

VET Schools¹ and their Cooperation with Employers - questionnaire survey outcomes

Since the launch of the *Support of Action Planning* project (PKAP, 2016-2021), two surveys comprising all Czech upper secondary and tertiary professional schools (SŠ and VOŠ) have been carried out. The survey realised at the turn of 2015/2016 included 1,365 schools and its response rate approximated 98%. The second survey was carried out at the end of 2018 in 1,293 schools with 96% response rate. Both waves of questionnaire survey consistently showed that, in terms of importance, the Czech schools put VET and cooperation with employers on the second place, right after school infrastructure development (refurbishment of school facilities and equipment).

The most common activities implemented in cooperation with employers are lectures or similar forms of participation of experts from practice in instruction (the second wave showed a 9 pp increase, moving from 67% to 76%) and the provision of practical training in real work environment (reported by 68% of schools in both waves). Relative to 2015/2016, the schools gravitate more towards activities related to the provision of internships for teachers and educators at workplaces and state-of-the-art employers' premises (14 pp increase, from 26% to 40%). They also increasingly focus on career guidance implemented in cooperation with employers (9 pp increase). A slight increase was reported in employers' involvement in final examinations (2 pp, from 36% to 38%). The planning of cooperation or the elaboration of cooperation strategy with social or other partners remained unchanged (21% of schools).

The schools also commented on the obstacles to cooperation with employers. In general, relative to 2015/2016, less obstacles were identified. The most significant improvement was seen in the identified lack of employers' interest in cooperation with schools (6 pp decrease, from 34% to 28%) and the reported too high costs of medical examinations and health insurance required for students before entering workplaces (5 pp decrease, from 39% to 34%), a 3 pp decrease was recorded in the motivation of students to learn in real work environment, availability of companies or the lack of interest of employers to be involved in final examinations. The most common obstacle for schools in 2018 were the companies not being able to adapt to the educational needs of students (37%, i.e. a 1 pp increase compared to 2015/2016).

As for measures that the schools would find helpful to achieve their goals for cooperation with employers, relative to 2015/2016, they emphasize mainly lectures and similar forms of participation of experts from practice in instruction (6 pp increase, 58%) and to a lesser degree they are interested in partnership contracts among school, company and student (9 pp decrease, 32%) or securing funds for students' practical training (7 pp decrease, 47%). Despite reported 3 pp decrease, 52% of schools would still welcome students' internships in foreign companies and the same share are interested in funding for administration costs, teaching equipment, insurance fees and costs related to commuting to employers. Vocational training or practical training for students at employers' workplaces was indicated by 51% of upper secondary and tertiary professional schools.

The goal of the project is to integrate long-term planning into school practice as a tool for quality management and to align educational policy at school, regional and national levels. In 2019, the schools must submit evaluated questionnaires as a mandatory part of their application for project calls of the Ministry of Education.

¹ Schools at upper secondary and tertiary professional non-university level