

Emphasis on increasing employers' participation in VET in the Czech Republic

With re-emerging economic growth in recent years, companies in the Czech Republic have been facing a shortage of skilled labour force. The structure of labour supply does not match the demand on the labour market and practical skills of graduates entering the labour market are often insufficient. Those are the reasons behind the growing desire for closer connection between the corporate world and VET. The fact is that the employers as well as representatives of VET schools show often greater will to engage in co-operation, one example of these tendencies is the agreement concluded between the key representatives of the employers (Chamber of Commerce, Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, Czech Agrarian Chamber and Confederation of Employers' and Entrepreneurs' Associations of the Czech Republic) on the allocation of responsibility for individual areas of initial vocational education. The aforementioned actors have divided among themselves the responsibility for particular fields of education. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) is not lagging behind, it has prepared a reform to the Amendment of the School Act, by which the schools are bound to enhance the co-operation with employers.

In line with the School Act, the employers, at present, are mainly involved in the negotiations concerning the *National Programme for the Development of Education*, the draft of the *Long-Term Plan for Education and the Development of Education System of the Czech Republic*, the field structure in primary, secondary and tertiary VET and the health requirements for persons applying for education and finally in the negotiations related to the national curricula¹ for VET.

Employers' involvement in VET is embedded in the School Act through the option to implement practical training at their premises, their inclusion in the development of uniform assignment of final examinations for the fields with vocational certificate, mandatory participation of an expert from practice in the examination board for the programmes concluded by a vocational certificate (three-year study programmes, EQF 3) and the optional participation of an expert from practice at the profile part of *Maturita* examination (four-year study programmes, EQF 4) and at *absolutorium* (tertiary professional education, EQF 6).

The aforementioned reform of the School Act Amendment relates to §57. Up till now, this paragraph has been setting the objectives for secondary education without explicitly mentioning the co-operation with employers. The reformed Amendment obliges schools to develop, with regard to the field of study, efforts fostering co-operation with employers towards joint fulfilment of the objectives of secondary education. According to the reformed Amendment, schools shall involve employers in the educational process particularly through:

- a) consulting with employers drafts of school curricula,
- b) engaging employers in shaping of conceptual plans for school development,
- c) securing that a part of practical training being implemented at the premises of the employers who are authorised to perform activities related to the relevant field of education,
- d) allowing for participation of experts from practice in theoretical training at school,

¹ Based on the national curricula designed by the State, the schools create their own school curricula for each field of study offered. In line with the plan for development of particular school, the school curriculum shall reflect the educational conditions in the school as well as educational needs and specific features of the regional labour market.

- e) allowing for participation of experts from practice at the profile part of *Maturita* examination,
- f) securing, in co-operation with the employers, continuing education and internships for teaching staff of theoretical as well as practical training at employers.”²

The above-mentioned activities are being implemented by many schools and employers already at present. The reformed Amendment should be viewed as a step towards systematisation and an effort to extend these activities also to schools that haven't been exploiting them to their full potential so far. The proposal, at the same time, puts emphasis on greater involvement of individual employers at regional and local levels.

² See the Amendment 841/3 to the Chamber of Deputies publication No 841, which includes the reform of regional education funding <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/historie.sqw?o=7&t=841>. The Amendment is expected to be approved in the course of 2017.