

A Report for DGVT on New Initiatives in Vocational Education and Training in the 2nd half of 2005

Czech Republic

The government approved a law on recognition of the outcomes of continuing education and training

In August 2005 the Government of the Czech Republic approved a bill on recognition of the outcomes of continuing education. After it is passed by Parliament and signed by the President of the CR, the law will come into effect on 1 August 2007. Until now there has not been a single piece of legislation governing such recognition. There were only ad-hoc regulations of various Ministries related to some forms of professional education. The new law should change this. It will make it possible to acquire a generally recognised certificate of a certain level of professional competence regardless of the ways in which the person has achieved it. The applicant will take an examination with an authorised commission (or an individual) and obtain a certificate of passing the exam and acquiring a partial qualification. A list of full or partial qualifications which can be confirmed and recognised in the CR along with the relevant evaluation standards will be part of the National System of Qualifications (Národní soustava kvalifikací), which is being developed by the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education (Národní ústav odborného vzdělávání – NÚOV).

The long-term plan for the development of higher education institutions

In August 2005 the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy - MŠMT) adopted the Long-Term Plan for the Development of Education, Science, Research, Development, Artistic and other Creative Activities of HE institutions for 2006-2010. The document sets out basic priorities of the Ministry in Czech higher education. They cover three areas:

I. Internationalisation. This will include incentives for institutions to expand the provision of programmes delivered in foreign languages and to increase the level of language competencies on the part of student as well as the academic and administrative staff, support for participation in international programmes, introduction of joint degrees, full implementation of the ECTS, and promotion of international co-operation in research and development.

II. The quality and excellence of academic activities will be sought in all basic activities of HE institutions. Emphasis will be placed on the professional development of academic staff and equal access to education and guidance, and on enhancing co-operation between schools and regional institutions, potential employers and consumers of R&D outcomes, which will enhance the employability of graduates. Moreover, the development of R&D will be pursued as well as efforts to increase the professional standards of management, to promote integration of HE institutions, to improve the infrastructure in higher education (particularly as regards research and development and information technologies), and to develop quality evaluation systems in HE.

III. The culture and quality of the academic life will be supported by means of activities focused on improving the social situation of students and the staff, integrating groups at risk of social and cultural exclusion and on supporting students with special talents.

In order to support these activities the Ministry will use various resources, particularly those within its development schemes. The schemes make it possible for HEIs to draw on finance from the state budget to implement projects focused on the priorities set out in the Long-Term Plan. The EU funds may also be used. The extent to which HEIs implement these priorities will be an important criterion in their evaluation.

Conception of higher education reform – an update

In September 2005 the Czech government approved an Updated Outline for Higher Education Reform which contains a proposal for the funding of HEIs until 2008. This year (2008) the expenditure on higher education should amount to 1% of GDP (as compared to 0.8% in 2005). The main objectives the implementation of which is to be financed from these additional resources are set out in the

Outline Of Higher Education Reform (Koncepce reformy vysokého školství) issued in 2004. They include the following: to complete and assess the transition to a three-level structure of higher education (bachelor, master and doctoral); to introduce public HE institutions of a non-university type into the HE system; to promote evaluation of HEI's operations; to support research and development at HEIs; to increase the proportion of HEIs in the provision of lifelong learning programmes; and to motivate HEIs to support student and academic staff mobility.

The launch of the accreditation commission for tertiary professional education

The new schools law no. 561/2004, § 3, par. 4 stipulates that tertiary professional education in each subject area must be provided in line with an accredited programme. Accreditation is granted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) based on a statement of the Accreditation Commission for Tertiary Professional Education (Akreditační komise pro vyšší odborné vzdělávání – AK VOV).

As this type of education forms an integral part of the tertiary education sector, and in view of the transferability between tertiary professional schools and higher education institutions, the AK VOV should operate in synergy with the Accreditation Commission for HEIs.

After the AK VOV was set up its secretariat sought to establish the relevant conditions for its operations. The secretariat staff file applications for accreditation of study programmes at various tertiary professional schools which have been arriving since the summer of 2005. They arrange for them to be evaluated and prepared for the AK VOV meeting. At present the AK VOV meets in relatively short intervals so as to manage the large inflow of applications in the shortest possible time. Eight study programmes have already been accredited and others are being prepared for accreditation.

A new systemic project – Recognition of the Outcomes of Non-Formal and Informal Education (Uznávání výsledků neformálního a informálního vzdělávání – UNIV)

In September 2005 the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) in co-operation with the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV) launched a new systemic project with the support from the European Social Fund. Its implementation should, in the following three years, expand considerably the provision of lifelong learning in the Czech Republic, and the recognition of qualifications acquired outside initial schooling should be made easier.

These changes are most desired as the number of adults involved in continuing education after school is considerably lower in the CR as compared to the old EU countries. One of the reasons for this is an inappropriate provision of continuing training courses. The absence of a coherent system for the development of lifelong learning and the relevant legislation also has a negative impact.

As part of the project networks of secondary and tertiary professionals schools will be set up in six regions. The participating schools will enlarge their provision to include adult learning programmes. Similar networks operate in the Liberecký and Moravskoslezský regions which are also involved in the project.

The second part of the project will consist in piloting a new approach to recognition of prior learning at schools in the Liberecký and Moravskoslezský regions. Since September 2005, they have been designing procedures for testing the knowledge and skills acquired in various courses, via self-study, as part of leisure activities and at work. For this purpose the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV) has been developing so-called evaluation standards.

A new information system will assist in career choice

Pupils at basic and secondary schools and their teachers lack detailed information to assist them in making career decisions based on a good understanding of labour market issues. This is why, in 2005, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) launched a systemic project entitled **Education – Guidance – Information** (Vzdělávání – Poradenství – Informace: VIP Kariéra) which is funded from the European Social Fund and will last until 2008. As part of the project the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV) will develop an integrated information system concerned the situation of school leavers in the labour market (Informační systém o uplatnění absolventů škol na trhu práce – ISA). This new system will interlink information about schools and

subject areas with information about the position of school leavers in the labour market and the employers' needs.

ISA will collect all information necessary for the choice of a career and the relevant educational routes and make it available in a user-friendly form on the Internet.

Its advantage will be an unlimited access for pupils and their parents.

The system will contain:

- 1) **A detailed list of schools' programmes and subject areas** including contact information, admission requirements, chances of admission and part-time study opportunities.
- 2) **Information resulting from labour market analyses** such as regular analyses of the unemployment among school leavers, information about the employability of school leavers and possibilities of transferring to tertiary education, surveys among employers, etc.

The ISA will also include a **prediction system** designed to find suitable substitute programmes for pupils at risk of dropping out of school, and a **multimedia guide** to the choice of a career and education.

The national plan for language teaching

In December 2005 the Czech government approved the National Plan for Foreign Language Teaching (Národní plán výuky cizích jazyků) including an action plan for 2005-2008. Its objective is to improve the language competencies of children as well as adults in the Czech Republic. The National Plan was drawn up on the basis of the Action Plan of the European Union on Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity.

At present children begin to learn a foreign language in grade 4 of basic school, and a second foreign language is not compulsory. Czech children learn fewer languages at basic school as compared to the EU average. The MŠMT envisages that children should begin to familiarise with English as early as the final year in kindergarten in the form of language propaedeutics. This should continue in grade 1 of basic school (short periods of language learning incorporated into various subjects). From September 2006 children should start learning their first foreign language as early as grade 3 and some subjects should be taught (in full or in part) in a foreign language.

Expansion of language learning is conditional upon availability of teachers who not only have a good command of the relevant language, but also have qualifications to teach other subjects. The provision of higher education institutions will be expanded to include teacher training programmes of this kind. Apart from this, the MŠMT intends to concentrate on the continuing training of teachers in the form of courses and international exchanges. The strategy also reckons with a continuing access of adults to free language lessons on the Internet. Courses at various levels should also be provided by the National Language Portal (Národní jazykový portál). Other incentives will include education vouchers which, according to the plan, should be partially funded by the state and employers.

An amendment to the law on higher education institutions

On 1 January 2006 an amendment to the law on HE institutions became effective. Among other things it provides for a change in the system of funding of HEIs. The revenues of HEIs include a new item – “contribution from the state budget for education, science, research, development, artistic and other creative activities” – the level of which will depend, *inter alia*, on the results achieved in these areas. Moreover, HEIs can make profit and transfer the resources to the following financial year.

The amendment also makes it possible to implement study programmes in co-operation with a foreign institution of higher education and to award joint degrees. It also stipulates that grants from the state budget for accommodation, meals and grants for Czech citizens studying abroad are no longer classified as an individual/family income that is relevant for determining the level of welfare benefits.