

Report

On establishing and delivering a new training system for teachers subject to mandatory attestation

The establishment and delivery of a teacher training system subject to mandatory certification was accompanied by numerous mistakes and omissions, as well as organizational problems. In order to understand what mistakes and problems are involved, it is necessary to separate the function of each actor operating the system.

On April 1, 2021, the government of the Republic of Armenia adopted the decision N 466 N, according to which, based on the 17th point, the training organization signs a contract with the teacher and the school, that is, the contract is tripartite, which confirms not only verbally, but also from a legal point of view, the right to choose the training organization by the teacher.

Then on July 22, 2021, the government adopted the decision N 1187-N, according to which it is decided that the teacher should be excluded from the tripartite contract. The contract should be signed only by the school and training organization. No valid reason was given as to why such a decision had been made. In fact, the government abolished the legal basis for the teacher to select a training organization of her/his own choice. Moreover, while based on the 15th point of the decision N 466-N, which was 'The educational institution, based on the opinions and suggestions of teachers, chooses the training organization and (or) course from the published list of training organizations and (or) course,' now the practical application has remained in the domain of the teacher and director's personal relationship. That is why more than 40 teachers who applied to our organization for ICT training as part of the curriculum, when they went to their schools to fill out the application, found out that school principals had already chosen to sign contracts with other organizations or even if the contracts had not been signed yet, the teacher confronted an unfair situation. There were a lot of teachers who were afraid to even mention the names of the organizations with which their principals had arrangements without informing them.

From the very beginning, the employees of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (ESCS) emphasized that 'the teachers are free to choose the training organizations, according to the components and that the only factor that guides the teacher is the training module, i.e. to become familiar with the content, structure of the training course provided by the chosen organization. But how did it really turn out? A number of organizations started posting announcements for teacher recruitment on their

Facebook pages immediately after the order of the Minister of ESCS of May 18, 2021, which certified the list of guaranteed training organizations. There were even organizations that visited schools located both in the regions and in Yerevan by promoting their organizations, while still there were no modules by the training organizations, which had to be submitted to the "National Center for Education Development and Innovation" foundation (NCEDI) and they had to study and send the relevant modules of the courses to the Minister for approval. In that case, this brings up the question: What were those organizations advertising on the basis of which the teacher had to decide which organization's course was necessary for his/her professional development? Did not the employees of the Ministry of ESCS see what was happening? Definitely, they saw it because during the meeting of the representatives of the certified organizations and the employees of ESCS on June 8, 2021 both the Deputy Minister of ESCS Zhanna Andreyan and the director of the NCEDI foundation Artashes Torosyan briefly mentioned about it but preventive, controlling actions were not carried out. It turned out that a mechanism to regulate the behavior of training organizations was needed, so that no one could exploit from the disadvantages of the procedures introduced by the state bodies, and then an unfair, unequal environment would not arise, with all its negative consequences. Which, by the above-mentioned state bodies, was simply not done.

The employees of the Ministry of ESCS and the NCEDI foundation have repeatedly stated on various occasions that change is needed, for which programs, projects, systems with new approaches are introduced in the education sphere. This brings up another question: Why are not real control mechanisms (if it is necessary, mechanism for prosecuting the offender) implemented?

It should be noted that from the Ministry of ESCS the template of the contract, which had to be signed between the schools and the training organizations and the attached documents, where the legal and financial information related to the process could be found, were sent to the training organizations on August 6, 2021 that is, almost 3 months after the Minister's order to approve the list of certified training organizations and courses. The organizations did not receive an explanation from the Ministry of ESCS as how the amount of money allocated for the training was calculated, on what basis it was decided that the amount of money allocated for the training was sufficient to organize really effective training.

By the way, in the tender announced for inclusion in the list of certified organizations and courses for the teachers subject to mandatory attestation, the Ministry of ESCS did not consider it necessary to indicate the minimum approximate funding for organizing training, so that before applying organizations could calculate with the proposed amount to see if they could cover the minimum costs or not. The order N 46 of the Minister of ESCS "On approving the norms for financing the training of a teacher subject to mandatory attestation to an educational institution" was 4 months after the

announcement of the competition on July 2, 2021. According to those norms, in case of 92-110 hours of courses, the maximum fee is 24,000 AMD for each trainee teacher, and in case of distance courses, for the same amount of hours - 20,800 AMD, and the money is distributed according to the components in the percentage of lessons.

If we divide the course based on components,

1. "Professional Development" (81 hours)

offline 17,673 AMD, online 15,309 AMD

2. "Use of Information and communications technology (ICT) in the educational process" (20 hours)

offline 4364 AMD, online 3780 AMD

3. "Legislation in the field of general education" (9 hours)

offline 1964 AMD, online 1701 AMD

It turns out that the organizations which did not take advantage of the lack of oversight norms in the project implemented by the Ministry of ESCS and until the modules were approved, did not begin to gather groups of hundreds of teachers subject to mandatory attestation, but acted in accordance with the procedure, were found in an unfavorable condition because to organize a training course with a group of several teachers becomes impossible for the organization as the organization will not be able to fulfill its tax obligations with the intended amount, as well as pay the minimum hourly wages of the trainers. In this case, it is pointless to even talk about paying professional trainers what they are worth. As a result, to expect that in the current situation, when organizations have to work, first of all, to provide the necessary quantity, at the same time include at least more than 4 dozen teachers in each group, which will lead to a heavy workload for trainers and the complete absence of an individual approach, it is practically impossible to imagine quality, highly effective training. Organizations that only have a few teachers applied for training will have to refuse to provide training for these teachers, as a result of which these teachers will have to join a large group of those several organizations in order not to miss the mandatory attestation. The same organizations that utilized the gaps in the project and used their large financial and system resources to reach agreements with school principals.

The next problem we witnessed was the lack of awareness of both teachers and principals about this new system of mandatory attestation. Although the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport stated that the schools had twice been sent a circular containing the training documents and guidelines, our experience showed the opposite. On the basis of the teacher's application, the unique principals who applied to our organization asked us for the relevant documents, the templates of application and contract. This situation was noticed both in the schools of Yerevan and in the regions. In

addition, the vast majority of teachers knew almost nothing about the content of the training course and exemplary curriculum. We received complaints from school principals that they could not sign a contract now because they had not yet received the appropriate funding from the Ministry of ESCS. It turned out that the Ministry of ESCS, according to its own developed procedures, offered organizations to start training courses, but left the issue of funding deadlines for organizing those courses uncertain. Companies with big budgets benefited here, and equal working conditions were disrupted again.

If the Ministry of Education, Sport, Culture and Science really wants reforms in the field, then the above-mentioned omissions and shortcomings need to be corrected, otherwise this new system of teacher attestation will not differ from the previous ones.

By the way, we should mention that with the above-mentioned considerations we had sent a letter to the Minister of ESCS, Mr. Dumanyan, on August 30, 2021 but we did not receive any response or action that would change the situation.

We sent another inquiry-letter to the Deputy Minister of ESCS, Mrs. Andreasyan, on August 5, 2021. We received the answer on September 27, 2021. However, there were no answers to the questions raised by us, just some unrelated technical data.

We tried to raise the issues at the meeting of the Public Council under the Minister of ESCS (on September 30, 2021), which was strongly opposed by the Deputy Minister of ESCS, Mrs. Andreasyan, arguing that the issue was not on the agenda and was not subject to further discussion. After that session, we tried many times to put the issue on the agenda, but in vain.

Artashes Torosyan, director of the National Center for Education Development and Innovation (NSDC) Foundation, said during an online meeting with representatives of training organizations guaranteed by the Ministry of ESCS (on November 19, 2021) that a discussion was planned with each organization but was not organized.

Another problem is the lack of transparency in decision-making by the Ministry of ESCS. According to the order N 24-N of the Minister of ESCS, the Ministry of ESCS certifies the organizations for 3 years, which are going to organize training courses for teachers subject to mandatory attestation. In order to certify a training organization or a course, before announcing the competition, an evaluation commission is set up by the order of the Minister of ESCS, which examines the submitted documents within two weeks after the deadline and evaluates them based on the existing procedure in the N24-N order. However, the Ministry of ESCS, out of the planned competition (for which the relevant organizations had to apply to be certified by the Ministry of ESCS from April 5 to April 19, 2021, submitting the necessary documents) certifies to a number of organizations during the year as well as it certifies courses by giving the appropriate credits. This brings up the question: Did the Ministry follow the procedures approved by the above-mentioned order, set up an evaluation committee to study the application of each organization out

of competition, or did the minister make the decisions alone? Does it not contradict the procedures developed by the Ministry of ESCS itself?

Here another problem has arisen, as the organizations certified by the Ministry of ESCS can also organize training courses for teachers subject to mandatory attestation during the current year but also for next years and can charge the fee for these courses from the teachers and do not have a limit on the amount of money for the courses they organize (according to our observations, the cost of a 110-hour course has been estimated 60,000 AMD by some organizations) and for the above-mentioned period the Ministry of ESCS can only reimburse the teacher up to 24,000 AMD during the regular (mandatory) attestation, after numerous paperwork carried out by the school administration. Is the situation or such an approach fair to already very low paid teachers in the state?

In fairness, it should be mentioned that in order to organize really high-quality, effective training by certified organizations, to involve highly qualified specialists, the appropriate funding is needed, which, to put it mildly, the cost up to 24,000 AMD set by the Ministry of ESCS, is not enough.

The launch of this new system of mandatory attestation began in August 2021. Teachers subject to mandatory attestation since 2019 took part in the necessary training courses until November 30th, 2021 on the basis of which they received the established credits and were certified, but it was not clear how the Ministry of ESCS together with the NSDC foundation carried out the quality control of those training courses, what mechanisms measured the effectiveness of training courses, which were conducted last year.

P.S.

The organization authorized by the Ministry of ESCS, which controls the quality of work of training organizations that conduct courses for teachers subject to mandatory attestation, is the National Center for Education Development and Innovation (NSDC) Foundation. The latter also conducts training courses within the framework of mandatory teacher attestation, however, there is no information about that, not in the Minister's order N 780-A / 2 of May 18, 2021, not in the order on making changes on June 4, 2021 N 894-A / 2 (order N 780-A / 2). From a legal point of view, is it right for a supervising body to conduct training courses? By the way, at the time when the 48 organizations certified by the Ministry of ESCS had not yet received proper information about the process from the Ministry of ESCS so that they could start organizing the training, the NSDC foundation already started to conduct training courses by having the relevant information in advance.

'Collaborative Educational Projects' NGO
Yerevan 22.03.2022