

## **Development of Tertiary Professional Education in the Czech Republic**

In the field of tertiary professional education, 2016 became an anniversary year as twenty years ago, based on the new legislation, the first tertiary professional schools (VOŠ) started to emerge in the Czech Republic. The Association of Tertiary Professional Schools of the Czech Republic representing the vast majority of tertiary professional schools celebrated this anniversary in April 2016 by organising the “Skills for Practice” conference which recalled all the important milestones within the field and declared unanimous effort to foster further functioning of tertiary professional education within the Czech educational system as a vocation-oriented branch.

The dynamic development of tertiary professional education is driven by the demand for skills within the private as well as public sectors. It is reflected by the schools widening their study programmes portfolios in the effort to match the labour market and social partners’ needs. In terms of tertiary professional education, 2016 was groundbreaking on multiple levels. The Association of Tertiary Professional Schools in co-operation with the Czech School Inspectorate finalised the criteria for assessing conditions, implementation and results of education at tertiary professional schools that was successfully piloted at five member-schools sorted by the field (health-care, social services, economic sector, technical sector and agriculture). This methodology is to unify the existing vague approaches to the evaluation of tertiary professional schools and will be regarded as binding for the Czech School Inspectorate.

Also modification of legislation was essential for the tertiary professional schools. Namely, it was the Amendment to the School Act - it moves the date of admission of students to the first grades by one month to October 31<sup>st</sup> of the given year securing thus the same conditions as those of the students applying to higher education institutions.

Another level of qualitative shift within tertiary professional education is represented by the breakthrough in terms of mutual permeability between VOŠ and tertiary education institutions. This was fostered, to a great extent, by the Amendment to the Higher Education Act securing that as of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 the rectors of the higher education institutions are authorised to validate and recognise integral parts of studies completed within accredited study programmes at tertiary professional schools.

This modification became an impulse for a series of mutual negotiations between the representatives of higher education institutions and employers with the representatives of the Association of Tertiary Professional Schools. The communication platform will allow for a close individual co-operation between tertiary education institutions and tertiary professional schools aimed at providing the graduates from VOŠ with the option to acquire, in a shorter period of time, also a bachelor’s degree at the tertiary education institutions.

Tertiary professional education in the Czech Republic is gaining prestige mainly among the employers who value the most the professional orientation of training programmes and the skills acquired by the graduates who already in the course of their studies take part in practical training in companies.

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