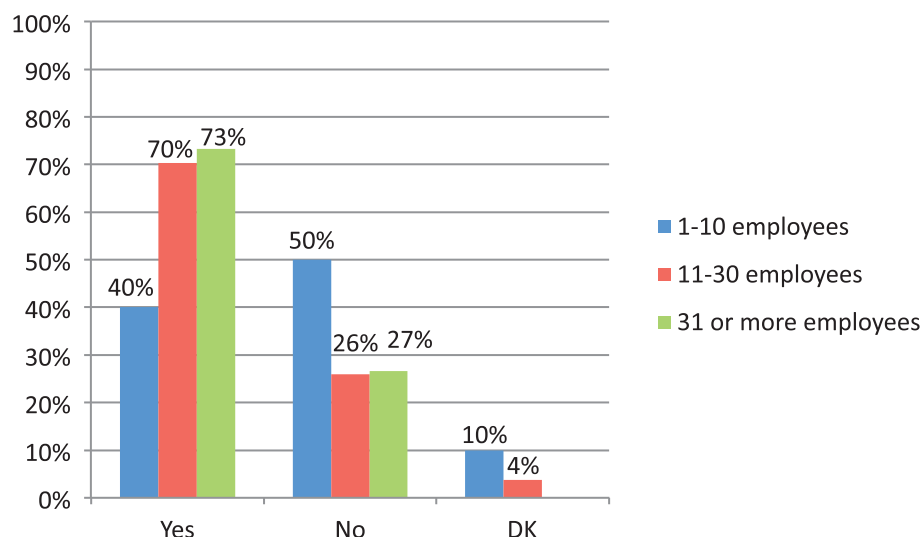


It is worth noting that this group was generally very positive about their courses and did not offer criticism in other areas where they were offered the opportunity to do so. Therefore, the fact that 30% highlighted the need for more practice should be taken seriously.

In addition, the issue here might not be the amount of practice the VET students are getting, but the type of practice. We did not ask the graduates to assess the quality of the experience they gained during internship. However, we did ask the businesses several questions to evaluate the level of engagement between VETs and the businesses that took interns.

Two questions were central. First, we asked the employers if they have ever evaluated their interns.

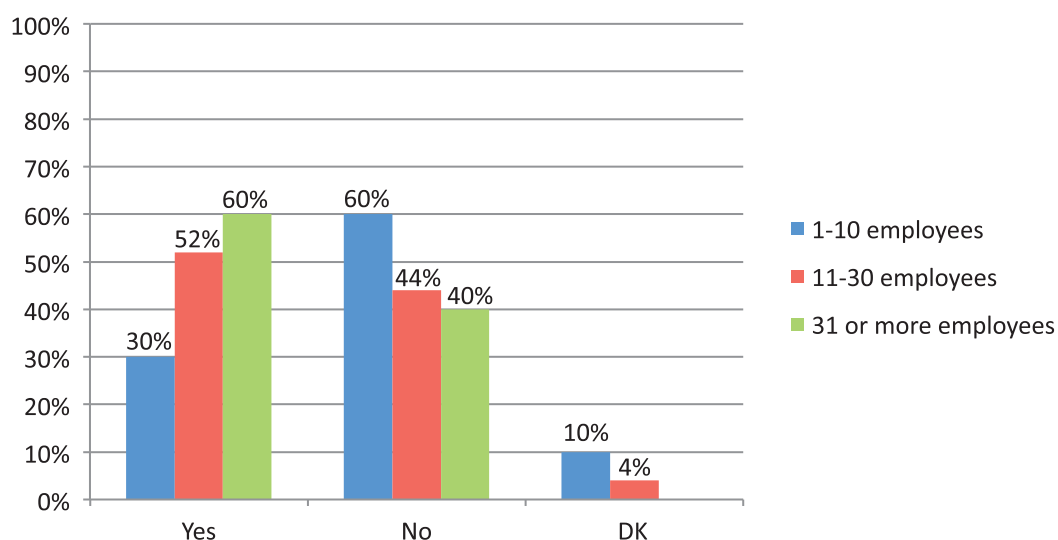
Figure 29: Did you have to evaluate the performance of these interns as part of their VET program/internship? (provide some sort of feedback to the VET centres) by business size



Overall, around 2/3 of businesses provided feedback and 1/3 did not. As one might expect, evaluation was far more likely with bigger businesses than smaller businesses.

However, the active engagement of VET centres in the internship process was somewhat lower.

Figure 30: Did the staff of VET centres visit your establishment or keep track of the interns' progress?



Generally only around ½ of the interns were checked by the VET centres. However this was more common in larger businesses rather than small ones.

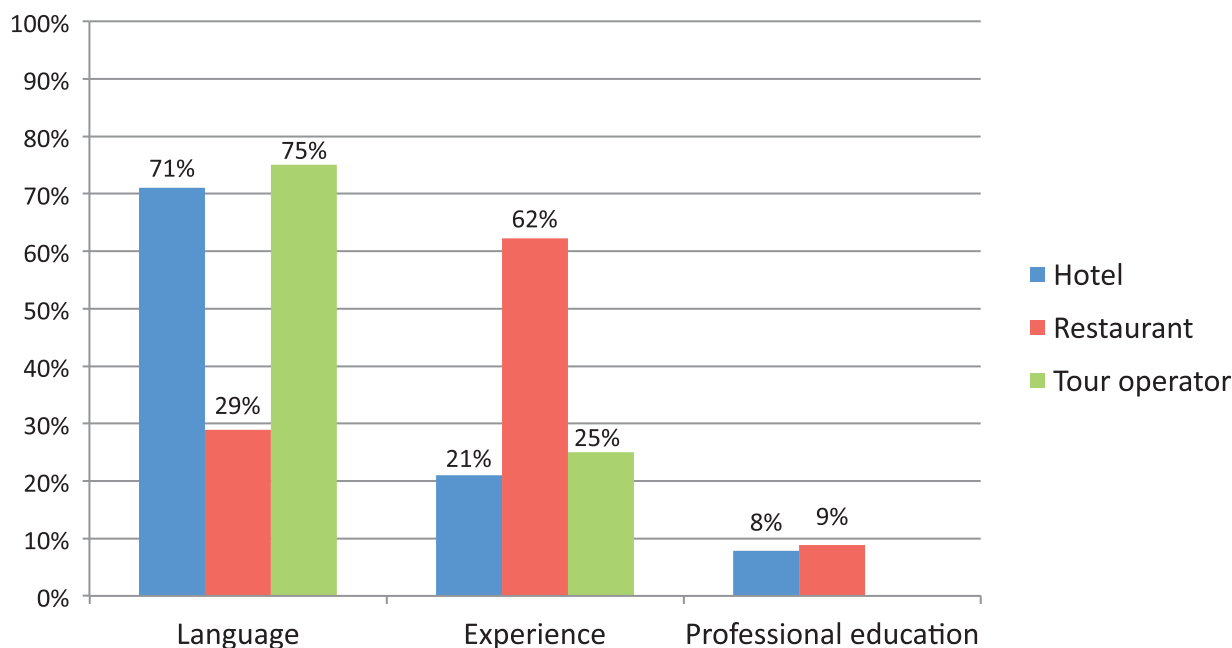
It is hard to draw strong conclusions from these numbers. Again, it is important to look at the exact nature of the interaction that VETs engage in with the intern-providing businesses. However, the fact that half of the internships include no site visit or interaction with the business during the internship, and that 1/3 do not give feedback of any kind, is troubling. Internships can be an enormously useful mechanism for on-the-job training, but international experience has demonstrated that the internships need to be fairly heavily managed if one is to ensure that students really come out of them with experience that an employer will recognize and value.

9.4 Language

From all of our preliminary discussions with stakeholders, language skills came up regularly as the most important skill that employers were looking for in client-oriented positions (not cleaners or cooks). We therefore looked at this from a number of angles. As one can see from Figure 23 (above), the second most in-demand change to the curricula was to expand the teaching of language.

This was also verified in the general questionnaire. We asked business, if they were hiring an entry level employee for a job that involved interaction with customers, what skills they would prioritize.

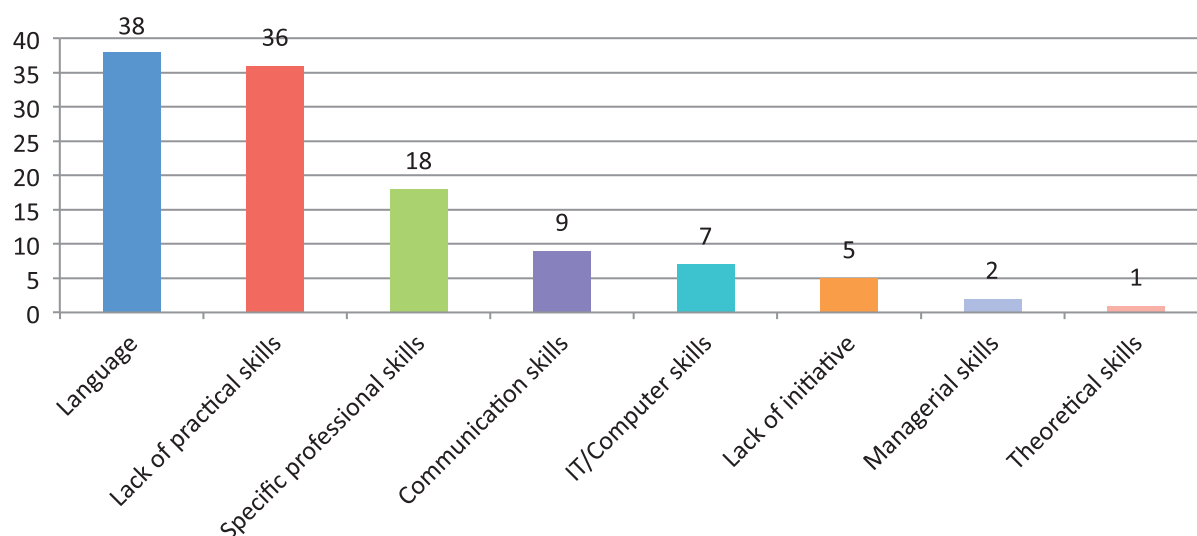
Figure 31: What skills would you prioritise in a staff member who had to interact with clients?



Interestingly, while professional education was secondary to either language skills or experience, there was a split in the prioritization of the two. Hotels and tour operators prefer language skills. Restaurants prefer experience. We suspect that is because the most challenging profession in a restaurant is generally a cook and, as we will see below, language skills are generally considered unimportant for cooks.

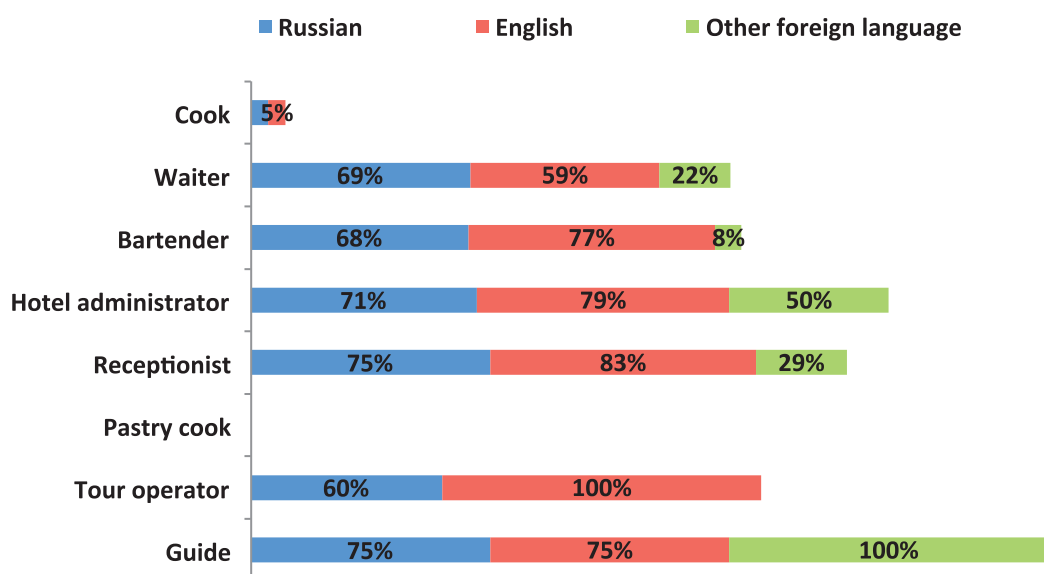
We also asked the same group what skills VET graduates tended to lack and, again, language and practical experience were listed as the most important.

Figure 32: Critical skills VET graduates lack at entry level



Therefore, in the professional questionnaires, we asked which languages were essential.

Figure 33: What percentage of respondents considered a given language skill 'essential'?

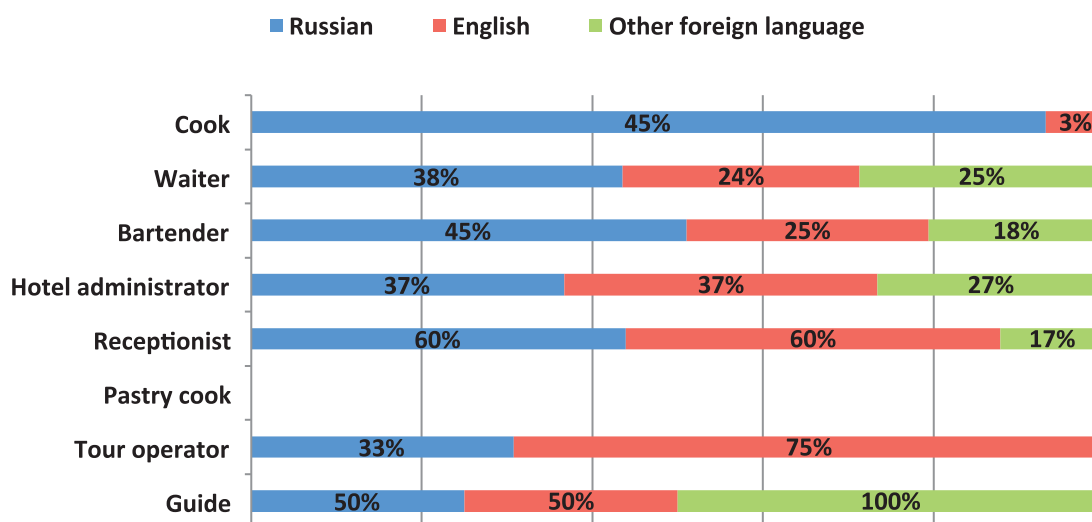


As expected, language skills are considered essential by a very large proportion of the businesses that deal directly with clients (not cooks). Also interesting is the fact that English is not the only language desired. Russian is almost as highly in-demand as English, slightly higher in the case of waiters. Also, 'another foreign language' (usually Turkish) is also fairly highly prized.⁶³

⁶³ Though we feel that the 100% demand for 'other foreign languages' amongst guides should not be taken too seriously as we only have four completed responses for guides. This allows for easy confusion.

Of course, to identify the mismatch one has to also look at the level of this skill-set. The assessment is, again, not too bad, with 43% on average claiming that the customer-oriented professions speak English and 45% saying that they speak Russian. However, while only 5% of respondents suggested that their entry level respondents spoke no English or Russian, about half said that their entry level staff only partially had this skill. (see figure below)

Figure 34: Percentage of respondents who considered a given language skill fully provided



Also, from all of our more general discussions we can conclude that there is little question that language skills are probably the skill-set that guarantee employment more than any other. In multiple discussions with managers in hotels they have commonly stated that they would rather have an individual with no experience or training but good language skills than someone with a high level of training and experience but no language skills. The feeling is often that ‘we can teach them how to wait tables/receive guests/provide a tour/operate the right computer software etc’ but ‘we cannot teach them English, Russian or Turkish’.

9.5 Unnecessary profession-specific skills

The second half of the questionnaire talked about profession-specific skills. We took these skills from the professional standards and, as before, asked about their usefulness and whether entry level staff had the skills. When we aggregated the data we were then able to assess which skills were considered ‘useless’ and which skills were considered ‘essential’ and under-provided.

For our list of skills, based on the professional standards, we asked people to identify what skills are essential, useful or useless. Below there is list of the profession-specific skills that were identified by more than 25% of the respondents as ‘useless’.

Figure 35: Not-at-all useful professional skills

Profession (and number of respondents)	Professional skill	Percentage of answers considering skill useless
Receptionist (12 questionnaires)		
	Coordination of guest reception-accommodation with booking department (or with tourist agencies)	33%
Hotel administrator(24)		
	Skills for manager position: basics of how to run a hotel restaurant and food/drink service	58%
	Foundations of marketing and general management	58%
	Food industry and restaurant business; general principles of financial management	50%
Cook (39)		
	Skills for Manager position: control and analysis of prices of dishes	51%
	Skills for Manager position: creates kitchen budget, analyzes kitchen revenues and expenditures together with the food and beverage/hotel manager	44%
	Skills for Manager position: Hires kitchen staff, determines their functions and working scheme	38%
Pastry Cook (9)		
	Creates confectionary budget, analyzes with food and beverage or hotel manager	56%
	Controls and analyzes prices of pastries	44%
	Knows types and functions of different restaurants and confectioneries; their organizational structure	44%
Bartender (24)		
	Summarizing daily income, recording daily sales, preparing relevant reports on cash and non-cash payments and passes them on to the responsible person	38%
	Defining of drink sizes and prices for mixed drinks	25%
Waiter (33)		
	Usage of program systems of restaurant/bar management, "touch computers"	42%
	Calculation of daily income according to bills	38%
Guide (4)		
	N/a	
Tour operator (5)		
	Supervise and control the staff; divide work	60%
	Ability to write a business plan	40%

Each of the different professions has some skills listed in the professional standards that a fair proportion of those interviewed considered 'useless' and it would clearly be worthwhile for those developing the standards to review each of these elements and decide whether they are needed or not. Also, this list almost certainly under-reports the level of unnecessary skills included in the professional standards because, in producing the questionnaires, we had already abbreviated the standards heavily and so many of the less important skills had already been removed.

It is extremely hard to draw general conclusions from these aggregates because the size and the nature of the businesses are very different. Smaller businesses, for example, almost never need to hire managers as they are likely to be family operations. Also, in our discussions of professions generally we were extremely clear that we were talking about entry-level positions. This was necessary because the skills required for an entry-level position may be entirely different from the skills needed by someone in a higher position.

However, even with those caveats, the one overall notion suggested by the skills listed above is that it is 'management skills' that are most generally considered useless by respondents. This is not to say that there is no space for level 4 and level 5 VET training, but it should be made clear that in levels 1-3 even fairly minimal management training is generally deemed unnecessary by employers.

9.6 Under-provided profession-specific skills

We were also able to use the data provided from this section to identify, in a somewhat more complicated way, the skills considered important but under-provided. The most extreme form of this skill mismatch would be if a skill were deemed 'essential' and that same skill were also deemed 'not provided at all'. However, the good news is that there were no skills where a large group of respondents answered in this way. Therefore, we can say that all the essential skills are at least partially provided.

However, there were interesting results if we looked for skills that were under-provided, rather than not provided at all. We also looked at all the skills in each of the 8 questionnaires and identified those skills deemed 'essential' and either 'not provided at all' or 'partially provided'. This generated a small sub-list of skills for each profession where a fairly large proportion of respondents considered the skill under-provided. Below, we only list the skills where 25% or more considered the skill both essential AND under-provided.

Figure 36: Professional skills reported as essential and either partially or not at all provided

Profession (and no. of questionnaires completed)	Underprovided Professional Skill	Percentage
Receptionist (12)	Reception and check-out procedures for guests	42%
	Process of taking a booking including performing booking procedures via one of the hotel management international programs	42%
	Reception and greeting of the guests	33%
	Generating the bill for guests; processing the payment bill and closing of accounts	33%
	Summarizing daily income, preparing relevant reports	33%
Hotel administrator (24)	Managing daily accounts, preparing relevant reports on cash and non-cash payments	33%
	Electronic processing of bookings, check-in and check-out	29%
	Generating the bill for guests and closing accounts	29%
Cook (39)	Workplace safety, fire safety, ventilation	28%
	Primary food processing and storage rules	26%
	Basic principles of kitchen / kitchen equipment	26%
Pastry Cook (9)	Food infections, food poisoning and diseases caused by spoiled food or food products	33%
	Regulate color, temperature and humidity in order to maintain desirable products	33%
	Workplace safety, fire safety, ventilation	33%
Bartender (24)	Types of beer, pouring and serving rules	42%
	Assortment of liquors, syrups, fresh juices and other drinks and rules of serving	38%
	Defining of drink sizes and prices for mixed drinks	38%
	Proper use and maintenance of bar appliances, machinery, tools, service sets, accessories etc	38%
	Keeping inventory	33%
Waiter/ Restaurant manager (33)	Setting the table according to the order	39%
	Types and structure of restaurant menu	30%
	Main principles and types of service; etiquette of services	30%
	Reception of customers; seeing them off to the table; presentation of menu, specials and daily meals, suggestion of aperitifs	30%
Guide (4)	Georgian geography, flora and fauna	50%
	Basic knowledge of tourism marketing; foundations of tourism business; Tourist infrastructure of the country	50%
	Basics in group psychology	50%
	Experiences in conflict management	50%
	Preparation skills (where to find information about the sights, etc.)	50%
Tour operator (5)	Main principles of tourism, marketing, sales, advertising, customer attraction, PR, hospitality etiquette	40%
	Provision of tour staff with proper travel documents, details and proper instructions on tours	40%
	Selling tour packages	40%
	Preparing and filling accounting information	40%

This is a potentially incredibly useful list and should be reviewed by anyone working on the professional standards and/or curricula for any of these professions.

It is worth noting two elements that most of the professions have in common in terms of under-provided skills. First, the under-provided skills are generally very basic. This seems to suggest that the VET training would do well to focus on covering the basics really well rather than expanding the range of skills they include in syllabi. Second, this list does not include very much that is theoretical, general or managerial. Again, this suggests that a very rigorous application of basic training is crucial.

In more simple terms that relate to the professional standards directly, most of the skills that the respondents considered essential were from the 'knowledge in practice' section, rather than the 'knowledge and comprehension' section and so, once again, we have another piece of evidence to suggest that basic practical skills are highly in-demand.

Annex 1: List of Interviews

Interviews in Tbilisi:

- Zviad Kvividze, Manufacturing and Service Manager USAID EPI.
- Irina Salukvadze, USAID EPI
- Maia Tsereteli, Director, Key Management Solutions
- Nino Bartaia HR manager, Holiday Inn (Tbilisi)
- David Khipiani HR manager, Marriott (Tbilisi)
- Leila Akhmetelashvili, HR manager, Sheraton (Tbilisi)
- Ekaterine Lomidze, HR manager Radisson Blu (Tbilisi)
- Rusudan Chartolani, Director, ICARUS VET centre
- Lali Ebanoidze, Head of the VET department, Ministry of Education
- Nika Kochishvili, EU VET development project
- Revaz Sakvarelidze, UNDP VET project

Interviews in Batumi:

- Giorgi Gogitidze, Director, LEPL professional college Black Sea, Batumi
- Davit Mchedlishvili, LEPL Professional college New Wave, Kobuleti
- Sopo Lazishvili, Deputy Director, Tourism Department of the Autonomous republic of Adjara,
- Mamuka Berdzenishvili, Department Director, Tourism Department of the Autonomous republic of Adjara
- Rauli Abuladze, Deputy Head, Department of Tourism and Resorts, Tourism Department of the Autonomous republic of Adjara
- Eka Chanishvili, Chair, Tourism Agency
- Zaal Chagalidze, Specialist, Batumi Investment Agency
- Lamzira Bolkvadze, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Ajara
- Gocha Gabrushidze, Batumi Employment Agency

Annex 2: List of Interviewed Businesses (for both General and Professional Questionnaires)

Name	Location	Name	Location
AB Visit Adjara	Batumi	Light House	Batumi
Acropolis	Batumi	Literature Cafe	Batumi
Adeli (Childrens Sport School)	Batumi	Ludis Bari	Batumi
Adjara Tour	Batumi	Machakhela	Batumi
Adjarian House	Batumi	Marani	Batumi
Alik	Batumi	Marco	Batumi
Amiran	Batumi	Marina	Batumi
Ankara	Batumi	Marselle	Batumi
Antique	Batumi	Megrul-Lazuri	Batumi
Aquarius	Batumi	Mercury	Batumi
Argo tour	Batumi	Mgzavrebi	Batumi
Art Boulevard	Batumi	Old Batumi	Batumi
Art Gallery	Batumi	Old City	Batumi
Baia Tour	Batumi	Piazza Hotel	Batumi
Bata	Batumi	Premier Class	Batumi
Batumi Globe	Batumi	President Plaza	Batumi
Baumi Tourism Agency	Batumi	Press Cafe	Batumi
Black Sea	Batumi	Prestige (LTD T-Dias)	Batumi
Boni	Batumi	Quiet Woman Pub	Batumi
Brighton	Batumi	Radisson Blu	Batumi
Calipso	Batumi	Rcheuli Villa	Batumi
Captain	Batumi	Rendez Vous	Batumi
Caravan	Batumi	Retro	Batumi
Chao	Batumi	Revazi	Batumi
City Star	Batumi	Ritsa	Batumi
Cloud 9	Batumi	Riviera	Batumi
David	Batumi	San Remo	Batumi
Dukani	Batumi	Sanapiro	Batumi
Elegant	Batumi	Sanapiro	Batumi
Era-Palace	Batumi	Sazandari	Batumi
Espresso Bar Sinatra	Batumi	Sector 31	Batumi
Galogre	Batumi	Shemoikhede	Batumi
G-Bakuri	Batumi	Sheraton	Batumi
Golden Fish	Batumi	Sputnik	Batumi
Golden Fish	Batumi	Tabla	Batumi

Name	Location	Name	Location
Golden Key	Batumi	Tower	Batumi
Golden Star	Batumi	Tserodena	Batumi
Grand Grill	Batumi	Unitour	Batumi
Harale	Batumi	Vardebis Bagtan	Batumi
Hotel Lux	Batumi	Voyage	Batumi
Indian-Chinese Restaurant	Batumi	Wonderland	Batumi
Intourist Palace	Batumi	Zuda	Batumi
Istanbul	Batumi	Georgian Palace Hotel	Kobuleti
Khinklis Sakhli	Batumi	Green-House	Kobuleti
Khiramala	Batumi	Oasis	Chakvi
La Brioshe	Batumi	Tchadrebi	Keda
Laguna	Batumi	Khulo	Khulo
Le Kanape	Batumi	Cameo	Kvariati
Les Tournesols	Batumi	Complex "Shuakhevi"	Shuakhevi

Annex 3: General Questionnaire

Questionnaire Adjara businesses

Name	
Organisation	
Position	
Tel No	

General information

How was the questionnaire filed? *(for the interviewer to fill in)*

In-Person	1
By phone	2

Type of business?

Hotel	1	Go to Q 0
Restaurants	2	
Tour operators	3	
Other, please specify		

If hotel, please specify the number of rooms

--

Number of employees (at the current time)

--

Number of employees (you expect to have in January (asked to gauge seasonality of business))

Types of employees *(interviewer tick the boxes)*

	Answer	No.	No recruited in the last 6 months	No from VET centres	No with praktikums in last 6 months
Hotel administrator					
Receptionist					
Restaurant manager					
Cook					
Pastry cook					
Bartender					
Sommelier					
Waiter					
Cleaner					
Guide					
Hiking guide					
Mountain guide					
Tour-operator					
Other					

Employment

Has your organization recruited new employees in last 6 months?

Yes	1
No	2(Go to Q 11)
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

Does your organization plan to employ new staff during the next year?

Yes	1
No	2 (Go to Q 0)
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

What type of employees will you be looking for?

	Answer	Number of new employees
Hotel administrator		
Receptionist		
Restaurant manager		
Cook		
Pastry cook		
Bartender		
Sommelier		
Waiter		
Cleaner		
Guide		
Hiking guide		
Mountain guide		
Tour-operator		
Other (please specify) _____		
(Don't know)		
(Refuse to answer)		

Finding employees. On a scale to 1 to 4, how would you qualify the process of finding employees (where 1 means 'it is very difficult to find employees' and 4 means 'it is very easy to find qualified employees')

Very difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very easy	DK	RA
1	2	3	4		

On a scale to 1 to 4, assess how easy or difficult it is to find employees in these categories (where 1 means 'it is very difficult to find qualified employees' and 4 means 'it is very easy to find qualified employees')

	Very difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very easy	DK	RA	N/A
Hotel administrator	1	2	3	4			
Receptionist	1	2	3	4			
Restaurant manager	1	2	3	4			
Cook	1	2	3	4			
Pastry cook	1	2	3	4			
Bartender	1	2	3	4			
Sommelier	1	2	3	4			
Waiter	1	2	3	4			
Guide	1	2	3	4			
Hiking guide	1	2	3	4			
Mountain guide	1	2	3	4			
Tour-operator	1	2	3	4			
Cleaner	1	2	3	4			
Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4			

VET awareness

Are there any VET centres in your area that train staff in the tourism sector?

Yes	1
No	2 (Go to Q 0)
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

Have you been approached by VET centres for internship programs (praktikums)?

Yes	1
No	2
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

Are you currently receiving interns from VET centres?

Yes	1	(Go to Q 0)
No	2	(Go to Q 0)
(Don't know)	98	
(Refuse to answer)	99	

Would you be interested in receiving interns from VET centre?

Yes	1 (Go to Q 0)
No	2
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

Please specify why are not you interested in receiving interns from VET centre?

(Go to Q 0)

How many interns are you currently receiving from VET?

Do you/have you ever employed VET students?

Yes	1 (Go to Q Error! Reference source not found.)
No	2
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

VET students you have employed at an entry level are at what level in your organisation when they start?

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Managerial (Department heads or above)				
Mid level (cook, bar manager, Hotel administrator)				
Worker (waiter, receptionist, housekeeper/cleaner, cooks assistant)				

Would you be interested in hiring a VET graduate in tourism?

Yes	1	(Go to Q 0)
No	2	
(Don't know)	98	(Go to Q0)
(Refuse to answer)	99	

Why would not you be interested in hiring a VET graduate in tourism?

Don't need employees	1	(Go to Q 0)
Are not qualified	2	
Job hire in the family	3	
Hire friends	4	
Others, please specify	5	

What is your general assessment of the quality of these interns/employees?

Very poorly	poorly	average	well	Very well	DK	RA
1	2	3	4	5		

Did you have to evaluate the performance of these interns as part of their VET program/internship? (provide some sort of feedback to the VET centres)

Yes	1	(Go to Q 0)
No	2	
(Don't know)	98	
(Refuse to answer)	99	

Specify your involvement in that process:

Did the staff of VET centres visit your establishment or kept track of the interns' progress?

Yes	1
No	2
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

Do the knowledge and skills of professional graduates correspond to the needs of your organization?

Completely	1
Partially	2
Does not correspond	3
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

What are the specific problems with graduates (choose no more than three)?

Lack of practical skills	1
Specific professional qualifications	2
Lack of managerial skills	3
Theoretical knowledge	4
Creativity	5
Lack of initiative	6
Knowledge of foreign languages	7
IT skills (computer skills)	8
Communication skills	9
Others, please specify _____	10

For an entry-level employee working with customers directly (receptionist, barman, waiter, tour-guide, tour operator) please say which of the following applicants you would prefer:

An application with language skills but no professional experience or training	
An applicant with professional experience but no language skills or training	
An applicant with professional training but no language skills and no experience	

How do you advertise job openings?

Print advertisement	1
Contacts and recommendations	2
Internet	3
Private employment services	4
Internal hire	5
Friends or family	6
Other, please specify _____	7

What type of process do you use to select new employees?

Interview	1
Based on the CVs	2
Some written or practical exams	3
Trial period (probation)	4
Others, please specify _____	6

Does the level of qualification of your staff correspond to the requirements of your organization?

Completely	1
Partially	2
Does not correspond	3
(Don't know)	98
(Refuse to answer)	99

Does your establishment offer professional development trainings to your employees?

Yes	1	Questionnaire is finished
No	2	
(Don't know)	98	
(Refuse to answer)	99	

If yes, specify what types of trainings and how often (try to give a few sentences. We are particularly interested to know is the training occasional or regular and systematic

Does the training provide a career path so that good employees can develop quickly

What type of profession usually are the targets the trainings?

Hotel manager	
Receptionist	
Restaurant manager	
Cook	
Baker/pastry	
Bartender	
Sommelier	
Tour-operator	
Waiter	
Guide	
Hiking guide	
Mountain guide	
Cleaner	
Other (please specify) _____	

What type of skills are taught or are priority for these trainings?

Who do you hire to provide these trainings?

In house trainers (restaurant or hotel chains for example: Radisson or Sheraton)	1
International trainers (private)	2
Local hired company (private)	3
VET centres	4
Other, please specify	5

If not the VET centres, then why not?

What are the specifics you look for when hiring these companies for trainings?

Experience	1
Price	2
Availability	3
Others, please specify	4

What is the average salary of different professions (?

Hotel administrator	
Receptionist	
Restaurant manager	
Cook	
Baker/pastry	
Bartender	
Sommelier	
Waiter	
Guide	
Hiking guide	
Mountain guide	
Tour-operator	
Cleaner	
Other (please specify) _____	

What do you think about the differences between the professional qualifications of graduates from different VET centres?

Annex 4: Professional Questionnaire: Cook

Name	
Organisation	
Position	
Tel No	

Cook

Have you employed any cooks from VET centres?

Yes	1
No	2

Please assess the importance of these skills for cooks (essential, useful, or not at all useful) and whether VET trainees\entry level employees on this position have these skills

	How useful is it			Do trainees have this skill		
	Essential	Useful	Not at all useful	Yes	Partially	No
Personal characteristics						
Initiative						
Creativity						
Motivation						
Positive attitude						
Sociable						
Professionally dressed/presented						
Professional standards (punctual, reliable, responsible)						
Working skills						
IT + computer skills						
Managerial skills						
Communication skills						
Specific professional skills						
Background						
Higher education						
Professional education (VET education)						
Professional experience						
Language skills						
Knowledge of Russian						
Knowledge of English						
Knowledge of foreign languages (not English or Russian)						
Others, please specify _____						

On a scale please assess the usefulness of each of these working skills/ you require employee on the entry level

List of Working Skills	How useful is it			Do trainees have this skill		
	Essential	Useful	Not at all useful	Yes	Partially	No
General professional knowledge						
Types of restaurants and their activities						
Primary food processing and their storage rules;						
Basic principles of kitchen/kitchen equipment works						
Types of local and foreign food products, their nutritional values and preparation methods						
Food safety (food infections, food poisoning and diseases caused by spoiled food or food products)						
Services (main types and principles of service, service etiquette, relevance of dishes and drinks, timing of dishes served)						
Others, please specify _____						
Professional skills						
Prepares, organizes and cleans working area						
Independently prepares National dishes						
Independently prepares European dishes						
Independently prepares International dishes						
Decorates dishes						
Uses different tasting and taste selecting methods						
Prepares and bakes pastry						
Prepares fruit assortments and deserts						
Specification of food preparation for different types of events: banquets, cocktails, VIP/official/diplomatic receptions, corporate dinner, outdoor activities						
Labor safety						
Workplace safety, fire safety, ventilation						
Sanitary-hygiene and kitchen clean-up rules						
First-aid rules						
General working skills						
Basic accounting;						
Managerial skills (levels 4+5)						
Hires kitchen staff, determines their functions and working scheme						
Trains and re-trains staff						
Establishes the standard ration for the dish, plans and compiles the menu						
Can create new recipes						
Creates/makes changes in menus						
Controls and analyzes prices of dishes						
Creates kitchen budget, analyzes kitchen revenues and expenditures together with the food and beverage/hotel manager						
Others, please specify _____						

Annex 5: Interviews with Students

1. Name

2. Age

3. Sex

4. Which VET centre did you graduate from?

Kobuleti VET centre

Batumi Black Sea VET centre

Batumi university VET faculty

Other

DK

RA

5. When did you graduate?

1 year ago

2 year ago

3 years ago

4 or more years ago

6. Have you been employed since?

Yes, in the field that I studied (cook, bartender, waiter etc)

Yes, in tourism industry but different field

Yes, in an unrelated field

No, I am unemployed

7. If in that field, which?

Hotel administrator

Cook

Pastry Cook

Bartender

Waiter

Other (which)

How many employees did you have since graduation?

1

2

3

4 or more

none

DK/RA

8. Currently employed in

Hotel
Restaurant
Tour agency
Other
Not employed
DK
RA

9. What were the (3) most useful things you learned in the VET centre (open q)

10. What were the (3) skills that your employer requested that you did not learn in VET centre (open q)

11. How did your VET centre fare as compared to other VET centres? (open q)

12. What would you advise VET centres to change in their curricula/practical lessons to be more useful for graduates employment/skills? (open q)

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