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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update

COUNTRY REPORT: **CZECHIA**

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1 Introduction

Since the 2016 Inventory no major development has occurred in the area of VNFIL in the Czech Republic, therefore this Inventory is an update of 2014 and 2016 reports. The system for VNFIL as described in previous Inventories is well established and the number of qualifications created and awarded within this system is growing. The main difference from previous years is that its development is not supported by ESF funding but is mainly funded from the state budget.

The VNFIL system is based on and regulated by the Act 179/2006 on the Recognition of Further Education Results (further The Act on the VNFIL). The system focuses on validation of vocational competences usable on the labour market, therefore the main tool for validation is the National Register of Qualifications (NSK), publicly accessible at www.narodnikvalifikace.cz.

The NSK comprises eight qualification levels and is currently populated with 1 234 vocational qualifications (VQs) ranging between NSK/EQF levels 2 and 7. More than 180 000 adult learners (data from April 2018) have passed the exams and were awarded with a certificate of vocational qualification in the last ten years. Each VQ is defined by its list of competences (qualification standard) that are further elaborated in the respective assessment standard. Assessment standards contain information on assessment methods and procedures for examination as well. VQs are developed by Sector Councils (29 in total), where representatives of employers, employees, qualification authorities and academic sectors are involved to identify current skills needs and shortages to be tackled. There is a common set (a database) of competences (currently around 23 000) for the development of occupational standards in the National System of Occupations (the NSP) and the development of vocational qualifications in the NSK.

Any individual applicant can stand for examination on any chosen VQ upon request to an authorised entity. The assessment is competence-based and normally consists of an oral examination, written part and, most importantly, practical demonstration of skills and competences defined in the qualification and assessment standards. The authorised entity issues certificates to successful applicants. Certain VQs can be combined and lead to a comprehensive VQ.

As regards the progress in relation to the Council Recommendation on VNFIL, the majority of proposed actions, such as the establishment of the national system for the VNFIL, has been fulfilled since 2012, although no significant improvement has occurred since the 2016 Inventory. The VNFIL system as described above and further in the report is more or less parallel to the formal education system, with some connections. However, it does not cover general and higher education. In these two sectors there are validation possibilities which fall under the European definition of VNFIL, but these are not new, have not been reformed since 2010, there is no national methodology or approach to doing so and there is little data about them. In the absence of a national qualifications framework, coordination, communication and transfer among sectors remains limited.

Among the strengths of the current VNFIL system is its legal definition, information accessibility, quality assurance arrangements, close connection with labour market needs and collaboration with employers on the development of VQs. The development of VQs and their consistency is ensured by detailed guidelines and methodologies that must be observed. VQs are developed and revised in a multistep process that involves many actors. The NSK is publicly available via internet. Each VQ certificate contains a reference to the corresponding level of the EQF.

On the other hand, improvement in the accessibility of guidance and counselling would help individuals to better understand their abilities and further possibilities and there is a room for improvement in the coordination among sectors of education and the third sector and also between relevant policies. Validation is subject to fees being paid, although disadvantaged groups have access to validation through public employment services. Disadvantaged groups should be specifically targeted by the validation system. Currently, the opportunity to undergo a skills audit is not guaranteed to them within three months of an identified need.

To sum up, the Czech approach to validation shows impressive results in terms of the number of newly created VQs and awarded certificates. These are due to close orientation towards the labour market and cooperation with employers. Wider scope of the validation approach could improve connection and transferability of the validated outcomes among sectors and would thus better benefit individuals.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

The approach to VNFIL in the Czech Republic is mainly based on passing a competence-based assessment of the knowledge, skills and competences gained by individual applicants in their prior learning, including (mainly) work experience. The competences required can also be gained through specific courses (training programmes) and acquired learning outcomes can be assessed through the same competence-based process.

In 2014, the Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2020 was approved, which covers education policy as a whole, including the system of VNFIL. The second priority of the Strategy is the Support of Quality Teaching with an objective (3.2.5) to clearly describe expected outcomes of education. Within this objective, measures should be elaborated in order to 'develop a mechanism for transparent validation of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning (including learning acquired abroad) on all levels of the education system using the learning outcomes approach'¹. No indicator was established for this particular objective. The Strategy for Education Policy follows the Strategy on Lifelong Learning in the Czech Republic (2007-2015), which recognised the development of VNFIL as one of its key objectives and was the decisive impulse for the emergence of the Act on the VNFIL and its main tool, the National Register of Qualifications (NSK).

The substantial policy rationale feeding the VNFIL strategy in the Czech Republic is the agenda of a partnership between the education sector, qualification management and employers, with a specific focus on defining skills shortages on the labour market and utilising the VNFIL system to mitigate them. The concept of Sector Councils² (*sektorové rady*) is the most important example of this policy. Sector Councils are independent groups of experts in specific industry sectors set up to create a system

¹

Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2020
http://www.vzdelavani2020.cz/images_obsah/dokumenty/strategy_web_en.pdf

² <http://www.sektorove-rady.cz/>

of cooperation on reflecting objective needs of employers with regards to skills and qualifications of the workforce. Representatives of employers play a crucial role in the composition of the Sector Councils, while representatives of employee unions, qualification authorities, the VET sector, academic sector and HR professionals are also members of them. Currently, 29 Sector Councils are operational in the system.³

As regards the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, preparatory work on its implementation is in the early stage of development. A project on the development of basic skills among low skilled persons is in preparation by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

Within the implementation of the project P-KAP (2016-2021), coordinated by the National Institute for Education, broadening of the current practice in validation is envisioned. One of the purposes of the project is to further support upper secondary schools and tertiary vocational schools in their function as regional centres for lifelong learning established within the implementation of the projects UNIV 1-3. Provision of courses will no longer concentrate on vocational education only, but schools will offer education programmes in and validate the outcomes of basic, digital, civic and leisure education and learning as well. Centres of lifelong learning will be established also in gymnasiums (general upper secondary schools) and conservatories and the target group will be enriched by senior citizens. These centres should provide career guidance and counselling to youth and adults.⁴ (NUV, 2016)

The existing VNFIL arrangements are not primarily aimed at low-skilled adults, nevertheless most VQs in the register are on levels 3 (659) and 4 (384) (April 2018). So low-qualified adults who do not have a leaving certificate (either a VET certificate or a Maturita certificate) from upper secondary education have the opportunity to take a course and pass the corresponding exam and gain a vocational qualification certificate with national recognition. The Czech Republic has one of the highest rate of at least upper secondary education attainment in Europe (94.6% in age group 25-54)⁵.

2.2 Validation in education and training

The situation in validation in education and training has not changed since the last Inventory update in 2016. There is a national system for the validation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic with a focus on validation of vocational skills and competences. It concerns mainly CVET and is partially connected with formal initial education and training. There is no national framework for VNFIL in higher education or general education. The CVET sector has been prioritised since the inception of the validation system because it has been and is still considered as the most important means of increasing employability of applicants, in finding better jobs and in solving skills mismatches in the labour market. The validation system and its tools were developed in cooperation with employers in projects funded by the ESF.

³ <http://www.sektorove-rady.cz/sektorove-rady>

⁴ http://www.nuv.cz/uploads/P_KAP/ke_stazeni/pojeti/P_KAP_pojeti_Skoly_centra_CZU.pdf

⁵ [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Share_of_the_population_by_level_of_educational_attainment,_by_selected_age_groups_and_country,_2016_\(%25\).png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Share_of_the_population_by_level_of_educational_attainment,_by_selected_age_groups_and_country,_2016_(%25).png)

All four stages (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) are part of the validation system, but identification and documentation is not mandatory to apply for assessment and certification. The NSK provides the basis for identification both on a structural basis (in relation to the classifications of occupation - the NSP and the Sector Councils) and on an individual basis (provision of descriptions and requirements). The PES is another important stakeholder in the identification stage (see Section 2.3.1, on skills audits, below). The documentation stage is supported also by the portfolio of Europass documents. Finally, assessment and certification relate to the authorisation system. Authorising bodies (ministries and other central authorities) provide authorisation to authorised entities (organisations and individuals) under legally specified conditions to provide vocational qualification examinations, assess applicants and certify successful candidates.

There are no prioritised industry sectors as the national approach is comprehensive. However, as previously demonstrated in the 2014 and 2016 update, in certain sectors there are considerably higher numbers of VQ applicants than others. This imbalance is partially explained by the current labour market trends, however, the most notable differences are caused by specific legislation when a particular vocational qualification becomes mandatory for performing a particular profession (e.g. security guard).

Despite initial plans, the validation system has not been fully linked to the system of initial education. Functional links can be seen in the possibility of combining certain vocational qualifications into a comprehensive vocational qualification and after passing a final exam to gain the qualification 'VET certificate' (*výuční list*), normally attained in IVET after three years of study. Currently this is the case for about 80 IVET qualifications at EQF level 3. About 30 IVET qualifications at level EQF 4 can be recognised as vocational part of the Maturita exam (leaving certificate enabling to apply for higher education). In order to attain Maturita certificate (EQF 4), the standardised part of Maturita exam (Czech language, English or Maths) must be passed as well. Another approx. 40 IVET qualifications are in the process of being identified and approved as comprehensive vocational qualifications, i.e. their possibility to become attainable by VNFIL is being discussed.

Within the ESF projects UNIV 1-3 on pilot testing and promoting VNFIL (2007-2015) a growing number of VET schools have adopted the concept of lifelong learning and have been building, in cooperation with the National Institute for Education, infrastructure and capacities to become fully operational lifelong learning centres in addition to their regular initial education provision functions. CVET is provided in these institutions to those who are interested in applying for a VQ and would need structured training to complete all skills and competences defined by a specific qualification standard.

There is no specific strategy focusing on VNFIL in relation to MOOCs and Open Educational Resources.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

As described in previous sections, the validation system is primarily focused on CVET, but, because the competences and vocational qualifications are defined in sector councils in close collaboration with employers and their representatives (the Czech Chamber of Commerce, the Agrarian Chamber, the Confederation of Trade and Industry, etc.), the validation system and its tools are very much labour market oriented.

The PES increasingly benefit from the NSK, which has been further incorporated into the national Active Policy for Employment (APE), the framework of measures stipulated by the Act 435/2004 on Employment. One of the key components of the APE is the concept of retraining (*rekvalifikace*) aimed at people with low or outdated qualifications and those at risk of long-term unemployment.

The PES adopted the national policy of VNFIL, represented by the NSK, and has been linking retraining offers to existing vocational qualifications in the NSK. This provides the registered unemployed with the opportunity to gain a nationally recognised qualification, with the related fees covered (if approved) by the PES. Also, the profile and content of any VQ is by definition directly related to the current labour market demands as VQs are created in close cooperation with employers, as explained above in Sections 2.1 and 2.2.

2.3.1 Skills audits

The subject of skills audits remains relatively unchanged from previous Inventories. Skills audits can be offered by the public employment services (PES) under the title “professional and competence diagnosis” - also translated using the French terminology of ‘bilan de compétences’ (*profesní bilanční diagnostika*). Certain categories of unemployed persons can get access to ‘enhanced support in finding employment’: this concerns, in particular, young people (aged below 20) or people who are identified as eligible for such support due to their situation with regard to childcare or their health condition. With the development of this instrument, the PES experts can also identify persons at risk due to outdated qualifications or qualifications based on skills and occupation profiles that are superfluous on the labour market. These persons are also eligible for the competence diagnosis. This enhanced support should be automatically offered to all who are registered as unemployed for a longer period than five months. People falling into this category work with the PES on developing an individual action plan. The professional and competence diagnosis can be offered at the discretion of the PES workers as a part of this individual action plan, depending on the needs of a specific person.

There is no binding national framework concerning this procedure, either who should have access to it or how the diagnosis should be carried out. Nevertheless, efforts to provide methodological support to practitioners has been developed for almost two decades now. A number of professionals (psychologists) were trained with the method inspired by the French Bilan de compétences. However, due to restructuring in local PES offices, this service is increasingly provided by external contractors to PES offices and that raises questions on the quality of the service offered. As a result, a national association of professionals active in this field was established in 2013 with an aim to enhance their skills and competences (Maříková, 2013). Since 2014 the Association of Bilan de Competences (*Asociace bilanční diagnostiky*) has been a member of the European Federation of Centres of Career Guidance and Bilan de Compétences (FECBOP).

There are other associations of career counsellors and centres for career guidance whose members offer and provide skills audits, such as the Association of Private Counsellors and Association for Career Guidance and Development.

The NSK qualification standard for vocational qualification ‘Careers Advisor for Academic and Professional Career’⁶ (NSK/EQF level 7) comprises the knowledge and ability to implement methods, techniques and procedures for basic career

⁶ <https://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/qualification-1538>

diagnostics. Approximately 25 vocational qualifications 'Careers Advisor' were awarded so far. The qualification is not a prerequisite to carry out a skill audit and/or provide guidance services but gives a proof of a set of skills needed for providing guidance services.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

This section is based on the previous Inventories. In the youth sector, a number of initiatives were implemented to support VNFIL for people who are either youth work professionals or volunteers. In the last ten years two important ESF-funded national projects 'Keys for Life' and 'K2 – Quality and Competitiveness in Non-formal Education' have been carried out by the National Institute for Children and Youth (merged with the National Institute for Teachers' Professional Development in 2014) to raise awareness and provide tools for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning attained by leaders working with children and youth⁷. The first project developed, among other things, a set of occupational descriptions for a range of job positions related to youth activities, including a competence and assessment framework. A relatively large number of persons in organisations working with young people were reached through this project. The main idea was to support the recognition of competences of workers and volunteers in youth and children's organisations, independent of how these were achieved and in which organisation they were active⁸. The K2 project aimed at the dissemination of the Personal Competence Portfolio⁹, a pilot supplement to Europass CV. Furthermore, six of the occupational descriptions have so far been transferred into vocational qualifications within the NSK (e.g. Coordinator of volunteers, Expert in the area of international cooperation with children and youth, Recreation leader for children and youth etc.)

Every participant of Youth exchange within the Erasmus+ programme has the right to receive the Youthpass, where his/her learning experiences are recognised.

3 Links to national qualification systems

The information provided in this section is based on the 2014 and 2016 Inventories, since no significant development has occurred since then.

Qualifications and qualification frameworks

The Czech Republic has not yet decided whether a comprehensive national qualifications framework, i.e. a framework that would cover all sectors of education, will be developed.

The NSK, the main tool for VNFIL, is a register and a framework for vocational qualifications, but it does not cover formal initial general and vocational education, nor higher education.

⁷ <http://znv.nidv.cz/projekty/priprava-projektu/k2>

⁸ For more information see ICF GHK (2013) *Study on the value of youth work. Keys for Life case study*

⁹ www.okp.ka2.cz

Since the formation of a comprehensive qualifications framework is not proposed in the Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2020 (MŠMT, 2014) it is highly unlikely it will be established before 2020. Despite efforts of the EQF National Coordination Point, namely the Working Group on the Implementation of the EQF, the majority of stakeholders and decision makers are not convinced about the need for a national framework, nor of its benefits. Therefore the question on how to bridge the gaps between sub-systems, how to improve communication and cooperation among them and how to open up different pathways to access education programmes remains unanswered.

In 2011, the Czech Republic referenced its national qualifications systems to the EQF, specifically secondary education qualifications, higher education qualifications and the vocational qualifications in the NSK (in the National Register of Qualifications). These three systems are regulated by three different acts.

The National Register of Qualifications (NSK) functions as a qualifications framework for CVET with eight levels comparable to EQF levels.

The qualifications framework for higher education was developed and proposed within the project Q-RAM in 2012, but it has not been officially approved and implemented yet.

The NSK is closely linked to the procedure for VNFIL as all qualifications in the register can be achieved through VNFIL. General education is not included in the validation system. The Maturita exam (the standardised upper-secondary leaving examination) is the requirement to enter higher education and no exceptions apply. In addition to it, higher education institutions can also decide to use specific entry examinations.

Vocational certificates awarded within the VNFIL system differ from those awarded in formal IVET, because certification in IVET and in the VNFIL system are regulated by two different acts. Nevertheless, learners who have collected a certain set of vocational qualifications can apply for examination in secondary vocational schools that leads to obtaining 'VET certificate'. (For more information see Section 2.2)

Credit systems

There is no credit system as such in vocational education and training. However, there are possibilities to accumulate learning outcomes achieved through VNFIL:

- Persons who achieve a set of vocational qualifications through VNFIL can have these recognised in view of passing an assessment for the related IVET qualification. As noted above (Section 2.2), some vocational qualifications in the NSK are related to the formal IVET qualifications. When a person holds all the related vocational qualifications they are exempt from the formal training and can directly pass the final assessment;
- When a person holds a vocational qualification and wishes to pass an assessment for another (related) one, s/he should be exempted from an assessment for those competences that have already been assessed in the first certification procedure.

Data on practical use of the above possibilities are not collected.

Vocational qualifications as defined in the NSK are not modularised, but by using qualification and assessment standards, education providers create programmes,

which can be modularised. Further possibilities and advantages of modularisation including an opportunity for learners to have certain parts of a qualification validated will be explored and developed during the implementation of the project KVASAR (Quality of Authorised Bodies and Retraining) that started in 2017. No further information is publicly available yet.

Vocational qualifications are composed of individual ‘vocational competences’ that can be broadly regarded as units of learning outcomes. There is a methodology for creating units of learning outcomes based on NSK standards.

ECTS is the credit system used in higher education. As there is no system for VNFIL in higher education, neither is there a defined link to the use of ECTS. Some institutions have institutional practices linking ECTS with their recognition procedures.

4 Standards

Each vocational qualification in the NSK contains the qualification standard, which is defined through a specific set of competences, and the assessment standard that defines methods and procedures used in the assessment and certification of NFIL. These standards are also used as the basis for defining non-formal training programmes. The NSK platform contains English versions of qualification standards as well.

The NSK qualification standards are based on the national occupational standards as published in the National System of Occupations (NSP)¹⁰. In formal IVET, the occupational and qualification standards are used for updating/revision of national core IVET curricula.

Although the NSK standards and core IVET curricula should have the same market value since they both are used for proving achieved knowledge, skills and competences of candidates, qualifications gained in formal IVET are valued more by holders and employers. This can be attributed to greater familiarity and tradition and also because they are necessary for entering higher levels of formal education.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The arrangements have not changed since 2016, so the table below remains virtually the same as in the 2014 and 2016 Inventories.

Table 5.1 Institutional framework for recognition of non-formal and informal learning in CZ

Function / Process	(Type of) Institution responsible
Qualification and assessment standards	Approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Developed by the Sector Council. Sector Councils bring together: employers' and (less) employees'

¹⁰ www.nsp.cz

Function / Process	(Type of) Institution responsible
	representatives, as well as the National Institute for Education (formerly National Institute for VET), National Council for Qualifications and relevant ministries. The Sector Councils are expected to be proactive in suggesting what new standards are needed and where standards should be updated, based on identified labour market needs.
Conception of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning process	The Ministry of Education and the National Institute for Education. The process and responsibilities of different institutions are defined in the Act 179/2006.
(Carrying out) Assessment of non-formal and informal learning (based on the standard) – for Vocational Qualifications	<p>Authorised persons/institutions – these can be schools, private institutions and companies, as well as persons (for example a craftsman can become an authorised person).</p> <p>Some assessment standards require the presence of a jury (two or three people).</p> <p>In line with the assessment standard and the specified mode of assessment the authorised persons are responsible to choose the most appropriate assessment method, context, tools, as well as the exact definition of the assessment (i.e. the formulation of the question or the assignment, etc.).</p>
(Carrying out) Assessment of non-formal and informal learning (based on the standard) – for comprehensive vocational qualifications	<p>Upper secondary vocational schools only</p> <p>In line with the regulation and specifications for the specific comprehensive vocational qualification. Note: final examinations for VET qualifications at upper-secondary level are all defined nationally and the same examination applies to regular students, as well as to people who have achieved vocational qualifications (in NSK) but have not participated in the full formal programme.</p>
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning (i.e. delivery of certificate) – for vocational qualifications	<p>The certificate is delivered by the authorised person or the jury.</p> <p>Act 179/2006 specifies what information has to appear on the certificate.</p>
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning (i.e. delivery of certificate) – for comprehensive vocational qualifications	Only schools can award comprehensive vocational qualifications – these are the same certificates as those awarded by schools to people who have achieved the qualification through formal education and training (VET Certificate).
Quality assurance of the process	<p>Act 179/2006 stipulates the requirements regarding documentation and archiving of proceedings.</p> <p>Appeals procedure: the applicants can request the authorising body (see below), to review the process.</p>
Giving licence to authorised persons/institutions	<p>This is done by Authorising Bodies, the ministries under which the given vocational qualification falls.</p> <p>Authorisation is linked to a specific vocational qualification and is valid for a period of five years.</p>

Function / Process	(Type of) Institution responsible
	Those interested in becoming authorised persons/institutions need to request authorisation. The process is set in Act 179/2006.
Monitoring and expertise for the overall approach	National Institute for Education (formerly National Institute for VET).

Source: 2016 Inventory on Validation – country report on Czech Republic, updated for 2019 version

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising

Up until 2015 the development and functioning of the NSK was funded by the ESF within two national projects. This funding allowed creating and populating the NSK information system (the portal) with qualifications, to involve employers and other partners and to organise awareness campaigns.

Since 2015 the NSK development is funded mainly from the state budget and the main goal is to maintain the register of qualifications, i.e. to create new vocational qualifications and keep the current ones up-to-date. The operation of sector councils is financially supported by the employment sphere.

The portal is linked to another portal called ‘Education and Work’ (*Vzdělávání a práce*) that people can search to identify either a course or an assessment in an area where they are interested.¹¹

In relation to the involvement of employers’ representatives in the NSK development, a significant progress was achieved in increasing the awareness of the NSK among individual employers. This could be contributed to a motivation tool in the form of an honorary certificate ‘NSK in practice’, which was gradually awarded to over 1 000 companies in different fields of activity and from different regions. Most often, the companies implement NSK in the area of recruiting and hiring new employees (58% of the organizations), where the NSK certificate of vocational qualification is accepted as a relevant proof of qualification for specific jobs. 34% of the organisations utilise the NSK primarily in the area of education of employees.

Although the system for validation had been put in practice for eleven years now, individuals are still very often not aware of validation opportunities and what benefits the validation system could bring them. How to inform people who would benefit most, such as young people and other target groups is still a subject of debate.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

In addition to the NSK portal¹², the public employment services and their counsellors guide people towards the NSK and the possibilities it offers. The PES is gradually adopting the concept of vocational qualifications as the primary instrument offered to job-seekers in the system of retraining. Nevertheless, the frequent fluctuation of PES workers causes institutional information loss.

¹¹ <http://vzdelavaniaprace.cz/>

¹² www.narodnikvalifikace.cz

The NSK technical assistance office in the National Institute for Education carries out presentations and lectures aimed at various audiences, including people in human resources, as well as guidance counsellors in public employment services (PES).

In the last ten years, the projects UNIV 1-3 helped to establish centres of lifelong learning in all 14 regions. These centres are usually groups of several schools. They offer adult education, career guidance and exams for vocational qualifications.

There is not sufficient support for the inactive target group in the Czech Republic: services related to career guidance are not widespread and the general public is usually not aware of them. (ReferNet, 2017). The PES should ensure that guidance is available for disadvantaged groups, but low motivation of difficult-to-engage persons is still viewed as a main obstacle in reaching out to them and involving them in learning. There is no specific policy measure that would deal with it. Persons who are unemployed, at risk of losing their jobs, inactive, disadvantaged and under-represented can participate in many ESF-funded projects under the current programming period within the Operational Programme Employment (managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs). Nevertheless, the sustainability of these programmes and projects is limited and it is not clear whether and how these groups will be supported beyond 2020.

Another project that aims to improve IAG on validation is the project JobHub. It will create an information system to support career guidance and career counsellors and it will contain and connect diagnostic and guidance tools, various sources of labour market information and feature a shared online platform for career counsellors.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

In most cases, practitioners in charge of assessment are either teachers or trainers, or professionals in the relevant sector. The assessment committee is often constituted of a mix of teachers/trainers and professionals in the given sector. However, any person can become a validation practitioner provided they comply with the qualification requirements defined in the assessment standard. If a person does not have the appropriate pedagogical qualifications, they must pass a preparatory course that is specific for the practice of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

7.2 Qualification requirements

There has been no change in the qualification requirements for validation practitioners since the 2016 update. For each vocational qualification the mandatory qualification requirements for the authorised person are specified in the assessment standard of particular vocational qualification (e.g. required qualification in the occupational field and/or years of practice in an occupation). The level of required education/qualification varies with the level of the particular qualification being assessed. As a general rule, assessors themselves have to be qualified in the given area.

In addition, general rules are valid for all vocational qualification validation practitioners, and these are:

- The person has to be either a qualified education professional, or experienced adult educator, or have passed a specific preparation course for recognition of non-formal and informal learning and work with adults (12 hours of courses).
- The person must have basic competences in working with computers and the internet.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The UNIV2 project trained VET school representatives, in particular VET trainers, on how to use the NSK qualification and assessment standards for the purposes of VNFIL.

The UNIV3 trained authorised bodies and advisors on the use of assessment standards, the development of assessment tasks and examination specifications and also on how to guide candidates through the process.

Participation in both projects was voluntary.

8 Quality assurance

The quality assurance framework for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic has remained the same since 2016. The framework was set out in the Act 179/2006, which stipulates the approach and related regulations for quality assurance. It relies on the following pillars:

- The quality of the qualification and assessment standards

These are formulated by bodies (Sector Councils) that feature a mixture of stakeholders from the labour market as well as from the education and training area. After that, proposed standards are assessed and commented-on by three to five independent experts. There is also a national level guidance available concerning the process, e.g. how qualifications should be designed, defined and presented. Furthermore, there is an approval process for the standards by the relevant ministry.

- The quality of authorised entities, their expertise and material equipment

The overall criteria through which an individual or an organisation can become an authorised body, or an authorised person are defined at national level and each assessment standard specifies the particular qualifications and equipment that the authorised entities have to demonstrate. They are authorised by the relevant ministry. The authorisation is limited for five years.

- Definition of the assessment mode and material equipment at national level

For each competence defined in a qualification standard (unit), several assessment criteria are specified through the accompanying assessment standard. For each criterion the mode of assessment is defined and is hence homogeneous across the country. The material needed for assessment is also generally defined at national level.

- The requirement to document the execution of the assessment

It is required that the authorised entities keep documentation of the procedure. It is also required that the assessment process is open to the public.

- The possibility for individuals to appeal
Individuals can request a review of the process and the competent ministry has to give an opinion upon their request.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

In 2007-2015 the development of the main tool for validation (the National Register of Qualifications, NSK) was funded by the ESF (CZK 651 million, approx. EUR 26 million). Also, many IVET schools were supported in their effort to become centres for adult learning and validation within three UNIV projects funded by the ESF.

Since 2015 the administration of the NSK portal is funded mainly from the budget of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. It contributes 1.3 million EUR per year and employers provide 0.5 million EUR. Given that there has only been three years of implementation, it would currently be premature to evaluate this practice.

Public funding might be used for:

- Retraining courses for unemployed people funded by the Public Employment Services (Labour Offices). These must prepare participants to pass a standardised exam, as defined in the NSK register, if a corresponding vocational qualification in the register exists; and,
- Coordination and technical assistance.

In the current EU programming period the development and support of adult education and VNFIL is not funded from the Operational Programme Research, Development and Education (OPVTV) under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, but is funded within the Operational Programme Employment (OPZ) under the managing authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

VNFIL on national level has not been included among the priority areas of the relevant funding mechanisms.

9.2 Distribution of costs

The procedure is designed so that the direct costs of the recognition procedure (assessment and assessors) are covered by the applying individuals. Individuals may seek co-funding from their employers in cases where the retraining is requested by the company. The current experience shows that employers are willing to cover the costs of the procedure if the qualification is related to a regulated profession or a licence to practice.

The use of private funding should ensure that the system is demand-driven and sustainable. During the eleven years of existence of the system (2007-2018), there have been 183 904 successful assessments (as of April 2018) carried out. This indicates that the fees might not be a major obstacle for individuals to apply for validation procedures, although a substantial proportion of vocational qualifications awarded were mandatory due to relevant legal acts (e.g. in the case of the Security Guard vocational qualification). The costs of examination are tax deductible for individuals. The taxpayer may deduct from the tax base of the relevant tax period fees of up to CZK 10 000 (EUR 370) for examinations which validate NFIL under the Act on VNFIL. Disabled taxpayers may deduct up to CZK 13 000 (EUR 480) over the

course of a tax period and severely disabled taxpayers up to CZK 15 000 (EUR 550). Employers can deduct costs associated with adult education from the tax base as stipulated by the Act 586/1992 on Income Taxes.

It is for the authorised entity to set the fee and, in practice, this varies depending on the qualification and the material needed for the assessment (it can go up to several hundreds of EUR). Initially there was a nationally defined price range set at national level. This was meant to ensure that there are no unreasonable differences in fees charged. However, it proved to be difficult to set in practice and the review of the legislation abandoned the use of such scales.

The organisations asking to become authorised entities have to pay a fee covering the authorisation process. The fee is CZK 1 500 (approx. EUR 60) for each authorisation.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Data is only collected on the number of vocational qualification certificates awarded and number of authorised entities. There is no further evidence of the benefits of VNFIL to individuals in the Czech Republic. No studies and/or surveys on the main benefits of validation arrangements were conducted.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

The 2014 and 2016 reports indicate a total of 87 000 and 139 000 vocational qualifications awarded respectively. Until April 2018, this number has risen to 183 904. The following table gives an overview of the distribution of these VQs among sectors represented by the different authorising bodies:

Table 9.1 Overview of the NSK data as of April 2018

Authorising body ¹³	Transport	Culture	Regional Development	Industry and Trade	Labour and Social Affairs	Education, Youth and Sport	Interior	Health	Agriculture	Environment	Total
Number of existing VQs	43	37	66	717	23	41	22	8	263	14	1 234
Number of authorised entities	15	7	192	325	169	222	209	99	127	2	1 367

¹³ Ministries, as central administrative bodies, are authorising bodies in the system of the NSK. Therefore, in this line the word „Transport“ stands for „Ministry of Transport“, „Culture“ stands for „Ministry of Culture“, etc.

Number of authorisations ¹⁴	31	19	708	1 560	359	299	352	233	559	2	4 122
Number of authorised examiners	332	64	1 833	3 569	907	707	698	403	1 455	5	9 973
Number of VQs awarded	139	31	11 474	19 513	8 681	12 713	123 366	3 313	4 661	13	183 904

Only data on validation of vocational skills as described in the NSK are collected. In that sector we see a stable number of people who undergo the process of validation completed with certification. The average annual number of examinations is around 22 000.

9.4.2 Validation users

There is no data collection system set up in the Czech Republic to identify the characteristics of validation users based on age, gender and qualification level or citizenship status of the beneficiaries of the VNFIL process.

9.4.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

The validation system as set up and stipulated by the Act on VNFIL gives equal access to all. The system was not primarily intentioned to support disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, it is used by PES in retraining people and discussions are ongoing regarding how to broaden the system and how to use it to support various groups of potential users, including low qualified and early school leavers.

One suggestion is to offer validation of vocational skills to those students of four year vocational programmes, who fail the standardised general part of the Maturita exam, but who are capable of passing the vocational part of the exam. Currently, these young adults do not get any recognition and leave upper secondary school without any certification. This would allow them to have a vocational qualification and therefore they would have a better position on the labour market.

10 Validation methods

There has been no change in the methods used for the validation process since 2014 and 2016. The assessment takes the form of a complex examination in front of an authorised person or a commission. Portfolios are used as complementary materials. The applicant carries out the practical, written and/or oral parts of the assessment in front of the assessors.

The following three main assessment modes are used:

- Practical demonstration, where the person directly carries out the tasks or presents a finalised product, including simulations. This is the main method used frequently where possible and suitable.
- Written assessment, which covers both complex written assignments, as well as tests. (However, the use of tests is limited and recommended in certain

¹⁴ A single authorised entity can hold authorisations for more VQs.

circumstances only.) If practical assessment is not possible or not appropriate, written assessment is preferred to oral assessment.

- Oral assessment, which is recommended as a complementary method to practical assessment.

For each assessment criterion the preferred mode is defined in the respective assessment standard. However, these modes can cover several methods.

The most commonly used methods at the different stages of the validation process are indicated in the table below¹⁵.

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			
Declarative methods	X		
Interview	X		X
Observation			X
Portfolio method		X	
Presentation			X
Simulation and evidence extracted from work			X
Tests and examinations			X
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify Written assessments and oral assessments			X

Currently, the validation system is CVET and labour market oriented only. Application of methods is stipulated by assessment standards and is the same for all applicants, so there is only a limited room for customisation of procedures to the needs of target groups.

ICT based assessment methods or EU templates are not used for validation.

11 The position of validation in society: visibility and trust

The validation system developed in the past ten years focuses on CVET and the labour market sectors. The value and benefits of the current validation possibilities are still not as widely understood and known as expected. The advantages of validation need to be disseminated among all stakeholders including civil servants, PES workers, career guidance practitioners, teachers and employers, and consequently among all other potential users.

¹⁵ Please note that only assessment is defined in the Act on the VNFIL, therefore identification and documentation stages of the validation process as well as career guidance might or might not be organised by authorised entities.

No study/survey has been conducted on how vocational qualifications are trusted among employers and/or users. Nevertheless, the prevailing view is that people are not sufficiently aware of the validation opportunities and do not feel the need to use it. Certificates from formal education are still seen as the best, because everybody knows and understands them. Major qualifications from formal education (VET certificate, Maturita exam, Diploma specialist, Bachelor, Master etc.) are used as reference points, although the notion and principle of qualification frameworks and their potential benefits has been promoted and explained for many years.

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Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports: www.msmt.cz

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National Institute for Children and Youth (merged with the National Institute for Teachers' Professional Development): www.nidm.cz

National Institute for Education: www.nuv.cz

National System of Occupations: www.nsp.cz

National Register of Qualifications (Information portal on vocational qualifications awarded in the system of VNFIL (in en): <https://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/>

Sector Councils: www.sektorove-rady.cz

UNIV3 - project (support of the validation processes): <http://www.nuv.cz/univ3/pilotnioverovani>

Czech Council for Children and Youth: <http://crdm.cz/projekty/roads-to-recognition/>

12.2

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