



Report on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training in the Czech Republic

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July 2023

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of vocational education and training (VET) is set in the context of national priorities for the development of education set out in strategic documents, namely in the [Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030+ \(MEYS, 2020b\)](#) and in its implementation document – [Long-term Plan for the Development of Education and Educational System of the Czech Republic \(MEYS, 2019, 2022a\)](#)¹, as well as in the [Strategic Plan of the Ministry for Higher Education for the period from 2021 \(MEYS 2020a\)](#) and the annual implementation plans for this Strategic Plan (MEYS, 2023b).² These documents set out two key priorities. One of them is to transform the organisation and methods of education so that education would develop the competences needed for active civic, professional and personal life in the 21st century. The second priority is to ensure equal access to quality education for all and to reduce region-to-region and school-to-school disparities in the quality of education. In addition to these priorities, only higher education aims to create “conditions for all higher education institutions to provide quality education to students in full-time, combined and distance learning programmes, as well as through lifelong learning courses available to the general public” (MEYS, 2020a, p. 4). Given the significant diversification of the Czech education system, individual groups of VET providers will participate in the fulfilment of these priorities in different capacities.

The starting point for the characterisation of quality assurance processes in VET in this Report is the concept of quality as the desirable and optimal level of functioning of the VET provided by secondary schools and tertiary professional schools (MEYS, 2020a; 2020c). We aim to describe the setup of selected processes of quality assurance of VET in the Czech Republic with regard to the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training in Europe (EQAVET, 2023a). This framework defines quality assurance as a cyclical and systematic process that can be used by EU Member States to develop the quality of VET in line with the [Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training \(VET\) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience \(EU, 2020\)](#), [the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships \(EU, 2018\)](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration on Vocational Education and Training \(Cedefop, 2020\)](#).

In this report, we will focus on two quality assurance processes – evaluation and monitoring of VET – and briefly mention the participation of key VET stakeholders in education policy. In addition to these processes, we will focus on the tools, namely standards and accreditation, which ensure quality in initial and continuing VET. Finally, we will look back and highlight the areas that are potentially suitable for the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training in Europe (EQAVET) in the Czech Republic.

Vocational education and training system in the Czech Republic

Vocational education and training develop the knowledge, skills and competences needed to practice a profession or a group of professions and work activities corresponding to a specific qualification, enabling graduates of vocational education programmes to enter the labour market as competent and employable individuals and to participate in continuing VET in order to specialise, deepen or maintain

¹ At the time of this report, the Long-term Plan (2023) was in the [public comment phase](#). In autumn 2023, its final version will be submitted to the Government of the Czech Republic for approval. This document is essential for the development of concepts in individual regions.

² [Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Area of Higher Education for the year 2023](#).

their qualifications (MEYS, 2020a; 2020c). The system of VET is highly decentralised in terms of management and administration, with a high degree of autonomy for schools and all providers of continuing VET. Vocational education and training can be acquired through both formal education and non-formal education, and the structure of the Czech education system implies a specific division into initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET).

Initial vocational education and training (IVET)

IVET is part of the education system, it takes place in secondary schools, tertiary professional schools and higher education institutions and it is provided as formal education at upper secondary and tertiary levels. This is also reflected in the certificates, by which initial vocational education and training graduates simultaneously prove their level of education and level of qualification (Cedefop, 2022a, 2022b; Evropská komise, 2023b; Zákon, 2004). IVET starts after nine years of compulsory schooling and covers a total of six EQF levels (2–7, with the exception of EQF level 5, which is not utilised in the Czech Republic).

Vocational training programmes with lower requirements in the field of general education and vocational theory are designed primarily for learners with special educational needs. They include one-, two- and three-year programmes that can lead to a VET certificate or a school leaving examination certificate (ISCED 253/EQF 2). These programmes are offered by secondary schools or practical schools.

The three-year ISCED 353/EQF 3 vocational training programmes (completed by final examination leading to VET certificate) enable graduates to enter the labour market directly and to practice occupations requiring mainly practical skills. The VET certificate also allows the holder to obtain a trade licence and to run a business in a specific field. Graduates of these programmes can go on to two-year follow-up programmes (ISCED 354/EQF 4) and take a school-leaving Matura exam (*Maturita*), which allows them to study at higher education institutions or tertiary professional schools.

The four-year vocational training programmes ISCED 354/EQF 4 and lyceum programmes ISCED 344/EQF 4, with the Matura exam (*Maturita*), have a higher proportion of general education subjects (lyceum up to 70%) and allow graduates to continue in tertiary education or to take up mid-level jobs in e.g. technical, commercial, service or health-care sectors.

Conservatory programmes last six years (music and drama) or eight years (dance) and lead to a DiS degree (*diplomovaný specialista*, to an associate degree, ISCED level 554/ EQF6). Students can take the Matura (*Maturita*) exam (EQF4) during their studies.

Three- and four-year VET programmes (including lyceum programmes) may be offered as reduced programmes. They are aimed at secondary school leavers who want to gain a second qualification in a different field of education. They last one to two years and are suitable for adults.

VET programmes offered by tertiary professional schools are included in tertiary education. These studies last three to three and a half years and students are prepared for more demanding careers. The study is completed with an *absolutorium* examination (EQF 6) and graduates obtain the associate degree (DiS.). Although many graduates of these programmes enter the labour market, they also may continue their studies at higher education institutions.

In accordance with the 2004 Education Act (MEYS, 2020c), as amended, practical training is an integral part of IVET offered by secondary schools and tertiary professional schools. This can take place at employers' workplaces or in school workshops / school facilities.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) offer two types of study programmes, academic or professional profile programmes (EQF 6, EQF, 7), both at the Bachelor's degree (ISCED 65) and Master's degree (ISCED 75³) level. The study programmes of the professional profile provide specific and relevant qualifications directly applicable on the labour market, but also develop their general knowledge, the ability to approach new challenges critically and creatively and deepen the relationship to lifelong learning. The training of students in professional study programmes is closely linked to practice and cooperation with employers, but the study is not subordinated to the particular interests of specific companies. The Strategic Plan (MEYS, 2020a) states support for the development of professional study programmes, especially in progressive sectors oriented towards digital technologies, environmental quality, waste management, energy, and health and social care, with the aim of increasing the share of graduates from professional Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes to 33% of all graduates by 2030.

Continuing vocational education and training (CVET)

CVET takes the form of non-formal education and represents one of the segments of further education in the education system, which is influenced by the policies of several ministries and social partners (primarily the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, representatives of employers and employees). Further education is any learning that can be applied to private, civic and professional life after formal education, but the primary aim of continuing vocational education and training programmes is to enable adults to acquire new knowledge, skills and competences (or improve the existing ones) that are transferable to the labour market.

CVET includes the following: in-company training, retraining, statutory further training for regulated professions (e.g. teachers) and individual training ([Cedefop, 2022a](#)). Training programmes, courses or internships offered by employers to people other than their employees (e.g. secondary school teachers) are an important part of CVET. CVET emphasises learning by doing and learning on the job. Learning for the job is also a common part of in-company training. CVET programmes are usually completed with a certificate; however, the form of these certificates is not prescribed by legislation.

The described structure of VET in the Czech Republic is also decisive for setting up quality assurance mechanisms (processes and tools). In the following chapters of this Report, the mechanisms of quality assurance of study programmes at higher education institutions will be intentionally omitted, among other things because the quality of education provided by higher education institutions is understood as "the added value of studying at higher education institutions" (MŠMT, 2020a, p. 12), i.e. differently than in the case of education in secondary schools and tertiary professional schools (Zákon, 2004).⁴ On the other hand, in Chapter *Quality Assurance Tools in Continuing Vocational Education and Training*, we describe the process of accreditation of educational programmes offered by HEIs within the framework of lifelong learning.

³ The ISCED does not specify criteria for academic and professional programmes, as is the case, for example, for upper secondary education.

⁴ For those interested in the topic of quality assurance at higher education institutions, we refer you, for example, to the activities of the [European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education](#) (ENQA).

Key actors in VET as stakeholders

In the spirit of participatory management of the vocational education and training system, an important quality assurance mechanism is the involvement of various stakeholders who participate in the field of VET in the development and implementation of education policy in line with trends in education as such, trends in VET (such as digital and green transition) and in line with labour market dynamics. The diversity of these VET stakeholders who participate in education policy requires social dialogue and close cooperation.

The key stakeholders in the Czech Republic are as follows:

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) is responsible for education policy, assesses the development of VET and on this basis sets the priorities for further development and decides on individual measures. As part of its responsibilities, it supports secondary schools, tertiary professional schools and higher education institutions in their role as providers of VET. It has the power to accredit continuing education programmes and thus influence their quality.

The Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) is a civil service and administrative authority with nationwide competence. It consists of a headquarters and 14 regional school inspectorates. The CSI is responsible for the external evaluation of the education system and carries out the tasks imposed by Section 174 of the 2004 Education Act and Decree No 17/2005, on more detailed conditions of the Czech School Inspectorate organisation and the performance of inspection activities.

Educational institution is an umbrella term for various types of higher education institutions, tertiary professional schools, secondary schools, conservatories and school facilities listed in the school register, as well as for institutions that provide educational services. Schools are the backbone of VET, as they provide education and develop the vocational knowledge and skills of all, regardless of age.

Employers are important providers of CVET, among other reasons because vocational training is often focused on specific skills and qualifications required by the current labour market. In the context of IVET, they participate as social partners of schools in the provision of practical training and in the development or updating of school educational programmes. Employers' representatives are involved in revisions of the Framework Educational Programmes and comment on other conceptual changes in VET.

Students and participants in CVET represent one of the main stakeholder groups in any education policy. They are the clients of vocational education and training and from this point of view they are the clients who are directly affected by the quality and effectiveness of the whole system. Their feedback on the educational programmes and their employability on the labour market are important criteria for evaluating the quality of educational programmes, but they do not have a significant say and influence at the systemic level in the Czech Republic (except for students at HEIs).

Professional associations of teachers of various types of schools strive to improve the conditions of teachers' work and the quality of teaching (e.g. Učitelská platforma, z.s., Pedagogická komora, z.s., Učitel naživo, z.ú.; Otevřeno, z.s.). Furthermore, there are associations of schools, some of which are associated under the Union of Schools' Associations of the Czech Republic CZESHA (e.g. Association of Tertiary Vocational Schools, Association of Private Schools of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, Association of Medical Schools, Association of Secondary Technical Schools, etc.). The purpose of the Union is to contribute to the mutual exchange of information and experience, to actively participate

in the development and promotion of the concepts of the educational system of the Czech Republic and to cooperate with employers and their organisations.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) is responsible for the implementation of retraining, which is defined by Act No 435/2004, on employment. Currently, the MoLSA subsidises adults to participate in retraining or further education courses and keeps a database of educators of these courses.

The Czech and Moravian Trade Union of Workers in Education is a professional trade union that brings together education workers, pensioners and the unemployed who have worked in education. It is a civic association focusing on the issues of the employees in education, who, on their own, have no chance to influence the employers or the public administration and self-government bodies.

Non-governmental non-profit organisations and other groups (professional associations and other entities) can be providers of continuing vocational training, as well as, depending on their nature and professional focus, participants in education policy.

Research institutions and think tanks: They conduct studies and research, which are the starting point for the decision-making of key stakeholders and indirectly influence practice in VET.

The European Union and international organisations (e.g. European Commission, Council of Europe, Cedefop) encourage the development of national policies, contribute to the development of strategies, standards and qualification frameworks in EU Member States, which in turn facilitates labour mobility and the recognition of qualifications across the European labour market.

These key stakeholders cooperate at national level in various groups such as the Council for Vocational Education (an advisory body to the Minister of Education in the field of vocational education and training) or the National Council for Qualifications (an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports on the basis of Section 24 of Act No 179/2006). Similar groupings exist at the regional level (e.g. Employment Pacts, Sectoral Councils), but the degree of their involvement in regional policies and responsibility for the implementation of education policy in the regions varies from region to region.

EQAVET

The EQAVET National Reference Point (EQAVET NRP) has a specific position among key stakeholders. In the Czech Republic, the EQAVET NRP was established in 2010. In 2010–2016, it was the Czech School Inspectorate. The functioning of the EQAVET NRP at that time was carried out in close cooperation with the National Institute for Education (NIE) and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). In 2016, the MEYS appointed the National Institute for Education (from 2020 the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic) as the National Reference Point for EQAVET. The role of the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic as the EQAVET CZ NRP is based on the status of the NPI CR as a directly managed organisation of the Ministry of Education.

At national level, the EQAVET CZ NRP benefits from close cooperation and synergies with other EU instruments and networks such as the EQF National Contact Point, the Europass National Centre, ReferNET Czech Republic or the National Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition. The close cooperation between the NPI CR and the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) continues as well.

Mechanisms and tools for quality assurance in VET

For the purposes of this Report, we will focus on two processes – evaluation and monitoring – which are the prerequisites for achieving quality in VET in terms of effectiveness. **Monitoring and evaluation** of a range of aspects of VET take place at national and regional levels, and both contribute to quality assurance by collecting, producing and collating data that key stakeholders use to manage and administer their respective segments of VET and, together, in education policy as a whole. Evidence-based policy making can also be considered as one of the quality assurance processes, but we will not deal with this process, given the scope of this Report.

Systematic monitoring and evaluation at national and/or regional level covers the following areas: the VET system and the context of its further development (economic, social), providers (organisations), inputs (e.g. number of students, number of teachers), the educational process (conditions of the educational process, curriculum and teaching), educational outcomes and to some extent resources (human, financial and material resources). In the following chapters we will look at how these quality assurance processes are set up for both the initial vocational training and continuing vocational training (Evropská komise, 2023a).

Evaluation of IVET

Monitoring and evaluation of the system of IVET at the level of upper secondary education and tertiary professional schools is based on the evaluation of the education system and follows the division of powers between the MEYS and the 14 self-governing regions, i.e. it takes place at the national and regional level and involves various entities (including providers of VET). At the national level, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic and the Czech School Inspectorate carry out evaluations of the education system. At the regional level, individual regional authorities monitor and evaluate the education system.

The MEYS evaluates the education system in its entirety. In accordance with the Education Act and the Higher Education Act, it prepares an annual report on the state and development of education in the Czech Republic (MEYS, 2023c). The education system in the regions is evaluated by the relevant **regional authority**, which publishes an annual report on the state and development of the education system in the region. The structure and content of these reports are governed by Decree No 150/2022, laying down the details of long-term plans and annual reports.

The number and structure of the student and teacher population is an important indicator for evaluating the education system. Currently, the Czech Republic does not have a register of teachers and schools are obliged to keep records of their students in the form of school registers. In the coming years, a single student identifier (MEYS, 2022a), should be established to track the educational paths of individuals throughout their lives. This data could be used to refine data on participation in and completion of vocational training programmes, or to monitor the permeability of the education system.

Evaluation of initial vocational training providers

IVET providers are educational institutions, but in this section of the Report we will focus solely on the evaluation of secondary schools, conservatories and tertiary professional schools in accordance with Section 12 of the Education Act (Zákon, 2004). School evaluation takes two forms – **self-evaluation** and **external evaluation**.

Schools enjoy considerable autonomy in the area of self-evaluation and specific evaluation activities are concentrated in the pedagogical management of schools. Head teachers are not required to submit a self-evaluation report, but on the other hand, the self-evaluation report is one of the documents for the annual report on the school's activities, which is approved by the school board. In our experience, the management of most secondary schools and tertiary professional schools is aware of the importance of self-evaluation of the educational process, the educational outcomes, the teaching staff development and other aspects of the school functioning, does self-evaluation in some form and works with it in terms of school development and the quality of education provided. In this respect, the methodological portal <https://www.kvalitniskola.cz>, prepared by the CSI, is a helpful tool for schools, providing a set of best methodological practices and tools for self-evaluation, including examples of inspiring practice.

The CSI publishes information from its inspection activities on selected aspects of education in “their” school to head teachers and their representatives via the [InspIS portal](#).⁵ The registered head teachers or their representatives have the opportunity to compare the situation at “their” school with the situation at schools of the same type in their region or the Czech Republic (this serves as a kind of benchmarking).

The external evaluation of schools is carried out by **the CSI**, which assesses their **quality and effectiveness** through its inspection activities (including thematic reports), through the National Survey of Educational Achievement and through the Czech Republic's participation in international surveys of educational outcomes (e.g. PISA). The quality and effectiveness of the schools are evaluated together based on the data collected from the schools visited as part of the inspection activities during the relevant school year. The CSI evaluates schools according to a set of annually updated “Criteria for evaluating the conditions, progress and results of education”⁶, which are based on the “quality school” model. The criteria cover six main areas:

- Concept and framework of the school.
- Pedagogical leadership of the school.
- Quality of the teaching staff.
- Teaching.
- Educational and learning outcomes of students.
- Supporting pupils and students in education (equal opportunities).

The criteria are formulated for the purpose of external evaluation of educational institutions, but they are also fully applicable for internal evaluation of schools. They are developed in modified versions for each type of school, i.e. there is a modification of these criteria for secondary schools and for tertiary professional school, which allows **schools** to continuously monitor and evaluate the quality of their education in accordance with the external evaluation by the CSI.

In relation to the quality of IVET, the relevant findings are gathered from the inspection activities on [Common features of education in successful secondary vocational schools offering 3 - year programmes](#) (Chovancová et al., 2022) or some of the findings of the national survey [Qualifications, training and competences of teachers](#) in 2021 and 2022 (Koucký et al., 2023). In the school year 2023/2024, the CSI will again focus on education in secondary schools with programmes ended by the

⁵ InspIS DATA is the CSI's main information system for gathering and evaluating information related to education and the performance of evaluation and inspection activities in initial education. It is compulsory for all schools and educational institutions to register in the system. Only head teachers and their representatives have access to the portal and thus to reports about their school after logging into InspIS DATA (CSI, 2023a).

⁶ At the of this Report, the up-to-date relevant documents published were as follows: [Criteria for evaluating the conditions, progress and results of education for the school year 2023/2024](#) and [The annual report for the school year 2021/2022](#) (Zatloukal et al.,2022).

school-leaving examination (*Maturita*) that repeatedly show high failure rates in the common part of the Matura exam (*Maturita*), thus building on [the results from the 2017/2018 school year \(CSI, 2018\)](#).

Since 2019, the EQAVET CZ NRP (now NPI CR) has been working with [14 criteria for quality apprenticeship training](#) in accordance with the Recommendation (EU,2018). In 2021 and 2022, the NPI CR has developed two tools for assessing the conditions of practical teaching based on the EQAVET quality cycle. These tools include checklists of quality criteria and conditions for practical training (one checklist for employers' workplaces and one for school workplaces). The checklists (EQAVET, 2023c) are intended to facilitate the **monitoring of practical training conditions** for schools and employers. There is also an evaluation tool for assessing the conditions of practical training at employers' workplaces and school workplaces. This tool (EQAVET, 2023c) is designed to **evaluate the conditions** that are critical to the achievement of intended and expected learning outcomes in practical learning. Both of these tools were piloted in secondary vocational schools and conservatories in 2022 (NPI ČR, 2022) and are currently being offered to schools and employers to use according to their needs.

Monitoring of IVET

Monitoring of IVET has a long tradition in the Czech Republic. Currently, it is coordinated at the national level by the NPI CR with the participation of the CSI.⁷ At the regional level, monitoring conditions are laid down by the regional authority together with the founders of secondary schools. Several EQAVET framework benchmark indicators [are monitored at the national and regional level, which are in turn used for education policy purposes](#). Specifically, these are the following:

- participation rate in VET programmes;
- completion rate in VET programmes;
- employment rate of participants in VET programmes;
- utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace;
- unemployment rate according to individual criteria.

The monitoring of IVET according to the above criteria is supplemented by data from the CERMAT, which analyses the results of the didactic tests of the common part of the [Matura exam \(*Maturita*\)](#) (part of the outcomes monitoring) and the results of the [standardised entrance examination](#) to the fields of education that end with the Matura exam (*Maturita*) (part of the input monitoring). These data are used to produce summary final reports that form a comprehensive time series. CERMAT also annually prepares [an analytical report on applications](#) to education in fields of education that end with the Matura exam (*Maturita*), in which the standardised entrance examination is part of the admission procedure. For example, the numbers and combinations of applications submitted by applicants to four-year fields of study, post-secondary fields and six- and eight-year grammar schools are tracked, as are the numbers of applicants to four-year fields broken down by subject group, type of school and the regional affiliation of the applicant's starting and destination school, and all data are compared with previous years (Centrum, 2022; 2023).

Procedures for entry into IVET

Entry to IVET offered by secondary schools is conditional on successful completion of **an admission procedure**, which consists of submitting an application for education at the selected school and field

⁷ The CSI launched an interactive web platform in 2022, www.vzdelavanivdatech.cz, which provides the professional public with visualisations of anonymised data from the InspIS portal.

of education, completing compulsory schooling and meeting the conditions of the entrance examination(s). The aim of the entrance examination is to verify the applicant's prerequisites for education. These prerequisites are adequate skills, knowledge, interests and medical fitness. The head teacher may stipulate that the admission procedure will include a school entrance examination, in which case he or she must publish the conditions and criteria for this examination. These are usually the results of previous education, grades in relevant (profile) subjects, the results of school entrance exams or interviews, and the results of various competitions or Olympiads. The head teacher of the school to which the applicant applies decides whether to admit the applicant to education.

A compulsory part of the admission procedure in fields of education completed by the Matura exam (*Maturita*) (including follow-up study programmes) is passing the **standardised entrance examination** in Czech language and literature and mathematics. CERMAT creates the assignment for the standardised entrance examination and the level of the didactic tests corresponds to the level of educational results specified in the Framework Educational Programme for Primary Education.⁸

Candidates for study at conservatories and in some art-oriented fields must first pass **talent tests** as a prerequisite for study. Applicants for tertiary professional schools apply for admission and, if the head teacher has decided to hold an entrance examination, applicants must meet the conditions of the entrance examination in addition to demonstrating their medical fitness. The content and form of the entrance examination must be set in accordance with the framework education programmes providing secondary education with the Matura exam (*Maturita*).

It is clear from the description of the conditions for entry into initial vocational education in secondary schools that the applicants' entry is determined by their interest in the type of school, the field of education, and the specific school of that type. Each applicant is allowed to submit two applications (for up to two schools), which is a further evidence of the above. However, given the strong competition among applicants, this measure does reflect the (often professional) interest of the applicant, but rather a tactic employed by the children and their parents, who try to apply for field fields and schools that are perceived as easier to get. 2023 was the strongest population year in the last 15 years and analyses, which prepared EDUin (Analýza, 2023), and public reactions show the inflexibility of the admissions system, which should change at least partially from 2024.

Completion of IVET and certification

Providers of **initial vocational education and training** (secondary schools, tertiary professional school) are obliged by the Education Act to verify vocational knowledge, skills and competences (learning outcomes). The conditions for the completion of IVET in secondary schools are governed by the Education Act and a set of decrees, specifically Decree No 530/2021, (amending Decree No 177/2009, on more detailed conditions for the completion of education in secondary schools by the school-leaving examination and Decree No 3/2015, on certain education certifications), Decree No 47/2005, on completing education in secondary schools by final examination and on completing education in conservatories by graduation, and Decree No 423/2020, on tertiary vocational education and training.

In order to complete their education in a fields with apprenticeship certificates (ISCED 353), students must pass a **standardised final examination**. This exam consists of three separately graded parts, which include both a vocational theory and a practical part and are taken in the following order:

⁸ The results of the standardised entrance examination are compiled by CERMAT and the report for 2023 [has already been published](#).

- written examination (paper or electronic);
- practical training examination (can be held at an employer's workplace);
- oral examination.

The specific subjects in which the final examination is held are set out in the Framework Education Programme (FEP) and the School Education Programme (SEP). In accordance with the amendment to the Education Act (2015), secondary schools are obliged to use **standardised assignments** for the final examination, which are prepared for individual fields of education and made available in the information system by CERMAT, an organisation directly managed by the Ministry of Education. CERMAT manages a database of topics and tasks, updates them and continuously creates new topics that capture developments and trends in the field. The editors at CERMAT are responsible for the creation and innovation of the topics, and they work with experienced teachers from secondary vocational schools and incorporate their comments. Schools can supplement the assignments with specifics from their own educational programmes and the CERMAT information system will then generate the assignment based on their needs. In accordance with the Education Act, an expert from practice in the relevant field is a mandatory member of the examination board.

The uniform content of the final exam ensures comparability of learning outcomes for each qualification across schools in different regions and also increases the credibility of these educational programmes for employers.

Completion of the four-year fields of study (ISCED 354, 344) is conditional on passing the school-leaving examination – Matura exam (*Maturita*). The **Matura exam (*Maturita*)** consists of two parts – a common (State) and a profile (school) examination, and successful completion of both parts of this examination gives the student a secondary education with the Matura exam (*Maturita*), which is a condition for entry into tertiary education or a ticket to the labour market.

The **common part** is the same for all types of secondary schools with four-year study programmes (i.e. including general education schools) and it was held for the first time in the Czech Republic in the school year 2010/2011. This part of the Matura exam (*Maturita*) includes two compulsory subjects – Czech language and a foreign language, or Czech language and mathematics and a maximum of two elective subjects (extended mathematics, another foreign language). The examination in both subjects takes the form of standardised didactic tests, which are created and evaluated by CERMAT.

The **profile part** of the Matura exam (*Maturita*), which is designed and evaluated by the schools themselves, consists of an oral and written part in Czech language and literature, a foreign language (oral and written part only for those who have chosen it in the common part and have already passed the didactic test in the common part of the examination) and two or three other compulsory examinations from the school head teacher's offer of subjects (the exact number of examinations is defined in the framework educational programmes for each field of education). In the profile exams, schools have the opportunity to test professional knowledge, skills and competences in accordance with their educational programme – school profile. One of the compulsory examinations offered by the head teacher must take the form of a practical examination or a graduation thesis. Each student has the opportunity to take up to 2 optional profile exams in addition to the compulsory exams. The profile part of the Matura exam (*Maturita*) examination takes place in front of the **Matura (*Maturita*) examination board**, whose members may be experts from practice, higher education institutions or tertiary professional schools.

Studies at tertiary professional school end with **graduation**. The graduation procedure includes a defence of the graduation thesis, a foreign language exam and an exam in professional subjects. The examination in professional subjects may include a maximum of three professional subjects. The graduation procedure is held in front of the examination board and is open to the public. One of the members of the examination board is an expert from practice. In the case of successful completion of

all parts of the graduation, the graduate receives a certificate of graduation and a diploma of a graduate of a tertiary professional school with an endorsement of obtaining a tertiary level of education (EQF 6).

On successful completion of the final examination, the Matura exam (*Maturita*) or the graduation examination, the participants receive certificates or diplomas of their educational attainment and level of qualification in accordance with Decree No 530/2021, in accordance with the international standard classification ISCED-11 (Český, 2016), the revised ISCED-F 2013 classification of subjects (Český, 2018), [the European Qualifications Framework \(2017\)](#), Government Regulation No 211/2010, on the system of fields of education in primary, secondary and tertiary vocational education (Nařízení, 2010) a Government Regulation No 354/2020 on the system of subjects in primary, secondary and higher vocational education (Nařízení, 2020) or [Government Regulation on the areas of education in higher education](#) (Nařízení, 2016).

Tools and guidelines for quality assurance in IVET

The quality of (not only) VET can also be ensured through the observance of norms, standards and procedures, which enable the identification of quality and set rules for its evaluation. Of these tools, we will focus on **standards** and the **accreditation** procedure.

In the Czech Republic, educational standards have the form of framework educational programmes that define the minimum level of educational content attained in individual fields of education. There are currently 281 fields of education (Nařízení, 2010; 2020) and therefore 281 Framework Education Programmes. Each of these sets out the objectives, forms, length of education, key competences, compulsory content of education and its organisation, the profile of the graduate, the conditions for the course and completion of education, the expected results of education in relation to the planned educational content and the conditions for the education of students with special educational needs. The Framework Educational Programmes (FEP) are a binding document for the development of school educational programmes, but also for the assessment of learning outcomes or the development and assessment of textbooks. The NPI CR is responsible for the preparation, updating and revision of all FEPs, but it is the MEYS who approves and issues them. For the fields of education in scope of competence of the Ministries of Defence, Interior and Justice, the FEPs are issued by these ministries in consultation with the MEYS.

Secondary schools create and update “their” school education programmes (SEP) for each field of education separately in accordance with the issued FEPs. Therefore, schools may specify, upgrade or extend the FEPs based on their own conditions, but the degree of diversity of the SEPs and specialisations is currently subject to criticism (MEYS, 2022a). From 2022, schools can use a module in the CSI system [InspIS SEP](#), where they can create, edit or modify their SEPs in accordance with the currently valid FEPs. In the 2023/2024 school year, the CSI will focus its inspection activities on the ways in which teachers use the SEPs in their work. The output will be a detailed assessment of the use of SEPs for planning, implementation and evaluation of education (not only) in secondary schools, which will allow monitoring the improvement of the work of schools with the SEPs in the future (CSI, 2023fg).

Currently, the system of field of education is being innovated and, as a follow-up, revisions of all FEPs are being prepared, which will be created in close cooperation with various stakeholder groups (see Chap. 2). In addition to the revisions of the FEPs, the Long-Term Plan (MŠMT, 2022a also mentions the creation of a quality standard for practical teaching in accordance with the Educational Policy Strategy of the Czech Republic until 2030+ (MEYS, 2020b). It is unclear what such a standard will look like and whether it will be implemented in the FEP/SEP or whether it will be another standard for IVET.

Another quality assurance tool is the **accreditation** of educational programmes of tertiary professional schools, which are subject to accreditation by the MEYS after the prior approval of the relevant ministry (i.e. defence, interior, health). The tertiary professional school submits an application for accreditation of the educational programme, which must include a proposal for the educational programme and evidence that the teaching will be provided in a professional manner. The educational programme will be accredited on the basis of an approval opinion of the Accreditation Commission for Tertiary Professional Education. The conditions for accreditation are regulated by the Education Act and [Decree No 10/2005, on tertiary vocational education](#).

Quality assurance in CVET

This segment of non-formal education is only minimally regulated at the national level. At the national level, the participation of adults in further education courses/programmes is monitored without specifying vocational education and training, but the Labour Office of the Czech Republic records graduates of retraining courses who have received financial support for this type of training.

Setting up quality evaluation processes only applies to certain educational programmes, namely those that are subject to accreditation by the MEYS and are linked to the National Register of Qualifications (NRQ) or regulated by the relevant ministries (e.g. legislatively prescribed training for certain professions in the field of public administration, health care or e.g. railway transport) or are linked to specific professional standards. In addition, there are training programmes/courses that are run entirely by the providers and the conditions, course and verification of the learning outcomes of these programmes/courses are influenced by free market principles. The quality of non-accredited courses is ensured by the providers or lecturers of these courses and partly by the participants. Any national quality standards are absent in these cases and quality is not assessed by any particular institution or body.

The quality of such training programmes/courses is monitored, evaluated and ensured by the providers themselves, e.g. according to departmental/branch/company methodologies or internally developed procedures. The spectrum of continuing vocational education and training providers (employers, educational institutions such as HEIs, secondary schools and school facilities for extracurricular education, non-governmental non-profit organisations, but also various types of associations, professional societies or educational institutions), suggests that the processes of monitoring, evaluation and the use of quality assurance tools will be embedded in various quality management systems emphasising customer/client satisfaction (e.g. ISO, EFQM, CAF, or departmental quality methodologies e.g. [Supporting the implementation of quality management in service authorities – Civil Service \(mvr.cz\)](#), or standards resulting from the law e.g. [Evaluation of quality and safety of health services – Ministry of Health \(mzcr.cz\)](#)).

In April 2023, the MoLSA launched an e-shop with accredited and non-accredited [training courses and retraining](#). Educators offer their courses to adults (including courses in digital education in the field of IT and Industry 4.0), which are then fully or partially reimbursed by the MoLSA. The plan is to train as much as 20 000 people using this method in 2023. These activities are also aimed at verifying the possible future functioning of the system of retraining and training courses for the purpose of introducing individual learning accounts.

Tools and guidelines for quality assurance in CVET

The quality assurance of such broadly defined educational opportunities is set at the national level only thanks to the processes of accreditation of lifelong learning courses at higher education institutions and of retraining programmes in accordance with Decree No 176/2009, as amended on 28 March 2018.

Accreditation

A specific group of continuing vocational education and training programmes are educational programmes leading to retraining (retraining programmes). Retraining programmes prepare their participants for the performance of specific work activities with employability on the labour market or for the acquisition of specific work skills. They are primarily intended for general job seekers and job seekers registered at the Labour Office of the Czech Republic, but not only for them. The difference between general job seekers and those registered at the Labour Office of the Czech Republic is that registered job seekers are reimbursed by the Labour Office of the Czech Republic for the costs of retraining according to the conditions defined by the Employment Act and the Decree on the retraining of job seekers. All retraining programmes must be accredited by the MEYS in accordance with Decree No 176/2009, as amended on 28 March 2018. Accreditation of a retraining programme is granted for a period of 3 years and the MEYS simultaneously grants accreditation to the educational facility for the specific retraining programme. A list of all accredited retraining programmes can be found on the [MEYS website \(MEYS, 2023a\)](#).

The procedure for obtaining accreditation of a retraining programme differs from the procedure for accrediting educational programmes of tertiary professional schools. An educational facility wishing to obtain accreditation of a retraining programme must apply for accreditation depending on whether the retraining programme is aimed at a professional qualification listed in the National Register of Qualifications or not. If there is a professional qualification in the National Register of Qualifications (NRQ) for the work activity in question, it is necessary that the entire application is prepared in accordance with the standard of the professional qualification and the final examination is conducted by an authorised person. If there is no qualification in the NRQ for a given work activity, an application for “simple retraining” is submitted in accordance with Decree No 176/2009, as amended on 28 March 2018. The retraining should include practical training, which serves to acquire or renew practical knowledge and skills and must take place in enterprises or other facilities equipped for practical training. Interestingly, the application for retraining programmes must specify the entry requirements for applicants. Retraining programmes are concluded with a final exam and if the participant passes this exam, he or she will receive a certificate of retraining. If the knowledge and skills acquired in a given programme are not verified, the participant has the right to obtain a certificate of participation in an accredited training programme. The application for accreditation is assessed by the MEYS accreditation committee.

The Standards for Continuing Professional Development of Pedagogical Staff (CPDPS) are an example of an original combination of two quality assurance tools (standard + accreditation) in CVET. These standards define exhaustively which qualification and specialisation studies of teaching staff are covered by the application for accreditation, and the application for accreditation must elaborate the standard for the given educational programme (MEYS, 2023c). As of 1 September 2023, the scope of accreditation of educational programmes of the CPDPS system will be narrowed by removing educational programmes for deepening professional qualifications (continuing education) from the accreditation regime.

Another group of non-formal education programmes subject to quality assurance processes are lifelong learning (LLL) programmes offered by HEIs as part of their educational activities. These programmes can be provided free of charge or for a fee and can be professionally-oriented or interest-oriented. The detailed conditions of LLL programmes are set out in the internal regulations of each HEI (usually the Lifelong Learning Regulations) and the quality of these programmes is part of the internal evaluation of each HEI. The evaluation of LLL programmes usually consists of feedback on the quality

of teaching from participants and graduates, on the organisation and promotion of the programme, and comments from the faculty implementing the programme.

Process for verifying education and learning outcomes

Procedures for **verifying the results** of non-formal and informal learning have been developed since 2007. In accordance with Act No 179/2006, candidates for verification of their knowledge, skills and competences must prove their level by passing an examination according to the standards for the selected professional qualification listed in the [National Register of Qualifications](#) (NRQ).

Each qualification in the NRQ is described through **two standards**: a qualification standard (a structured description of the knowledge, skills and competence requirements for a specific professional qualification) and an assessment standard (a set of criteria and methods for verifying the knowledge, skills and competence of a given professional qualification). Employers, guilds, associations, trade unions, training institutions and the public administration are involved in the development of these standards through sectoral councils, which ensure that the standards are in line with the actual labour market requirements for specific occupations and jobs. The qualification and assessment standard for each professional qualification goes through an approval process, which is described in Act No 179/2006. Individual professional qualifications are updated (revised), which allows for a relatively flexible response to changing labour market requirements.

In July 2023, the NRQ database contained 1453 professional qualifications. Successful candidates who pass the exam are awarded a Certificate of Professional Qualification, which lists not only the professional skills acquired and their relationship to the profession, but also the EQF level.

The process of creating and approving new standards happens in several stages, which ensures the relevance of the draft PQ standard for a given qualification with a current and medium-term outlook for the holder's employability on the labour market. There are several quality assurance steps in the development of standards. The draft professional qualification is submitted and proposed by the relevant sectoral council. After the authorising body (the ministry under which the professional qualification falls) and the MEYS have given their consent to the creation of the professional qualification standard, a working group consisting of approximately 5 experts is formed, which is methodically led by a guarantor from the NPI CR and they, in cooperation, prepare a draft professional qualification standard in the NRQ information system. Once approved, the draft PQ standard is published on the NRQ website (<https://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/>) and is available for authorised persons (entities) for verification purposes, for examinations and for consultation by the professional public.

As a tool, the NRQ:

- ensures that learning outcomes achieved through different pathways can be validated;
- enables the comparability of knowledge, skills and competences regardless of how they were acquired;
- uses the qualification levels of the Czech Republic and in the EU;
- allows for a relatively rapid transfer of labour market requirements into education;
- ensures public awareness of all nationally recognised qualifications.

CONCLUSION

Quality assurance is one of the major priorities for the development of VET in the Czech Republic and this Report indicates that there are several pathways to ensuring quality. In the text, we have focused on two processes (monitoring and evaluation) that serve as the basis for quality assurance in any form. However, the setting of current indicators for monitoring and evaluation of initial and continuing vocational education and training has not proved to ensure the quality of VET in its entirety – from initial through continuing vocational education and training to the recognition of skills and competences acquired during life. From the perspective of an individual's lifelong learning, there is a lack of indicators that would allow stakeholders to clearly view the passage of an individual through IVET and CVET in both directions, as well as the links between different forms of CVET (in-company training, retraining, statutory continuing education for regulated professions and individually selected training programmes).

Quality assurance conditions in initial and continuing vocational education and training differ as well. In IVET, many quality-related aspects are defined in legislation, whereas in CVET, quality assurance is more firmly in the hands of the providers. Based on our mapping of quality assurance mechanisms, the accreditation process appears to be a powerful tool for quality assurance in both IVET and CVET. The diversity of existing accreditation procedures reveals a potentially optimistic future in this regard.

As a result of the autonomy of vocational education and training providers, VET in the Czech Republic has an increasingly evident tendency to define quality by customers' requirements (TQM) and to approach quality assurance in the spirit of strategic management. In this context, it is possible to look for ways and areas to apply the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training in Europe (EQAVET) and to try to implement the EQAVET quality cycle. The planned revision of the Framework Educational Programmes (standards) could be an opportunity to test the use of the EQAVET quality cycle at system level and possibly at the level of schools (as providers of vocational education and training) to ensure that the system of VET is able to meet the changing social and professional needs of individuals and diverse communities. This could be the EQAVET's contribution to VET quality assurance in the Czech Republic in the near future.

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