

National Strategy for the Modernisation of Vocational Education and the WBL System in the Czech Republic

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RNDr. Miroslav Procházka, CSc., February 2019

Drawn up within the framework of the project

Targeted capacity building of VET partnerships in the Danube Region for effective modernisation of VET systems

1. Introduction – why modernise the system of vocational education?

An educated workforce equipped with the necessary skills is a key factor for prosperity, competitiveness and economic growth. Pupils acquire certain skills, primarily transferable skills, in general education, but specific professional skills are also required for employability on the labour market. The system of initial vocational education plays a decisive role in the acquisition of these skills. This obligation is imposed by the law on secondary schools in the Czech Republic:¹

*Secondary education develops the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and values gained in primary education important for the personal development of the individual. It provides pupils with a general education or a vocational education associated with a general education that is broader in terms of content and consolidates their value orientation. Secondary education, furthermore, creates the necessary preconditions for a fully-fledged personal and civic life, the independent acquisition of information and life-long learning, continuation in follow-up education and **preparation for the performance of an occupation or work.***

A number of representatives of employers, regional authorities, educational experts and even, from time to time, representatives of the Ministry of Education have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the functioning of secondary vocational education. For example, Jaroslav Hanák, President of the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, states that, “*There is a pronounced disparity between the educational system and the demands of the labour market*”. Similarly, 1st Vice-president of the Confederation of Industry Jan Rafaj states that,² “*We should focus on improving the quality of tuition and careers advice and popularise technical education. Practical tuition based on dual education should also be expanded*”. The text published by the Czech Chamber of Commerce on its pages is also extremely similar,³ stating that “*The Czech Chamber of Commerce places great emphasis on education. The educational system must be unequivocally linked to the labour market. Supply in the form of graduates of initial education must be harmonised with demand from companies. At the present time, the discrepancy between the qualifications of graduates and the demands of the corporate sphere is a fundamental brake to the development of the Czech economy*”.

These relatively general statements contain a number of truths. The shortage of specialists and tradesmen with a technical education resulting from the inappropriate branch structure of pupils and, therefore, graduates of vocational education is mentioned most often. Another

¹ see Section 57. The goals of secondary education. Act no. 561/2004 Sb on preschool, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education (The School Act).

² Talks of the Tripartite 21.1.2019.

³ <https://www.komora.cz/vzdelavani/>.

feature is a low level of relevance, i.e. the fact that schools prepare their pupils for skills that are no longer required and, in contrast, do not teach those skills that are needed. Antiquated and sometimes substandard curricula (framework curricula for school education), inadequate school facilities and the small number of hours of vocational training (practical tuition) are stated as causes. Last but not least, there is often talk of the poor quality of graduates which, in addition to the above factors, may also be caused by the sometimes inadequate standard of teaching staff and their lack of connection with the practical world. A low level of interest in and an insufficient connection with technology among young people is another aspect that is mentioned as a factor having a negative influence on the functioning of vocational education.

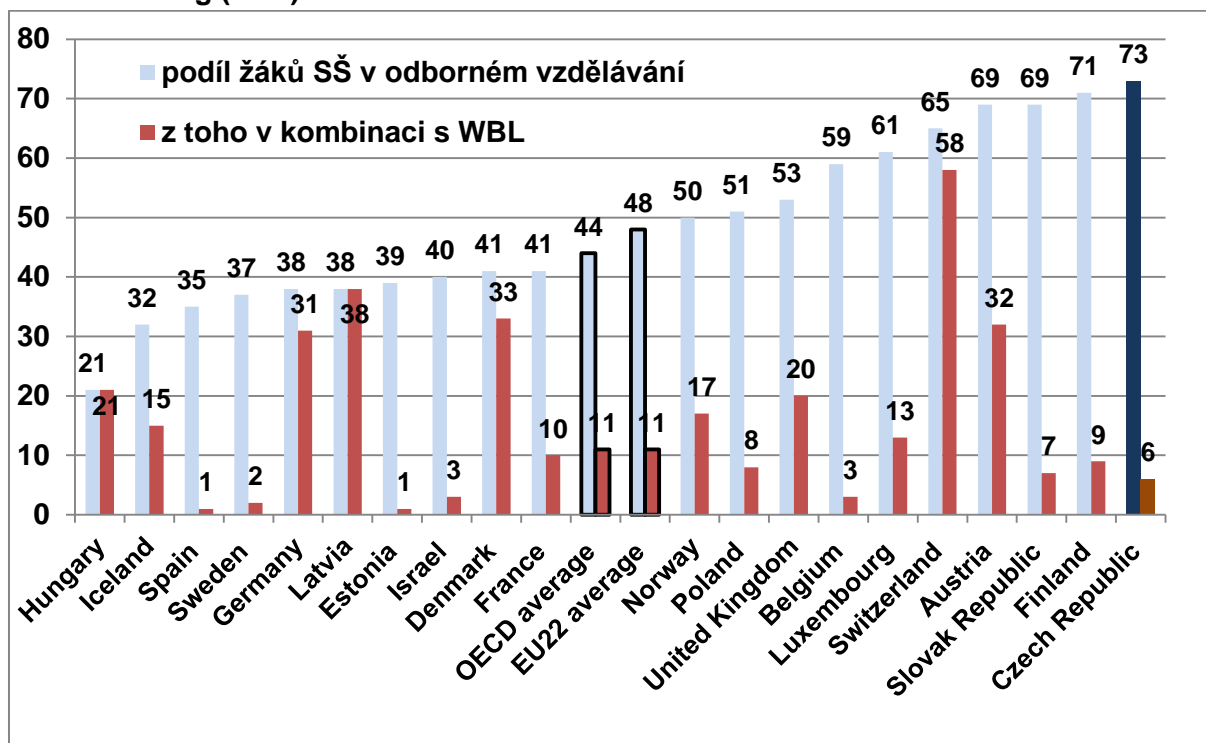
The most recent data from the OECD⁴ reveals a fact that might surprise many of us (see Figure 1).⁵ The proportion of pupils attending vocational educational programmes at secondary schools in the Czech Republic is the highest of all (73 %)⁶. The OECD average is 44 %. A proportion comparable with that in the Czech Republic can also be seen in Finland, Slovakia, Austria and Switzerland. A diametrically different picture is, however, presented by the second indicator – the proportion of those taught both at school and at a company. The overall average is relatively low (11 %). The value for the Czech Republic (6 %) is one of the lowest. The highest values are logically seen for the traditional bastions of the dual system – Switzerland (58 % – highest of all), Germany (31 %), Austria (32 %), Denmark (33 %) and Latvia (38 %). Here we can see one of the evident problems. It may be true that secondary school pupils have a certain proportion of practical tuition laid down, which particularly for apprenticeships may be far from small (and may amount to as much as 3 days a week in higher years), but these pupils may, according to the law, take this practical tuition “*at schools and educational establishments or at the workplaces of natural or legal persons who hold authorisation to perform activity associated with the given field of education and who have closed a contract with the school on the content and extent of practical tuition and the conditions relating to it*”. The OECD data shows us that the proportion of practical tuition that is actually held at companies is extremely small. For various reasons, schools tend to realise practical tuition on school premises (workshops). Increasing the proportion of practical tuition at companies may undoubtedly aid the relevance and quality of technical fields, and perhaps the level of interest in them as well.

⁴ Education at a Glance 2018 OECD INDICATORS, OECD 2018.

⁵ Data from those OECD and EU countries for which both indicators were available are given in the graph.

⁶ The proportion is also lower for those states that are not shown in the graph.

Figure 1: The proportion of secondary school pupils on vocational education programmes and the proportion of pupils training in a real work environment – work-based learning (in %)

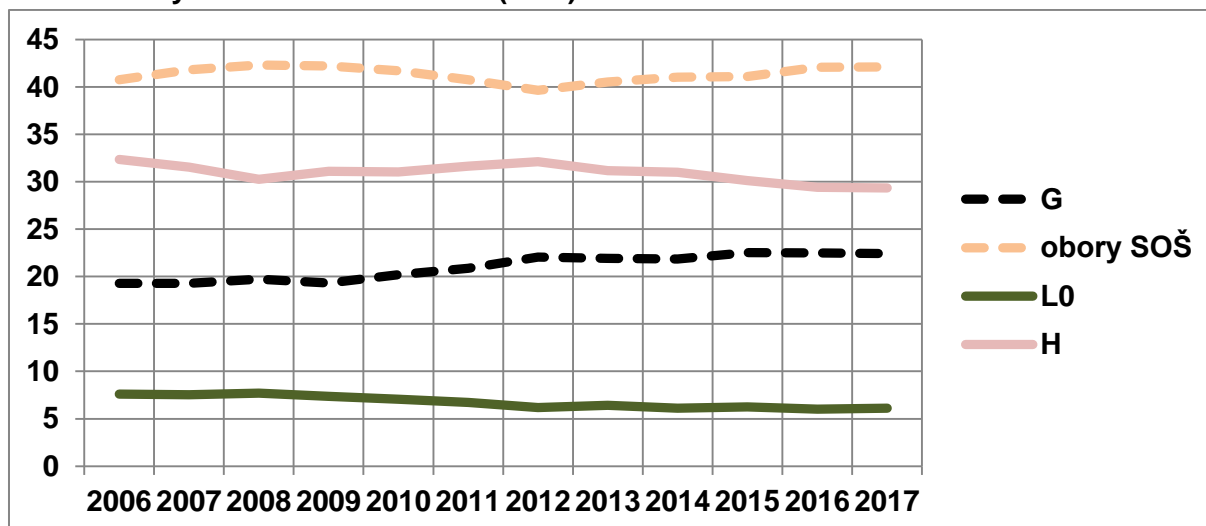


- proportion of secondary school pupils in vocational education
- of which combined with WBL

Source: OECD

If we look at the structure of pupils in secondary education from a slightly different viewpoint (see Figure 2), we see an essentially analogous situation, first and foremost the frequently mentioned increase in the proportion of grammar school students to ca 22.5 % in 2017. This growth is, however, far from as rapid as might be expected from the simplistic statements that are often heard and amounts to just 3.14 percent in the last 12 years. The proportion of pupils in apprenticeships has fallen at around the same rate (by 3.02 percent) in the same 12 years. These trends are not especially dramatic and, although they might not be popular with many people, it is highly probable that they will continue to some extent for some time to come.

Figure 2: The development of the proportions of new admissions in the main streams of secondary education 2006–2017 (in %)⁷



Source: The National Institute for Education, Infoabsolvent

It can, then, be stated that it is not true that the proportion of vocational education is too small and the proportion of grammar schools needlessly high. The proportion of students studying on general educational programmes is lowest in the Czech Republic in comparison with developed countries. The idea that something will change significantly in this regard in favour of vocational education is unrealistic. The high degree of openness of the tertiary sector, the endeavour to obtain the highest possible education and the perspective needs of the economy (digitalisation, rapid changes in technologies and pronounced changes in the substance of individual professions, not to mention the changeable situation on the labour market, etc.) are necessarily accompanied by a trend towards an increase in general education components on secondary school programmes. On the other hand, however, it is also true that 40,825 fewer pupils entered the first years of secondary schools between the years 2006 and 2017. This is a huge number, and it can be no surprise that we sometimes feel the lack of these people. The response from employers is, therefore, legitimate, though it does not always identify the right causes.

The weaknesses of the system of vocational education were identified in a relatively precise and sophisticated manner by an OECD study nine years ago.⁸ This study does not mention the numbers of pupils in vocational education or the branch structure, though it does, nevertheless, identify the principal causes of the inadequacies of vocational education in the Czech Republic extremely accurately and does not disagree to any great extent with the current propositions – see the quotations above. First and foremost, however, it must be stated that the following propositions remain valid, in spite of the age of the study:

⁷ G – grammar schools, SOŠ – study fields at secondary vocational schools with a school-leaving examination, L0 – secondary education study fields with a school-leaving examination and vocational training, H – secondary education fields with a certificate of apprenticeship.

⁸ Learning for Practice – Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Performed by the OECD, THE CZECH REPUBLIC. OECD 2010, The Czech National Institution of Technical and Vocational Education 2010.

- The results achieved by pupils and the standard of tuition on three-year study programmes do not match the standard seen on four-year general education and vocational study programmes.
- The management of higher secondary vocational education at the regional level lacks transparency. Mechanisms that would stipulate responsibility for harmonising the demands of the labour market and the choices of pupils, while also ensuring the standard of vocational education on the national level, are lacking.
- The realisation of vocational training at the workplace differs greater in terms of both the number of pupils participating and its length and quality, and depends on individual branches and individual schools. The engagement of companies in the provision of vocational training at the workplace is low.
- Institutional assurance for the engagement of social partners in vocational education is fragmented. Not all areas associated with vocational education are subject to consultation with social partners.
- The initial education and training of school counsellors⁹ and their further education focuses more on pedagogical and psychological counselling than on careers advice. School counsellors combine careers advice with other roles; in addition to tuition, they also provide pupils with help in resolving their personal and study problems.
- Two ministries are responsible for careers advice – the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs – which may also contribute to the fragmentation of the system.

The same study also proposed a set of measures that should improve the operation of vocational education. A number of measures have been proposed and realised over the years (see the following chapter), though the measures originally proposed by the OECD can still be accepted today as a conceptual foundation for a strategic direction leading towards improved vocational education:

1. Improve tuition and systematically assess the quality of general education on vocational education programmes, in particular three-year study programmes. Direct targeted support at pupils with poorer results.

2. Improve the quality and quantity of careers advice in primary education in the following ways:

- Separate educational counselling from careers advice. A “careers advisor” would be responsible for careers advice.
- Focus on the initial education of careers advisors and its greater flexibility, while also improving access to further education of a high standard for existing staff.
- Diversify forms of provision of careers advice.

Efforts should be directed in the future towards ensuring that reforms of this kind in careers advice are also introduced in vocational education at secondary schools.

3. Introduce clearer procedures and more transparent criteria in the development of regional educational plans (regional long-term plans for education and development of the educational system). These plans should reinforce the engagement of employers and should give greater consideration to the choices of pupils during the planning of the range of higher secondary education on offer.

⁹ This is also true of counsellors at primary schools, where careers advice is extremely important to the choice of educational pathways after primary school.

4. Systematically improve the quality and quantity of training at the workplace, on both three-year and four-year programmes, by means of the introduction of a national framework for vocational training at the workplace. Part of this framework should be the introduction of targeted incentives for schools, employers and pupils and the introduction of national standards for the realisation of vocational training at the workplace. This should all be supported by effective quality assurance.
5. Introduce uniform elements of assessment in the profile section of the school-leaving examination.
6. Employers and unions should be more engaged in vocational education. A certain simplification and rationalisation in the engagement of social partners in vocational education should occur for this purpose. The responsibility and tasks of the pertinent bodies should be reinforced and clearly defined.

As this document is being produced as part of the Learning by Doing project,¹⁰ its basic aims are the same as the aims of the project: systematic changes leading, first and foremost, to preparedness for the labour market, reinforcing or improving training at the workplace, and more effective co-operation between vocational schools and companies. We will, therefore, be keeping to the following topics in analysed documents and proposals for measures to be taken:

- **Relevance:** the key thing is for vocational education, alongside additional goals, to prepare its graduates for employability on the labour market. The content of education must, then, be in harmony with the current and, if possible, future needs of the labour market.
- **Curriculum:** in order for it to be possible to achieve the above goal, it is necessary for the required content of education to be part of the curriculum. To put it simply, for pupils to learn what is needed and not learn things that are unnecessary.
- **Practical training at a company:** practical training within the framework of Czech vocational education may take place either at a company or at school (in school workshops). There are many positive aspects to training at a company, for which reason the proportion of pupils whose practical tuition takes place at a company must be increased.
- **Quality:** in order for practical education at a company to produce the intended effects, it must be of a high standard – from the viewpoint of facilities, instructors and its content, which should be standardised to a certain extent.
- **The engagement of employers:** if the content and results of vocational education are to correspond to the true needs of the labour market, this cannot be achieved without the engagement of employers. No one doubts this in general terms. The important thing is the form this engagement takes and what jurisdiction and responsibilities employers will have in reality in the realisation of vocational education.
- **Careers advice:** a pupil taking practical training must be positively motivated. The correct choice of an educational pathway and a relationship to technology or a craft can and should be supported and developed by means of a properly functioning system of careers advice.

¹⁰ Within the framework of the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme.

2. The current situation – points of departure, preconditions and contexts

Proposals for the improvement of vocational education are not just part of political or media declarations, but also appear, it goes without saying, in many political, conceptual and strategic documents and are the focus of various projects at the national, sector or regional level, as well as concrete steps from the Ministry of Education and its funded organisations (The National Institute for Education). The aim of this chapter is not to present a complete enumeration of such documents, projects and proposals, but to define (on the basis of an evaluation of the most important that have appeared on the educational policy scene in recent years) a certain context and points of departure for our proposals that will be a certain synthesis, interconnection, supplementation and refinement of proposals that have mostly already appeared at some point. The fact is that the majority of the meaningful proposals have already appeared somewhere or other in the past, though in some cases merely on a general level or in isolated form with no connection to other areas of vocational education. It is also true that the majority of these proposals can be assigned to a number of simple catchwords: relevance, curriculum, more practical training, quality, the engagement of employers, and careers advice. It can be said, with a little simplification, that this text would be almost unnecessary if most of the proposals that have already been formulated had actually been implemented and brought to a successful conclusion. The same also goes for the long-standing proposals put forward by the OECD.

The fundamental strategic document in education in recent years is the document from the Ministry of Education entitled **The Strategy for the Educational Policy of the Czech Republic to the Year 2020 – Strategy 2020** (2014). It is based deliberately on the first integral document (or rather an evaluation of its fulfilment) that was devoted in the Czech Republic to the conception of the development of educational policy, i.e. on the National Programme for the Development of Education (the “White Paper”) from 2001.

Strategy 2020 is formulated in relatively very general terms, with its principal aims divided into three cross-sectional priority areas (Reducing Inequality in Education, Supporting Tuition of a High Standard and Teachers as its Key Prerequisite, and Managing the Education System Responsibly and Effectively). The concrete goals directed at vocational education are also extremely general and can be found in individual priority areas, e.g.:

- strengthen a joint foundation in fields of secondary education, secondary education with a certificate of apprenticeship and secondary education with a school-leaving examination, directed primarily at the development of basic knowledge, skills, capabilities and attitudes, this in the interest of the long-term employability of school leavers on the labour market and greater success in further studies and in personal life,
- do not increase the number of study fields in secondary education and interconnect their structure more effectively with the needs of the labour market,
- create formal prerequisites for the access of graduates of educational fields with a certificate of apprenticeship to tertiary education, in particular tertiary education with a professional focus, by means of the introduction of a master’s examination,

- modernise the system of secondary vocational education to ensure it leads to more intensive and more effective development of transferable knowledge, skills and capabilities, while also incorporating a larger proportion of practical tuition into the final stages of study in the interest of adequate acquisition of professional skills,
- give consideration to the descriptions of professional qualifications contained in the National System of Qualifications during the updating of framework curricula for school education for secondary vocational education,
- support the development of social partnership between schools and employers with the aim of easing the transition of school leavers from school to work,
- make information on the character and specialisation of schools available in a way enabling remote access and expand the supply of educational counselling that will help pupils, including talented pupils, both when choosing a school and when choosing educational possibilities within the scope of school education and informal education, with an orientation towards extracurricular educational opportunities, sources and services,
- improve the availability and quality of careers advice focusing on the development of the skills necessary to managing one's own professional pathway,
- create platforms for communication between schools and employers.

It is possible to agree, in principle, with most of the goals in the Strategy 2020 that relate in some way to vocational education, and they are also consistent with the OECD proposals given above. The real urgency and necessity of reforming vocational education (e.g. the introduction of a “Master’s Examination”) is probably not always entirely clear. What is most problematic, however, is the high degree of generality and, therefore, uncertainty. It is, for example, possible to imagine a great many various approaches in relation to the formulation “create platforms for communication between schools and employers”. What’s more, “platforms for communication” are certainly useful, but there is no response to one of the key features of the original OECD proposals which is that the engagement of social partners in vocational education should be greater and, most importantly, the responsibility and roles of the pertinent bodies (meaning those in which representatives of social partners play a certain role) should be reinforced and clearly defined. Their role should not be merely consultative (as a partner for communication), but should have clearly defined jurisdictions and responsibilities.

The Long-term Plan for the Period 2015–2020¹¹ (LTP 2015–2020) is currently still valid, though its new form for the period 2019–2023¹² (LTP 2019–2023) has also been practically completed. If the Strategy 2020 is cross-sectional, the structuring of the Long-term Plans is relatively highly conventional (and practically identical for both the given documents). An analytical introduction is followed by sections devoted to the individual main parts of the education system according to its various levels (from nursery schools to higher vocational schools). This is followed by sections devoted to certain cross-sectional topics (improving the

¹¹ The Long-term Plan for Education and Development of the Education System in the Czech Republic for the Period 2015–2020.

¹² The Long-term Plan for Education and Development of the Education System in the Czech Republic 2019–2023 is currently (February 2019) at the approval stage.

effectiveness of the system of assessment of pupils, schools and the school system, equal opportunities in education, counselling, education for children, school pupils and students with special educational needs, improving conditions for teaching staff) and other components of the school system (primary artistic, linguistic and special-interest education, education for sustainable development, institutional and protective care and preventative protective care, further education, management of the school system). A final chapter is devoted to financing. The majority of the measures targeting vocational education are contained, quite logically, in the section devoted to secondary schools, though they also appear in part in cross-sectional topics.

LTP 2015–2020 is directly connected to the Strategy 2020 and was intended as one of its implementation documents. The largest number of measures targeting vocational education relate to its relevance:

- Apply a system of predicting the needs of the regional labour market.¹³
- Prepare an analysis and evaluation of the structure of the branch system in secondary education in co-operation with representatives of ministries and employers.
- Focus specifically on fields of further education and the quality of the education provided by certain forms of education – combined, distance and evening study – and the effectiveness of completion of these study fields during assessment of the effectiveness of the branch structure.
- Support, within the new system of financing regional education, tuition in those fields of secondary education whose graduates are qualified for long-term employment on the labour market and are required by the anticipated future structure of employment.
- Establish a system of cyclical revisions to framework curricula for school education.
- Innovate framework curricula for school education in connection with the anticipated future demands of the labour market formulated through the National System of Qualifications with the aim of the current and long-term employability of graduates.
- Reinforce, during revision of framework curricula for school education, the common general technical foundation of the curriculum in areas of transferrable competences particularly applicable to the labour market; reinforce this universal foundation by changing its content and relevance, not by changing its extent.
- Introduce certain measures proposed by the POSPOLU (Support for Co-operation Between Schools and Companies) study of a new model of vocational education promoting the openness of vocational education.
- Evaluate the structure of framework curricula for school education and innovate the content of curricula in secondary education, particularly in fields of a technical and scientific nature, with a view to technical progress and the demands of the labour market, and innovate those areas that do not correspond to the realities of work.
- Create a Council for the Revision of Framework Curricula for School Education that will contribute to the conception, monitoring and evaluation of education.

¹³ A prediction system is currently in preparation within the KOMPAS project from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

- Propose and verify possibilities for the use of professional qualifications during revisions to framework curricula for school education for secondary vocational education.
- Link the system of educational fields, innovation to framework curricula for school education, their cyclical revision and the creation of a School Education Programme systematically to the future demands of the labour market formulated by employers (e.g. through the National System of Qualifications).

An endeavour to harmonise (vocational) education and its results with the needs of the labour market is reflected extremely strongly in the proposed measures. It is clear that this should take place by means of the revision of framework curricula for school education and perhaps a new conception of them, though a link to the National System of Qualifications also has its place. It is not possible to assess the success of the declared goals in view of the fact that the revisions to framework curricula for school education are far from having achieved any definite result.

The measure relating to co-operation between schools and employers is worded rather vaguely: "To support, and demand of school principals, the further deepening of co-operation between schools, employers and branches of the Labour Office with the aim of further improvement to the standard of vocational education, thereby leading to easier employment on the labour market". Three measures relate to the form of vocational training and, on a declaratory basis, its quality:

- Reassess the extent (and organisation) of practical vocational experience in study fields completed with a school-leaving certificate and vocational training in vocational education study fields not completed with a school-leaving certificate, and increase it if necessary. At the same time, allow schools to divide these hours unequally between individual years (e.g. to increase the extent of vocational training in higher years).
- Provide practical tuition in vocational education study fields where possible in individual regions at the workplaces of employers and at other facilities (e.g. Centres of Vocational Education in Agriculture).
- Support the use of tools ensuring the quality of vocational education in the real working environment (e.g. tax reliefs for companies co-operating with schools).

The aim of introducing a "Master's Examination" (prepare a procedure for the introduction in practice of master's examinations in study fields with a certificate of apprenticeship in co-operation with the pertinent departments and representatives of employers) and other measures specified in greater detail with the aim of easing the transition to tertiary education for graduates of apprentice programmes (into professionally oriented programmes) without the necessity of obtaining a school-leaving certificate have been incorporated into the Long-term Plan from the Strategy 2020. The Master's Examination is currently being prepared within the scope of a project that the National Institute for Education is working on with other partners. A total of twelve measures are devoted in a separate subchapter to careers advice, focusing primarily on its information support and on the education of advisors, including the creation of the pertinent professional qualification in the National System of Qualifications. A key element, i.e. the separation of careers advice from educational counselling, has,

however, still met with no response. It goes without saying that the document also contains a large number of additional measures relating to vocational education (e.g. a total of eight measures directed towards improvement to the new final examination in study fields with an certificate of apprenticeship), though they are not directly related to the focus of this document or are not of the nature of systematic changes and represent “merely” a path to a certain improvement to existing and already functioning system components.

If we were to assess the Long-term Plan 2015–2020 merely as a plan, then the proposed measures falling into the area of concern of this document can be assessed as adequate and correct. They are, however, also insufficient, since even their complete implementation would not result in any real systematic change to the form of vocational education and, in particular, its “apprentice” component. If we are to assess its actual implementation, then the results are indisputably inadequate. Revision of framework curricula for school education for vocational education is far from having been completed, and even the direction it is to take is far from clear. As far as the engagement of employers in vocational education is concerned, then no systematic change has occurred (though this was not formulated in the Long-term Plan). The same is, in essence, also true of other aspects that we emphasize in this document.

The **Long-term Plan 2019–2023**¹⁴ also aims to follow on from and further develop the Strategy 2020 and, logically, to follow up from its predecessor for the period 2015–2020. Let us first summarise the measures that relate to vocational education and, first and foremost, the aspects that are important to this document. As in the previous Long-term Plan, they are concentrated primarily in the section dealing with secondary education.

The following are given as priority goals for secondary education in the Long-term Plan:

- Revise the branch structure and framework curricula for school education.
- Increase the effectiveness of the admissions procedure and reduce the administrative burden associated with the admissions procedure.
- Innovate the system of school-leaving examinations.
- Innovate the holding of a uniform final examination.
- Increase the engagement of employers.

From our perspective, the first and last priority goals are the most important. The measures proposed in these areas are:

- Simplify the branch structure of secondary education.
- Reinforce the content of the common general vocational foundation in areas of transferrable competence during the revision of framework curricula for school education.
- Conclude the verification of the phased completion of education with a uniform final examination in the third year and a school-leaving examination in the fourth year and its implementation in the system of secondary education study fields.
- Create a standard for the quality of company workplaces.
- Innovate practical tuition (in greater detail: introduction of a pupil portfolio and creation of a standard for pupil assessment).

¹⁴ A working version of the document from September 2018 was available to the authors of this Strategy.

It is clear at first glance that the proposals (at least in terms of their number) are far more modest, though it is of course possible that the proposal section will be modified and supplemented during the process of approval of the document. Similarly, what we stated during our evaluation of the previous Long-term Plan is also being confirmed: far from everything has managed to be implemented. A good example is the revision of framework curricula for school education. Although certain measures are headed in the right direction, and the true form of others cannot be assessed (the revision of framework curricula for school education), it is clear that the implementation of the Long-term Plan 2019–2023 has not initiated any true systematic change.

The National Agreement (2014)¹⁵ considers the necessary changes to the system of lifelong education at the legislative and economic level in order to enable full long-term co-operation between the education and employer sectors focusing on the greatest possible degree of harmony between supply and demand on the labour market from the viewpoint of both structure and quality. The National Agreement focuses on concrete systematic, legislative and non-legislative measures that will lead to rectification of poorly operating segments of education with a view to the labour market. Eight key topics in the area of primary, secondary vocational and further education and in the area of managed economic migration were identified on the basis of cross-sectional topics in the development of human resources identified by sector councils in 2012. These topics are:

- Support for technical education.
- Careers advice.
- Increasing the quality and extent of vocational training at the workplace: work experience, traineeships, mobility.
- Further professional education – requalification.
- The National Occupational System / The National System of Qualifications.
- Centres of lifelong learning for critical fields, including low-capacity fields of supra-regional importance.
- An advisory council for the development of human resources.
- Managed economic migration.

It is clear that at least half of these topics are consistent with the topics considered by this Strategy and, therefore, that the signatories to the Agreement¹⁶ have reflected the same

¹⁵ The National Agreement was created within the framework of the project “Sector Agreements as a Tool of Social Dialogue in the Resolution of Long-term Problems in the Development of Human Resources” initiated and realised by the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic and the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions.

¹⁶ **The National Agreement was signed** on behalf of employers by the presidents of the **Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, the Confederation of Employer and Entrepreneur Associations of the Czech Republic, the Czech Chamber of Commerce and the Agrarian Chamber of the Czech Republic.** Employees were represented by the chairs of the **Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions and the Association of Independent Unions of the Czech Republic.** The chairs of the **Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic and the Association of Regions of the Czech Republic** attached their signatures on behalf of regional and local government. The National Agreement was also signed by **the Minister of Industry and Trade, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports.**

problems. The National Agreement was followed up by “sector agreements” that consider the resolution of similar issues, though focusing on specific sectors: the security services, transport, fitness, the food industry, ceramics, engineering, technical fields, the textile, clothing and leather industry, the public administration and services, power engineering, catering, gastronomy and tourism, information technology and electronic communication, the chemical industry and the building industry.

Within the eight priority topics mentioned above, the National Agreement contains a total of thirty-three measures that are elaborated in detail into concrete tasks. It goes without saying that the most important from our perspective are the measures in the priority area “Increasing the quality and extent of vocational training at the workplace: work experience, traineeships, mobility”. There are a total of six of these measures, and they are evidently targeted at goals similar to those in this document. They are also elaborated in greater detail than the measures given in the Long-term Plans:

- Evaluate, update and expand the possibility of writing off the costs of education during support for primary schools and secondary vocational schools provided by employers and by self-employed persons without employees.
- Resolve the position of pupils of secondary vocational schools performing work experience at the workplace, draw up a specimen contract and determine the level of “remuneration” for productive work, determine possible sources of financing, grants.
- Introduce a National Framework for Vocational Training at the Workplace.
- Introduce work placements with employers for teaching staff, including resolution of the conditions of substitute (supply) teaching, self-education, remunerations and work safety.
- Increase the number of experts from companies who take part in teaching work at secondary vocational schools.
- Organise a system of co-operation between secondary vocational schools and employers and employer associations during the implementation of the vocational training of their students.

We could put forward another three measures from other priority topics that are also relevant and interesting from our perspective:

- Assure the promotion of technical and craft fields.
- Introduce the independent position of careers advisor for primary and secondary schools (separate from the position of educational counsellor), and systematically embed the position of careers advisor in the framework of the system of education and employment services provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.
- Enable access to existing secondary vocational schools to companies.

The National Agreement and the system of sector agreements represent an interesting attempt to mobilise interested partners into finding solutions they can agree to. The proposals in the National Agreement that relate directly to vocational education and, first and foremost, to reinforcing and improving the standard of training at the workplace are headed in the right direction and their real implementation would provide significant aid to this goal.

The aim of the **Pospolu**¹⁷ project was, first and foremost, the proposal of systematic changes that would lead to more effective and easier co-operation between schools and companies. A great number of activities aimed at supporting the development of co-operation between vocational schools and employers have been implemented over the almost three-year duration of the project, both at the level of the system itself and in relation to co-operation between individual schools and employers. One of the principal results of the Pospolu project is a conceptual study¹⁸ containing a proposal for new elements of vocational education inspired by the dual system familiar in German-speaking countries. This conceptual study is an analytical document that investigates the possibilities for the application of elements of the dual system in the Czech environment – it describes the current situation and the possible ways in which it can be changed. The study is based both on data from Pospolu pilot partnerships and from a questionnaire study in introduction to the project, a comparison with the situation abroad and ongoing discussions with social partners about their needs. The proposed measures aim to facilitate the transition of school leavers to employment, primarily by improving the standard of co-operation between vocational schools and employers. Thirteen systematic measures, which are assigned to four priority areas for the sake of easier comprehension, have been proposed on the basis of the conceptual study.

The entire set of measures proposed by the Pospolu project represents a sophisticated (and most comprehensive) attempt at the greatest possible changes in vocational education in the form of reinforcing training at the workplace and engaging social partners. It is devoted to all the key areas we have defined above as being decisive to the effective implementation of the necessary changes (relevance, curriculum, the engagement of social partners, a greater extent of training at the workplace, quality, and careers advice). It also attempts to propose changes in such a way that they “fit” into the current legislative framework. In other words, it attempts to propose changes that can take the greatest possible advantage of the possibilities that can be implemented without amendment to the legislation. The Long-term Plan 2015–2020 also refers to the Pospolu project, with one of its measures proposing, though rather indeterminately, the introduction of “certain measures” from the Pospolu project. The entire group of changes proposed by the Pospolu project is as follows:

Priority I: Facilitate the transition of school leavers to employment by means of their engagement in the real working environment during the course of their studies

A. Quantitative expansion of vocational training and vocational experience at companies:

- Assign at least **12 weeks of vocational training in a real or model working environment**, enable more continuous blocks of vocational training at companies and a continuous period of vocational training in the second half of year 3 in study fields with an certificate of apprenticeship and LO fields; determine the specific length of practical tuition in all cases in line with branch specifics in framework curricula for school education.
- In study fields leading to the **attainment of education category M** expand the possibilities of **practical tuition** in a real or model working environment to **at least 8 weeks** over the course of the education as a whole. Study practice held in a real environment can also be included in this period. Determine the specific length of practical

¹⁷ The National Institute for Education worked on the individual national project of Support for Co-operation Between Schools and Companies focusing on vocational education in practice as principal project partner between December 2012 and October 2015. See <http://www.nuv.cz/pospolu>.

¹⁸ http://www.nuv.cz/uploads/POSPOLU/Koncepcni_studie_projektu_Pospolu.pdf.

tuition in all cases in line with branch specifics in framework curricula for school education.

- Enable **individual vocational experience** in study fields leading to the attainment of education category M. Make it possible to take vocational practice in companies during the holidays.

Priority II: Increase the qualitative standard of the skills of school leavers so as to correspond to the needs of employers

B. Linking fields of initial vocational education with corresponding professional qualifications in the National System of Qualifications:

- Link the **School Education Programme with corresponding professional qualifications in the National System of Qualifications** with the aim of enabling pupils taking initial vocational education to prepare for professional qualifications in the National System of Qualifications during the course of the educational process in schools.
- Prepare a foundation of professional qualifications required to supplement the School Education Programme with a view to the revised system of educational fields.
- Support the gradual **standardisation of the content of the profile section of the school-leaving examination** for selected fields in the attained education categories L0 and M in connection with the content of the pertinent qualification NSQ-EQF4.

C. Modernisation of the conception of general education in vocational education:

- With an emphasis on basic literacy and key competences supporting employment and success in other aspects of life.

D. Support for a system assuring the quality of vocational training and vocational practice at companies and elsewhere:

- Demand of schools the preparation of concrete plans of co-operation with social partners in the form of a supplement to the School Education Programme.
- Stipulate compulsory requisites of documentation for the assessment of the results of pupils in vocational training / vocational practice on the basis of competences (including a portfolio of competences, company documentation, ECVET documents for national mobility and EUROPASS supplements), support the creation of specimen forms.
- Assurance of the quality of company workplaces with the use of requirements for accreditation for authorised persons in the National System of Qualifications.

E. The staffing of co-operation between schools and companies:

- Provide support for **instructors from companies** for them to obtain the professional qualification “practical tuition instructor”.
- Make **work placements** in the real working environment **compulsory for all teaching staff at vocational schools** within the time demarcated for self-study to an extent of 6 days a year; make these work placements a condition to career growth.
- Create the position of **coordinator of co-operation between school and companies** at schools.

F. The completion of studies in co-operation with companies:

- Link the continual and final assessment of pupils by means of a **portfolio of competences** (a portfolio as part of assessment of the final examination and profile school-leaving examination).
- Revise the conditions of the **standardised final examination** and **profile school-leaving examination** to ensure that the **realisation of the practical component** of these examinations **in the company environment** is provided with methodical and financial support:
 - methodical support for companies in the creation of company assignments,
 - methodical support in the creation of the school-company section of the final examination,
 - methodical and financial support for the participation of experts with practical experience in guiding independent vocational work,
 - methodical and financial support for experts with practical experience (heads, opponents, consultants) during co-operation on school-leaving work with defence of this work and during co-operation on a practical school-leaving examination.

Priority III: Harmonising the supply of vocational education with changes to the qualifications needed on the labour market

G. Coordination management for vocational education:

- The constitution of a **coordination/advisory platform** for vocational education **at the national level**.
- Support for the operation of **regional coordination/advisory platforms** with the use of existing structures and in connection with the creation of regional action plans focusing on the development of education in the region.
- The incorporation of a **sector principle** into the coordination system at the national and regional level (sector boards, sector agreements, employment pacts).

H. Supplementation of normative financing to take in qualitative parameters relating to, for example:

- The extent of co-operation between schools and companies (number of pupils and hours of vocational training/vocational practice at companies, etc.).
- Establishing a system assuring the quality of vocational training/vocational practice for pupils at companies.
- Levels of employment of school-leavers in the field, etc.
- The level of premature termination of study.
- The success of pupils in the new final examination and school-leaving examination, etc.

I. Support for the operation of funds for the shared financing of vocational training of a regional or sector dimension.

J. Creation of a system for predicting the needs of the labour market that can point out trends at the national and regional level relating to the needs of employers and thereby provide a good foundation for the structure of supported study fields opened at schools.

Priority IV: Increasing the attractiveness of vocational education for young people

K. Reinforcing careers advice:

- Provide methodical and financial support for the quality of careers education for pupils at primary school and secondary school and its coordination with the services offered by careers advice, this in co-operation with employers.
- Support the position of careers advisor in schools by means of the implementation of the concept of school advice units, resolve financial support for school advice units and ensure the corresponding level of qualification of careers advisors (e.g. the professional qualification Careers Advisor in the National System of Qualifications).
- Support an integrated system of careers advice in which entities in the fields of education and employment are engaged on a national and regional level. Support the coordination of school and education counselling services in the area of careers advice.

L. Ensure greater openness to the system of vocational training:

In the short term:

- Enable the acceptance of pupils to **year 1** of vocational education in the same category of attained education conceived jointly for a number of concurrent fields (e.g. for 23-00-00 or 26-00-00, etc.).
- Support the functioning of multidisciplinary classes.
- Enable the **staged completion of education** in fields H and L0, with the existence of the corresponding study fields.
- Allow graduates of **category L0 study fields to obtain a certificate of apprenticeship** in their field.

In the medium and long term:

- Revise the system of educational fields and create **a smaller number of more broadly conceived fields** on the basis of a common vocational foundation.
- Enable gradual specialisation and the completion of education after 2, 3 and 4 years of study depending on the level of attained education and qualifications gained. Conceive the School Education Programme in such a way that pupils can obtain a corresponding professional qualification at the level of EQF 2, EQF 3 or EQF 4.

M. Open up alternative paths to tertiary education:

- **Separate the attainment of a level of education and a qualification.** Conceive the School Education Programme in such a way that pupils can gain a corresponding professional qualification even if they do not attain the level of education (e.g. if they do not pass the school-leaving examination).

- Introduce a **Master's Examination** enabling access to the tertiary sector with a school-leaving examination.

Certain of the proposed measures are implemented, for example, within the scope of the Kompas project (predication of qualification requirements, support for “regional platforms” as a tool for coordinating vocational education on the regional level), projects that support action planning at the level of the regions (a series of individual projects from the regions), and schools (the project P-KAP,¹⁹ in which one of the “compulsory interventions” is “support for vocational education, including co-operation between schools and employers”). Work is underway on the revision of framework curricula for school education, though it is not yet clear how far this revision will go in terms of the application of the pertinent proposals. A Master's Examination²⁰ is being prepared within the framework of a separate project. The activities of the National Institute for Education itself within the scope of the “sustainability” of the project have tended to be modest. The most significant of these are courses for lecturers who can then train practical tuition instructors. More than 100 lecturers all over the country have been trained since the completion of the project. Materials for co-operation coordinators were also produced in 2018.

The project **Modernisation of Vocational Education (MOV²¹)**, which aims to develop the quality of vocational education and support the employability of school-leavers on the labour market, follows up from the Pospolu project in a certain sense. One of the key activities of the project is concerned with the development of co-operation between schools and companies. Selected tools are elaborated here that are connected with possible use in the School Education Programme in schools. Only some fields are, however, included here and only in a proportion of schools. This is then, to all intents and purposes, a pilot verification of the modernisation of school curricula. The prepared outputs of the project are:

- **An educational module of vocational practice and vocational training** – a module will be created, with the application of company specifics, etc., for each school and company involved.
- **Units of Learning Outcomes (ECVET²²)** – linked to the module drawn up and verified, on a selective basis, in schools.
- **Tools for monitoring and increasing quality (EQAVET²³)** – a tool for obtaining feedback between the company and the school on the quality of co-operation – assessed at the beginning and end of the monitored period; verification of work is performed during the project using this tool.

¹⁹ P-KAP: Support for Regional Action Planning, <http://www.nuv.cz/p-kap>.

²⁰ The project MIZK – Master's Examination System, <http://www.nuv.cz/projekty/mizk>.

²¹ <http://www.nuv.cz/projekty/mov>.

²² The European ECVET system (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) contributes towards the transference and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences gained during the course of study traineeships or work placements at home or abroad. ECVET has been introduced in all European countries since 2009 on the basis of recommendations from the European Parliament and the EU Council.

²³ EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) is a European framework for supporting quality assurance in vocational education.

- **A pupil portfolio** as an assessment tool, with the aim of helping pupils apply valuable practice as practical experience, and allowing employers to obtain an overview of the previous activities of school-leavers during the course of their studies.
- **Plan of co-operation between a school and company** – this should be an integral part of each partnership proposed. A tool for planning co-operation helps make study goals during co-operation more specific and helps find additional appropriate forms of co-operation. The aim is to draw attention to the fact that it is hard to demand any elements of quality or to assess co-operation without specification of the goals of vocational practice and vocational training.

The joint **initiative by the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic** and a number of entities in the Moravian-Silesian Region is interesting and thought-provoking, though it is not, as yet, particularly wide-ranging. It consists of the thorough application of certain elements (tax reliefs for employers, contracts between a school, a pupil and a company, amendments to the School Education Programme) to reinforce co-operation between schools and companies and, first and foremost, to strengthen and improve the quality of training at the workplace. Only a few schools and companies have taken part so far, though activities to expand this co-operation to around ten regions and a pilot verification of the activities realised in co-operation between schools and companies are currently underway. Part of the initiative from the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic is the engagement of the company Trexima as methodical support. A study among schools and companies has been realised through this co-operation in five regions²⁴ and thought-provoking and useful documents have also been produced. One of these is a practical guide²⁵ for companies that want to initiate co-operation with schools or improve the standard of their existing co-operation. The guide presents principles of vocational training in the company environment which makes it possible in practice to use selected elements of dual education in study fields, while also taking into consideration the current parameters of vocational education in the Czech Republic. A second document is a conceptual study²⁶ that analyses the development of efforts to strengthen the role played by employers in vocational education and to improve training at the workplace. The proposal section, in which proposed changes to vocational education and training in the Czech Republic whose application has great potential to improve the standard of vocational education are described, is the most important. Scenarios of change from the viewpoint of the importance of the initial conditions for the successful realisation of the proposed recommendations are also concisely defined. While certain measures that can be rapidly applied do not demand any systematic amendments, the introduction of other proposals is conditional to changes to processes, parameters, and the structure and/or content of framework curricula for school education, or even changes to the legislation. It is possible first to implement gradual changes that do not

²⁴ The Ústí Region, the Moravian-Silesian Region, the Zlín Region, the Central Bohemian Region and the South Moravian Region.

²⁵ VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN THE COMPANY ENVIRONMENT WITH FEATURES OF DUAL EDUCATION IN PRACTICE. Guide from the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic and the Moravian-Silesian Employment Pact for the engagement of employers in partnership with secondary vocational schools. April 2018.

²⁶ VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC. PROPOSALS FROM THE CONFEDERATION OF INDUSTRY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC FOR CHANGES TO THE SYSTEM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING. May 2018.

demand any great intervention in the current legal environment and gradually prepare more profound changes that also demand political will, particularly to assure the true equal engagement of employers.

The current **revision of framework curricula for school education**, which appears as an aim in many of the proposals given above, is a significant opportunity for the real initiation of changes. This involves both absolutely fundamental conceptual changes (reducing the number of fields, reinforcing the general vocational base and general transferrable competences, a consistent link with professional qualifications in the National System of Qualifications, including preparing pupils for their attainment and allowing the pertinent examination to be taken during the course of study, etc.), as well as changes to the extent and quality of practical training (increasing its extent in graduation and apprentice fields, the necessity of having a plan of co-operation with social partners as part of the School Education Programme, as well as the introduction of a standard of some kind for the form and results of practical training). If these changes to the conception and form of framework curricula for school education can be implemented, this would be a significant change on the path to vocational education of greater quality.

During analysis of the many and various proposals for improvements to vocational education, reinforcing practical training at the workplace and highlighting the role played by employers in vocational education, we must not forget what the reality “on the ground” looks like and **how these matters are seen by the schools and companies themselves**. In this regard, there are two relatively new sources of data available to us. One comes from the survey conducted by the company Trexima in the spring of 2018, the second from a survey conducted at secondary schools (including institutes of higher vocational education) in the autumn of 2018.

The Trexima survey²⁷ was conducted in five regions (the Ústí Region, the Moravian-Silesian Region, the Zlín Region, the Central Bohemian Region and the South Moravian Region) at a total of 103 companies (60 % of the companies were from the manufacturing industry) and 276 schools. Although the survey is not completely representative, and its results may have been influenced by the selection of regions and sectors and the willingness of schools and companies to respond, the results are undoubtedly interesting. 71 % of companies and as many as 97 % of schools declare some form of co-operation (18 % of companies plan on establishing some form of co-operation). The fact that the vocational training of apprentices takes place at least in part in a company environment in 58 % of schools is important from our perspective. The problem lies, of course, in the words “in part”. A total of 61 % of schools stated that the practical tuition of pupils in apprentice fields (sum for the duration of vocational training) takes place largely at school. At the same time, just 31 % of schools with apprentice fields confirmed a predominance of practical tuition at co-operating companies. Attitudes towards increasing the proportion of practical tuition or to the dual system in general are interesting and rather contradictory. 32 % of schools believe that a dual system of vocational education is lacking in the Czech Republic, though just 7 % of schools believe

²⁷ https://www.spcr.cz/images/Spoluprace_firem_a_skol_28_11_2018.pdf.

that the proportion of practical tuition in the total extent of apprentice fields is low and should be increased. As far as companies are concerned, 39 % believe that a dual system is lacking in the Czech Republic and should be introduced, and 31 % think the proportion of practical tuition is low and should be increased. Companies are, then, more open to changes directed at increasing the proportion of practical tuition, though even here they amount to just a third. A third of schools may think that it would be useful to introduce a dual system, but just 7 % think that the proportion of practical tuition is low. These facts must be considered if the proposed measures are to be implemented, as the attitude of the parties actually involved is decisive to the success of any reforms.

A survey of practically all secondary schools (the questionnaire was completed by a total of 1,293 schools, of which 762 were secondary vocational schools and 486 secondary vocational colleges) was conducted as part of the **P-KAP project**. The survey is structured according to “areas of intervention”, of which one is co-operation between schools and companies. The opinions of schools were determined in 13 various areas. Drawing up plans of co-operation with employers is considered important²⁸ by 90 % of secondary vocational schools and secondary vocational colleges. Meanwhile, just a third of schools (33 % of secondary vocational schools and 31 % of secondary vocational colleges) stated that they are actually drawing up such plans. The question remains what is causing this contradiction: a strong awareness of the importance of such co-operation on one hand, and its relatively low frequency on the other. Vocational training or experience at the workplace of employers is considered important by practically everyone – 100 % of secondary vocational colleges and 99 % of secondary vocational schools. A similarly large proportion (96 % of secondary vocational colleges and 92 % of secondary vocational schools) states that they are co-operating with companies on vocational training or experience at the workplace of an employer. Data on the extent to which vocational training is actually taking place at a company workplace is, however, not given in the results. We can assume from other sources that the extent of it is not particularly large, though there is evidently relatively good potential in this respect from the frequency of co-operation with companies in this area.

If we began our considerations of the possibilities of improving Czech vocational education by referring to the unfortunate fact that the OECD recommendations have yet to be implemented, then it would be appropriate in conclusion to formulate the key principles that must be respected during any changes targeting high-quality and relevant vocational education and true apprenticeships and that also come from the international sphere. Such principles are the content of the **EU Council Recommendation on Apprenticeships** that came out last year.²⁹ This document, in contrast to the OECD materials, does not contain specific recommendations for a specific country or countries, but emphasises that the principles should be applied while respecting the actual conditions in each specific country. They are, for this reason, formulated rather generally, though this does nothing to undermine their validity.

²⁸ The responses “extremely important” and “relatively important”.

²⁹ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprentices (2018/C 153/01).

The document first states that high-quality and effective apprentice training makes it possible to gain professional skills, experience and knowledge within the framework of the working process, as well as key competences, and facilitates the access of young people to the labour market, as well as the career progression of adults, and the transition to employment. It is established by means of structured partnership in which all the pertinent interested parties are engaged, principally social partners, businesses, mediating entities such as chambers of industry, commerce and trade, professional and branch organisations, institutes of vocational education and training, organisations for young people and parents, and local, regional and national bodies. The general aim of the recommendation is to enhance the employability and personal development of apprentices and contribute to the development of a highly vocationally competent and qualified workforce capable of responding to the needs of the labour market. A specific aim is to provide an integrated framework for apprentice training based on the mutual understanding of the terms quality and effectivity, with a view to the diversity and traditions of systems of vocational education and training and the political priorities of the individual member states.

Apprentice training is understood in the document as formal systems of vocational education and training that:

- **combine tuition** at institutes of education and vocational training **with a large extent of practical tuition** conducted **at businesses** and other workplaces,
- lead to **qualifications recognised at the national level**,
- are based **on an agreement** defining the rights and obligations of the apprentice, employer and institute of vocational education and training, and
- are based on the fact that the apprentice is **provided a wage** or other compensation for his or her contribution to the working activity performed.

The decisive principles for the implementation of apprenticeships of a truly high standard are:

- **A written agreement** should be closed before the commencement of an apprenticeship in which the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and (where relevant) the institute of vocational education and training are defined with a view to study and working conditions.
- Employers, institutes of vocational education and training and, where relevant, union organisations should agree on the **fulfilment of a certain set of comprehensive teaching results** defined in accordance with national legislation.
- **Internal company trainers**, whose task would be to co-operate closely with institutes of vocational education and training and their teaching staff, should be designated with the aim of providing apprentices with guidance and assuring regular feedback. Teachers, trainers and mentors must be supported, particularly at micro-companies and small and medium-sized concerns.
- **A fundamental proportion of apprentice training**, amounting to at least one half, **should be conducted at the workplace** and, where possible, there should be the opportunity of going abroad for a proportion of work experience. With a view to the

diversity of national systems, the aim is to increase gradually the proportion of apprentice training conducted in the form of practical tuition at the workplace.

- **Apprentices should be provided a wage** or other compensation in accordance with state or branch requirements or collective contracts, should these exist, with a view to agreements on cost sharing between employers and public bodies.
- Apprentices should have the right to **social protection**, including the essential insurance in accordance with national legislation.
- **Host workplaces should conform to the pertinent rules and regulations** on working conditions, and in particular to legal regulations relating to work safety and protection.
- A clear and consistent **regulatory framework** based on a fair and equal partnership approach, including structured and transparent dialogue between all pertinent interested parties, should be introduced. This could include accredited approaches for companies and workplaces offering apprentice training and perhaps additional measures for the assurance of quality.
- **Social partners should be engaged** in the conception, management and implementation of systems of apprentice training. In appropriate cases this should include partners at the branch level or mediating entities in accordance with national systems of employment relations and approaches in the area of education and vocational training.
- **Financial or non-financial support** should be stipulated, particularly **for micro-companies and small and medium-sized companies**, to allow them cost-effective apprentice training, possibly with a view to an agreement on cost sharing between employers and public bodies.
- **Qualifications** obtained within the framework of apprentice training should be **included in frameworks of qualifications** recognised at the national level and linked to the European Qualifications Framework.
- **Professional consultancy**, mentoring and learning support should be provided both before the commencement of and during apprentice training with the aim of assuring successful results, limiting the number of apprentices leaving their training prematurely and supporting those who abandon their training in re-joining pertinent forms of education and vocational training. Apprentice training should be promoted as an attractive form of education by means of broadly targeted information activities.

These are, then, the principles that we are to try to respect, and fulfil to the greatest possible extent, in the following proposal section of this document.

3. Our proposals

In this section we present a set of proposals for improving vocational education in the Czech Republic, with measures directed at strengthening practical training, where possible in the company environment, at the centre of attention. It is clear that no individual measure, no matter how forceful, can function in this respect. What is needed is a set of measures directed at various areas in the operation of vocational education. This also does not involve one-off changes, but rather a long-term process that should alter the overall conception of vocational education. It also demands the engagement of all parties – change does not lie merely in the hands of the ministry.

These measures do not directly target the introduction of a dual system. Regardless of the simplistic political proclamations, the system would, in reality, have to change significantly, and not merely within the scope of the school system itself (the position of apprentices, the role of employers – finances, examinations, etc. would all have to be taken over by employers in all respects – with the corresponding powers and responsibilities). In our opinion, the soil is not yet adequately prepared for such change at the present time. There is little awareness of what such change would actually mean. In any case, the field (see the results of the survey given in the preceding chapter) is far from being overwhelmingly convinced of the need for a transition to a dual system. Nevertheless, if the proposed measures are implemented, the system will be prepared for a gradual transition to a dual system.

As is clear from the previous chapter, nothing fundamentally new is being proposed here. All these measures have been proposed in one form or another in certain documents in the past. Our endeavour here is for all the measures taken together to create a certain integral system and for vocational education to approach the vision described below by means of their implementation. The system will, meanwhile, as has already been said, be open to changes leading in the direction of a dual system.

The measures are divided into a total of six priority areas according to their content:

- Curriculum
- Relevance
- Practical training at a company
- The engagement of employers
- Quality
- Increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and careers advice

A global goal is formulated for each priority area, as well as individual goals if the given area is further structured internally. Individual measures are also given defining the parties that should be responsible for their implementation. Certain measures may relate to more than one priority area (or operate from various points of view) – these are given in just the one priority area to which they belong most logically.

The vision

Vocational education in the Czech Republic fulfils its basic goals to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. It prepares graduates not merely for their initial entry onto the labour market, but also for the many and various transformations that take place on the labour market, in technologies and in the organisation of work. Graduates are equipped both with specific vocational skills and with general transferable competences that enable them to contribute to a high standard to the life of civic society, while also being prepared and motivated for lifelong learning. The system of framework curricula for school education corresponds in terms of the structure of fields and their content to the current and, to a certain extent, future needs of employers. It is periodically revised, new fields are created and existing fields altered on the basis of consensus between the state and employers. Vocational training in apprentice fields generally takes place at company workplaces in accordance with universally respected standards and under the supervision of accredited instructors. Employers contribute to the form and implementation of vocational education to a sufficient extent and take over powers and responsibilities. The same applies to financing, while there is also stable support for their participation from the state in the form of adequate tax benefits or direct support for small and medium-sized businesses. The system is managed according to well-thought-out and interconnected tools assuring quality (company workplaces, the course of vocational training, instructors, examinations). The responsible educational and professional orientation of pupils of primary and secondary schools is supported by independent careers advisors operating at every school who have access to a sophisticated information system and co-operate with employers and labour offices in their region. Vocational education is managed and coordinated by a platform (council) with the corresponding representation of public institutions, employers and unions.

A. Priority area: Curriculum

The global goal: Give appropriate consideration to all important proposals contained in valid and prepared documents during the currently ongoing revision of framework curricula for school education. Establish an effective regime of subsequent modifications of the entire branch system and individual framework curricula for school education in a way that ensures that the system remains compact, while also being able to respond to changing needs on the labour market.

Individual goals:

A1. Strengthen the general vocational base and transferable competences during revision of framework curricula for school education, link educational fields with the National System of Qualifications

Measure A1.1: Strengthen and consolidate educational goals in all framework curricula for school education directed at transferable competences, including fundamental elements of digital literacy.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the National Institute for Education

Measure A1.2: In defined sets (clusters) of framework curricula for school education strengthen the general vocational foundation corresponding to the given cluster of fields and framework curricula for school education that will increase the employability of graduates in a broader spectrum of fields. Consolidate the conception of the general vocational base for associated clusters of fields and use this concept to simplify the set of fields.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the National Institute for Education

Measure A1.3: In all cases in which a link exists between professional qualifications and a study field, conceive the vocational part of framework curricula for school education in a way that enables training for the pertinent professional qualification(s).

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the National Institute for Education

A2: Increase the proportion of practical training (vocational practice and vocational training) in total and at the workplace in study fields H and M

Measure A2.1: Expand the proportion of practical tuition in individual framework curricula for school education on the basis of branch specifics and in co-operation with employers.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the National Institute for Education

Measure A2.2: Assign at least 12 weeks of practical tuition in a real or model working environment, enable more coherent blocks of practical tuition at companies and a coherent period of practical tuition in the second half of year three.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the National Institute for Education

Measure A2.3: Expand the possibilities for the **realisation of practical tuition** in a real or model working environment to **at least 8 weeks** over the course of education in fields in **attained education category M**. Include apprenticeship in a real environment in this period.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the National Institute for Education

Measure A2.4: Enable **individual vocational experience** in fields in attained education category M. Enable the holding of vocational experience at companies during the school holidays.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the National Institute for Education

Note: Do not change the definition of practical tuition stipulated by the law within the framework of the current revision of framework curricula for school education (i.e. enabling its realisation in a company or other environment – in a school workshop). It is, at the same time, necessary to improve conditions for the engagement of employers systematically (see below) and to monitor the proportion of practical tuition taking place in companies. Then determine a certain proportion of compulsory training at a company at the right moment and following agreement with representatives of employers.

A3. Set up an effective and realistic regime of future modifications to framework curricula for school education

Measure A3.1: Set up a system of cyclical revisions to framework curricula for school education in areas of the general section of framework curricula for school education, in key competences and in the general vocational base. Determine a stable frequency of these revisions (4 or 5 years) and stipulate the obligation of cyclical revision under the law.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Measure A3.2: Assess the relevance of the content of the vocational component of individual framework curricula for school education in co-operation with social partners at regular intervals (1 to 2 years) and select, on the basis of consensus, those fields whose vocational component is to be modernised within a stipulated period.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, social partners

Measure A3.3: Make thorough use of a pilot verification instrument during proposals for the introduction of a new field into the system of educational fields.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

A4. Define the compulsory component of the School Education Programme directed at co-operation with employers and reinforcing the employability of graduates

Measure A4.1: Stipulate in framework curricula for school education the obligation of schools to prepare concrete plans for co-operation with social partners in the form of an appendix to the School Education Programme.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Measure A4.2: Ensure the gradual **standardisation of the content of the profile section of the school-leaving examination** in fields in attained education categories L0 and M in connection with the content of the corresponding qualification NSQ-EQF4.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Measure A4.3: Interlink the **School Education Programme with the corresponding professional qualifications in the National System of Qualifications** with the aim of allowing pupils in initial vocational education to prepare for a professional qualification in the

National System of Qualifications during the educational process in schools. Enable the passing of the pertinent examination within the framework of the financial normative.
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, schools

B. Priority area: Relevance

The global goal: Adapt the structure of fields and content of education so as to correspond to the current and known future needs of the labour market. Establish and use a system of predicting qualification needs.

Individual goals:

B1. Establish a system of predicting qualification needs and apply it consistently in the formulation of the range of education on offer

Measure B1.1: Establish a system of predicting qualification needs and periodically elaborate predictions at the national, regional and sector level.
Responsible: The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Measure B1.2: Establish and continue to support a system of regional platforms, in part as tools for the coordination of vocational education in the region. Use the prediction of qualification needs in this regard.
Responsible: The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the regions, social partners

B2. Interconnect vocational education systematically with the needs of the labour market

Measure B2.1: Do not increase the number of fields of secondary education; link their structure effectively with the needs of the labour market.
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Measure B2.2: Take into consideration indicators testifying to the quality and standard of co-operation with employers (the extent of co-operation between a school and companies, the number of pupils and hours of practical tuition at companies, etc., establishing a system of assuring the quality of practical tuition for pupils at companies, the level of employment of graduates in the field, the level of premature termination of studies, the success of pupils in the new final examination and school-leaving examination, etc.) within the system of normative financing.
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

C. Priority area: Practical training at a company

The global goal: Increase the proportion and quality of practical training taking place at companies.

Individual goals:

C1. Increase the proportion and quality of practical tuition taking place at companies

Measure C1.1: Maximise the adjustment of reliefs from the tax base for companies at which the practical tuition of secondary school pupils is held. Also include freelancers among the entities entitled.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Agriculture, employer and union federations

Measure C1.2: Determine financial support for small and medium-sized companies to make it possible for them to be involved in the practical tuition of secondary school pupils.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, employer and union federations

Measure C1.3: Create a standard for the quality of company workplaces.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with the Ministry of Industry and Trade, employer and union federations

Measure C1.4: The gradual implementation of the observation of the standard of company workplaces as a compulsory component during the planning of practical tuition at companies.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Measure C1.5: Increase the role of social partners in assuring the implementation of the standard of company workplaces (e.g. the conferral of a licence, inspections). The gradual transferral of responsibility entirely onto representatives of social partners, and resolution of the financing of essential activities.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with the Ministry of Finance, employer and union federations

C2. Assure suitable conditions for pupils taking practical tuition at a company

Measure C2.1: Resolve the position of pupils of secondary vocational schools on practical experience at a workplace, consider the form of the contract between the pupil (or his or her legal representative) and the company, create a specimen contract. Remuneration for productive work paid by the employer on the basis of this contract.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, employer and union federations

Measure C2.2: Determine the level of remuneration for the productive activity of pupils engaged in practical experience. The remuneration for the work performed should amount to between 50 % and 80 % of the remuneration for the given productive work, though at the least to 30 % of the minimum wage stipulated by the state converted to each day of the pupil's work experience.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, employer and union federations

Measure C2.3: Support the motivation of pupils in important fields in the region by means of the payment of grants.

Responsible: the regions

Measure C2.4: Create a standard for practical tuition at company workplaces for all fields, with definition of the course of teaching and its anticipated results. Implement this standard in framework curricula for school education and introduce the obligation of schools to create a module of practical tuition with the application of company specifics as part of the School Education Programme.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, schools

Measure C2.5: Stipulate the compulsory attributes of documentation for the assessment of the results of pupils in practical tuition on the basis of competences (including a portfolio of competences, company documentation, ECVET documents for national mobility and EUROPASS supplements), support the creation of specimen forms. In connection with this, introduce and regularly keep a Report on the Course of Practical Tuition.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, schools

Measure C2.6: Consider the introduction of a preliminary examination in the middle of the second (or third) year of apprentice fields. Such an examination would primarily test practical skills and would, as a tool of formative assessment, enable the adaptation of further practical training to the requirements of the pupil.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

D. Priority area: The engagement of employers

The global goal: Consistently increase the engagement of employers in the formulation of the goals and realisation of vocational education. Strengthen their powers and responsibilities.

Measure D1.1: Establish, on a tripartite basis, a National Council for Vocational Education and consult with it consistently on all conceptual matters related to vocational education, including the revision of framework curricula for school education.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with other ministries, employer and union federations

Measure D1.2: Embed the National Council for Vocational Education in the law and equip it with corresponding powers (e.g. approval of the concept of revisions to framework curricula for school education, changes to the branch system, approval of regulatory frameworks for practical tuition, etc.).

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in co-operation with other ministries, employer and union federations

Measure D1.3: Engage actively in the work of regional platforms.

Responsible: social partners at the regional level

Measure D1.4: Introduce the compulsory participation of an expert with practical experience in the examination commission for profile sections of school-leaving examinations.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Measure D1.5: Consider the introduction of a fund/funds (at the national or sector and regional level) for financing the activities of employers in vocational education.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Finance in co-operation with employer and union federations

E. Priority area: Quality

The global goal: Devote permanent and consistent care to assurance of the quality of vocational education, first and foremost by supporting teaching staff and instructors.

Measure E1.1: Introduce **compulsory work placements** in the real working environment **for all teachers at vocational schools** to an extent of 6 days a years within the scope of the time demarcated for self-study.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Measure E1.2: Increase the proportion of specialists from companies contributing to teaching, e.g. by sharing the costs of their wages between the school and the company.

Responsible: schools, companies

Measure E1.3: Support **instructors from companies** in obtaining the professional qualification “Instructor at a Provider of Practical Tuition” through lecturers trained by the National Institute for Education.

Responsible: The National Institute for Education, employers, schools

Measure E1.4: Create the position of **coordinator of co-operation between the school and companies** at schools.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

F. Priority area: Increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and careers advice

The global goal: Develop a positive relationship to vocational education and assure high-quality careers advice.

Individual goals:

F1. Provide systematic support to high-quality and accessible careers advice at schools

Measure F1.1: Continue to support and develop the infoabsolvent.cz information system.
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the National Institute for Education

Measure F1.2: Introduce the independent position of careers advisor for primary and secondary schools (separate from the position of educational counsellor).
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

F2. Promote a positive relationship towards vocational education

Measure F2.1: Provide financial and material support to the participation of pupils and schools in mathematics, physics and science and technology competitions for children and young people and in vocational competitions in crafts and technical skills, including international skills competitions (e.g. Euroskills).
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the regions, social partners

Measure F2.2: Consider the introduction of a programme for vocational orientation (analysis of potential and ca 2 weeks of workshops at companies or company education centres) as a standard programme supporting the professional choices of pupils in the final or penultimate year of primary school.
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, employers

F3. Promote vocational education

Measure F3.1: Introduce an award for the best concerns providing practical tuition in co-operation with ministries and social partners.
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Czech Chamber of Commerce, the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic

Measure F3.2: Promote vocational education, and in particular technical and craft fields, by means of, for example, closer co-operation between primary and secondary schools, joint presentations of vocational education institutes and employers at education trade fairs and open days, by promotion of the success of graduates at domestic schools, etc.
Responsible: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the regions, schools, companies

4. Political recommendations

The proposal section of the Strategy is conceived and structured by content according to six priority areas. If any changes in vocational education are actually to be realised, it is clear that on one hand the largest number of the necessary steps lie with the Ministry of Education, while on the other it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve actual change without the co-operation of other parties and their contribution to the realisation of a number of the given measures. This is also clear from a more-or-less formal analysis of the proposed measures. There are a total of 43 of these measures, though the responsibility for the realisation of a considerable proportion of them lies with more than one party. The largest number of measures involves, to some extent or another, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports – 35 measures. Another 18 involve social partners, 9 the National Institute for Education, and 8 involve other ministries (not counting the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs). A number of the measures involve the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs directly, the regions and, of course, schools. This part of the Strategy (Political Recommendations) is structured according to the various parties concerned and the roles they have to play. We will not repeat the given proposals here, but refer to those that are of critical importance to the various parties concerned, and to contexts and connections.

It is, above all, necessary to emphasise the fact that the success of these changes does not depend merely on the work of any given party, but on a coordinated approach taken by them all. The most important thing is real political will at the level of both the Ministry of Education and the government as a whole. As is clear from just a mere enumeration of measures targeting various parties, one of the most important preconditions will be the thorough and effective coordination of all activities. One of the key measures should, for this reason, be the establishment of an appropriate coordination platform (measures D1.1 and D1.2) – a **National Council for Vocational Education**. This Council should certainly be no “mere” consultation body of the Ministry of Education, but should be established at the governmental level and furnished (preferably by law) with the pertinent powers and responsibilities. It goes without saying that it does not suffice merely to establish this Council – its systematic and long-term operation must also be assured. Its composition must be truly representative – the results of its work will go unheard and unused without the credibility conferred on it by respected figures. The minimum level of ministerial representation is clearly that of deputy ministers, accompanied by the corresponding representation of social partners. It also goes without saying that this Council may (should) establish an expert group or expert groups that will elaborate documentation for it on the basis of relevant data and documents. Only the interconnection of the political position (the Council itself) and expertise (an expert group) will assure decision-making in line with the principle of evidence-based policy.

The decisive role in the realisation of the entire strategy is, in any case, played, understandably, by the **Ministry of Education**, and measures in all priority areas are targeted at it. The **revision of framework curricula for school education** currently underway gives the Ministry of Education a unique opportunity to initiate real change.

Important aspects of the proposed change can (and must!) be codified in framework curricula for school education:

- A conception of framework curricula for school education reinforcing transferable competences and the general vocational foundation.
- Revision (and simplification) of the entire system of study fields.
- Consistent interconnection with the National System of Qualifications.
- Reinforcing and improving the standard of practical tuition.
- True co-operation with social partners, etc.

Should it not prove possible to initiate profound and, to a certain extent, radical change to framework curricula for school education, this does not, of course, mean that schools of a high standard will be unable to operate, though the necessary changes, particularly in relation to practical tuition and social partners, will be more difficult and will take longer. It is also necessary to bear in mind that changes to a system as extensive as education will not be easy to realise. It is essential to convince all parties involved that the proposed changes are necessary and useful. The key tool in this regard is open communication with all the important parties – with social partners, with the regions and, it goes without saying, with schools. This does not, of course, mean that it is necessary to accommodate every proposal put forward by everyone. In any case, the results of the field investigation (see Chapter 2) show that not all parties are convinced of the necessity of change. It is, however, necessary to explain openly, with relevant arguments and, most importantly, consistently and over the long term what the essence of the change is and what its effects will be.

It is quite indisputable that vocational education cannot meet its goals well without the adequate co-operation of **social partners**, their representatives at the central and regional level and companies themselves. It is essential that social partners (particularly employers) are prepared to take their share of the responsibility and not only to declare repeatedly their readiness to do so, but also to engage consistently in talks with state institutions at all levels. This responsibility lies, first and foremost, in a corresponding level of representation in both the proposed National Council for Vocational Education and regional platforms. If these entities are given the pertinent powers (and not merely a consultative role), then this also means the automatic sharing of responsibility.

It goes without saying that the willingness and ability of companies to contribute adequately is decisive to improving the quality of and expanding practical tuition in a real working environment. The pertinent incentives from the state (tax benefits, direct support for small and medium-sized businesses) are essential, but will not suffice on their own without the will of employers. Co-operation with schools, for example on the preparation and updating of the School Education Programme or the participation of company specialists during tuition and final examinations (school-leaving and apprentice exams), is also important. Care for the quality of vocational training at companies (standards for company workplaces and their observation, instructors of a high standard) is also important. Companies should also allow teaching staff to go on work placements to reinforce their connection with the real working environment and technological development.

The role played by employers in shaping and reinforcing a positive relationship to vocational education is extremely important and involves participating in various trade fairs and promotional events, as well as co-operating in the provision of careers advice. The introduction of a programme of vocational orientation may provide significant support in promoting an emerging relationship to vocational education. Not least, company prestige could also be increased by the introduction of an award of some kind to be conferred by employers themselves.

The regions are the founding bodies of secondary schools, for which reason they have considerable responsibility for their operation. This responsibility also takes in the form of the range of education on offer in the region. This range should be well balanced, i.e. it should respect both the needs of the regional labour market and long-term developmental needs and the needs of pupils. Regional platforms should become an important instrument for decision-making regarding the form of the range of education on offer as they make it possible to integrate various perspectives. Decision-making should be based on consistently analysed predictions of qualification needs. It should not, however, involve excessive regulation such as, for example, the populist proposal for the regulation of the admissions procedure of secondary schools. Excessively strict regulation that excludes a certain group from the range of education does not work in the long term and is ineffective. We know that the unmotivated choice of a study field may lead to it being studied, but in many cases the graduate will abandon the field in the end anyway and find work elsewhere. Positive motivation, using grants for pupils in preferred fields for example, is far more effective. Experience in regions that apply this approach has been positive. The selection of school principals also lies in the hands of the regions. Since the school principal has a considerable influence over how the school operates, the regions should devote greater attention to this aspect and base the selection of principals on transparent criteria aimed at reinforcing co-operation between schools and companies.

As has already been said, the proposals in this Strategy are not aimed directly at the establishment of a dual system. Nevertheless, a number of aspects of the changes we are proposing do bring the system of vocational education closer to the principles of a dual system. Strong political will (and not merely from the Ministry of Education), which leads to a willingness to implement measures that would transfer significant powers and responsibilities to employers, is necessary for the true introduction of a dual system. Since it is quite clear that there is a relatively low level of awareness of what a dual system actually means, a profound expert and political discussion that would clarify all associated aspects, while also preparing the ground (schools and companies) for such change, is required before specific steps leading to its introduction. It is also not necessary for the entire system of vocational education to operate (compulsorily) on a dual principle. The move towards a dual system should be a gradual process, though a corresponding environment should be enabled. If employers are willing to and capable of taking real responsibility for the operation of a dual system, even in just certain specific cases, then the legal environment should enable this.

5. Abbreviations

ECVET – European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

EQUAVET – European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

EUROPASS – Europe-wide set of documents demonstrating the attainment of knowledge, skills and experience

H – attained education category: Secondary vocational education with certificate of apprenticeship

L0 – attained education category: Full secondary vocational education with completion of apprenticeship and graduation

LTP – Long-term Plan

M – attained education category: Full secondary vocational education with graduation (without apprenticeship)

MIZK – the project Master's Examination System

MOV – the project Modernisation of Vocational Education

NSQ – National System of Qualifications

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

P-KAP – the project Support for Regional Action Planning

POSPOLU – the project Support for Co-operation Between Schools and Companies

VET – Vocational education and training

WBL – Work-based learning