

# Strengthening integrity and fighting corruption in education: Armenia<sup>1</sup>

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## Preface

Education matters, in any country of the world. Corruption in education matters too. It hinders prosperity as bogus knowledge and qualifications waste the human potential of nations. It raises the cost of education as corruption diminishes the efficiency and fairness of public spending for the sector. Finally, with each wave of graduates, corrupt schools and universities replicate tolerance for malpractice, causing long-term damage to societies – to their integrity, values, and social cohesion.

There is evidence that corruption is a persistent problem in Armenian education and that so far attempts to tackle it have led to less satisfactory results: in the perceptions of the Armenian public, education continues to be a sector particularly affected by the problem.

The Armenian authorities acknowledge and accept the challenge and, in recent years, the Ministry of Education has committed to fighting corruption as a matter of priority. In support of these efforts and in the hope to give them a new momentum, in 2014 the Open Society Foundations – Armenia commissioned the present integrity assessment as a new, potentially more effective and constructive way to address the problem of corruption in Armenian secondary and higher education. The assessment applies a novel methodology called INTES (Integrity of Education Systems) that was first developed in 2010 for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) by the lead author of this report, with the financial support of the Open Society Foundations.

By undertaking the present integrity assessment, OSF-Armenia is following the example of education authorities in other countries that have participated in an INTES exercise to successfully tackle integrity and corruption challenges in their education systems: Serbia, Tunisia, and Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

The INTES report for Armenia commences with an explanation of the purpose of the work, an introduction to the INTES methodology, and a presentation of the concept of integrity in education that is at the core of the INTES approach.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the assessment by presenting the basic features of the education system in Armenia. It then moves on to reconstructing the integrity context of education in Armenia by taking stock of what can be called the state of “collective awareness” about corruption and about corruption in education in particular – about its forms and prevalence – as captured in mass media, publicly available research reports, and through anecdotal evidence. The purpose is to obtain a better understanding of the integrity situation in education from the point of view of those working in the sector or having stakes in it, and to get a better sense of the extent to which malpractice is tolerated/has become accepted as a fact of life in Armenia and its education system.

Chapters 2 and 3 assess a range of suspected integrity violations in secondary and tertiary education, respectively. Both chapters follow a logic that is specific to the INTES methodology. Thus, both are structured in a similar way. The narrative first describes the suspected integrity violation (Section A); it then analyses how the integrity violation takes place and the system shortcomings that create an opportunity for the perpetrators (Section B); it gives an interpretation of stakeholder-centered reasons for why they engage in the malpractice under discussion (Section C); and finally, in Section D it suggests what can be done to close the gaps identified in Sections B and C. The ABCD logic is applied to each suspected integrity violation separately.

## Acronyms

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of preparation of this assessment report, the INTES assessment of Ukraine was in at the preparatory stage.

|            |   |
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| ANQA       | Armenian National Quality Assurance Agency  |
| CFOA       | Communities Finance Officers Association  |
| CPI        | Corruption Perceptions Index  |
| CRRC       | Caucasus Research Resource Centre   |
| ECTS       | European Credit Transfer System   |
| EHEA       | European Higher Education Area  |
| ENIC/NARIC | European Network of Information Centres in the European Region/<br>National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European<br>Union |
| GCB        | Global Corruption Barometer   |
| HE         | Higher Education  |
| HS         | High school(s)  |
| INTES      | Integrity of Education Systems methodology/approach   |
| MoES       | Ministry of Education and Science   |
| OECD       | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  |
| OSCE       | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  |
| OSF        | Open Society Foundation   |
| OSFA       | Open Society Foundation Armenia   |
| PD         | Professional development  |
| PFA        | Policy Forum Armenia  |
| PISA       | Programme for International Student Assessment.   |
| PTF        | Partnership for Transparency Fund   |
| SEUA       | State Engineering University of Armenia   |
| SNCOs      | State Non-Commercial Organisations  |
| UNCAC      | United Nations Convention against Corruption  |
| UNDP       | United Nations Development Programme  |
| UNESCO     | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural<br>Organization   |
| UNICEF     | United Nations Children's Fund  |

## Executive summary

### Background

The Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia has committed to fighting corruption as a matter of priority. In support of the efforts of the Armenian government to fight corruption in the public sector, in 2014 the Open Society Foundations – Armenia commissioned the present integrity assessment as a new, potentially more effective and constructive way to address the problem of corruption in Armenian secondary and higher education. The assessment applies a novel methodology – INTES – that was successfully used in other countries prior to Armenia.

### INTES methodology and the notion of “integrity”

INTES was designed to support national authorities, civil society, and participants in education in developing effective solutions to the corruption challenge in their schools and universities. The methodology does not focus on identifying and chasing perpetrators, but on understanding the ways in which the education system can be improved to make malpractice both impossible and unnecessary. The objectives of INTES in Armenia are to:

1. Consolidate a list of integrity violations that require immediate attention;
2. Identify education policy areas the improvement of which will help to effectively prevent these violations; and
3. Set a roadmap for improvement in these policy areas.

INTES treats each violation as the final stage of a process that **originates** in a combination of factors on the education system level, is **enabled** by another set of factors on system level, and ends with **manifestations of malpractice** that perception surveys capture and the media reports about. The INTES recommendations therefore always come in a double “package” of suggestions how to target the factors that enable malpractice, and how to eliminate the incentives of those who engage in it.

The notion of “integrity” is central to the INTES approach. INTES uses “integrity” instead of “corruption” because it is a broader, more constructive, and less contagious notion that allows for discussion of not only the violations, but also the systemic context in which they take place.

The INTES assessment in Armenia was administered in three phases. Phase I identified the integrity violations to be included in the Sections A of the final report. Phase 2 subjected them to causal analysis (Sections B and C of the final report) to determine what opens opportunities for the violations and what creates incentives to engage in them. Phase III determined the possible solutions described in Sections D. Desk research, data analysis, review of third party reports and surveys, and extensive site visits were instrumental in the preparation of this report. It was decided to limit its scope to secondary and tertiary education.

### Education and its integrity context

In the two and a half decades since Armenia regained its independence, education has frequently been at the forefront of public sector reforms. The last big reform package was conceived in 2003 and is

now underway in its second phase,<sup>3</sup> bringing about massive changes in key aspects of teaching, learning and school/university operation. Due to their ambitious goals, many of the reform undertakings take a long time to gain traction and, despite being in the making for over a decade, remain incomplete. This has implications for accountability within the system, the capacity of its participants to comply with rules and regulations, and the ability of education institutions to resist engaging in problematic practices.

This situation is a reflection of a broader challenge with integrity and corruption, which many surveys confirm is a serious and persistent problem in the country. Despite the success of the authorities in reducing petty corruption/bribery in some citizen-government interactions, anti-corruption watchdogs report that entrenched corruption, strong patronage networks, a lack of clear separation between private enterprise and public office, as well as the overlap between political and business elites limit the effective implementation of anti-corruption efforts.

These problems affect the education system too. According to various surveys, it is perceived as one of the sectors that is hit hardest by corruption. Attempts to fight the problem have brought mixed results and often opened new opportunities for malpractice instead of closing the existing ones.

### Integrity of secondary education

In secondary education, the report identifies and analyses four<sup>4</sup> integrity violations: private supplementary tutoring by class teachers; politicisation; abuse of procedures for appointment and dismissal of staff; and undue recognition of learning achievement.

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#### Secondary education – suspected integrity violation #1: Private supplementary tutoring by class teachers

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In countries where private tutoring is a widespread phenomenon, there is a heightened integrity risk as teachers might be working in a state of latent conflict of interest. This is especially true for teachers of high stake subjects.

Contrary to widespread perceptions, the 15-year olds in Armenian high schools do not resort to private tutoring more often than their peers in other countries. Among those who do, however, almost a quarter might be taking classes with teachers who participate in tutoring schemes or tutor their own students. Furthermore, in the last year of schooling teachers seem to purposefully lower the effectiveness of their teaching in class to allow for supplementary tutoring in preparation of graduation and university entrance exam.

A major enabling factor is the regulatory framework, which fails to consider the negative implications and integrity risks associated with the tutoring practice. Two of the gaps causing the most concern are the failure to define out-of-school-time tutoring to students by their own teachers, or referral to fellow teachers, as a violation, and the absence of a binding, sector-wide code of conduct for the teaching profession as a whole. Furthermore, the practice of school inspections is ill-suited to detect problematic private tutoring practices.

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<sup>3</sup> See Education Quality and Relevance Project at <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P074503/education-quality-relevance-project-apl-1?lang=en> for the first phase, and <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P107772/second-education-quality-relevance-apl-2?lang=en> for the current, second phase.

<sup>4</sup> In discussions during the final round of comments to the assessment report, several counterparts noted that some schools tend to over-report the number of teachers and students in order to secure more funding. Due to lack of evidence and the advanced stage of report preparation, it was decided to not include a discussion about this tentative violation.

From parental and student perspective, the presence of tutoring demand is a sign of uncertainty and lack of trust: uncertainty about school success and the outcomes of high-stake examinations, and distrust in the ability of schools to prepare for watershed situations in the students' educational career. Part of the reasons for this distrust is the striking lack of explanation by the schools of why students succeed or fail an exam. This fuels a widespread belief that without an additional "investment", any student, no matter how good or bad, can fail, at any time. A side effect is low student self-esteem, which further reduces the effectiveness of learning during regular school hours. The reportedly modest wages of teachers, as well as discrepancy between the requirements of the regular curriculum and those posed by the standardised graduation and admission exams, play a role as well.

The report suggests that integrity gaps that allow for private tutoring can be addressed through regulatory interventions. Out-of-school-time tutoring by teachers to their own students, as well as referral to fellow teachers, should be defined as a violation. It is also necessary to not only hammer out, but also enforce a binding code of conduct for the teaching profession, the provisions of which are tied to administrative consequences in case of infringement. Finally, further improvements in the system of classroom assessment, as well as more focused school inspections, better-trained inspectors, and more independent inspectorate, can greatly contribute to a positive change.

In parallel, to tackle the deeply rooted incentives to seek private tutoring, there is a need to design convincing trust-building measures, and improve the coherence between study content and high stake examination requirements.

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## Secondary education – suspected integrity violation #2: Politicisation of secondary education

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There is an abundance of anecdotal observations of how the practice of school management and operation is influenced by informal arrangements driven by political interest. A common form is the misuse of administrative resources, including human resources of education sector employees. The primary aim of the politicisation effort is to ensure allegiance to the incumbent political power. In exchange, the authorities offer preferential treatment in a range of domains, most notably hiring and firing of staff, appointment of principals, and procurement and financing decisions.

Most of the fertile (school) ground on which the politicisation efforts thrive is clientelism and clientelistic<sup>5</sup> relationships. These are institutionalised by patterns of interaction and exchange in which education professionals are able to trade political support for various outputs of the public decision-making process, most notably access to employment. Cases of coercion of education professionals who are not willing to exchange their professional integrity for political loyalty, are also quite common and target the teachers mostly.

The politicisation process relies entirely on the capture of structures and positions in charge of management and decision-making in Armenian secondary education: school boards and school leadership (principals). The process is further facilitated by a legal framework that allows for patron-client type of relationships between regional authorities and schools, to flourish.

Education professionals in Armenia offer little resistance to politicisation, for a combination of reasons. They include a calculus that conformism will help to solve existing problems, for example resource shortages, but also hope that it will help to prevent future problems, such as loss of employment or unfavourable treatment of students by teachers and of the school by regional education authorities. There is also a strong cultural-traditional dimension to it as Armenian schools closely mirror the pattern

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<sup>5</sup>While it is common to link clientelism with corruption (both involve political actors using public and private resources for personal gain), they are not synonyms.

of relationships in a typical Armenian family, which is based on tradition and allegiance to authority. In such a setting, resistance to collective behaviour requires more than rational thinking and a sense of integrity. It requires courage and readiness to take risk, which are rare qualities in any profession or sector. Among the factors motivating the receptiveness of education professionals for political influence, are a shortage of resources and employment insecurity.

This report recommends that the authorities urgently initiate a de-politicisation process to clean up the public education system of undue influence. The first and foremost step is to acknowledge publicly that politicisation is a problem and commit to its solution in legally binding documents. A legislative analysis can help to determine whether the initial action should focus on closing gaps in the legislative framework or on improving compliance with existing rules and regulations. In any case, political activism<sup>6</sup> in public education must be prohibited in all of its manifold manifestations. The legislation leaves grey areas in this respect. An important element in “tightening” the loose ends is also to place professional education staff in the category of professionals who are banned from political activism, such as judges and prosecutors, and define consequences for non-compliance.

After all is said and done, compliance will depend on how well the authorities manage to deal with the incentives currently in place. The channels, through which the political establishment delivers preferential treatment to loyal education institutions, must be identified and closed. There is also an acute need for reforms that will help to reduce the vulnerability of teaching staff *vis à vis* school leadership and its susceptibility to external pressure. As a supporting measure, the media should be encouraged to play a more active role in the public reporting and debate on the problem, and protected from reprisals when they do so.

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### Secondary education – suspected integrity violation #3: Abuse of procedures for appointment and dismissal of school staff

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Reports collected during the INTES site visits suggest that at least some of the inefficiencies in hiring and firing of staff might be side effects of deliberate actions at the point of entry to the education profession. Rumours about recurrent practices of hiring teachers in exchange for money (especially in rural areas), of teachers and principals on the basis of political or family affiliation, and of firing representatives of both groups with the help of fabricated arguments, appear to be widespread and were a source of concern for most INTES interview counterparts. Year by year the hiring and firing of teachers are subject to well over a third of the public complaints to the MoES.

The MoES has put forward secondary legislation that regulates the process of hiring and firing of school staff, but compliance with the rules is weak and the *de facto* role that principals play in the process – bigger than envisaged by law, mainly because of weak control through school boards that fail to function. The arbitrariness of decisions is further facilitated by a school inspection process that relies on the very same bodies that are involved in the violations – the school boards and the regional education authorities. Finally, the legislation does not define consequences for non-compliance with the specific set of rules on hiring and firing.

The incentives of those involved in the violations revolve around professional vulnerability and employment insecurity. Principals, who appear to be the main “culprits” in violating the staffing procedures, are in reality trapped in the same networks of political and family interdependency like all other participants in the education system. Teachers, who accept it all and let it happen, have very limited alternative employment opportunities (if any). The prospect of a public job and/or the wish to keep a job,

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<sup>6</sup> Understood as promoting a particular political party or candidate.

create a strong incentive to comply with informal requirements, accept procedural violations, but also bribe principals to ensure a favourable outcome of a job application.

A possible response to all of these challenges would be to raise the effectiveness of school inspections in ensuring compliance with the normative framework. To that end, it would be necessary to limit formally or fully eliminate the reliance of the inspection process on the very same entities that are subject to inspection. Another key intervention should aim at defining proportionate consequences for non-compliance with the rules on hiring and firing, and at demonstrating that they are being enforced. Finally yet importantly, the supervisory function of the school board depends on the quality of school board members. It is recommended to define binding eligibility requirements that also include provisions against conflict of interest.

An alternative, but more radical solution to the abuse of staffing procedures would be to centralise the recruitment process, effectively taking away responsibilities from the school leadership and the regions, and thus limiting the potential sources of abuse.

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#### Secondary education – suspected integrity violation #4: Undue recognition of learning achievement

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There are indications that in Armenia, classroom assessment is susceptible to violations. Evidence analysed in the course of the INTES assessment points towards undue recognition of learning achievement as a common practice, in particular grading (marking) students on the basis of criteria other than merit (*e.g.* money, family ties, external pressure, and so on).

The two most visible manifestations of this form of malpractice are the inflation of marks (grades) due to end-of-year pressure by parents for good results,<sup>7</sup> and marking in absentia. The latter is a form of informal “support” by teachers tolerating the prolonged absence from class of students who prepare for the graduation and university entrance exam.

International experience shows that for teachers’ judgements to be reliable, they must be guided by assessment policy frameworks that specify the procedures and objective criteria of assessment. On paper, Armenia has introduced such criteria and procedures. However, the realities of teaching and learning seem to be ill-suited to take in the reform to the fullest, and translate it into new and better classroom assessment practices. There are manifold, often self-imposed distortions in the way teachers grade their students. Part of the problem is the uneven access of teachers to training on criteria-based assessment, and lack of control of the extent to which those who were trained apply the new, more reliable assessment methods in their work. In fact, none of the School Inspectorate’s reports since the introduction of the assessment reform has dealt with an evaluation of whether and if yes, how well the new assessment criteria are being applied.

The origin of the marking bias in Armenian schools is, for the most part, parental pressure. The sources of influence are the material support that parents provide to the schools of their children, and political and/or personal connections to decision-makers in education. Parental pressure is particularly effective when exercised by parents who happen to be also school board members, teachers or political functionaries.

The main channels through which parental pressure has an impact are teachers and school leadership. For the teachers, engaging in grade manipulation is a form of investment in preserving the fragile status quo of their employment, while remaining in a good relationship with the teachers’

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<sup>7</sup> The INTES assessment team could not find evidence of widespread grade deflation.

collective of their schools. Further “incentives” could include opportunity to participate in training that are necessary for their compulsory attestation as teachers, long overdue career advancement, or distribution of teaching hours (which has an impact on wages).

For principals, promoting grade manipulation is a way to ensure that parents are satisfied and leave their children enrolled in their schools. A decline in enrolment means a decline in funding. This is a realistic risk because the school network is oversized, and most parents have an ample choice of schooling alternatives.

Action to prevent the practice of undue recognition of student achievement should start with an in-depth evaluation of assessment reform implementation. Assuming that it can be granted with a reasonable degree of independence and professionalism, the School Inspectorate would be in a good position to carry out such a task due to its proximity to the schools. The results should be used to: identify the limitations in the working conditions of teachers that prevent proper assessment reform implementation; fine-tune the scope of reform to make it work in the typical conditions of work in the schools; and develop a framework for regular monitoring of assessment practices by teachers and schools in view of recommending system-level improvements.

### Integrity of tertiary education

In tertiary education, the integrity violations in focus are cheating and plagiarism; undue recognition of academic achievement; improper influence on decisions about appointment, dismissal and promotion of academic staff; and politicisation. Despite a superficial similarity to the issues discussed in the integrity analysis of secondary education, in tertiary education the mechanisms of violation and the possible solutions are different and thus merit a stand-alone chapter.

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#### Tertiary education – suspected integrity violation #1: Cheating and plagiarism

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Academic integrity should be the foundation of any academic career. On the other hand, academic dishonesty devalues the concept of merit that is the foundation of trust in education and its outcomes. Academic dishonesty can manifest itself through cheating, fraud, plagiarism, the theft of ideas and other forms of intellectual property. Some of these forms of academic dishonesty are quite common in Armenian public universities.

The proliferation of the problem among students is due to a combination of ignorance and impunity. In general, academic institutions do not provide clear guidance to their students on what counts as acceptable practice and standard of academic integrity. Also, survey evidence suggests that even the most blatant cases of plagiarism and cheating are commonly left without consequences.

The sense of impunity is promoted by a quality assurance system that is still under development, is largely susceptible to outside influence, and lacks a proper focus on academic integrity issues. Furthermore, the responsibility of teachers in preventing these types of behaviour is not defined. They can thus afford to ignore what they witness instead of doing something about it. This also helps to avoid the risk of confrontation with students and possibly with the university administration.

The analysis of evidence implies that academic dishonesty in Armenia is not only due to opportunities to commit violations, but also due to a low level of motivation to adhere to standards of academic quality. A series of deficits in the system of admission to university and allocation of financial support (budget places) leads to a situation in which the majority of students do not study what they are interested in, and the admission process gives an undue advantage to better off, but not necessarily better-motivated students. For both groups, academic interest is replaced by a focus on academic credentials and

the shortest way to obtain them. Boring and/or overloaded study programmes prevent students from recognizing a higher personal value than obtaining a diploma. Finally yet importantly, the package of requirements for passing exams on tertiary level does not promote intellectual ownership and academic thinking.

The report recommends the development of formal, sector-wide guidelines against selected forms of academic dishonesty. The process should be based on a sector-wide consultation; contain a fair distribution of responsibilities for enforcement among teachers, student bodies, and university administration; define administrative consequences for non-compliance; and be integrated in the quality assurance system in the form of sector-wide standards.

Efforts to improve transparency *vis à vis* the wider public regarding the prevalence of the problem are likely to put (peer) pressure on faculties to enforce the integrity guidelines. Good examples of transparency efforts can be found in the experience of other countries such as Romania and Serbia, where student-led organisations carry out surveys of perceptions of various forms of malpractice in major public universities, and release the results to the media.

Finally, it is recommended to introduce a package of measures that will help to scale down the importance of financial considerations in the study choice and put forward academic ones. It is important to enable study placement that is more in line with the aptitude and interests of students.

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## Tertiary education – suspected integrity violation #2: Undue recognition of academic achievement

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Recognition of merit-based achievement is a cornerstone of trust in education – trust in the quality of its graduation credentials, and in its ability to foster excellence, preserve equity, and safeguard the integrity of its staff. Regrettably, in Armenia the due recognition of academic achievement is often withheld from students who deserve it, and unduly granted to students who do not. This manifests itself in the application of double standards, effectively making it easier for some students and more difficult for others to pass. Alternatively, the requirement to meet achievement criteria in exams is waived altogether, in exchange for actions that personally benefit the assessor.

A major development that, unintentionally, fuels this integrity violation is the implementation of changes required by the participation of Armenia in the Bologna Process. The Bologna reforms in Armenia are hampered by difficulties with the practical implementation of the modular approach to study programmes and the definitions of learning outcomes, as well as absence of a sector-wide approach to the assessment of study outcomes. For example, university professionals report difficulties to understand how they should internalise the novelties and adjust their professional practices. In fact, they also have no incentives to change the old ways.

This gives ample room for arbitrariness (purposeful or not) on behalf of those in charge of examinations. An additional factor is the absence of standards of accountability and, on an institutional level, difficulties in enforcing the quality standards set by the Armenian National Quality Assurance Agency (ANQA). Enforcement is also hampered by the tendency of universities to prioritise fee-paying students over those who are studying “for free” by treating them more favourably in exam situations, mostly by lowering the assessment criteria.

The vulnerability of teaching staff is a *leitmotif* in a majority of integrity violations discussed in this report, and it contributes to the practice of undue recognition of academic achievement as well. The employment conditions of university teachers put them in an unfavourable position to resist pressure,

especially when the stakes concern institutional interests, such as ensuring the academic survival of lower quality, but fee-paying students.

It is recommended to invest in ensuring the full independence of the Armenian National Agency for Quality Assurance – ANQA as guardian of quality assurance processes in higher education. The measures must include an effort to safeguard ANQA from any form of political capture and influence with the help of strict, transparent rules against conflict of interest and politicisation. Also, the accreditation and quality assurance criteria must include a check of learning outcome definitions and assessment approaches, and provide universities with a set of minimum quality standards for external quality assurance. Furthermore, the report recommends safeguarding public higher education institutions from the problematic side effects of dependency on private funding (fees), for example, by strengthening their independence as well as capacity to handle income from private sources.

Finally yet importantly, teachers should be protected from personally motivated reprisals when they assess in line with good professional standards. This could be done, for example, by introducing exam settings characterised by some or all of the following: responsibility for assessing academic achievement is shared between several assessors; oral exams are reduced to a minimum; and the process of assessment is anonymised.

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### Tertiary education – suspected integrity violation #3: Improper influence on decisions about appointment, dismissal, and promotion of academic staff

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In Armenia, nepotism is a common feature of government agencies and public administration in general. Almost 80 % of the individuals interviewed by Transparency International in 2013 indicated that personal contacts were important to get things done when dealing with Armenia’s public sector. Desk research and the site visits for the INTES assessment suggest that these practices are commonplace in Armenian universities too. Hiring of academic staff is often based on personal connections rather than merit and skills, and dismissals of academic staff are often triggered by their activism in fighting for their rights and expressing critical opinions. The area of academic research is affected as well. The government maintains a high level of control over who works and studies at the higher education institutions, what is being published and what voices can be heard, adjusting all this to the needs of the ruling political party.

Staffing procedures appear to be quite modern and in line with international good practice but in reality, compliance with the unwritten rules of informal networks and political parties, matter more for professional survival and promotion than those envisaged in the laws. Compliance oversight is weak, and one of the concerning reasons for that is the weakness of even the highest level of university management *vis à vis* the government.

Here too, the introduction of Bologna process-inspired standards and guidelines for quality assurance has had a mixed impact. On paper, staff policies have become more transparent and the administration of universities – more efficient. In practice, lack of proper understanding of how changes should be applied has led to a sense of resignation among teaching staff. For many, an otherwise good reform seems to have turned into just an extra layer of externally imposed compliance requirements.

The fight against abuse of staffing procedures should primarily focus on rehabilitating merit as a leading principle in the hiring, promotion and firing of staff in public universities. Open competitions for all positions, as well as external supervision over the leadership of universities and administrations on how they apply the procedures, are a precondition. External supervision should be established as an integral element of the quality assurance process of universities.

To eliminate the incentives for exercising or tolerating improper influence on staff policies, it is recommended to create and enforce a system of professional appraisal and promotion based on innovation, involvement in academic research, and pursuit of higher standards of academic excellence. It is also recommended to revise the salary scheme into a system of adequate financial and material compensation to academic staff based on performance, and ensuring budget support for its implementation. For staff evaluations, it is suggested to harvest the potential of student feedback on teacher performance and to triangulate it with data from self-evaluation and external peer reviews.

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#### Tertiary education – suspected integrity violation #4: Politicisation of tertiary education

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The current Armenian legislation stipulates the autonomy of universities in determining the main spheres of activity, adopting budgets and supervising their execution, introducing new fields of study and upgrading existing ones, adopting curricula and teaching methods. However, governance at the university level is still heavily influenced by political powers, in all its aspects. Analysis of the composition of the top governing layer shows that high-level positions are routinely given to members of government. The lower levels of governance – rectors, vice rectors, and others, are affected by political capture as well. Obviously, this set-up is conducive to influence by the authorities in various aspects of institutional management.

This situation is made possible by weak regulations and poor application of conflict of interest norms. In general, conflict of interest in Armenia is partially regulated when it comes to the engagement of high-level officials in entrepreneurial activities. When it comes to decision-making, the regulations are, however, vague. Furthermore, the legislation does not clearly define what measures the Commission on Ethics, a body responsible for conflict of interest regulation, can take: would they include eliminating the consequences of a conflict of interest, or would this body just note the decision made in conflict.

Furthermore, in most universities there is no real student power that would limit the existing autocratic order or protect students' academic interests. In most cases, students have the opinion that their student representatives are instructed and directed by the university leadership or by a party. This integrity problem also has a negative effect on the quality of research, as noted above.

A promising way to counteract the undue political influence on the management of higher education institutions would be to limit the number of governmental representatives in governing structures of the public high education institutions so that the government does not have a majority. Another step would be to reduce the scope of powers exercised by the Minister of Education and Science *vis à vis* the higher education leadership. Finally, the existing laws must be enforced so that cases of violations have disciplinary or criminal consequences.

In parallel, action is needed to remove politics from all matters related to design of academic curriculum and the freedom of research. This could entail the strengthening of student self-governance bodies and eliminating political elements within them.

## INTES and report rationale: linking education outcomes, integrity and corruption<sup>8</sup>

### The INTES assessment methodology

#### Rationale

INTES was designed to support national authorities, civil society, and participants in education in developing effective solutions to the corruption challenge in their schools and universities. Effective, because the methodology allows exposure and understanding of the mechanisms of corrupt practices in education, and from there to target a precise selection of interconnected factors that contribute to the emergence and persistence of the corruption problem.

INTES achieves this with the help of a novel rationale and approach. At the core is the assumption that corruption is not a stand-alone phenomenon, but a consequence of deeper-rooted problems in the education system, and sometimes of the society that the education system is serving.

To the extent corruption can be seen, its most visible part is the corruption offence itself – the act of bribing, cheating, embezzlement, etc. Typically, the focus of measures proposed in national anti-corruption strategies and similar programmatic documents to combat corruption, is limited to these most obvious, oftentimes criminal manifestations of non-compliance with rules and regulations. This might be a logical choice of focus, but it does not necessarily mean that it also leads to the most effective course of action. Measures that try to address the offence and the offence alone, have some serious disadvantages.

The first disadvantage is that such measures are reactive. This means that they take place in response to problems that are already happening, have possibly become pervasive, and might be too late to address. Preventing a problem is often better than then dealing with it after it happened.

The second disadvantage is that an exclusive focus on the manifestations of corruption can easily overlook the context in which the corruption offence takes place. The context might contain important hints about the reasons and circumstances of the offence. In turn, such hints might be key to understanding why perpetrators do what they do and to designing more proactive responses. Without such an understanding, fighting corruption is like fighting the symptoms of a disease without understanding its causes.

Finally yet importantly, there are reasons to assume that the visible manifestations of the problem are just the “tip of the iceberg” and that in their “shadow” numerous more subtle, softer forms of sector-specific malpractice can go undefined and undetected.<sup>9</sup> One could think, for example, of teachers who purposefully, yet discretely under-teach during regular school hours to create artificial demand for their private tutoring classes.

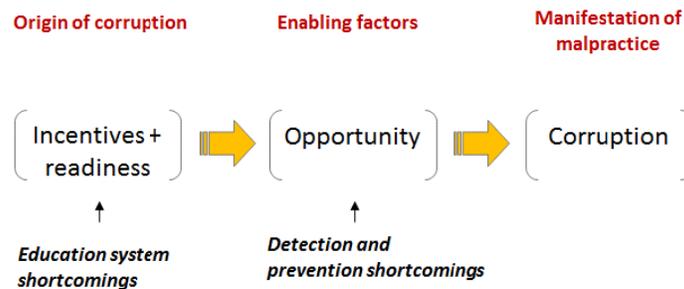
To avoid the pitfall of one-sided analysis, the INTES methodology approaches the problem in a more comprehensive way. It treats each violation as the final stage in a corruption **process**. It is a process that **originates** in a combination of factors on education system level, is **enabled** by another set of factors on system level or broader, and ends into **manifestations of malpractice** that perception surveys capture and the media reports about (Figure I).

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<sup>8</sup> The sections describing the methodology reproduce a forthcoming OECD Working Paper on the INTES approach (Milovanovitch, forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> See for example (Milovanovitch, 2014a)

**Figure I. The corruption process**



Source: (Milovanovitch, forthcoming)

To reveal what happens at these key stages of the corruption process, INTES places each type of corruption offence that it deals with, in the broader integrity context in which it takes place and analyses the ways in which context and offence are related. To do so, it seeks an answer to three questions:

1. What is the violation?
2. How does it happen?
3. Why does it happen?

Questions two and three aim at revealing the root causes of each violation. The INTES framework groups these causes in two major groups of contextual factors: (i) factors that make the offence possible and (ii) factors that create incentives for the perpetrators to engage in the offence.

Systemic malpractice is a repetitive phenomenon. Once established, the mechanism of each violation tends to remain similar unless those involved have a compelling reason to change it and look for alternatives. This means that the combinations of factors that would fall under point (i) are likely to be well-tested routines of exploiting shortcomings in the education system. Examples of such routines are a misuse of classroom assessment in the absence of proper oversight and assessment criteria, or arbitrary firing and hiring of teachers because of low accountability of school leadership.

When it comes to factors that create incentives for the perpetrators (point ii), it is important to keep in mind that the fight against corruption in education rarely is a fight against criminals. Most of the violations in the sector are sector-specific phenomena that, for the most part, involve regular participants in the education system – teachers, parents, students, school leaders, university professors, etc. They can hardly all be labelled as criminals. The INTES methodology assumes that, their motives to break or bend rules are for the most part rooted in perceptions that education is not delivering what is expected, and that malpractice is the only available “remedy”. A remedy for limited access to good education, for distrust that regular schooling prepares well enough for later in life, or for unsatisfactory management of staff and resources.

The process-oriented take on the corruption challenge in education allows for a broader, more comprehensive treatment of the problem. It shows that a violation is the sum of smaller steps and actions, each one in turn violating a particular aspect of what is meant to be a proper functioning education system.

## The concept of integrity

Not all languages of countries that are carrying out an INTES assessment have a ready-to-use word for “integrity”. This and the next sections provide conceptual and practical briefs on the notion of integrity as applied by the INTES methodology, in the hope to facilitate a more accurate translation, or allow for the introduction of “integrity” as a loanword in the respective language.

Corruption is too narrow a notion to capture the connection between the offence and the chain of actions and systemic weaknesses that lead to it. Therefore, INTES resorts to the broader, more constructive, and less contagious notion of integrity to describe the violations in the focus of assessment, and analyse them in all their complexity and implications.

The choice of the term “integrity violation” over “corruption offence” has two significant advantages. First, it allows consideration of softer, education-specific forms of malpractice that would not qualify as offences according to the respective national legislation. Second, it points towards the importance of individuals and their incentives to act in compliance with (or against) rules and regulations in education.

Integrity is well described with an analogy. If corruption were a disease, integrity would be the state of being “healthy”. The healthier an education system, the less likely it is that it will “suffer” from a corruption “disease”. The state of integrity of most education systems would be somewhere in-between two hypothetical extremes: that of being perfectly “healthy”, delivering to the full satisfaction of everyone involved and thus (mostly) free of corruption; and that of a “failed” education system in which deliverables can only be obtained by violating rules, as it fails to serve the public interest.

Integrity can also be described in a more formal way. It is a founding principle of public administration (Article 101 of the UN Charter) and stands for the consistent application of generally accepted values, principles and norms in the daily operations of public sector organisations (OECD, 2005) that should allow them to serve the public interest in the best possible way. The values, principles and norms of operation are reflected in laws and bylaws (regulations) that set the “rules of the game” in the public sector in general and in education in particular. Taken together, they form the normative fundament of institutional integrity.

Below this normative fundament, however, there is a deeper, less visible layer. It is the integrity of individuals participating in education, either as providers or as users of services. Without their compliance with the norms, even the best of laws and bylaws will fail to make a difference. The integrity of individuals is a function of their willingness to comply with the norms, and the extent to which the education system serves their needs. In the case of education, public and individual interest alike comprises access to good quality education, and proper management of staff and resources. This is discussed in the next sections that describe the logic of the INTES assessment process.

## Assessment steps

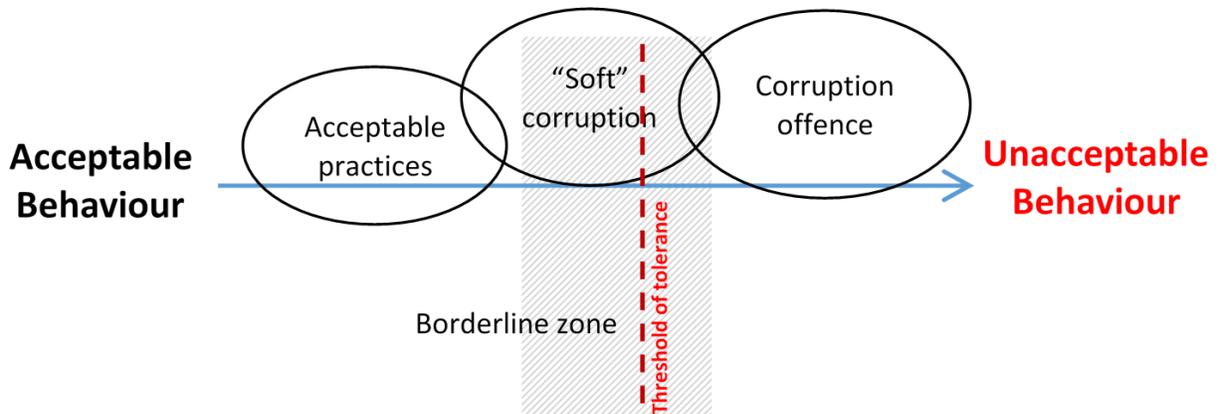
### *Step A. Determine what counts as integrity violation*

To combat a problem, one needs to know its name. The first step in assessing education system integrity is to list the integrity violations that are (or are believed to be) taking place in the education system under assessment.

It is not easy to compile such a list. Perceptions of what is right and what is wrong can vary between participants in education and countries, there are no international recommendations and standards on the matter, and in some places, malpractice might have become norm of behaviour (Figure II). All of this

brings a risk that the assessment might miss important issues, or deal with questions that are not really a problem.

**Figure II. Threshold of tolerance for malpractice**



Source: (Milovanovitch, 2014a)

In order to avoid this danger and compile an initial list of suspected violations (it can be called “the A list”), the INTES assessment relies on several sources. For example, to arrive at the suspected integrity violations discussed in this report, the assessment process took reference to:

- Examples of practices that education practitioners and national education authorities in Armenia interpret as integrity violations;
- International anti-corruption standards as laid down in the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and the Council of Europe’s Criminal Convention Against Corruption;
- A growing body of evidence collected through INTES assessments of other countries;
- Analytical results generated in the course of the INTES assessment itself (the “A list” remains open for adjustments throughout the assessment).

Furthermore, it is important to set clear limits as to what can count as integrity violation. In a sector with a diverse, multi-stakeholder management architecture such as education, it is relatively easy to “drift away” into analysis of issues that are of general importance for education policy, but have no link to integrity and corruption. In order to prevent this, the INTES methodology defines minimum criteria that a problematic practice must meet before it can be qualified as an integrity violation.

For problematic practices to be considered as integrity violations, they must meet the following five criteria:

1. Infringe the rules and regulations that govern the education system;
2. Violate the principle of equality of all participants in education before those rules and regulations;
3. Be replicable, which means that isolated instances of malpractice would not qualify as integrity violation;
4. Be systemic and originating in (or verifiably connected to) the education system and its operation;

5. Involve and affect (positively or negatively) some or all participants in education (*e.g. parents, students, education professionals*).

*Step B. Determine what opens opportunity for the violation*

After the compilation of an initial version of the “A list” of suspected integrity violations, the second step in the INTES methodology is to subject each violation to causal analysis. The purpose is to understand the mechanism of each and the circumstances under which it typically takes place.

The causal analysis comprises two steps, labelled B and C.

The first analytical task/step is to determine how (technically) the integrity violation takes place, in other words what systemic flaws create an opportunity for perpetrators to engage in the violation, and how do they exploit these flaws. “Opportunity” here is defined as failure to detect, prevent or punish the malpractice in question.

Opportunity is a powerful element in the corruption process logic followed in the INTES approach. Opportunities created by weak monitoring and control always cause temptation, in even the best of education systems and with even the most honest of education participants . At the same time, systemic malpractice is a repetitive phenomenon. Once established, the patterns of violations and the opportunity channels used to commit them, tend to remain the same until those involved are confronted with a compelling reason to change them.

Commonly, the opportunities for malpractice are created by weak monitoring and control, sometimes in combination with deficits in the **normative fundament of institutional integrity**, that is – in the set of values, principles and norms that guide the operation of the education system, and are reflected in its laws and bylaws.

*Step C. Determine what creates incentives for the violation*

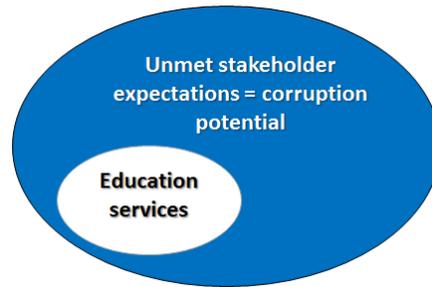
A deeper, less visible layer of integrity is the **integrity of individuals** participating in education, either as providers or as users of services. Without their compliance with norms, even the best of laws and bylaws will fail to make a difference.

INTES assumes that for the most part, malpractice in education is a function of the willingness of participants in education to comply with the norms, and the extent to which the education system succeeds in serving their needs. These needs are grouped around three main deliverables:

- Quality of education;
- Access to education;
- Sound staff and resource management.

Systematic failure to deliver to these expectations creates incentives for participants in education to engage in malpractice as a “remedy” (Figure III). The bigger the discrepancy between expectations and deliverables, the higher the risk of violations.

**Figure III Corruption potential in education**



Source: (Milovanovitch, 2014a)

*Summary and Step D. Propose pointers for policy action*

Step D in the INTES assessment process proposes a roadmap for action, built on the insights gained in the course of analysis in steps B and C. The recommendations are disaggregated by factor groups (opportunity and incentives). The INTES reports distinguish between main and supporting actions. The purpose of this distinction is to allow for better timing and prioritisation by the authorities.

Table I Summary of the INTES assessment logic and steps.

**Table I. INTES assessment logic and sequence**

| INTES Phase               | Steps  | INTES logic                                    | Lead question | Task  |
|---------------------------|--------|--|---------------|---|
| Phase I: Identification   | Step A | Education Corruption                           | What?         | Determine what counts as integrity violation ("A" list) |
| Phase II: Causal analysis | Step B | Failing Prevention and Detection = Opportunity | How?          | Determine what opens opportunity for the violation      |
|                           | Step C | Failing Education Services = Incentive         | Why?          | Determine what creates incentive for the violation      |
| Phase III: Solutions      | Step D |  |               | Formulate action  |

Source: (Milovanovitch, forthcoming)

About this report

Intent

The present report deals with a selection of suspected integrity violations in the education system of Armenia. Like other INTES reports, it is a diagnostic and prevention tool. Its purpose is not to investigate, expose and judge who is to blame, but to reveal the education policy shortcomings behind each violation, and thus provide all parties involved with an objective analysis of systemic weaknesses that promote problematic behaviour and practices. In other countries, INTES reports have proven useful. With their help, the education authorities have worked on building consensus on what needs to be done in order to reinstate merit, equality before the law, and trust in the ability of the education system to deliver to

expectations. A nation like Armenia that prides itself with its history and erudition owes nothing less to its youth and future.

The report does not claim to have covered all issues, but those that are included are of key importance for the integrity of the Armenian education system. They offer a solid basis for deliberations about follow-up action in an otherwise sensitive area.

It is hoped that following the INTES exercise, the pointers for action will be discussed by the Armenian authorities and stakeholders. It is recommended to convene working groups to carry out further investigation into specific issues discussed in the report, together with potential ways of addressing them. The analytical evidence gathered by INTES will be useful to that end.

### Assessment process

For Armenia, the INTES assessment included:

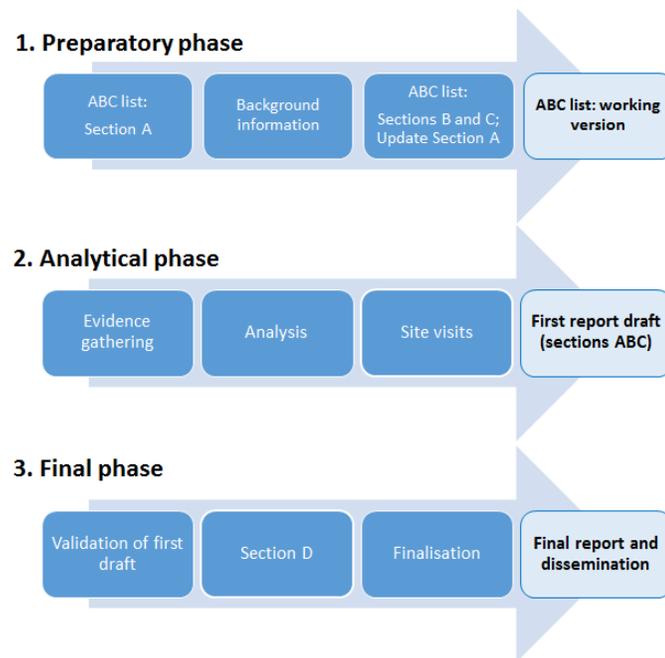
- A review of national and international documents, including: a) legislation and analysis pertaining to the performance of the education system in terms of quality; b) legislation pertaining to the performance of municipal governments; c) legislation and analysis pertaining to specific anti-corruption issues; and d) a range of thematic documents on Armenia and its education system;
- Collecting all accessible data on the performance of Armenian education, as deposited with the World Bank and UNESCO;
- Site visits and interviews. Interviews were carried out in groups and information cross checked among team members.<sup>10</sup>

The assessment process followed a predefined sequence of steps, divided into 3 phases of implementation, as shown in Figure IV.

#### **Figure IV Application of INTES in Armenia**

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<sup>10</sup>The INTES assessment team met with over 80 purposefully selected counterparts from the Ministry of Education and Science, educational institutions (secondary and tertiary), national entities in charge of quality and quality assurance, entities in charge of standardised testing, and with students, student associations, international partners, teacher trade unions and representatives from civil society. It visited a range of education institutions in the capital and selected regions to talk to teachers, school leadership, students and parents.



The preparatory phase for the INTES assessment of Armenia commenced with a compilation of a draft version of the “A” list of integrity offences, followed by collection of evidence and third-party analysis on issues included in the A-list. After a period of desk research, the assessment team was in the position to suggest a tentative reconstruction of processes that lead to the integrity violations in the A-list, and presented them as factors to be included in Sections B (opportunity) and C (incentives).

The working version of the ABC list was used for a next round of data and information collection at the beginning of the analytical phase (phase 2), and for planning a first, targeted round of site visits to the capital and selected regions. By the time of the site visits, the INTES assessment project had already accumulated a body of preliminary analysis that guided the meetings with stakeholders and made them more informed and efficient.

The final phase of the project (phase 3) was about suggesting pointers for action to be included in Sections D, and validation of analysis and findings included in the report.

## Chapter 1: Armenian education and its integrity context

Armenia is a lower-middle income country with a population of 3 million, located in the Southern Caucasus region of Eurasia. Turkey borders it to the west, Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east, and Iran to the south. In 2013 Gross National Income (GNI) was 3 800 USD<sup>11</sup> and annual growth was around 4% (World Bank, 2011). The number of Armenians living outside the country is about 9 million. In 2013, foreign remittances amounted to 21% of GDP. This is the eight highest level of remittances worldwide.<sup>12</sup> In the same year, Armenia spent 2.3% of its GDP on education - a low share in international comparison. It reflects continuing cuts in public spending in response to the 2008 economic crisis (World Bank, 2011). The rate of literacy in 2013 was close to 100%, and tertiary gross enrolment was at 46%: higher than in Azerbaijan and Georgia (15% and 33% respectively). In 2013, over a quarter of the youth aged 15-24 was in neither education, nor employment or training (Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 Selection of basic indicators, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (2013 or latest year available)<sup>13</sup>**

|  | Armenia | Azerbaijan | Georgia |
|--|---------|------------|---------|
| GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$)  | 3800    | 7350       | 3560    |
| Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP)                                  | 2.25    | 2.44       | 1.98    |
| Literacy rate, youth total (% of people aged 15-24)                                    | 99.75   | 99.94      | 99.80   |
| Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total (% of youth population) | 27.40   | m          | m       |
| Unemployment, youth total (% of total labour force ages 15-24) (modelled ILO estimate) | 33.10   | 14.80      | 31.00   |
| School enrolment, tertiary (% gross)   | 46.11   | 20.44      | 33.05   |

Note: m=missing

Source: World Bank Development Indicators

### The Armenian education system

#### Description

The education sector of Armenia comprises pre-school, basic and upper secondary education, preliminary and middle vocational education and training, and higher education. Each segment of the system is governed by its own piece of primary legislation (Laws on Education, Pre-school Education, Preliminary Vocational Education and Training, and on Graduate and Post-Graduate Education), supported by secondary legislation made by the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia.

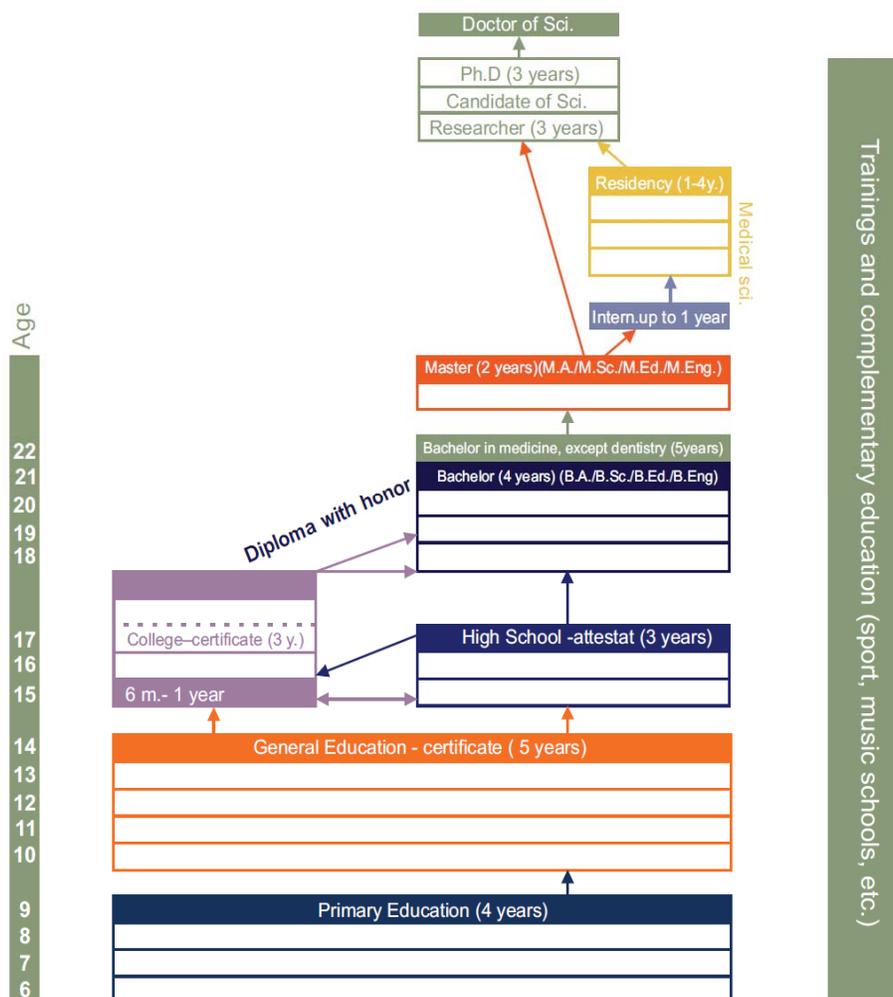
Pre-school education starts at the age of two and takes four years, followed by primary education for the age group 6 to 9 and grades 1 to 4; basic secondary education for the age group 10 to 14 and grades 5 to 9; and upper secondary education for the 15 to 17 years-olds in grades 10 to 12. Preliminary Vocational Education and Training commences at the age of 15. Higher Education follows the Bologna degree structure, except at post-graduate level. Post-graduate education has maintained the structure from Soviet times, with two scientific degree systems: *aspirantura* (candidate of science) and *doctorantura* (doctor of science). Figure 1.1 provides a schematic overview of the education system.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank Atlas method.

<sup>12</sup> Countries for which there is data in the period 2011-2013 (167 countries, 2013 or latest available year).

<sup>13</sup> Period 2011-2014.

Figure 1.1 Structure of the national education system of Armenia



Source: <http://www.armenic.am/?laid=1&com=module&module=menu&id=101>

In 2012/2013, total enrolment was slightly more than 602 000 students. Their education was provided by 2247 education institutions, of which 628 kindergartens, 1433 primary and secondary schools (public and private), 123 vocational institutions, and 63 universities (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Number of students and education institutions in Armenia, public and private (2013)

| Education level              | Number of students | Number of education institutions (Public and private) | Private |
|------------------------------|--------------------|---|---------|
| Preschool                    | 59591              | 628 <sup>1</sup>                                      | m       |
| Primary                      | 140638             | 1433  | 45      |
| Secondary                    | 252428             |   |         |
| Preliminary VET <sup>2</sup> | 6800               | 45  | m       |
| Middle VET <sup>2</sup>      | 27452              | 78  | m       |
| Tertiary                     | 115207             | 63  | 23      |

Note: 1. Year of reference: 2010; 2. Year of reference 2012.

The responsibility for the management of the education system is distributed among a number of institutions, all of which are subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science. These are the National Institute of Education; Inspectorate for Education; National Centre for Educational Technologies; Assessment and Testing Centre; National Information Centre for Academic Recognition and Mobility; National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development; Armenian National Quality Assurance Centre; and National Training Fund.

Among the institutions responsible for the organisation and administration of the higher education system are the State Licensing and Accreditation Service and the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance. In addition, there are two Councils acting as advisory bodies to the Ministry of Education and Science: the Council of Rectors of State Higher Educational Institutions and the Council of Rectors of Private Higher Educational Institutions.

### Reforms in education

In the two and a half decades since Armenia regained its independence, education has frequently been at the forefront of public sector reforms. The last big reform package was conceived in 2003 and is now underway in its second phase.<sup>14</sup> The changes include a gradual extension of compulsory schooling from 10 to 12 years (which is due to start in 2015/2016); detachment of lower secondary from upper secondary education; “relocation” of the latter to a new type of upper secondary institutions; changes in the school and university curricula and the grading of students; and a new centralised system of admission to universities through standardised external testing. These changes are in line with the National Development Strategy 2014–25. The document declares education to be a key sector for the sustainable development of the country and that its constant improvement is a top priority.

Commendable as they are, reforms like these require considerable adjustments on the side of both parents and schools. Firstly, the reform plans are far-reaching as their aim is to redefine nothing less than key aspects of teaching, learning and school operation. Then, there is less coherence between old and new reforms as new initiatives for improvement continue to be planned and launched<sup>15</sup> without much evaluation of what has already taken place. Finally, due to their ambitiousness, many of the reform undertakings take a long time before gaining traction and, despite being in the making for over a decade, plenty of them remain incomplete. The curricula are still far from new, the use of the new grading system is still prone to flaws (just like the one it replaced), the patchy distribution of new upper secondary schools across the country affects the equity of access for students from rural locations, and so on.<sup>16</sup>

In this situation, parents are not quite certain anymore what is best for their children, while in doing their job teachers resort to a rather arbitrary mix of old and new practices, the choice of which depends on individual preferences and schools. The thorough review of the rich research literature on Armenian education in preparation for the INTES assessment strongly implies that all education participants - parents, teachers, students and school leadership – are for years now in a limbo between tradition and progress in an education system that engages in sweeping reforms, while “underneath” often holds on to its old ways.

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<sup>14</sup> See Education Quality and Relevance Project at <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P074503/education-quality-relevance-project-apl-1?lang=en> for the first phase, and <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P107772/second-education-quality-relevance-apl-2?lang=en> for the current, second phase.

<sup>15</sup> Most recently of pre-school education and of vocational education and training (ETF, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> According to anecdotal evidence, in some cases there was only one high school left for 2-3 rural villages and pupils had to commute to a neighbouring village on their own. In a society in which it was a firm tradition to have the child attend the same school, this change also represents a cultural shock.

One of the side effects of reform appears to be an accountability void in which school and university leadership, as well as regional education authorities, are free to apply laws and regulations at their discretion. They are aided by poorly operating bodies in charge of checks and balances, such as school boards and university councils, which have limited ability and leverage to verify or question these actions. In a sign of acknowledgement of these and other problems, the new Anti-Corruption Strategy of Armenia declares the fight against corruption in education, a priority.<sup>17</sup>

### The general integrity climate

Armenia was one of the first republics to break away from the Soviet Union due to grassroots citizen activism during the late 1980s. The state's transition to both a democratic political system and a market economy had a promising start as its new leaders embarked on political and economic reforms. However, since gaining independence in 1991, Armenia has been challenged by external conflict, internal instability, and political strife. Abrupt economic restructuring and a decline in living standards in Armenia's post-Soviet economy have caused social frustration and political apathy. Armenia's gross domestic product shrank by more than half between 1992 and 1993, and the new political establishment developed authoritarian tendencies that increased following a 1994 ceasefire agreement with Azerbaijan.

Since that time, Armenia has improved its economic – but not political – structures. “Shock-therapy-like economic reforms led to impressive economic growth, went hand in hand with a grossly uneven distribution of this new national wealth, which contributed to widening existing disparities and also creating deep socioeconomic divides” (BTI, 2012) (BTI, 2014). According to numerous international reports, Armenia's political system operates based on consensus among elite groups that control economic and political resources. Society has little influence over legislative processes or political decision-making (Freedom House, 2013). These excessive overlaps between political and economic interests in Armenia, rigged elections, and corrupt administrative practices have depleted public trust in political elites and public institutions.<sup>18</sup>

Local authorities in Armenia enjoy stronger popular support than does the central government (Gugushvili, 2011). This implies that informal networks based on family and friend ties, or geographical proximity, are strong determinants of trust. This can be rooted in culture and tradition but is also strengthened and sustained by the absence of guarantees that public institutions will fulfil their mandate.

Surveys show that corruption remains a very serious problem in Armenia and is commonplace, with 82% of the individuals surveyed by the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer 2013 (GCB) asserting that the level of corruption in Armenia either stayed the same (39 %) or increased (43%) over the past two years. Furthermore, 61% of the respondents classify corruption in the country's public sector as a very serious problem. According to the World Bank, Armenia has also lost ground on the “control of corruption” indicator, which captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests.<sup>19</sup>

### Forms of corruption

**“Petty” corruption** is one of the most prevalent forms of corruption in Armenia. Paying a bribe to get things done, to speed up administrative procedures or to express gratitude is quite common (Transparency International, 2013a). Approximately a fifth of the people surveyed by Transparency International admitted to having paid a bribe in the last twelve months to a public service, and almost

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.edrc.am/images/National\\_Strategies/Comprehensive/anticorruption\\_2009-2012\\_eng.pdf](http://www.edrc.am/images/National_Strategies/Comprehensive/anticorruption_2009-2012_eng.pdf)

<sup>18</sup>Historically, poverty and political apathy have made the Armenian electorate vulnerable to vote-buying. According to reports by media and political parties, bribes averaging \$30 each were widely handed out in exchange for the commitment to vote for a particular party (Freedom House, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>

70% regarded civil servants as corrupt or extremely corrupt. Moreover, almost 80% indicated that personal contacts were important to get things done when dealing with Armenia's public sector.<sup>20</sup>

The situation is aggravated by the fact that bribery is becoming an institutionalised practice. The Caucasus Research Resources Centre's (CRRC) 2010 Armenia Corruption Survey of Households<sup>21</sup> showed that more than a third of the surveyed citizens reported that it is "known beforehand how to pay and how much to pay". Practices of institutionalized corruption dating back to Soviet times such as embezzlement, trading in influence, abuse of authority, and others all seem to have survived political and reform changes. From that time, Armenia also inherited very hierarchical administrative structures, politically controlled, secretive and accountable much more to the vertical of power than to the citizens whom public institutions are supposed to serve.<sup>22</sup> It also appears that the political changes have not seriously damaged the "informal networks" because most officials at the lower and middle levels of the state remained in place, and new officials have gradually become part of the system.

**"Grand corruption"** is another significant issue in Armenia. The blurred line between the political elite and business people deepens the risk of grand corruption. Even though the Constitution forbids members of parliament to own or run a business while in office, this ban is often ignored (International Crisis Group, 2012). Powerful officials and politicians frequently have control over private firms through hidden partnerships or relatives (US Department of State, 2012). The absence of clear separation between private enterprise and public office leads to gross manipulations of government procurement, abetted by the poor implementation of the existing regulations, which results in inefficiencies and abuse in the bidding system (Freedom House, 2013). CRRC's 2010 Armenia Corruption Survey of Households showed that when asked which level of the administration corruption was the most significant in, almost 50 % of the respondents indicated that corruption is most common among high-ranking officials.

**Political corruption** presents a special concern in Armenia. The results of Transparency International's 2013 Global Corruption Barometer show that nearly 60 % of the interviewed citizens think that political parties and the parliament are corrupt or extremely corrupt. Similarly, the Caucasus Barometer 2012 produced by the CRRC<sup>23</sup> indicates that more than 30 % of Armenians "fully distrust" the Parliament and the executive government. Political corruption takes various forms, including patronage networks and collusion. A key feature of Armenia's political system is the significant interconnection of political and economic elites, and the consensus among these groups that control the resources of the country (Freedom House, 2013). Transparency International's GCB 21013 reports that more than 80 % of the surveyed citizens think that the government is run by a few big entities acting in their own best interest.

Another common feature of government agencies and public administration in Armenia is nepotism (Freedom House, 2013). Public employment is commonly used to reward cronies, and there are allegations of government officials discriminating against opposition party members in hiring decisions (US Department of State, 2012).

#### Sectors most affected by corruption

Judiciary, police and public administration are consistently identified as sectors most affected by corruption. Within the public administration, services in education and health continue to appear on the top of the list. Transparency International's 2013 Barometer shows that 58 % and 66 % of respondents respectively consider the education system and medical services to be corrupt or extremely corrupt. In a

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.crrc.am/research-and-surveys/completed-projects/49-armenia-corruption-surveys-2008-2010?lang=en>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/armenia-0#.VD5XmxY8RDw>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.crrc.am/caucasus-barometer?lang=en>

survey done by Policy Forum Armenia (Policy Forum Armenia, 2013) when asked to identify the first three most corrupt sectors, healthcare (27 %), education (12.7%), electoral systems/processes (10.2%) have been singled out by the respondents.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) conducted a survey of corruption in higher education among Armenian students and approximately 50% indicated that the corruption problem was widespread to an extent that makes them feel uncomfortable. The admission exams were seen by almost half of the respondents as the phase most vulnerable to corruption. Notably, near to 40 % of the surveyed students see corruption in higher education as a systemic problem that is inherent to a faulty educational system (OSCE, 2010).

### Government's response

The political crisis after the 2008 elections identified the need for change and translated into the political will to pursue such change. The reforms that were triggered in response included the adoption of an anti-corruption Strategy for 2009-2012 and achievements in its implementation, such as the adoption of the Law on Public Service, introduction of e-governance, reforms in such sectors as education, health, police, public registry, tax and customs.

In addition, several ministries developed their own anti-corruption programmes to support the implementation of the Strategy. The Ministry of Education too developed an anti-corruption plan. The anti-corruption Strategy itself focuses only on four sectors: education, health, tax and the police.

In recent years, the Armenian leadership has succeeded in reducing petty corruption/bribery in some citizen-government interactions. However, it appears that entrenched corruption, strong patronage networks, a lack of clear separation between private enterprise and public office, as well as the overlap between political and business elites render the implementation of anti-corruption efforts relatively inefficient (Transparency International, 2013). Only 20% of the respondents to Transparency International's GCB 2013 think that the government is effective in its anti-corruption efforts and more than 60% admit that they do not think that citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption. What is more concerning is that corruption is becoming more sophisticated and latent and moving to the spheres where big money and power are located.<sup>24</sup>

### Overview of evidence on corruption in Armenian education

Various surveys<sup>25</sup> suggest that education in Armenia is plagued by corruption. Attempts to deal with the problem and its pervasiveness in particular in secondary and tertiary education have produced mixed results. Reforms and responses to corruption have often created new opportunities for abuse instead of eliminating the existing ones. Problems with the implementation of requirements of the Bologna Process in Higher Education, which Armenia joined in 2005,<sup>26</sup> contribute their share to corruption challenge (Policy Forum Armenia, 2013).

Surveys among students in secondary and tertiary education show that they are very much aware of integrity violations and that there is consensus on areas of biggest risk for occurrence of corruption.

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<sup>24</sup> Situation Analyses of Public Sector Corruption in Armenia- project results

<sup>25</sup> These surveys include: (1) 2010 Armenia Corruption Survey of Households; (2) OSCE: Student's perception on Corruption in Armenian Higher Education System, Yerevan 2010; (3) Government of the Republic of Armenia, "The Republic of Armenia Anti-Corruption Strategy and Its Implication Action Plan for 2009-2012"; Yerevan 2009; and (4) H. Aleksanyan, "Cases of Corruption and its Prevention in Armenia's Education System; Yerevan 2012."

<sup>26</sup> Armenia signed the Bergen Communiqué of the Ministers of Education from the Bologna participating countries on May 19, 2005.

A large percentage of students at universities (72.5%) report that there is corruption in their Higher Education Institutions, and 31.1-38.9% thinks that 50-75% of professors are involved in malpractices<sup>27</sup>. Areas, where corruption is most present according to students, include admission exams (more than 69% of students believe that), exams (48.2%), graduation exams (41.7%).<sup>28</sup> Bribery seems to be one of the most common forms of corruption. In 2010, an Armenian student group with the support of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) conducted an opinion poll on higher education in the framework of a project aimed at promoting engagement against corruption in Armenian higher education. The poll found that 25% of 1,200 first- to third-year students pursuing their bachelor degrees at the universities in Yerevan and Gyumri had been personally involved in bribery transactions, while 36.5 % had heard about such transactions and believed the information to be true (OSCE, 2010).

At the secondary level according to the survey of 452 students, 172 (38%) considered that there was corruption in their schools, and 19.9% thought that there were no cases of corruption (Aleksanyan, 2012).<sup>29</sup> When those who answered that they are aware of corruption in school were asked about bribes made – 36% replied that their parents had given bribes once, 38% several times, 26% on a regular basis.

Table 1.3 sets out corruption-related challenges in tertiary and secondary education that have been identified according to the research results from the surveys.

**Table 1.3 Summary of currently identified corruption-related challenges in education**

| Tertiary education   | Secondary education  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The lack of corruption control mechanisms in universities</li> <li>✓ The need to further improve admission examinations</li> <li>✓ The need to change or improve the current and final graduate examination system</li> <li>✓ The low salaries of university teaching staff</li> <li>✓ The need to create an independent body of students, university lecturers/administration staff, student’s parents in each university to monitor and report corruption cases</li> <li>✓ The lack of ethnics-related training courses for university lecturers and students</li> <li>✓ The lack of anticorruption campaigns in the education sector in general</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The absence of corruption control mechanisms in secondary schools</li> <li>✓ The need to further improve teaching methods in some school subjects to raise their effectiveness and avoid demanding extra classes from students</li> <li>✓ The need to change teacher and parent mentality (the mentality of bribe taker and bribe giver)</li> <li>✓ The low salaries of teachers</li> <li>✓ The need to establish an independent body in schools (consisting of parents, school administration, and other representatives) responsible for finding and reporting corruption</li> <li>✓ The lack of ethics related training for school teachers and the school administration</li> </ul> |

Source: Aleksanyan, 2012.

Education is highly politicized. Political activism and ruling party membership of school principals and teachers are commonplace. So is their involvement in elections as members of electoral committees. In exchange, school leadership is given unprecedented freedom to run the schools at will (Policy Forum Armenia, 2013).

The most common violations identified in the reports on corruption in Armenian education so far refer to staff policies, bribing, favouritism and academic fraud. Although data on education expenditure is

<sup>27</sup>Gyumri State Pedagogical University and Vanadzor State Pedagogical University  
28 (Harutyun, 2012[2007])

<sup>29</sup> 42.1% answered ‘I don’t know’

very scarce, the sector is commonly reported as underfunded, and the low salaries and compensation of teachers and faculty are believed to be among the main reasons for the readiness of staff to take bribes (Policy Forum Armenia, 2013) (Aleksanyan, 2012). Further problems include illicit payments by parents in support of the schools of their children and forced donations to teachers, which often benefit principals and regional officials with responsibilities for education. The misuse of resources is facilitated by a weak system of control and school boards which fail to fulfil their oversight functions (Policy Forum Armenia, 2013).

## Chapter 2: Integrity of secondary education

### 2.1 Suspected integrity violation #1: Private supplementary tutoring by class teachers

#### VIOLATION ID

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>A. Suspected integrity violation</b>   |  |
| No. 2.1 Private supplementary tutoring by class teachers  |  |
| <b>B. Factors that create opportunity for the violation</b>   |  |
| Missing regulations<br>Gaps in school inspection practice   |  |
| <b>C. Factors that create incentives for the violation</b>  |  |
| Parental mistrust and lack of assessment feedback<br>Low self-esteem of students as learners<br>Teacher salaries<br>Disconnection between assessment requirements and learning content                    |  |
| <b>D. Pointers for action</b>   |  |
| <b>B:</b>   | <b>C:</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research and regulate tutoring practices</li> <li>- Improve classroom assessment (see Violation No. 2.4)</li> <li>- Adjust school inspection routines</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trust-building: improve feedback on learning and assessment progress</li> <li>- Adjust testing to curriculum content</li> <li>- Improve classroom assessment (see Violation No. 2.4)</li> </ul> |

#### A. Description

Private supplementary tutoring can be defined as instruction in subjects of relevance to student progression and graduation, which is provided for a fee and takes place outside of regular school hours.<sup>30</sup>

Supplementary tutoring can take many forms, but not all can be treated as integrity violations. The Programme for International Student Assessment – PISA of the OECD, for example, collects information on students’ participation in out-of-school-time lessons and considers these lessons to be a form of remedial or enrichment learning (OECD, 2013d) that can help slow learners to keep up with their peers, and high achievers to become even better. Recent research on private supplementary tutoring in Asia<sup>31</sup> underlines the benefits of remedy and enrichment through tutoring, and adds that families might even consider out-of-school learning to be a good way to keep their children busy with useful tasks after school (Bray & Lykins, *Shadow Education: Private Tutoring And Its Implications for Policy Makers in Asia*, 2012, pp. x-xi).

Even some of the well-known negative implications of private tutoring, such as its propensity to exacerbate social inequality by being more accessible and beneficial to students who can afford more of it and better tutors, than to those from families with a lower income, do not directly qualify it as an integrity violation. These are predominantly equity-related concerns. They might or might not explain problematic behaviour “elsewhere” in the education system, but they are not malpractice per se. In other words, private tutoring practices might be legal despite their negative side effects.

<sup>30</sup> This is a variation of the definition of private supplementary tutoring by Bray and Lykins, which describes private supplementary tutoring as a shadow system of tutoring in academic subjects that is provided for a fee and that takes place outside standard school hours (Bray & Lykins, 2012, p. 1).

<sup>31</sup> Asia is a world region where private supplementary tutoring is particularly common and has a long tradition (Bray & Lykins, 2012).

Nevertheless, private supplementary tutoring always poses a potential integrity threat. The threat originates in the inherent closeness of tutoring to mainstream education. The content of tutoring is for the most part aligned with the curriculum (Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Bray, 1999) and the tutoring lessons are provided mostly in subjects with stakes for educational success. This implies that in countries where tutoring is widespread, teachers, especially those teaching high stake subjects and in charge of classroom assessment, are likely to be working in a state of latent conflict of interest. The extreme manifestation of this problem is when teachers ask their own students to take private lessons as a condition for passing an exam (Bray, 2013). In a somewhat “softer” malpractice scenario, teachers might purposefully under-teach in regular classes, either to stimulate demand for tutoring, or to reserve their and their students’ time and energy for the out-of-school lessons, or both (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Milovanovitch, 2013).

In both versions of the problem, teachers fail two major tasks associated with their noble mandate: to transmit knowledge to their students in the best way they can, and to assess learning success on the basis of merit. It is important to note that lower-than-expected effectiveness of teaching in the classroom might also be due to factors that are not in the remit of teachers, such as overloaded curriculum, sub-standard working conditions, or insufficient hours for teaching. Some of these play a role in Armenia as well and are in the focus of the following sub-sections of this chapter.

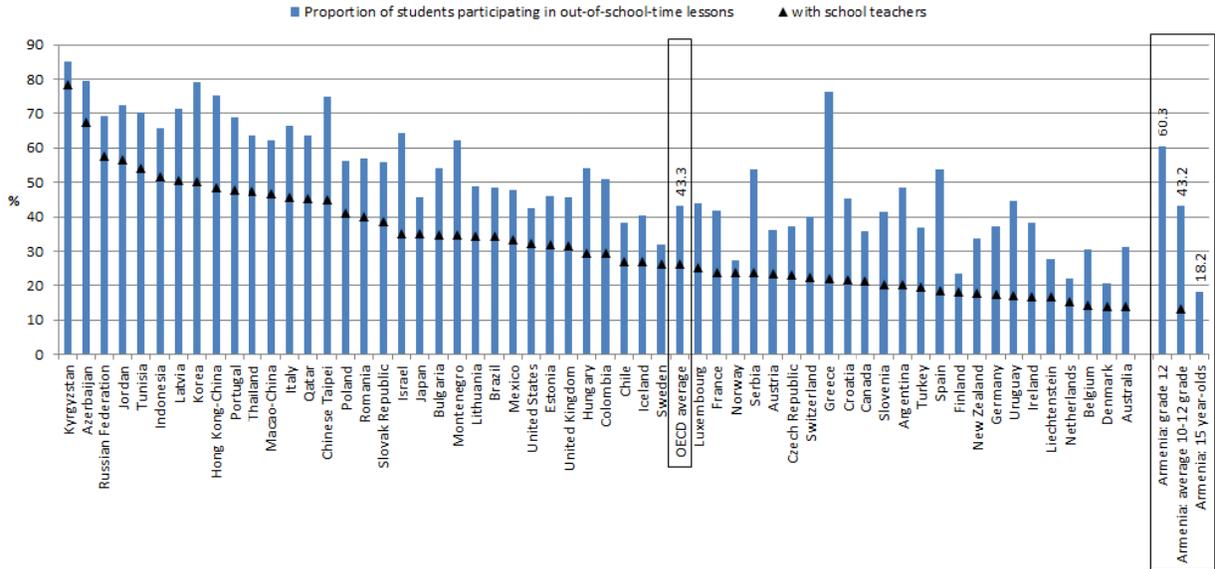
The discussion so far suggests that the analysis of private tutoring as a suspected integrity violation should start by establishing how widespread it is in Armenia. A second, even more important question is whether classroom teachers are providing tutoring to their own students. Finally, it is important to determine whether teachers purposefully underperform in their profession because of private tutoring.

#### *Prevalence of private supplementary tutoring in Armenia*

According to recent research, in 2012 an average of 43.2% of all students in upper secondary education in Armenia took private tutoring. The average masks some important differences. Firstly, there is a trend towards more tutoring in later years of schooling. In grade 10, the share of tutored students is 18.2%, but in grade 12, it is 60.3%. Secondly, tutoring is more prevalent in the capital Yerevan (56.2%) than in the rest of the country (38.3%) (OSF Armenia, 2014).

Considered in isolation, these figures do not tell much, beyond the fact that tutoring gains in intensity closer to the point of high school graduation and that tutoring is more common in Yerevan than in the provinces, presumably due to a higher concentration of students from more affluent backgrounds in the capital. Does this mean that private supplementary tutoring in Armenia is a widespread practice? A comparison with other countries, especially those with a well-known “private tutoring problem” (OECD, 2013c) like Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, or Singapore might provide a useful point of reference in this respect.

**Figure 2.1.1 Percentage of students participating in out-of-school lessons, Armenia and selected countries**



Source of data: PISA 2006 and 2009 Databases; OSF Armenia, 2014.

Figure 2.1.1 shows the latest available data on the share of 15-year-olds who attended out-of-school-time lessons in countries that participated in OECD’s PISA. The Figure also includes data on participation in private tutoring in Armenia of students in grades 10 to 12 (upper secondary education), collected for the already quoted report of the Open Society Foundations Armenia (OSF Armenia, 2014). Due to possible differences between PISA and the OSF survey in the definition of out-of-school-time lessons and in the means used to collect the evidence, the comparability between the two sets of data might not be fully warranted. Imperfect as it is, the comparison is nevertheless helpful in providing an international backdrop for the interpretation of data on private tutoring in Armenia.

In some of the education systems that perform very well in PISA, such as Hong Kong, Korea or Japan, the share of students attending out-of-school lessons is very high (75%, 79%, and 46%). In other well-performing systems, i.e. Finland, Norway or Switzerland, the share of students who resort to supplementary learning, is among the lowest internationally. Contrary to wide-spread perceptions, the 15-year-olds in Armenian high schools (the typical age at which students take the PISA test) do not resort to private tutoring more often than their peers elsewhere in the OECD (43.2% in Armenia, compared to 43.3% in the OECD, on average). Even at the age of 17 (grade 12) when tutoring is most widespread, the share of Armenian students who go to private tutors remains around 60%. In over a third of the countries included in Figure 2.1.1, the proportion of students who resort to out-of-school-time lessons already at the age of 15, is larger than that.

*Private tutoring by class teachers*

The finding that in other countries out-of-school learning might be more widespread does not mean that its prevalence in Armenia is negligible, and even less so that it does not represent an integrity concern. During the INTES site visits, students were regularly providing anecdotal evidence of conflicts of interest: of tutoring by teachers from the same school, or of class teachers directing their students to fellow teachers who enjoy a good reputation as private tutors and to university professors. There is some hard data to confirm the student narratives. In 2012, more than 13% of students in upper secondary education on average (grades 10-12) were provided with fee-based tutoring by teachers from their own

school. While this figure appears low in international comparison, it might not be reflecting reality to the fullest as teachers might be resorting to tutoring schemes by sending their students to each other, or to tutoring companies with which they are associated (Milovanovitch, 2014b). In the same year, 23.2% of high school students paid for tutors from other schools or universities (OSF Armenia, 2014).

Students interviewed during the INTES assessment further reported that in such situations they were taking the supplementary lessons to hedge against a risk of failing an exam, and confirmed to have enjoyed a preferential treatment by their teachers after taking the extra lessons.

#### *Private tutoring and teachers' under-performance*

In the last year of schooling in Armenia (grade 12), the priority for students and their parents shifts from formal success in mastering the curriculum, to learning for the combined, standardised graduation and university admission test at the end of the year. Since not all questions in the test are well aligned with the content and achievement requirements of the school programme, the test is widely considered to require a separate preparatory effort. This has implications for the demand for private supplementary tutoring in grade 12. It shifts from an out-of-school instruction focused on the curriculum, to extensive out-of-school learning for the test. In 2012, this shift in attention drove a more than three-fold increase (from 18.2% to 60.3%) between grades 10 and 12 in the share of students who hired a private tutor for a fee (Figure 2.1.1).

There is no evidence of the extent to which classroom teachers in the last year of schooling are willing and able to meet the specific, test-related tutoring demand of their students. It is, however, unlikely that they can afford to ignore the significance of its impact on their daily work. This impact comes in the form of student absenteeism and lack of motivation and interest to learn during regular school hours. Even if they are not providing the tutoring themselves, as a minimum, classroom teachers are expected to show understanding and support for the redefined success priorities of their students and their families, mainly by tolerating student absence during regular school hours, and by lowering the standards of learning achievement so that students can receive favourable marks. The student time and energy freed up in these ways is then invested in private tutoring. It is not hard to imagine that such signs of “support” and “understanding” require deliberate limitations in the effectiveness of teaching during regular school hours.

Following this last point, it is important to underline that none of the analysis of tutoring as integrity violation is meant to put the blame on the teachers alone. Private tutoring is the probably most participative of all integrity violations in education. It requires the involvement of teachers who provide the extra instruction, financial effort by the parents and, in the best-case scenario, a learning effort by the students. All sides involved in this share a responsibility, albeit to a differing extent.

The next sections discuss the origin of the problem and offer a differentiated view on responsibilities and involvement in private tutoring as an integrity violation. They show that teachers are often following external pressure or are driven by shortcomings in the national education system.

## B. Factors that create opportunities for the integrity violation

### *Failure to regulate problematic tutoring practices*

Private tutoring presents regulators with a mixed message. They must find a way to reinforce its positive dimension, while limiting the negative implications, in particular those that put teachers in situations of conflict of interest. Thereby, extreme solutions are hardly the best option. Having no rules at all is risky, and the other extreme – prohibition of private tutoring – is hardly sustainable and can be damaging. The possibility to have private lessons should be available, and there certainly are many

quality tutors in Armenia, who provide the kind of remedial or enrichment lessons that students need to succeed in school and later in life. The flexibility of private tutoring in addressing individual needs of students is unparalleled, and cannot be easily provided by the schools.

The regulatory framework in Armenia does not prohibit private tutoring, but it fails to acknowledge and deal with its negative implications and the associated integrity risks. In fact, it is striking to discover that private tutoring in Armenia is not a subject of serious policy discussion, and that research on the issue is limited to a description of basic facts related to its prevalence. Much can be learned from the experience of other countries with similarly deep-rooted tradition of supplementary teaching that have a track record of attempting to create a synergy between regular schooling and supplementary tutoring, for the benefit of all involved.

For example, in Georgia, private tutoring is not prohibited, but some of its aspects are regulated. The Revised National Curriculum (2011–2016) permits schools to provide additional fee-charging educational services if (a) the service is not provided by the teachers of the school, (b) the service is not provided as a regular lesson, and/or (c) the service is not provided to a student while regular lessons are conducted. The 2010 Teachers’ Code of Ethics issued by the Ministry of Education and Science guide teachers “not to tutor their own students for profit-making purposes except in those cases covered by the law” (Bray & Lykins, 2012).

Examples from Asian countries show that once shadow education structures and habits become entrenched for better or worse, they are very difficult to change. What seems to have an effect is a comprehensive action through a combination of regulations, social awareness campaigns to highlight the harmful dimension of shadow education, reform of the systems of student assessment, and the creation of alternative channels for learning.<sup>32</sup>

One of two concerning gaps in the Armenian regulatory framework is the failure to define out-of-school-time tutoring to students by their own teachers, or referral to fellow teachers, as a violation. The other gap is that at the time of preparation of this report<sup>33</sup>, there was no sector-wide, binding code of conduct for the teaching profession. An encouraging development comes from the tertiary sector, where some universities have recently introduced restrictions regarding private lessons to students by their professors. This is, however, still a voluntary initiative by a limited number of higher education institutions.

#### *Gaps in school inspection practice*

A well-functioning inspectorate is a key to preserving the integrity, quality and efficiency of education services (OECD, 2013c). The school inspectorate in Armenia is entrusted with a wide range of tasks. It inspects and observes the educational activities of educational institutions of all types; evaluates the effectiveness of educational services and student success with the educational programmes; analyses the activity of educational institutions; suggests projects for education/school development and controls their implementation; presents reports to the education authorities on the current situation in education; presents an annual Inspectorate report for approval by the education authorities; upon request it investigates matters raised in complaints of citizens; develops reports, analyses, etc., on the basis of the inspection results; controls and inspects the activities of the regional educational departments; develops reports on its own activities; and attracts external experts and the civil society to contribute to its work.<sup>34</sup>

The documentation regulating the way in which school inspections are administered, has a strong focus on inspection methodology and instruments. The instructions define comprehensive procedures for

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<sup>32</sup> For more on this see Bray & Lykins, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> School and academic year 2014-2015.

<sup>34</sup> Article 9 of the Law on Inspectorate of Education of Armenia.

the evaluation of different aspects of school functioning and prescribe the use of multiple data sources such as class observations, surveys, documentation analyses, and so on.

There are reasons to assume that, despite the high level of detail provided in the instructions, the set-up in which the school inspections take place hinders them in capturing the negative impact of private supplementary tutoring on school operation. Such an impact would normally signal the presence of problematic private tutoring practices.

For example, the timing and organisation of class observations are hardly enough to detect under-teaching. The overall duration of the inspection depends on the risk level of the school,<sup>35</sup> and on the activity that is inspected (*e.g.* attendance, follow-up on recommendations, examination of a reported violation). A recent schedule provided to the INTES assessment team shows that the usual duration of an inspection is 20 days that are taken in one go.<sup>36</sup> However, the inspection instructions limit the maximum number of inspections per school to one in five years, or one in three years for the few schools that are rated as being at a medium level of risk.

Another point is that the Inspectorate's analysis of documents with study plans and programmes is limited to what teachers are reporting to have done, and does not include a check of what they have actually taught in class. In the same vein, the inspection only verifies that the reported hours match the prescribed hours per subject.<sup>37</sup> A random selection of inspection reports provided to the INTES assessment team were brief, noted instances of mismatch between planned and reported number of hours and subject units, but did not explain the anomalies or offer further analysis of how the subject was taught, or what the recommended follow-up measures are. In fact, some of the reports looked like copies of the school self-assessment reports. Even if the reports would have contained recommendations (the findings of the Inspectorate are binding on the principal and the school), there is no mechanism to ensure compliance.

In sum, the current practice of school inspections allows important clues about integrity problems related to private tutoring, to go unnoticed. Under-teaching is one of them. Another one is the bias in classroom assessment that is associated, among other things, with private tutoring by classroom teachers (see part 2.4). The INTES assessment team was presented with abundant anecdotal evidence of student grades that improved significantly after students took private tutoring with their class teachers. If the INTES assessment team managed to obtain this information, the school inspectors who are in much better position to reach out and collect information from schools and secondary sources of evidence, should be able to obtain it too. The data about discrepancies between classroom and external assessment results, which will be discussed in part 2.4, is also readily available. Regretfully, the Inspectorate does not do any work with this information.

It is beyond the scope of the INTES report to speculate about the reasons for the limitations in the way the Inspectorate approaches these issues. It is, however, certain that with its mandate and proximity to schools, the School Inspectorate is in a unique position to carry out the evidence collection and analysis required to determine and contain the integrity risk that comes with private supplementary tutoring, and to guide an effort to regulate the tutoring practices.

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<sup>35</sup> Institutions or subjects with high level of risk – no more than once a year; Institutions or subjects with medium level of risk – no more than once in 3 years; Institutions or subjects with low level of risk – no more than once in 5 years.

<sup>36</sup> Schedule of Inspections 2015.

<sup>37</sup> According to curriculum school has autonomy in programming these hours but all programmes have to be approved by the MoES

### C. Factors that create incentives for the integrity violation

#### *Parental distrust and lack of assessment feedback*

From the perspective of parents and students, tutoring demand is a sign of uncertainty and lack of trust: uncertainty about school success and the outcomes of high-stake examinations, and distrust in the ability of schools to fulfil their mission to prepare for watershed situations in the students' educational career. The parents interviewed in the course of the INTES assessment in Armenia underlined that they consider private tutoring to be a must if their children are to pass the final and university admission exams. Some of the subjects tested in the final standardised exam, like Armenian and English, are considered particularly "hard" and therefore even the best of students go for additional lessons in their final year.

Apart from the assessment results, in Armenia there is a striking lack of explanation of why students succeed or fail an exam. Cases in which 80% and more of the cohort in a school fails the final exam in a subject (chemistry for example) are not rare and fuel the shared belief of parents and students that any student, no matter how good or bad, can fail. Internally, the Armenian Testing Centre is using an item-response test approach to analyse exam results, but schools do not use this for their own analysis, nor is there a publicly accessible report that would discuss how and why students fail or succeed.<sup>38</sup> Together with the problems related to student assessment outlined in part 2.4, this situation strengthens the conviction of parents that private tutoring is "necessary evil" and fuels their mistrust in the ability of schools to provide education that is good enough to ensure successful transition to the next educational level.

There are indications that parental mistrust in the public education system runs deep and that, in fact, it might have already become embedded in Armenian society as a prejudice: it can set in as early as primary education. It is not uncommon for parents to send their children to private supplementary tutoring already in first grade of primary school, which obviously is well ahead of the time when students will be exposed to subject teaching and high stake assessments. According to data from a 2013 household survey, each month families with children in primary school age invest 14% of their education budget in private tutoring (Armstat, 2014). Certainly, the decision to resort to extra lessons is driven not only by mistrust, but also by the natural wish of families to secure the best possible future for their children. Nevertheless, it is indicative that already at an early stage in the educational career of students, their parents consider supplementary lessons to be a necessity to that end.

#### *Low self-esteem of students as learners*

Research on student motivation and beliefs confirms that the way students think and feel about themselves shapes their behaviour at school (Bandura, 1977). When students do not believe in their own ability to succeed in a given task, they need to have much higher levels of self-control and motivation in order to succeed. Unfortunately, students who have low self-efficacy<sup>39</sup> are less likely to regulate their achievement behaviours or be motivated to engage in learning (Klassen and Usher, 2010; Schunk and Pajares, 2009; OECD, 2013e).

Recent international data confirms these observations. In 2012, one of the aspects of student learning explored by OECD's PISA was the drive and motivation of students to succeed, and the beliefs they hold about themselves as mathematics learners. The analysis of data collected through the participation of over half a million students worldwide suggests that there is a strong positive relationship between the beliefs of students about their abilities and the quality of their learning outcomes. For example, Figure 2.1.2

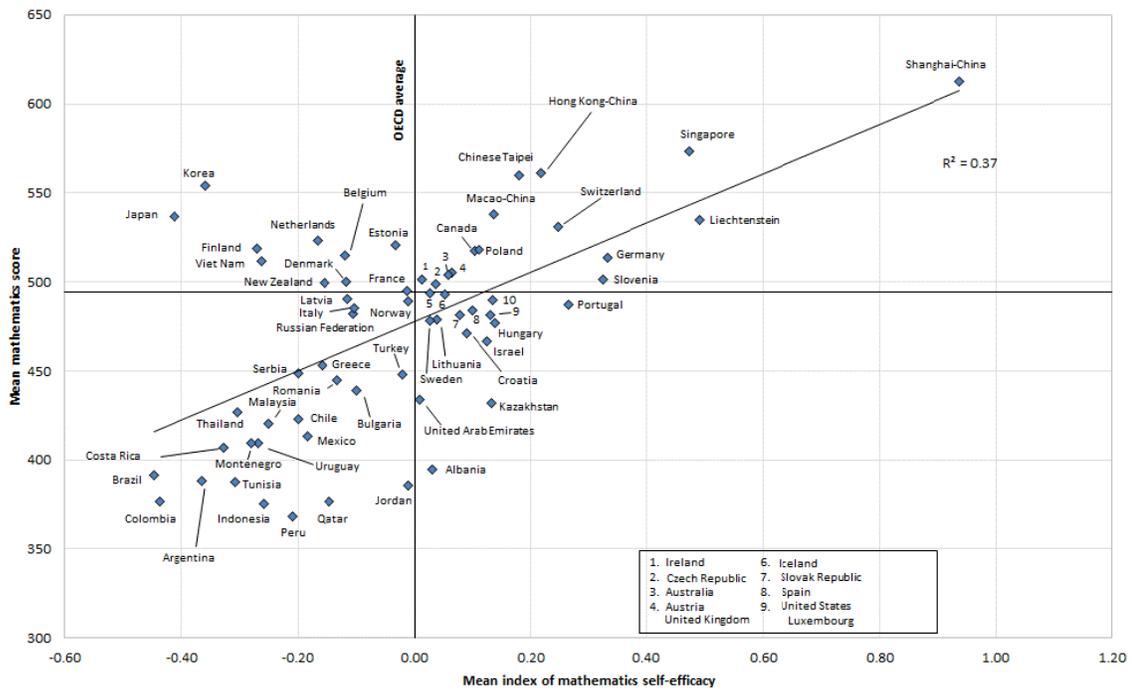
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<sup>38</sup> In Armenia, the "mechanics" of success at the graduation exam is still an unexplored and potentially promising field. In 2013, only 1.6% of the students graduated high school with honours (112).

<sup>39</sup>The term "self-efficacy" is used to describe students' belief that, through their actions, they can produce desired effects, which, in turn, is a powerful incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1977) (OECD, 2013e).

shows that mathematics self-efficacy (the extent to which students believe in their ability to handle mathematical tasks effectively and overcome difficulties) is strongly associated with mathematics performance. Countries with higher mean PISA performance in mathematics are those where students are more likely to report feeling confident about being able to solve a range of pure and applied mathematics problems (OECD, 2013e).

**Figure 2.1.2 Country-level association between mathematics performance and mathematics self-efficacy, PISA 2012**



Source: OECD, 2013e

In Armenia, the general atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty has a negative impact on the self-esteem of students as learners. Students, who resort to the type of private supplementary tutoring discussed here, can easily start to perceive this as an indication that their effort and achievement during regular schooling is not good enough. This is further exacerbated by a common practice of teachers to avoid giving the highest (and lowest) grades in classroom assessments in order to avoid attracting the attention of school and inspection authorities to their work and assessment decisions.

Marks are a key carrier of feedback for students, and they shape their self-esteem. If for whatever reason marks are effectively being detached from standards of achievement, success during the school year becomes a vague, unclear notion and might appear unattainable. If students do not believe in their ability to accomplish particular tasks, they will not exert the effort needed to complete the tasks successfully, and a lack of self-confidence can easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy (OECD, 2013e), which causes underperformance and in turn fuels demand for tutoring.

### Teacher salaries

The modest level of teachers' salaries is an issue in Armenia and many countries of the former Soviet Union. Even when resource allocation policies are favourable to teachers and the authorities earmark a sufficient proportion of the education budget to teachers' pay, it fails to translate into adequate

remuneration due to an overall low level of public spending on education. In 2012, Armenia invested only 3.3% of its GDP in education, a very low share in international comparison (Table 2.1.1).

**Table 2.1.1 Expenditure on educational institutions as share of GDP, Armenia and selected countries, latest year available**

|                     | Notes | Expenditure as share of GDP, all levels of education combined (including undistributed programmes) |
|---------------------|-------|--|
| Denmark             |       | 7.9  |
| Korea               |       | 7.6  |
| Norway              | 3     | 7.4  |
| United States       |       | 6.9  |
| Canada              | 1     | 6.8  |
| Finland             |       | 6.5  |
| United Kingdom      |       | 6.4  |
| Sweden              |       | 6.3  |
| Netherlands         |       | 6.2  |
| France              |       | 6.1  |
| <b>OECD average</b> |       | <b>6.1</b>   |
| Brazil              | 3     | 5.9  |
| <b>EU21 average</b> |       | <b>5.8</b>   |
| Switzerland         | 3     | 5.6  |
| Spain               |       | 5.5  |
| Germany             |       | 5.1  |
| Russian Federation  |       | 4.6  |
| Hungary             | 3     | 4.4  |
| <b>Armenia</b>      | 2     | <b>3.3</b>   |

Notes: 1. Year of reference 2010; 2. Year of reference 2012. Public sources only; 3. Public expenditure only (for Switzerland, in tertiary education only; for Norway, in primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education only).

Source: OECD, 2014; World Bank Development Indicators

According to UNICEF, the income of teachers is low not only because of a low base salary, but also because a majority of teachers do not have enough teaching hours to earn a full salary. The distribution of hours is decided based on factors such as availability of teachers to teach the classes, the need for more senior teachers for a larger teaching load and thus extra pay, and others. The way in which the base salary and the supplements for additional responsibilities are being calculated is decided by the principal, and varies by school. In reality, most teachers have less than a full load of teaching hours, and many who have a full load still receive less than what is envisaged by law (UNICEF, 2011). Also, there are vast differences in income between and within schools between teachers who earn high and low.

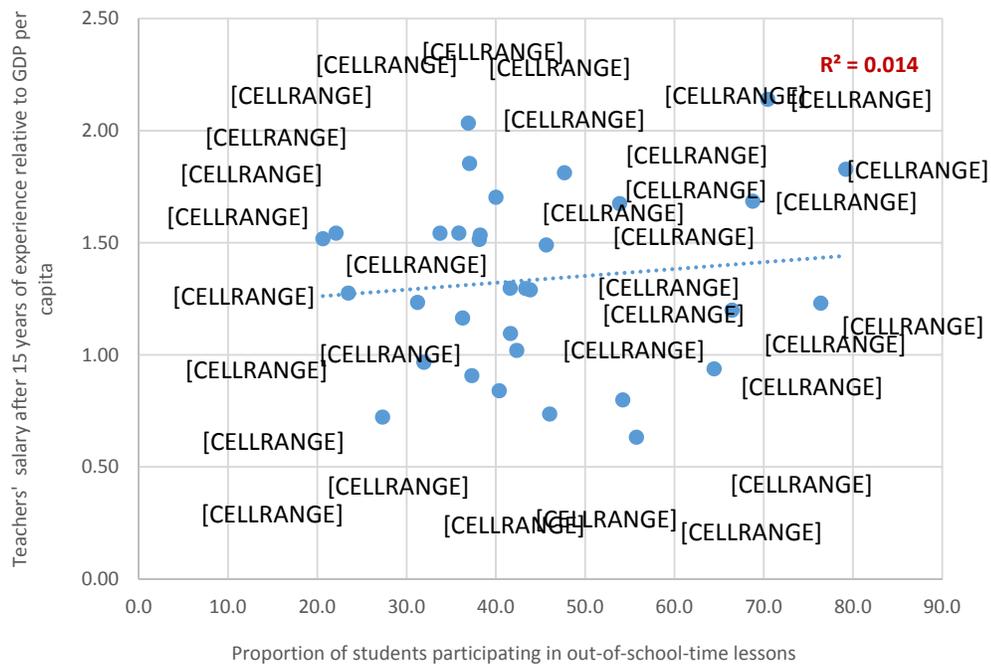
It is widely believed that the decline in the purchasing power of teachers' salaries after 1990 and the subsequent low level of their income are a major force driving the expansion of private tutoring in the decades that followed.<sup>40</sup> The remuneration of teachers does not only have repercussions for the status of the profession, but also affects teacher motivation and willingness to comply with rules. In Armenia, reports that dealt with this issue in greater detail, claim that the low income level in combination with the low statutory teaching load (18–22 hours) have degraded the teaching profession to a part-time job, encouraging teachers to seek additional income from parents (UNICEF, 2011). Furthermore, teachers tend to consider the income generated through tutoring as the only way to satisfy basic financial needs. Many of them seem to treat tutoring more as a necessity than as a choice.

<sup>40</sup><http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/the-challenge-of-shadow-education-1>

Naturally, policy interventions that involve adjustments in teacher salaries require caution. Since only a selection of subjects is in demand for private supplementary tutoring, the provision of extra lessons can hardly be a solution for the financial hardships of all teachers. This means that the negative implications of tutoring originate in the practices of only a limited number of professionals, in a limited number of subjects and school grades. A strategy to curb private tutoring that relies on salary increases across the board, is likely to be an inefficient and costly policy intervention because it will benefit everyone while aiming at only a few.

Probably the most difficult question, however, is how much is enough? There is a proverbial wisdom that money is never sufficient. Analysis of similar issues in other countries (Tunisia) has shown that unjustified perceptions of income might motivate teachers to seek additional revenue even when they are earning well by national and international comparison (Milovanovitch, 2014b). Furthermore, the relationship between wage levels and the prevalence of private tutoring might not be as unconditional as it is commonly assumed. Figure 2.1.3 features OECD countries with data on teacher salaries and student participation in out-of-school-time lessons. It shows that in developed countries the two variables – relative salary level and participation in out-of-school-time lessons – do not concur. Countries that pay a comparable share of per capita income to their teachers can vary greatly in the extent to which their high school students resort to out-of-school learning. This suggests that wages, if at all, are only one factor among others that drive private tutoring.

**Figure 2.1.3 Relationship between relative salary of mid-career teachers (15 years of experience) and student participation in out-of-school time lessons, OECD countries**



Source: PISA 2012 database.

Armenia is economically less prosperous and spends less on education than the countries showcased in Figure 2.1.3, and a policy debate about more investment in Armenian education is long overdue. In the short run, teacher salaries might not be the most promising starting point for tackling the challenge of tutoring. In the long run there is, however, acute need for a consensus on how to update the salary scheme

and level of pay in a way that teachers, especially those in sought after subjects, start to feel that their work is acknowledged and can earn at a level comparable to other qualified workers in the country.

#### *Disconnection between graduation and progression requirements, and curriculum content*

A recurrent issue raised during the INTES site visits by parents, students and even professors, was the discrepancy between the requirements of the regular curriculum and those posed by the standardised graduation and admission exams. In a survey carried out some years ago, only 11.9% of the secondary school graduates felt “school knowledge is sufficient” for admission to a higher education institution (Bray & Lykins, 2012). Their impression is confirmed by evidence. In 2012, of those high school graduates who took classes with tutors, some 97% were admitted to the university. Of those who did not take classes with tutors, only 53.8% succeeded in entering tertiary education. (OSF Armenia, 2014).

Private tutoring for graduation and university access is a time-intensive task. In the last year of schooling, a considerable (10%) share of students is, therefore, absent from school (Hua, 2008). If success at any exam would be considered as a function of students’ time, effort and aptitude, the time required for preparation of the graduation and university entrance exams could be taken as a proxy for the additional investment required to offset the discrepancy between “regular” and “graduation” success requirements. On average, preparation takes at least 240 hours or a third of the time (Hua, 2008) reserved for the regular school curriculum. There is abundant anecdotal evidence that schools do not undertake anything in the very many cases in which students do not respect this limit. According to interviews during the INTES site visits, schools seem to interpret their lack of reaction as a sign of support for students who prepare for university.

#### D. Pointers for action

Private tutoring presents regulators with a mixed message. They must find a way to reinforce its positive dimensions, while limiting the negative implications, in particular those that put teachers in situations of conflict of interest. Extreme solutions are thereby hardly the best option: no rules at all is risky while the other extreme – prohibition of private tutoring – is hardly sustainable. What seems to have had an effect in other countries with similar problems is a comprehensive action through a combination of regulations, social awareness campaigns to highlight the harmful dimension of shadow education, reform of the system of student assessment, and alternative channels of learning.

#### *Closing the opportunities for malpractice*

##### Main interventions

The authorities can address the problem of private tutoring with the help of regulatory interventions. As a first step, this means to define out-of-school-time tutoring by teachers to their own students, as well as referral to fellow teachers, as a violation. Second, it is necessary to hammer out a binding code of conduct for the teaching profession the provisions of which are tied to administrative consequences in case of infringement. It is paramount to vest the responsibility for compliance not only with teachers, but also with their principals so that principals can be held accountable for violations that took place under their leadership. Otherwise, the codes of conduct will become one more instrument of administrative pressure on teachers.

Reforms in the system of classroom assessment as recommended in part 2.4 would further contribute to taming the extent to which teachers can abuse assessment to justify demand for private tutoring, and will reduce actual demand for tutoring for the final graduation test at the end of secondary schooling.

##### Supporting interventions

A well-functioning school inspectorate is a key to preserving the integrity, quality and efficiency of education services. Despite the high level of detail provided in the instructions on how school inspections

in Armenia should work, the set-up in which the school inspections take place hinders them in detecting the negative impact of private supplementary tutoring on school operation.

It is recommended to lift the current limitations on the frequency of inspections and allow for a more regular but subtle inspection visits that would permit for observations that are more formative in nature and can capture the teaching process in better detail. In fact, it is worthwhile to consider complementing the current purpose of inspections, which is to ensure compliance, with a new type that is geared towards providing formative advice.

It is important to note that in the current situation of dominance of informal and political networks over the education system, simply adding responsibilities to the already ambitious portfolio of the school inspectorate will only create additional channels of politically motivated pressure. Besides, it is questionable to what extent the Inspectorate disposes of qualified enough staff to take on the new role and responsibilities. For the inspectorate to fulfil its role with both the compliance and formative school inspections suggested here, an additional effort is needed to transform it into a strong, professional and highly independent establishment. This effort might require profound and difficult changes in an otherwise traditional and rigid institution.

Finally yet importantly, all reforms to tackle the negative implications of private tutoring should be based on evidence to the maximum extent possible. However, evidence on the issue in Armenia is currently scarce. In order to better understand the positive aspects of private tutoring and draw a line between acceptable and unacceptable practices, more research on the subject is needed. International experience, in particular from Asian countries with a record of accomplishment in education reforms, can be a useful source of guidance.

#### *Eliminating the incentives for malpractice*

##### *Main interventions*

Demand for tutoring is a sign of uncertainty and lack of trust: uncertainty about school success and the outcomes of high-stake examinations, and distrust in the ability of schools to fulfil their mission to prepare for watershed situations in the students' educational career.

Correspondingly, the two main interventions to tackle the deeply rooted incentives to seek private tutoring should be (i) the introduction of trust-building measures and (ii) making study content and examination requirements better aligned.

Regarding (i), beyond the communication of test scores, in Armenia there is a striking lack of explanation of why students succeed or fail an exam. It is recommended to improve communication around that by undertaking regular in-depth analysis of testing results, raising capacity in schools to do such analysis themselves, and introducing a structured communication channel between teachers and parents to inform about the findings. The purpose will be to communicate not only the marks of students, but details about the marking process, justification of the marks given in classroom assessments, and other relevant observations on the progress of students.

The latter could be done in a specific format that will provide more comprehensive and in-depth information about student's progress than is the case now, for example through student scorecards that are regularly updated in the course of the year.

Action in point (ii) requires a revision of items in the standardised graduation test. Such revisions are being regularly undertaken by the Armenian Testing Centre, but they do not focus on adjusting the testing items to fit the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade curriculum better. A more difficult but equally effective measure would be to revise the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade curriculum and allocation of hours to allow for preparation for the graduation test.

The latter would help to “legalise” at least part of the time that students are now investing in out-of-school preparation at the expense of their regular classes.

#### Supporting interventions

Research confirms that there is a strong positive relationship between the beliefs of students about their abilities and the quality of their learning outcomes. The general atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty that pervades Armenian education has a negative impact on student self-esteem. Adjustments in assessment arrangements and practice, as suggested in part 2.4 are likely to have a positive effect on the reluctance of teachers to give good marks when these are deserved.

Another issue in need of attention is the modest level of teachers’ salaries in Armenia, which is commonly given as a shortcut-explanation for the existence of private tutoring. A strategy that relies on salary increases across the board to deal with private tutoring is likely to be an inefficient and costly policy intervention because it will benefit everyone while aiming at only a few. Nevertheless, in the longer run it will be necessary to update the salary scheme and level of pay in a way in which teachers, especially those in sought after subjects, start to feel that their work is acknowledged and can earn at a level comparable to other qualified workers in Armenia. This will be an important contribution to curbing private tutoring in the country.

#### Summary of recommended actions

| <b>Suspected integrity violation</b>  | <b>Recommendations Chapter 2</b>              |    |  | <b>Areas of policy intervention</b> |
|---|---|----|--|-------------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation # 1: Private supplementary tutoring by class teachers | 1. Closing the opportunities                  | 1  | Define out-of-school-time tutoring by teachers to their own students, as well as referral to fellow teachers, as a violation   | Staff policies                      |
|   |   | 2  | Make principals responsible for integrity violations in their schools  | Governance                          |
|   |   | 3  | Introduce a binding code of conduct for the teaching profession the provisions of which are tied to administrative consequences in case of infringement.   | Staff policies                      |
|   |   | 4  | Lift the current limitations on the frequency of inspections and allow for a more regular but subtle inspectoral visits that would permit for observations that are more formative in nature and can capture the teaching process in better detail.  | School inspections                  |
|   |   | 5  | Make school inspectorate a strong, professional and highly independent institution   | School inspections                  |
|   |   | 6  | Improve classroom assessment practice  | Assessment                          |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 7  | Undertake regular in-depth analysis of testing results, raise capacity in schools to do such analysis themselves, and regularly inform parents not only about the marks of students, but also about the marking process, justification of the marks given in classroom assessments, and other relevant observations on the progress of their children. | Assessment                          |
|   |   | 8  | Revise the 12th grade curriculum and allocation of hours to allow for preparation for the graduation test.   | Teaching and learning               |
|   |   | 9  | Revision of items in the standardised graduation test to bring them more in line with the curriculum.  | Assessment                          |
|   |   | 10 | Update the salary scheme and level of pay of teachers, especially of those teaching sought after subjects, so they feel their work is acknowledged   | Spending on education               |

## 2.2 Suspected integrity violation #2: Politicisation of secondary education

### VIOLATION ID

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>A. Suspected integrity violation</b>   |  |
| No. 2.2 Politicisation of secondary education   |  |
| <b>B. Factors that create opportunity for the violation</b>   |  |
| Informal interdependence between schools and regional authorities<br>Capture of school governance and management  |  |
| <b>C. Factors that create incentives for the violation</b>  |  |
| Resource shortages on school level<br>Employment in (security)  |  |
| <b>D. Pointers for action</b>   |  |
| <b>B:</b>   | <b>C:</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commission legislative analysis</li> <li>- Prohibit all forms of political activism</li> <li>- Define political neutrality as a central tenet of the teaching profession</li> <li>- Make principals accountable for infringements by teachers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify and close the channels of preferential treatment of schools by authorities</li> <li>- Reduce vulnerability of teaching staff vis-à-vis school leadership</li> <li>- Safeguard media freedom</li> </ul> |

### A. Description

Article 4 of the Law on Education of the Republic of Armenia prohibits political activities or advocacy in education institutions. This provision is part of an effort of state policy to increase the independence of schools and introduce more decentralised patterns of governance. However, there is an abundance of anecdotal observations of how the practice of school management and operation is influenced by informal arrangements driven by political interest. Empirical evidence is scarce, not the least because the problem has many manifestations. They make it difficult to agree on what to start with: the misuse of education as administrative resource<sup>41</sup> by incumbents in election campaigns; the electoral behaviour of education professionals; the political affiliation of principals; the interference of regional authorities in the management of schools; or with something else. The debate on how to deal with these problems is long overdue in Armenian society. In the meantime, this Chapter focuses on an underlying trend that makes all of these violations – the politicisation of secondary education.

Politicisation is not a straightforward phenomenon. It can take various forms and comprise different patterns of behaviour (Verhey, 2013). This complicates the collection of evidence of its prevalence in Armenian education even further. A standard definition applicable to all forms of politicisation describes it as the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion and disciplining of members of the public service (Peters & Pierre, 2004). In addition to this “direct” form there is a more subtle pattern in existence. It is one that targets only the senior positions in the public service by filling them with political loyalists who are highly professional in their respective fields. Common to both is that they aim at increasing the influence of political leaders on bureaucracy, and on public policy.

<sup>41</sup>The “misuse of public resources” is unlawful behaviour of civil servants, incumbent political candidates and parties who use their official positions or connections to government (public) institutions with the purpose of influencing the outcome of elections (Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, 2013).

The cases reflected in media reports, electoral reports, and the INTES interviews suggest that the politicisation of Armenian education oscillates between the direct and professional forms of the practice. Sometimes the political bias is “limited” to decisions about appointments of heads of regional education departments and principals of schools, on other occasions it might permeate all of the staff-related policies in the schools. Research literature suggests that the latter scenario is particularly detrimental for the professionalism of public institutions (Verhey, 2013). Also, there is plentiful anecdotal evidence of education professionals who act as multipliers of political influence by proactively lobbying parents and students to follow the “official” line of electoral choices.

Whatever the form, the benefits that emerge in the politicisation process are reciprocal, long-term, and occur at the expense of those who do not participate. The primary aim of the politicisation effort is to ensure allegiance to the incumbent political power in view of securing a channel of influence for the political establishment. In exchange, the authorities offer preferential treatment in a range of domains, most notably hiring and firing of staff, appointment of principals, and procurement and financing decisions.

In an education system characterised by high stakes and scarce resources, this is an offer that education professionals and those who depend on them (parents and students) are finding hard to resist. For example, the election observation report for the 2012 Parliamentary Elections in Armenia concludes that teachers regularly participated in campaign events, including during school time. This is an instance of misuse of administrative resources, including human resources of education sector employees, which violates Articles 18 and 22 of the Electoral Code (European Parliament, 2012) and also article 4.8 of the Law on Education (prohibition of political activity and campaigning in educational institutions). Numerous such cases are reported to have taken place also during the municipal and Presidential elections.<sup>42</sup> This suggests that in Armenia, the misuse of administrative resource in education is a common offence and thus that the process of politicisation of the sector must be quite advanced. Indeed, over 82% of the school principals in the country are members of the ruling political party (Turpanjian Center for Policy Research, 2012).

The following sections discuss in some detail what makes the politicisation process of secondary education in Armenia possible, needed, and so detrimentally effective, and what could be done to start reversing the trend.

## B. Factors that create opportunities for the integrity violation

It appears that most of the fertile (school) ground on which the politicisation efforts fall is cleared by clientelistic<sup>43</sup> relationships. These are institutionalised by patterns of interaction and exchange in which education professionals are able to “trade political support for various outputs of the public decision-making process” (Roniger, 2004), most notably access to employment.

While receptiveness to political influence runs high in Armenian secondary education, clientelism is not always sufficient to ensure a default-free functioning of the politicisation arrangements. Cases of coercion of education professionals who are not willing to exchange their professional integrity for political loyalty, are also common and target the teachers mostly.

The application of these tactics is systematic in nature. According to research, a common trait of politicisation through clientelism is the set-up of “expensive organizational surveillance and enforcement

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<sup>42</sup> See for example <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/25094742.html>, <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/24975207.html>, <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/24959553.html>, <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/24882971.html>

<sup>43</sup> While it is common to link clientelism with corruption (both involve political actors using public and private resources for personal gain), they are not synonyms.

structures” by the political establishment (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). In Armenia, the politicisation process relies entirely on capture of the structures and positions in charge of management and decision-making in Armenian secondary education: school boards and school leadership (principals).<sup>44</sup> The process is further facilitated by a legal framework that allows for patron-client types of relationships between regional authorities and schools, to flourish.

#### *Informal interdependence between schools and regional authorities*

The Law on Education vests most of the responsibility for implementation of the State policies on education with the regional administrations (*Marzpetarans*) and, correspondingly, equips them with wide-reaching powers. Schools are highly dependent on the *Marzpetarans* both formally (two of the members of the school boards are appointed directly by the head of the regional administrative body (*Marzpet*), (CRRRC, 2008; Mkrtchyan & Tsaturyan, 2008) and informally as regional authorities commonly lobby with the central level authorities and the Parliament for capital investment and projects in “their” schools and regions. A school without such regional “protection” would quickly fall behind the others in terms of attractiveness and popularity with parents – a situation that principals are trying to avoid by demonstrating allegiance, whenever needed. Formally, none of these practices violates a law or regulation. On the contrary – the legislation permits and even encourages them. However, they all strengthen the channels of influence for the regional education authorities, to an extent where some reports speak of public schools as of institutions representing the regional political power (Mkrtchyan & Tsaturyan, 2008).

#### *Capture of school governance and management*

Improvement of school governance has been high on the reform agenda for some years, but success in safeguarding schools from political influence has been modest. The introduction of school boards was considered to be a major positive step, but the government failed to follow up to their establishment with capacity building measures and assistance, and left most of the work necessary to make the boards operational, to the school principals (Mkrtchyan & Tsaturyan, 2008).

International Organisations active in Armenia have attempted to fill the void through projects focused on the professional development of principals and capacity building in schools, and subsequently the authorities took over this priority with the help of a loan disbursed under the Education Management and Financing. Already in the first years, a total of 820 principals and 2 700 school board members were trained, and follow-up activities are being designed and implemented (The World Bank, 2003). Despite this continuing attention, school independence remains a serious challenge. Progress is hampered most notably by principals who act as political functionaries, and by deficient school boards.

#### *Principals as political functionaries*

The school principals are positioned at the junction between the two major groups participating in the electoral process: political parties and voters with children in school age. In a setting marked by politicisation, the authority of principals to hire and fire staff and manage the school budget and the stakes associated with their institutions, make them valuable counterparts for the incumbent political powers. The political establishment in Armenia treats the school leaders as entry points for influence over the public school network.

According to a study, in 2012 the principals in the second and third largest cities in Armenia (Gyumri and Vanadzor) were for the most part members of the ruling Republican Party. Many of them were regularly involved in elections as members of electoral committees. In exchange for their loyalty, they reported having been allowed to conduct the affairs of their schools at their own discretion (Policy

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<sup>44</sup>A detrimental side effect of this strategy is that it makes it more difficult to differentiate between regular and politically biased decisions in the education sector.

Forum Armenia, 2013). It is probably safe to assume that this was true as long as their decisions did not run counter the regional or national interests of the party. What power do politicians have over the profession of school leaders that permits them to count over four-fifths of the principals in Armenia among the members of the ruling party?

The first and most important lever of influence is access to employment. In theory, appointments of principals are carried out in transparent way based on merit. Considering, however, the prevalence of party membership among school leaders, cases where candidates get or retain a job only because of qualifications and experience, must be quite rare. In recent days, Armenian media has even featured stories about principals who are transferring their jobs to their children with the consent of the regional education authorities.<sup>45</sup>

The second lever of influence over the principals is the prospect of impunity for personal enrichment, offered by the authorities. After several waves of ambitious reforms of schooling in Armenia, the regulatory framework that guides school management and operation is far from perfect. In its present shape, it leaves ample scope for arbitrariness on the side of school leadership (Partnership for Transparency Fund, 2012) that, more often than not, seems to be used for personal benefit.<sup>46</sup> Several studies, including a United Nations report from 2007/2008 have identified weaknesses related to the collection and use of extra-budgetary funds, for example. A report from 2012 documented that 90% of the 30 schools surveyed did not maintain basic accounting and cash flow accounts of their extra-budgetary income (Partnership for Transparency Fund, 2012). Impunity though comes with a trade-off – it provides the regional authorities who are aware of the violations but “turn a blind eye”, with information that can be used to blackmail and pressure the principals.

#### School boards as rubber stamp

The regulation on school boards at state secondary institutions envisages that the board be composed of eight members, including representatives of the government of the republic, local government bodies, teachers and parents.<sup>47</sup> Since principals are meant to be accountable to their school boards, they cannot be members of this body.

Media reports, as well as several independent, in-depth assessments of operation of the school boards<sup>48</sup> conclude that these bodies are not strong enough to balance out the bias of school management towards political and informal networks, and to offer a more technocratic alternative to decision-making. The legislation stipulates two members of the school board to be elected by the Council of the schoolteachers as their representatives. INTES interview counterparts suggested that in practice, teachers elect candidates that are favoured, or at least approved, by the principal of the school. It is common for parents-members of the boards to be at the same time teachers in the school. There are no rules against this practice, which increases the potential number of school board members who depend on the principal and are thus “loyal” to him/her. The overlap of roles and interests means that the parents and teachers that are on the school boards are not necessarily acting in the best of interest of the stakeholders groups they represent. They also rarely, if at all, disagree with the decisions of the school principals (Mkrtchyan & Tsaturyan, 2008).

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<sup>45</sup> See for example <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/26918258.html>

<sup>46</sup> Reports on some of the more prominent cases can be found here: <http://transparency.am/en/cases> and here <http://www.tert.am/en/news/2011/03/30/school/262291>

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Order No. 981-N, of 2006.

<sup>48</sup> See (Mkrtchyan & Tsaturyan, 2008, pp. 8-11; 14-15). Also Aravot Daily, 16 February 2007, Lusine Ohanyan, School Boards Are Formal; 2. Education Weekly, August 31, 1999. Khachatryan, Serob, The Board Should Defend the School Sovereignty; 3. Education Weekly, March 27, 1999. Khachatryan, Serob, The School Boards and the Community Power. All references provided through Mkrtchyan & Tsaturyan, 2008.

The power of principals is limited only by their dependence on the regional administrative bodies (*Marzpetarans*)<sup>49</sup>. These are, in turn, subordinate to the central authorities. This yields a system of school governance which is fully permeable for vertical command and influence, straight from the very top and the central authorities, to the very bottom and the teachers' daily work, if need be (Box. 2.2.1). The school boards are an important part of this governance set-up. Instead of promoting and strengthening accountability, they perpetuate a culture of political domination and obedience on behalf of the stakeholders that they are elected to represent.

#### **Box 2.2.1 School governance as a pyramid of subordination**

"The specific character of the regional administration and school is that it is mostly like a pyramid, with the regional administrative body at its peak. This body in Armenia is only representing the central administration. The mechanism of this is like the following: the higher authorized body of state governing seeks to have a principal expedient for him and correspondingly "supports" his/her election (in most cases, finally, that candidate is elected). The principal in his/her turn as an adequate reply (gratefulness) to this undertakes to assist or at least not hinder the realization of decisions and desires of the regional administration. In this way, the principal obtains the right and possibility of being proportionally independent in issues inside the school. The principal considers being the responsible person of school's activity and the bearer of sole authority, according to the viewpoints of the parents and school staff, educational policy makers and state officials of the sphere. Principals of the school outside Yerevan once typically mentioned:

*If the director works bad and is not assisted by the authorities, he could not work under complaints, and if he is assisted by the authorities, even if the parents of the whole school and populated area are against him, he would continue working. ...The boss and owner of the school is the director, since the responsible person it is me".*

Source: Mkrtychyan & Tsaturyan, 2008, p. 16.

### **C. Factors that create incentives for the integrity violation**

As noted, the politicisation of Armenian education is a process that relies on a two-way partnership. Education institutions provide their loyalty in exchange for benefits and preferential treatment. Stories of schools (some of which seen by the INTES assessment team) that are regularly favoured in terms of capital investment, of teachers who become party members in order to keep their jobs, and even of civil society organisations closely affiliated with the ruling party, which receive the lion's share of a budget earmarked for difficult reforms,<sup>50</sup> are very common. They all testify allegiance to those who have the power of taking such decisions.

Every single instance of such politically motivated, preferential treatment of institutions and players in education is an instance of designing, bending or breaking rules to someone's advantage at the expense of someone else. In addition to a number of negative implications that are not strictly in focus of this chapter part, this violates the very essence of the mandate of public education: to serve the education needs of everyone, to the maximum extent possible.

Instead of blaming the sides involved in these transactions, it is more constructive to understand their motives and situation,<sup>51</sup> and then try to change them for the better. Research implies that in places where clientelism is pervasive, the benefits which characterise the relationship between politicians and the electorate, are targeted to individuals and groups that are known to be highly responsive to such benefits, and hence are willing to surrender their vote (or professional integrity) for the right price (Kitschelt &

<sup>49</sup> According to comments provided by stakeholders at the last stage of assessment report preparation, this dependence forces some school leaders to act from a position of subordination and weakness, not of strength.

<sup>50</sup> See for example <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/26790210.html>

<sup>51</sup> Since this report is about integrity of education, and for the sake of brevity, the motives of the political establishment to capture public education are left aside. A note on this can be found in Section 3.4-C.

Wilkinson, 2007). What makes education professionals in Armenia susceptible to the temptations and pressures of political interest?

When stakes are high and the issue at hand is as important as keeping a job, ensuring access to high quality next level of education for one’s children, or avoiding resource shortage that might endanger the future of the school one is responsible for, those who are potentially affected might resort to pre-emptive action. For example, the INTES assessment of Serbia revealed that parents sometimes send their children to private tutoring “just in case” to make sure that they have done everything they can in order to raise the chances for a good average at the end of the school year (OECD, 2013c).

Education professionals in Armenia offer little resistance to politicisation, for a combination of reasons. These include an expectation that conformism will help to solve existing problems, for example, resource shortages, but also hope that it will help to prevent future problems, such as loss of employment or unfavourable treatment of students by teachers and of the school by regional education authorities. There is also a strong cultural-traditional dimension to it as Armenian schools closely mirror the pattern of relationships in a typical Armenian family, which is based on tradition and allegiance to authority. The conclusion of a 2006 UNDP report on human development in Armenia confirms this:

*“Armenian schools, as well as the Armenian family unit, are based mainly on authoritative and traditional principles, and the educational system functions with the logic of a closed society. Correspondingly, when the public context is ignored, the education system loses its connection with the reality of the situation...” (UNDP, 2006)*

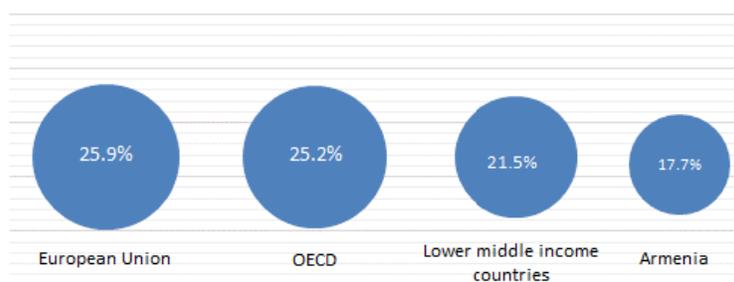
In such a setting, resistance to collective behaviour requires more than rational thinking and a sense of integrity. It requires courage and readiness to take risks, which are rare qualities in any profession or sector.

Among the factors that motivate behaviour, and can be influenced with the help of public policy interventions, the two that probably matter most are a shortage of resources and employment insecurity.

#### *Resource shortages on school level*

Public investment in secondary education in Armenia is modest by international comparison. Spending per student as share of GDP per capita in Armenia was less than in other countries with comparable level of income and, on average, considerably less than in countries of the EU or the OECD (Figure 2.2.1)

**Figure 2.2.1 Expenditure per student in secondary education (% of GDP per capita), Armenia and selected groups of countries (2012 or latest year available)**



Notes: European Union and OECD – year of reference 2011. Lower middle-income countries – countries for which there is data. Data shows the latest year available since 2000.

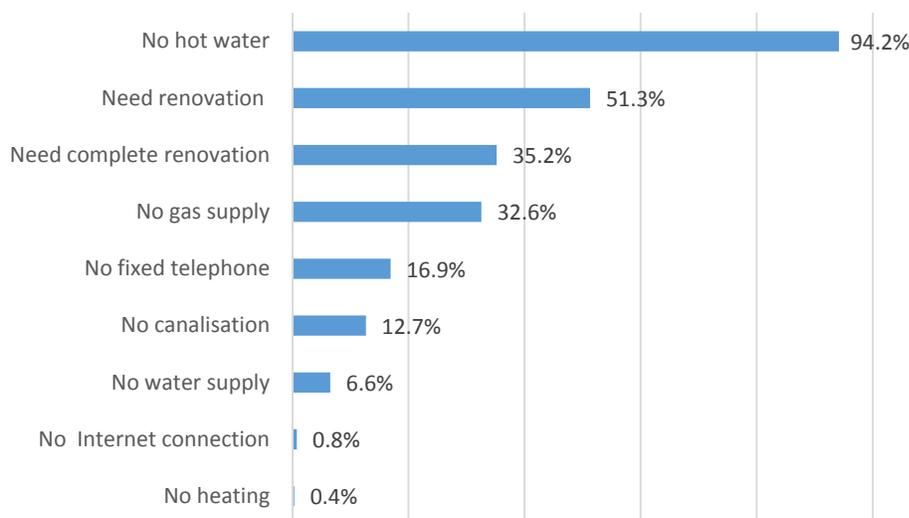
Source: World Bank Development Indicators

In 2012, per student expenditure in Armenia amounted to 17.7% of GDP per capita. Countries which were classified as lower middle-income countries like Armenia, spent an equivalent of 21.5% of GDP per capita per student, and per student spending in the group of wealthier countries – members of the OECD and the EU, amounted to 25.2% and 25.9% of GDP per capita, respectively.

It would be a far-fetched to draw any conclusions about the actual conditions in public schools across Armenia from such aggregate data. However, the figures imply that either secondary education in Armenia is more efficient than secondary education in other countries (which is unlikely) or that funding might be an issue. If funding were an issue (as suggested by numerous reports), this finding would imply that a prospect of influencing decisions on the allocation of the scarce resources would matter a great deal for the schools.

Some data indeed suggest that the authorities have a persistent problem to address the needs of all schools they are responsible for and that they are giving a preference to some schools over others. Figure 2.2.2 shows an overview of infrastructural needs of schools across Armenia in 2013. It is striking to discover that over half of the public schools in the country need renovation and that well over a third need a complete overhaul. Less than 6% of the schools have hot water, 12.7% have no canalisation, and some schools do not even have a water supply (6.6%).

**Figure 2.2.2 Condition of the school infrastructure in Armenia (2013)**



Source: Armenian Statistical Office <http://stat.armedu.am>

This data is confirmed in interviews with school principals carried out in the course of various studies, some of which presented in Box 2.2.2.

**Box 2.2.2 Views of principals on the need for capital investment in their schools**

During in-depth interviews, all target groups often mentioned physical conditions (specifically need for renovation in many schools) as an issue that needs to be addressed. For school principals, it was often mentioned as the main burning problem. On the other hand, the physical condition was often mentioned as the main recent success story in a specific school or in the sector of school education in general. One thing was common - both parties, having their schools renovated or not, viewed school renovation as the most important aspect of school operation in general.

“The first success is that, being a disaster zone, we have normal schools with the heating system and conditions according to the norms, stone-building, light... Schools are not housed in temporary shelters anymore.”  
Village community head

“The most burning problem is school’s renovation. The school has seen no renovation since 1970 (since its establishment).” School principal, Yerevan

“We need to find sponsors as the school is in need of renovation. If the problems of the village were solved, if it had gasification, the heating of school would also become easier. If the building conditions of our school improve, we will preserve it, and protect the border as well.” School principal, bordering village

Source: Turpanjian Center for Policy Research, 2012, p. 63.

Unfortunately, no study so far has attempted to quantify the benefit of political engagement in terms of funding and between-school variance in the condition of school infrastructure. It is, however, safe to assume that schools have a strong incentive to look for ways, formal and informal, to ensure a more favourable treatment with resource allocations. All evidence so far, anecdotal and empirical, points towards political affiliation as an effective strategy to that end.

#### *Employment (in)security*

Another factor that in all likelihood contributes to the readiness of education professionals to act as political loyalists, is the risk of loss of employment. In some of the interviews during the INTES site visits counterparts noted that despite the official reasons for firing (such as misconduct, absenteeism or proselytism), in reality teachers are being fired for non-compliance with the expectations of the principal and/or of those whose directives the principal is following. Apart from sporadic media reports, evidence that this is a regular practice is scarce. A possible reason is that with some notable exceptions,<sup>52</sup> those who are fired do not want to attract public or media attention to their cases. Civil society organisations that have tried to take such cases to court, report that the teachers are “too scared” to file the complaints themselves.<sup>53</sup>

Teachers are especially vulnerable during elections. The polling stations are commonly in the schools, and the teachers are often members of the electoral commissions. Being the ones in touch with the parents and with this – with a sizeable proportion of the electorate, teachers are also under pressure to lobby for the ruling party. Whether forced or not, their political activity makes them vulnerable on formal grounds because it violates the Law on Education. If they resist and do not engage in political actions, they make themselves vulnerable too, but on informal grounds. In both cases, the choice of consequences is entirely up to the principals or those on whose behalf the principals are acting.

In sum, the risk of being fired is fuelled by precisely the type of behaviour that teachers are expected to show in order to keep their jobs – political activism in support of the incumbent political party. The actual frequency with which teachers are arbitrarily fired by the principals is not as important as the fact that principals as appointing authority are able to fire them at any point in time, while pretending to act in conformity with the rules. The resulting insecurity contributes to a general feeling among teachers that their jobs are at a perpetual risk, which in turn encourages a conformist attitude. At the core of the problem is the unbalanced power of principals (and with this – of supra-ordinate authorities) over hiring and firing of staff (see also part 2.3), and impunity when regulations are disrespected.

<sup>52</sup>See for example [http://www.armenianow.com/news/8326/schools\\_and\\_politics\\_teacher\\_says](http://www.armenianow.com/news/8326/schools_and_politics_teacher_says)

<sup>53</sup> See for example <http://a1.am/en/news-20122014-1933-0>

## D. Pointers for action

### *Closing the opportunities for malpractice*

Armenia is not the only country where education is being politicised. Other countries<sup>54</sup> are exposed to their own versions of this problem. Despite the likely pervasiveness of this challenge, it is still under-reported, under-researched, and there is still little evidence of lessons learned about successful prevention. Should Armenia succeed in halting or even reversing the politicisation trend in its education system, it might easily become an example of good practice for other countries.

Like elsewhere, the politicisation of Armenian education is a systemic issue. It, therefore, calls for strategic and carefully planned responses that require simultaneous action on multiple fronts.

This report recommends that the authorities urgently initiate a de-politicisation process to clean up the public education system of undue influence. The first and foremost step is to acknowledge that politicisation is a problem and commit to its solution in legally binding documents. The following subsections outline a series of more technical interventions that can help to operationalise such a commitment.

### *Main interventions*

A basic instrument against abuse is the law and its enforcement (Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, 2013). A strategy to address politicisation in education should be based on an assessment of the scope of the problem from a legal point of view. A legislative analysis can help to determine whether the initial action should focus on closing gaps in the legislative framework or on improving compliance with existing rules and regulations. Political activism in public education must be prohibited in any of its manifold manifestations.

### *Supporting interventions*

Article 4.8 of the Law on Education prohibits political activism in education institutions, but education professionals can still be members of a political party and advocate for it outside of their professional setting. In practice, this helps to blur the line between permissible and illegitimate actions. For example, a narrower version of Article 4.8 would greatly facilitate compliance and enforcement. An important element in “tightening” the loose ends is to consider whether education staff can be treated in a way similar to special categories of professionals banned from political activism, such as judges and prosecutors. This includes the definition of consequences for non-compliance, which include also the school leadership. Principals must be held accountable for the staff of their schools and their own actions.

### *Eliminating the incentives for malpractice*

#### *Main interventions*

Ultimately, compliance will depend on how well the authorities manage to deal with the incentives currently in place. The elimination of incentives is the probably most difficult part of measures against politicisation. It requires good understanding of the problem and deep-going, long-term systemic adjustments. The analysis in this part of Chapter 2 helped determine what areas of education policy and school operation have to be targeted.

Firstly, the channels through which the political establishment delivers preferential treatment to loyal education institutions must be identified and closed. This might imply a revision of regulations about

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<sup>54</sup> For example, in Latin America ownership of private universities by Parliamentarians is a widespread practice and teacher trade unions are elected as political parties in Parliaments, and in countries of Eastern Europe, it is common for members of government to be represented on the boards of public higher education institutions.

procurement and allocation of resources for capital investment in schools to make those regulations better, more detailed and transparent. This is key to effective control.

Secondly, there is acute need for reforms that will help to reduce the vulnerability of teaching staff *vis à vis* school leadership and its susceptibility to external pressure. Here, the recommendations to part 2.3 of this Chapter apply to the fullest, in particular, the sections about strengthening the effectiveness of school boards and centralising the teacher recruitment procedures.

#### Supporting interventions

As a supporting measure, the media should be encouraged to play a more active role in the public reporting and debate about the problem, and be protected from reprisal when they do so. The fundamental principles of transparency and freedom of information are *sine qua non* pre-conditions for preventing misuse (Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, 2013). Armenia still scores relatively low in the ratings of international freedom of media watchdogs,<sup>55</sup> and defamation cases, especially civil libel cases by politicians against journalists are common. The creation of more favourable conditions for investigative journalism would be a clear (albeit indirect) sign of commitment to the de-politicisation agenda in Armenian schools. An aspect of this drive towards more transparency is to provide for adequate whistle-blower protection for those education professionals who decide to draw attention through the media (or otherwise) to the abuses they are aware of.

#### Summary of recommended actions

| <b>Suspected integrity violation</b>                                       | <b>Recommendations Chapter 2</b>              |     |  | <b>Area of policy intervention</b>     |
|--|---|-----|--|--|
| Suspected integrity violation #2.<br>Politicisation of secondary education | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 12  | Initiate a public de-politicisation process to clean up the public education system of undue influence. Two of the main steps should be to:  |  |
|  |   | 12a | Assess the regulatory framework to verify that it prohibits political activism in public education in any of its manifestations  | Staff policies                         |
|  |   | 12b | Place professional education staff in the category of professionals who are banned from political activism, such as judges and prosecutors, and define consequences for non-compliance   | Staff policies                         |
|  | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 13  | Identify and close the channels through which the political establishment delivers preferential treatment to loyal education institutions. This might mean to revise the regulations about procurement and allocation of resources for capital investment in schools in order to make those regulations better, more detailed and transparent. | Procurement; public finance management |
|  |   | 14  | Encourage and support the media in playing a more active role in the public reporting and debate about the problem, and protect them from reprisal when they do so   | Freedom of media                       |
|  |   | 15  | An aspect of the drive towards more transparency is to provide for adequate whistle-blower protection for education professionals who decide to draw attention through the media (or otherwise) to abuses they are aware of.   | Whistleblower protection               |
|  |   | 16  | As an alternative, consider centralising the teacher recruitment and appointment procedures.   | Staff policies                         |
|  |   | 17  | Reduce the vulnerability of teaching staff vis-à-vis school leadership by strengthening the effectiveness of school boards.  | Governance                             |

<sup>55</sup> See for example <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/armenia#.VVYUyNyUdmM>; <http://www.osce.org/yerevan/116321?download=true>



## 2.3 Suspected integrity violation #3: abuse of procedures for appointment and dismissal of school staff

### VIOLATION ID

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>A. Suspected integrity violation</b>  |  |
| No. 2.3 Abuse of procedures for appointment and dismissal of school staff  |  |
| <b>B. Factors that create opportunity for the violation</b>  |  |
| Ineffective enforcement of rules and regulations<br>Oversupply of teachers<br>School leadership without accountability   |  |
| <b>C. Factors that create incentives for the violation</b>   |  |
| Persistent unemployment<br>Allegiance caused by politicisation<br>Maximisation of private gain   |  |
| <b>D. Pointers for action</b>  |  |
| <b>B:</b>  | <b>C:</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reshape the school inspection process to prevent conflict of interest               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Define disciplinary consequences for non-compliance</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Define binding requirements for school board membership               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alternatively, centralise the recruitment process</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Revise and update the allocation of budget places for pre-service teacher training</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- De-politicise secondary education (see Violation 2.2)</li> <li>- Commission research to better understand the connection between violations of staffing procedures and socio-economic conditions</li> </ul> |

### A. Description

Of the school-related factors that can be directly influenced by policies, the quality of teachers is the one that matters most for student achievement (Schleicher, 2012). Therefore, effective teacher policies would focus on, among other things, attracting the best professionals available, and on retaining them in the profession (OECD, 2005).

Armenia is having difficulties in this respect. Despite an oversupply of graduates from the pedagogical faculties<sup>56</sup> (Table 2.3.1 suggests a ratio of graduations to vacancies in schools of approximately 3.6 to 1), over 14% of the teaching workforce is under-qualified – lacking either a tertiary level qualification, or pedagogical credentials (true for 72% of the teachers), or both (UNICEF, 2011).

**Table 2.3.1 Demand for schoolteachers and supply with graduates from the pedagogical faculties, Armenia**

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Number of graduates from tertiary education | 35002 |
| % of graduates education programmes         | 16.2% |
| Total graduates education programmes        | 5670  |
| Recruitments (1)                            | 1556  |
| Approximate ratio of graduates per vacancy  | 3.6   |

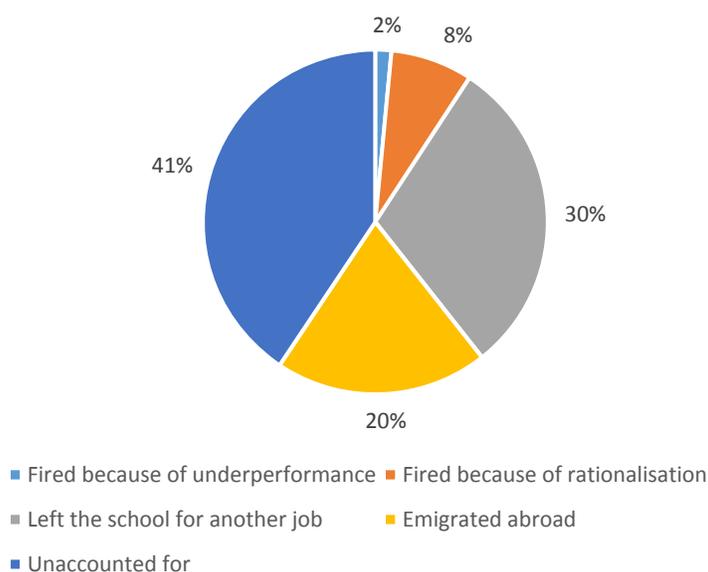
<sup>56</sup> The figures illustrate the opportunities and limitations of finding or offering a job as/to a teacher. While the majority of graduates from the pedagogical faculties wish or specialise to become schoolteachers, the figures do not imply that this is the case with all of them.

Notes: 1. Data for 2012. All other data for 2010.

Data sources: UNESCO UIS Database; Armenian Statistical Office.

The school system not only has difficulties hiring professionals with the necessary qualifications, but also fires quite a few of those that it already employs. In 2013, the number of teachers who left the profession outpaced the number of newly recruited teachers by 45%. Contrary to what one would expect, underperformance was the least common reason for dismissal (only 2% of those who left were fired for incompetence). The biggest share of teachers (41%) left because of reasons that are unaccounted for (Figure 2.3.1).

**Figure 2.3.1 Reasons for leaving the teaching profession in Armenia (2013)**



Source of data: Armenian Statistical Office

Reports collected during the INTES site visits suggest that at least some of the inefficiencies in hiring and firing of staff might be side effects of deliberate actions at the point of entry to the education profession. Rumours about recurrent practices of hiring teachers in exchange for money (especially in rural areas), of teachers and principals on the basis of political or family affiliation,<sup>57</sup> and of firing representatives of both groups with the help of fabricated arguments, appear to be widespread and were a source of concern for most interview counterparts.

**Box 2.3.1 Quote describing a pattern of retaliatory decisions by principals against teachers**

“Let us imagine I am a principal and have a preferable candidate to be chosen as school board member from the teacher Council. If someone from the teachers declares something against it, in that case, I will wait until the beginning of the next school year and will tell her there is no job for him or her”.

Source: Quote from an interview with a school board member presented in Mkrtychyan & Tsaturyan, 2008, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> More recently, Armenian media has even featured stories about principals who are transferring their jobs to their children with the consent of the regional education authorities. See transparency.am; <http://a1.am/en/news-20122014-1933-0>

Year by year the hiring and firing of teachers is subject to well over a third of the public complaints to the MoES (Table 2.3.2). In most of the reported cases of irregularities with hiring and firing, the blame was put on principals who, however, put forward formal reasons to justify their decisions.

**Table 2.3.2 Hiring and firing as share of all complaints to MoES about irregularities (2007, 2009, and 2013)**

| 2007  | 2009  | 2013  |
|-------|-------|-------|
| 36.7% | 36.9% | 34.4% |

Source: Armenian Statistical Office

While there is some clarity about the ways in which it usually happens, there is little to no hard evidence about the actual prevalence of arbitrary hiring and firing of school staff. Some stories tell of mass firings of 10, even 20 people at once, others are about isolated, but not less concerning cases of unfair treatment of individuals (Box 2.3.2).

**Box 2.3.2 Two decisions about dismissal of teachers**

A teacher complained to the governor of the Armavir province about systematic embezzlement of funds by his principal in a village secondary school. The subsequent school inspection failed to find a proof for the claims of the teacher. In what is believed to have been an act of retribution, the whistle-blower teacher was fired. He tried to contest the decision but failed.

In a more recent case, nearly two dozen teachers were dismissed, allegedly for engaging in proselytism in class. After they had been fired, a lawyer requested evidence and documents on their behalf from the Ministry of Education that could prove the allegations against them. The MoES refused to provide such documents and evidence. It is not clear whether such evidence exists at all.

Sources: See transparency.am; <http://a1.am/en/news-20122014-1933-0>

The data in Figure 2.3.1 and the descriptions and stories in Boxes 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 suggest that it is not the frequency with which it happens, but the reasoning behind the known cases that should be of concern. It has a detrimental effect on morale and integrity in the system and creates an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty and distrust.

This section does not aim at generating evidence about the prevalence of abuse of staffing procedures. Even one case of politically motivated dismissal or recruitment (in Armenia the cases are certainly more than one) can become a rapidly spreading example of how the system can be abused, and would thus justify a full chapter in this report. For the purposes of combatting the problem, more important than the absolute number of cases is to determine how such cases are possible (Section B), why they happen (Section C), and what can be done to prevent them (Section D).

**B. Factors that create opportunities for the integrity violation**

*Ineffective enforcement of rules and regulations*

The teachers and principals in Armenian public schools are public employees – a category of employment that has some similarities to the civil service, and some important differences. The similarity lies in the way in which salaries follow a grading scheme that is set in the law and are guaranteed by the state, and in the fact that vacancies are tied to a centrally approved roster of profiles and positions for each school. It is different because, apart from some general principles, there are no uniform rules for recruitment, dismissal, promotion, rotation, training, attestation, etc. of public employees. It is up to each public sector (this includes the municipal level of governance) to define its own staff policies.

Naturally, the MoES has put forward secondary legislation that regulates the process of hiring and firing of school staff.<sup>58</sup> Among other things, it envisages that vacancies are made public and the establishment of a hiring panel/committee to verify whether candidates meet the formal criteria, assess their performance and potential in oral and written tests, and take a decision about who is a successful candidate. Principals are given a key role throughout the process – they establish the panel, participate in the decision-making, and sign the contract with the newly recruited member of staff. They also decide on who will be fired, pending approval by the school board.

There hardly is a lack of formal guidance in this policy area, but compliance with the rules seems to be weak and the de facto role that principals play in the process – bigger than envisaged by law. The INTES assessment had a chance to work with school inspection reports from four regions in Armenia from 2011, 2012 and 2013,<sup>59</sup> all of which determined that candidates with the best qualifications were not always the ones who were hired. The reports identified common violations: principals did not follow the regulations for selecting the candidates properly; some teachers were hired without a selection procedure; and the vacancies were not advertised properly. Cases like these were also mentioned during the INTES site visits. Counterparts also remarked that the principals (acting on their own or someone else's behalf) are the ones who ultimately dominate the hiring and firing processes, and take the final decisions.<sup>60</sup>

How can compliance with rules on a high-stake matter such as employment of professional staff be so low?

Compliance is best described as the ability to act according to a set of rules (ICA, 2015). Compliance with rules seldom comes on its own. It requires enforcement. Delivery of outcomes according to even the best of regulations cannot be effective without proper mechanisms to enforce these regulations (OECD, 2014b). In essence, enforcement is about monitoring compliance and ensuring that there are consequences for non-compliance.

In Armenia, the monitoring process in education is well defined. It envisages procedural violations to be reported to the MoES and the corresponding *Marzpet* by the School Inspectorate. The *Marzpets* are then in charge of forwarding the reports establishing the violations to the school principals together with recommendations by the Inspectorate on how to improve, and of collecting reports from the school boards on how the recommendations are being implemented. A follow-up monitoring is supposed to verify the implementation of the recommendations.

The inspection process relies on the proper functioning of the very same governance bodies – school boards and regional education authorities – that are expected to comply with the rules and are most likely involved in their non-enforcement. Consequently, it is not surprising that in interviews with MoES and the Yerevan municipality, the INTES team failed to find information about sanctions against principals who violated the hiring and firing procedures. On the contrary, praise for their (admittedly important) work is the most common conclusion in the inspection reports.

Another problem is that the legislation does not define consequences for non-compliance with the specific set of rules on hiring and firing. This takes away from principals the fear of consequences, which is an important incentive for compliance and instead creates it at the wrong place – with the teachers, who commonly are reluctant to complain against unfair decisions. Those who decide to complain, address

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<sup>58</sup> A good example of the typical level of detail provided in these regulations is the *Order on organising the competition for teacher vacancies* from April 15, 2013, Order No. 396-N.

<sup>59</sup> Inspection report in Armavir, Ararat, Vayots and Kotayk region of 146 state secondary educational institutions. Analysis of the results of the studies (2011, 2012, 2013)

<sup>60</sup> Of particular concern were anecdotal reports about hiring one teacher for two positions while paying only one salary, and about intentional manipulations of staff numbers and vacant positions.

themselves directly to the MoES, which has limited possibilities to deal with those complaints with the necessary attention to detail.

#### *Oversupply of teachers*

The data in Table 2.3.1 suggests that there is no shortage of candidates for the teaching profession. Except for schools in rural or mountainous areas that might experience shortages and are thus allowed to offer a special set of benefits to attract prospective teacher candidates,<sup>61</sup> all other schools can afford to treat their teachers as a resource that is in constant supply. The oversupply of teachers requires action on the level of tertiary education. In the meantime, it certainly helps to make decisions about firing of staff on secondary level easier to take.

#### *School leadership without accountability*

The formal stance of the education authorities is that schools are granted autonomy in exchange for taking decisions in a democratic and transparent way through a shared decision-making process between principals and school boards.

The school boards have decision-making powers and hold a number of internal control functions. These include the election of school principals, the confirmation of internal disciplinary rules, the validation of school budget reports, verification and approval of the list of staff members, and financial-economic and educational training activities. The boards are also empowered to decide about the use of school revenues (except for the salaries of teachers, which are determined centrally). In addition, the school principal is elected by, accountable to and bound by the decisions of the Board.

As in other areas of the schooling system, the normative framework appears complete, but the application of its provisions lags behind. School boards are largely believed to fail their mission to supervise the work of the school (Turpanjian Center for Policy Research, 2012), thus tipping the balance of shared responsibility towards the principals, many of whom seem to use the school boards to rubber stamp decisions about all aspects of school operation, including staff policies.

The main problem seems to be the quality of school board members, who are purposefully chosen to be passive and/or trapped in a conflict of interest. The parental representatives on the board are either supporting the school or have an affiliation with the principal (or both), and the teachers on the board often are active members of the incumbent party or fear for their contracts on the board loyal to the principal, or the school administration (Turpanjian Center for Policy Research, 2012). This allows principals to act on their own authority when taking decisions on matters related to staff.

In this situation, the school leadership appears to be in a privileged position of power, and the main culprit in procedural violations related to firing and hiring of school staff. In reality though, principals are trapped in the same networks of political and family interdependency like all other players and stakeholders in the public education system. Properly functioning school boards would have helped to isolate and protect the principals from external influence through genuine sharing of responsibility for decisions. Without proper verification through the school board, all decisions of principals, even those that are timely and serve the interests of the school in a legitimate way (for example about hiring good quality teachers), are potentially discredited and can be questioned by the regional and central authorities, civil society, or fellow teachers. This invites blackmail and creates a channel of pressure on school leaders. In a way, the strength of the principals – the possibility to decide unilaterally by violating procedures – is at the same time the source of their biggest vulnerability. It also helps to perpetuate and proliferate the tradition of procedural abuse regarding staff in the pre-university system.

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<sup>61</sup>See Government Decree 586-N of April 14, 2004 on Procedures for Assigning Pedagogical Staff Work in Remote, Mountainous Communities

### C. Factors that create incentives for the integrity violation

#### *Persistent unemployment*

Both external observers and the Armenian public consider poverty and unemployment to be among the most serious problems confronting the country.<sup>62</sup> The unemployment rate in 2014 was 17.6%<sup>63</sup> and according to official statements, close to a third of the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>64</sup> These challenges are often quoted in connection with the limited number of jobs available to tertiary education graduates.

Teaching is the largest single employer of graduate labour in OECD countries (OECD, 2005). In Armenia, education is the third largest sector after agriculture and trade in terms of share of the total workforce employed (9%). Naturally, tertiary graduates in various fields who are keen on working but have difficulties in finding a job and /or do not wish to work in agriculture or the private sector, consider the option of working in education. In rural areas, in particular, working in the local school is sometimes the only hope of receiving regular income, however small, and teachers often are the only earners in the family.

In a labour market that offers very limited opportunities, the prospect of a public job and/or the wish to keep a job create strong incentives to comply with informal requirements, accept procedural violations, but also bribe principals to ensure a favourable outcome of a job application. Some of the anecdotal information collected during the INTES site visits noted, for instance, the existence of price lists for the bribes that are due for a job.

#### *Allegiance caused by politicisation<sup>65</sup>*

Politicisation of schools in Armenia and the pattern of clientelistic relationships that is at the heart of the focus of the previous part of this chapter (2.2). Most acts of support (financial or other) between governance levels in the secondary education system are marked by a commitment to allegiance. Support (financial and otherwise) from top of the education system hierarchy, flows to the bottom under the condition that, in return, actors on the lower levels of the system pledge allegiance to those on the higher levels. For teachers this means to show loyalty to their principal in exchange for employment; for principals this means to follow the line of the regional authorities in exchange for freedom in running their school; and for the regional authorities this means to follow orders from the central government in exchange for staying in power (Figure 2.3.2).

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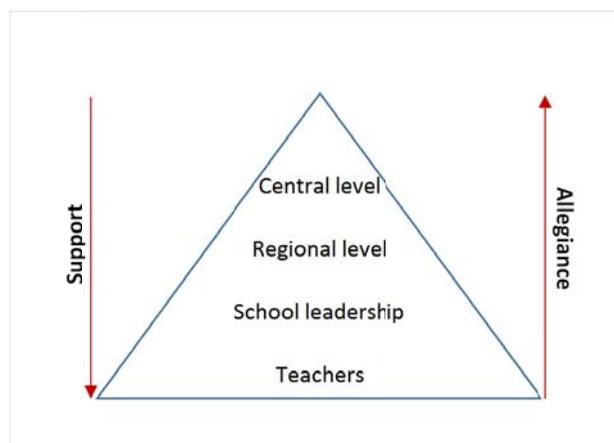
<sup>62</sup><http://www.arminfo.info/index.cfm?objectid=2F57A2F0-C0DF-11E4-8BBA0EB7C0D21663>; <http://en.lin.am/2082.html>

<sup>63</sup><http://www.armstat.am/en/?id=08010&nid=126>

<sup>64</sup>[http://en.apa.az/xeber\\_un\\_poverty\\_and\\_unemployment\\_are\\_the\\_mos\\_201653.html](http://en.apa.az/xeber_un_poverty_and_unemployment_are_the_mos_201653.html)

<sup>65</sup> See also Part 2.2.

**Figure 2.3.2 Support and allegiance transfers in secondary education in Armenia**



Source: INTES assessment team

On the regional level of administration, this promotes an attitude that the schools are an extension of the political apparatus and management structure of the party. This view is further strengthened by the fact that school principals in Armenia either directly owe their job to their political affiliation or are allowed to keep their jobs because of it. (OSI, 2013). This set-up requires regular demonstrations of loyalty, which might as well involve the hiring and firing of staff in violation of the corresponding procedures if requested.

#### *Maximisation of private gain*

Not every instance of malpractice in education can be traced back to a genuine need of a stakeholder group for an education service. Sometimes integrity violations can be motivated by a straightforward, basic desire for private benefit. It is safe to assume that in some cases, the abuse of staff regulations in Armenian schools is driven by prospects of personal enrichment. Still, the analysis so far strongly suggests that the two primary, systemic issues at stake for the principals are to secure the survival and well-being of their institutions, and to foster a healthy relationship with the regional education authorities. In the current situation, the share of principals who violate the rules out of greed and greed alone is not likely to be high.

#### D. Pointers for action

##### *Closing the opportunities for malpractice*

##### *Main interventions*

The readiness of education professionals in Armenian secondary schools to comply with formal rules and regulations is low, as if replaced with a willingness to obey informal rules and networks instead. For the most part, this attitude is being sustained by weak to inexistent regulatory enforcement.

A possible response to this challenge would be to raise the effectiveness of school inspections in ensuring compliance with the normative framework. To that end, it would be necessary to limit formally or fully eliminate the reliance of the inspection process on the very same entities that are subject to inspection. These entities are the school boards and, through their responsibility for the schools, indirectly also the regional education authorities. The school boards and regional authorities could be involved in remedial of formative action *vis à vis* offenders (teachers, principals, entire institutions) which are under their responsibility, but should not be in charge of punitive follow-up as is the case now.

Another key intervention should aim at defining proportionate consequences for non-compliance with the rules on hiring and firing, and at demonstrating that they are being enforced.

Finally yet importantly, the supervisory function of the school boards depends on the quality of school board members. It is recommended to define binding requirements for their membership and include provisions against conflict of interest, in particular such that emerge from an overlap of roles (*e.g.* teachers with children enrolled in the school that they are expected to supervise).

An alternative, but more radical solution to the abuse of staffing procedures would be to centralise the recruitment process, effectively taking away responsibilities from the school leadership and the regions, and thus limiting the potential sources of abuse. Candidates would go through a competition procedure, and the successful ones will be put on a reserve list from which the authorities can choose and appoint them to any school in the country, as needed. A system like this is not immune to corruption and can have other disadvantages, but it makes the monitoring of compliance with rules much easier. The roster of vacancies could be filled in by schools with the approval of regional education departments, but it will be managed centrally. France and Spain are examples of countries that have arranged their teacher staffing policies in a similar way.

#### Supporting interventions

It is worthwhile to consider how to curb the oversupply of education professionals by universities. If supply is more in line with actual demand in the education system, it is likely that in the end, the value of teachers will rise and that school leaders in Armenia will start to treat the school staff as a key and valuable education resource.

A promising, longer-term way to achieve this could be to revise and update the historically determined allocations of budget places for teacher training, the number of which was in most cases set a long time ago to serve the needs of a much bigger education system.

#### *Eliminating the incentives for malpractice*

As noted in Section C, participants in education have three main motives to abuse hiring and firing procedures: political loyalty (allegiance), socio-economic need (unemployment), and maximisation of private gain. Private gain can only be tackled through interventions recommended under Section B. The remaining two require long-term strategic responses, some of which fall beyond the reach of decisions that can be taken in the education sector.

#### Main interventions

Next to maximisation of private gain, political allegiance is the primary motive of school leadership and regional authorities to engage in the violations described in this part of the report. The effects of political allegiance can be neutralised through a coordinated, persistent effort to de-politicise education, as outlined in part 2.2 of this Chapter

#### Supporting interventions

The primary incentive for teachers to engage proactively in procedural abuse is socio-economic need. The rules and procedures for hiring and firing in Armenian schools are set with the purpose of identifying quality candidates for the teaching profession, and dismissing teachers who violate them or underperform. However, in a country with a persisting unemployment problem which is particularly acute in disadvantaged and/or rural regions, the teaching profession is miss-taken for a privilege and a remedy for unemployment and socio-economic hardship. This particular motivation to bend or break rules is understandable, and some of the teachers who have been hired “illegally” might be professionals with a vocation and talent for teaching. What counts though is not their aptitude or personal situation, but the way they have been hired or fired – in compliance with the rules or despite them.

Improvements in the socio-economic situation of prospective teachers will likely have a positive effect. Before action in this direction is undertaken, it is recommended to commission research to understand better the connection between staffing violations and socio-economic conditions or those who engage in them.

*Summary of recommended actions*

|   |   |    |   |                                       |
|---|---|----|---|---------------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #3. Abuse of procedures for appointment and dismissal of school staff | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 18 | Raise the effectiveness of school inspections in ensuring compliance with the normative framework, by limiting or fully eliminating the reliance of the inspection process on the very same entities that are subject to inspection | School inspections                    |
|   |   | 19 | Define proportionate consequences for non-compliance with the rules on hiring and firing, and demonstrate that they are being enforced .  | Staff policies                        |
|   |   | 20 | See recommendation No. 16   | Staff policies                        |
|   |   | 21 | Define binding requirements for schoolboard membership and include provisions against conflict of interest, in particular such that emerge from an overlap of roles.  | Governance                            |
|   |   | 22 | Curb the oversupply of education professionals by revising and updating the historically determined allocations of budget places for teacher training.  | Public finance management (budgeting) |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 23 | Commission research to understand better the connection between staffing violations and socio-economic conditions of those who engage in them.  | Follow-up research: staff policies    |

## 2.4 Suspected integrity violation #4: Undue recognition of learning achievement

### VIOLATION ID

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>A. Suspected integrity violation</b>  |  |
| No. 2.4 Undue recognition of learning achievement  |  |
| <b>B. Factors that create opportunity for the violation</b>  |  |
| Limited capacity to implement assessment reforms<br>Limitations in teacher training<br>Shortcomings in the practice of school inspections  |  |
| <b>C. Factors that create incentives for the violation</b>   |  |
| Dependency of schools on parents<br>Private gain?  |  |
| <b>D. Pointers for action</b>  |  |
| <b>B:</b>  | <b>C:</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undertake in-depth evaluation of the assessment reforms in view of adjusting them and setting up a monitoring of assessment practices</li> <li>- Provide an opportunity for capacity building to all teachers</li> <li>- Diversify the information to parents about student progress and achievement</li> <li>- Consider introducing formative assessment approaches</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undertake in-depth research on the marking bias in classroom assessment</li> <li>- Use the results to improve the working conditions and introduce more transparency in the classroom assessment process</li> </ul> |

### A. Description

Evaluation and assessment of student performance are key to understanding how well students are learning. The results can guide improvements in teaching practice and school operation and help to increase accountability *vis à vis* stakeholders (OECD, 2013a). According to the National Curriculum for General Education, in Armenia the main goal of student assessment is the monitoring of learners' knowledge and their abilities and skills. The results are intended to help in improving the learning process and achievements of students (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, 2010, p. 8).

To assess learning achievement, Armenia resorts to three types of student assessment: classroom assessment, unified standardised testing (examination), and system-level diagnostic testing. The results of the first two are individual and have an impact on the academic success of students. The purpose of the diagnostic testing is to monitor the overall performance of the education system and has no consequences for the individual student. The classroom assessment is carried out regularly by the teachers and provides “real-time information” (World Bank, 2011) on student progress. At present, the sole purpose of classroom assessment and external examination in Armenia is summative.<sup>66</sup> The standardised testing is administered by an external institution (Assessment and Testing Centre – ATC) at the end of grade 12 and serves both as high school graduation and as university entrance test.

At the centre of (summative) assessment is the recognition of achievement. When achievement becomes an empty word, assessment cannot fulfil any of its important functions and can easily turn into an instrument for promoting and defending personal interest.

<sup>66</sup> The purpose of assessments can vary. In principle, they can record and certify achievements (assessment of learning or “summative assessment”), or identify aspects of learning in order to better shape subsequent instruction (assessment for learning or “formative assessment”) (OECD, 2013a).

There are indications that in Armenia, classroom assessment is susceptible to violations of this kind. Evidence analysed in the course of preparation of this report points towards undue recognition of learning achievement as a common practice, in particular grading (marking) students on the basis of criteria other than merit (*e.g.* money, family ties, external pressure, etc.). The two most visible manifestations of this form of malpractice are the inflation of marks (grades) due to end-of-year pressure by parents for good results<sup>67</sup>, and marking in absentia. The latter is a form of informal “support” by teachers tolerating the prolonged absence from class of students who prepare for the graduation and university entrance exam.

*Undue recognition of learning achievement through marking bias*

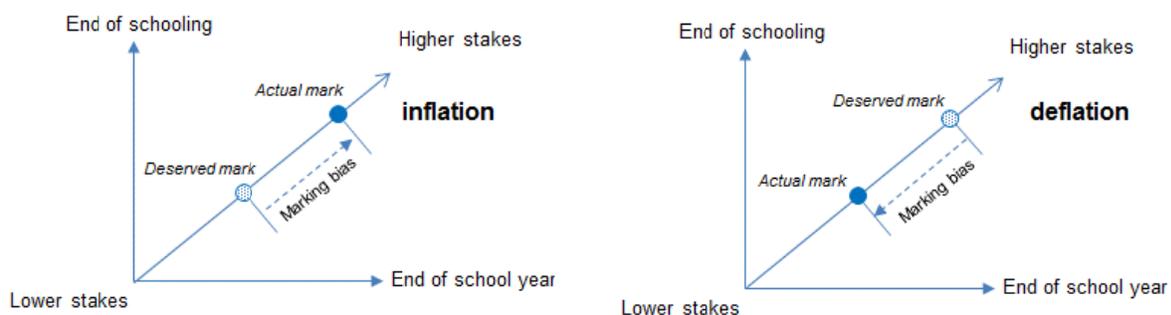
Classroom assessment in general education is delegated to schools and teachers, who are free to choose the methods and set the assessment standards. The most commonly used methods are questioning and oral tests, written tasks (“control works”), and homework tasks (Bethell & Harutyunyan, 2008). Typically, secondary school teachers will set four control works each year in Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Armenian Language and a Foreign Language. All forms of assessment are graded on a 10-point scale.

Teacher-administered assessments are an important source of information about student success, but they are not necessarily the most reliable one. When marking, teachers in Armenia, just like teachers working in similar conditions elsewhere, resort to classroom and school-specific norms, for example by comparing each student’s achievements with those of other students in the same class or year. No matter how experienced they are in doing this, their judgements are prone to subjective bias, especially when assessment norms can be chosen and changed freely and at any time, as is the case in Armenian schools.

This happens in other education systems too. Recent analysis of data and questionnaire responses on school marking in 21 of the 75 countries that participated in OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that teachers systematically tend to reward certain student characteristics that are unrelated to learning. For example, all other things being equal (including students’ reading proficiency and attitudes to learning), girls and socio-economically advantaged students were receiving higher marks than their peers (OECD, 2012).

In Armenia, the bias in marking is observable in particular around the end of the school year and towards the end of schooling. The higher the stakes, the higher the pressure on teachers to mark students more favourably and the bigger the temptation for teachers to extort favours by undervaluing student achievement (Figure 2.4.1).

**Figure 2.4.1. The logic of grade inflation (typically as a result of external pressure on teachers) and of grade deflation (typically to create artificial demand for private tutoring)**



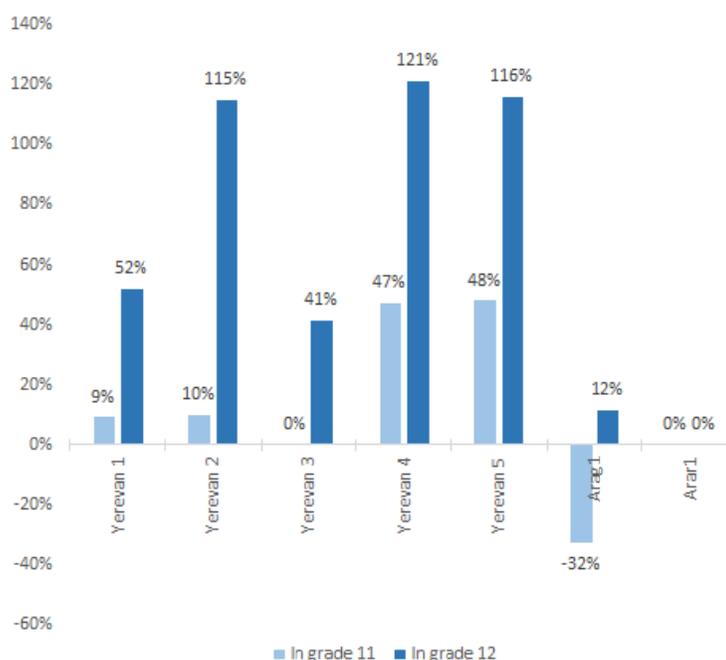
<sup>67</sup> The INTES assessment team could not find evidence of widespread grade deflation.

Source: INTES assessment team

In an integrity survey carried out in 2013 among secondary school teachers in Armenia, 58.1% of the respondents admitted having personally been involved in over-marking. Of those who named their reasons, 60% said that they had no choice (Avetisyan & Milovanovitch, forthcoming).

The presence of a marking bias in classroom assessment is also confirmed by evidence on a bigger scale. Figure 2.4.2 is based on data about average graduation marks in grades 10-12 in high schools in Yerevan and the Marzes of Aragatsotn and Aparan.<sup>68</sup> The figure shows the difference in share of high-performing students (defined as students who achieved at least 7 out of 10 points in all subjects on average in the last term of the school year) in grades 11 and 12, to the share of students with the same level of achievement in grade 10.

**Figure 2.4.2 Share of high performing students in grades 11 and 12 with grade 10 as a baseline (2013)**



Note: Baseline=grade 10. High-performing students are defined as those who were given by their teachers at least 7 points on average in all subjects in the last term of the school year.

Source of data: (CFOA, 2013). Calculations: INTES assessment team.

For grade 11, the comparison renders diverse results. In some schools the share of high achievers was lower (-32% in Aragatsotn) than in grade 10, in others (Yerevan 3) it was the same, and in some the share of excellent students was 48% higher than the share in the more junior cohort. The picture is less ambiguous at the end of grade 12. In all schools but one (Aparan) the share of students who excel in all subjects was very much higher than in grade 10, up to impressive 121%.

These are dramatic differences in learning achievement between student cohorts. How is it possible that, in the same school, the relative number of high achievers can be so much higher in grade 12 than in grade 10 or 11? One of the possible explanations is that the lower performing students have dropped out between the end of grade 10 and the end of grade 12, but in Armenia, the dropout rate is quite low in international comparison (Hua, 2008).

<sup>68</sup> The real names and numbers of the schools have been changed.

Another possibility is that shortly before graduation more students mobilise themselves to learn better than in grade 10. In reality, the opposite is the case. In grade 12, most of the time and effort is invested in preparations for the standardised exit exam, not in classroom learning. This is time-consuming to an extent where it creates a serious problem with absenteeism, as discussed later in this part of Chapter 2.

Last but not least, the difference between grades might be due to a marking bias, in particular, grade inflation. External assessments of student achievement carried in 2013 by the School Inspectorate in another set of schools corroborate this possibility. The purpose of the Inspectorate’s assessments was to verify the extent to which the marks of students reflect the quality of their learning outcomes. The Inspection administered a dictation to pupils in grade 7 in 5 schools and to pupils in grade 10 in 4 schools. The results are presented in Table 2.4.1.

**Table 2.4.1 External and classroom assessment results in Armenian language in selected schools in grades 7 and 10 (2013)**

| Institution | Grade | Students who failed on dictation | Students who <u>could</u> have good or excellent annual results in Armenian language | Students with good or excellent annual results in Armenian language | Students with good or excellent results whose achievement is <u>not</u> justified |
|-------------|-------|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
|             |       | Share of total<br>A              | Share of total<br>B=100%-A   | Share of total<br>C   | Share of total<br>D=C-B   |
| 1           | VII   | 83%                              | 17%  | 67%   | 50%   |
| 2           |       | 60%                              | 40%  | 80%   | 40%   |
| 3           |       | 50%                              | 50%  | 91%   | 41%   |
| 4           |       | 92%                              | 8%   | 44%   | 36%   |
| 5           |       | 71%                              | 29%  | 50%   | 21%   |
| 1           | X     | 58%                              | 42%  | 65%   | 23%   |
| 2           |       | 63%                              | 37%  | 78%   | 41%   |
| 3           |       | 83%                              | 17%  | 50%   | 33%   |
| 4           |       | 85%                              | 15%  | 30%   | 15%   |

Note: The names of institutions have been removed.

Data source: School Inspectorate.

Column A shows the share of students who failed the task in each of the schools. Column B shows the share of students who did not fail the dictation and, in theory, could have been given good or excellent marks by their teachers. Column C shows the share of students from the same student group that took the dictation task, who received good or excellent annual grades from their teachers. If marks would reflect achievement, the share of high achievers should not surpass by much the share of those who did not fail on the dictation task (Column B). If it does, it means that some of the students who failed the dictation task and are thus not proficient in written Armenian (Column A) must have received a good or excellent mark in Armenian language from their teachers, which in turn would prove the presence of a marking bias.

Column D shows the difference between the share of “high achievers” and the share of those who managed the dictation task. The figures are revealing. Between 15% and 50% of the students in the tested grades and schools have received marks that they do not seem to deserve. It is interesting to note the presence of a considerable marking bias even well ahead<sup>69</sup> of the high-stakes at the end of schooling in grade 12.

These findings are in line with a certain attitude towards learning and assessment in general that transpired in discussions with parents and students during the site visits for the INTES assessment. Both

<sup>69</sup> The grades tested were 7 and 10.

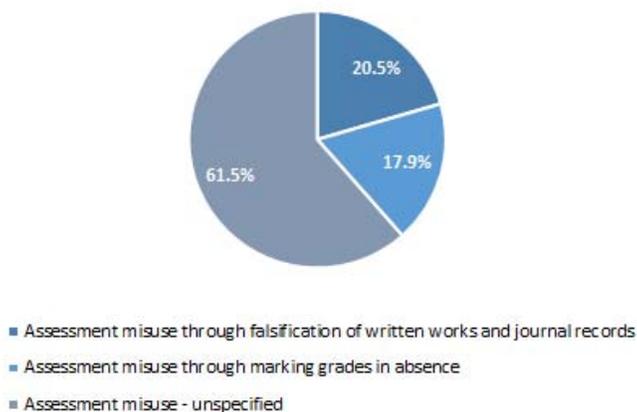
groups appeared to be concerned mostly with the result – the mark itself – but not with the question of whether the mark is reliable, justified and reflecting real learning achievement.

#### *Undue recognition of learning achievement through marking in absentia*

Another common form of undue recognition of learning achievement in Armenian schools is marking in absentia. Around the end of schooling, a considerable number of students skip classes in order to prepare for the graduation and university entrance examination. Some estimates speak of as much as 10% of the student cohort being absent on any given day in grade 12 on average, across the country (UNICEF, 2008). The INTES assessment team was informed that it is common for students to cease attending school whatsoever in the last semester of grade 12, in formal agreement with their teachers who believe that by tolerating absenteeism, they support the students in their endeavour to prepare for university.<sup>70</sup>

Education researchers, students and activists, but also teachers interviewed during the site visits remarked that student absenteeism in grade 12 is a serious challenge and that teachers are often left with no other alternative but giving marks in absentia. In the 2013 survey of teachers from different regions in Armenia, 17.9% of the respondents who reported to have been personally involved in abuse of assessment, admit to have given marks to students who were not in class at the time of assessment (Figure 2.4.3).

**Figure 2.4.3 Prevalence of classroom assessment misuse by type, share of total**



Note: Total number of valid survey responses n=93

Source: Avetisyan & Milovanovitch, forthcoming

For such an obvious violation to be possible, the design and/or practice of classroom assessment must be plagued by some serious deficits. Sections B and C go through some of the possible explanations for this and the preceding form of undue recognition of learning achievement, discussing the factors that most likely make the violations possible, and those that are driving demand for them.

<sup>70</sup> Almost none of these absentees are reported under any of the wastage indicators since they are not included in dropout, repetition, or those who are regarded as absent for more than predefined number of hours (UNICEF, 2008). Schools also have a motive not to report absenteeism properly. If they were to report the real magnitude of the problem, they would be put in a higher risk category, subjected to more rigorous and frequent school inspections, and placed lower in the national school ranking.

## B. Factors that create opportunities for the integrity violation

### *Limited capacity to implement assessment reforms*

International experience shows that for teachers' judgements to be reliable, they must be guided by assessment policy frameworks that specify the procedures and objective criteria of assessment (OECD, 2013a).

On paper, Armenia has introduced such criteria and procedures. This was done in order to reform classroom assessment practices that dated back to Soviet times and were considered to be unreliable and prone to a subjective bias. The new assessment rules are outlined in clear and detailed Orders of the Ministry of Education and Science from 2012 and 2014 and a number of supporting regulations on standards and curriculum.<sup>71</sup> The content that is subject to assessment is organised in educational spheres (e.g. Armenian, Mathematics, Social sciences etc.), each with components to be assessed in students such as knowledge system, student abilities and skills (cognitive, logical, communicative, cooperative, creative), ability to work independently, and value system. Textbooks and workbooks on classroom assessment activities, scoring criteria and rubrics for evaluating students' work, as well as item banks or pools with examples of selection/multiple-choice or supply/open-ended questions are available to teachers in support of implementing the novelties and working in accordance with the new system.

However, the realities of teaching and learning seem to be ill-suited to take the reform to the fullest, and translate it into new and better practice of classroom assessment. The assessment component "student ability and skills" for example is broken down into the following cognitive methods that students are expected to master and be assessed in: analysis, specification, comparison, abstraction, reflection, induction, deduction, generalization and projection. In one-on-one interviews during the site visits, teachers shared that they find it hard to organise their work and assess in such a diversified way in conditions where time is often limited time and classes – oversized. That insufficient time limits the application of better assessment approaches by hindering a better organisation of the school day is confirmed also in the analysis of a 2013 report on teacher professional development that collected information from 450 students, 49 teachers and 27 principals (Khachatryan, Petrosyan, & Terzyan, 2013). In addition, teachers who underwent specialised training and praised its quality were in the same position of having trouble with applying the new knowledge in their everyday practice.

The consequence is superficial compliance (if any) with the new requirements, facilitated also by the fact that the new assessment dimensions and criteria are quite diversified, but at the same time also formulated broadly, leaving ample room for personal interpretation.

The grading system is part of the problem. Without proper, in-depth implementation of the assessment reform, the 10 points grading scheme currently in place can be applied as arbitrary as the previous one, which had half the range of grades. In the absence of clear guidance on how the newly defined student abilities and skills translate into achievement points, there are manifold, self-imposed distortions in the way teachers grade their students at the two extreme ends of the grading scale. According to anecdotal evidence, teachers are reluctant to give the maximum number of points to any student in order to not attract attention to their grading decisions and raise suspicion of blatant grade inflation. At the same time, they never give a mark below 4 to avoid conflicts with parents and attract attention to their performance as teachers.

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<sup>71</sup> See for example Order No. 388 of 3 May 2012, with recent amendment No. 491 of 8 May 2014 at <http://aniedu.am/school/normdocuments.html> and also Order No. 37 of 21 January 2014 at <http://aniedu.am/school/assessment-page.html>.

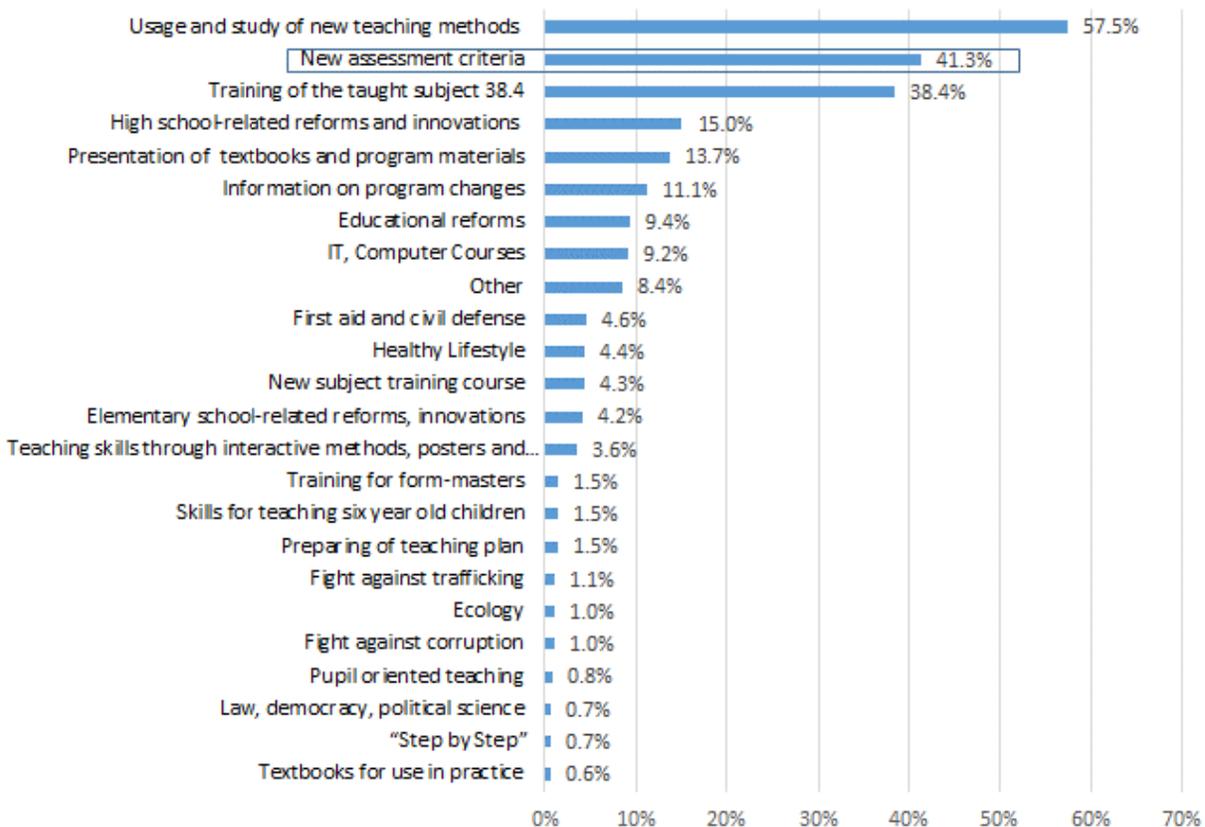
It is difficult to hold teachers accountable for such practices. The vague assessment criteria make it nearly impossible to prove there is a difference between learning achievement that deserves 4 points and one that deserves 3 points, for example, or that a student who has been graded 9 points would have in fact deserved 10. In fact, this very same vagueness makes it relatively easy to inflate any grade to the next best one(s) if need be.

None of this affects the confidence of teachers in their ability to assess students' knowledge objectively (IPSC, 2011). From what the INTES team gathered from the site visits and interviews, the source of such self-confidence comes from the fact that the assessment reform is not perceived as a real challenge to the "business as usual", as teachers can continue to assess like they always did, should they wish to. In fact, the reform novelties are perceived as nothing more than an additional administrative burden (UNICEF, 2011).

*Limitations in teacher training*

The package of assessment reforms also included opportunities for capacity building support for teachers to familiarise themselves with the enhancements (World Bank, 2011). Some of the data processed by the INTES team shows that these opportunities are being used, to a considerable extent. 41.3% of the 1050 teachers who participated in a 2011 survey of teachers' and principals' professional development had a training course on new assessment criteria, the second-best attended course of all courses offered in that year (Figure 2.4.4).

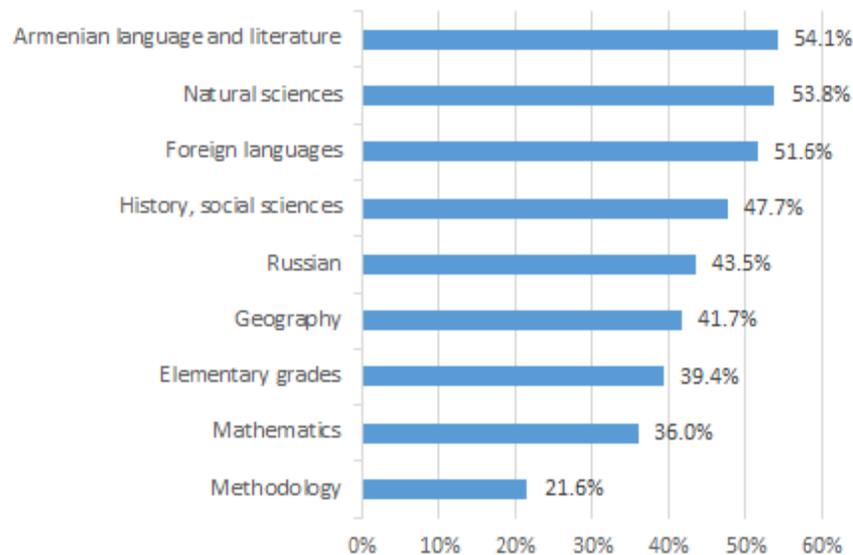
**Figure 2.4.4. Share of teachers who attended a training course, by topic**



Data Source: IPSC, 2011

However, some teachers are more likely to participate in criteria-based assessment training than other teachers. The vast majority of those who attended the professional development courses listed in Figure 2.1.4 were teachers of Armenian language and literature (54.1%), followed by teachers in natural sciences (53.8%). The share of attendees teaching in mathematics, in primary education, geography and Russian was considerably lower, in comparison: 36%; 39.4%; 41.7% and 43.5% respectively (Figure 2.4.5).

**Figure 2.4.5 Share of teachers trained in new assessment methods, by basic specialization**



Note: The survey presents aggregate figures on attendance from different years. Therefore, the total surpasses 100%.

Source of data: IPSC, 2011

Proper and reliable assessment of student success on school level depends not only on the ability and knowledge of particular teachers or groups of teachers, but also on the professionalism of the teachers' team as a whole and on its capacity for peer collaboration. One would expect that capacity building on an issue as central as criteria-based assessment is evenly provided to all, or at least to a selection of teachers teaching subjects of significance for progression to the next grade or education level. The fact that this is not the case represents an additional obstacle to the proper implementation of the assessment reform, and thus to the closure of opportunities to abuse classroom assessment.

#### *Shortcomings in the practice of school inspections*

Beyond the anecdotal evidence already noted, there is not much certainty about the extent to which teachers apply the criteria and new assessment methods once they go back to their classrooms after having been trained. The first and foremost point of concern in this respect is the absence of mechanisms to ensure that classroom assessment practices comply with the new rules.

The State Inspectorate is entrusted with a general responsibility for the inspection of examination procedures, testing and assessment, but none of the Inspectorate reports since the introduction of the assessment reform, has dealt with an evaluation of whether and if yes, how well the new assessment

criteria are being applied.<sup>72</sup> The INTES team could also not verify the existence of functioning “varied and systematic mechanisms to monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices” as stated in the SABER report for Armenia (World Bank, 2011).

In the absence of adequate verification of compliance, what would prevent teachers from not applying any assessment rules at all, if need be? Nothing, as suggested by the findings in Section A.

### C. Factors that create incentives for the integrity violation

#### *Dependency of schools on parents*

The analysis so far has helped to establish that, in Armenian public schools, learning achievement is not the only way to obtain better marks. Of all groups participating in education (teachers, students, parents and administrators), parents are the only stakeholder group that has both a direct benefit from more favourable marks, and the leverage to influence classroom assessment results. The sources of influence are the material support that parents provide to the schools of their children, and the political and/or personal connections to decision-makers in education. Parental pressure is particularly effective when exercised by parents who happen to be also school board members, teachers or political functionaries.

So far, there is no empirical evidence about the prevalence of trading in parental influence in public schools. This is partly because this kind of pressure is mostly indirect, exercised through proxies such as the regional education authorities or the principals, which makes it hard to trace it back to its origin (Avetisyan & Milovanovitch, forthcoming). Partly it is due to the absence of research on the marking bias in Armenian classrooms. It is interesting to note that classical forms of corruption such as direct bribing of teachers are not as common as one would perhaps expect. Only some 6% of the households reported that, during the current and previous academic years, they were requested to provide a teacher with a “gift” (Armstat, 2014).

Except for those who are school board members, most parents are not a formal part of the education system and thus are not directly bound by its rules. Therefore, instead of focusing on the parental motives to exercise pressure, it is more important to understand the channels through which this pressure can influence the schools to an extent where they neglect basic principles such as fairness and merit in recognising learning achievement. The main channels are, perhaps less surprisingly, teachers and school leadership.

#### *Teachers as a vulnerable professional group*<sup>73</sup>

The probably most obvious of channels are the teachers who are, without a doubt, instrumental in the production of fake student results.

The leitmotif in the discussion about their employment situation and work environment in the preceding parts of this report is that teachers are the most vulnerable category of professionals in the education system. Their dependence on informal arrangements and loyalty expectations set by the school leadership makes them an easy target for coercion even for practices that clearly go against their professional integrity, such as undue recognition of student achievement. Sixty-eight % of the teachers who participated in the teacher integrity survey, recognised that this behaviour is problematic, but did not see themselves in the position to resist or change anything (Avetisyan & Milovanovitch, forthcoming). Their problematic behaviour is a form of investment in preserving the fragile status quo of their

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<sup>72</sup> An exception are the ad-hoc external examinations carried out between 2011 and 2013, used as source of data presented in Table 2.2.1.

<sup>73</sup> See also Part 2.2 and Part 2.3, Section C on employment in (security).

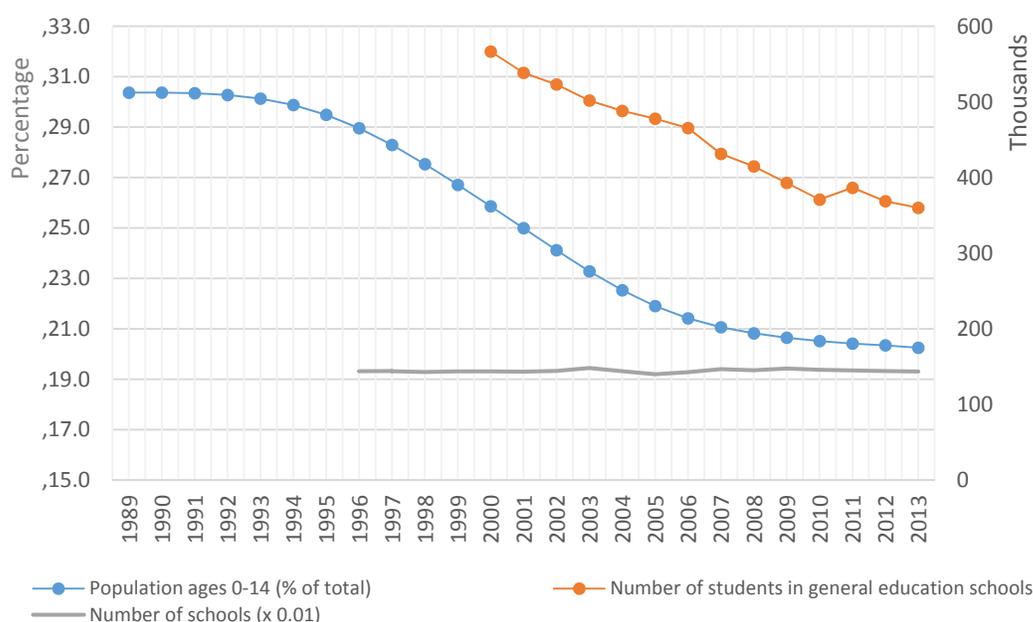
employment while remaining in a good relationship with the teachers' collective of their schools. Further "incentives" could include an opportunity to participate in training that is necessary for their compulsory attestation as teachers, long overdue career advancement, or distribution of teaching hours.

This means that the typical motive to succumb to parental pressure and mark more favourably would hardly involve direct, ad hoc benefits. In the self-reported cases of malpractice recorded in the teacher integrity survey, less than 5% were motivated by a prospect of personal enrichment. This is an important insight as it suggests that constructive, positive policy responses to the problem might be more effective than the introduction of punitive, corrective measures.

#### School leaders and their competition for students and funding

Another, perhaps less visible channel of influence for parents are the school principals. Most of them are in charge of schools that are struggling to attract a diminishing number of students and keep them formally enrolled at any price in order to secure funding from the state budget (Armenia applies a per capita funding formula). For years now, this must have been an increasingly difficult task. Over the past two decades, the size of the school network (in terms of number of general education schools) has remained unchanged, despite a decline in the share of youngsters aged 0 to 14 by roughly a third in the period since 1989, and a drop in enrolment of over 36% in the period since the year 2000 (Figure 2.4.6).

**Figure 2.4.6 Trends in demography, enrolment and number of general education schools, earliest year available to 2014**



Data sources: World Bank Database; National Statistical Service of Armenia.

In the current situation, schools can ill afford to lose any of their students – both because of the public funding that comes along with each student, and because of the support that their parents could provide for the school. In discussions with parents during the INTES site visits, it became clear that changing of schools is a common way of ensuring more favourable treatment and conditions for students ahead of the graduation exams, for example. Instructing teachers to compromise assessment procedures by inflating student marks, or by marking in absentia, might have in fact become a standard of behaviour

for school administrators who wish to pre-empt a decline in enrolment in their schools, and send a message to prospective new students and their families that in their schools “things” can be “arranged”. Besides, the average scores have an influence on the ranking of schools and from there – on their overall attractiveness.

#### *Maximisation of private gain as a driver of grade deflation?*

It is a classical scheme – a teacher undervalues a student and after a short round of private tutoring, the learning achievement of the student skyrockets to the desired level. The INTES assessment team was provided with sporadic, anecdotal evidence of teachers who under-grade their students in order to force them into private tutoring lessons – a practice that allegedly gains in intensity around the end of each school year. There is no reason to doubt the truth of such claims, but the INTES assessment did not find sufficient evidence to claim that grade deflation is a common practice, or that tutoring demand can be reliably traced back to it. A further, more in-depth research on the topic of undue recognition of learning achievement should bring more clarity in this matter.

#### D. Pointers for action

##### *Closing the opportunities for malpractice*

###### *Main interventions*

Teachers are experiencing difficulties in applying the new assessment methods and principles in their daily work – methods that have the potential to make classroom assessment more reliable and resistant to bias. Before the barriers to the implementation of the new assessment framework can be removed, it is paramount to understand what these barriers are. Not much is known about what factors precisely limit the teachers in applying the novelties they have been trained in, whether they are the same for all schools and teacher profiles, whether there are teachers who apply the new methods at all, and if yes, how.

It is recommended to undertake an in-depth evaluation of assessment reform implementation and entrust the school inspectorate with the task as an external institution that works in closest possible proximity to the schools. The results should be used to:

- Identify, describe and analyse the limitations in the working conditions of teachers that prevent proper assessment reform implementation (such as time for teaching, class size, or else);
- Fine-tune the scope of reform to make it applicable to the typical conditions of work in the schools;
- Develop a framework for regular monitoring of assessment practices by teachers and schools with the purpose of recommending system-level improvements (and not as a form of evaluation of teachers’ performance).

###### *Supporting interventions*

Proper and reliable assessment of student success depends not only on the ability and knowledge of particular teachers or groups of teachers, but also on the professionalism of the teachers’ team as a whole and on its capacity for peer collaboration. The authorities should ensure that capacity building on an issue as central as criteria-based assessment is evenly provided to all teachers, irrespective of the subject they teach.

Furthermore, effort should be invested in changing the predominant attitude towards learning and assessment according to which the result – the mark itself – is the only real deliverable of the education

process. More concretely, the information from schools to parents about student achievement must be diversified to include details about the marking process, justification of the marks given in classroom assessments, and other relevant observations on the progress of students (see Part 2.1). A possibility to achieve this is to start with the introduction of a formative use of assessment results.

### *Eliminating the incentives for malpractice*

#### *Main interventions*

Undue recognition of achievement is known to be a common practice in Armenian education, but little is known about the typical circumstances under which it happens and about the prevalent motives and attitudes of those involved (apart from the parents, whose motives should be obvious). The analysis in this last part of Chapter 2 pointed out the employment vulnerability as a possible reason for staff to succumb to direct or indirect parental pressure. It would be easier to translate this finding into action if it would be underscored by empirical evidence about its circumstances, as well as the attitudes of teachers towards the violation.

It is therefore recommended to undertake an in-depth research on the marking bias in classroom assessment, and use it as a basis for targeted improvements in the working conditions of teachers and more transparency in the classroom assessment process. In the meantime, the recommendation about enforcing compliance with staffing rules (see part 2.3), applies to the problems discussed here as well.

#### *Supporting interventions*

In the absence of additional public investment in schooling, in the longer run a rationalisation of the oversized school network is inevitable. Even if it appears to be a far-fetched recommendation, an optimisation of the school network will not only contribute to a more efficient use of resources invested in the system, but also diminish the competitiveness pressure on principals, who obviously do not compete through higher quality of education, but through the level of readiness of their staff to satisfy informal parental demands.

### *Summary of recommended actions*

| <b>Suspected integrity violation</b>  | <b>Recommendations Chapter 2</b>              |    |  | <b>Area of policy intervention</b> |
|---|---|----|--|------------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #4. Undue recognition of learning achievement | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 24 | Undertake an in-depth evaluation of assessment reform implementation, and entrust the school inspectorate with the task. The Focus should be on: limitations in the working conditions that prevent implementation; suggestions to adjust the scope of reform; a framework for regular monitoring of assessment practices in view of constant improvement. | Follow-up research: assessment     |
|   |   | 25 | Ensure that capacity building on issues as central as criteria-based assessment is evenly provided to all teachers   | Professional development: teachers |
|   |   | 26 | Diversify the information about student progress that is provided to parents, <i>i.e.</i> by including details about the marking process, justification of the marks given in classroom assessments, and other relevant observations on the progress of students.  | Assessment; quality assurance      |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 27 | Undertake in-depth research on the marking bias in classroom assessment.   | Follow-up research: assessment     |
|   |   | 28 | As a long-term goal, rationalise the oversized school network  | School network optimisation        |



## Chapter 3: Integrity of Higher Education

### 3.1 Suspected integrity violation #1: Cheating and plagiarism

#### VIOLATION ID

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>A. Suspected integrity violation</b>  |   |
| No. 3.1 Cheating and plagiarism  |   |
| <b>B. Factors that create opportunity for the violation</b>  |   |
| Ignorance and impunity<br>Deficient detection mechanisms<br>Staff motivation and working conditions  |   |
| <b>C. Factors that create incentives for the violation</b>   |   |
| Lack of intrinsic motivation to study<br>Overloaded and/or outdated study content  |   |
| <b>D. Pointers for action</b>  |   |
| <b>B:</b>  | <b>C:</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop rules and guidelines against academic dishonesty</li> <li>- Raise awareness about the scope of academic dishonesty, improve capacity to enforce the rules, and define consequences for non-compliance with them</li> <li>- Mobilise the potential of student initiatives for more transparency</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve student motivation by ensuring better match between study choices, interests and aptitude of students</li> <li>- Create the conditions and incentives for faculties to embark on a reassessment and possibly calibration of their study curricula</li> </ul> |

#### A. Description

Academic integrity should be the foundation of any academic career. On the other hand, academic dishonesty devalues the concept of merit that is the foundation of trust in education and its outcomes. Academic dishonesty can manifest itself through cheating, fraud, plagiarism, the theft of ideas and other forms of intellectual property. It has serious consequences for the quality of university graduates. It also signals that the education system is or has become an environment that promotes such practices instead of preventing them.

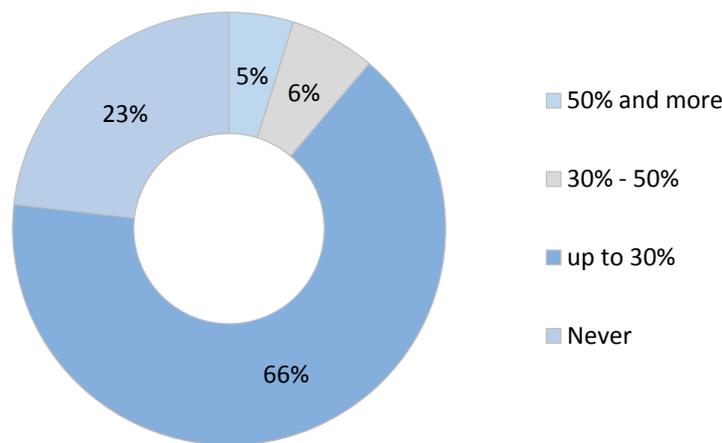
Academic dishonesty is not only a matter of individual transgressions, but also a phenomenon that is indicative of the general climate in the education institution and the sector. In Armenian universities, there is a range of practices that can be qualified as breach of academic integrity. Their primary aim does not differ from the aim of similar malpractices elsewhere –“cut corners” to minimise the efforts that are required to obtain an academic credential. The more common forms of this malpractice in Armenia coincide with those described in (Jones, 2011) and include (but are not limited) to:

- Giving or receiving information during an exam;
- Using unauthorised material (like notes) during exams;
- Taking an exam or writing a paper for another student;
- Submitting the same paper—or different versions of what is substantially the same paper – in other courses or in subsequent attempts to pass a course.

- Sabotaging, misrepresenting or fabricating written work, sources, research, or results as well as helping another student commit an act of academic dishonesty or lying to protect a student who has committed one;
- Plagiarism understood as the use of another writer’s words or ideas without acknowledging the source and is or passing off a source’s information, ideas, or words as your own by omitting to cite them. (Jones, 2011)

The surveys avoid making a statement about the prevalence of these problems in Armenian higher education. Indirect evidence and the site visits for the INTES assessment suggest, however, that academic dishonesty (plagiarism, for example) is quite common. Two-thirds of the 125 students who participated in a survey in five Armenian universities in 2013, reported to regularly copy up to a third of their written works from Internet sources or elsewhere without attributing authorship (Figure 3.1.1).

**Figure 3.1.1 Prevalence of plagiarism in academic writings of students: share of text plagiarized**



Note: Number of respondents n=125

Source of data: Hovakimyan, 2012

Twenty-three % of the respondents claimed to never plagiarize, while the share of those who steal up to half, and more than half of their academic writings from elsewhere, is relatively low in comparison: 6% and 5% respectively.

The number of respondents in the study is too low to render these findings representative. Nevertheless, the results are sufficient to allow for the formulation of some critical questions that can guide both further research and the analysis in this report. For example, what is it that motivated a third of the respondents to stand firm and preserve their academic integrity? Alternatively, what forces 66% of the students to resort to plagiarism, and what factors permit them to do so regularly?

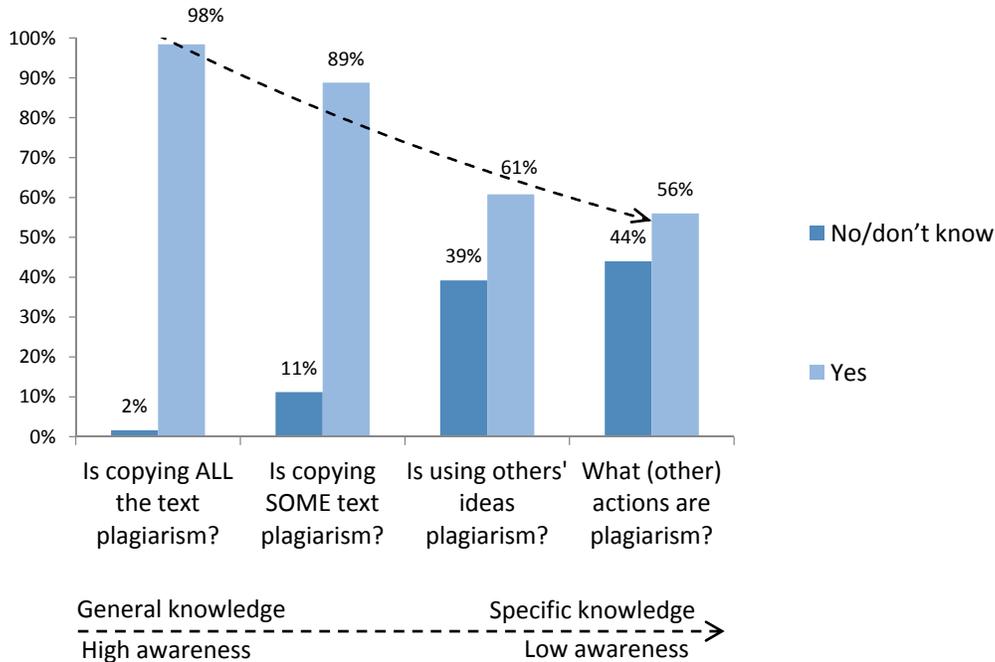
## B. Factors that create opportunities for the integrity violation

### *Ignorance and impunity*

It is well known that “ignorance of the law excuses no one”. Ignorance combined with impunity does facilitate, however, problematic behaviour. Close to 89% of the respondents in the aforementioned study

state that their universities do not provide possibilities for them to learn about integrity and academic writing, or that they are not aware of such possibilities. In the absence of guidance, students are left to judge about acceptable and unacceptable practices based on their common sense. To stay with the example of plagiarism – Figure 3.1.2 shows that actions such as copying “all” of the content for an academic text without disclosing the source are almost unanimously perceived as instances of plagiarism (98%). Less so, when only “some” of the text is copied from elsewhere, and even less so if it is only about a theft of idea (61%). Overall, more than half of the students do not feel confident about their knowledge of the issue (56%).

**Figure 3.1.2 Awareness about plagiarism**



Note: Number of respondents n=125

Source of data: Hovakimyan, 2012

Perhaps the problematic behaviour is less a matter of wrong attitudes (impressive 76.8% of respondents have no doubt that plagiarism is dishonest), but more due to a lack of awareness of the limits of what should count as acceptable practice. An effort to expand the knowledge of students about the problem might therefore “fall” on fertile soil.

Further data from the same source suggests that impunity might play an even bigger role than ignorance. Only 12% of the students have ever been reprimanded for plagiarism. Forty-two % are certain that they will not be penalised if caught, and 58.4% believe that their plagiarised text will be accepted no matter what (Hovakimyan, 2012). This is confirmed in other studies. In 2011, participants in focus groups discussing the issue noted that lower grades for plagiarism are a “fiction”, and failed to find examples of students ever being punished for plagiarising (Khachmerouk, 2011).

#### *Deficient detection mechanisms*

On the undergraduate level, the sense of impunity is promoted by a quality assurance system that is still under development and lacks a proper focus on academic integrity issues. For example, the self-

assessments that universities carry out for accreditation purposes reveal that little attention is being paid to the development of formal guidelines against academic dishonesty (Antonyan, 3/2013). In graduate studies, the control of plagiarism is delegated to the individual university departments. These in turn provide the teaching staff with tools to discover plagiarism. There is no formal obligation to use these tools and no information on how many of the staff use them in reality. It is unlikely, though, that the number is high. Rectors, provosts and instructors of various universities do not consider plagiarism and cheating to be a vital problem (Khachmerouk, 2011).

Technically, the quality assurance set-up on more advanced academic levels (MA and Ph.D.) is better equipped to safeguard academic integrity. Depending on subject area, 60 thematic councils are on stand-by to verify the quality of written works for advanced university degrees. All of them are subordinate to the scientific (academic) council of the respective university.<sup>74</sup> Each thematic council comprises 9 to 21 members, usually with comparable scientific expertise. Decisions about approval or rejection of MA and Ph.D. theses require 2/3 of the council votes. The final (formal) approval is with the scientific council of the university. Each thesis is publicly available, and the defence of the thesis is open to the public as well. The thesis defence includes an argument with two opponents, hired by the council. Recently, the higher education institutions have also adopted standards for the quality of academic publishing. The standards are in line with those common to countries of the European Union.

In practice, this seemingly robust system appears to be susceptible to outside influence. Without exception, the chairs of the scientific councils of the public universities are high-level members of the government or individuals who are close to them by virtue of family or political affiliation (see Table 3.4.1). As a minimum, this permits them to influence the councils to apply double standards *vis à vis* candidates who are not members of the same political party, or are otherwise not compliant with the legitimate (or not so legitimate) expectations of their superiors.

These expectations might be in the interest of the university, but they might as well serve the interests of specific individuals, families, ethnic groups, or institutions. In the current quality assurance set-up, the classical academic values of fairness and impartiality can be jeopardised every time the institutional interest gets in the way of the personal interests of those involved. There is no direct proof of how often this is the case. There should be, however, less doubt that the effects of the political capture of university governance structures spill over to the quality assurance systems of all public institutions in the Armenian higher education system. Anecdotal evidence about Ph.D. theses being refused without adequate justification, for political and/or personal reasons, is widespread.<sup>75</sup> Double standards can also be applied for the opposite purpose. Instead of restricting access to a scientific degree, they can help grant it even when it is not fully deserved. Both ways, the practice is detrimental to the quality of research output and undermines the trustworthiness of academic credentials of higher education institutions in Armenia.

#### *Staff motivation and working conditions*

Teachers are direct observers of how students cheat and plagiarise, but their role and responsibility in preventing this type of behaviour is not clearly defined. There is no unified set of rules and where they (partially) exist, they are not being enforced. The lack of clarity, in combination with the absence of guidelines on administrative consequences for students who cheat or plagiarise, fosters the sense of impunity among students and teachers alike. Teachers can thus afford to ignore what they witness instead of acting on their initiative and taking the risk of confrontation with students and possibly with the university administration.

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<sup>74</sup> The scientific councils are the key decision-making bodies (Higher Education Observatory, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> During the INTES site visits, interview counterparts also underlined the conservatism of the thematic councils as a reason for turning down theses and thesis proposals. The councils comprise predominantly very senior university staff close to, or beyond retirement age.

Those teachers, who nevertheless consider reacting appropriately, might be prevented from doing so by their professional setting. The political capture of the public universities replaces merit with loyalty as a principle of institutional operation. In such an environment, professional survival and success often depend on compliance with an informal codex and not on safeguarding of professional standards.

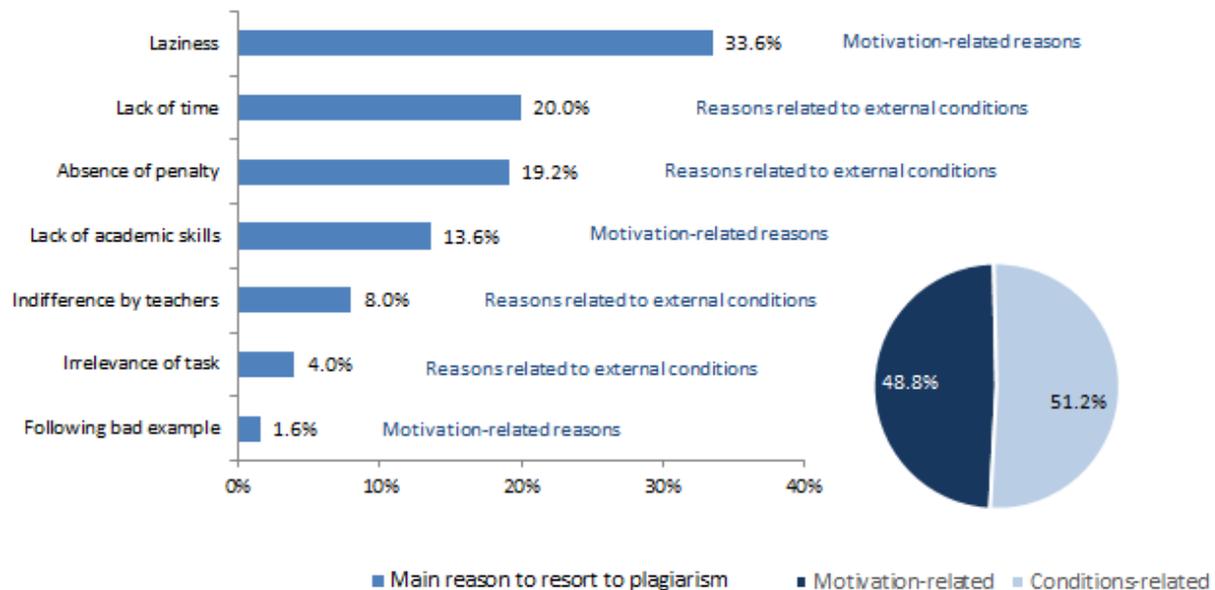
### C. Factors that create incentives for the integrity violation

#### *Lack of intrinsic motivation to study*

Heuser and Drake argue that there is a strong connection between the reasons of students to pursue higher education, their motivation to study, and academic integrity (Heuser & Drake, 2011). They note that students who enrol because of a genuine interest in their chosen field have an intrinsic motivation to study and are less inclined to be academically dishonest. In comparison, those students for whom the primary reason is not the subject, but rather external pressures or a desire for a reward such as a degree or student status will be less likely to invest an effort in academic rigour and the advancement of knowledge in their chosen field.

A survey among 420 students in private, public and national universities in Armenia from 2013, confirms the existence of a connection between motivation and academic integrity. “Personal motivation” to study had the strongest negative relationship to cheating behaviours of students, followed by ‘aim to obtain a grade’, ‘inaptitude’ and lack of ‘general motivation’ (Antonyan, 3/2013). In other words, students who were academically dishonest were predominantly students lacking intrinsic motivation to study. The data in Figure 3.1.3 suggests that their number might be high. Almost half of the respondents in the study of Hovakimyan (49%) declared to be academically dishonest for motivation-related reasons, such as laziness (33.6%), lack of academic skill (13.6%), or following a bad example (1.6%) (Figure 3.1.3).

**Figure 3.1.3 Self-reported student reasons to resort to plagiarism (2012)**



Note: Number of respondents n=125

Source of data: Hovakimyan, 2012. Graphs and grouping of reasons by INTES assessment team

Academic institutions in which the extrinsic motives prevail are likely to also experience problems with the motivation of teaching staff and the quality of teaching overall. In a vicious circle of malpractice

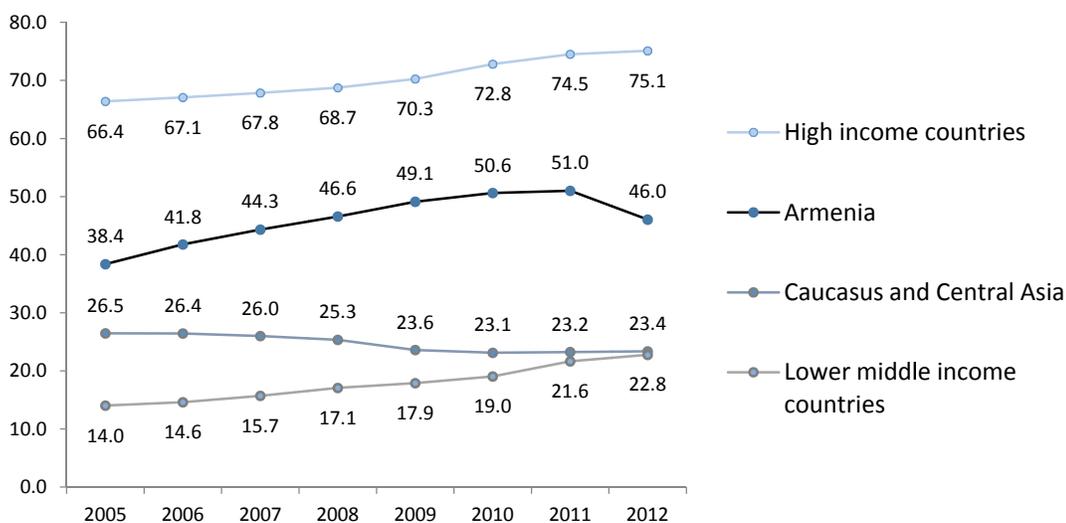
and tolerance, in turn facilitates the dishonest behaviour of students and weakens the academic morale of staff even further. In 2011, a study by Karakhanyan, van Veen, & Bergen recorded the complaints of teachers from four major Armenian universities about the lack of students’ motivation, and their explanations of how this contributed to their own half-hearted attitudes towards teaching (Karakhanyan, van Veen, & Bergen, 2011). For example, the study quotes a teacher saying:

*“Students have no motivation to learn nowadays. If I put the diplomas on the table and sell them, they would take them happily and leave the university without any education. They realise that they need an education, but they also realise that nobody needs their education. They see different people buying diplomas and getting positions and get discouraged” (Karakhanyan, van Veen, & Bergen, Teachers’ Voices in the Context of Higher Education Reforms in Armenia, 2011, pp. 519-520).*

It is important to establish that, reportedly, student motivation has a significant impact on academic integrity in Armenian universities. It is equally important to understand what systemic factors influence the motivation of students. Did students already have these attitudes before enrolling, for example from secondary education? Alternatively, did they develop them upon admission, in response to the realities in their faculties?

For more than a decade, students have enrolled in Armenian universities at a rate that is well above regional and international averages. In 2012, the latest year for which there is data, the gross enrolment ratio in Armenia was two times higher than in the Caucasus and Central Asia region, and higher than the average for the group of lower middle-income countries (Figure 3.1.4).

**Figure 3.1.4 Gross enrolment ratio, tertiary education, both sexes (percentage): Armenia, selected regions and country groups**



Notes: Data for Caucasus and Central Asia for 2010 and 2012 is UIS estimation. 2. The region of Caucasus and Central Asia as defined by the Millennium Development Goals 3. Lower middle-income and high-income countries as grouped in the World Bank income grouping.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

There is no compelling reason to doubt the desire of these new enrolments to study. They have all gone through the hardships of graduation and extensive preparations for the admission test. They have all

been also brought up in a country that prides itself on a long history of intellectual achievement, and traditionally attaches high value to education.<sup>76</sup>

The purpose of this INTES assessment is to provide recommendations for hands-on responses to the corruption challenge in Armenian education. Instead of trying to question traditional values, this purpose would be better served by an assumption that at some point in their academic career students tend to adjust their attitudes and motivation for the worse under the influence of external factors. There is evidence in support of this assumption. Twenty % of the respondents in the study of Hovakymyan stated that the reasons for their academic dishonesty are lack of time, 19.2% named absence of penalty, 8% indicated indifference by teachers and 4% the irrelevance of their tasks (4%) as a reason. In other words, 51% of the students felt that the reasons for their problematic behaviour are due to external circumstances. These responses point towards serious systemic deficiencies. For example, indifference by teachers suggests professional negligence on the side of academic staff; lack of time and irrelevance of tasks could mean an overburdened or otherwise inadequate study programme; and absence of penalty is indicative of shortcomings in the normative base that regulates academic conduct. Students would be confronted with some or all this at latest when the lecture routine picks up after the start of the first academic year.

Even before their academic life begins, prospective students feel the impact of a deeper systemic problem with a potentially profound impact on their academic motivation – the apparent failure of the system of admission to ensure that their preferences and aptitude match their actual study choices. Almost all students who participated in the interviews for the INTES assessment admitted having enrolled in subjects that were not among the ones they felt interested in. In order not to jeopardise their chance for access to tertiary education and state support, they have deliberately chosen subjects that are easy to enrol in, instead of those they cared for (and most likely would have been good at). Unfortunately, there is no quantitative evidence on the prevalence of the problem as no survey has so far focused on the issue. All the same, the question remains: what creates the incentive for such a detrimentally pragmatic attitude? The next sub-section discusses some answers.

#### The influence of resources on academic choices and motivation

In its current size, the public higher education system requires more funding than the state budget is providing. The hunger for resources is acute enough to influence the academic behaviour and choices of teaching staff (see part 3.2) and students alike.

First-time access to university depends on the combined results of a standardised admission exam and learning achievement in secondary school. Prospective candidates can be admitted to study either free of charge or on a fee-paying basis. The free-of-charge admission is made possible through scholarships disbursed directly to the university budgets, but tied to a predetermined number of study places per university and subject (also called budget places or state order places). From a student point of view, the scholarship comes in the form of a waiver of the tuition fee. For the university, it represents direct, not earmarked budget support. For the state, the scholarship is a means to disburse the annual budget allocated to higher education.

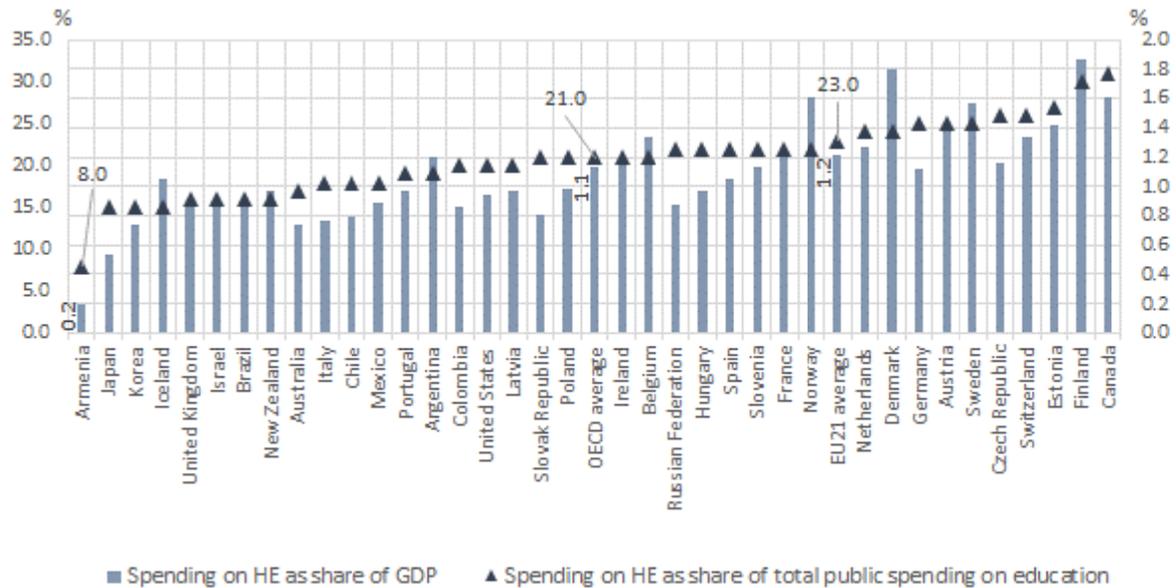
The disbursements by the state are modest. The share of national wealth that Armenia allocates to education is low by international comparison (3.1% of GDP in 2011, compared to 5.8% for the EU and 6.1% for the OECD on average). In relative terms, the proportion spent on higher education and thus on scholarships, is even further away from the levels of spending common to economically developed countries. In 2013, investment in public universities amounted to only 0.2% of GDP, which is five times

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<sup>76</sup> According to a UNDP-supported survey by the Caucasus Resource Centres, in 2011 some 85% of Armenians considered education to be third most important matter in Armenian society, right after children (96%) and family (92%) (Caucasus Research Resource Centers - Armenia, 2015).

less than in countries of the OECD and the EU on average. Spending on higher education was low also as a share of overall public expenditure: 8%, compared to 21% in OECD countries and 23% for the EU on average (Figure 3.1.5).

**Figure 3.1.5 Expenditure on higher education (HE) as share of GDP and of total public spending on education, Armenia (2013), EU, and selected OECD and non-OECD countries (2011)**



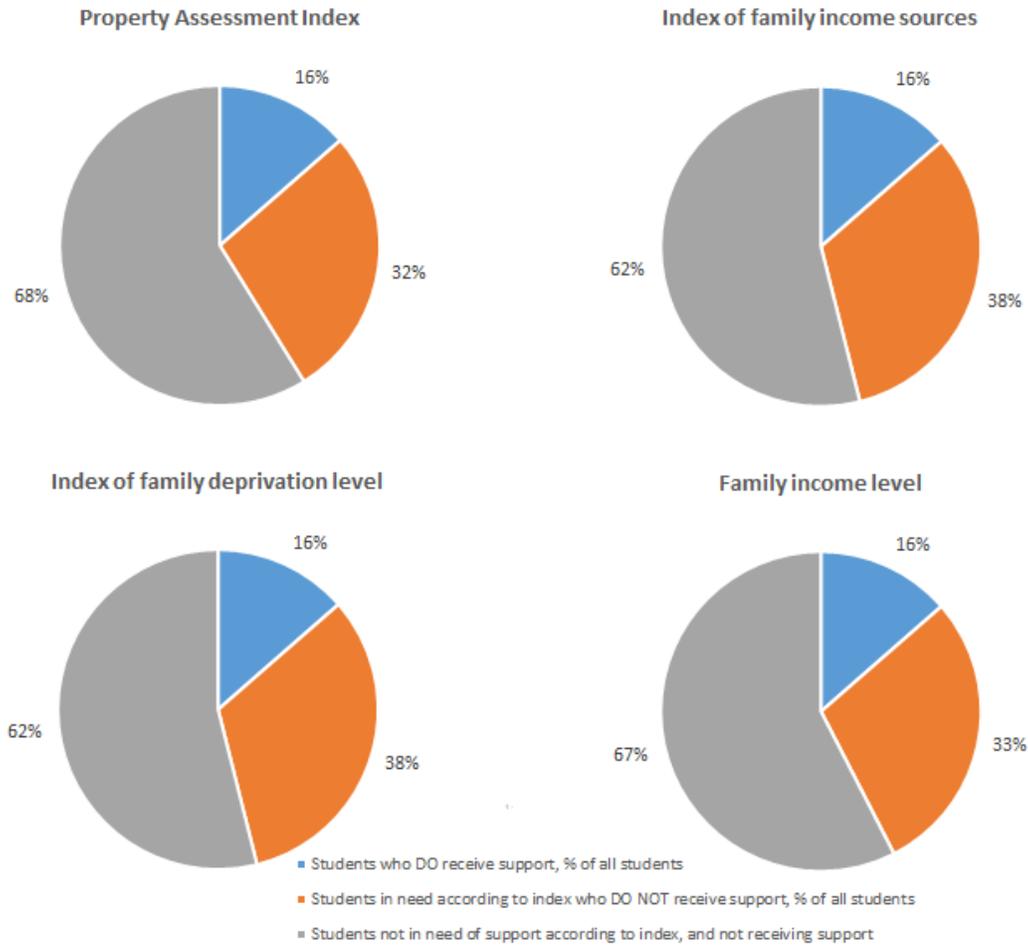
Source of data: OECD, 2014; Harutyunyan & Tsaturyan, 2014.

In 2013, these allocations were sufficient to waive the tuition fees for about 8 455 students, which is close to 16% of all students enrolled (Harutyunyan & Tsaturyan, 2014). In the same year, a further 19 362 students (35% of the student body) were academically “fit” and in need<sup>77</sup> of financial support, but were left without a scholarship.<sup>78</sup> Figure 3.1.6 shows the share of students who, according to various indices, are socio-economically disadvantaged but do not receive public support, the share of those covered by public scholarships, and the share of those who do not need and did not receive support. Depending on the index used, the share of students in need who do not receive support varies between 32% and 38% (Figure 3.1.6).

<sup>77</sup> “In need” defined in accordance with the results of analysis provided to the INTES assessment team by the Institute for Political Sciences and Consulting based on four indices of need. The indices are related to the socio-economic background of students and include Property Assessment Index, Index of Family Income Sources, Index of Family Deprivation Level, and Family Income Level.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 3.1.6 Students enrolled in public higher education by socio-economic background and access to public scholarship, Armenia (2013)**



Source of data: Harutyunyan & Tsaturyan, 2014; Institute of Political Sciences and Consulting

Access to the limited number of places supported from the public budget is based on merit<sup>79</sup> and is allocated based on results from an admission test. When registering for the test, students must list up to 10 study preferences and rank them in order of preference. Of these, only the top two choices can be for state-funded placement, for any of the remaining eight the prospective student will have to pay tuition fees. The competition for cost-free enrolment in “popular” majors that are considered a gateway to prestigious occupations such as law, architecture, or medicine is severe. Access to the others still depends on the results of the unified admission test, but the threshold for entry is lower, to an extent where some faculties have difficulties to attract a sufficient number of students to fill the state-supported places they have.

Described like this, the system appears to be genuinely merit-based and rewarding those prospective students who have the courage, learning stamina, and talent to apply admission to the subjects they care for, popular or not. In reality, the admission process gives an undue advantage to better off, but not

<sup>79</sup> 88% of the scholarships are merit-based. The remaining 12% are granted to students with disabilities, orphans, veterans, etc. (Harutyunyan & Tsaturyan, 2014).

necessarily better-motivated students by failing to ensure an equal start for all contenders for a study place.

The main source of inequity in access is the fact that competition for public scholarships is open to everyone, irrespective of their socio-economic background. As discussed in Chapter 2, the learning standards in the last year of secondary schooling differ from those used in the admission test. Success at the test, therefore, requires additional preparation. To prepare for the test, students who can afford commonly invest in supplementary, out-of-school instruction provided by private tutors – a widespread practice in Armenia (UNICEF, 2008; CFOA, 2013; Armstat, 2014). In a set-up in which both affluent and socio-economically weak students are competing for the same places and limited number of public scholarships, it is likely that those who secure more time and better tutors for their preparation will be more successful in securing a study placement. Indeed, in 2013 the ratio of students from the top income quintile enrolled in public universities to those from the lowest income quintile, was three to one. There is no data on the distribution of public scholarships according to the socio-economic background of students, but it is likely that the distribution pattern is similar, and the majority of scholarships is granted to better-off students.

Candidates for study who are interested in the more sought after subjects but are not successful enough to secure financial support by the state, are left with three choices<sup>80</sup> – to enrol in paid education, not to enrol at all, or to go for a less popular subject. For a third and possibly more of the students (Figure 3.1.6), the first option – paying a fee – is not a solution. Even for those who could afford it, sustaining the payments throughout the entire duration of studies might be a challenge because of the relatively high cost. In terms of per capita income, Armenian universities request on average six times higher fees than countries of the OECD (Table 3.1.1). The fees are thus higher than in Serbia – a country that carried out an INTES assessment in 2011, and was found to have very high student fees in relative terms in international comparison.

**Table 3.1.1 Average annual tuition fees relative to GDP per capita, Armenia (2013), Serbia (2009) and selected OECD countries (2008)**

| Country         | Annual study fee relative to GDP per capita | GDP per capita in USD PPP |
|-----------------|---|---------------------------|
| <b>Armenia</b>  | <b>35.0%</b>                                | <b>3505</b>               |
| Serbia          | 27.0%                                       | 5630                      |
| Korea           | 19.1%                                       | 27858                     |
| Ireland         | 15.7%                                       | 40744                     |
| Japan           | 13.9%                                       | 33115                     |
| United States   | 13.7%                                       | 46125                     |
| Slovak Republic | 12.6%                                       | 21555                     |
| New Zealand     | 11.2%                                       | 26948                     |
| Australia       | 10.8%                                       | 38493                     |

<sup>80</sup> A small group of prospective students can benefit from a fourth way. In recent years, some of the upper secondary institutions in Armenia have been sub-ordinated to some of the universities. The high school graduates can access the patron university without entrance examinations. With this solution, the point of entry into higher education and the integrity pressures that come along with it, have de facto been moved “lower”, to the point of transition to upper secondary education. This has implications for the integrity of the system. Firstly, the point of access to upper secondary education is ill equipped to serve as a gateway into higher education, because of its reliance on classroom assessment results. This comes with all deficiencies discussed in Chapter 2 of this report. Secondly, it means that students have to commit to a specific area of study at too early a stage in their educational pathway, possibly well before they are certain about (or aware of) their preferences for later.

|                              |             |       |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------|
| Canada                       | 9.8%        | 38527 |
| <b>Median OECD selection</b> | <b>7.6%</b> |       |
| Portugal                     | 5.4%        | 22899 |
| Netherlands                  | 4.5%        | 40682 |
| Italy                        | 4.3%        | 29657 |
| Spain                        | 3.4%        | 30252 |
| France                       | 2.2%        | 33598 |
| Austria                      | 2.2%        | 39241 |
| Switzerland                  | 2.1%        | 41045 |
| Belgium                      | 1.6%        | 35812 |

Notes: 1. Data for OECD countries from 2008; 2. Study fee cost: average value for Armenia, median value for all other countries; 3. Data for Serbia from 2010.

Sources: Harutyunyan & Tsaturyan, 2014; OECD, 2013c.

Assuming that non-enrolment is not an option, the only other alternative that students are left with is to exercise self-restraint and pick less popular subjects in order to increase their chances to receive a scholarship. The current set-up provides them with a strong incentive to go for this solution, with all the aforementioned consequences for motivation and academic integrity.

If left at that, the analysis so far might create the wrong impression that academic dishonesty is a phenomenon driven predominantly by the ill-fated choices of students in economic need. The vast majority of students is enrolled on a fee-paying basis. What about their motivation?

The faculties need fee-paying students to fill their oversized capacities and secure funding for the academic year. They attract the fee-payers by tolerating a considerably lower threshold for their admission than for scholarship recipients, or by removing the threshold altogether. This amounts to a practice of double standards and is detrimental to academic integrity.

Admission to tertiary education is not only a matter of managing demand for higher level degrees, it is also a mean to verify that the aptitude and attitudes of students befit their academic choices, and thus that the initial selection of freshmen each year is good enough to promise sustainable commitment to academic work and learning. Driven by a disproportionate reliance on study fees for their survival (see part 3.2), universities in Armenia lower the admission standards to an extent where the requirement to demonstrate individual potential for study is practically waived. Ironically, the subjects for which this strategy works best, are those that are high in demand and normally would require solid student commitment throughout the study – a commitment that lower-achieving students who can buy their way into (and survival in) a university, might not be ready or able to make. It is also a commitment that universities are not very likely to require from them. In such a setting, the “cutting of corners” during exams is easy to predict behaviour.

Other countries too are confronted with the calamitous combination of declining public investment in higher education and lack of academic integrity. The Global Corruption Report 2013 by Transparency International which focused on education and featured the INTES approach (Transparency International, 2013b, pp. 232-239), discusses a global trend according to which reductions in the amount of public money allocated to universities fuel corruption in the higher education systems across the world. The report argues that in particular unethical academic behaviour is on the rise because of falling public investment in the public tertiary institutions (Transparency International, 2013b, p. 111).

#### [The influence of student status on academic choices and motivation](#)

Student motivation is an issue also on the post-graduate level, in particular among male Ph.D. candidates who have a strong extrinsic incentive to keep their student status for as long as possible. Armenia has universal military conscription, but full-time male students are not drafted until they

graduate. Once they are awarded a Master's degree, they can enrol in a post-graduate programme to continue avoiding military service. In case of a successful graduation at the end of the three-year post-graduate programme, they are awarded a "candidate of sciences" degree and are free from the obligation to serve altogether. The consequence is loss of focus on scientific achievement, and a proliferation of low-quality scientific work (Caucasus Institute, 2010)

#### *Overloaded and/or outdated study content*

Some of the factors that shape student behaviour and readiness to violate academic integrity originate in the study content and the way it is being taught. An overloaded and/or outdated programme prevents students from recognizing a higher personal value than obtaining a diploma. A number of reports (OSI, 2013; Khachmerouk, 2011; Antonyan, 3/2013) conclude that the study curricula are indeed overburdened and outdated, or in the case of newer subjects – incomplete, and that the syllabus is predominantly promoting theoretical knowledge and rote learning. According to interviews during the INTES site visits, students are often struggling to see the purposefulness of some or all of their study programmes<sup>81</sup> and manage preparing on average 3 to 5 papers in each term, in addition to numerous exams. Students are thus inclined to seek shortcuts to obtaining their diplomas, either because they want to graduate as effortlessly as possible, or because they consider cheating and plagiarism to be an adequate, maybe even the only way to academic survival. Overload is a problem for teachers as well. In the 2012 survey of Hovakimyan, they state that reading all written works of larger student groups is impossible due to a lack of time and work overload (Hovakimyan, 2012).

Finally yet importantly, the package of requirements for passing exams on tertiary level does not promote intellectual ownership and academic thinking. The prevailing model of teaching is that of lecturing ex-cathedra. The content is delivered with the requirement for students to reproduce later precisely what they heard from their lecturer. This is also true of the term papers, which in Armenian public universities are understood as a proof that the student can reproduce existing knowledge, and not that he or she is capable of creating and developing individual, analytical approach to problem-solving (Khachmerouk, 2011). This is an environment that deprives the majority of students of a chance to develop the critical thinking, research techniques and evaluation skills that are necessary for the production of original, independent academic work, and from there – to commit genuinely to academic integrity.<sup>82</sup>

#### D. Pointers for action

##### *Closing the opportunities for malpractice*

###### *Main intervention*

The chapter established that the readiness of universities and their staff to tolerate academic dishonesty is influenced by the lack of formal, sector-wide guidelines against it. It is urgently recommended to develop such guidelines. They should also include the introduction of exam settings characterised by some or all of the following: responsibility for assessing academic achievement is shared between several assessors; oral exams are reduced to a minimum; and the process of assessment is anonymised.

The impact of all guidelines will depend on the extent to which they:

- Are based on a sector-wide consultation;

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<sup>81</sup> See also Figure 3.2.3. Some 24% of the respondents said that lack of time and irrelevance of task are the main reasons for them to plagiarise)

<sup>82</sup> Research production at the level of both the higher education institutions and individual academics appears to be significantly underdeveloped, and in fact neglected and undervalued...reproducing existing knowledge and mentioned that the process of new knowledge creation plays no or only minimal role in universities

- Contain a fair distribution of responsibilities for enforcement among teachers, students bodies, and university administration;
- Define administrative consequences for non-compliance;
- Are integrated into a sector-wide quality assurance system – in its compendium of rules and corresponding processes.

#### Supporting interventions

Further factors that enable academically dishonest behaviour are a lack of awareness of the limits of acceptable practice, as well as a widespread sense of impunity by those involved in going over these limits.

The definition of academic integrity guidelines should go along with an effort to raise awareness about the specific forms of academic dishonesty included in the guidelines, improving capacity for their enforcement, and ensuring that each group of participants in academic life is well aware of the consequences of non-compliance.

The de-politicisation of university governance structures can considerably raise the effectiveness of measures against this particular integrity violation, as it is likely to improve the reliability of quality assurance on the more advanced academic levels considerably.

Finally, efforts to improve transparency *vis à vis* the wider public as to the prevalence of the problem are likely to put (peer) pressure on faculties to enforce the integrity guidelines. Good examples of transparency efforts can be found in the experience of other countries such as Romania and Serbia, where student-led organisations regularly carry out surveys of perceptions of various forms of malpractice in the majority public universities, and release the results to the media.

#### Eliminating the incentives for malpractice

None of the measures described so far will be particularly effective without a package of interventions that address the underlying causes of malpractice. The integrity analysis identified lack of intrinsic motivation to study and overburdened/outdated curriculum as being the main drivers of the problematic behaviour.

#### Main interventions

The improvement of academic motivation of students is a complex task that starts already at the point of entry to higher education. At present, the study choices of students do not necessarily match their interests and aptitude. Promising, but financially disadvantaged students are forced to choose according to financial considerations, and those who might have insufficient potential can, in principle, buy their way into even the most prestigious of study fields. Behind all this lays a failure of the public higher education system to fulfil a major part of its mandate – to ensure a fair chance of access to education for all those who need it, and not only to those who can afford it. The main reason for this failure is financial. There is, of course, severe lack of resources but also the limited public support is not disbursed in an effective way.

It is recommended to introduce a package of measures that, from a student perspective, will help to scale down the importance of financial considerations in the study choice, in favour of academic ones.

First, competition for state order scholarships should not be left open to everyone irrespective of their socio-economic background. It is recommended to reserve the merit-based state order scholarships for those who not only perform well, but also need them. This should be done by including the socio-economic background of students in the list of scholarship criteria.

A parallel course of action should take place on macro level and will be a real test of the political commitment of authorities to preventing malpractice in the public education system. In addition to reducing the dependency of public universities on fee-paying students (see part 3.2) it is recommended to reassess the outdated scholarship allocations to institutions and study areas. This should be done based on up-to-date and transparent criteria, chosen to strike a good balance between the needs of the national economy and the interests of prospective study candidates. If combined with a revision of the criteria for granting access to scholarship, this intervention should lead to considerable increase in the efficiency of public resource allocations.

#### Supporting interventions

The INTES assessment found that students are often struggling to see the purposefulness of some or all of their study programmes and have difficulties in coping with an overload of outdated or reportedly inadequate study content. It is beyond the remit of this assessment to judge about the purposefulness of study curricula and organisation, but the consistent reports by students that these are factors affecting their readiness to cheat, should be taken seriously.

It is recommended to create conditions and incentives for faculties to embark on a reassessment and possibly calibration of their study curricula. This could be included as a set of requirements in the quality assurance/accreditation process, or alternatively defined as a criterion for institutional access to public scholarship allocations. Assuming that student reports reflect reality, the calibration should include reduction of theoretical content and a stronger focus on interactive exercises and group work to foster the sense of belonging to an academic community and move away from the practice of rote learning.

#### Summary of recommended actions

| Suspected integrity violation                                | Recommendations Chapter 3                     |   |  | Area of policy intervention   |
|--|---|---|--|-------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #1:<br>Cheating and plagiarism | 1. Closing the opportunities                  | 1 | Develop formal, sector-wide guidelines against academic dishonesty   | Academic integrity            |
|  |   | 2 | Raise awareness about the specific forms of academic dishonesty and consequences of non-compliance with the guidelines ; raise capacity for enforcement of guidelines  | Academic integrity            |
|  |   | 3 | De-politicisation of university governance structures  | Governance                    |
|  |   | 4 | Improve transparency vis-à-vis the wider public  | Accountability                |
|  |   | 5 | Introduce exam settings in which responsibility for assessing academic achievement is shared between several assessors, oral exams are reduced to a minimum, and the process of assessment is anonymised.  | Assessment                    |
|  | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 6 | Improve student motivation by introducing a package of measures that will help to reduce the importance of financial considerations for study choices, while favouring academic interest.  | Admissions;<br>Scholarships   |
|  |   | 7 | Reserve the merit-based state order scholarships for those who not only perform well, but also need them (include SES as criteria)   | Scholarships                  |
|  |   | 8 | Reduce the dependency of public universities on fee-paying students by reassessing the outdated scholarship allocations to institutions and study areas based on criteria that balance the needs of the national economy and the interests of prospective study candidates | Financing of higher education |
|  |   | 9 | Create conditions and incentives for faculties to embark on a reassessment and possibly calibration of their study curricula.  | Study content                 |



### 3.2 Suspected integrity violation #2: Undue recognition of academic achievement

#### VIOLATION ID

| A. Suspected integrity violation  |   |
|---|---|
| No. 3.2 Undue recognition of academic achievement   |   |
| B. Factors that create opportunity for the violation  |   |
| Incomplete implementation of Bologna reforms<br>Impunity and low accountability with regards to rules of academic recognition<br>Limited independence of quality assurance bodies   |   |
| C. Factors that create incentives for the violation   |   |
| Financial dependency on fee-paying students<br>Deficient hiring and firing procedures and practices   |   |
| D. Pointers for action  |   |
| B:  | C:  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure the full independence of the Armenian National Agency for Quality Assurance - ANQA</li> <li>- Improve the accreditation and quality assurance process by adjusting the involvement of the Ministry of Education and Science, defining sector-wide approach to assessment of academic achievement in modularised programmes, and reassess the definitions of study outcomes currently in place</li> <li>- Set standards for the quality of external quality assurance</li> <li>- Make the position of the ANQA President elective</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase public spending on higher education and improve the resource allocation arrangements</li> <li>- Strengthen the independence and capacity of public higher education to handle funding from private sources, including households</li> <li>- Commission a feasibility assessment of whether public universities can or should be re-profiled as private entities that operate with public support</li> </ul> |

#### A. Description

The Oxford dictionary of the English language defines “merit” as the quality of being good or worthy. Throughout its long history – from Latin to Old French and Middle English, to modern times – this word has been used to qualify achievements (positive or negative) that **deserve** to be rewarded.

Recognition of merit-based achievement is a cornerstone of trust in education – trust in the quality of its graduation credentials, and in its ability to foster excellence, preserve equity, and safeguard the integrity of its staff. The prerequisite of this trust is a fair and legitimate recognition process that applies the same criteria of achievement to all students involved to identify those who deserve recognition.

If merit would be an education integrity standard, at no other point in the education process would it be put to a harder test than in exam situations. The higher the stakes, the higher the risk that considerations other than merit might take over and undermine the assessment, thus leading to an undue recognition of achievement.

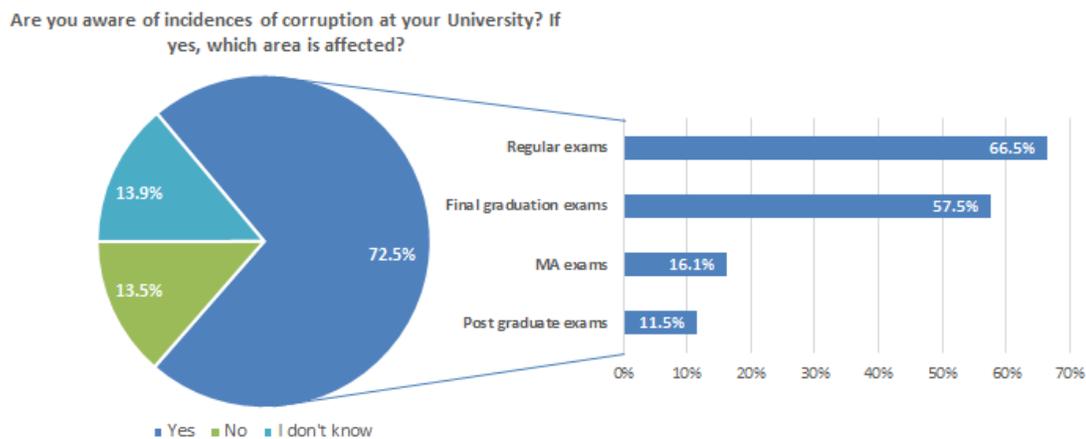
Regrettably, undue recognition of achievement is common practice in both secondary and tertiary education in Armenia. As discussed in part 2.4, classroom assessment in upper secondary schools is affected by a marking bias that is proactively allowed and sometimes even promoted by education institutions and teaching staff. In tertiary education, the due recognition of academic achievement is often withheld from students who deserve it, or unduly granted to students who do not.

The departure from the hypothetical integrity standard of merit takes different forms. It might manifest itself in the application of double standards, effectively making it easier for some students and more difficult for others to pass. Alternatively, the requirement to meet the achievement criteria in a given

exam might be waived altogether, in exchange for actions that personally benefit the assessor or the institution for which he/she works.

There is abundant anecdotal evidence in support of these findings, but data about the prevalence of the problem is scarce. The limited figures that are available reproduce a concerning picture. In a survey that was carried out among 983 students enrolled at the Gyumri State Pedagogical University and the Vanadzor State Pedagogical University, 73% of respondents confirmed to be aware of corruption practices at their respective institutions. Sixty-seven % of them noted that the violations affect their routine exam sessions, and 58% considered that this is the case with their final graduation exams as well (Figure 3.2.1).

**Figure 3.2.1 Student perceptions of corruption, by share of respondents and area affected**



N=983

Data source: Aleksanyan, 2012.

Sixty-two % of those students, who stated they are aware of corruption at their universities, admitted having given a bribe to their teachers to pass an exam. The majority of those who bribed (56%) have done this more than once, which is an indication that purchasing of academic recognition might have become part of the institutional culture at the universities surveyed.

Anecdotal evidence from other tertiary institutions implies that the situation in the two universities is rather the norm than an exception. For example, according to INTES interview counterparts it is supposedly common knowledge that at the Yerevan State University the “price” of passing a “regular” exam is 100 USD to 150 USD, whereas the final graduation exam costs 300 USD to 500 USD. Sometimes the condition for passing is not a cash transaction, but the purchase of, and rote learning from, a specific book or reader, usually chosen for reasons other than quality (*i.e.* the professor is an author or has informal agreement with an author/publisher).

A more subtle form of undue recognition of achievement is the application of double standards in exam situations so that certain students can enjoy a more favourable treatment. This is the case with fee-paying students whose tuition fees are vital to the survival of numerous otherwise underfunded and oversized faculties. According to the heads of departments at one of the major public universities in Yerevan who were interviewed for a report by the Caucasus Institute, of over 3 000 students only around

30 per year are expelled for poor performance. If the quality of academic work would be the only criterion, the university management estimated that each year over 1000 students would have to part with their student status because of underperformance (Caucasus Institute, 2010).

## B. Factors that create opportunities for the integrity violation

### *The destabilising effect of Bologna process reforms on assessment of academic achievement*

Armenia joined the Bologna Process in 2005. According to the Armenian ENIC/NARIC office, since then the authorities and the higher education providers have worked on, among other things, the introduction of a two-cycle degree system, a credit transfer and accumulation system, and a Diploma Supplement system. Currently, all universities, including private institutions, have based their programmes on the two cycles of Bologna. Two universities have recently started to issue Diploma Supplements to both Bachelor and Master degree programme students.

By adopting the principles of the Bologna declaration, Armenia is obliged to implement also a European Credit Transfer System – ECTS and to revise the study programmes accordingly. The introduction of an ECTS system has several layers. First, the changes affect the general organization of studies, which must be rearranged in two-/three-cycle degree systems, with a range of 180–240 credits (in ECTS) for the first and 60–120 credits for the second degree (INCHER, 2008). This is a general requirement that calls for an additional level of revision before it can get traction in practice: the allocation of credits in the new credit system must be properly linked to student workload and learning outcomes. The link between outcomes and credits enables the creation of programme modules and cross-curricular links in and between the study programmes.

The gradual introduction of the ECTS was among the first steps undertaken in the course of Bologna-driven reforms in Armenia. Starting from 2008 all educational programmes have been duly modularised<sup>83</sup> and transferred to the ECTS, but a major challenge has remained unsolved – the absence of a unified approach to the assessment of learning outcomes in the modularised programmes. Without a common ground in this respect, academic staff and programme designers have a limited understanding of how modularisation is supposed to work in practice and the core purpose of ECTS – to foster mobility, flexibility and transferability of previously acquired academic knowledge – is difficult to fulfil. Indeed, even after a decade of intensive Bologna changes, to date the share of elective subjects offered in public universities is still below 25% (INCHER, 2008).

Most countries that have successfully implemented the Bologna reforms follow two well-known and non-antagonistic patterns of defining learning outcomes. One comes from the overarching framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It is based on what the student is expected to know, understand and be able to do. The other is drawn from the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and defines requirements regarding the "knowledge, skills and competences" of students,<sup>84</sup> for example that the "general measurable results of the learning process should allow higher education institutions to assess whether students have developed the required competencies." (EACEA, 2012).

Armenia does not follow either of these international patterns. Instead, the tertiary sector uses specific national definitions that are not necessarily compatible with those common in the EHEA. According to information collected during the INTES site visits, to operationalise the ECTS and define the "new" learning outcomes that modular programmes are expected to produce, Armenian universities have largely resorted to old, subject-specific content definitions from Soviet times. Those definitions are

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<sup>83</sup> 25%-90% are modularized (implementation ongoing)

<sup>84</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. 2008/C 111/01. Official Journal of the European Union, 6.5.2008.

ill-suited to support the implementation of the Bologna concept of assessment based on learning outcomes.

There is an additional challenge. Since the internal systems of student evaluation and assessment are regulated by the HEIs themselves, the assessment methods vary from university to university. For instance, the grading scales used to mark the results of oral and written tests can vary considerably between institutions (5, 10 or 20 -point marking scales, A-F letter grading, etc.). Also, the state examination committees that are responsible for the final examination sometimes rely on a combination of comprehensive examination of subject knowledge and defence of graduation work (diploma project, thesis or dissertation), but sometimes they resort to only one of these forms of examination.

The inadequate definitions of learning outcomes, as well as the absence of a sector-wide approach to their assessment, send a rather vague message about what should be assessed and how. The lack of appropriate guidance on how the Bologna reforms affect the educational dimension of academic life makes it difficult for university professionals to understand how they should internalise the novelties and adjust their professional practices. They also have no incentives to do so.

This gives ample room for arbitrariness (purposeful or not) on behalf of those in charge of examinations. While there is an evident effort to comply with the structural aspects of the Bologna requirements, there is little evidence that, “underneath”, the essence of teaching and assessment has changed. In fact, discussions with university teachers during the INTES site visits suggest that many do not see the need to change at all and do not apprehend how the “new” ways differ from the “old” ones. Some were even convinced to have been applying student-centred teaching and outcome-oriented assessment already in Soviet times. Furthermore, some reports note that university teachers consider the Bologna reform to be a superficial one that is likely to cause more harm than good. Convictions like these cannot be overcome overnight through regulations and procedures. They require a long-term investment in incentives to change attitudes and professional behaviour – a task that so far has been largely neglected. (Karakhanyan, van Veen, & Bergen, 2011; OSI, 2013).

Until something is done to move things ahead, students will continue to report how the failure to implement properly the Bologna reform allows their teachers to hold on to the old ways of teaching and assessment (Avagyan, 2012). As reported by students in interviews during the site visits, one-on-one exams with professors are still the rule and not the exception, and the assessment of knowledge rewards accuracy in reproducing books instead of comprehension and ability to apply new knowledge (Navoyan, 2009).

#### *Impunity and low accountability with regards to rules of academic recognition*

The tertiary education sector in Armenia is not as accountable to authorities and stakeholders as it could and should be. This allows for undue recognition of academic achievement. The MOES requires HEIs to conduct graduation examinations to assure that students meet criteria stipulated in the educational standards. Accredited universities conduct state graduation examinations that are managed by the Attestation Committee at each institution.<sup>85</sup> However, there are no sector-wide standards of accountability, and the national quality assurance requirements do not include hands-on guidance on how to assess study outcomes properly. National indicators that could help to monitor and evaluate the performance of universities are missing as well.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The Ministerial Normative Order N 1197 dated November 31, 2011.

<sup>86</sup> The feasibility of performance comparisons between tertiary education institutions is being debated, and in the international academic community, there are strong sentiments for and against them. In Armenia, the question of whether institutional performance indicators are needed and possible has not yet been subject to a discussion.

There is a fair chance that authorities and stakeholders prefer to preserve things as they are. The existing limitations seem to contribute to a twisted win-win situation in which universities can keep lower quality students as sources of income, parents and students know and follow the “rules of the game” when they need good exam results, and the authorities can retain influence and control over all sides involved by capturing university boards, appeal commissions, and other structures in charge of the professional fate of university teachers and administrators (see part 3.3). So far, the “system” seems to work smoothly. For example, despite a suggested rate of corruption incidence of 79% at the Armenian State Pedagogical University, over the past 4-5 years there were no instances of dismissal of teachers.

#### *Limited independence of quality assurance bodies*

The discussion about factors that enable the undue recognition of academic achievement would be incomplete if it does not consider the state body in charge of defining and safeguarding the quality standards for the tertiary sector – the Armenian National Quality Assurance Agency, or ANQA. It is obvious that ANQA is not able to prevent the situation described so far. The question is rather to what extent ANQA is an enabling factor.

The quality of higher education in Armenia is assured through attestation and accreditation of universities and programmes. The standards of accreditation, self-analysis and external assessment are elaborated by the Ministry of Education and Science. The methodologies for their application are developed by the Licensing and Accreditation Service – LAS.

The main task of ANQA is to ensure that the universities adhere to this package of rules for their quality assurance. The mandate of the Agency is, of course, broader than that and includes “investigations, analyses, recommendations and evaluation in the field of tertiary level education”. ANQA has also developed the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and Academic Programmes and Accreditation Criteria and Standards, which defines policies, procedures, criteria, and standards for external quality assurance (The World Bank, 2013).

Formally, the quality assurance set-up is complete and the mandate of ANQA grants the agency with competences comprehensive enough to help it make a difference with all challenging integrity problems described in this chapter. However, three factors prevent the ANQA efforts from getting sufficient traction on the ground and render ineffective the realisation of ANQA objectives. (Navoyan, 2009).

First, there is the lack of genuine ownership over compliance. This is caused by a strictly top-down approach to defining the rules, criteria and standards of quality assurance, without involvement or even superficial consultation with those who are directly affected and expected to adhere to them – students, teaching staff and academic institutions. Whenever new policies or regulations are about to be introduced, in Armenia or anywhere else, their implementation will very much depend on the sense of ownership and responsibility by those who are expected to implement them. In situations in which proper enforcement mechanisms and mandate are absent, as is the case with ANQA, stakeholder ownership and responsibility become particularly important. For example, the participation of students in the process is either occasional or very formal,<sup>87</sup> mostly through student bodies that are widely believed to be politically captured.

The second factor preventing the proper functioning of the quality assurance system is political capture. The ANQA Charter envisages that its work is overseen by a Board of Trustees, the composition of which has to be balanced (Article 20). However, the President of the Board is the Prime Minister of Armenia (Article 14). This means that each time ANQA has to accredit and attest public universities it risks being trapped in a conflict of interest because the board members of the institutions subject to

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<sup>87</sup><http://www.eapyouth.eu/sites/default/files/documents/ansa.pdf>

accreditation are members of the same party and government as the President of the ANQA board. It is hard to imagine how a tertiary institution in the governance of which there is high-level interest present, could ever fail an ANQA accreditation process. Even if it does, the final decision on awarding accreditation certificates still lies with the government (MOES) and not with the ANQA Accreditation Committee (Article 21).

Thirdly, the implementation of the requirement for external quality assurance in the self-assessment process of institutions is patchy, at best. According to reports and as confirmed in some of the interviews during the INTES site visits, it is common for the external evaluation simply to copy the self-evaluation findings. The reports prepared in this way fail to fulfil their primary goal – critical verification of the self-assessment findings. Also, they have a merely descriptive character and contain no recommendations for improvement (Navoyan, 2009). Among the main reasons for this situation is that the choice of external assessors is limited to Armenia, while the capacity for external assessments in the sector is low. In addition, the procedure of identification and recruitment of experts for the external reviews does not guarantee the involvement of those who would have the necessary expertise and competence. There is also no publicly available information on entities and experts that are recommended as external reviewers.

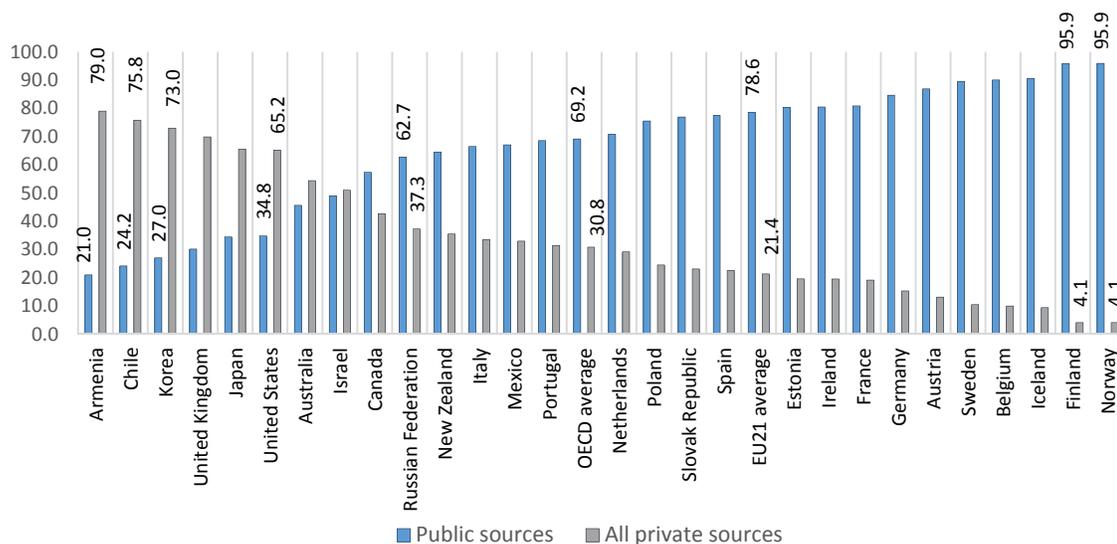
### C. Factors that create incentives for the integrity violation

#### *Financial dependency on fee-paying students*

Part 3.1 touched upon the issue of limited public funding for public universities (Figure 3.1.5) from the point of view of students and scholarship support, and discussed the relatively high tuition fees that faculties are charging, or have to charge, to compensate for their resource shortages (Table 3.1.1).

For public universities in Armenia, the reliance on private sources after the withdrawal of public funding some years ago has become higher than in countries where the level of private expenditure on tertiary education is traditionally high, like Chile, Korea and the US (Figure 3.2.2). Seventy-nine % of funding for Armenian public higher education comes from private sources. Chile covers on average 76% of this cost through private sources, in Korea the share is 73%, in the US it is 65%, and in the OECD area it is 31% (Figure 3.2.2).

**Figure 3.2.2 Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on tertiary educational institutions, Armenia (2012) and selected OECD countries (2011)**



Notes: Data for expenditure from private sources includes subsidies attributable to payments to educational institutions received from public sources, except for Armenia where data refers to private household expenditure on public institutions only. Year of reference for Canada 2010 instead of 2011. Year of reference for Chile 2012 instead of 2011.

Sources: OECD, 2014; Sprague & Sargsyan, 2013 for Armenia.

The proportion of funding from public sources in Armenia is very low by international comparison: 21%, compared to 69% in OECD countries on average, 63% in the Russian Federation, 35% in the US, and 79% in the EU.<sup>88</sup> In Armenia, all of this funding flows into the scholarships discussed in part 3.1 (Harutyunyan & Tsaturyan, 2014). The amount of funds per student disbursed through the scholarships is well below the amount per student that the universities collect through their study fees.

Due to the shortage of public resources, tertiary institutions naturally tend to prioritise fee-based income and fee-paying students over those who are studying “for free”. The conditions under which they operate push them strongly into an institutional attitude that can be best described as “the more students – the more money – the better”.

This attitude was further strengthened in 2010 by a decision of the Government to extend the upper secondary cycle by two years, delaying in this way the transition to university of several cohorts of high school graduates. In the 2011/2012 academic year, there were 7 584 first time enrolments, compared to 26 443 the year before. Consequently, over the next few years the universities will be facing considerable revenue constraints, the impact of which will last until the first wave of students graduates from the new extended cycle in 2016 and 2017 (The World Bank, 2013). In addition, the state requires public universities to offer a partial discount on their tuition fees of up to 75 % to at least 10% of students, to cater for the needs of those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

International experience and the cases of successful private universities abroad with a long-standing tradition show that there is nothing wrong with high or even exclusive reliance on tuition fees. Universities that rely on private sources can be independent private or (partially) publicly supported private institutions. They follow governance, contractual and accountability models set-up to safeguard them against the danger of undue influence from those who are supporting them financially – households, private donors and/or businesses. Recent scandals around the independence of academic research funded from private sources show that even well respected private universities are not immune from problems that might arise from conflicts of institutional, public and private interest.<sup>89</sup>

In Armenia, most of the households that pay for higher education, invest their money in the public universities.<sup>90</sup> The public higher education system heavily relies on these private resources. This is a very important difference compared to the countries included in Figure 3.2.2, for example, where commonly the destination of private funding is private higher education. Private investment in public higher education in those countries would usually be “limited” to public-private partnerships between universities and companies that provide them with a service or product, or to separate (research) projects, such as the McGill University Health Centre in Quebec, Canada.<sup>91</sup>

There is a good reason for this limitation. Without major adjustments in governance, mandate and accountability arrangements, a public higher education system that depends on private funding is likely to prove ill-equipped to balance between its mandate to serve the public interest, the need to safeguard

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<sup>88</sup> Average for the 21 EU countries covered in OECD, 2014, indicator B3.

<sup>89</sup> See for example <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/14/AR2008071402145.html>, [http://www.medico-legalsociety.org.uk/articles/dishonesty\\_in\\_medical\\_research.pdf](http://www.medico-legalsociety.org.uk/articles/dishonesty_in_medical_research.pdf), <http://www.bmj.com/content/326/7400/1167.abstract>

<sup>90</sup> According to data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, in 2003, (the latest year for which there is data), enrolment in private higher education in Armenia was 19.1%.

<sup>91</sup> <http://muhc.ca/>

satisfactory academic standards, and the pressure to address the private interest of its funders (in the case of Armenia – the interest of fee-paying students and their families).

Armenian public universities are a good example of how, in the case of public institutions, the balance between multiple public-private interests can quickly become a challenging task and a serious integrity concern, especially when money is involved. Since the bulk of the university budgets is generated with the help of tuition fees, the pressure to attract enrolment and resources must be enormous. As a consequence, institutions tend to lower the requirements for entry in order not to discourage potential applicants (see part 3.1)<sup>92</sup> and across the board, all public universities in Armenia are inclined to treat fee-paying students more favourably to keep them enrolled. In a way, this is understandable. What is at stake is not profit, improvement or expansion, but the mere survival of the universities in their current size.

#### *Deficient hiring and firing procedures and practices*

While there is no direct evidence about the frequency with which teachers over or under-rate student achievement, it is rather certain that the conditions of their employment and work put them in an unfavourable position to proactively resist becoming accomplices in malpractice. This is especially true when the violations seem to serve institutional interests like, for example, ensuring the academic survival of lower performing, but fee-paying students.

The legislative framework grants public universities with full autonomy to determine their human resource policies. These include the definition of staffing needs, the development of procedures for hiring and firing of staff at all levels of the institutional hierarchy, and the final decision of who gets or loses a job. There is no external accountability for any of these decisions, but there are robust channels for external influence, mostly opened through the governance structures of the universities with the help of persisting regulatory ambiguities (OSI, 2013). The government appoints a majority representation in the Councils (Governing Boards) of the public higher education institutions and places a politically affiliated figure to be the Chair. According to surveys, the next level of institutional governance - rectors and vice-rectors - is also captured by political affiliations.<sup>93</sup> The Rector's Councils – entities that, among other things, have the final say over staff policies and staff-related decisions including hiring and firing – follow orders that are defined by the politically captured Governing Boards.

The teaching staff is hired on short-term contracts of not more than few years duration. In the closed circle of influence, informal rules and networks, decisions over keeping or losing a job become a matter of loyalty and collegial solidarity. Indeed, fear of retribution or falling into disfavour by colleagues is a strong incentive to engage in activities that are against the ethical and professional codex.

#### D. Pointers for action

##### *Closing the opportunities for malpractice*

##### *Main interventions*

It is recommended to ensure the full independence of the Armenian National Agency for Quality Assurance – ANQA. The measures to that end should include the safeguarding of ANQA against any form of political capture and influence with the help of strict, transparent rules against conflict of interest and politicisation. For example, a shared political (party affiliation) or private (business) interest between

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<sup>92</sup> Navoyan and UNDP, 2005. Conceptual Approaches to State Policy Development in the Field of Professional Education in Armenia. Available

<sup>93</sup> Almost all state HEIs interviewed answered that the government appoints their Rector, indicating government's strong influence on the selection of the Rector possibly through the powerful representation in the Council and/or other informal means (The World Bank, 2013).

individuals-members of the Board of a tertiary institution that is applying for accreditation, and those participating in any of the ANQA governance structures, should be a reason to reject the application.

The accreditation and quality assurance processes require some important improvements as well.

Firstly, the Ministry of Education should not have a final say over ANQA accreditation decisions. Its verdict must be limited to verification of compliance with accreditation procedures.

Secondly, the accreditation and quality assurance criteria must include a check of study outcome definitions and assessment approaches on an institutional level. ANQA should prepare the ground for this intervention by assessing the definitions of study outcomes currently in place in faculties and subjects with high rate of enrolment, and by suggesting a roadmap for their improvement in line with good international practice.

This should be done in view of, thirdly, defining a unified, sector-wide approach to the assessment of academic achievement in modularised programmes. Good definitions of learning outcomes and assessment approaches are key to improving assessment reliability, and thus to rehabilitating merit as a guiding principle of recognition of academic achievement. Success with these endeavours will also depend on the extent to which they rely on consultations with the institutions that are affected.

Finally, there is a need for binding minimum quality standards for external quality assurance. Proof of compliance with these standards should be one of the formal requirements for accreditation.

#### *Supporting interventions*

In the short run, it is recommended that the position of the President of the Board of ANQA is an elective one and that a Manual for the Board Operationalization be developed.

It is also recommended to embed the Accreditation Committee in the ANQA Charter and regulate its independence and competences in a separate statute and manual of operation (The World Bank, 2013).

#### *Eliminating the incentives for malpractice*

##### *Main interventions*

The analysis in this chapter part identified that the disproportionate reliance by public universities on study fees creates a strong incentive to treat the group of fee-paying students more favourably, for example by lowering achievement requirements.

In order to limit the negative influence of this factor, it is necessary to isolate the side effects of dependency of public universities on fees and fee-paying students, mainly by reducing this dependency to manageable levels.

The first and most difficult recommendation is to increase public spending on higher education.

However, an increase in the level of spending alone will not make much difference if the funds are not allocated and spent in a meaningful way. One possibility would be to distribute public spending on a competitive basis to institutions that fulfil certain criteria related to quality, study content, research contributions, and so on. Another possibility is to embark on a process of long overdue rationalisation of the public higher education system to bring its capacity in line with actual demand for study places. This will ensure that the additional resources are not spread too thinly in an outsized network of providers. All public universities should thereby be given a choice to go private.

Less far-reaching actions than the ones recommended here might not have a lasting effect on the drivers of the integrity violation described in this Part of Chapter 3. The next heading lists some supporting interventions that can, however, be tackled immediately.

#### Supporting interventions

The sustainability of reform interventions often depends on a good compromise between reform ambitions and realities “on the ground”. No matter how far the previous two interventions would go, it is not likely that they will remove the dependency of public institutions on private funding altogether.

In order to safeguard public higher education institutions from the problematic side effects of dependency on private funding, it is necessary to strengthen their independence as well as capacity to handle income from private sources. This includes the already discussed de-politicisation of university governance structures in view of improving quality assurance, but also allowing the universities to diversify their sources of income, for example by giving them freedom to accept and manage donations in exchange for accountability arrangements that are better and more befitting their current situation.

It is also recommended to consider undertaking a more far-reaching step in this direction by commissioning a feasibility assessment of whether some or all public universities would not be better off re-profiled as private universities that operate with public support. This might appear as too radical a step, but in reality, it is just a formal reflection of what is already a fact for all public universities in Armenia.

Finally yet importantly, teachers should be protected from personally motivated reprisals when they assess in line with good professional standards. This could be done, for example, by introducing abuse-resistant exam settings.

Summary of recommended actions

| Suspected integrity violation   | Recommendations Chapter 3                     |    |   | Area of policy intervention                                    |
|---|---|----|---|--|
| Suspected integrity violation #2: Undue recognition of academic achievement | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 10 | Ensure the full independence of the Armenian National Agency for Quality Assurance – ANQA; adopt strict, transparent rules against conflict of interest of its staff, management and board members, and against politicisation.   | Governance; staff policies                                     |
|   |   | 11 | Improve trustworthiness and reliability of quality assurance processes by: limiting MoE responsibilities to verification of compliance with accreditation procedures; defining a unified, sector-wide approach to assessment of learning outcomes in the modularised programmes; and by developing minimum quality standards for external quality assurance. Compliance with these should be a formal requirements for accreditation. | Quality assurance  |
|   |   | 12 | The President of the ANQA Board should be an elective position  | Governance   |
|   |   | 13 | Embed the Accreditation Committee in the ANQA Charter, and regulate its independence and competences through a stand-alone statute and manual of operation.   | Governance   |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 14 | Increase public spending on higher education and consider distributing at least part of it on competitive basis.  | Financing of higher education                                  |
|   |   | 15 | Embark on a process of rationalisation of the higher education system to bring its capacity in line with actual demand for study places.  | Optimisation of the public university network                  |
|   |   | 16 | Strengthen the independence of tertiary institutions as well as their capacity to handle income from private sources through de-politicisation of university governance and by allowing the universities to diversify their sources of income.  | Governance; financing of higher education                      |
|   |   | 17 | Commission an assessment of feasibility of partial privatisation of public universities.  | Follow-up research: feasibility study on partial privatisation |
|   |   | 18 | See recommendation No. 5  | Assessment   |

### 3.3 Suspected integrity violation #3: improper influence on decisions about appointment, dismissal, and promotion of academic staff

#### VIOLATION ID

| A. Suspected integrity violation  |   |
|---|---|
| No. 3.3 Improper influence on decisions about appointment, dismissal and promotion of academic staff  |   |
| B. Factors that create opportunity for the violation  |   |
| Deficient hiring and firing procedures and practices<br>Temporary nature of employment contracts<br>Abuse of performance evaluation procedures  |   |
| C. Factors that create incentives for the violation   |   |
| Lack of adequate material compensation<br>Lack of professional motivation<br>Limited involvement in the decision-making or reform processes<br>Fear of losing employment  |   |
| D. Pointers for action  |   |
| <b>B:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rehabilitate merit as a leading principle of staff policies at public universities</li> <li>- Include criteria for evaluation of staff performance in the obligatory quality assurance processes</li> <li>- Use the appraisal system to develop sector-wide regulations regarding the remuneration of academic staff</li> <li>- Establish external supervision of the application of rules and regulations of relevance for human resource policies</li> </ul> | <b>C:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce a sector-wide base salary scheme that is more fair, transparent and performance-sensitive than the arrangements currently in place</li> <li>- For staff evaluations, harvest the potential of student feedback on teacher performance</li> </ul> |

#### A. Description

Professionalism, access to positions and promotion based on merit and through competitive procedures, guarantees of stability and independence, a transparent and objective remuneration system, political restraint and accountability should be not only established in law, but also rigorously enforced to prevent cronyism, nepotism and politicisation of the employees within any segment of the education system. It is understood that these notions should be perfectly applicable to higher education and cover academic staff since academic staff carries most of the weight of representing their institutions to the public. When the public mistrusts its education systems, it mistrusts first and foremost the education staff.

In Armenia, nepotism is a common feature of government agencies and public administration in general. Almost 80 % of the individuals interviewed by Transparency International in 2013 indicated that personal contacts were important to get things done when dealing with Armenia's public sector. Public employment is commonly used to reward cronies, and there are allegations of government officials discriminating against opposition party members in hiring decisions (Transparency International, 2013).

Desk research and the site visits for the INTES assessment suggest that these practices are commonplace in Armenian universities as well, and that the higher education institutions, while enjoying full autonomy to develop and implement their own human resource policies, lack strong and transparent human resource administration. In particular, hiring, firing and promotion of staff in Armenian higher education institutions is often conducted arbitrarily and influenced by improper factors, including political motivation.

Reportedly, hiring of academic staff is often based on personal connections instead of merit and skills. Once hired, all academic staff is operating on one to five-year short-term contracts. No clear criteria or common guidance regarding extension of contracts seems to exist. It is commonplace for administrators to take decisions regarding extension of short-term academic staff contracts based on their obedience and loyalty, rather than professionalism and achievement. Public higher education institutions have developed their own remuneration systems, which often are not transparent. Common to all is that the salaries of academic staff are very low and, as a rule, academics are forced to take up jobs in several universities. This certainly offers no employment stability, makes academic staff even more vulnerable and dependent on multiple administrators, and forces them to compromise their professional integrity and ethical norms further to keep their teaching positions.

Furthermore, the tools that should help safeguard integrity of the procedures of staff promotion, contract extension and termination such as, for example, performance evaluation, are often not transparently or adequately used and turn into vehicles of abuse instead. For instance, in some higher education institutions lecturers were not informed about the outcomes of their evaluations and were not able to foresee whether their contracts would be extended or their performance would be deemed unsatisfactory. This can result in manipulations of the performance evaluations to fit the necessary decision on promotion or dismissal of academic staff, instead of being used as a basis for making proper human resource decisions. Similarly to hiring and promotion, dismissals of academic staff are often motivated by their activism in fighting for their rights and expressed critical opinions. To this end, several cases of firing of academics staff echoed strongly in the media and, during the site visits, the assessment team was informed about many other such cases that were never publically exposed because of pressure and fear of retribution.

Lastly, even though Armenia has a long academic tradition and its universities always catered for numerous students, there seems to be no clear vision about the mission of the higher education institutions, research is put on the back burner, and academic work serves many other functions instead of those that it should. The government maintains a high level of control over who works and studies at the higher education institutions, what they publish and what voices can be heard, adjusting all this to the needs of the political establishment and the ruling political party in particular.

## B. Factors that create opportunities for the integrity violation

### Deficient hiring and firing procedures and practices

Public universities in Armenia have full autonomy to determine their human resource policies, including defining of staff needs, procedures for hiring and firing, and so on. This approach was introduced for the sake of departing from the old Soviet centralised model of education management.

On the books, Armenia has a proper system for selection and hiring of academic staff based on merit and conducted in open competitions. Relevant procedures appear to be quite modern and in line with international good practices. However, the problem appears when these rules and procedures are being applied in practice and when they fail to be implemented or enforced. In fact, there is no objective, external or stakeholder supervision over universities' leadership and administrations. At the same time, various opportunities for improper external influences do exist.

The same could be said about the procedures for dismissal of academic staff. To illustrate the point, numerous reports (Aleksanyan, 2012; OSCE, 2010; Karakhanyan, van Veen, & Bergen, 2011; Transparency International, 2013b) draw attention to the high number of incidences of corruption involving university staff, such as bribery and conditioning of students, but, at the same time, cases of firing for committing such violations are almost entirely absent. Only one such case was brought to the attention of the INTES assessment team. On the other hand, the team was informed of many cases of

dismissals based on other reasons. For instance, recent large-scale protests, such as the protests against the new “Pension system”,<sup>94</sup> resulted in many people losing their jobs. And while according to the official explanation many of them voluntarily submitted their resignations, refusing to comply with the new social security system, still a certain number of lecturers in the higher education (and also teachers and principals in general education) were simply dismissed.<sup>95</sup>

#### Temporary nature of employment contracts

Another factor that may contribute to this integrity violation lies within the temporary nature of the academic staff contracts, and the decisions regarding their extension or termination.

Namely, all academic staff in Armenia is hired on short-term contracts of one to five years. After the contract expires, it can be extended for another one to five years. The decisions regarding which teaching faculty members are extended and whose contracts are terminated rest with the university administrators, granting them extensive discretionary powers and giving them full control over these HR processes.

There is nothing wrong with such arrangement per se. In fact, if there is a set of clearly defined objective criteria on which basis decisions can be made, and their application is strictly pursued and rigorously monitored, such a system may promote healthy competition and improve quality of the academic staff.

However, it appears that in Armenia such decisions are often made not based on transparent and professional criteria but are rather arbitrary in nature and result in academic staff’s mediocrity, unwillingness of teaching faculty to do something differently, and fear of criticising the system.

To this end, findings of the site visits confirmed that there seems to be low recognition for those faculty members who are more active and successful, be it locally, internationally, in research projects or other initiatives. Loyalty or obedience seems to bring more dividends than innovation or striving for excellence.

In fact, academics often choose a “self-censorship” mode even in informal settings, and they clearly tend to refrain from making statements in public, afraid of being reprimanded. Cases when university teachers did not have their contracts extended, allegedly after voicing concerns about education in public, have been mentioned as a partial explanation for not speaking up (OSI, 2013).

This creates a system of unhealthy dependency and undermines the integrity of both academic staff and administrators of the higher education institutions.

#### Abuse of performance evaluation procedures

Extension of contracts should no doubt be based on evaluations of staff performance, but most higher education institutions do not have proper performance monitoring. Most universities have teacher evaluations performed through surveys or superficial questionnaires for students and staff. The practice differs from department to department.

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<sup>94</sup> In June 2014, a Mandatory Funded Pension System was re-approved in Armenia obliging all Armenian citizens born after 1973 to pay an additional contribution towards the pension funds. In September, several dozen young professors turned in their resignation notes because of this compulsory rule. For many of them lecturing at the university was their second employment, while their primary income came from other sources. However, because they held the positions at the state-run schools they were obliged to pay in both places of employment.

[http://www.armenianow.com/society/pensions/56622/armenia\\_universities\\_lecturers\\_pensions;](http://www.armenianow.com/society/pensions/56622/armenia_universities_lecturers_pensions)

[http://www.azernews.az/aggression/70733.html\)](http://www.azernews.az/aggression/70733.html)

<sup>95</sup><http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/26518831.html>

As stated earlier, performance evaluation procedures in Armenia rarely serve their primary purpose of evaluating staff's performance in view of providing correctives and guidance for further improvement. They often lack transparency and mostly serve a dual purpose: to substantiate certain "necessary" management decisions, and to exert pressure on academic staff.

### C. Factors that create incentives for the integrity violation

#### Lack of adequate material compensation

Grossly inadequate financial and other material compensation forces academic staff to look for employment in several universities at the same time. This presents several potential problems. Firstly, it prevents the academic staff from being fully committed to the goals of any of these institutions; secondly, it does not allow them to devote the necessary time and energy for the preparation of their tasks.

Furthermore, low salaries lead to various compromises both professional and ethical, making academic staff more susceptible to receipt of undue advantages and vulnerable to pressure from different administrators. The academic staff is often pushed to resort to overtly illegal practices, such as extortion, receipt of bribes and acceptance of gifts. Taking bribes from students is not rare according to the surveys, but university leadership does not take any strong action against it.<sup>96</sup> In turn, such "tolerance" puts the staff in a position to be blackmailed and pressured by the management and administration, and they are expected "to trade favours" when such need arises.

#### Lack of professional motivation

Professionalism and striving for innovation among the academic staff of higher education institutions seem largely not to be encouraged or in any way rewarded in Armenia. It appears that there is no recognition of those faculty members who are more active and successful, be it locally, internationally, in research projects or other initiatives.

This is well illustrated through attitudes towards engagement in academic research. Many education experts remarked on the poor quality and scarcity of the academic research in Armenia, explaining that there was no motivation for the academic staff to engage in it. To this end, they stated: "it will not necessarily mean career advancement, higher salary and it is severely underfunded" (OSI, 2013; The World Bank, 2013; Melkonyan, 2009).

The motivation of professors to keep up with high academic standards and criteria is negatively affected also by the fact that in order to be promoted, all one needs to do is to belong to an informal network or a formal group, such as political party. This kind of environment inevitably degrades the system of values and lowers motivation for academic excellence since it is neither properly recognized nor in any way appreciated.

#### Limited involvement in the decision making or reform processes

The introduction of Bologna standards and guidelines for quality assurance should have made staff policies more transparent and administration more efficient. However, this seems not to be the case. The academic staff complained that the Bologna reform processes were not properly explained to them and that they implemented the changes only because this was imposed on them by the administrators.

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<sup>96</sup> According to a head of the public relations department of a major public university in Armenia, during the last 5-6 years not a single lecturer was fired due to corruption. However, the survey conducted by the Sarkis Tkruni student organization indicated a 41.8% incidence of corruption. Over the last 4-5 years, there were no instances of lecturers losing their jobs at the Armenian State Pedagogical University, even though the same Sarkis Tkruni survey suggested a 79% incidence of corruption there (Aleksanyan, 2012).

It seems that the feeling of humiliation and devaluation is widespread even among the representatives of the highest positions (chairs) because they too believe they are expected to obey the orders of the university leadership and administrations without questioning them (Karakhanyan, van Veen, & Bergen, 2011; Karakhanyan, Veen, & Bergen, 2010).

#### Fear of losing employment

Academic staff in Armenia often operates in conditions of fear and oppression. The review team was told that the teaching faculty is often harshly treated by the administration and that there are no opportunities to discuss decisions made by the administration or to express opinions regarding such decisions.

Devalued and mistreated education staff accepts to sustain power hierarchy in exchange for job security. The persons in power have the means to maintain education staff in a subordinate position by trading in influence for services and favours.

#### D. Pointers for action

##### Closing the opportunities for malpractice

###### Main interventions

The fight against abuse of staffing procedures should primarily focus on rehabilitating merit as a leading principle of staff policies at public universities. Merit should be the leading principle in the hiring, promotion and firing of staff. Open competitions for all positions, as well as external supervision over the leadership of universities and administrations on how they apply the procedures, are paramount. The external supervision should be established as an integral element of the quality assurance cycle of universities.

The adoption of a set of clearly defined, sector-wide, objective criteria can help with the above and make sure that decisions regarding extension or termination of contracts are made in a transparent and fair way. Strict application and rigorous monitoring are a precondition for this recommendation to work.

###### Supporting interventions

The process of improving the quality assurance system as suggested in parts 3.1 and 3.2 should include the integration of clearly prescribed, objective and measurable criteria also for evaluation of staff performance. The availability and application of these criteria should become a core criterion in the process of accreditation of institutions and the evaluation of institutional performance.

Once established, the staff appraisal system can be used to develop universally applicable regulations regarding the remuneration of academic staff.

##### *Eliminating the incentives for malpractice*

###### Main interventions

To eliminate the incentives for exercising or tolerating improper influence on staff policies, it is recommended to create and enforce a system of professional appraisal and promotion based on innovation, involvement in academic research, and pursuit of higher standards of academic excellence. This is a long-term goal but its fulfilment can start even today with the creation of conditions for greater involvement of the academic staff in decision-making processes through consultations, inclusion into the discussions of key reform efforts, solicitation of ideas for further reform and action, etc.

It is also recommended to revise the salary scheme into a system of adequate financial and material compensation to academic staff based on their performance and ensuring of the budget support for its implementation.

### Supporting interventions

For staff evaluations, it is suggested to harvest the potential of student feedback on teacher performance and to triangulate it with data coming from self-evaluation and external peer review. There are some examples of tertiary institutions where this system has been already put in place and operates to the satisfaction of all sides involved. (SEUA, 2014).

### Summary of recommended actions

| Suspected integrity violation   | Recommendations Chapter 3                     |    |  | Area of policy intervention   |
|---|---|----|--|-------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #3: Improper influence on decisions about appointment, dismissal, and promotion of academic staff | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 19 | Enforce the existing rules and procedures for hiring, promotion and firing of staff on the basis of merit by open competitions for all positions, and by introducing external supervision over the leadership of universities and administrations. | Staff policies                |
|   |   | 20 | Establish external supervision as an integral element of the QA cycle of universities.   | Quality assurance             |
|   |   | 21 | Develop and integrate clearly prescribed, objective and measurable criteria for evaluation of staff performance as part of QA.   | Staff policies                |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 22 | Create and enforce a system of professional appraisal and promotion based on innovation, involvement in academic research, and pursuit of higher standards of academic excellence.   | Staff policies                |
|   |   | 23 | Create conditions for greater involvement of the academic staff in decision making processes.  | Governance                    |
|   |   | 24 | Revise the salary scheme into a system of adequate financial and material compensation to academic staff based on their performance, and ensure its financing.   | Financing of higher education |

### 3.4 Suspected integrity violation #4: Politicisation of tertiary education

#### VIOLATION ID

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>A. Suspected integrity violation</b>   |  |
| No. 3.4 Politicisation of tertiary education  |  |
| <b>B. Factors that create opportunity for the violation</b>   |  |
| Politicised governance of higher education institutions<br>Weak regulation and poor application of conflict of interest norms<br>Politicised student bodies and lack of grassroots control<br>Politically influenced academic curriculum  |  |
| <b>C. Factors that create incentives for the violation</b>  |  |
| Maximisation or private gain  |  |
| <b>D. Pointers for action</b>   |  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>B:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limit the number of governmental representatives in governing structures of the public high education institutions</li> <li>- Reduce the scope of powers exercised by the Minister of Education and Science vis à vis higher education leadership</li> <li>- Enforce legally prescribed hiring and firing procedures, including sanctions when existing rules and procedures are violated</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">- De-politicise research and study content</li> <li>- Improve the provisions on regulation of conflict of interest</li> <li>- Strengthen student self-governance bodies by limiting political influence within them</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>C:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">not applicable</p> |

#### A. Description

Prevention of undue political influence on the management of the higher education institutions, as well as their academic staff, is an important pre-condition for enabling these institutions to deliver good quality education free of bias. It contributes to the prevention of corruption in these institutions and building of a culture of academic integrity. It is important to develop mechanisms for the protection of professional and managerial staff from undue pressure from political officials. It is equally important to provide for the independence of their governing bodies to ensure that higher education institutions focus their resources on providing good quality education services, instead of serving the political interests of selected groups.

Higher education in Soviet Armenia was centralized and strictly controlled by the government. After the fall of the Soviet Union, numerous legislative reforms have been initiated to grant more autonomy to the higher education institutions. As a result, current Armenian legislation stipulates their autonomy in determining the main spheres of activity, adopting budgets and supervising their execution, introducing new majors and upgrading existing ones, adopting curricula and teaching methods. Rectors and Deans are now elected by the academic community of each institution rather than being appointed by the Ministry. This being said, since 2002 public high education institutions are being also regulated by the Law on State Non-Commercial Organisations (SNCOs) from 2001, provisions of which contradict other legislation on education and deny autonomy and self-governance of these institutions (The World Bank, 2013; OSI, 2013; Navoyan, 2009).

Legal collisions aside, the real question at hand is how much of legally granted autonomy is being exercised in practice. Various reports, as well as findings of the site visits, paint a different picture to that stipulated in the law. Different stakeholders met by the INTES assessment team during the site visits stated that the governance at the university level is still heavily influenced by political powers and

expressed concern that the current governance structure compromises the quality of the higher education and stalls any attempts at real reform.

The INTES assessment has identified various forms of this integrity violation. The most common ones include (but are not limited to):

- Political and governmental interference in making of staff policies and staff-related decisions including hiring and firing through the use of politically captured Governing Boards;
- Political influence exerted by the government over hiring and firing of the rectors through the powerful representation in the Governing Boards and/or other informal means;
- Engagement of high-level public officials in actions or decision-making in conflict of interest situations
- Trade-off of quality and academic integrity in exchange for loyalty to a specific person or party;
- Illegal firing of lecturers who had a different opinion or objected to practices or decisions made on an institutional level.

## B. Factors that create opportunities for the integrity violation

### *Politicized governance of higher education institutions*

As noted by Heyneman (2007) leaders chosen on merit will perform better rather than those who are chosen based on privileges.<sup>97</sup> This should apply to the leadership of the higher education institutions. However, analysis of governing structure in tertiary education shows that most of the high-level positions are held by persons from the government and only rotational changes take place.

According to the Law on Higher Education, the Prime Minister of Armenia nominates state employees and renowned persons from the cultural, scientific, economic, and educational sphere as members of the Council of public higher education institutions, to a total of 50% of all Council membership. Perhaps less surprisingly, usually the nominees are politically affiliated figures. Site visits and desk research revealed that the governing bodies of every state higher education institution had a member of the government, including the President, the Head of the Presidential Administration, the Chairman of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Education and Science (Table 3.4.1).

**Table 3.4.1 Overview of appointments for Chairperson of the Council (Governing Board) of major public higher education institutions in Armenia**

| State HEIs                                    | Chairperson of the Council   |
|---|--|
| Yerevan State University                      | President of Armenia   |
| Yerevan State Linguistic University           | Head of the Presidential Administration                                  |
| Armenian State University of Economics        | Chairman of the National Assembly  |
| State Pedagogical University                  | Prime Minister of Armenia  |
| State Engineering University                  | Former Chairman of the National Assembly                                 |
| State Agrarian University                     | Chairman of the Civil Servants Council                                   |
| Yerevan State Medical University              | Minister of Education and Science  |
| State Conservatory                            | Former Armenian Ambassador to Russia                                     |
| State Engineering and Construction University | Mayor of Yerevan   |
| Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture  | Head of the second largest political party represented in the Parliament |
| Goris State University                        | Governor of Syunik Marz  |

<sup>97</sup><http://www.vanderbilt.edu/peabody/heynean/PUBLICATIONS/Heyneman.2007.BuyingYourWay.pdf>

The government has the last word also regarding the Council members that it does not nominate, as the composition and all members of each Council must be approved by the Prime Minister, with the name of each member individually stipulated in a respective Ministerial Decree. Finally, all but two universities (Yerevan State University – YSU and the Armenia State Engineering University – ASEU) have opted to adopt “voluntarily” the sample Charter for Public Higher Education Institutions developed by the Ministry of Education and Science. The Charter is notorious for limiting institutional autonomy and academic freedom that are guaranteed in Article 6 of the Law on Higher Education. The YSU and ASEU are the only two institutions that have adopted the sample Charter but have deleted the sections that affect their autonomy. The Chairs of their Councils are the President of Armenia and the former Chairman of the National Assembly of Armenia.

Obviously, this set-up is conducive to influence and interventions by the state authorities in various parts of institutional management, such as finance, management appointments, specialization, and admission policies and decisions, etc. This includes a direct channel of control over the use of the budget, despite the fact that the proportion of state allocation is small (between 9% and 30%, depending on the university).<sup>98</sup>

The next level of institutional governance – the rectors and vice-rectors – is also captured by political affiliations.<sup>99</sup> Most notably, there seems to be a considerable political influence over hiring and dismissal of rectors by the government. By law, the rectors are appointed by academic bodies and the government is supposed only to approve the appointed rector; based on which the Minister of Education and the rector in question sign a five-year contract. However, in practice, almost all state higher education institutions interviewed for the World Bank report already cited here (18 in total) answered that the government appoints their rector, indicating government’s strong influence on the selection of the rectors, possibly through the powerful representation in the Council and/or other informal means. Similarly, there are some scandalous examples when university leadership was fired by a decision of the Minister himself despite the fact that he is not afforded with such power by law.<sup>100</sup>

In addition, the Rector’s Councils – entities that, among other things, have the final say over staff policies and staff-related decisions including hiring and firing – follow orders that are defined by the politically captured Councils.

Finally, the last level of institutional governance – the deans and the heads of the departments – lacks true independence as well. The selection process for these positions is not sufficiently competitive. While they are supposed to be selected through an open competition with a possibility for the external candidates to apply, in reality elections are often open only to internal candidates and are mostly based on the nominations put forward by the rector, academic staff, and/or students (The World Bank, 2013; OSI, 2013). Moreover, all decisions made by the deans or at the department level have to go through approval of higher instances, either formal or informal.

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<sup>98</sup> Armenia: Second Education Quality and Relevance Project (P107772) and Education Improvement Project (P130182) Inspection Request

<sup>99</sup> Almost all state HEIs interviewed answered that the government appoints their Rector, indicating government’s strong influence on the selection of the Rector possibly through the powerful representation in the Council and/or other informal means (The World Bank, 2013).

<sup>100</sup> Suren Zolyan, former rector at the Yerevan State Linguistic University, was dismissed from his post under the order of Armenia’s Education Minister Armen Ashotyan. Zolyan filed a complaint because he considered the dismissal illegal, but was unable to reverse the decision. Justification for his dismissal was that University’s Rector had left the country for 4 days for plenary session in CoE despite the fact that the Minister considered the trip inappropriate. (<http://news.am/eng/news/118793.html>; <http://en.trend.az/scaucasus/armenia/2015779.html> )

The government also has control over access matters and admission policy of faculties. Minimal financial support from the state is accompanied by a significant level of power in decision making in higher education. For example, the Republican board of admission examinations is a body with important responsibilities. It defines the competition results on paid and free educational system, admission results of the applicants possessing the privileges as defined by the law and redistributes the vacancies in paid and free educational system with competition results. The Board consists of 27 members. The chief of the Republican board of admission examinations is the Minister of Education and Science. The Republican board is composed of deputies of the Minister of Education and Science, the representative of the government staff, the representative of the National Security Service adjacent to the government, two representatives of the assessment and testing centre, rectors of the state higher educational institutions and the executive secretary. The Minister of Education and Science appoints the admission board staff.<sup>101</sup>

#### *Weak regulation and poor application of conflict of interest norms*

Ensuring that the integrity of government decision-making is not compromised by public officials' private interests is a growing public concern around the globe. According to the OECD, effective management of conflict of interest requires a balance. An overly strict approach to controlling private interests may conflict with other rights, be unworkable, or deter experienced and competent potential candidates from entering a public office or the public service. A modern approach should include identifying risks; prohibiting unacceptable forms of private interest; raising awareness of the circumstances in which conflicts can arise; and ensuring effective procedures to resolve conflict-of-interest situations.

Conflict of interest in Armenia is regulated to some point in regards to the engagement of high-level officials in entrepreneurial activities, but when it comes to decision-making – regulations are very vague. Norms of ethics, prescribed by Article 28 of the Law on Public Service, do not prevent public servants from engaging in actions or decision-making in conflict of interest situations. It is possible that the official would make a decision in favour of his/her relatives and contributions not connected to his/her investments. It seems that the aim of the provision was not the exclusion of conflict of interest situations, but rather a reduction of their probability.

Furthermore, the law does not clearly define what measures the Commission on Ethics, a body responsible for conflict of interest regulation, can take: would they include eliminating the consequences of a conflict of interest, or would this body just note the decision made in conflict (Transparency International, 2014; CFOA, 2013). Similarly, in cases when high-ranking officials make a decision or take an action that causes a conflict of interests, the legislation does not regulate whether that decision or action should be declared invalid, how and by whom.

In practice, there is anecdotal evidence that violations of conflict of interest regulations are violated commonplace. For instance, the Prime Minister is the chair of the ANQA Board. In this capacity, the Prime Minister participates directly in the deliberations and decision-making process at ANQA, sometimes deciding on major changes in policies or direction. Moreover, given that ANQA is in the process of accrediting the Pedagogical State University, at which the Prime Minister himself holds the position of the Chairman of the Council (OSI, 2013).

#### *Politicised student bodies and lack of grassroots control*

In most universities, there is no real student power that would limit the existing autocratic order or protect students' academic interests. In most cases, students have the opinion that their student representatives are instructed and directed by the university leadership or by a party.

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<sup>101</sup> Order on Admission to State and Non State Higher Educational Institutions (According to bachelor's degree).

In fact, talks with students and Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA) confirmed that most student bodies are either politically engaged or inactive. Often there are situations, when members of the student representative bodies, being also a member of a political party, use the provided opportunity for party propaganda and for defending the party's interests that has nothing to do with the interests of students and courses.

According to an OSCE survey conducted in 2010, only the SEUA Student Council enjoyed a high level of trust among the students of that university (76%). Other student councils were trusted by 21% to 50% of students (OSCE, 2010).

#### *Politically influenced academic curriculum*

Politicisation also affects academic integrity in higher education. Assurance of quality of academic work, implementation of development and research projects are all happening in the context of compromised integrity. Compliance with prevalent political structures and opinions is perceived to be an important criterion for academic success and professional career in higher education. Loyalty to specific persons or party and informal networks, according to information collected during the site visits, often make quality and academic integrity a trade-off for different benefits and favours.

This integrity problem also has a negative effect on the quality of research. Polarisation and politicization of science in Armenia, especially in the sphere of social sciences and particularly in history and political science, is commonplace. An overall standard for “patriotism” often interferes with the objectivity and quality of research. Scholars sometimes become the target for nationalistic groups and actors, including those active within the academic community. Many academics also find themselves in an unfavourable position for expressing a different opinion than that of university leadership or political party.

The assessment team came across numerous complaints raised by students whose thesis or academic papers were refused on the ground other than academic quality. Also, the review team has been informed by counterparts during the site visits of illegal firing of lecturers that had a different opinion or objected to practices or decisions made on an institutional level. There are also examples of renowned Armenian and international scholars of Armenian being prohibited for not being “enough patriotic”. (Caucasus Institute, 2010). All such practices suppress critical thought and de-motivate many young scholars to engage in social research.

### C. Factors that create incentives for the integrity violation

#### *Maximisation of private gain*

The origin of all integrity violations described so far was in a combination of opportunity for malpractice, and a genuine need by a stakeholder group for a service that the education system was failing to deliver.

As an integrity violation, politicisation in Higher Education is different. Its origin is for the most part a combination of opportunity and basic stimulants, such as a desire to maximize profits and private gain; political ambition and the need to further secure electoral positions and power grip on the society or its individual segments; and finally a corporate culture where all interlocutors feel that this is an acceptable mode of operation and that by breaking it they would let down others in their surroundings. All of these are personal motives that are unrelated to the system of higher education, except to the extent to which this system provides the perpetrators with a window of opportunity to act in accordance with their basic motivation.

The gain-oriented character of this violation in Higher Education limits the options for a policy response to regulatory and enforcement solutions that aim at closing the opportunities of perpetrators. Therefore, Section D does not feature a sub-section with recommendations on eliminating factors that create incentives for malpractice.

#### D. Pointers for action

##### *Closing the opportunities for malpractice*

###### Main interventions

Undue political influence on the management of the higher education institutions could be prevented by: (i) limiting the number of governmental representatives in governing structures of the public high education institutions; (ii) reducing the scope of powers exercised by the Minister of Education and Science *vis à vis* higher education leadership; and (iii) by strictly enforcing legally prescribed hiring and firing procedures, including punishment when existing rules and procedures are violated.

It is also recommended to undertake immediate measures to remove politics from all matters related to study content and research.

###### Supporting interventions

Further improvement of the provisions on regulation of conflict of interest, ensuring their enforcement and establishment of an effective mechanism for their control will contribute to building up of resistance to the undue political interference in the functioning of the higher education institutions.

If student self-governance bodies are strengthened by limiting the influence of political elements within them, this should put them in a better position to exercise grass root control in the area of higher education.

##### *Summary of recommended actions*

| <b>Suspected integrity violation</b>                                    | <b>Recommendations Chapter 3</b>              |    |   | <b>Area of policy intervention</b> |
|---|---|----|---|------------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #4:<br>Politicisation of higher education | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 24 | Prevent undue political influence on the management of the higher education institutions  | Governance                         |
|   |   | 25 | Take measures to remove politics from all matters related to study content and research.  | Quality assurance                  |
|   |   | 26 | Improvement of the provisions on regulation of conflict of interest, ensuring their enforcement and establishment of an effective mechanism for their control | Staff policies                     |
|   |   | 27 | Strengthen student self-governance bodies and limit the influence of political elements within them   |                                    |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice |    | not applicable  |                                    |

## Annex: Summary of pointers for action

The Annex contains a summary of all recommendations and suggestions on how to close opportunities and eliminate the incentives for the integrity violations that were identified throughout the report.

| Suspected integrity violation   | Recommendations Chapter 2                     |    |  | Areas of policy intervention |
|---|---|----|--|------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation # 1: Private supplementary tutoring by class teachers | 1. Closing the opportunities                  | 1  | Define out-of-school-time tutoring by teachers to their own students, as well as referral to fellow teachers, as a violation   | Staff policies               |
|   |   | 2  | Make principals responsible for integrity violations in their schools  | Governance                   |
|   |   | 3  | Introduce a binding code of conduct for the teaching profession the provisions of which are tied to administrative consequences in case of infringement.   | Staff policies               |
|   |   | 4  | Lift the current limitations on the frequency of inspections and allow for a more regular but subtle inspectoral visits that would permit for observations that are more formative in nature and can capture the teaching process in better detail.  | School inspections           |
|   |   | 5  | Make school inspectorate a strong, professional and highly independent institution   | School inspections           |
|   |   | 6  | Improve classroom assessment practice  | Assessment                   |
| 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice                                       | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 7  | Undertake regular in-depth analysis of testing results, raise capacity in schools to do such analysis themselves, and regularly inform parents not only about the marks of students, but also about the marking process, justification of the marks given in classroom assessments, and other relevant observations on the progress of their children. | Assessment                   |
|   |   | 8  | Revise the 12th grade curriculum and allocation of hours to allow for preparation for the graduation test.   | Teaching and learning        |
|   |   | 9  | Revision of items in the standardised graduation test to bring them more in line with the curriculum.  | Assessment                   |
|   |   | 10 | Update the salary scheme and level of pay of teachers, especially of those teaching sought after subjects, so they feel their work is acknowledged   | Spending on education        |

|   |   |  |  |   |                    |
|---|---|--|--|---|--------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #2. Politicisation of secondary education | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 12   | Initiate a public de-politicisation process to clean up the public education system of undue influence. Two of the main steps should be to:  |   |                    |
|   |   | 12a  | Assess the regulatory framework to verify that it prohibits political activism in public education in any of its manifestations  | Staff policies  |                    |
|   |   | 12b  | Place professional education staff in the category of professionals who are banned from political activism, such as judges and prosecutors, and define consequences for non-compliance   | Staff policies  |                    |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice   | 13   | Identify and close the channels through which the political establishment delivers preferential treatment to loyal education institutions. This might mean to revise the regulations about procurement and allocation of resources for capital investment in schools in order to make those regulations better, more detailed and transparent. | Procurement; public finance management  |                    |
|   |   | 14   | Encourage and support the media in playing a more active role in the public reporting and debate about the problem, and protect them from reprisal when they do so   | Freedom of media  |                    |
|   |   | 15   | An aspect of the drive towards more transparency is to provide for adequate whistle-blower protection for education professionals who decide to draw attention through the media (or otherwise) to abuses they are aware of.   | Whistleblower protection  |                    |
|   |   | 16   | As an alternative, consider centralising the teacher recruitment and appointment procedures.   | Staff policies  |                    |
|   |   | 17   | Reduce the vulnerability of teaching staff vis-à-vis school leadership by strengthening the effectiveness of school boards.  | Governance  |                    |
|   | Suspected integrity violation #3. Abuse of procedures for appointment and dismissal of school staff | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice | 18   | Raise the effectiveness of school inspections in ensuring compliance with the normative framework, by limiting or fully eliminating the reliance of the inspection process on the very same entities that are subject to inspection | School inspections |
|   |   |  | 19   | Define proportionate consequences for non-compliance with the rules on hiring and firing, and demonstrate that they are being enforced .  | Staff policies     |
| 20  |   |  | See recommendation No. 16  | Staff policies  |                    |
| 21  |   |  | Define binding requirements for schoolboard membership and include provisions against conflict of interest, in particular such that emerge from an overlap of roles.   | Governance  |                    |
| 22  |   |  | Curb the oversupply of education professionals by revising and updating the historically determined allocations of budget places for teacher training.   | Public finance management (budgeting)   |                    |
| 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice                           |   | 23   | Commission research to understand better the connection between staffing violations and socio-economic conditions of those who engage in them.   | Follow-up research: staff policies  |                    |

|   |   |    |  |                                    |
|---|---|----|--|------------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #4. Undue recognition of learning achievement | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 24 | Undertake an in-depth evaluation of assessment reform implementation, and entrust the school inspectorate with the task. The Focus should be on: limitations in the working conditions that prevent implementation; suggestions to adjust the scope of reform; a framework for regular monitoring of assessment practices in view of constant improvement. | Follow-up research: assessment     |
|   |   | 25 | Ensure that capacity building on issues as central as criteria-based assessment is evenly provided to all teachers   | Professional development: teachers |
|   |   | 26 | Diversify the information about student progress that is provided to parents, <i>i.e.</i> by including details about the marking process, justification of the marks given in classroom assessments, and other relevant observations on the progress of students.  | Assessment; quality assurance      |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 27 | Undertake an in-depth research on the marking bias in classroom assessment.  | Follow-up research: assessment     |
|   |   | 28 | As a long-term goal, rationalise the oversized school network  | School network optimisation        |

| Suspected integrity violation                             | Recommendations Chapter 3                     |   |  | Area of policy intervention   |
|---|---|---|--|-------------------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #1: Cheating and plagiarism | 1. Closing the opportunities                  | 1 | Develop formal, sector-wide guidelines against academic dishonesty   | Academic integrity            |
|   |   | 2 | Raise awareness about the specific forms of academic dishonesty and consequences of non-compliance with the guidelines ; raise capacity for enforcement of guidelines  | Academic integrity            |
|   |   | 3 | De-politicisation of university governance structures  | Governance                    |
|   |   | 4 | Improve transparency vis-à-vis the wider public  | Accountability                |
|   |   | 5 | Introduce exam settings in which responsibility for assessing academic achievement is shared between several assessors, oral exams are reduced to a minimum, and the process of assessment is anonymised.  | Assessment                    |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice | 6 | Improve student motivation by introducing a package of measures that will help to reduce the importance of financial considerations for study choices, while favouring academic interest.  | Admissions; Scholarships      |
|   |   | 7 | Reserve the merit-based state order scholarships for those who not only perform well, but also need them (include SES as criteria)   | Scholarships                  |
|   |   | 8 | Reduce the dependency of public universities on fee-paying students by reassessing the outdated scholarship allocations to institutions and study areas based on criteria that balance the needs of the national economy and the interests of prospective study candidates | Financing of higher education |
|   |   | 9 | Create conditions and incentives for faculties to embark on a reassessment and possibly calibration of their study curricula.  | Study content                 |

|   |   |  |   |  |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| Suspected integrity violation #2: Undue recognition of academic achievement | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 10   | Ensure the full independence of the Armenian National Agency for Quality Assurance – ANQA; adopt strict, transparent rules against conflict of interest of its staff, management and board members, and against politicisation.   | Governance; staff policies   |
|   |   | 11   | Improve trustworthiness and reliability of quality assurance processes by: limiting MoE responsibilities to verification of compliance with accreditation procedures; defining a unified, sector-wide approach to assessment of learning outcomes in the modularised programmes; and by developing minimum quality standards for external quality assurance. Compliance with these should be a formal requirements for accreditation. | Quality assurance  |
|   |   | 12   | The President of the ANQA Board should be an elective position  | Governance   |
|   |   | 13   | Embed the Accreditation Committee in the ANQA Charter, and regulate its independence and competences through a stand-alone statute and manual of operation.   | Governance   |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice   | 14   | Increase public spending on higher education and consider distributing at least part of it on competitive basis.  | Financing of higher education  |
|   |   | 15   | Embark on a process of rationalisation of the higher education system to bring its capacity in line with actual demand for study places.  | Optimisation of the public university network  |
|   |   | 16   | Strengthen the independence of tertiary institutions as well as their capacity to handle income from private sources through de-politicisation of university governance and by allowing the universities to diversify their sources of income.  | Governance; financing of higher education  |
|   |   | 17   | Commission an assessment of feasibility of partial privatisation of public universities.  | Follow-up research: feasibility study on partial privatisation   |
|   |   | 18   | See recommendation No. 5  | Assessment   |
|   | Suspected integrity violation #3: Improper influence on decisions about appointment, dismissal, and promotion of academic staff | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice | 19  | Enforce the existing rules and procedures for hiring, promotion and firing of staff on the basis of merit by open competitions for all positions, and by introducing external supervision over the leadership of universities and administrations. |
| 20  |   |  | Establish external supervision as an integral element of the QA cycle of universities.  | Quality assurance  |
| 21  |   |  | Develop and integrate clearly prescribed, objective and measurable criteria for evaluation of staff performance as part of QA.  | Staff policies   |
| 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice                               |   | 22   | Create and enforce a system of professional appraisal and promotion based on innovation, involvement in academic research, and pursuit of higher standards of academic excellence.  | Staff policies   |
|   |   | 23   | Create conditions for greater involvement of the academic staff in decision making processes.   | Governance   |
|   |   | 24   | Revise the salary scheme into a system of adequate financial and material compensation to academic staff based on their performance, and ensure its financing.  | Financing of higher education  |
|   |   |  |   |  |

|   |   |    |   |                   |
|---|---|----|---|-------------------|
| Suspected integrity violation #4:<br>Politicisation of higher education | 1. Closing the opportunities for malpractice  | 24 | Prevent undue political influence on the management of the higher education institutions  | Governance        |
|   |   | 25 | Take measures to remove politics from all matters related to study content and research.  | Quality assurance |
|   |   | 26 | Improvement of the provisions on regulation of conflict of interest, ensuring their enforcement and establishment of an effective mechanism for their control | Staff policies    |
|   |   | 27 | Strengthen student self-governance bodies and limit the influence of political elements within them   |                   |
|   | 2. Eliminating the incentives for malpractice |    | not applicable  |                   |

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