

Reform of final examination in vocational education

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The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education, has been working on a gradual reform of the final examination that aims at increasing the quality of vocational programmes at upper secondary level. Since 2005, the reform has been taking place via projects supported by the European Social Fund.

The reform entails a systemic change in the process of vocational programmes completion that means an end to the current situation where each school prepares its own final examination content. **The fundamental feature of the new final examination (NZZ) is a uniform content for each specific field of education** (e.g. bricklayer, toolmaker, baker, hairdresser, etc.) that is developed jointly by vocational school teachers and experts from industry. The process of unifying the final examination requirements leads to an increased level of comparability of learning outcomes and has a major influence on the quality of educational provision and the students' employment prospects.

There has been major progress in the reform that can be demonstrated by the fact that a growing number of schools **administer the uniform exams each year** for an increasing number of students. In 2003/2004 uniform assignments were developed for 3 fields of training and tested in 34 schools. In 2007/2008 there were as many as 70 examinations set for virtually all three-year vocational training programmes that were administered by some 50% of schools.

Since 2009/2010 the assignments set for the exams have been available on a web portal for all schools to use them for their final examinations. A total of 98 examinations have been developed for 2009/2010 in 116 fields of vocational training. Some 500 school directors and teachers at secondary technical schools worked on them. The content was assessed by 74 experts from industry selected by the Economic Chamber of the Czech Republic. The exam content was downloaded from the NZZ information system by 99.6 % of schools and 80% of schools administered the uniform final exams in at least one field. A total of 21,202 students (68%) took the final examination using the uniform assignments in June 2010.

For 2010/2011 uniform exams are also being developed for less demanding programmes designed for students with special educational needs. In March 2011 all the exams shall be made available for schools via the NZZ web portal. Each school shall only have access to those fields of training that are included in the school registry, and the school director shall decide on the use of the assignments in the final examination.

At present schools may join the uniform final exam scheme on a voluntary basis. It is therefore clear that they are interested in being able to compare whether the quality of a specific programme they provide stands comparison with other schools. The uniform assignments also make the preparation of the examinations easier for schools, and therefore those who have experienced this exercise wish to continue.

An amendment to the relevant legislation is envisaged that should introduce an obligation for all schools to administer the new final examination. The assignments are, of course, going to be altered each year. This is why a database of topics for final examinations is being developed and should be gradually expanded.

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