

National Policy Challenge Statement – Czech Republic

I. Introduction

According to terms of PROCSEE project the newly established National Committee for PHE Excellence (NCPHEE) met on 30th August 2016 in Prague and discussed topics that project PROCSEE opens. The PROCSEE project aims at strengthening Professional Higher Education (PHE) in Central and South-Eastern Europe, through a cooperation of all stakeholders within PHE sector.

Meeting was attended by relevant national stakeholders - representatives of the world of work – Confederation of Industry of Czech Republic and Chamber of Commerce, Higher education Institutions, Universities, Tertiary professional schools (Higher Vocational Schools) and also student's chamber and Professional Employees Association.

Through an open call, 4 experts were selected to help in the identification and also in proposing solutions of national policy challenges related to the thematic area. The selected Czech experts are also active participants of NCPHEE and they are very respected experts in Czech republic:

| Thematic Area | Expert | Institution |
|---|-----------------|--|
| Alignment of PHE with Regional Development Strategies | Karel Šíma | Centrum pro studium vysokého školství/Centre for Higher Education Studies |
| Promotion of PHE to respond to skill shortages | Jiří Nantl | Ředitel Středoevropského technologického institutu/Director Central European Institute of Technology |
| Organising and monitoring student placements in the world of work | Hana Slámová | Vyšší odborná škola informačních služeb/Higher Professional School of Information Services in Prague |
| Personal Learning Environments in PHE | Dominik Fellner | Vyšší odborná škola publicistiky/The College of Media and Journalism |

II. Overview of the PHE Sector in Czech republic

It should be noted that PHE is a topic in the Czech Republic for more than 20 years, but during that time discussion did not moved significantly ahead. Literally when discussing the PHE meaning and development, we could say that sometimes it was the time of "missed opportunities."

The separate system for professionally oriented Higher Education Institutions of the non-university type could not have been established. (There are only 2 PHEIs law-based currently, and around 40 private HEI with state approval). Also the objective and proper mechanisms within PHE could not have been set. Change of funding and search for new indicators is still not in sight. Professionally oriented programs are also provided by colleges (Higher Vocational Schools). They are working with same age group - high school graduates - but they must follow a completely different law (Education act vs. Higher education law).

In the 1990s when CASPHE and EURASHE were founded (as the political representation of the sector), the system was more or less binary – on one hand the universities, on the other hand the non-universities with professional profiling. It was black and white and clear. Currently the PHE sector is undergoing, same as whole society, dramatic changes. Even renowned universities (i.e. VŠCHT- University of

Chemistry and Technology in Prague) are now considering expanding of its profiles. The professionally oriented bachelor's programs have been and still are the core and basis, however in many countries (including the Czech Republic) there are also growing professionally oriented master's programs.

There are also some sectors where everything works relatively well – e.g. health professions (nurses). These sectors quite fulfil almost everything needed - working closely with the world of work, placements etc. They are involved in policy making, communicating with employers on the development, research, etc.

There is also another big issue: Tertiary professional schools (Higher Vocational Schools). The problem is - they are embedded in regional education system. This might make an impression, that they are even a burden for regions. From TPS's perspective there is an absence of a law specifically dedicated to them and their activities. Some of newly approved proposed tools, such as tax relief for employers, have yet questionable effects. They are helping somewhere, but not everywhere are positively accepted. Also the world of private schools is also very underestimated and its not really reflected. They often meet the definition of PHE schools. But due to their "privacy" their focus on PHE is often lost behind and unseen.

At the end, we have to say, there is no long-term concept for PHE.

III. Main Challenges faced by PHE

General agreement is that the connection between the PHE and the world of work is the key issue, which is not always clearly set and understood by all of the stakeholders - employers, schools and students. We have to say, that most universities are not interested to participate in PHE – in Czech Republic we have amongst the worst results from this point of view. We also identify fundamental lack of interest of employers in discussion with schools – there are many factors why – management of companies is mostly just short-term (3-5 years), mostly they need only acute solutions, they are not planning that far ahead etc.

The key is to change the negative perception of the word "qualification" in both academics – for them placement is something "inferior" and employer perspective – on the other hand. There should be quality general education (but this doesn't mean encyclopaedic knowledge). Employers need educated and independent graduates. There is plenty room for PHE schools because our future is full of major changes in Industry (4.0)...

We must emphasize, that not everyone will and can be manager, director or academic. We have to diversify and set criteria for quality standards. Good craftsman is worthy of admiration, there is no reason to look down upon him. There are also problems with basic student literacy in basic live skills. Life is now much heavier (complicated) than before, but general education is not taking this into account. The provision lags behind with its teaching methods there are no longer functioning. The lectures might seem even too dull for the nowadays' students. Sometimes, 40 years old teaching methods are used in school for teaching of the "current" generation. This corresponds with learning outcomes and student motivation...(very little). In Czech Republic we have 350 regulated professions, there is a general agreement, that this is "too much".

The "key players" in the field of PHE remain, of course, schools (providers of education) and employers. Previously neglected, but yet crucial players are students. Within then rapidly changing trends schools are often lagging behind students' needs and interest. On the other side, many of the students do not even meet the basic prerequisites for a successful career...

However, crucial role remains in the hands of political representation, only they can put theory really into practice.

IV. Ideal Future Scenarios for PHE

The key-debate is on the definition of standards. It is also necessary to respect smart employers. Everything in the world is rapidly changing and the communicative and adaptable graduates are needed. There is no other solution than that the world of work and schools (providers of education) will live together and cooperate. The ideal situation – future scenario - is that the school has a designated employee only to communicate with world of work. The responsible person listens every day to the needs and identifies priorities (not once in a while, but continually).

It is also important within our Country to gain experience from European instruments – initially there was scepticism – especially in the Czech Republic, which is known always by finding “its own way”, still time has shown to us the relative functionality of these instruments (EQC, ECVET etc.).

Employers, resp. experts from world of work should ideally teach more at schools, be present at schools, be active in the development of Curriculum / but this is now blocked by Accreditation legislation again etc. If they don't have prescribed publications, they cannot officially guarantee quality of teaching... There should be strengthening the role of “professional regulators”, who closely and continuously monitor their own sector. They can be very useful e.g. within Accreditation commissions.

The ideal situation is to find a somehow “functional present” under current legislation, but also continue finding a long-term vision, where this sector should be oriented. There is also need to bridge the gap between private and public schools.

There is a complete consensus on the necessary separation of the general education and vocational education. E.g. during high school one could get qualifications as bricklayer, tiler, painter etc. – however high school diploma as well, separately. Therefore if one is not successful in “maturita”- school leaving examination, the qualification reached can be used for work purposes. Two levels next to each other. There is also common understanding that whole system should be more open - It is true for both – schools and employers.

It is necessary to respond to modern challenges, digitalization and there should be a strong emphasis on the quality of teachers, especially within PHE. They must understand what are they teaching in the context of practice.

In the future, we have to set up truly long-term goals and priorities (but not to forget the short term goals and functionality as well).

----- *The invitation, agenda and list of participants are attached to this document.*

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