Article on innovation in VET in the Czech Republic

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ReferNet article - draft
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**Introduction**

In the Czech Republic (CR), there is no unified system approach to innovation in education. Nevertheless, awareness of the need for innovation, innovative teaching, creativity and entrepreneurship is reflected in the strategic documents of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT).

A paper adopted by the MŠMT in January 2013 entitled *New measures fostering vocational education and training* talks about the need to modify the already issued National Curricula (RVP – Rámcové vzdělávací programy) for secondary schools in terms of contents particularly due to the recent development within the fields of science and technology and the changing requirements of employers. Modifications need to be carried out in a systemic manner, in close co-operation of ministries, representatives of employers, regions and schools while coordinated in line with the standards set by the National Register of Qualifications (NSK\(^1\)). Emphasis is placed also on fostering acquisition and usage of knowledge, skills and qualifications facilitating personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market, improving quality and innovation within the area of VET particularly by means of the Leonardo da Vinci programme and the lifelong learning programmes.

*The Strategy of Digital Education by 2020* adopted at the end of 2014 suggests specific transformation and upgrading of learning process at schools with the support of digital technologies. They include creation of electronic materials available on-line, transformation of teaching methods, provision of educational software. The aim of the *Strategy* is to incorporate modern technology in learning process so that it covers the entire education at primary schools, not only particular subjects. The full involvement of modern technologies in teaching of all subjects is a prerequisite securing a shift within the education system from memorizing facts towards the emphasis on reading literacy, communication skills and logical thinking. One of the seven main areas of the *Strategy* is concerned with the promotion of innovative processes, monitoring, evaluation and dissemination of the results.

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\(^1\) National Register of Qualifications (NSK) is a publicly accessible register of vocational qualifications and complete vocational qualifications recognised and validated in the territory of the Czech Republic that can be acquired on the basis of the Act no. 179/2006 Coll. on validation and recognition of the outcomes of CVET. **Vocational qualification** is defined as ability of a person to duly perform a task or a set of tasks within an occupation enabling their applicability on the labour market (e.g. cold dishes preparation, production of cakes and desserts, roofer skilled in laying roofs of historical buildings). **Complete vocational qualification** is defined as a professional competence to duly perform all the tasks within an occupation (e.g. cook, pastry chef, roofer).
The National Innovation Strategy for the Czech Republic 2012-2020 consists of four main sections dedicated to excellence research, co-operation between the corporate and academic sectors in the area of knowledge transfer, support for innovative entrepreneurship and finally the people as shift initiators and bearers of new ideas— in terms of technical as well as non-technical innovation. It seeks to reinforce the role of innovation and the use of high-technology as a source of competitiveness of the country and increase their benefits for the long-term economic growth, for the creation of prospective jobs and improvement of quality of life in the CR.

The fulfilment of the objectives set by the National Innovation Strategy in the area of education and human resources depends on the functionality of primary and secondary education and on the improvement of its quality. Inter-connection of the Strategy with the National education policy is evident particularly in the following areas:

- Key competences, education towards entrepreneurship, independence and creativity;
- Horizontal mobility and involvement of the corporate sector in the development of curricula;
- Tools promoting lifelong learning;
- Development of logical thinking;
- Enhancing IT literacy;
- Teaching of mathematics;
- Fostering teaching of technical subjects and sciences and targeted development of positive attitude towards technology from early age.

Education should, in addition to training for a specific profession, place emphasis on transferable skills and the ability to further deepen and broaden one’s professional skills. The aim is also to link VET with the requirements of the labour market by introducing co-operation mechanisms between employers and schools (e.g. by means of sectoral agreements). The requirements should be reflected in curricular reforms, by increased efficiency of the counselling system and enhanced co-operation between schools and external partners while providing practical training to students in real work environment. Schools however should not prepare students for highly specialised working positions based on the existing situation or for a particular employer only. Variety of employers should be as much as possible involved in curricula shaping.
In practice, these strategic priorities are promoted through a combination of push-down and bottom-up approach. There are national (system) projects on one hand and Development Programmes (grants) of the MŠMT and ESF operational programmes that support multiple projects of individual institutions and partnerships, or popular competitions rewarding innovative attitude of students and teachers on the other hand. Usually the innovation of education content (curricula), teaching methods (using of ICT, support of teachers) or development of soft skills including creativity and innovativeness are targeted.

**MŠMT development programmes/grant schemes**

In line with the strategic document *New measures fostering vocational education and training*, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports announced for both 2013 and 2014 a development programme entitled *Fostering continuing education of VET teachers and trainers in real work environment*. The purpose of this programme is to support secondary schools implementing projects that help to enhance co-operation of schools and their founders with employers in particular region, in particular training of VET teachers and trainers of selected fields directly at the employers’ premises. Acquired competencies of trained teachers will be subsequently used during the innovation of school curricula.

In 2010 and 2011, the MŠMT announced calls for proposals of projects within the Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme (ECOP): *Improvement of the conditions for education at primary schools* and *Improvement of the conditions for education at secondary schools*. The main purpose was to promote development of areas that, over the long term, are proving to be problematic, e.g. innovative teaching methods, reading and IT literacy, mathematics, mentoring, etc. Submitted applications show that the most preferred projects are those focusing on creation of digital teaching materials and on teachers’ training in the field of usage of modern communication and digital technologies.

**Competitions**

The Czech Republic has a long tradition of multiple competitions organised for students of secondary schools. They are very popular among the students. "Students’ scientific activity" (SOČ – Středoškolská odborná činnost) has been organised with great success for several decades already. The more recent ones include:

**The “Czech Little-Head”** (České hlavičky) - a competition organised for talented students of secondary schools on annual basis since 2007. The best student scientific papers in multiple fields receive a national award.

Since 2009, a national convention of students of secondary vocational schools and a competition “Boffin of the Year” (Machři roku) are organised. The aim of this event is to
draw attention to and promote vocational fields of study. On the main square of a selected city, the schools from across the country compete every year in several categories. The competition is accompanied by a crafts market where individual schools can promote themselves.

In 2011 within the framework of the “Craft is Alive" project, Prague had a chance to test a new competition entitled Sollertia. Its main principle is direct comparison of the performance of students with a professional in the given field. Students as well as professionals have to fulfil the same task under identical conditions. That makes it possible to objectively determine the level of achieved knowledge and skills of students. The purpose of the competition is also to enhance direct participation of companies in shaping the contents of education and evaluating the results of vocational training.

In 2011, the MŠMT initiated for the first time a national competition entitled DOMINO. The aim of this competition is to motivate and encourage teachers to get actively involved in the development of digital learning materials and to enhance their interest in innovation of teaching process and introduction of ICT in majority of subjects taught in schools. The slogan of the competition therefore is – “a good school is not made by modern technology, it is made by the people who use modern technology.” The competition is linked to the international competition E-learning Award organised by European Schoolnet.

**Other project-based initiatives**

Often, ESF funded projects are an opportunity to pilot innovative initiatives. They can be either national “system" projects or more local bottom-up initiatives. E.g. internships of teachers of vocational subjects at employers’ workplace have been recently quite successfully pilot-tested within the framework of multiple ESF projects. The internships provide convenient opportunity for the transfer of innovations into learning process. It has been verified in practice that for the VET teachers and trainers repeated internships in companies are particularly beneficial. This method of vocational skills development is quite popular.

An example of a national project that piloted several innovations within VET is a project POSPOLU.
Example: National pilot project POSPOLUM (TOGETHER)

Overview of the project

The systemic project POSPOLUM (Fostering Co-operation between Schools and Enterprises with Focus on Vocational Education and Training in Practice) has been selected to illustrate innovation in VET. The project is being implemented in the CR since December 2012 and will run until June 2015. The project identifies and analyses the existing system of co-operation between schools and enterprises and at the same time it secures pilot-testing of new models of co-operation. The aim of the project is to promote co-operation between secondary vocational schools and employers resulting in higher quality of graduates and increased volume of vocational training in real work environment. By means of revising curricular documents, the project pilot-tests innovations in the area of staffing of the co-operation between schools and enterprises, introduction of ECVET and EQAVET principles or improvement of quality as well as increase of volume of practical training and work placements carried out at the premises of companies.

The main aim of the project is to draft a new model of VET and propose modifications and shifts in the system, including legislative changes, resulting in smooth and more efficient co-operation between schools and enterprises. The project is co-financed from the European Social Fund and the State Budget of the CR. It has been prepared by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with employers’ associations and is being implemented by the MŠMT in collaboration with the National Institute for Education (NÚV). In addition, also professional associations, founders of schools, representatives of public sector and a number of experts from schools as well as enterprises are involved in the implementation of the project.

Within the project, a committee consisting of thirteen social partners has been established. The committee represents their interests and checks whether the project outcomes are in line with their expectations and not far from the real practice of the world of work.

The main activities within the project:

- Design of co-operative models and case studies,
- Pilot-testing and monitoring of co-operative models,
- Square quantitative and qualitative surveys mapping the existing situation and forms of co-operation in the area of vocational training carried out in real work environment,
- Creation of methodological publications and teaching materials,
- Drafting VET model,
- Proposing legislative modifications promoting inter-connecting of VET with practical training in real work environment,
- Educational events for pedagogues and representatives of companies.

The project involves a total of 38 schools from across all regions of the CR, nearly 100 companies and other entities. Co-operation between schools and enterprises is monitored in 26 fields of study. Pilot-testing of co-operation is carried out by means of 16 partnerships and its purpose is to determine its possibilities and limits under the existing legislation and to transfer the practical experience from the pilot-testing into proposals of systemic measures. Another 10 partnerships between a school and an enterprise are involved in the so-called monitoring, under which examples of good practice are to be identified and case studies, units of learning outcomes and methodological materials prepared.

While using simple descriptive templates, pedagogues and company representatives will in the courses learn how to plan co-operation in a transparent manner, i.e. the involved partners will agree in advance what the student needs to learn at the workplace. They will also learn to evaluate and plan mutual co-operation. The ready-made templates can be used for the purposes of innovation of school curricula with particular regard to the needs of co-operating employers.

The project POSPOLU is gradually generating co-operative models capturing various possibilities of co-operation between secondary vocational schools and enterprises in the following areas:

- Practical training and work placement;
- Involvement of experts from practice in planning and implementation of the training;
- Profile Maturita examination;
- Internships for pedagogues in companies.

The project included creation of generic models of co-operation featuring a framework description of co-operation between schools and enterprises (employers) in three main

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2 The term *practical training* is used for training of predominantly manual skills in 2-3 year VET study programmes (ISCED 3C), that may be realized in the companies as well as in the schools workshops and other facilities. The term *work placement* is used for the real-work experience that is a part of more advanced four-year VET study programmes (ISCED 3A).
categories of educational attainment and identifying areas in which it is possible to develop co-operation between schools and employers. Those were further developed into applied models of co-operation related to various groups of fields of study and levels of education. Applied models point out sectoral differences while implementing training in real work environment in companies and describe field-of-study specific opportunities of co-operation between schools and employers. In total, there were created 56 applied models. Among other, they provide specific information on objectives of co-operation, content, evaluation methods and organisational arrangements and legislative environment.

Applied models have been developed for typical study programmes within a certain group of fields of study (e.g. within the fields of study “Transport and Communications”, the four-year study programme entitled “Transport Management and Administration” and the three-year study programme “Operator of Postal Services and Transportation” were selected as a representatives of the whole group of fields), however, they cannot be directly applied to other study programmes within the group. The models are meant to be a source of inspiration for pedagogues from schools and company representatives in the course of the joint planning, implementation and evaluation of specific co-operation. They serve as a basis for development of principles for specific co-operation between a school and an enterprise.

Case studies developed in the course of pilot-testing are closely related to the applied models. They describe a specific example of co-operation between a school and a company while implementing practical training/work placements of the students and internships of pedagogues in real work environment. Case studies are meant to inspire – not to be copied – they offer an example featuring, in addition to positive experiences, also problematic areas of co-operation.

Innovative elements in the project

It is safe to say that the project POSPOLU promotes innovations at two levels: firstly at the micro-level of participating schools, where the close link to the world of work makes the whole educational process more innovative (e.g. it allows for transfer of innovation in technology into learning process and flexible response to changes in practice, etc.) while creating the same tools for other schools; and secondly at the macro level, where it seeks to propose innovations of the VET system. They are being submitted in the course of the project in the form of proposals for legislative modifications and form part of the new model of VET. These innovative elements include:
• Innovation in staffing of co-operation between schools and enterprises

➤ Reinfocing the role of an instructor of practical education

The instructor of practical education is an employee of the company and is responsible for management of learning activities of students and for their safety at workplace. The instructor's position is specified in a contract concluded between the school and the company on contents, scope and conditions of practical education. The relevant employee can perform instructor's activities solely part-time or (especially in larger companies) may instructor’s position represent a full-time job. The instructor needs to prove their professional competencies, skills and experience in relevant occupation. They are not pedagogues and therefore they only submit proposals and documentation for the purposes of students’ evaluation. In order to become an instructor, it is currently required to complete the so-called “pedagogical minimum” in the extent of 50-60 hours.

In relation to the increased share of practical training of students at workplace of companies piloted within the project POSPOLU, increases also the importance of the role of instructors, particularly if the teacher of vocational training secures solely supervision and is not permanently present at the workplace. Therefore, in order to increase quality of pedagogical guidance provided to students, it has been proposed to establish a vocational qualification “Instructor of practical education” within the National Register of Qualifications. Competences required by the NSK qualification standards can be acquired also through training courses developed and provided specifically for these purposes within the project POSPOLU. In case the school becomes the so-called “authorised person” ³ it is entitled to carry out examinations of the applicants to verify vocational qualifications required by the qualification standards.

➤ Training of practitioners involved in VET

Involvement of practitioners in school environment, using their practical experience from companies and transfer of latest technologies and materials in VET is more than desirable and has potential to allow for a smooth transition of graduates to the labour market. Practitioners take part in theoretical teaching or supplement practical training carried out at schools or model work environment. Practitioners are also involved in the process of completion of vocational training, i.e. in shaping assignments of uniform final examinations or during actual examinations.

³ Authorised person is (usually) an institution entitled to carry out examinations of candidates applying for verification of acquired vocational qualifications in line with the Act no. 179/2006 Coll. on validation and recognition of the outcomes of CVET.
Under the current legislations, practitioners are not regarded as members of pedagogical staff. However, unless they are involved in teaching only occasionally and accompanied by a teacher, they need to prove pedagogical competencies. A specific training course has been developed and piloted within the project with the aim to facilitate acquisition of these competencies.

➢ **Continuing education of teachers in enterprises**

So far implemented ESF projects pointed out not only the need but also the popularity of internships in companies provided for teachers of practical training and vocational subjects. Currently, the teachers of vocational subjects maintain and enhance their expertise and professional knowledge and skills by means of self-study and in their spare time. Long-term employment at school, which does not allow for direct contact with rather dynamic development within their field results in outdated knowledge and reduces the quality of education.

The project POSPOLUM proposed introduction of an obligation for the teachers to complete an internship in a company within the specified time for self-study and at the same time an obligation for the schools to enable teachers to participate in such an internship. The companies should provide suitable schedule of such internships in terms of length as well as timing in relation to the school year (during the school holidays, during periods reserved for self-study activities, or during periods when the students perform their own practical training at workplaces of the companies) while securing a mentor who will provide a teacher in internship with necessary guidance. The schools are to make it possible for the teacher to participate in an internship and if needed secure a substitute teacher. Internships for the teachers shall be treated in the *Agreement on Co-operation* concluded between a school and an enterprise and their administration should be entrusted to a coordinator of such collaboration (see below).

Also long-term internships of teachers (e.g. several months) that would be more of an employment-like nature combined with long-term engagement of practitioners in teaching positions on a rotation basis seem to be a convenient and effective solution. This would allow for alternating academic and professional career of teachers and practitioners.

Completed internships would help to increase teachers’ qualifications within the upcoming career system and in the case of vocational subjects teachers they could become a prerequisite of acquisition of higher qualification level.
Coordinator of co-operation between school and enterprise

Since the creation of quality long-term co-operation places significant demands on organisation, planning, assessment and evaluation of students' practical education in enterprises, the project POSPOLU suggests establishing the position of a coordinator. The need for this position has been identified primarily in schools co-operating, for various reasons, with multiple enterprises (often more than 100).

The coordinator would be in charge of adjusting the terms and conditions of co-operation between the school and the enterprise and responsible for securing at least the minimum volume of practical training and work placements of students in enterprises. Coordinator’s tasks would also include research of companies in the region, identification of suitable enterprises with adequate personnel as well as material resources, establishment of contacts and networking, quality evaluation of particular co-operation.

In addition to securing practical education of students in collaboration with teachers of practical training and work placements, coordinator should also focus on other types of co-operation such as:

- Organisation of students recruitment in co-operation with enterprises,
- Implementation of final examinations at the workplace of enterprises,
- Graduation projects using assignments of the companies
- Organisation of leisure activities for students in co-operation with companies,
- Securing internships for school teachers in companies,
- Recruiting practitioners to take part in teaching process at schools.

The coordinator would be an employee of the school. In the case of smaller schools, a deputy head teacher for practical education might fulfil this function. In the case of larger schools, one of the teachers of practical training or work placements might perform this function as a part-time job.

The key tasks of the coordinator would include also processing and annual up-date of the so-called Supplement to the school curriculum, which would be a result of negotiations with companies (see below); setting up processes monitoring and evaluating quality of students’ practical education at companies and other forms of co-operation with enterprises.
Piloting the principles of European Credit Transfer in Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

The purpose of the implementation of ECVET principles piloted within the project POSPOLU is to enhance mutual trust, foster quality and attractiveness of practical training and work placements for students of secondary vocational schools as well as to actively use descriptions of learning outcomes. The main point is to describe with great precision the goals of student’s practical training at the employer’s premises and which specific skills, knowledge and competences they need to master and how they will be assessed and evaluated. Given the fact that the students usually come to companies after completing some vocational training at schools, the employer shall be provided with the information on student’s level and practical experience.

In the pilot stage, the school together with the company in advance define and agree on what the students need to master during their training in a company – creating thus a learning outcome unit – and draw up the Agreement on training. Surveys carried out among the schools involved in the project conclude that additional paperwork is counterproductive and the schools are often discouraged from participating in pilot-testing. Therefore, it is possible for the schools involved in the project to make use of their existing agreements with the social partners. The relationship between a school and an enterprise shall be in line with the applicable legislation (School Act no. 561/2004 Coll.) defined by the so-called Agreement on contents, scope and conditions of practical education. The template of the Agreement is available as a supplement to the School Act and majority of schools make use of it while making some minor modifications. The purpose of ECVET principles piloting is to improve quality of current Agreements concluded between the schools and their social partners by including in them quality assurance and quality control mechanisms.

Units of learning outcomes are quite flexible in a sense that they can facilitate response to fast changes in modern technology and development in some fields. It is possible to edit and modify the units in line with the labour market trends and requirements and thus enrich and enhance school curriculum (see below – Supplement to school curriculum). When creating units of learning outcomes, the project recommends using as a reference the qualification and evaluation standards developed within the National Register of Qualifications (NSK).

According to the employers and schools it would be useful to issue standardized certificate of completion of practical training or work placement, which would be mandatorily provided to graduates with Maturita or apprenticeship certificate. Each graduate of secondary vocational or secondary professional school receives yearly report on their study results. Provided they successfully conclude their studies, they receive also a certificate on Maturita examination or
an apprenticeship certificate. Since 2014, it is possible to indicate on the report the company in which the student completed their practical training or work placement. However, it would be appropriate that the reports include, in addition to the name and the address of the company, also the learning outcomes (described by means of listed and evaluated skills, knowledge and competencies mastered in the course of practical training). Students who do not complete successfully their studies have no other evidence of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies but their yearly school reports. In such cases, the certificate on completed practical training or work placement could help to facilitate the entrance on the labour market, transfer to another educational institution or future recognition of vocational qualification within the framework of the National Register of Qualifications.

The “Europass Mobility” document has been piloted for these purposes. This personal document records, in addition to the identification data of the student and institution by which it was issued, also a list of acquired learning outcomes.

Overall evaluation of vocational training, regardless of where it had been carried out, should be included within the list of competencies in the student’s portfolio – stipulating all the competencies arising from the school curriculum (or the VET standards of the complete vocational qualification) mastered by the student. The portfolio of student’s works produced in the course of their studies together with the portfolio of (mastered) competencies would be a prerequisite for taking the final examination.

- Using EQAVET principles (European Quality Assurance Reference Framework)

While the teaching at schools is subject to initial, interim and final evaluation secured by the Czech School Inspectorate (ČŠI), contents and quality of practical training/work placement in companies often lacks quality control. In line with the current legislation, the school is responsible for quality assurance. In practice, the quality is determined by the material equipment of companies, good will, tradition and scope of co-operation with specific school, personal contacts as well as size of the company and number of employees guiding the students. Many schools, whose students spend only limited part of practical training in real work environment, do not even presume that the students would master some part of competencies required by the school curriculum and therefore their evaluation is based on the attendance and good behaviour. Learning outcomes of the students are by most schools monitored to a limited extent; particularly the schools in technical fields are just trying to make sure that the students get familiar with a real work environment at all.

The project POSPOLU suggests to establish ex-ante criterion for the selection of the company – it would be its accreditation as an authorised person for particular qualifications within the National Register of Qualification (NSK). The guarantee would be then provided by
the relevant authorising body, i.e. individual Ministries. Thus the company would be, in line with the Agreement concluded with the school, responsible for learning outcomes of a defined part of vocational training, including that the students shall perform work activities in such a manner securing acquisition of relevant competencies.

For the purposes of quality assessment of the co-operation, the project designed a template – entitled “Quality training criteria”. It is a table consisting of 30 quality indicators inspired by the example of Switzerland (the so-called Qualicarte). The table is divided into four areas and it is supposed to be filled in by the company providing the training. The school verifies extent and quality of the fulfilment of given criteria in the following areas:

- Prior to the beginning of the training in the company: Terms and conditions are set by the hosting institution;
- Beginning of the training: A specific programme for the initial period spent in the company/institution;
- Training: The institution helps the student to acquire competencies needed for the labour market and devotes time to training and gradual transfer of knowledge and skills;
- Obligation of the company, in which the training is carried out: The institution plays an active role in the training and co-operates with all the parties involved.

It also includes targets for the following period that shall help the company as well as the school to be able to effectively address potential issues arising from the evaluation.

The project POSPOLU suggests that evaluation of practical training/work placement in companies should not remain responsibility solely of the schools but it should be carried out by the Czech School Inspectorate.

- **To improve quality and enhance the scope of practical training and work placements carried out at employers’ premises**

The project “POSPOLU” seeks to eliminate major part of issues arising for the companies when employing the graduates of secondary vocational schools. The proposal to reinforce substantially co-operation between employers and schools, particularly in the area of practical training, opens up room for improvement in terms of graduates’ competencies.

- **Improving the time distribution (scheduling) of practical training**

National Curricula specify solely the minimum weekly scope of practical training for the entire study. Traditionally, the practical training is organised on weekly basis, when one week of school is followed by one week of practical training. Despite this arrangement being regarded
as satisfactory during the initial period, in the course of the professional development it becomes an obstacle to quality training aimed at practical application. Under this arrangement, students do not get comprehensive overview of processes and links within individual professional activities (e.g. processes during construction, technological processes during production, processing of an order since the placement until the distribution, etc.) neither are they able to get integrated into the team. This arrangement causes problems also in general education, e.g. foreign languages teaching – where lack of continuity makes it difficult to master the language.

The project POSPOLU proposes that it should become obligatory to provide the students with at least 3 months of practical training in real work environment in companies. It also recommends to pilot-test arrangement that would allow for implementation of a continuous 3 months period of practical training in real work environment in the 2nd half of the last year of study. Such a solution seeks to facilitate transition of students into practice in case they perform their practical training at the premises of their potential future employer. It would allow for more intensive vocational training just before entering the world of work. The assumption is that students would take the written and oral part of the final examination before the start of the continuous period of practical training and the practical part of the final examination would be carried out after the completion of practical training. This kind of arrangement has also its potential risks. In addition to the problem of limited capacity of companies providing practical training for students, this solution requires substantial modifications in terms of organisation of academic year within operating conditions of schools.

- **Enhancing the scope of work placements**

Given that work placement is typically implemented during two weeks in the second grade and another two weeks in the third grade of the study, it can possibly offer only a basic introduction to the real practice environment to a student. In fact, the schools as well as co-operating companies do not expect that work placements as they are arranged now would enable students to acquire any vocational competencies.

Therefore, the project POSPOLU suggests to enhance substantially work placements of students up to the minimum scope of 12 weeks per study with the option to perform maximum half of the placement during the school holidays. The assumption is that the work placement will be carried out in a continuous manner (during at least a whole month), typically in the last two years of the study. It will be possible to schedule the placement any time in the course of the school year.
This work placement should be followed by individual work placement in the minimum scope of 4 weeks during the last two years of the study. It might be carried out during the school holidays as well as during normal school hours, in such a case it would be school’s obligation to make sure the student gets opportunity to catch up on missed theory lessons, e.g. by means of individual consultations, e-learning, etc. The purpose of individual work placement would be fulfilment of a specific task assigned by the employer and preparation for the profile Maturita exam including processing of Maturita paper. Individual work placement might be carried out in a continuous form or as one- or multiple-day consultations concerning the assigned task.

- **Revision of National Curricula (RVP)**

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports issued an individual National Curriculum for each field of study (the total number of RVPs amounts to 281). The Curriculum defines mandatory requirements for training in relevant fields of study and levels of education, i.e. particularly learning outcomes, which need to be acquired by the end of the study, contents of education and basic conditions of implementation of education. It is a binding document for all the schools providing secondary vocational education who are obliged to develop their own school curricula in line with it. The National Curricula for secondary vocational education were developed gradually in the course of the period 2007-2012.

The options for RVPs revision leg behind the dynamics of changes in both technology and labour market. The whole VET system is not able to respond adequately to the needs of employers. Many of the fields of study have an extremely narrow vocational profile, i.e. they prepare students for one specific occupation securing thus only limited applicability on the labour market. Due to that and some other circumstances, a major part of the graduates do not work in their field. Therefore, it is necessary, on one hand, to increase quality of training in the area of general and key competencies\(^4\) and on the other hand, to adapt vocational competencies to the needs of specific employers. The new VET model designed by the project POSPOLU proposes the following revision and update of the existing curricular documents:

- To allow to open joint first grades for different fields of study (when needed) with enhanced role of career counselling, particularly in cases when there is not cooperating employer for whom the students are being trained.

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- Instead of making distinction by an occupation or a group of occupations already at the very beginning of the study, the fields of study should be grouped by broader vocational profiles focused on particular section of technology, economics, services, agriculture, etc. and its application in the world of work, while placing emphasis on key competencies, general education and broad basis of vocational training.

- Reinforce the focus of VET National Curricula on basic types of literacy (reading literacy, numeracy, scientific literacy) and key competencies (ability to learn, to work in team, communication skills, etc.) and to strengthen preparatory nature of the general parts of the curricula for the purposes of the follow-up vocational training (i.e. applied mathematics, applied chemistry, etc.)

- To draft the qualifications’ part of VET using the complete vocational qualifications defined in the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) and to formulate standards for practical training/work placement in the form of qualification and evaluation standards incorporated in NSK.

- To make sure that the last year of the study is focused on the specific complete vocational qualification (defined by NSK) related to the potential employment of the graduate in the given company.

- To make it possible to divide the study period into stages, i.e. so that the students after completing the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) (in case of the three-year vocational programmes) or 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) (in case of the four-year vocational programmes) year of their study could acquire apprenticeship certificate of lower category in the relevant field of study and the corresponding vocational qualification or the complete vocational qualification (some kind of proficiency test) to avoid the situation when students leave the school prematurely without any formal qualifications.

➢ Standards for practical training/work placement

Students of the same field of study should during the practical training or work placement acquire comparable vocational competencies. Currently, these competencies are generally outlined in the National Curricula for given fields of study; however, they are not explicitly defined. They are clearly formulated solely in individual school curricula, which does not allow for comparability among schools. Other issues are related to the fact whether the students perform major part of their vocational training at school or in various companies. In the framework of vocational training, students should as a matter of fact master much wider
spectrum of competencies than they are able to learn in a company with a specific production programme. Therefore, the new VET model comes up with a proposal to incorporate the so-called Standards for practical training/work placement – specifying the qualifications’ part of VET - into curricular documents. It should secure that students, during their training, master all required practical competencies either in one or multiple co-operating companies or at school.

The role of the standards can be played by relevant vocational or complete vocational qualifications of the National Register of Qualifications (NSK). The Standards for practical training/work placement should include also standards defining requirements for facilities and equipment of the workplace; they should be regarded as a guideline for co-operating companies.

➢ Supplement to the school curriculum (ŠVP)

At present, the ŠVP chapter devoted to the co-operation with social partners is usually rather general and does not specify competencies and learning outcomes, which students will acquire during their practical experience in particular company or how this training will be secured in terms of training staff. That is due, among other things, to the fact that the school curricula are designed for a long-term, however conditions and circumstances in the companies are changing rather fast.

Therefore, for the purposes of planning specific co-operation between schools and enterprises in school curricula, it is recommended to introduce the so-called Supplement to the ŠVP. The Supplement represents a planning for practical training/work placement, defining required competencies (learning outcomes) that students need to acquire in the course of their practical training/work placement at the company's workplace, including the time schedule (scope). The Supplement, updated on yearly basis, shall allow for flexible response to the development in the field as well as changing conditions and production plans of the companies; and for planning of the schedule and organisation of the training in relation to a specific company.

Conclusion

More than a quarter of all secondary vocational schools across all 14 regions of the CR have been involved in the project. At the national level, the project proposes the introduction of principles specified in the so-called “New model of VET”. The draft of the new VET elements fostering co-operation between schools and companies will be the principal outcome of the project. Selected topics will be subsequently endorsed by submitting proposals for legislative modifications enabling their future implementation.
Even if the proposals are not implemented in the future, the project still brings undeniable benefits at the level of the schools involved. They have adapted and innovated their own curricula in the section entitled “Co-operation with the employers” they had selected those principles (e.g. participation in sponsorship activities or open door days) and forms of co-operation (e.g. recruitment of new students), which in the course of pilot-testing proved to be beneficial and they incorporated them into the Supplement to the school curriculum, which would be updated on yearly basis. The Supplement will allow for an efficient and flexible response to labour market skills needs and address regional differences. In the course of the project’s sustainability, the schools will, on regular basis, submit a report on their particular implementation and developments within the principles.
National Training Fund
http://en.nvf.cz/

National Institute for Education
www.nuv.cz

http://www.refernet.cz/en