Adult Education in the United Arab Emirates

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Executive Summary

Adult education plays a critical role in a country's economic development, but very little information on the sector is available in the UAE. To address this gap, we conducted a landscape review of the key adult education regulators in the country to understand the existing situation and identify challenges and make recommendations for the sector going forward. Using publicly available information, we found a complex system of regulators that lack transparency in roles, processes, and criteria, with some information contradicting public information available elsewhere. To address these challenges, we suggest immediate steps be taken to update and standardize regulator websites across the country and create a centralized portal for all adult education regulators and providers with a dashboard of key indicators. This can be further supported by developing a national adult education strategy and conducting a needs assessment to adopt a more inclusive approach, to TVET in particular, and a greater focus on quality provision. Finally, we emphasize the importance of greater collaboration between the regulators as well as the private sector across the country. Together, we hope these recommendations will lead to a more efficient adult education sector that aligns with market demands and supports the continued growth and development of the nation.

Introduction

The UAE's adult education sector is designed to support the supply of a skilled workforce with the aim of increasing productivity, fostering economic development, and supporting a knowledge-based economy, a key component of several of the UAE's strategic visions.¹ However, an effective adult education sector requires close coordination between public and private stakeholders, including effective regulatory bodies and programs that meet labor market demands. In recent years, the UAE has made a great effort to sustain high levels of engagement with adult education providers. However, many challenges persist around access to information, transparency in regulations and processes, and a lack of coordination between stakeholders. These challenges could be addressed

through additional support and investment, enabling the UAE to make further progress and meet UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action, where adult education plays a key role (UIL, 2021).

In this policy paper, we examine the current landscape of adult education in the UAE to identify the key challenges and provide recommendations for stakeholders across the country. We considered various factors in adult education, including licensing information, inclusion, market demands, quality assurance, and the availability and access to information. Policy recommendations include introducing a comprehensive database of all providers, establishing a uniform and transparent licensing process, and understanding current and future labor market demands to ensure that students are provided training in these key areas.

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1   For example, UAE Vision 2021, Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, Dubai Vision 2040 all reference the knowledge-based economy and how they can support economic development.

Background

In this section, we define adult education and give examples from around the world that demonstrate its importance in supporting economic development. We also highlight the importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and efficient regulatory bodies within the education sector.

Defining Adult Education

Adult education can be classified as any form of education that helps adults improve, enrich, develop, or acquire professional qualifications, knowledge, skills, and competencies (UIS, 2021). This may also include adults who never completed formal school, those looking to acquire an additional level of formal education, and those looking to explore a new field. Adult education has several sub-categories, including life-long learning, professional development, and vocational education. Regardless of the type, adult education plays a critical role in economic and social development, as it has been shown to increase productivity, which allows organizations to stay competitive and innovative (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, it is essential that adult education be supported and developed to ensure the continued success of the UAE.

Adult Education Around the World

Numerous examples of successful adult education sectors exist around the world. Examining the trends in higher education in the 1990s, Singh et al. (2018) demonstrated how a rapid increase in private institutions, better ties to the labor market, and expansion of institutional differentiation supported economic growth. Singh et al. (2018) highlighted that countries that have experienced rapid development and economic growth in recent decades, such as Nigeria, Brazil, China, India, and South Korea, also saw rapid growth in adult education and higher education. More recently, this has also been the case in Malaysia, which further saw high levels of development and growth supported by the government's high level of investment in the education sector (Singh et al., 2018). Thus, although adult education alone cannot necessarily lead to economic development, the adult education sector can support development if done correctly, especially in coordination with complementary policies explored in greater detail below.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

TVET is usually organized as a separate component of the larger education system, with its own set of rules and regulations, but it's a critical component of adult education. TVET is usually distributed across private and public educational establishments and encompasses all "aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding, and knowledge relating to occupants in various sectors of economic and social life" (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2021a).

Many studies have captured the importance of TVET on the economy. For example, Pavlova (2014) found that education and training for productive employment are crucial for economic and social development while examining countries in Asia and the Pacific, and Hong Kong in particular, where new strategic development areas have been shown to have boosted economic performance. However, there is perhaps no better example of the importance of TVET than Germany. The key to Germany's economic success has been adult education and TVET specific offerings supplemented by private company training and trade union-organized adult education (EAEA, 2011). This includes key providers and advisors from chambers of industry and commerce and trade and agriculture (EAEA, 2011). Since industry representatives are directly involved with adult education, this model is more demand-driven and allows for collaboration with employers, creating relevant adult education offerings based on industry trends (EAEA, 2011). Overall, Germany's TVET sector demonstrates the importance of creating industry-specific upskilling facilitated through public-private partnerships (PPPs), including regular surveys of the adult education market and specifically the alignment of learners' and employers' demands essential for a successful adult education sector, including TVET.

The TVET sector in the UAE has not been extensively researched, resulting in a lack of publicly available information. As a result, what is currently being

done, planned, and the challenges remaining to be addressed around TVET in the UAE are unclear. One study, however, gives a general overview of the history and importance of TVET in the UAE. Owais et al. (2020) highlight that the scope and size of TVET in the UAE is small; however, there have been efforts to expand and improve the system to meet the economy's demands. For example, there has been an increase in TVET institutes in recent years, growing to 73 recognized institutions offering 589 accredited programs in 2016 (Owais et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the TVET sector remains small, and additional research is needed to understand the sector's current status fully.

Regulatory Authorities

Regardless of whether one is discussing adult education in general or TVET specifically, an efficient and transparent regulatory system is key to the sector's success. In some western countries, but still emerging markets, such as Estonia and Hungary, we have observed large increases in adult learning over the past decade, accompanied by large gains in economic outcomes, making them top performers internationally (OECD, 2020). Key to the success of these two countries has been the introduction of several policy reforms that have impacted adult education rates (OECD, 2020). Some key changes worth mentioning are new programs to provide free basic and second-chance education for adults, the expansion of active labor market policies, offerings of free-of-charge basic skills courses, and free second vocational degrees (OECD, 2020).

As another example, in 1990, the United States specifically addressed adult education and literacy with the National Literacy Act 1991, which focused on providing measurable student gains by documenting and tracking student progress using a national reporting system (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, p. iv). Two decades later, the impact of this Act has been found to have created accountability systems, enabled better coordination, and improved program development. But, above all, it has demonstrated that the success of the adult education sector requires efficient policies, the government's support, and close collaboration with the private sector.

Methodology

This policy paper aims to provide a greater understanding of adult education providers and an overview of the different regulatory bodies in the UAE. To do so, we conducted an online search of the information available relating to licensing, quality assurance, and the type of centers that currently exist in the UAE. Additionally, we contacted the relevant authorities to obtain more information. Finally, using the information that was accessible, we examined the publicly available process descriptions and regulations and the information available using a centralized regulator platform on adult education providers in the country.

This information was then organized into common themes and is presented below as a landscape review. We then analyzed the landscape of regulators using a SWOT analysis (see Table B1 in Appendix B) to identify the sector's challenges and opportunities to develop actionable recommendations. Finally, we highlight the key challenges after the landscape review below, followed by recommendations to support the sector.

Due to the constantly changing nature of the sector and the complexity brought about by having numerous regulators, it is difficult to capture all aspects of the regulatory process for adult education providers in the UAE. This information is constantly developing, and there may be additional components, such as databases, strategies, processes, and assessment mechanisms, in place that are not reflected here. However, the information presented represents a thorough assessment of what is publicly available. Thus, it can provide guidance on areas for improvement since what the public can access and understand will affect the type of providers approved by regulators and the quality of provisions in the sector.

Figure 1: Adult Education & TVET Licensing and Regulatory Structure in the UAE

Legend:
- Regulatory Authority
- Sub Institute or Center
- Specialized Board, Commission, or Council
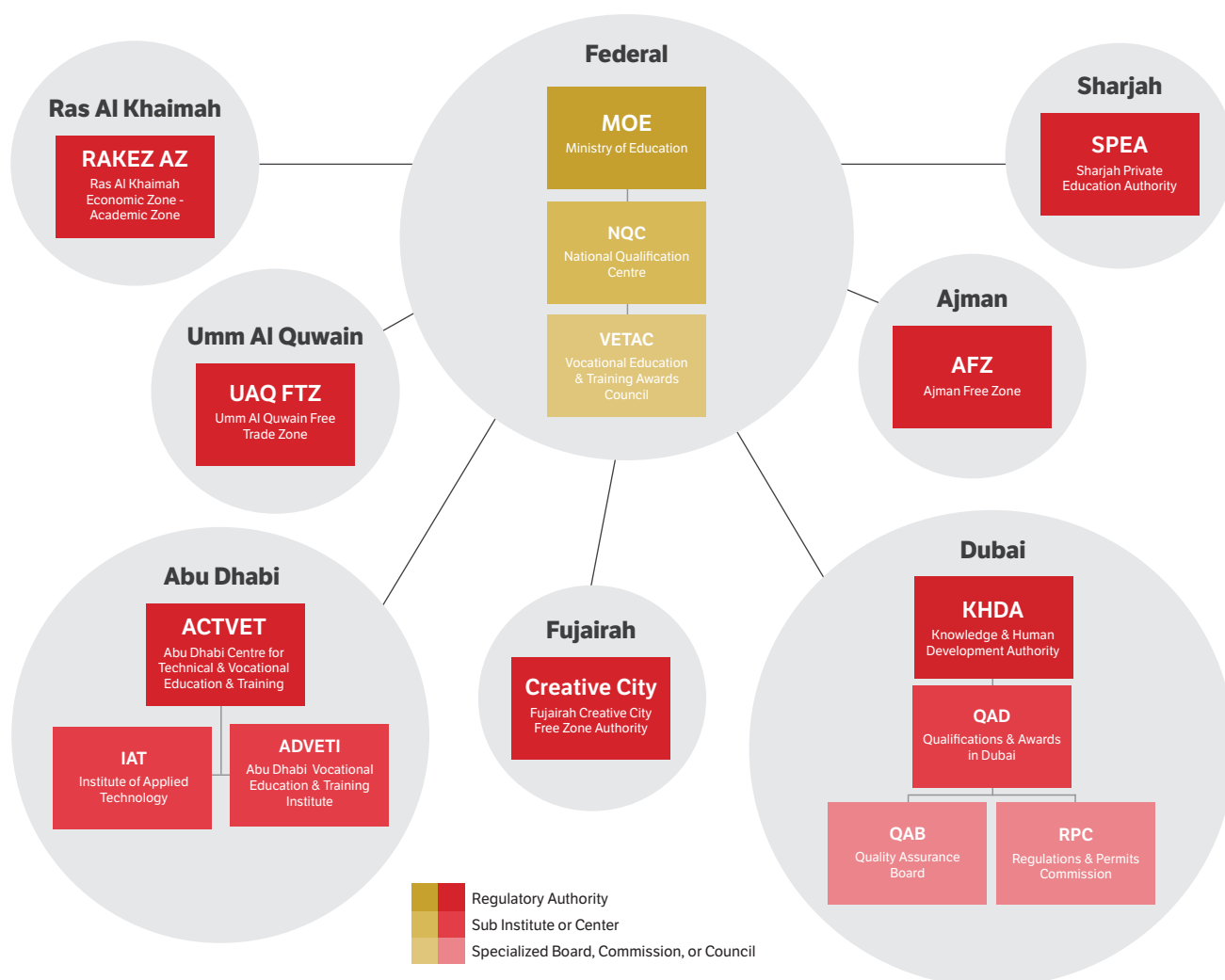
The Adult Education Landscape in the UAE

The adult education sector in the UAE has numerous providers offering a diverse array of courses, with many having a dedicated website. In addition, there are several regulatory authorities licensing adult education providers in the country, with each having a website and a limited number of links on the next steps to secure a license. However, as shown in Figure 1, the regulatory framework for adult education in the UAE is quite complex. There are different levels of authority, numerous sectors, and regulatory policies, making it difficult to understand due to a lack of publicly available information.

As shown in Figure 1, the regulatory environment falls under the jurisdiction of both federal and emirate levels of government. Each emirate is responsible for issuing licenses and ensuring compliance with the policies; however, these regulations are introduced at the federal level. The main overseeing entities are the Ministry of Education (MOE), ACTVET for TVET specific institutions, and KHDA for Dubai and the regulators specific to each emirate in the northern emirates. The section below provides a more detailed overview of the regulatory authorities, their roles, processes, and the information they make available to the public.

Ministry of Education (MOE)

The MOE is a government ministry of the UAE, with its main offices in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The MOE is the primary regulator of education activities at the federal level and holds numerous responsibilities. In addition to regulating primary and secondary schools, the MOE

also regulates higher education[2] and oversees adult education providers that the MOE refers to as 'Training Providers.' The exception is Dubai, where KHDA is the primary regulatory, although the MOE still plays a role through NQC and the Vocational Education and Training Awards Council (VETAC), described below.

Based on the previously available information on the MOE's website,[3] the MOE's primary roles in regulating training providers include approving the type of center and instruction to be provided and how it will be provided. As a part of the initial approval process, training providers must submit documentation detailing the facilities, staffing and their qualifications, the materials and assessments used, etc.

Once the MOE is satisfied with the documentation submitted and approves the training provider, it then issues a certificate, which must be presented to the respective business regulator in the emirate where the center is to be opened. In this regard, the MOE leaves the issuing of business licenses to the responsible government body of each emirate, only requiring their initial approval regarding the education aspects of the business. Moreover, the MOE does not indicate whether they conduct systematic inspections of the providers once they are operational, such as verifying whether the providers comply with the information provided during the application process. In that regard, we are unsure if the MOE involves itself in the quality assurance of training providers once they has been approved. Overall, the MOE plays a large role in the initial approval process; however, it is unclear if and to what extent they engage in monitoring and evaluation once a training provider is operational. In addition, no comprehensive list of the providers approved by the MOE could be located, except TVET providers, which are regulated by the National Qualifications Centre

(NQC) and described below.

- *National Qualifications Centre (NQC):* NQC was originally established as the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) with the introduction of a federal decree No. 1[4] in late 2010. With this decree, the UAE government wanted to initiate new strategies to move towards better socio-economic development to focus on a knowledge-based economy. Hence, the need for a body that will regulate the roles and responsibilities of the educational and training bodies. However, in 2021, the NQA was rebranded to the NQC and merged under the MOE.

Today, NQC is one of the main regulatory bodies of adult education, including TVET, in the UAE. Its responsibilities include developing a national qualification framework, policies and standards, the standardization of qualifications, policies that promote life-long learning, and alignment with the economy and labor market demands.[5] NQC also lists educational and training institutions that it approves on its website and refers to them as 'Registered Training Providers' (RTPs). Currently, NQC lists 24 RTPs with active status and 8 RTPs with inactive status; however, there is overlap with ACTVET – described below — where some of the providers are listed on both ACTVET's and NQC's website, but not all, with no explanation for these differences.[6] NQC also lists the number of endorsed national vocation qualifications by RTPs (99) and the number of TVET graduates (1,553 in 2020), which has increased from 980 in 2019.[7] However, these also lack depth, with no further breakdown beyond these high-level numbers.

The process of quality assurance and accreditation of training providers on a national level is supported by its regulatory body, VETAC. VETAC

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2 The MOE regulates public and private universities; however, branch campuses in economic free zones are not required to be approved by the MOE. 3

3 During the writing of this policy paper, the information on the licensing process of training providers, previously referred to as 'adult training centers,' was removed from the MOE website, and new webpages could not be located. The UAE government portal, does, however, still list information on the licensing process, and notes that the MOE is the responsible regulator in the northern emirates; for more information, visit: https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/education/licensing-private-educational-institutes

4 For more information on the Decree, visit: http://www.qualifications.ae/About_Us

5 For more information on NQC, visit: https://www.nqa.gov.ae/en/our-responsibility/technical-and-vocational-education-and-training.aspx

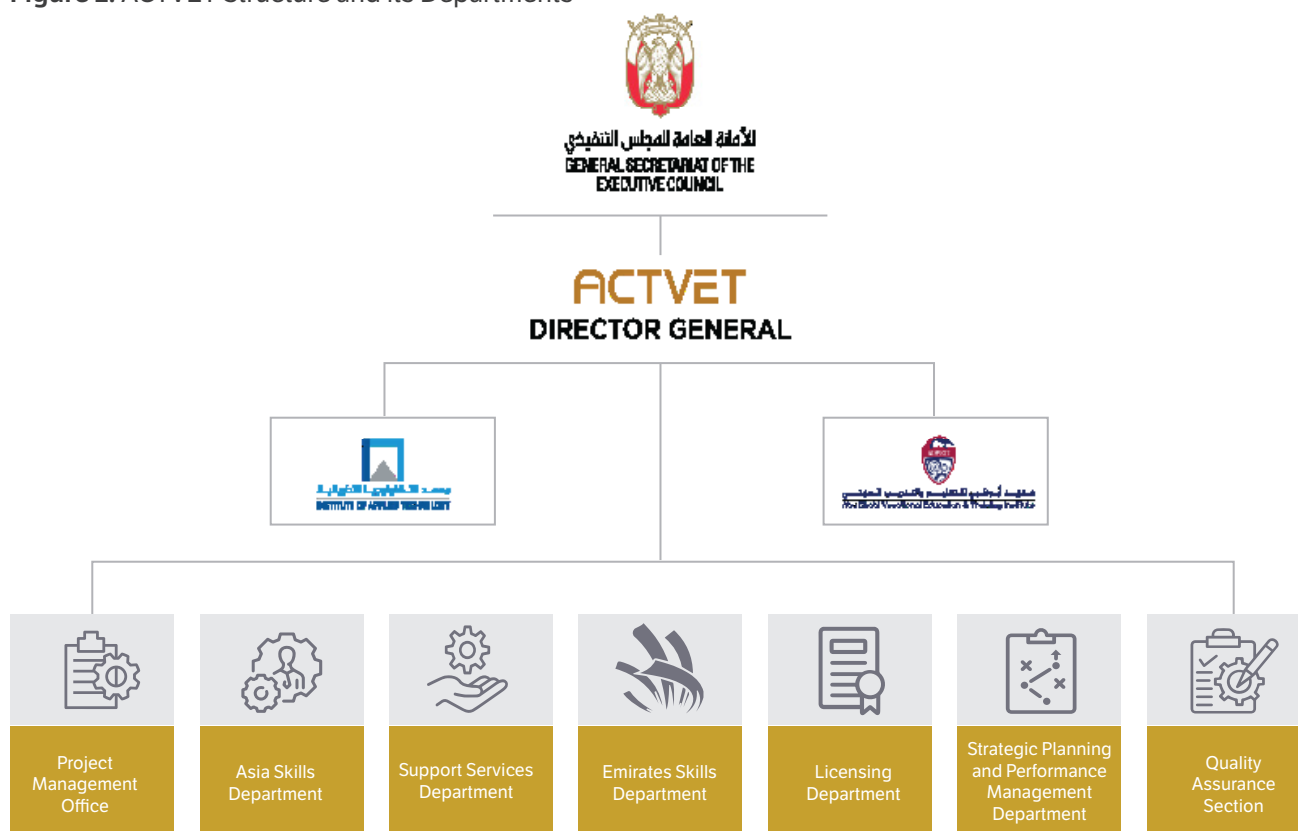6 For more information visit NQC's website: https://www.nqa.gov.ae/en/registered-training-providers.aspx and ACTVET's website: https://www.actvet.gov.ae/en/EducationSystem/Pages/Locations.aspx

7 All statistics provided by NQC are available here: https://www.nqa.gov.ae/en/open-data/numbers-and-statistics.aspx#page=1

is tasked with "setting strategies and managing quality assurance and control process of issuing vocational qualifications in accordance with approved regulations" (NQA, 2021). On the MOE website, the procedures for approving qualifications are explained, but there is a lack of information on what or how a submitted request is being assessed.[8] The website lists several services and the documents required, but the detail on what these should include could not be found.[9] Moreover, detailed information on the licensing process and monitoring and evaluation of TVET institutions after issuing licenses could not be found. Overall, there is little information available to the public on the roles, responsibilities, and processes of NQC and VETAC, and much of the wording is repeated for each body, making it difficult to understand the roles and responsibilities of each respective body.

Abu Dhabi Center for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET)

ACTVET is described as the primary regulator of TVET institutions in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, but they also oversee intuitions across the UAE. For example, ACTVET oversees the process of licensing trainers and training centers and aims to "boost training and educational opportunities for young nationals within the qualification framework of the Emirate with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of skilled Emirati youth in rewarding careers and foster life long learning and personal development" (ACTVET, 2021a). ACTVET also emphasizes its role in ensuring that the institutions also meet labor market demands by establishing policies and standards that regulate technical and vocational educational institutions, but how they do this or have done this is unclear.

Figure 2: ACTVET Structure and its Departments

Source: ACTVET (2021b)

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8 For more information, visit: https://www.nqa.gov.ae/en/our-responsibility/vocational-education-and-training-awards-council.aspx

9 The services available on NQC's website can be found here: https://www.nqa.gov.ae/en/services/services-directory.aspx#page=1

As shown in Figure 2, ACTVET's institutional structure consists of various departments. ACTVET's Licensing Department is the main actor responsible for providing licensing services and performing several other functions, including establishing the standards and requirements for TVET providers, engaging the private sector, and ensuring effective management and delivery of different training programs (ACTVET, 2021a). ACTVET lists two types of licenses on its website: 'Licensed Training Providers' (LTPs) and 'Registered Training Providers' (RTPs) license. ACTVET lists the requirements for being an LTP on its website.[10] However, the RTP license also requires the qualifications of the institution to be endorsed by NQC.[11]

Based on their website, ACTVET oversees 33 secondary school institutions (21 boys, 12 girls) and 14 post-secondary institutions (six boys, eight girls).[12] Within ACTVET, there are two other regulatory bodies, the Institute of Applied Technology (IAT), which oversees institutions that focus on applied technology, and the Abu Dhabi Vocational Education & Training Institute (ADVETI), which oversees the TVET institutions. A complete list of the intuitions under IAT and ADVETI is presented in Table A1 in Appendix A. However, as previously mentioned, there is no clear distinction provided on the roles of ACTVET and NQC and how they differ, except for the two different license types and that ACTVET also regulates several secondary school TVET institutions.

The information on ACTVET's quality control assessment criteria is publicly available on the portal under the Quality Assurance Section.[13] The document contains extensive information regarding quality control and inspection procedures. They categorize the defining factors under five major areas: Governance, Teaching and Learning, Data Management, Resources, and Health and Safety of Facilities. Although these major areas are listed and mentioned, there are no details on how they are taken into account during the quality assurance process. Following the initial licensing process, ACTVET does not indicate whether they conduct systematic inspections of the providers once they are operational, such as verifying whether they comply with the information provided during the application process. There is mention of self-evaluation reports, which seem to be the primary form of the evaluation process in the latter stages.

Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA)

KHDA is the main education regulator in the emirate of Dubai and has numerous roles in supporting the growth, development, and quality of private educational institutions in the emirate. In addition to regulating private K-12 and higher education providers in Dubai, KHDA aims to support the delivery of high-quality technical and vocational education and training and meet the needs of residents and employers in Dubai.[14] On the KHDA website, there is a directory of all approved training institutes with contact information, location, activities, and the courses offered.[15] Currently, there are more than 1,100 approved training institutes in Dubai. They offer a broad range of courses – from foreign languages and computer training to engineering, banking, and finances. However, they do not provide a summary dashboard or filters of all institutes in a dashboard format, making it difficult to easily identify what is being offered and where.

10 For more information on ACTVET's LTPs licensing process visit: https://www.actvet.gov.ae/en/AboutUs/Structure/LisencingDepartment/Pages/NewTrainingLicense.aspx

11 For more information on ACTVET's RTPs licensing process visit: https://www.actvet.gov.ae/en/AboutUs/Structure/LisencingDepartment/Pages/RenewNOCtoDeliverNationalQualification.aspx

12 The full list of ACTVET secondary and post-secondary locations is available here: https://www.actvet.gov.ae/en/EducationSystem/Pages/Locations.aspx

13 For more information on ACTVET's quality assurances processes, visit: https://www.actvet.gov.ae/en/AboutUs/Structure/QualityAssurance/Pages/default.aspx

14 For more information on TVET within KHDA, visit: https://www.khda.gov.ae/en/tvet

15 KHDA's directory of training providers is available here: https://www.khda.gov.ae/en/directory?isSearched=1&textFilter=&trainingInsId=&trainingInsLoc=&trainingInsActivity=&courseName=&tab=tab-training

16 For more information, visit: https://www.khda.gov.ae/en/tipermits

To open an educational facility in Dubai, it is necessary to obtain an approval/training permit from KHDA. The Training Institute Permit issuance process is summarized on the KHDA website.[16] It is presented in two phases, with a process similar to the northern emirates in which the educational content is first approved, and then the business license is approved in the second phase.

KHDA also regulates TVET providers under its jurisdiction. Their responsibilities include monitoring TVET providers and ensuring compliance with NQC's and VETAC's criteria and regulations.14 They do so by setting standards for development, registration, and administration; however, it is important to note that further details about what this entails are not publicly available.[17]

As shown in Figure 3, KHDA has an extensive structure and branches responsible for operations on different levels. The Qualifications and Awards in Dubai (QAD) is the arm of KHDA responsible for regulating the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector. It operates under the rules and regulations of KHDA, while its awarding body functions are regulated by the NQC and VETAC.

KHDA'S Quality Control assessment criteria and their process is not clearly defined on KHDA's website, which leaves us with little detail on the quality assurance process.[18] Generally, there are two main ways in which KHDA ensures quality in higher education institutions. First, KHDA gives the institutions in the Free Zones of Dubai academic authorization through its Quality Assurance scheme. Second, institutions can apply for accreditation through the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA). It is important to note that all educational institutions in Dubai outside the Free Zones must be licensed and accredited by the CAA.

Figure 3: KHDA Structure and its Branches
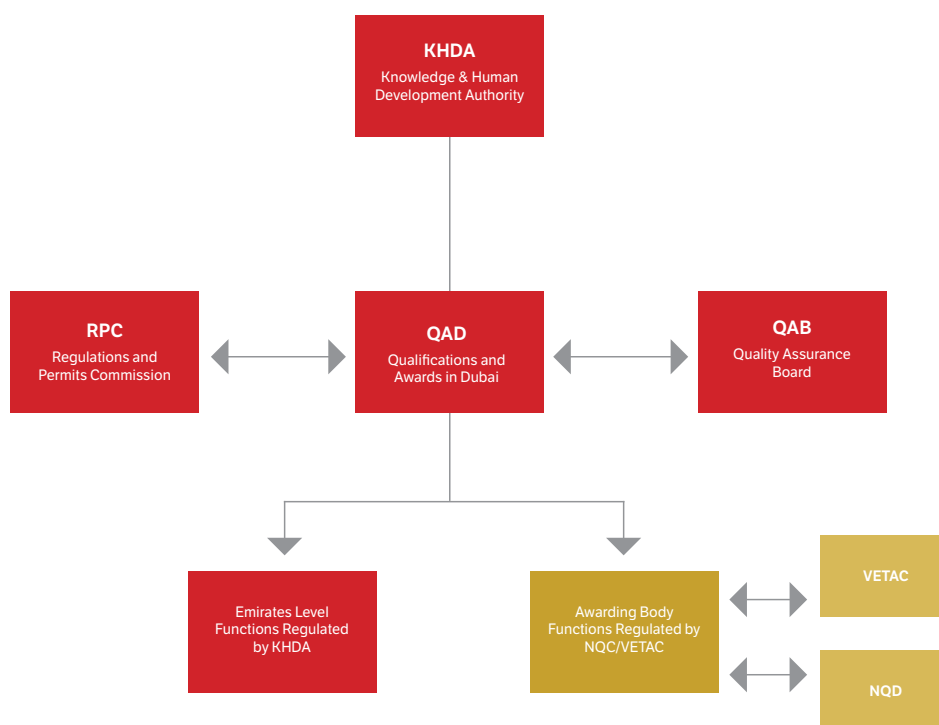
Source: KHDA (n.d., p.5)

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17   The authors also contacted KHDA for more information, but KHDA only reiterated what is provided on their website.

18   The authors also contacted KHDA for more information, but KHDA only reiterated what is provided on their website.
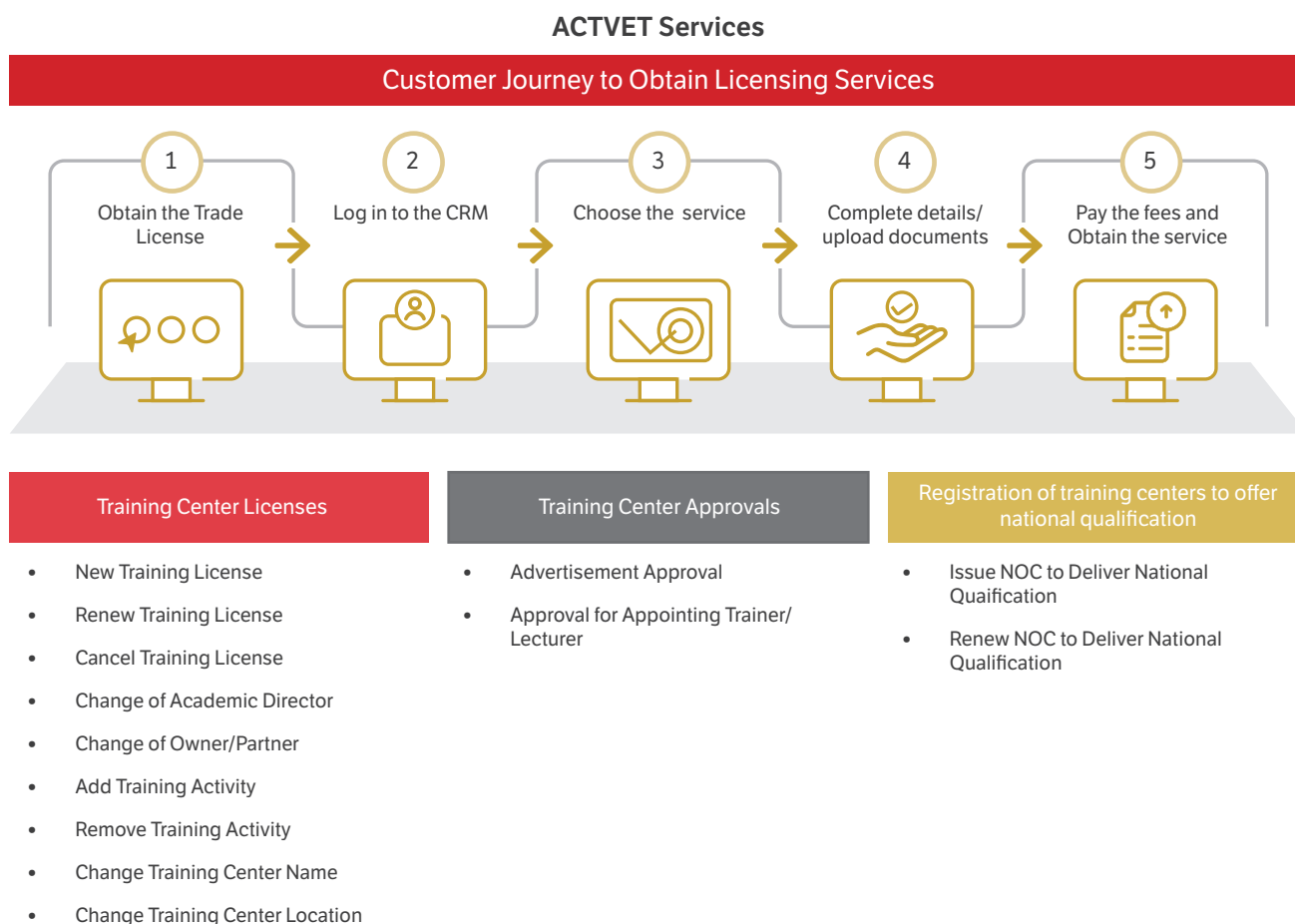
Key Challenges in the Adult Education Sector in the UAE

Although several regulatory authorities govern the adult education sector in the UAE, many of the specific requirements and content of those requirements are unclear and constantly changing. Furthermore, the process often requires approval from several regulatory authorities, making for a confusing process since there is no centralized platform. This also makes it challenging for the authorities to know what types of providers are licensed in other emirates and how the supply of providers aligns with market demands. Moreover, potential students and organizations seeking adult education services may find it challenging to identify the provider appropriate for them.

Beyond the licensing process, there are no transparent quality control measures to ensure that the courses offered by providers align with their license, nor that they are delivering the standard of quality needed in the

market. In addition, although there is a well-regulated and much more centralized TVET sector, it tends to focus on high-performing Emirati men and women, especially boys at the secondary level, thus failing to help other students outside these demographics realize their maximum potential. Because of this focus on high-performing students, the offered courses and programs are also not really vocational in nature and instead aim to prepare Emirati students for university. However, this is in contrast to other successful TVET models around the world that were reviewed in the background section of this paper, and that have a clear focus on vocational skills and also academically lower-achieving student demographics. The net result is an adult education sector that lacks coordination, making it difficult to create a strategy for the sector that identifies challenges and potential solutions, leading to lost economic productivity and development. Key challenges were identified from a review of the adult education stakeholder landscape and are presented in greater detail below.

Figure 4: ACTVET Licensing Process

ACTVET Services

Customer Journey to Obtain Licensing Services

1. Obtain the Trade License
2. Log in to the CRM
3. Choose the service
4. Complete details/ upload documents
5. Pay the fees and Obtain the service

Training Center Licenses	Training Center Approvals	Registration of training centers to offer national qualification
• New Training License	• Advertisement Approval	• Issue NOC to Deliver National Qualification
• Renew Training License	• Approval for Appointing Trainer/ Lecturer	• Renew NOC to Deliver National Qualification
• Cancel Training License		
• Change of Academic Director		
• Change of Owner/Partner		
• Add Training Activity		
• Remove Training Activity		
• Change Training Center Name		
• Change Training Center Location		

Source: ACTVET (2021c)

Approval and Licensing Information

1. **The licensing process is unclear; there is a general lack of transparency and a poor standard of customer service.** Although the basic documents required and the steps necessary to obtain a license are listed on the regulators' websites, the content of those requirements is not explained. Moreover, there are inconsistencies between different bodies and constant changes to the existing regulations. One particular issue that we encountered is a lack of transparency about the assessment process itself. As a result, it is unclear how the decisions are made regarding which provider satisfies the license criteria. The information on the licensing process focuses more on the application process, navigating the portals, etc., rather than their standards for the providers; see Figure 3 as an example. To better understand the initial evaluation process for licensing the providers, we made efforts to reach out to ACTVET and KHDA, but neither organization was able to provide more information beyond what was on the website, making for a poor customer experience.[19]

2. **There is a great deal of overlap between regulators, creating complexity.** The current regulatory landscape of the UAE is complex, with several regulators, such as ACTVET and NQC, playing a role in regulating adult education provision and TVET, with their role and how they differ not clearly defined. In addition, the regulatory bodies take on different roles based on the type of provider and location; the information available and the frameworks in place vary across the country, by the regulator, and even between websites that describe the different regulators.[20] The result is a regulatory sector that is difficult to understand, including how and with whom to coordinate, providing the conditions for further inefficiencies in the sector.

Inclusion and Market Demands

3. **There is insufficient information or publicly available numbers from a centralized database of providers.** KHDA does have a directory of training centers, but the information available is extremely limited. More importantly, it is not organized in a manner that providers an overview of the sector, such as the number of training centers providing specific types of courses, or where they tend to be geographically located, or how they differ. NQC does have some high-level statistics on TVET providers and students, but these lack more detailed information. Moreover, it was challenging to find any additional information on non-TVET providers other than what was provided by KHDA and NQC, nor was it provided upon request over email. As a result, even within Dubai, it is difficult to identify gaps and opportunities in the sector. For example, providers may not be aware of each other's existence, work, need in the market, and overall roles.

4. **There may be a gap between the licensed providers and the market demand.** Although ACTVET and NQC specifically highlight their mandate to ensure that the provision of adult education and TVET align with market demands, no information on what has or is being done or their outcomes could be located. In particular, there is no information on how the market is evaluated, which can potentially lead to gaps. For example, the regulatory bodies may be licensing adult education centers for which there is no demand. On the other hand, there may be demand for certain courses and programs, including in certain geographic locations or by certain groups within the population, but these gaps and opportunities are difficult to identify without a needs assessment of market demands made publicly available.

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19   We inquired about the details on the assessment process and criteria used to determine who is given a license. After an email exchange, the responses provided did not directly answer our inquiries. Instead, the two regulatory agencies offered the PDF documents that were already available to the public but gave no additional instructions.

20   For example, the official UAE government portal has different information on the TVET sector, some of which is outdated such as the current TVET institutions and still listing NQA as a regulator: https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/education/technical-and-vocational-education

Box 1: Data and Information Access

In 2011, the MOE established the Center for Higher Education Information and Statistics (CHEDS) as part of the CAA. The aim was to collect, report, and analyze relevant statistics on all types of higher education institutions. CHEDS has designed and implemented a system for collecting and reporting data, where each institution is required to provide its data. Thus, CHEDS serves as a central data collection platform, but unfortunately, their data is not available to the general public.[21]

Similarly, the data on TVET in the UAE is still limited and inconsistent. As reported by the National Qualifications Authority, some of it is available on the websites of the aforementioned authorities and the other UAE authorities, such as the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, UAE; Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi (SCAD); and Dubai Statistics Centre (DSC). We tried looking at the available data; however, most of the data lacked detail or depth. For example, according to the DSC data from 2019/2020, there were 3,234 individuals enrolled in the adult education centers in the emirate of Dubai. Most of the students (2,483) were enrolled in the Secondary Education program, set up in public Secondary Schools (Dubai Statistics Center, 2019). Unfortunately, the other websites listed above did not contain information relevant to the topic of our study, and the available numbers were particularly difficult to interpret.

5. **There is a lack of inclusion and information on the process of enrolling and eligibility.** The available information is scattered and poorly disseminated. It is often unclear whether a program is targeting students, adults, companies, or individuals. This makes it difficult for potential students to find the program they are interested in, as the target population for many of these entities is not clearly defined. In addition, current TVET providers target mostly Emirati nationals, and the secondary level targets mainly males and have very specific education requirements for admission. As such, TVET in the UAE is not entirely aligned with UNESCO's TVET strategy on equity and inclusion (UNESCO, 2021). This is also captured by the priorities listed by the UAE regulators, which do not list "promoting equity and gender equality" or "targeting disadvantaged groups" as their priorities. KHDA and ACTVET mention these components, but there is no material on whether there have been strategies to implement them as their priorities. As such, many students who would benefit from a TVET education are not offered the opportunity. This has cascade effects across the sector and the economy as many individuals cannot realize their full potential.

Quality Assurance

6. **There are inconsistencies in the way quality is assured across each emirate.** ACTVET and KHDA present various ways in which quality is assured among the education providers, but mainly it is done by obtaining a license from the MOE or ACTVET. The exception are the Free Zones. For example, in Ras Al Khaimah and Dubai, RAKEZ Academic Zone and the KHDA respectively give authorization. Once the initial approval is given, it is then up to the regulator in each emirate to issue business licenses to complete this process. As a result, each emirate has different procedures and requirements, which creates confusion within the sector. Moreover, these regulators seem to have only minimal coordination between each other, creating further market inefficiencies as similar institutes and mistakes are repeated across the separate emirates, further hindering quality adult education provision.

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21 For more information, visit: http://www.cheds.ae/

7. **Quality assurance is focused on the initial approval process, and there is limited information about how quality assurance will be implemented past the initial stages.** Despite the extensive structural descriptions, there is limited information on the follow-up process or how the quality of what is being delivered at the centers is evaluated. Moreover, there is a lack of information on how quality aligns with the market and labor expectations, making it difficult to determine how quality is assessed, including its criteria.

8. **There is a lack of clarity around the enforcement of regulations.** The consequences for non-compliance beyond the licensing process are not clearly defined for adult education institutions. The available information indicates that some regulatory bodies, KHDA and ACTVET in particular, have penalties for non-compliance, such as fines for late license renewal, the use of inappropriate locations, and the violation of provisions.[22] However, it is unclear whether they apply to adult education institutions or schools only.

Recommendations

To address the challenges in the adult education sector, additional research is necessary, including a needs assessment of the sector and a strategy to identify key objectives going forward. This must then be complemented by an evaluation of the current capacities of the regulatory authorities to identify the necessary staffing, facilities, and funding necessary to achieve the objectives of the sector. The sector can be further strengthened by regulatory authorities being more transparent and providing access to information, including the licensing process, building out mechanisms to ensure quality provision, and coordinating with other regulatory authorities on a centralized platform that details all of this information. These efforts can then be further complemented by formal collaborations between all regulatory authorities to ensure consistency in messaging, requirements, and the types of providers being approved. Collaborations between the public and private sectors can also ensure alignment and more robust programs that allow students to gain experience in applying what they learn. Finally, the TVET sector should become more inclusive by incorporating students who may not perform well in traditional education models but may reach their potential in applied learning environments. Currently, the sector targets high-performing students and prepares them for university, which is in contrast to well established and reputed international models such as Germany's. Thus, adopting a focus to teach truly technical and vocational skills in the offered TVET programs that prepare for jobs requiring manual skills should be a primary strategic goal. These recommendations are expanded upon individually below, organized into three themes, which include **quick wins**, **long-term sustainability**, and **collaborations**.

Quick Wins

These recommendations can be quickly taken up, including at the emirate level, to benefit the sector. However, they would be further strengthened by implementation at the national level and through collaborations with other emirate level stakeholders.

1. **Update and standardize adult education regulator websites to include essential information.**

    To ensure efficient communication and consistent quality standards applied to all providers, it is essential that all communication is standardized and encompasses essential information. This includes the requirements and processes for obtaining a license. This will enable providers to understand the licensing and quality standards process better.

2. **Create a centralized portal for all adult education regulators and providers that also provides a dashboard of key indicators.**

    A centralized list of all regulators and providers across all emirates will provide access to critical information and support quality course provision that aligns with market needs. This information will enable new providers to understand the current

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22   A list of the rules, regulations, and fines that are defined are available here: https://www.actvet.gov.ae/en/AboutUs/Structure/LisencingDepartment/Documents/Terms20%and20%Conditions.pdf

market conditions and to assess if, where, and by whom their services might be in demand. At the same time, having a centralized list of providers with details on their location and course type will help potential students and organizations identify the providers they are looking for. Furthermore, it will facilitate better coordination with entities in other emirates to ensure alignment with what is being done in their emirate. In addition to this and the directory that KHDA currently has, the information must be presented in a format that can be filtered to highlight current activities, program offerings, locations, and student demographics to identify gaps. Examples of the information to be presented may include:

- Provider Name
- Licensing Authority
- License Type (if applicable)
- Location of Institution
- Course Areas Offered
- Course Titles Offered
- Target Demographic
- Method of Instruction
- Course Schedule
- Course Fee Structure
- Registration Process
- Contact Information
- Online Presence
- Quality Assurance Measures & Indicators
- Certifications, Accreditations, & Endorsements
- Partnerships with the Labor Market

Long-Term Sustainability

These recommendations will take a longer duration of time and close collaboration with other stakeholders to implement. However, these recommendations are essential over the long term to develop sustainable solutions in the adult education sector.

3. **Develop a strategy for the sector and evaluate capacities and resources of adult education regulatory authorities.**

To identify all of the complex components required in each of these recommendations, a strategy for the sector must be developed in tandem with the market and needs assessment in Recommendation #4 and in collaboration with other regulatory authorities. Once a strategy has been developed, including the sector's objectives, the resources required will have to be evaluated against current capacities. Therefore, these recommendations and the larger strategy of the sector will require an evaluation of current staffing, facilities, and funding among the regulatory authorities and their ability to achieve these outcomes within their current constraints and identify which capacities need additional support. Ensuring that the authorities have the ability to implement and maintain these recommendations will ensure high-quality education provision, a higher-skilled, more productive workforce, and support economic development.

4. **Conduct market and needs assessments on the adult education sector and make them publicly available.**

ACTVET and NQC are currently tasked with ensuring alignment between the adult education and TVET sectors and the labor market, but no information is available, at least to the public. By conducting a needs assessment on the adult education sector, gaps in adult education provision can be identified, including content, geography, and target demographic. The regulator authorities can evaluate this information and make it public to inform their licensing process and communicate this to current and applying providers to help them in their decision-making process. This will ensure that adult education providers have a better impression of market demand and ensure alignment with their course provision, which will help create more sustainable businesses and support economic development both in terms of productivity and more successful adult education providers.

5. **Adopt a more inclusive approach and expand TVET programming.**

TVET can motivate and engage students regardless of their performance in traditional education settings. However, current TVET programming at the secondary level in the UAE focuses on high-performing students to prepare them for higher education by overlooking others. By adopting a more inclusive, applied approach to teaching technical and vocational skills, and expanding these types of TVET programs across the seven emirates as a clear alternative to higher education, more students may realize their full potential. The UAE's TVET programming would also then be in alignment with other successful international models and could potentially reap similar benefits for its economic development in the long-term.

6. **Develop and implement adult education provider inspections focused on quality provision.**

There is limited to no information on inspections on any adult education regulators' website and no published outcomes. Instead, most of the current regulations on quality control focus on the initial licensing process, which does not ensure quality provision nor that what is being provided aligns with that license. By inspecting the content of what is being provided and evaluating its quality either directly or by up-to-date third-party accreditation will ensure high-quality adult education provision and facilitate better planning by the regulatory authorities.

Collaborations

These recommendations focus primarily on collaborating with other emirate and federal government entities and the private sector. Although many of the recommendations above could be implemented at the emirate level, collaborations will facilitate a multi-stakeholder perspective, providing all of the critical information necessary to make informed decisions, ensuring the success of the recommendations mentioned above, and maximize their impact.

7. **Foster collaboration between the public and private sectors.**

Key to the success of quality adult education and TVET programs is applied work experience. By fostering collaboration between providers, the private sector, and schools, the government can facilitate apprenticeship opportunities for students to apply themselves and further develop their skills. In addition, these public-private partnerships (PPPs) will further support the alignment between provision and private sector demand. Finally, this process can be further supported and facilitated through the online portal outlined in Recommendation #1 by identifying potential providers that align with private sector entities. This could also be explicitly incorporated into the platform.

8. **Formalize collaborations between governments, including regulatory authorities, across emirates.**

In addition to PPPs outlined in Recommendation #7, formal collaborations between the different regulatory authorities in each emirate will be essential to maximizing the sector's potential. For example, these entities and authorities should publish their information on the portal described in Recommendation #2 and coordinate on their own websites outlined in Recommendation #1 to ensure consistency across organizations and emirates. These collaborations can also support the market evaluation and needs assessment in Recommendation #4 to ensure that these findings consider national rather than only local contexts. Finally, collaborations can also support developing a standardized framework for inspections and other quality control measures to ensure consistency around the country, as outlined in Recommendation #6.

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Appendix

Appendix A: TVET

TVET has several specific regulations and frameworks, so it is often examined separately, but we are incorporating a summary here to provide a more comprehensive view of adult education in the UAE. TVET in the UAE can be classified into two large categories: secondary and post-secondary TVET education. The aim of TVET in the UAE is to produce citizens with vocational skills to engage in a diversified, knowledge-based economy. TVET in the UAE is very specific to the country's context, as the programs target mainly unemployed youth.

As previously discussed, the two foremost authorities overseeing TVET education are ACTVET and KHDA. KHDA is responsible for Dubai, while ACTVET oversees all TVET outside of Dubai[23]. ACTVET works to align TVET qualifications and system capacity with the labor market's current and future demand. Ultimately, ACTVET aims to increase the number of skilled Emirati youth in rewarding career paths and foster life-long

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23   With the exception of two TVET secondary schools: STS and ATHS for boys in Dubai that is managed by ACTVET.

learning and personal development. KHDA, on the other hand, focuses more on ensuring the quality of providers.

As Figure A1 and Figure A2 depict, ACTVET oversees a range of programs. Under the ACTVET umbrella, two entities provide accredited TVET programs:

Abu Dhabi Vocational Education and Training Institute

(ADVETI): A vocational and training institution within the UAE and abroad. They offer a variety of certificate and diploma programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels that focus on acquiring practical skills to improve the career development of their students. In addition, ADVETI oversees a diverse range of entities and applied programs, such as institutes of science, technology, etc.

Figure A1: Secondary TVET Education
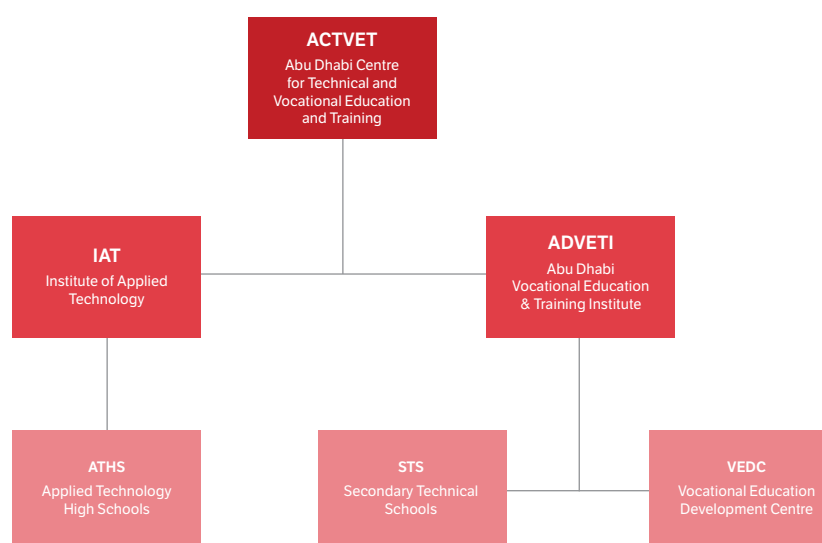
Source: NQA (2020, p. 4)

Figure A2: Post - Secondary TVET Education
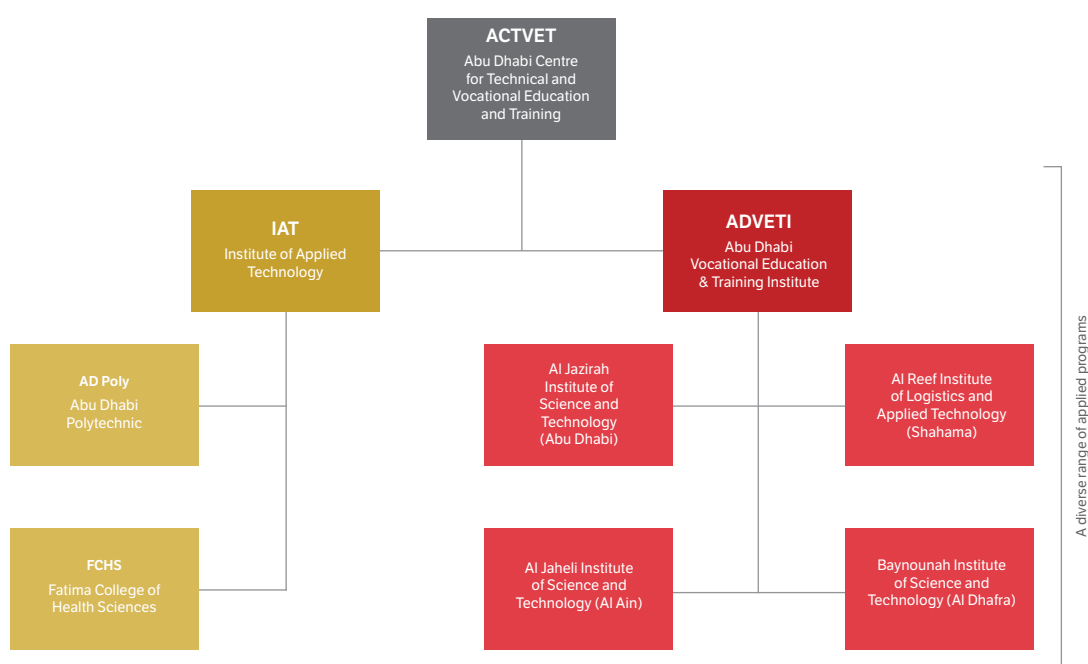
Source: NQA (2020, p. 3)

Figure A3: ACTVET Regulated TVET Centers

Location		Boys	Girls
Abu Dhabi	Al Ain	Abu Dhabi Polytechnic	Abu Dhabi Polytechnic
		Al Jahel Institute of Science and Technology	Al Jahel Institute of Science and Technology
		ATHS	ATHS
		STS	STS
	Abu Dhabi City		ATHS
			STS
	Al Mafraq		Fatima College of Health Science
	Al Maqta		Al Jazirah Institute of Science and Technology
	Al Shahama	Al Reef Institute of Logistics and Applied Technology	
	Delma Island	Vocational Education Development Centre	
		Al Hosn Science School	Al Hosn Science School
		STS	STS
		Abu Dhabi Polytechnic	Abu Dhabi Polytechnic
	Mohammed Bin Zayed City	ATHS	
		STS	
		ATHS	ATHS
	Zayed City	Baynounah Institute of Science and Technology	Baynounah Institute of Science and Technology
		STS	Fatima College of Health Sciences
			STS
Dubai		ATHS	
		STS	
Sharjah		ATHS	
		Sharjah Institute of Science & Technology	
		STS	
Ajman		ATHS	ATHS
		STS	Fatima College of Health Science
			STS
Umm Al Quwain		ATHS	ATHS
		STS	STS
Fujairah		ATHS	
		STS	
Ras Al Khaimah		ATHS	
		STS	
Total		27	20

Legend:
- Secondary School TVET Institution
- Post-Secondary TVET Institution
- RTP Post - Secondary TVET Institution
- Applied Technology High School
- Secondary Technical School

Source: ACTVET (2021d)

Institute of Applied Technology (IAT): Offers Career-based Technical Education (CTE) at secondary and post-secondary levels. There are twenty campuses across Emirates, including fourteen schools, four colleges for Fatima College of Health Sciences, and two colleges for Abu Dhabi Polytechnic.

A full list of the TVET institutions overseen by ACTVET is presented in Table A1. In addition, NQC also regulates several TVET institutions with a total of 24 active RTPs listed on their website; however, some of these are also under ACTVET. Other examples include private and industry-specific such as ADNOC Technical Institute/Academy, Emirates Aviation University, Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management. and Etisalat Academy. The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) also has a dedicated TVET center referred to as the Centre of Excellence for Applied Research and Training, which offers programs in various disciplines, including applied media, computer information science, education, engineering technology and science, health sciences, and business.

Appendix B: SWOT Analysis

Table B1: SWOT Analysis of Adult Education in the UAE

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Diverse providers and courses available. 2. Established regulators across the country with an explicit TVET focus. 3. KHDA and NQC provide easy access to pathways for finding information on different providers, including the institution's name, location, website, contact details, and areas of study. 4. Comprehensive licensing requirements with clear descriptions of how to upload documents using government portals for KHDA and ACTVET. 5. Mandate for ACTVET and NQC to ensure TVET provision that aligns with market demands. 6. ACTVET provides public access to quality assurance documents on their website.	1. Details on the content of the requirements for the licensing process and quality assurance measures are inconsistent, unclear, and constantly changing. 2. Regulators take an advertising approach, and the information accessible to the public tends to be descriptive rather than instructive. 3. Little to no public access to information on existing providers, directories that do exist are cumbersome to navigate. 4. Lack of consistency and coordination between market demands and desired skills. 5. TVET providers mainly target young Emirati nationals and particularly high-performing men at the secondary level.
Opportunities	**Threats**
1. Conduct additional research (needs assessment and market analysis) and engage regulatory authorities in developing a strategy for the sector to identify gaps and demands. 2. Improve quality assurance by being more transparent about processes, regulations, and enforcement, while also developing quality assurance measures and indicators available to the public. 3. Coordinate and streamline the licensing and regulatory processes, including details on the content of those requirements, across all regulators in all emirates, and ensure that this information is communicated consistently on all websites. 4. Provide a centralized platform for regulators, providers, and potential students detailing information about the centers and the sector. 5. Expand and improve public-private-partnerships (PPPs) to provide applied work experience for students and alignment with market demands.	1. Lack of strategic planning and defined objectives, resulting in regulations and reforms with little impact. 2. Lack of coordination between different regulators, resulting in inconsistencies, repeated mistakes, and inefficiencies. 3. Inaccessibility to key information for providers and potential students, resulting in difficulties in identifying demands and solutions. 4. Lack of coordination with the private sector, resulting in adult education centers for which there is no demand or repeats what already exists.

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- to inform policy making by conducting and commissioning high quality research;

- to enrich the local public sector, especially education, by providing educators and civil servants in Ras Al Khaimah with tools to make a positive impact on their own society; and

- to build a spirit of community, collaboration, and shared vision through purposeful engagement that fosters relationships among individuals and organizations.

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