

## Slovakia - New architecture of VET governance

In the 1990s, links between VET schools and enterprises were broken because of, the dramatic restructuring of the national economy after the collapse of the command economy. Old institutional relations were broken and new ones were hard to establish. In the 2000s, a gradual economic revival created a more positive environment for a revitalisation of the cooperation between schools and employers.

Nevertheless, a financing scheme based almost exclusively on per capita funding rewarded schools for massive production, disregarding quality and alignment to labour-market needs. Thus, secondary VET schools concentrated on the provision of VET demanded by students and their parents rather than on VET demanded by the labour market.

The Act on VET No. 184/2009 Coll. was highly expected by all stakeholders as an impulse to change. Indeed, it opened the door for a wide and deep assertion of employers' needs into the provision of secondary VET. This act stipulated the establishment of four-partite *Regional VET Councils* - advisory bodies affiliated to self-governing regions and similarly of a four-partite *National VET Council* affiliated to the government to cover trans-regional topics. These councils consist of representatives of State administration, self-governing administration, employers and representatives of trade unions and/or employees.

Furthermore, 'sectoral assignees' for respective (sectoral) fields of study were agreed by the Ministry of Education and the representatives of employers, and set in Annex No. 8 of the Decree of the Education Ministry No. 282/2009 Coll. on Secondary Schools. Professional organisations of employers ('sectoral assignees') are supported by newly created *Sectoral VET Councils*. These councils are composed predominantly of representatives of employers chaired by the president of the 'sectoral assignee' institution and co-chaired by the representative of the respective sectoral ministry and by the representative of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. While the Ministry of Education is not represented, the sectoral expert from the State Institute of Vocational Education is an obligatory member to take care of the compatibility of Sectoral VET Council's proposals with educational legislation.

Although the Ministry of Education has remained responsible for the development of overall VET strategies, the supply of sub-national strategies to the four-partite National VET Council and subsequently to the Ministry of Education is regulated by this act: sectoral VET strategies, regional VET strategies and plans of labour-market needs.

During 2010, all but one of sectoral strategies were elaborated by the respective sectoral ministries. Only the strategy to be elaborated by the Ministry of Culture is pending. Furthermore, all eight self-governing regions, assisted by Regional VET Councils, developed their regional VET strategies. All these strategies were submitted to the National VET Council for discussion.

Nevertheless, the quality of employers' contribution to VET strategies depend substantially on the quality of their data – and this is the crucial challenge coming from the Act on VET. The problem with both a lack of relevant data and underdeveloped research is transparently visible from the failure of employers to deliver valid and relevant 'plans of labour market needs'.

The law stipulated that 'sectoral assignees' assisted by sectoral councils should elaborate plans of labour-market needs in terms of estimated number of graduates in respective study and training branches required by the labour market for the following five years. Financing

and subsequently maintaining of schools delivering graduates of other profiles and/or over the required volumes should be affected by this, bringing them at risk of closure in the future. This is an extraordinarily powerful tool expected to change networks of schools and programmes to adjust them to employers' needs.

Plans covering 19 fields were elaborated, while four fields remained uncovered by December 2010. The results are unsatisfactory from all players' points of view: the National VET Council, the Ministry of Education and the 'sectoral assignees' themselves.

The Slovak Chamber of Craftsmen, which was assigned a task to elaborate a unified procedure for collecting data and elaborating plans of labour market needs, declared in its background document submitted to the National VET Council that recent 'attempts of employers associations and professional organisations to collect labour market needs data for the following five years did not bring comparable data which could be used for elaboration of qualified prognosis of labour market needs'.

At the National VET Council meeting held in October 2010, employers agreed on cooperation with the Education Ministry and Labour Ministry to support the creation of the National System of Occupations, already in progress, backed by legislation and the European Social Fund (ESF) and the National System of Qualifications, also backed by legislation, however with a respective ESF project not yet launched.

The lesson learnt is valuable: Schools understand that they need to know employers' requirements, and employers now recognise that valid data and evidence-based policies are inevitable steps for further development of secondary VET. Both sides agree, that it is time to stop blaming each other for failures.

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