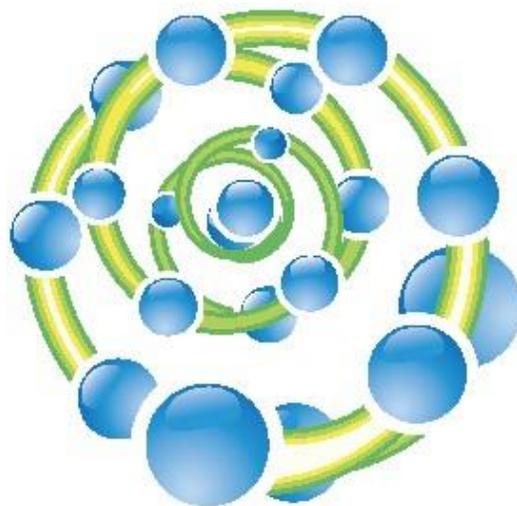


Apprenticeship-type schemes and structured work-based learning programmes

Czech Republic



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Introduction

Political changes and economic transformation after 1989 had a substantial impact on the Czech system of vocational education and training (VET). State-owned companies, which previously used to be the main providers of VET and employers of VET graduates, fell apart in the course of the privatisation. Practical training shifted largely to school workshops and laboratories whose equipment by far did not match existing needs and rapid development and the teachers themselves started to lose contact with new technologies. During the following period of rapid economic growth and demographic decline, the lack of skilled workers particularly in the fields of craft became a major obstacle to further business development. The mismatch between employers' needs and the capacity of the school system to satisfy those requirements thus led to the recovery of the employers' interest in cooperation with schools aimed, in particular, at securing provision of skilled graduates in the future. The employers' interest has intensified especially in recent years.

A. Definition and statistics

Despite the rather unfavourable development, the Czech VET still benefits from its long tradition and represents a substantial part of the Czech education system. The country has always recorded a high proportion of persons with upper secondary education (ISCED 3) and even now when there is a trend throughout the whole Europe towards the general secondary education, the share of graduates of vocational secondary education stays relatively high compared to the European average (IVET students as % of all upper secondary – ISCED 3 – students in 2006: EU-28 – 51.9% and ČR – 79.3%; in 2012: EU-28 – 50.4% and ČR – 72.7%) ⁽¹⁾.

There is no formal apprenticeship programme along the lines of the dual system in the Czech Republic, i.e. there is no programme that includes contract between the apprentice and the employer and there is no shared responsibility between employer and the school related to the training (as it the case e.g. in Germany or Austria). Schools are exclusively responsible for education and training and curriculum shows a high proportion of theory in comparison with practical training. However, practical, work-based training and work placements are integrated into IVET curricula as a mandatory part. For the purpose of this article, these two main secondary IVET schemes were selected:

Secondary education with vocational certificate – provided typically by secondary vocational schools (SOU – *střední odborná učiliště* – ISCED 3C)

Secondary education with *maturita* exam – provided typically by secondary technical schools (SOŠ – *střední odborné školy* – ISCED 3A).

The secondary education with vocational certificate (ISCED 3C), that prepares graduates primarily for the labour market, has been traditionally recognized as “apprenticeship” in the Czech Republic ⁽²⁾. The secondary education with *maturita* exam (ISCED 3A), that prepares graduates for the labour market, but at the same time also for higher education studies, is not perceived as “apprenticeship” in the national context (e.g. the participants are not called “apprentices”, but “students/pupils”, etc.), nevertheless this scheme complies to the large extent with the definition of apprenticeship provided by Cedefop for the purposes of this article ⁽³⁾; and

⁽¹⁾ Source: Eurostat, table educ_ipart, extracted on 27th May 2014.

⁽²⁾ It is often also translated as “apprenticeship” in English.

⁽³⁾ (a) Apprenticeship curriculum leads to a formally recognized qualification (ideally included in the national qualifications framework) and provides a full set of knowledge, skills and competences to give access to a specific (group of) occupation(s) recognized by employers;

together with the secondary education with vocational certificate they form relatively consistent and well-established mainstream of Czech secondary IVET, with both the schemes being often provided by one institution “under one roof”.

Table 1. **Secondary education programmes* – description and share of graduates in the academic year 2012/13**

		Percentage	Description
	Secondary education (ISCED 2C) ⁽⁴⁾	0.6%	basic working habits, primarily children with learning difficulties
TOPIC OF THE ARTICLE	Secondary education with vocational certificate (ISCED 3C)	26.7%	mainstream of IVET, high share of WBL
	Secondary education with <i>maturita</i> exam – vocational (ISCED 3A)	48.3%	
	Secondary education with <i>maturita</i> exam – general (<i>gymnázia</i> , ISCED 3A)	24.4%	general education preparing for HE

* not including follow-up studies and shortened programmes

Source: Statistická ročenka školství [*Statistical Yearbook of Education*], 2014, www.msmt.cz.

IVET that includes work-based learning is provided also at the tertiary level (tertiary professional schools – ISCED 5B), but here the working methods and governance is closer to those of higher education and therefore this scheme has not been selected for detailed discussion within the article.

(b) The form of training combines study and work and includes alternance between a specific work-place (employer) and a specific educational institution or training centre; (c) All aspects of apprenticeship are explicitly defined in the apprenticeship contract, in a legally binding document; (d) The design of curriculum and of modes of delivery is done in cooperation with social partners (employers but also employees).

⁽⁴⁾ The pupil achieves qualification at the level of secondary education by a successful completion of a study programme lasting from 1 to 2 years.

B. Description and specific features of the programmes

The pupils enter vocational education after completing the basic school, i.e. normally at the age of 15 (after concluding the nine-year compulsory education). Some vocational schools implement admission examinations; nearly fifty percent of regions in the Czech Republic have introduced uniform admission examination for study programmes with *maturita* exam. Due to unfavourable demographic development, the capacity of secondary schools in many fields of study exceeds the number of applicants. Therefore school founders often take measures by means of which they artificially reduce the capacity of schools (e.g. merges of schools, elimination of particular fields of study).

Secondary education is generally provided as part of formal education in schools following the state-guaranteed **Framework Educational Programmes** (National Curriculum, RVPs). They are developed at the national level for individual fields of study. These programme documents specify the general goals of education, they define the key competencies essential for personal development of pupils, set the factual areas of education and their contents and define expected learning outcomes. In line with the Framework Educational Programmes, the schools develop their own **School Educational Programmes** (School Curriculum, ŠVP). This system allows for a distinctive profiling of individual schools, which are able to adapt to the needs of their pupils as well as regional labour markets. In the course of 2007-2012, Framework Educational Programmes have been gradually developed and issued for all 284 fields of study within the secondary education that are currently defined by the legislation.

Practical education in the curricula

Under the School Act, the education provided by the secondary schools contains two parts – theoretical and practical education. Practical education is provided either in schools (e.g. practicum in labs, school workshops or practice enterprises etc.) or in a real work environment (e.g. practical training in companies). Companies providing practical education conclude with the school the Agreement on the Contents and Range of Practical Training and Terms and Conditions of its Provision. For purposes of this article we concentrate on two main types of practical education: Practical training and work placement.

Practical training takes place in school workshops or other model environments and ideally also in real companies. Its goal is to develop practical manual skills of the students at EQF 3 level.

Work placement is a part of practical education in the programmes with *maturita* examination (ISCED 3A). It should take place in a real company environment and it is aimed at the development of middle management skills at EQF 4 level – e.g. organizational, technology and administration skills.

The minimum duration of practical training and work placement is defined by the Framework Educational Programme for particular field of study. Organisation of work placements is the responsibility of the school. During the period of the work placement, a pupil or student is not regarded as an employee of the subject on whose premises they carry out the practical education. The School Act, however, stipulates the right of the pupil/student to get remuneration for the work which brings income to the subject on whose premises is the work placement carried out. The minimum monthly remuneration is 30% of the minimum wage.

Secondary education with vocational certificate

The three-year vocational education programmes (ISCED 3C/EQF 3) concluded by a final examination and vocational certificate enable the graduates to enter directly labour market and perform manual work, crafts and similar occupations (e.g. bricklayer, hairdresser). Most of these programmes are provided by the secondary vocational schools (SOU). Graduates may sign up for two-year follow-up study (ISCED 4A/EQF 4) and take *maturita* exam, which opens path to higher education. The secondary vocational schools provide also smaller number of four-year study programmes concluded by *maturita* exam (ISCED 3A/EQF 4). Training in programmes with apprenticeship certificate includes 30% of general subjects, while practical training represents 36-46% as a minimum depending on type of field of study and required working skills. In fields of study where pupils with special needs or limited learning abilities are being trained, the practical training represents 46-56% as a minimum. The schools may increase the proportion of practical training in the School Education Programmes based on an agreement with the social partners.

Practical training is usually provided in the form of week-long cycles – one week of theoretical education at school and one week of practical training at the work place, but other schemes are also common. During the three years of the study students usually experience various types of operations.

Secondary education with maturita exam

The four-year vocational education programmes concluded by *maturita* exam (ISCED 3A/EQF 4) are mostly provided by the secondary technical schools (SOŠ) and prepare the graduates for

studies at higher education institutions or for work in technical, administrative or similar mid-level occupations (e.g. construction technician, IT systems administrator). The proportions of general and vocational subjects vary depending on the field of study and grades. The ratio in study programmes concluded by *maturita* exam is around 45:55 in favour of vocational subjects.

The minimum mandatory scope of work placements set by RVP represents four weeks, however a number of study programmes shows higher proportion of practical education (on average it is 6-8 weeks in the course of the programme). Work placements are organized as several-week long blocks. They are usually scheduled at the end of the school year, but often it depends on the specifics of the given field (e.g. during the summer holidays in the programmes related to tourism or agriculture).

The secondary technical schools also offer **lyceum-type programmes** with high proportion of general education (up to 70% of the curriculum), these programmes prepare the students mainly for further studies of the given fields at higher education institutions. They include work placements lasting two weeks as a minimum.

The *maturita* exam completed at all types of schools entitles to apply for admission to tertiary education.

Currently, the possibility of obtaining both **vocational certificate as well as *maturita* exam** (ISCED 3C and 3A/EQF 3-4) is being pilot-tested within the framework of a four-year vocational education programme. Pupils are allowed to pass the final examination (ISCED 3C) after the third year of study programme and successful graduates get a vocational certificate that acknowledges the respective vocational qualification awarded. They continue in the programme and after the fourth year the programme is concluded by the *maturita* exam (ISCED 3A). These programmes are being introduced in order to improve position of new graduates on the labour market and prevent pupils who, after four years of studies, fail at the *maturita* exam to be forced to enter the labour market without any qualification.

Within the framework of **shortened study programmes** leading to secondary level of education with vocational certificate (ISCED 4C) and *maturita* exam (ISCED 4A), it is possible to obtain additional qualification of the same or lower level as the one that applicant already holds. Studies under this programme last 1 - 2 years. This option is particularly suitable for adults who are interested in enhancing their vocational qualification in another field.

All programmes can be studied not only in the form of daily studies but also distance learning (combined form of studies), then the studies are one year longer than in the daily form.

B.1. Governance

The **Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT)** is the main body responsible for IVET. At regional level, self-governing bodies – regional assembly and regional council (*zastupitelstvo kraje, rada kraje*) are directly responsible for establishing and closing down public VET schools ⁽⁵⁾ at upper secondary and tertiary professional levels). A regional body of state administration is a **regional authority** (*krajský úřad*), which is responsible for the development of a regional long-term plan for the development of education and a report about the situation in education in the region. The schools enjoy a relatively high level of autonomy. **School directors** hold significant powers. They are responsible for preparation and implementation of school curricula based on approved national curricula, for the quality of pedagogical work and human resources policy, for educational management and efficient use of financial resources.

In the course of the last decade, the role of **social partners** in VET has been gradually strengthened. The new School Act (effective since 1st January 2005) reinforced the role and involvement of social partners in shaping the contents as well as objectives of VET and evaluation of its outcomes both at the national (Framework Educational Programmes, RVP) as well as local levels (School Educational Programmes, ŠVP). The role of social partners has also been strengthened in the area of VET completion (a professional from practice is a member of the examination board at the final tests in fields of study with vocational certificate – ISCED 3C).

Also the Act on recognition of CVET outcomes (No. 179/2006 Coll.) has significantly contributed to the process of involving social partners in the broader context of the development of educational programmes. The law clearly defines the role of social partners in the process of creation and approval of the relevant qualification and evaluation standards within the development of the National Qualifications Register (see below).

Field groups, sector councils or regional councils for human resources development constitute additional means for involvement of social partners in VET. Despite these bodies being informally linked, there exists no official system as such. Field groups operating under the governance of the National Institute for Education (NÚV) have been established based on the need to foster, on national level, creation of the RVPs whose objectives and contents are in line with the labour market needs.

⁽⁵⁾ Majority of VET schools are public schools established by regions. The rest includes private schools, church schools and schools run directly by ministries (state schools).

There are 25 field groups consisting of experts from the area of education and of labour market and occupations. Sector councils (*sektorové rady*) represent a relatively new type of entities operating nationwide.

They bring together the representatives of key players, especially employers, in particular sectors and are involved in the process of defining occupations and qualifications (primarily the qualification standards). The concept is being developed since 2006 and the number of sector councils is gradually increasing (currently there are 29 sector councils). Regional councils for human resources development are established at the regional level and have a consultative function.

During recent years, the Czech Republic made also use of the possibility to draw funds from the ESF, which contributed to the successful implementation of multiple national projects focused on pilot-testing of **system adjustments and measures** in the area of VET. These included activities aimed at enhancing involvement of employers in VET, both in the development of curricular documents as well as in education and training itself (e.g. the project *Internships for Young Job Seekers*, *Internships in Companies*, POSPOLU – for detail information see below). There have been also media campaigns carried out aimed at promoting technical fields of study.

At local level, **partnership between schools and employers** is being usually implemented in the form of medium or long-term co-operation that includes participation of employers in the development of ŠVPs and defining the requirements for professional competencies of pupils, participation in VET (provision of practical training in real working environment on company premises), co-operation with teachers (continuing education), however, the schools benefit also from e.g. possibility of acquisition of new machinery and equipment or other incentives - such as safety equipment allowance, transport allowance, accommodation allowance or scholarship programmes. Some larger companies establish their own private vocational schools in order to secure qualified workforce suiting their needs.

National Register of Qualifications constitutes an important new tool for VET as well as labour market; it provides descriptions of skills and competencies required for the duly performance of an occupation or particular tasks within an occupation. It represents a state-guaranteed national system based on employer's real requirements for performance of tasks within particular occupations and jobs. It defines requirements for competencies within particular qualifications regardless of the manner in which they were obtained as well as the criteria for the verification of professional competence to perform tasks within particular occupation. At the same time it constitutes a systemic framework interconnecting IVET and CVET.

In fact, these are two inter-connected systems: a set of complete vocational qualifications based on study programmes and fields of study framework and a register of vocational qualifications, which represents a new element in the system.

B.1.1 Complete vocational qualification (source www.nsk.cz) is defined as professional competence to duly perform tasks within an occupation and there are three ways to obtain it:

- by means of IVET, i.e. successful completion of a study programme provided at the secondary or tertiary level by the relevant school authorising to perform an occupation (the existing method);
- by means of obtaining individual vocational qualifications that all together constitute a set of qualifications within the relevant complete vocational qualification and passing an examination required by the School Act for relevant complete vocational qualification. Provided the candidate delivers a certificate of vocational qualifications, they are intitled to take the examination (e.g. final examination in fields of study with vocational certificate) without having to complete school education;
- by means of obtaining vocational qualification or several vocational qualifications enabling to duly perform an occupation in combination with achieving a degree of education in a field of study; i.e. cases when a person has already achieved a degree of education and they obtain vocational qualifications leading to a complete vocational qualification of that degree (e.g. qualified bricklayer obtains all the partial qualifications that together constitute the complete qualification for the occupation of upholsterer); this section also includes the complete vocational qualifications which are not covered by any field of study or study programme.

B.1.2 Vocational qualification can be acquired by means of a successful completion of the examination prescribed by the assessment standard for particular vocational qualification. It is a qualification to duly perform a task or a set of tasks within an occupation (e.g. preparation of cold food or production of hats).

B.2. Attractiveness, career guidance and promotion of VET (including support for companies)

B.2.1 Career guidance and counselling

Career counselling services provided at schools and school counselling facilities fall under the responsibility of the MŠMT. At the national level, a key actor is **the National Institute for Education (NÚV)**. It focuses on research, methodology and dissemination of information related to career counselling, and supports the teaching of subjects dealing with labour market issues. It also pursues the development of an integrated information system (ISA) and the related website www.infoabsolvent.cz that gathers information on the situation and employment of school leavers in the labour market and thus provides useful source of information for career decision making (for students, counsellors and also adults).

At the local and school level, **the system of pedagogical-psychological counselling** is constituted by pedagogical-psychological guidance centres, centres for special pedagogy and school counselling facilities. In line with the School Act, counselling services need to be provided by all basic and secondary schools. Provision of counselling services at schools is secured by educational counsellors recruited from pedagogical staff (these teachers need to enhance their qualifications in a relevant training course).

The system of counselling services performed under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs consists mainly in the employment related services provided by the network of the Labour Office (ÚP) regional and local contact centres. It is aimed at resolving problems related to the transfer from school to employment, and at supporting job seekers and job applicants to find a job and to increase their employability through retraining. There is an **Information and Counselling Centre (IPS)** at each ÚP unit, whose main task is to provide assistance as regards career choice for young people and adults. Main target group of these centres are job seekers, people who seek alternative employment, school leavers and other groups at risk of unemployment, but they also provide services for school pupils and schools (e.g. visits of pupils of final grades of basic school are organized). IPSs offer mainly information on occupations, prerequisites and competences for performing occupations, related study or retraining options and chances of employment. There is a wide range of information materials and media available for this purpose (descriptions of occupations and leaflets on educational provision, computer test of professional interests, etc.). Each centre employs a career counsellor who is ready to attend to the clients' needs.

Every year in autumn “school fairs” are organized in cooperation with schools, where secondary schools of given region present their study options to basic school leavers and other interested persons.

B.2.2 Attractiveness of VET

In terms of attractiveness, the Czech Republic is recording a long-term decline of interest in secondary VET and study programmes without *maturita* exam in favour of those concluded by *maturita*. The interest in general study programmes shows to be stable.

Table 2. Development of the share of graduates (%)

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
VET – secondary education	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.7
VET – secondary education with vocational certificate*	36.3	34.6	32.9	31.2	30.1	28.6	26.6	28.3	28.2
VET– secondary education with <i>maturita</i> exam*	42.1	43.3	46.1	47.3	47.8	48.6	49.6	47.2	46.9
<i>Gymnázia</i>	21.0	21.3	20.4	20.9	21.6	22.4	23.3	23.9	24.2

*) including shortened study programmes

Source: MŠMT, www.msmt.cz, 2014.

Only in the last few years, the decline of interest in study programmes with vocational certificate ceased and even a slight increase has been detected. This trend might be related to the recent launch of the so-called state *maturita* exam, i.e. *maturita* examination with uniform assignment, which is by many vocational study programmes perceived as more difficult than the previous form of *maturita* exam contents of which used to be determined by the schools themselves. Some candidates interested in VET thus rather opt for study programmes with vocational certificate, which seem to be less demanding and easier to complete. The question is whether such a development represents only a temporary blip within the trend or a longer-term shift in preferences.

However, despite a series of undertaken measures (e.g. motivational campaigns promoting technical fields of vocational education and training), VET as a whole still has not managed to

increase its credit and motivate the pupils of basic schools to opt in higher numbers for this educational path. There are multiple reasons for this unfavourable situation – not fully and perfectly operational system of career counselling at basic schools and generally low social status related to VET persisting already for many years.

Also the fact that pupils leave the basic schools in order to study at more prestigious *gymnázia* contributes to this situation, thus a sort of ability grouping of the pupils (those with high academic aptitude and those with lower academic abilities) of basic schools takes place as early as in the 5th and 7th grades. Therefore often only the pupils with “no other choice” enter VET and study programmes with vocational certificate in particular as their academic achievements do not comply with the requirements of secondary technical schools or *gymnázia*. It is this equation – the poor academic achievements always equal apprenticeship – which creates the negative connotations.

Employers definitely value skilled people with vocational qualifications. Especially machinery and mechanical engineering professions are of high demand, but also other. The skilled workforce is getting older and there is a high demand for young professionals to replace them. But the quality of ISCED 3C graduates is often questioned. Employers complain about their low preparedness for working life and for performing the occupation. Due to this, and to the structural imbalances, many of VET graduates remain unemployed, which is especially the case of ISCED 3C (WBL) graduates.

B.2.3 Labour market outcomes

If we compare unemployment rates of the people with *maturita* (ISCED 3A) level of education, the prospects are better for VET than for general education. But those, who get secondary general education (graduates from *Gymnázia*), continue to tertiary level as a rule, so just a neglectable part of population enters the labour market with only general education (without vocational or academic degree). Unemployment rate of this small group has been higher for the long term than the one of the population with *maturita* from VET (only in 2013 the figures are close and show even slightly better unemployment rate of people with general education). Nevertheless, unemployment rates of ISCED 3C education (only vocational) have been steadily higher than of both other groups.

Table 3. **Unemployment rates of population aged 25-64 according to the highest education attained**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
ISCED 3c (voc.)	7,9%	6,8%	5,6%	4,1%	6,7%	7,7%	7,3%	7,4%	8,0%
ISCED 3a-4 (voc.)	3,9%	3,6%	2,7%	2,4%	3,8%	4,4%	3,8%	3,9%	4,6%
ISCED 3a-4 (gen.)	6,6%	6,8%	4,2%	3,6%	5,3%	5,9%	6,2%	4,4%	4,5%

Source: LFS, 2014.

B.2.4 Support for VET at the national level

The lack of skilled labour force, particularly of VET graduates, in recent years resulted in intense discussions and emerging co-operation between employers and the MŠMT (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports). Various methods of fostering VET constitute the main subject of discussions; particularly more effective employers' involvement in vocational education is often brought up. Several measures have been already introduced (such as tax incentives – see below), pilot projects testing the possible future solutions have been launched and further ways of making the whole system more effective are being looked into – e.g. conceptual transformation and also modifications in VET funding in the future are suggested most often.

MŠMT intends to declare 2015 the year of technical education. MŠMT as well as the employers believe that it is necessary to introduce polytechnic education already at the level of pre-school and primary education. Further on, MŠMT launched a development programme fostering VET in the total amount of CZK 200 million, this programme is aimed at improving quality of the so-called irreplaceable fields of study (in terms of labour market needs, uniqueness or tradition). These funds should allow schools to open a class also for the fields of study experiencing temporary lack of interest on the side of pupils.

In 2010, the national project “Career Counselling in Terms of Curricular Reform” (VIP Kariéra II – KP) was launched. The principal objective of this project is enhancement, rationalisation and further quality improvement of informational, educational and methodological support of career counselling and training in schools, prevention of early leaving from education and creation of a link to lifelong learning counselling.

B.2.5 Per capita funding as an incentive increasing the involvement of employers

Enhanced possibility for schools to finance instructors from companies has been created by the amendment to the School Act of 2009. The schools may use part of the per capita funding to pay the labour costs of an employee of the company providing the practical training for the students of a school. The schools shall, by means of this measure, be able to find more easily the companies to implement practical training and as contractual partners they may more effectively check on its quality. However, it appears that per capita funding does not constitute an effective tool to motivate the companies to commence co-operation with schools. In addition, per capita funding may vary from school to school depending on particular field or region and it does not always reflect complexity of a given field of study.

B.2.6 Tax incentives

The Government approved the Regulations of tax incentives for companies co-operating with the schools within the area of VET, the Regulations are effective since 1st January 2014. Deductions aimed at fostering VET has been incorporated in the Act on Income Tax in order to enhance co-operation between employers and schools particularly in the area of sharing the means of production, exchanging experiences and enabling the pupils/students to acquire working habits directly on employers' (tax-payers') premises.

Tax regulations increase the limits on tax deductibility of incentive allowance (including mostly scholarships, boarding and accommodation allowance, transport allowance, safety equipment, etc.) from CZK 2,000 to CZK 5,000 per month for the students of secondary schools and from CZK 5,000 to CZK 10,000 for the students of higher education institutions.

Among other innovations, the adjusted Regulations introduce deductible amount of CZK 200 per hour of practical training or work placement carried out on the tax-payer's premises per pupil/student. Employers often face additional costs related to assignment of staff, reservation of premises and machinery for the purposes of vocational training, which might create obstacles to their engagement in the VET system. The principle objective of the measure is to compensate, at least partially, for the incurred costs and motivate new companies to commence co-operation with the schools.

Additional deduction of 50% or 110% of the costs of assets acquired and at least partially used for the purposes of vocational training should also help to achieve desired development. The actual amount of the deduction will depend on the extent of the usage for educational purposes.

This particular incentive will ensure that the pupils and students are trained on the same machinery, which the relevant companies currently use.

In this case, the tax-payer is an individual or a legal person who has concluded with the school an Agreement on the contents and scope of practical training and on whose premises is the practical training or a part of accredited study programme implemented, provided that they are authorised to perform activities related to a given field of study or study programme.

B.2.7 Inter-corporate VET centres – ongoing discussions

Small and medium-sized companies are usually not able to provide on their premises practical training securing acquisition of all the required skills and competencies. Therefore the schools conclude agreements with multiple companies in order to achieve that their production programmes fully cover requirements of practical training, in such cases the pupils are frequently trained on individual basis and work under supervision of those employees who actually work in that particular section of production and with the relevant machinery. However, complete coverage of working skills and possibility to acquire all the relevant professional competencies seems to be quite often an issue. In this context, there are ongoing discussions concerning the re-introduction of inter-corporate VET centres that were established in the Czech Republic after 1989 but remained without much influence and most of them stopped operating or were transformed into better-equipped secondary schools.

B.2.8 Scholarships on a regional level

The support of VET has become an important topic also on a regional level. Most regional authorities provide scholarships or other benefits for students in fields of secondary schools that are normally not a very popular choice, but they are highly demanded by the labour market. The goal is to attract applicants and/or to motivate students to stay in the programme and finish it. Regular school attendance, excellent learning results and good behaviour are usually prerequisites for receiving a scholarship. The scholarship programmes may slightly differ in individual regions. A student can mostly obtain a total amount of about EUR 1,000 per 3 years of study (the monthly amount derives from particular grade of study). Some fields have recorded an increase in interest, in others, however, the student interest continues to decline.

B.2.9 Corporate scholarships

Also individual companies offer to pupils (based on a contract concluded with a school) monthly scholarships and a variety of other incentives (transport allowance, accommodation allowance, safety equipment, etc.) in order to increase attractiveness of particular fields of study.

B.3. Quality in apprenticeship

VET at the ISCED 3C level is one of the most costly forms of education; however its effectiveness is declining. The rate of elementary skills in graduates from study programmes without *maturita* exam shows rather low standards, i.e. areas of reading literacy or IT (see e.g. international PIAAC survey). NÚV surveys show that training for highly specialised occupations often remains unused. It turns out that within 5 years after the completion of their studies, the majority of employed graduates work in a different field than the one they graduated from. The graduates from study programmes with vocational certificate also record a high percentage of long-term as well as short-term unemployment. A large proportion of those graduates opt for follow-up study programmes concluded by *maturita* exam. This system, however, on a long term, proves to be rather ineffective as there is a relatively high percentage of drop-outs and also unemployment of graduates of these programmes is high.

In April 2012, the share of unemployed graduates from three-year study programmes represented 16.7% ⁽⁶⁾ (for comparison, the share of the unemployed in the total population in the age group of 15-64 amounted to 6.6%). In 2013, the overall situation on the labour market significantly deteriorated and the share of unemployed graduates from three-year study programmes with vocational certificate reached the record rate of 27.4% (April 2013).

As regards four-year study programmes with *maturita* exam, the share of unemployed graduates is in general lower, mainly due to the fact that higher percentage of these graduates continue to study at the next levels of education and do not enter the labour market. The share of unemployed graduates from four-year programmes was 9.5% in April 2012, however in April 2013 it represented already 15.4%. In case of follow-up study programmes, the values raised even to 29.6%. In 2013 the second wave of the economic recession peaked. The economy declined continuously for year and a half and the unemployment of graduates reached its maximum in a decade. This year (2014), according to the rough preliminary estimates, it seems that the curve is again adopting more favourable form. (Source: Infoabsolvent.cz)

Regular assurance of the quality of all secondary schools, **embedded in legislation**, is carried out by means of (i) external evaluation, and (ii) self-evaluation. In addition to this, each newly established school is evaluated by the MŠMT. Czech School Inspectorate (*Česká školní inspekce – ČŠI*) is the national evaluation authority and carries out the external evaluation. ČŠI's primary target is school-based education. The results of a school may also be evaluated

⁽⁶⁾ Share of unemployed graduates = share of graduates within 1 year after concluding their studies registered at labour office in the total number of the previous year graduates.

by its founding body (e.g. regions in case of public schools). Outcomes of the self-evaluation of schools form a basis for an annual report about the school's activities, and also serve as background material (among other things) for external evaluation by the ČŠI. The quality of work-based learning is guaranteed by the school. The teachers of the practical education must have, besides the relevant vocational education, also basic pedagogy education. If the work-based learning is provided at the workplace of a company, the conditions of the quality should be stipulated in the contract between the company and the school. The company appoints instructors to take care of the students (the instructor is selected for the company employees and it is not a separate profession). The instructors may undergo an accredited course of basic pedagogy, but it is not mandatory. The school teachers bear responsibility for controlling the quality of the workplace learning. These quality assurance mechanisms are not sufficient and often result in students performing in companies just auxiliary tasks and not developing their vocational skills. This situation has been triggering discussions about better quality assurance system.

In addition, various **other activities and projects** seeking to respond to employers' growing dissatisfaction with low quality of VET graduates are being developed. Every time more evident is the effort to increase the number of hours of vocational training and internships implemented in the real working environment; i.e. in companies. However, in relation to this, the necessity to define appropriately contractual relationship between a school and company is also discussed. Social partners would also like to establish a system projecting the labour market needs in order to be able to regulate openings of fields of study in regions and numbers of pupils. In the context of quality assurance, also the status of an "expert from practice" is being dealt with. A training course is being piloted and legislation changes are being discussed with an aim to enable persons from companies without pedagogical qualification participate in the training process.

Another issue that is being discussed is the introduction of dual system. The principal objective of the project called "Fostering Co-operation between Schools and Enterprises with Focus on Vocational Education and Training in Practice" (abbreviated title – POSPOLU) is to design systemic changes leading to more effective and flawless co-operation between schools and enterprises. Various types of co-operation are being pilot-tested in order to analyse the existing situation and, at the same time, to identify obstacles to co-operation and take these conclusions into account when designing systemic measures. Project POSPOLU seeks to raise schools' and enterprises' awareness of elements and principles introduced by the European tools ECVET and EQAVET that foster transparency and quality of training and internships and contribute to the improvement of quality of graduates' competencies and support the process of defining the required learning outcomes.

B.4. Innovative or special apprenticeship activities

B.4.1 Internships for Young Job Seekers (2012-2013)

The Czech Republic, as well as the entire European Union, is confronted with a lack of employment opportunities for young people. Most companies do not want to recruit fresh graduates due to lack of practical experience. The project “Internships for Young Job Seekers” should have compensated for such a drawback by means of providing opportunity to gain working experience. The project also aimed to facilitate contacts between employers and potential employees. Above all, students acquire much needed working habits and practical experience in their field. The project was implemented by the Continuing Education Fund (*Fond dalšího vzdělávání* – FDV) institution funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Primary target group were pupils of the last grade of secondary schools and students of the last two semesters of tertiary professional schools (VOŠ) and higher education institutions (VŠ). Selected internship had to be in line with the trainee’s field of study. Internships lasted between 1 and 3 months (50 – 300 hours) and it did not interfere with the school duties of the applicants (it is a leisure time voluntary activity) and could be completed also during the summer holidays depending on individual agreement between a company and a trainee. Trainees were selected by the companies and performed determined tasks under the supervision of an experienced worker (mentor), who was appointed by the provider of the internship. Trainee’s salary (CZK 60, i.e. approx. EUR 2.5, per working hour) and partial re-fund of the mentor’s salary were paid to the company ex-post from the project budget. An e-learning course focusing on soft-skills development was a compulsory part of the internship. Candidates got also individual counselling helping them with orientation when for the first time entering the labour market. Upon successful participation in the internship the trainee received a certificate.

Initially, it was planned to support 840 internships, however, the project supported 940 internships of pupils and students from across the country. The project was co-financed from the ESF. As it proved very successful, a new follow-up project for 2,200 internships lasting from 1-4 months has been prepared and submitted).

B.4.2 Internships in Companies – Education through Practice (2012–2014)

The two-year project has been launched by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in June 2012. It is co-financed from the European Social Fund (ESF) and implemented by the Continuing Education Fund (FDV).

Internships in companies aim at helping both the fresh graduates who fail to find employment due to lack of professional practice as well as other disadvantaged groups in the labour market, such as long-term unemployed or persons returning to the labour market – e.g. women after maternity leave. The internships are, however, suitable also for companies failing to find an adequate candidate for a specific position. The trainee programmes will enable them to train and educate employees in line with their own needs. The trainees are given opportunity to restore their working habits and get accustomed to work procedures again, get an update in fields undergoing fast technological development during their absence, etc.

Particular internships last between one to six months. Internships providers are paid the fixed costs for placements. On average, three-month internship costs amount to CZK 60,000-120,000 (approx. EUR 2,400-4,800). The companies must be able to provide a mentor for the trainee or trainees and create conditions for the implementation of internship on the basis of the contract with the FDV and a trainee.

Trainees are not entitled to wages; they receive only contribution for food and travel expenses, in exceptional cases also for accommodation. In addition to new knowledge and professional experience, the internship shall increase their competitiveness in the labour market; it also provides them with an opportunity to get employed by the company in which the internship is performed. Upon completion of an internship, the trainee receives a certificate recording the acquired professional skills.

In case a person registered with the Labour Office and receiving unemployment benefits becomes a trainee, participation in internship does not terminate their right to unemployment benefits. Therefore the project might become a really interesting opportunity for the unemployed. Offer of the positions is based on current skill needs of the employers and they represent both managerial and administrative positions as well as craft positions. Within the project, for individual selected typical positions there are so-called internship templates are being developed specifying framework content, requirements for trainees as well as providers of the internship and calculation of costs covered by the project.

In the course of September 2012, there have been 28 templates launched in selected fields (IT, management, construction, economics, etc.) their number will continue to increase until reaching the target of 150.

The registration of applicants as well as providers has begun in mid-September and by the end of the first month there were almost 270 registered applicants from among employers and more than 1,200 applicants for internship.

In total, 5,000 participants are to be trained within the project, but the main objective is to establish trainee programmes as universal tool for gaining professional skills in particular field and also to link education with practice as an important part of continuing education. The project should help to anchor continuing education in the form of internships in the Czech legislation. Business entities, involved in this project, get a unique opportunity to train and educate their future specialists in the field in which they operate and subsequently to employ these skilled workers.

C. Strengths and weaknesses

C.1. Strengths

- There is a persisting high interest in VET. About 80% primary education graduates enter secondary VET (approximately 19% continues their studies in secondary general education).
- The long tradition of this type of education plays an important role. The high prestige of some secondary schools has gradually decreased; however, there are still many schools with a very good reputation (e.g. secondary technical schools of industrial fields such as mechanical engineering). Although in recent years, there has been an evident tendency towards the general education, the long VET tradition remains something to build on.
- Permeability of education and opportunities to attain higher level of education. Secondary vocational education provides a wide range of fields of study and forms of education at EQF 2-4 levels. Graduates who have attained secondary education with *maturita* exam (4 EQF) may continue their studies at tertiary professional schools (VOŠ) or in technical fields of higher education institutions; in comparison with general secondary education is the education attained at a good secondary technical school often deemed as an advantage for the studies of particular field at tertiary professional school (VOŠ) or higher education institution.
- The vast majority of pupils successfully complete their educational path. The rate of early leaving from education oscillates around 5.5%.
- Many institutions (schools) provide education in study programmes of various lengths and profiles, even study programmes of tertiary professional schools, “under one roof”. This fosters both horizontal as well as vertical permeability of the education and helps to prevent early leaving from education, as it allows pupils who find their study programme too demanding to switch easily to one that suits their abilities better. Some schools create study programmes with a common first year for several fields of study allowing thus the pupils to postpone the choice of specialisation.
- The introduction of two-level creation of curriculum (the state issues the Framework Educational Programmes and based on them the schools develop their own school-based curricula) and the state support for co-operation between the schools and

employers create conditions for better and more flexible response of VET to the labour market needs, the regional labour market needs in particular.

- The introduction of key competences and the cross-subject topic “Man and the World of Work” in all study programmes fosters, inter alia, pupils’ employability, their orientation on the labour market and their ability to respond in a flexible manner to changes on the labour market.
- Secondary VET allows also adult candidates to attain a qualification and level of education either by means of direct studies or on the basis of the Act No. 179/2006 Coll, on recognition of CVET outcomes.
- Uniform final examination is being gradually introduced in vocational fields leading to secondary education with vocational certificate. In the academic year 2012/2013, about 80% of schools implemented uniform assignment for the final examination; starting 2015, the uniform final examination will be mandatory for all the schools.

C.2. Weaknesses

- Low interest in some study fields on the side of the prospective students, despite the existing demand on the labour market. With regard to the concurrent decline in population, some fields of study in the area of crafts and manual work are, on a long term, not being opened.
- Mismatch of VET and labour market needs. VET does not deliver sufficient number of graduates to meet the labour market needs, particularly in workers’ occupations (EQF 3). On the other hand, there is an overhang of graduates in some fields of study when compared to the actual labour market requirements. There is also quite a lot of criticism related to insufficient experience of the graduates with real working environment, poor working habits and low proportion of practical training in the workplace on employer’s premises.
- Insufficient co-operation between schools and employers in VET, particularly in the area of practical training in real working environment. The pupils are trained mostly at school environment and that does not secure attainment of professional knowledge, skills and habits necessary for working with modern technologies, which are not available at schools. The main causes of this situation are: character and size of companies within the region do not enable to train the whole range of skills that are necessary for the given field, unstable economic environment, often also a lack of communication between a

school and enterprises or low interest of employers to get involved in training (bigger companies or employers' associations show usually higher interest). The principal problem is that many regional training centres, which might have helped to solve this unfavourable situation, were closed down.

- Not always effective co-operation with employers providing practical education – pupils are often given tasks not related to their professional development and they do not always get a chance to carry out tasks, which should be an integral part of the training (e.g. they are in charge of preparing only breakfasts; they have to clean up the workplace, etc.).
- Lack of funding for improvement of teaching of vocational subjects and practical training in terms of material and for securing implementation of training and internships in real working environment. Lower quality of general education in three-year study programmes.
- Non-existent national standards for training in a real working environment (except for RVP, which cannot be deemed as a standard) and non-existent quality assurance standards.
- Negative connotations associated with the fields of study focused on manual work (2 or 3-year study programmes), low motivation to choose them and not so good reputation of apprenticeship in general.
- Non-existent square system of anticipation of skill needs (nevertheless the system development is foreseen by the project announced by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs).
- Despite some progress and changes, there is a persisting low involvement of social partners in support and development of VET, some kind of civic responsibility of the companies and willingness to participate in the training of pupils are missing – financial incentives seem to be the only effective measure that motivates them.
- Companies are not obliged to be grouped in chambers.
- Non-existent career system for teachers; which could provide for better motivation within this occupation.
- The existing method of per capita funding of the schools is regarded neither as suitable nor motivating therefore discussions about necessary adjustments have been initiated.

D. Conclusions

Vocational education and training (VET) has always been an essential part of the Czech educational system. Experts as well as general public have always paid attention to it, which is reflected also in all strategic documents. VET has been undergoing an intensive development in the course of the past few decades.

Compared to the countries with the dual system, the Czech Republic has had traditionally high share of general education within VET system in relation to the practical education. Currently, the possibilities of implementing selected elements of the dual system are being discussed with a goal to strengthen the practical part of education and to increase its quality and interconnection with the real practice. National project POSPOLU (Fostering Co-operation between Schools and Enterprises with Focus on Vocational Education and Training in Practice) pilots implementation of these elements.

Maintaining and improving quality and attractiveness of secondary VET, achieving effective inter-connection between the world of education and world of work, such as setting up new methods of co-operation between schools and enterprises or development of CVET as an integral part of lifelong learning, constitute some of the long-term challenges within this area. Funding and completion of the system of recognition of learning outcomes are also closely related to VET. Other issues that are being discussed are: master craftsman examination (*mistrovská zkouška*) or possibility of inter-connecting IVET with the National Register of Qualifications.

The tax incentives for companies cooperating with schools and providing scholarships for students have been stipulated by the legislation and the Ministry of Education has prepared related guidelines. The revision of framework educational programmes is being prepared with an aim to increase number of hours the practical training or work placement that can be realized in the companies. Better contractual arrangements between a student, a school and a company are also discussed – clearer content definition and quality assurance should be included. The status of the “expert from the practice” should be settled in the future. Those people from the companies should be able to participate in the education without the necessity to become the member of the pedagogical staff (with a full pedagogical qualification). Further development of career guidance system at schools is also envisaged. Social partners suggest the establishment of the skill needs forecasting system with an aim to better shape structure of study fields provided in regions and numbers of students.

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