

Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems

Country Report: Slovak Republic

Editors:

Ing. Vera Czesana, CSc.
Ing. Zdenka Matouskova, CSc.

Team of authors:

Ing. Vera Czesana, CSc.
Ing. Vera Havlickova,
Doc. Ing. Anna Kaderabkova, Ph.D.
PhDr. Olga Kofronova, Ph.D.
Ing. Zdenka Matouskova, CSc.,
Ing. Alena Zukersteinova,

Editorial assistant:

Jiri Vymazal

Translation:

Hana Cechova
Marc Corner

This report is one of a series of European country reports. It has been written to support a larger report: **Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET**, prepared by the Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission. This report is not intended as an official view. But rather independent insight into specific aspects of National VET systems in Europe.

Acknowledgement

The project team would like to express their gratitude to the experts from Slovak National Observatory, namely PhDr. Juraj Vantuch and Dagmar Vesela for their kind co-operation, flexible support, provision of background materials and especially for very useful comments and recommendations. The team also thanks representatives of the European Training Foundation for access to recent data and studies provided by the foundation.

Theme 1: Progress of national VET systems towards meeting the challenges of Lisbon

	QUESTION
1	Strategies and barriers for improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of Initial VET (IVET)
	What strategies are being used to by government, social partners and providers etc. to achieve these objectives:
	a) Raise the status of IVET?
	b) Improve the attractiveness of IVET?
	c) Increase the flexibility of IVET?
	d) What are the main barriers to achieving these objectives?
2	Reducing the number of early school leavers
	How does your country relate to other countries in terms of the contribution to increasing or reducing the number of young people:
	a) Who leave education or training at the earliest opportunity and with few or no recognised qualifications?
	b) Who leave formal education with low levels of basic skills at age of 15?
3	Increasing VET at tertiary level
	What steps are being taken to establish or improve technological and vocational qualifications at the tertiary (higher) educational level? Please refer in particular to any attempts to make pathways more flexible, and to introduce shorter post-secondary VET courses.
4	Incentives for updating knowledge & skills
	What initiatives and measures are the following taking to motivate employees to update knowledge and skills?
	a) Government
	b) Employers
	c) Other stakeholders
	d) Please provide examples (if any) of the contribution of VET to successfully promoting inclusion
5	Meeting the challenges of an aging population
	Please identify any innovations and initiatives in VET that are being introduced to encourage older people (55+) to remain at work longer and to participate in training and other forms of lifelong learning.
6	Effectiveness and efficiency of VET

	a) In the current the national debate, how effective is the system of VET perceived to be? (Is the VET route effective in fostering individual careers, self-confidence and personal identity? Benefits of training for employers? Is the VET route effective in combating youth unemployment?)
	b) In the current national debate, is the VET system seen as offering efficiency/ good value for money? (These questions are given as examples and need not all be answered: Who is investing in VET - the state, the employers, and individuals – and what are their benefits? How can we make the best use of existing resources: Better balance between practical and theoretical training, accreditation of prior learning, raising completion rates, etc.? Improving management and organisation of VET?)
	c) What are the main trends in terms of investment in VET (Public investment? Incentives to employers as well as to individuals to invest more? Public-private partnerships?)

Theme 2: Innovation in Teaching and Learning Processes

7	Improvements in learning processes and contents
	Please identify innovation in teaching and learning methods and contents for VET. (For example, developments towards student-centred learning styles; a possible shift from content/subject based learning to competences/outcomes; more problem- and project-based pedagogy, and contextualised work-based learning processes and contents.)
8	Improving the integration of different learning sites; integration of formal and informal learning
	Please Identify the institutional and organisational links (or lack of them) between learning sites at schools and companies. (How are the traditional barriers between learning at schools/colleges and learning in the workplace being overcome? How far can “simple experiencing” at work be transformed into a “reflective experiencing” by linking company-based learning with school/college based learning?)
9	Evaluation and quality assurance of VET provision
	What systems are in place to evaluate the processes and outcomes of VET – for learners, systems and the system? a) For the individual (assessment of competences and knowledge) b) For the institution (internal/external quality management) c) For the system (monitoring and evaluation)
10	Professional development and status of teachers and trainers
	Teachers’ and trainers’ professional development is now recognised as a decisive factor in improving learning processes and outcomes. Please indicate the key

	<p>initiatives and innovations that are taking place in the training of teachers and trainers.</p> <p>(These questions are given as examples and need not all be answered: Is initial training being introduced or reformed? If so, how? What provision is made for the continuous professional development of VET teachers and trainers? How do innovative education and training practices benefit students, companies and society? What is the position of trainers within organisations? How much autonomy do they have? What is the professional status - social status and self-esteem - of VET teachers and trainers in the society?)</p>
--	--

Theme 3: Building European Competences for a European Labour Market

11	Challenges & policies in relation to the Lisbon employment strategy
	a) What are the main challenges to achieving the Lisbon employment objectives for your country, according to the European Commission 'Kok Report'?
	b) Please identify any policies and strategies being developed to tackle these challenges.
	c) Please identify any obstacles standing in the way of reform of VET in relation to achieving the Lisbon objectives.
12	Involving stakeholders
	a) Please describe the role of stakeholders or social partners in the planning of VET at national, sector and company level
	b) Which actions to anticipate and recognise skills and qualifications needs (at national, sector or regional level) for your country do the European social partners identify as important in their recent report?
13	Transparency, recognition & mobility
	A key objective of the Copenhagen Agreement is to establish mechanisms that can lead to a European labour market. Credit transfer, qualification frameworks and Europass are specified in this respect. What measures, if any, are being developed at national and/ or sector level
	a) To establish credit frameworks
	b) To establish or reform a qualifications framework
	c) To implement Europass?

Theme 1: Progress of national VET systems towards meeting the challenges of Lisbon.

1. Strategies and barriers for improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of initial VET

Before 1989, the status of IVET was ensured by *numerus clausus*, which determined how many pupils/students individual schools should be admitted to first years. As part of central economic planning the need for various professions was also planned. From these figures a binding number of students to be admitted would be derived – not only at secondary, but at tertiary level as well. About 85 % of basic school leavers¹ had to go to VET and just 15 % to grammar schools.

Immediately after the political change, strong pressures occurred towards increasing student intake in the academic, general education stream. Basics of vocational training at grammar schools were removed due to low student interest, with the exception of basics of business and programming.

By the early 1990s, the number of students at secondary vocational schools² (SVS) fell significantly³. Additionally, a strong offensive started against SVS “maturita” programmes. This mostly ideological criticism⁴ against SVS ended as early as 1990 by a legal measure⁵ that preserved the possibility of organising “maturita” programmes at SVS. SVSs have been trying to fulfil students’ desire for “maturita” education because the social status of VET was traditionally enhanced by the completion of a “maturita” examination.

The **National Programme of Upbringing and Education in the Slovak Republic for next 15 to 20 Years** (the Millenium Project adopted by the government 2001) has set for the the objective of increasing the proportion of grammar school (*gymnázia*) students from the current 18% to 25-30% of the relevant age group. This proposal has been inspired, among other things, by the belief that young people are made to decide on their careers too early. General secondary education makes it possible to defer the choice until when the individuals are more responsible.

As part of the Millenium Project there is a proposal to increase the general component in educational programmes particularly in SVSs and SSSs (Secondary Specialized Schools⁶). The competencies that can be made use of in employment –

¹ Basic school lasts 9 years, provides primary and low secondary education.

² SVSs provide mainly 3 year courses ended by apprenticeship certificate. Small part of SVSs provides also 4 year courses ended by maturita exam

³ In the course of 1990s there has been an increase in the interest of students in “maturita” programmes. In 2000, 23% of young people of the relevant age group entered general education (in 1995 it was around 19%), 55% entered secondary specialized schools leading to “maturita” (53% in 1995). The proportion of vocational programmes without “maturita” decreased to 22% compared to 30% in 1995³. (Country Monograph, p. 38)

⁴ VET education leading to „maturita“ within SVS was considered to provide insufficient quality and to produce politically conformist working intelligence. Source: J. Vantuch: Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training in Slovakia, p.44

⁵ Act No. 171/1990

⁶ SSSs mainly 4 year courses provided technical education ended by maturita exam

i.e. communication skills, capacity to work with information, language skills, practical psychology (conflict management, teamwork, leadership, motivation, etc.), and entrepreneurship skills should be emphasized. There is also a proposal to increase expenditure on education (up to 6% of GDP), and, for example, to promote participation of young people in national and international competitions. Good results of VET students achieved in such competitions would certainly help raise the status of VET. However, the Millennium Project does not set forth any practical measures to achieve the relevant objectives.

Based on public debate on the Millennium Project and following the government's Policy Statement of 1998 the **National Programme for Upbringing and Education** was developed. Apart from other points, it outlines further development of VET. The Programme reiterates the aim set forth in the Millennium Project, according to which approx. 70-75% of basic school leavers should participate in VET at secondary level⁷. Most of them should achieve full secondary vocational qualification (with "maturita"). Secondary VET (two and three-year courses at SVSs) should be delivered more closely according to the employers' need. There are also plans to reduce and innovate the scope of study and training programmes, to develop broadly conceived programmes (approx. 20 programmes corresponding to industries). This should be accompanied by changes aiming at ensuring a broad concept of the vocational component in VET programmes. The quality of practical training will be ensured by the operation of training centres, which will be set up by mainly by employers' and entrepreneurs' associations.

In order to postpone career choice until when the student is older and to facilitate his/her transfer to a different programme or to *gymnázium*, the first year of SSSs should be designed as identical for all programmes. Emphasis will be placed on general education, key competencies and introduction to labour market issues.

Although one of the priorities set out is support for networking between schools and enterprises, the flexibility of IVET in terms of meeting the needs of employers is insufficient. This is reflected in a government statement: „The adjustment of school leavers, predominantly secondary specialized school and secondary vocational school leavers, to labour market needs will be enhanced by means of reducing non-effective information and knowledge in curricula and strengthening general education in these schools.“

The implementation of the change proposed requires not only robust political and public support and willingness on the part of education providers and social partners, but also the relevant financial resources. The critical shortage of financial resources is considered to be the most severe obstacle to the implementation of the plans proposed. The new government elected in 2002 presented, in June 2003, a new outline for legislation on education. A new education bill should be put forward to the government by the end of 2004.

The plans for higher education are contained in the **Outline of Further Development of Higher Education for the 21st Century**, which was approved by the government in 2000. One of the objectives set out in this material is to facilitate access to HE to a larger number of applicants. Participation in tertiary education will

⁷ Further liberalisation of the admission procedures is in progress. Nation-wide monitoring of ISCED 2 educational outputs started in 2003 with the aim to gradually cancel entry exams to secondary schools. Input testing should be replaced by output testing.

gradually converge with that in developed countries. First of all, access to the first cycle of tertiary education should be increased. New educational opportunities are also expected in connection with an increasing use of ICT and the introduction of new forms of education – particularly for part-time students (virtual universities, distance learning etc.). In view of the high demand for certain programmes, mainly humanities, the graduates from which are not demanded accordingly in the labour market, there is a proposal for prescribing, by law, intake figures for some programmes. Universities could admit students in excess of this figure, but would have to cover the costs from other than public sources. Public resources would only be available for the prescribed number of students.

The status and attractiveness of higher education should be also promoted by changes in admission proceedings. The changes should enhance the transparency and objectiveness of the proceedings, eliminate corruption and to prevent the situation where the applicants are required to prove knowledge that cannot be acquired at secondary level. One of the approaches is to replace entrance examinations by objective assessment of the knowledge of secondary school leavers. Standardised and objective "maturita" examination should become one of the criteria for admission to HE. However, universities would still retain the right to decide on specific methods of testing the competencies of applicants.

Due to their autonomy, universities can respond to the changing demand in a flexible manner. However, this has resulted in an excessive number of programmes⁸. Programme overlap and their name is often the only difference between them. Some provide too narrow specifications. The policy envisages optimisation of the number and structure of study programmes for all three cycles of tertiary education. The reduction in the number of programmes should particularly concern the first cycle. In the following cycles, specialisation occurs which results in an increasing number of programmes.

The attractiveness of studies at tertiary level will also increase by means of more profound co-operation with industry, which should focus on updating the content of education and on the development of applied research in universities. Co-operation with foreign institutions including student and teacher exchanges is also an attractive feature for students.

The attractiveness of IVET and the choice of an educational route is influenced by the relevant **information and counselling system**. There is a three-pillar system for the provision of career guidance and counselling. The first subsystem is based on the traditional guidance system at schools. The second subsystem is based on institutions in the employment sector and represented by the network of psychological counselling centres providing career guidance and counselling as a sub-component of family counselling. The third subsystem is covered by a network of regional and district labour offices focused on serving adults, in particular those who are unemployed. However, emphasis should be placed on the quality of counselling and a better system for the training of counsellors. In order to improve the quality of the information and counselling system, experts recommend that an Action Plan should be developed (including a model of career guidance, a profile of counsellors

⁸ The Outline of Further Development of Higher Education for the 21st century states that, in 1999, Slovak universities provided 64 Bachelor programmes, 401 Master and Engineer programmes and 228 Doctoral programmes.

and financing schemes), better networking of key players should be promoted and a National Forum of experts should be established.

The development of continuing education is the subject of the **Continuing Education and Training Policy** for the Slovak Republic approved by government in 2002⁹. The policy sets out objectives until 2010.

An important role in designing development plans in vocational education and training and continuing vocational education¹⁰ is played by The Council of the Minister of Education for Vocational Education established in 2001¹¹. The Council is an expert advisory body which also assesses vocational education and training, submits proposals for improvement of VET with regard to methodology, content, structure, management, financing, legislation, links with labour market and employment of graduates, and contributes to the identification of measures designed to address the issue of quality and content of education.

2. Reducing the number of early school leavers

The proportion of early school leavers in the SR is one of the lowest both in the EU-15 and in the new member countries. The proportion of young people aged 18-24 who only achieved lower secondary education and do not continue studying was only 6.5% in 2002. Slovakia is already meeting the EU objective for 2010.

Proportion of population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education and not in education and training, 2002, (in %)

	EU 15	ACC	SK	benchmark EU 2010
Total	18.8	8.4	5.6	10.0
Females	16.2	6.9	4.6	
Males	21.4	10.0	6.7	

Source: Education and Training 2010 - The success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms, EC, SEC(2003) 1250, Brussels, 2003

One problematic group - in terms of their educational attainment and further education chances – is composed of young people who failed to complete all nine years of basic school. Another group consists of young people who completed basic school (lower secondary level) and did not continue studying or failed to complete further studies.

In recent years, the proportion of early school leavers has increased slightly – one half of the children are those from poorer families. They face social disadvantages and leave the education system for financial reason, and also due to lack of motivation and poor performance. The social benefits system provides an incentive for remaining in education amounting to some 40 EUR per months, which is designed for children from socially weaker backgrounds. The counselling system also contributes to increasing the motivation to remain in education.

⁹ Resolution of the Government No 157/2004.

¹⁰ Monographs candidate countries – Vocational education and training and employment services in the Slovak Republic. ETF, 2002.

¹¹ Government Resolution No 213 of 7 March 2001

The level of educational attainment among the Roma minority is traditionally low¹². This is the result of several inter-linking factors: (a) the existing education system is not ready to attend to the needs of Roma pupils; (b) the ethnic specificities in term of the value scale where education is not highlighted; (c) low standards of the social environment and unchallenging family background¹³.

A physical disability is not normally the primary reason for early school leaving. The standards of care for disabled children are traditionally high, and there is a well-developed system of special schooling and associated services, including counselling. Over the long term, however, there are plans to integrate more of these children to mainstream schools. A higher degree of integration is hindered primarily by lack of the relevant human and material resources at schools.

Juvenile persons up to 18 constitute one of the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market. In view of their age, insufficient qualification and zero work experience they have virtually no chances of succeeding in the labour market. Employers are not motivated to employ juveniles. They often end up in the grey economy or as unemployed. The proportion of unemployed juveniles currently hovers at around 3% of the overall number of the unemployed in the SR. The rate of unemployment in the 15-18 age group is around 45%¹⁴, which is three times more compared to the rate of unemployment in the 25-29 group.

3. Increasing VET at tertiary level

The Higher Education Act of 1990 introduced a structure of higher education featuring a two-cycle system of undergraduate and graduate degrees in contrast to the pre-1989 system based on the five-year integrated Soviet model. It also guaranteed fundamental academic rights and freedoms consistent with those enjoyed by western universities. In 2002, a new Higher Education Act was adopted, which, among other things, outlined the legal status of higher education institutions and their fields of study; allowed for the creation of higher education establishments other than universities; established accreditation procedures; distinguished the Bachelor, Master, Doctoral cycles along “Bologna” lines; and introduced a system of credits. The new laws were promulgated in April 2002, and divided higher education institution into the following legal entities: public higher education institutions, state higher education institutions, private higher education institutions. There are 27 higher education institutions in the Slovak Republic, of which 20 are public, 4 are state owned and 3 are private. The only higher education institutions that have remained under complete state ownership are two military, one police and one medical school. Two private institutions are accredited for bachelor studies only, and one offers both bachelor and master-level qualifications.

¹² Updated figures are not available. The data obtained before prior to 1989 show that almost 82% of Roma men and 83% of Roma women completed compulsory schooling and 5% of men and almost 9% of women have no education. Source: Slovak National Observatory of Vocational Training: Vocational Education and Training Against Social Exclusion, 2001

¹³ Source: Slovak National Observatory of Vocational Training: Vocational Education and Training Against Social Exclusion, 2001, p. 19

¹⁴ Nearly on half is young people after completion of basic school, 43% have vocational training without “maturita” and 7% failed to complete compulsory education.

The new Slovak Higher Education Law of April 1, 2002 distinguishes between study programmes of the first stage (Bachelor's), second stage (Master's) and third stage (Doctoral). It states that tertiary-level education occurs through study programmes at three levels: Bachelor, Master and Doctoral. Integrated Bachelor/Master programs are still recognized by the Accreditation Commission in subject areas such as medicine, pharmaceuticals and veterinary science, all of which are explicitly excluded by law from the 'Bologna' format. Only in exceptional cases and after authorization from the ministry may universities combine programmes of the first and the second levels into one long program. Integrated programmes are particularly favoured by forestry, architecture and certain fields of study at military higher education institutions.

No specific measures to support lifelong learning have yet been adopted. Nevertheless, the development of policy in this area has been subject to intensive debate. In 2000, the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning was adopted and, in 2001, the Act on Continuing Education was amended so that courses provided under the Act could be accredited. Discussion and implementation of the Memorandum were organised in accordance with a European Commission recommendation.

As to the science and engineering fields, the share of students (at ISCED levels 5-6) is fairly high in Slovakia within EU-25. In 2000/2001, the share of students in science and engineering fields reached 28 % (males 42 %, females 16 %), of which in science, mathematics and computing 8 % (males 11 %, females 5 %), and in engineering, manufacturing and construction 21 % (males 31 %, females 11 %). These relatively high shares, however, must be partly ascribed to the still low tertiary enrolment rates in Slovakia, i.e. to the limited accessibility of tertiary education in humanities. Consequently, the position of Slovakia looks quite unfavourable, when the shares are expressed of graduates in science and engineering fields per 10 000 of the population aged 25-34 - these were 3 in 2000/2001 (males 5, females 3).¹⁵

4. Incentives for updating knowledge & skills

What initiatives and measures are the following taking to motivate employees to update knowledge and skills?

a) Government

The Act on Continuing Education¹⁶ recognises continuing vocational education and training as a legitimate part of the educational system of the Slovak Republic. Continuing education is seen as a part of lifelong learning, and everybody, regardless of age and educational attainment, has the right to continue his/her education in accordance with his/her abilities and interests. The act specifies establishment of continuing training institutions, conditions of accreditation, issuance of certificates of completed training, etc.¹⁷ Amendment¹⁸ to the Continuing Education Act clarifies the

¹⁵ Education across Europe. Chapter G: Mathematics science and technology. EUROSTAT 2004.

¹⁶ Act No. 386/1997

¹⁷ Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training in Slovakia, National report 2000, Slovak National Observatory for Vocational Education and Training. Bratislava, 2000.

¹⁸ Act No. 567/2001

criteria for accreditation of institutions providing continuing training and thereby seeks to improve the quality of training.¹⁹

The concept of Life-long Learning was approved by the government in 2004. LLL strategy is based on the recently accepted legislation. Working group for LLL was established.

The government of the Slovak Republic has, in its Outline of the Development of Education for the upcoming 15-20 years, committed itself to establishing conditions for lifelong learning for as many learners as possible. Other objectives include the creation of an environment conducive to a free provision of educational opportunities ensuring the right to the choice of an educational path, the development of a competitive environment promoting innovation and advancement, and active support for continuing training of citizens. Moreover, in the area of continuing education the government aims to inter-link education and employment policies and to develop systematic co-operation between various sectors of the national economy and social partners.²⁰

Since 2004²¹ citizens may obtain a so-called “mobilisation contributions” of 1,500 SK per month (approx. 37 EUR). It is designed to help those in material need and their family members, provided they participate in education (acquiring, maintaining or improving knowledge, vocational skills and working habits for the purpose of finding employment at the time of material need).

There is no systemic approach to generation, provision and dissemination of information on continuing education. Over the long term citizens experience lack of information about educational opportunities. There are systems providing partial information, but they are not inter-related and there is no link to an information system about initial education and retraining programmes provided by labour offices. One of the demonstrations of the information deficit is the non-existence of counselling services for adults who want to learn further. Counselling services provided by labour offices are more focused on the unemployed.

b) Employers

In the Slovak Republic all institutions linked to foreign know-how and/or investors are considered supportive to learning in accordance to the respective firm culture. The indirect support of learning at the workplace was caused by the high level of corporate taxing, as a result of which organisations tend to provide training for their employees instead of transferring taxes to the state budget²². With the flat tax reform introducing 19% income, corporate and value-added tax in 2004, a specific measure promoting learning at the workplace might be necessary. Currently, there is no measure in support of this.²³

c) Other stakeholders

Out of the total number of 56 valid collective agreements at the master agreement level (CAMALS), vocational education issues were covered in 23 of them, which

¹⁹ Monographs candidate countries – Vocational education and training and employment services in the Slovak Republic. ETF, 2002.

²⁰ Outline of the Development of Upbringing and Education in the Slovak Republic for 15-20 Years (the Millenium Project)

²¹ Act No. 599/2003 on Assistance to those in Material need, as amended

²² Training costs are eligible to be included into the total costs of enterprises

²³ Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution: Slovak Republic. EC, 2003.

represent just 41 %. The provisions of these CAMALs were focused on the following areas: enhancement of training and retraining - in a majority of collective the provisions concerned arrangements for education and training with the aim to improve or change the qualifications of employees. Furthermore, the provisions refer to qualification upgrading - the obligation to create conditions on the part of the employer and the obligation on the part of employees to enhance, on a continuous basis, the qualifications needed to carry out official tasks and perform jobs agreed.²⁴ However, profound analyses of the agreements show that the provisions are too general and do not oblige the employer to their implementation. (see question 12 a)

One good example of successful cooperation with social partners in the field of VET is the activity initiated and financed by the Guild of Motor Vehicles Dealers and Services (GMVDS) aimed at reforming VET curricula in related branches. The guild has invited all key players to cooperate on a regular basis.²⁵ The result of this co-operation is modernised training programmes that were offered to 14 selected schools in 2003.

d) Please provide examples (if any) of the contribution of VET to successfully promoting inclusion

Education Academy is a non-government, non-profit training institutions with 45-year-long tradition in adult education. It provides its services in 38 branches throughout the Slovak Republic. The Academy delivers over 200 retraining courses accredited by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic or other central administrative bodies. Apart from this, it provides a wide range of courses of various type. The Education Academy is attended by over 50 thousand learners per year. By means of retraining, re-socialisation and re-integration courses it contributes to a large degree to decreasing unemployment and the risk of social exclusion²⁶.

Many measures are targeted at reintegrating the Roma population. Integration into the labour market is more successful in the case of Roma women. The measures may involve an element of training, e.g. training Roma to become teaching assistants in predominantly Roma schools. Various Phare projects are also making a valuable contribution to alleviating the conditions of Roma communities. A project designed to improve the educational and cultural life of Roma in the Spis region was completed in 2001.²⁷

5. Meeting the challenges of an aging population

The law on social insurance²⁸ pushes up, with effect from 2004, the retirement age level by nine months every year. This means that the same age level of 62 will be gradually achieved both for men and women. However, no substantial measures in

²⁴ Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training in Slovakia, National report 2000, Slovak National Observatory for Vocational Education and Training, Bratislava, 2000.

²⁵ Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution on Lifelong Learning: Acceding and candidate countries. EC, 2003.

²⁶ Vocational Education and Training Against Social Exclusion, Slovak National Observatory for Vocational Education and Training. Bratislava, June 2001.

²⁷ Monographs candidate countries – Vocational education and training and employment services in the Slovak republic. ETF, 2002.

²⁸ Law no. 461/2003

the area of education are being implemented in order to support economic activity of the older generation.

As regards older people, the only group that is considered, in line with the law on employment services, to be disadvantaged in terms of seeking employment consists of unemployed individuals over fifty. They receive increased attention from labour offices, which means, above all, easier access to retraining, provided that this is a suitable solution to the individual's situation.

*The National Programme for the Protection of Older People*²⁹ elaborates on the principles adopted by the UN³⁰ and focuses primarily on social issues. It is only as part of the *self-fulfilment principle* that the Programme requires that older people should have access to educational opportunities. The so-called "*third-age universities*" are considered as beneficial. However, this type of education is more on the leisure side and a means of preserving mental health, rather than support for economic activity at a higher age.

6. Effectiveness and efficiency of VET

a + b) In the current the national debate, how effective is the system of VET perceived to be? In the current national debate, is the VET system seen as offering efficiency/ good value for money?

Effectiveness of the VET system may be assessed on the basis of the level of functional literacy (i.e. the capacity to participate in the world of information), which is necessary in both working and personal lives of an individual. Functional literacy is the subject of the PISA project (Programme for International Student Assessment), which focuses on 15-year-old pupils. Three dimensions of functional literacy were assessed as part of the project – reading, mathematical and scientific. The SR did not take part in the PISA 2000 project³¹, where reading literacy of 15-year-olds was measured. In 2003 Slovak pupils participated in the PISA survey focused on mathematical literacy. The results in terms of international comparison will only be available after the international report is released in December 2004.

As regards final competencies of those who complete VET programmes, no valid data are available.

As for the effectiveness of VET in terms of the position of those who complete the programmes in the labour market, it must be said that secondary school leavers constitute one of the disadvantaged groups. Their rate of unemployment is approximately double the overall rate of unemployment. For example, unemployment of secondary specialized and secondary vocational school leavers in some cases exceeds 40% in winter months. Secondary specialized school leavers are in a somewhat better situation than secondary vocational school leavers.

The development of unemployment among school leavers shows seasonal and regional differences (the highest is in autumn and the lowest is in Bratislava –

²⁹ The programme was adopted in 1999 by the government and updated in 2002.

³⁰ In connection with declaring 1999 as the International Year of Older People

³¹ Zpráva o stave a úrovni v_chovy a vzdelávania v _kolách a _kolsk_ch zariadeniach v Slovenskej republike v _kolskom roku 2000/2001 (Report on the State and Standards of Education in Schools and School Facilities in the Slovak Republic in 2000/2001), Bratislava, October, 2001

respectively). The following table illustrates unemployment rates among school leavers in September in the relevant year.

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Rate of unemployment among school leavers	30.9%	33.8%	40.9%	37.4%	32.6%

Source: Institute of Education and Prognoses in Education

Note: School leavers = youth who completed or left initial education no more than within one year

High unemployment rate of graduates from secondary vocational schools is a result of a decline and collapse of some industries and doubtful prospects of companies. It is also influenced by internal problems of vocational schools, especially insufficient links between theoretical education and practice, an inadequate structure of vocational courses not matching the labour market needs, a decline in the quality of the vocational education caused by outflow of experienced qualified professionals (teachers, on-the-job trainers, technicians), and a slow modernisation of obsolete technical equipment.

Since 1 February 2004 a new law on employment services has been in place. It provides incentives to citizens in relation to their search for jobs. This also concerns school leavers.

c) What are the main trends in terms of investment in VET?

Public expenditure on education dropped from 5% of GDP in 1995 to 4.5% in 1998 and 4% in 2000. However, the decrease in the level of resources allocated to primary and secondary education is in line with the recent population decline in the relevant age groups. The use of the resources does not appear to be efficient, particularly in view of the features of VET schools network (an high number of schools with too few pupils). Public expenditure on VET increased between 1990 and 2000 from 0.6% of GDP to 0.7%, although the number of students dropped by 15% during the same period.

The attempt at rationalisation of the schools network at central level has failed (the work of the Inter-Sectoral Commission for Rationalisation of the Network of Secondary Schools, which reported directly to the government, has not resulted in any practical steps). In connection with decentralisation of governance of education (launched in 2003), regional governments are responsible for rationalisation of the network. What is important in this respect is the establishment of integrated secondary schools in 2002/03, which are the result of mergers between secondary specialized and secondary vocational schools.

Full decentralisation of the funding of education should get off the ground in 2005, when regions obtain a certain proportion of tax revenues. Regions will be obliged to respect centrally determined levels of minimum wages and operational costs, for which a minimum and a maximum will be set.

Since 2004, funding of schools strictly follows the “per capita” principle and schools are financed from the national budget receiving the same amount regardless of their founder (public, private, church-affiliated). Financial resources for capital spending is allocated from the Ministry of Finance, and resources for labour and operational costs are allocated from the Ministry of Education directly to regional authorities. The

“per capita” amount is calculated depending on the type of school, number of students, the length of the heating season, the number of integrated students with special needs and the number of part-time students. This system motivates school directors to make most efficient use of the school capacity.

In higher education, the efforts to introduce tuition fees in public universities have failed so far due to resistance on the part of students, the academic community and opposition parties. An amendment of 2002 made it impossible for public universities to provide part-time courses for a payment. The Ministry of Education intends to design and introduce a new system of tuition fees accompanied by student loans to be paid back depending on the future income of the student. In special cases the loan may be paid back by the state (e.g. in the case of teachers who take a job in public schools).

Theme 2: Innovation in Teaching and Learning Processes.

7. Improvements in learning processes and contents

There is an ongoing process of adjusting the existing educational programmes. Innovation of programmes is largely school-based. Schools may adjust 30% of the content of the curricula and 10% of the syllabi³².

Excessive specialisation and a large number of study programmes pose a serious problem in VET. On the one hand this is the “legacy” of the pre-1989 structure of VET, on the other hand it is the result of spontaneous curricular adjustments. Schools tried to meet demand and introduced new specialisations without eliminating previous programmes. Moreover, the establishment of private schools has contributed to the growing number of programmes³³.

This situation should be radically changed by the National Standard for Secondary VET adopted in 2002. The Standard sets forth 22 integrated groups of programmes and constitutes a foundation for the development of national framework curricula for VET. The framework curricula determine the following: the level of education and its standard length, key competencies, and the features, targets and content-related standards for general and vocational components of education. The adoption of the Standard has had significant effects on the development of professional profiles and educational standards of various programmes. Following the approval of the Standard a methodology for the development of educational programmes was developed in 2003. While its first part is viewed as a compendium for curricula development, the second part is focused on school-based curricula in line with the school’s and region’s specific needs. The new curricula will be introduced to schools after the new education bill is enacted³⁴.

³² In 1994/5 – 1999/2000 period 55 programmes at secondary vocational schools were innovated (19 without „maturita“, 36 with „maturita“), and 71 programmes at secondary specialized schools (with “maturita”) were innovated. A total of 70 new programmes at SVSs and 83 programmes at SSSs were designed.

³³ In 1999/2000 there were 1,104 specialisations and sub-specialisations as 28 subject areas.

³⁴ The new education bill is expected to be passed at the end of 2004.

In 2003 the Ministry of Education set up a Curricular Council which should support the creation of an effective mechanism for transfer and implementation of innovations initiated by the labour market and employers in curricula. Members of the Council are currently being designated from among expert working in industry and research institutes, and representatives of trade unions and employers' associations.

8. Improving the integration of different learning site; integration of formal and informal learning

In 1990 SVSs were separated from enterprises³⁵. At a time of economic transformation this was a logical step aiming to preserve the infrastructure of SVSs for education purposes and to prevent sales of school facilities in the case of company bankruptcies. This development has had a profound impact on VET, as not only economic, but also professional links between schools and enterprises were disrupted. Enterprises ceased to have any influence on the structure and content of VET in schools.

The original programmes at secondary vocational schools, which included 4 months of practical training in companies at the end of studies, had to be abandoned. An increasing number of schools are having problems meeting the objectives of practical training and its scope and quality has been decreasing. The 2002/03 report of the School Inspectorate also points to disappointing results in the area of practical training.

Secondary specialized schools with "maturita" programmes currently organise work placements lasting 2 weeks on the basis of an agreement between the school and a business organisation. Enterprises willing to provide work placements for students are selected in co-operation with students' parents so as to ensure that the focus of the placement corresponds to the specialisation the student has chosen. Work placements are supervised by instructors – employees of the company, who usually lack a teaching qualification.

Integration of formal and non-formal learning

Certificates obtained in the formal education system ("maturita" certificates, final examination certificates, diplomas) are fully accepted by employers. However, certificates obtained in the non-formal education system (certificates of completion) are not valid as testifying to a qualification. It is up to the employer what weight he/she will assign to the given certificate. Linked to the absence of a system for recognition of non-formal learning outcomes is the "dead ends" between the school and out-of-school education, particularly at secondary level.

On important step towards creating systemic links between IVET and CVT (i.e. formal and non-formal education) has been the adoption of the "Outline of Lifelong Learning in the SR" in 2004³⁶. The Outline sets forth a requirement that legislative conditions

³⁵ Only 5 schools constituted an exception. Companies which showed appropriate interested they have the relevant resources to support the school could retain the status of the school's founding body.

³⁶ Resolution of the Government No 157/2004.

should be established for recognition of non-formal education on the basis of a system of assessment using credits, which will be comparable with that applied in formal education. Moreover, there are plans to set up conditions for recognition of modules completed in various types of formal and non-formal education. This will ensure smooth passage along various educational routes and the availability of appropriate certificates for the labour market. The modular approach to the organisation of education is also stressed in the National Programme for Upbringing and Education (the Millennium project). It is viewed as one of curricular alternatives, not as the only approach possible.

9. Evaluation and quality assurance of VET provision

The National Programme for Upbringing and Education in the SR for the following 15 to 20 years (adopted by the government in 2001) has set forth as one of the tasks to develop a coherent policy and strategy for the evaluation of quality of the education system and its components (evaluation, self-evaluation), and to introduce a system for comprehensive quality management. Attention should also be paid to the development of instruments for monitoring, measuring and evaluation of learning outcomes throughout school attendance. These methodological issues should be addressed either by newly set up institutions such as the National Curriculum Board and the Institute for Curriculum, Standards, Accreditation and Certification in VET), or they should be addressed by existing institutions. The lack of institutions and experts with experience in educational output measurement remains to a weak point in the Slovak education system.

a) for the individual

Current assessment/certification mechanisms are school driven within the framework stipulated by the MoE. The framework provides for both written and oral exams and a five-point scale with one indicating excellence. The overall assessment of students is carried out in midterm and at the end of the school year. In the final year students take examinations based on which they are awarded diplomas as official documents to either enter the labour market (final exam certificate, apprenticeship certificate, "maturita" certificate) or to continue at higher levels of education ("maturita" certificate).

Due to the moderating function of the MoE, there is little control over the maintenance of homogenous standards and a consequent lack of comparability between schools. Assessment procedures are subjective and often lacking in reliability and validity. Some schools tend to "soften" the performance standards required from students (deterioration of quality is associated with declining student population, absence of experienced teachers, etc.).

The reform of the „maturita“ examination constitutes response to this situation. The exam is being tested on a pilot base and will be launched in 2005. The exam is proposed to comprise two parts: internal, managed by the school-based examination committee, and external, managed by a national examination committee (with the participation of social partners) and based on standardised tests.

Programmes provided by secondary vocational schools are completed by a final examination implemented by the schools themselves. Based on the examination the relevant certificates are issued final exam certificate and apprenticeship certificate.

There is a continuing drawback consisting in a low level of representation of experts-practitioners on examination panels for the practical part of the exam.

Assessment procedures in tertiary education are set by higher education institution. They include continuous assessment by teachers during exercise/seminar; credit assessment at the end of semesters; examinations; and state examinations. As regards certification, Bachelor's as well as Master's programmes are completed by a state examination and the defence of a thesis.

b) for the institution

Secondary schools are not obliged by law to carry out internal evaluation. They must only submit the school budget and a development plan to the school board. School boards have a consultative function over these issues but their decisions are not binding for the school director. In addition, secondary schools elaborate annual financial report for their managing authorities.

HE institutions are obliged to develop annual reports about their activities and reports about their financial performance. The structure of the report is determined by the Ministry of Education, to which it is submitted. The report must be made public. HE institutions must also make it possible for students to express their views on the quality of teaching and teachers by means of anonymous questionnaires.

External evaluation of secondary schools (unofficial) is performed by the school boards mentioned above, but also by regional self-governing authorities, which develop annual reports about the situation in education in their administrative areas. They also prepare plans for the development of education and, of course, the budget. Regional educational boards³⁷ have their say as regards the reports and the draft budget. They act as consultative bodies to regional offices, but their conclusions are not binding for the head of the regional office. School boards and regional boards comprise teachers, parents, pupils and representatives of the community and regional or local institutions. While the participation of representatives of the regional/district labour offices and other social partners is not explicitly stipulated in the law, they may be included.

Until the end of 1999 school inspection was managed by the MoE. In 2000 school inspection was transformed into an independent body - the "State School Inspectorate". The mission of the Inspectorate is to control and evaluate the quality of the educational process, as well as material, technical, human and management resources of schools³⁸. These tasks are being fulfilled by means of eight School Inspection Centres and their units in various locations. The State School Inspectorate prepares annual reports about the situation in upbringing and education, which is submitted to the MoE and then to the government. It is discussed in the committee for science, education, youth, sports and culture of the Slovak Parliament.

In early 2004 the State School Inspectorate was admitted as full member of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates. Preparation for the membership involved application of foreign practices and experience and has contributed to enhancing the quality of inspections.

External evaluation in a certain form is also carried out by sectoral ministries and social partners (trade unions and chambers). Their statement of opinion is required

³⁷ There are 8 regions.

³⁸ § 12 a § 13 The Act No. 596/2003 on State Administration and Self-government in Education

by law³⁹ as a basis for inclusion or exclusion of a particular school in or from the schools registry. The State School Inspectorate could require that a school should be excluded from the registry in the case of violation of law, lack of appropriate facilities or a bad quality of education.

State Institute of Vocational Education and Training (SIOV) gradually established 14 expert commissions (see also question 13). Their role, apart from others, is assessment of IVET programmes. The commissions include representatives of SIOV, labour market institutions, professional chambers, employers' associations and federations, companies, secondary schools, higher education institutions and regional offices.

External evaluation of HE institutions is conducted by the Accreditation Commission, which is a consultative body to the government. The Commission monitors and assesses the quality of education and research performed by HE institutions. Based on its findings it prepares recommendations for improvement. The accreditation process is governed by law, and the criteria used are approved by the Ministry of Education, which also takes the relevant decision based on a statement of the Accreditation Commission. Accreditation may either be granted for a particular programme (this concerns new students), for an indefinite period of time or for the period of two years.

Each HE institution is evaluated regularly once in six years as part of the process of comprehensive accreditation. The institution is obliged to submit materials concerning self-evaluation including student questionnaires⁴⁰, background material for accreditation of all activities it performs⁴¹ and materials for evaluation of research. Based on a report prepared by the Accreditation Commission the Ministry decides to grant, suspend, withdraw or not to grant authorisation to perform the activities mentioned above.

There is no systemic approach to quality assurance in continuing education, although the system of certification of training organisations has been introduced. Certification is voluntary. It is obligatory provided that the institution intends to deliver retraining courses funded by labour offices. Certification has been in progress since the early 1990s⁴². Only since 2002, however, has it been in line with the relevant law⁴³ stipulating specific conditions⁴⁴. Accreditation is valid for five years. The Ministry of Education is responsible for monitoring accredited training institutions, which may be disqualified in the case of violation of standards. However, the Ministry lacks the resources to carry out appropriate inspection.

³⁹ The Act No. 596/2003 on State Administration and Self-government in Education

⁴⁰ The law on higher education institutions stipulates that students should be given the opportunity to use anonymous questionnaires at least once a year to state their views on the quality of teaching and teachers.

⁴¹ This includes study programmes and associate professorship and professorship proceedings.

⁴² Between 1991 and 2001, 1 452 training institutions were given accreditation to offer 12, 000 training activities.

⁴³ Act No 567/2001

⁴⁴ In order to receive accreditation of the respective educational activity, an institution must provide documented evidence to the commission on the following: (a) the organisational structure of the institution, its personnel, its target clientele and its professional competence, (b) the teaching staff to be assigned to each course offered by the institution, (c) classrooms, teaching materials and equipment, (d) the curriculum and syllabus, the target competencies of graduates, the assessment procedures, training methodology and balance between theoretical and practical training.

The quality assurance system still lacks other components, such as certification of trainers, publication of the results of evaluation of programmes and institutions, a comprehensive information system about continuing education on offer, etc.

c) for the system

Monitoring of the education system is carried out by the Institute of Information and Prognoses in Education in line with the requirements of the Ministry of Education. The institute collects and processes statistical information about all public, private and denominational schools and school facilities. It publishes annually a statistical yearbook on education and an overview of the network of schools.

10 Professional development and status of teachers and trainers

a) TTT

Qualification requirements for teachers and other educational staff were stipulated in 1996 by the Decree of the Ministry of Education⁴⁵ on *Professional and Educational Competence of Educational Staff* as amended.

Qualified teachers are trained at teacher training faculties or in teacher training programmes provided by other HE institutions. Any individual who has a university degree and a so-called “pedagogical minimum” is considered to be a qualified teacher. Young teachers, although considered to be fully qualified, are supported in their transition to work by an experienced teacher appointed by the school’s director. All university teachers are expected to have advanced degrees, or scientific degrees.

The Decree mentioned above introduced “*qualification examinations*” that are divided into:

- the first examination for teachers who have completed higher education in the appropriate field of study or subject and have at least five years’ experience;
- the second examination for teachers who have completed higher education in the appropriate field of study or subject and have at least ten years’ experience.

Passing the first qualification exam constitutes a precondition for promotion to a higher pay category due to the gained certification of higher professional competence. Passing the second qualification exam is again certified, however, without obligatory promotions. However, employers may add a bonus to the obligatory rate of pay.

According to the Decree of the Ministry of Education⁴⁶ on *In-Service Education of Educational Staff* in-service education of teachers is carried out in the following forms:

- an involvement of the new educational staff in practical issues;
- preparation of senior educational staff receiving a bonus for seniority;
- on-going education;

⁴⁵ No. 41/1996 Coll.

⁴⁶ No. 42/1996 Coll.

- specialized innovative study;
- specialized study leading to further qualifications;
- extended courses.

In-service training is predominantly organised by methodological centres funded by the Ministry of Education. Methodological centres serve as organisers rather than performers of the training. Usually they subcontract experienced VET teachers, university experts or other specialists. The quality of in-service training depends on the ability of methodological centres to attract quality lecturers for extremely low fees, and on fund-raising skills.

All principals and deputy principals of schools, including vocational schools, are obliged by law to undertake a two-year training course on school management. These courses are often organised by institutes of education and training⁴⁷ established by the ministries and by County Methodological/Training Centres. There are also some examples of successful distance learning programmes in the area of management training. For example, the City University, Bratislava organises this type of programme and uses curricula, study materials, teaching methods and assessment procedures used in the Open University in the United Kingdom. Similarly, the City University and its campuses in Trencin, Bratislava and Poprad use know-how provided by the City University of Bellevue, USA.

Considerable progress in management training has been achieved by a switch from classic lecturing to active learner-oriented methods. Since 1990, access to modern literature and manuals on the whole area of management has improved considerably and provides opportunities for individual learning. There has also been a rapid development in access to the Internet and its educational sources.

In continuing teacher training the upgrading and development of the knowledge of teachers of vocational subjects receives inappropriate attention. Teachers loose contact with the current technological development in the given field, as the links between schools and enterprises have been disrupted. Even if the teacher seeks to learn individually, he/she has no chance to communicate the findings to the students as part of practical training, because the school facilities are often outdated. This limits the capacity as well as willingness of teachers to take part in updating vocational curricula.

An opportunity in this respect consists teachers' involvement in international projects aimed at curricular innovations, e.g. those organised by the State Institute of Vocational Education and Training or based on school partnerships within the Leonardo da Vinci and Comenius programmes. Additional opportunities must be created by means of involvement of social partners in quality assurance.

b) Status

The remuneration in education is extremely low and the difference between the national average wage and the education sector wage is increasing, representing 94%, 82%, 79% of the national average in 1991, 1998, 2000, respectively⁴⁸. The

⁴⁷ For example, the State Institute of Vocational Education in Bratislava, which is part of the Ministry of Education, the Institute for Vocational Training and Retraining of the Ministry of Economy, the Agro-Institute (Nitra) of the Ministry of Agriculture etc.

⁴⁸ Labour Force Survey, 2Q.

annual increase in wages is below inflation (to the year 2000) and the official tariff wage increase is usually carried out at the expense of bonuses due to the insufficient increase (or even decrease) in total payroll funds.

Many very capable and creative educators that might act as valuable innovators in schools left the education sector, having found other better paid opportunities in the business sector. The low remuneration strengthens the tendency to consider education just as a secondary option for those failing to assert themselves in better jobs. According to a survey, up to about 30 % of full-time student teachers are looking for other than teacher positions⁴⁹.

As a consequence, ageing, an increasing number of unqualified educators, increasing signs of burnout, continuing feminisation, and the tendency toward career fluctuation among young educators are the most significant features observed among teaching staff. At basic and secondary schools unqualified teachers teach up to 35 % of lessons⁵⁰.

Theme 3: Building European competences for a European Labour Market.

11. Challenges & policies in relation to the Lisbon employment strategy

According to Kok's report, VET should contribute to the fulfilment of the Lisbon employment strategy objectives in the following manner:

a) to ensure greater access to training for the unemployed

The right of every citizen, regardless of age and educational attainment, to continue his/her education in accordance with his/her abilities and interests is acknowledged by the Act No 386/97 on continuing education. However, training for the unemployed is not considered to be an efficient tool for fighting unemployment as a consequence of a high dead weight and low absorption of the labour market. The government believes that the limited amount of funds available is more efficiently spent by new foreign investors who usually require the coverage of training and retraining costs by the state as a condition for direct investment. Similarly, retraining provided at regional level takes the form of specific training for an agreed position rather than training aimed at increasing of employability of the unemployed. New employment policies introduced in 2004 are based on a considerable reduction of unemployment and social benefits, administrative supervision (obligatory visits to a labour office every week) and targeted proactive financial incentives for real job seekers. "Mobilisation" bonus will also be given to those in retraining.

b) to bridge the gap between skills acquired in initial education and the skills needed in the labour market

⁴⁹ Source: Situation of VET Teachers and Trainers in Candidate Countries – Slovakia 2002

⁵⁰ Source: Situation of VET Teachers and Trainers in Candidate Countries – Slovakia 2002

One of the explicit aims of the process of rationalisation of the secondary schools network initiated in 1999 has been to support the adjustment of the education system to labour market needs. According to the new Law on Education, the MoE is responsible for defining framework educational programmes, which may then be adapted by individual schools for up to 40 % of the curricula in line with the features and requirements of the local labour market. Social partners are often involved in updating the curricula. One good example of such co-operation is the modernisation of curricula for programmes related to car industry. In this case the industry requirements for the knowledge and skills of students in the relevant programmes have been taken into account. (see also question 7)

Another contribution to matching supply of programmes and demand in the labour market is a good choice of an educational route. The main preconditions have been established for individuals to be able to consult experts about their aptitudes and prospective employment opportunities. Attention must be paid to the availability of these services and their quality, which is related not only to the qualifications of the counsellors, but also to the fact whether or not the counsellors have the relevant information about anticipated labour market developments in terms of demand. The availability of counselling services provided by labour offices is expected to be substantially improved by including them into the instruments of active employment policy⁵¹.

c) greater incentives to invest in training and to facilitate access to training

(see question 4)

12 Involving stakeholders

a) The role of stakeholders or social partners in the planning of VET at national, sectoral and company levels

In consequence of the previous developments the structure of social partners is not yet consolidated – as concerns both employers and employees (improperly developed structures at regional, professional and sectoral levels).

The issue of human resources development, particularly vocational education and training, is the subject of social dialogue between social partners, but it is not at the top of the agenda. The priorities addressed through social dialogue include remuneration of employees, employment terms, hygiene and safety at work, the provision of social services to employees, etc.

There are General Agreements that are annually signed at national level. Although they contain provisions concerning training and employability, they are very general. The provisions fail to set any measurable outputs, nor do they determine methods of achieving the aims set forth. The effectiveness of such agreements is therefore very low.

The involvement of social partners in addressing issues related to VET is particularly important at regional level. At this level, social partners have certain room to take part in influencing the course of the educational process in secondary specialized and vocational schools. Some regional tripartite councils undertake some activities in this area.

⁵¹ Law No 5/2004 on Public employment services

Institutionalised involvement of social partners was partly hampered by conflicts concerning tripartism and through institutional changes at the regional level caused by the decentralisation reform. The government in criticism of “corporativism” signalled the intention to revise the recent tripartite practice (and even Tripartite Act) as hampering reforms, and to revise the current legislation affecting chambers and other representative corps requiring obligatory membership considered a barrier of initiative individuals. Further development of social partnership in general and in VET in particular requires time for clarification of the new status of the social dialogue in SR and stabilisation of new regional governments.

There is substantial room for further improvement in terms of collective bargaining – both as regards support for VET and addressing the issue of unemployment. An analysis of collective agreements has revealed that their approach to the issue of continuing training of employees is not coherent, words are more important than actions and the relevant industrial standards are only mechanically adopted (see also question 4 c).

The standard of corporate collective agreements differs depending on the particular company and its financial situation. In view of this, there are varying approaches to VET of employees, while some companies pay appropriate attention to this issue.

Since recently, the issue of education, including VET, has been receiving increased attention. Various professional events have taken place, commissions have been formed and measures proposed. However, these actions lack coherence which would facilitate synergic effects and bring harmony into the issues of organisation, funding and legislation.

b) Actions to anticipate and recognise skills and qualifications needs (at national, sector or regional level) for your country do the European social partners identify as important in their recent report

Assessment and forecasting mechanisms constitute the weakest point of the Slovak VET system, together with the still non-existent system for quality assurance. Although all policy documents fully recognize the importance of this issue, progress in reality is very slow. Hopefully, with the administration reform resulting in stable institutions and decentralized responsibilities, the basic conditions for the introduction of quality assurance and skills needs assessment based on regional labour market developments could be established.

Nevertheless, interesting grassroots activities have emerged, e.g. those promoted by the relevant guild in the care industry, and as art of international projects (for example, the Canadian-Hungarian-Slovak DACUM project).

The responsiveness of the VET system to the needs of the labour market is constrained by the lack of systematic collection of data about the labour market in Slovakia. There is no reliable information on employers’ development plans, future job openings and the skills and competencies required by the labour market. As a consequence of this, the development of core skills, competence-based qualifications and skills upgrading in the schools system is driven by input standards rather than output standards that would be defined in line with labour market requirements. This situation contributes to the continuing mismatch between the skills developed in VET schools and the emerging new requirements of the labour market.

13. Transparency, recognition, mobility

a) Credit Framework

First steps towards the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) were taken in pilot projects within the Tempus programme in the early 1990s – it has been used as a support tool for student mobility within the Socrates/Erasmus programmes. However, ECTS was effectively introduced in 2002 under the new Higher Education Act and following a decree concerned with the credit system. Prior to 2002, several higher education institutions used a credit system but there was no standard model. The other credit systems in use have been introduced in most - mainly traditional - universities. According to the new law, all higher education institutions are required to introduce a credit system based on the ECTS by September 2005. The provisions of the law allow the student to complete - within the framework of his/her programme - periods of study in another Slovak or foreign faculty or university. Currently, ECTS or other credit point systems are largely used in the first two cycles and to a lesser degree at the PhD level throughout the whole tertiary sector.

There is not a credit system secondary and post-secondary levels.

b) To establish or reform a qualifications framework

There is not a national system of qualifications in Slovakia. However, various steps have been taken towards the development of qualification standards. In 1996 a government resolution stipulated the task of “preparing qualification standards and educational standards derived from these”. Since then, the Ministry of Labour has supported an analysis of 470 occupations out of some 3,000 occupations registered in the labour market (ISCO – 88) in terms of the process and methods related to the development of qualification standards. The results of this analysis do not constitute qualification standards as such – rather, they characterise the qualifications. Over 300 of these characteristics have been presented to the State Institute of Vocational and Technical Education to be used in the development of educational standards.

There has been progress made in terms of methodology – work is underway on the methods for the development of qualification and educational standards. Since 1999 expert commissions (ECs) have been set up on a tripartite principle⁵², which play a consultative and co-ordinating role in the development of the standards (among other responsibilities) in the field of SVS branches. In 2002 these ECs were replaced by 14 new ECs⁵³ responsible for the whole secondary VET. The main task of EC is to deal with the content of VET, and conceptual and methodological issues of VET (assess and express standpoints to the aims and tasks of educational standards, VET educational programmes, pedagogical documents, forms and methods of instruction, didactic tests, experiments). Activities of ECs are co-ordinated by Coordinating Council⁵⁴ (CC) created in 2002. EC are advisory bodies to MoE at national level in VET issues. Conclusions, standpoints, and expressions of ECs and the CC have the

⁵² 16 expert commissions are led by an expert who represents the relevant ministry, and 18 commissions are led by an expert of the State Institute of Technical and Vocational Education.

⁵³ EC include representatives of SIOV, respective sectors, labour market institutions, professional chambers, employers' associations and federations, companies, secondary schools, HEI, regional offices, institutions, etc. Over 200 professionals are expected to serve on the EC, with additional professionals participating in sub-commissions.

⁵⁴ The Chairman of CC is ex officio the director of SIOV, and CC members will consist of chairpersons of individual EC.

character of proposals and recommendations and create basis for MoE decision-making with regard to VET.

Diploma Supplement

Currently, some higher education institutions are issuing a diploma supplement upon request from students. In accordance with the new Higher Education Act (2002), the diploma supplement will be appended to all qualifications earned from accredited programs of study. It is anticipated that the diploma supplement will be a mandatory addition to all credentials issued to students from the year 2004/2005 and beyond. Slovakia has signed and ratified the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications. The Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education is the Slovak ENIC/NARIC body responsible for the recognition and evaluation of foreign credentials.

Europass National Reference Point has been established in 2004. There is discussion underway on whether it should remain to be part of the Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education, or whether it should be transferred to the Ministry of Education.

Secondary school certification supplement was issued.

Mobility

The Tempus program had already played a role in reforming higher education in Slovakia and laid the foundations for cooperation with higher education institutes in the European Union. Community programmes such as Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci were made available in Slovakia in March 1998. Figures supplied by the Ministry of Education show that in the academic year 2001/2002 four percent of the Slovak student population spent time studying abroad — primarily in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Germany. The ministry goes on to state that, in order to fulfil the requirement that each student spend at least one semester in a foreign higher education institution, a significant increase in financial resources would be needed to raise the proportional number of students studying in foreign higher education institutions from the present four percent to 12 percent. From 1998 through 2002 student and teacher mobility experienced rapid growth, supported by co-funding from the PHARE programme. Since academic year 2001/02 there has been no PHARE co-funding. The number of outgoing students in the Erasmus programme has increased from 59 in 1998/99 to 578 in 2001/02, and the number of incoming students over the same timeframe has increased from four to 85. At present, out of 24 higher education institutions, 18 are involved in the Socrates/Erasmus programme. One newly established institution will join the programme this year. Slovak institutions of higher education have also participated, since 1998, in the Leonardo da Vinci programme. In the period 1998-2002 more than 2000 Slovak students took advantage of the Leonardo practical placements and exchanges, of which 17-20 percent were higher education students and teachers. Slovak institutions also participate in the CEEPUS program and also have a number of bilateral agreements.

List of Abbreviations

ACC	Acceding Countries
CAMAL	Collective Agreements at the Master Agreement Level
CC	Coordinating Council

CEEPUS	Central European Exchange Program for University Studies
CVT	Continuing Vocational Training
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro, Currency
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMVDS	Guild of Motor Vehicles Dealers and Services
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MoE	Ministry of Education
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SIOV	State Vocational Education Institute
SK	Slovak Koruna (Crown), Currency
SR	Slovak Republic
SSS	Secondary Specialized School
SVS	Secondary Vocational School
USA	United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Bibliography

Answers. Slovakia. 2004. London, QCA.

Consulting Process of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. National Report on LLL

(Konzultácia proces k Memorandu o celoživotnom vzdelávaní . Národná správa o C_V za Slovenskú republiku.)

http://www.education.gov.sk/main/dokument/konproj/memorand/spr_mem.htm

Hrebíková, M., Hanzelová, E., Molnárová, I.: *Vocational Education and Training against Social Exclusion.* 2001. Bratislava, Slovak National Observatory of VET.

<http://www.siov.sk/siov/dokhtm/7sno/snoen/archiv/vetagainstsocialexclusion.pdf>

Implementing Lifelong Learning in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution. Reply to the Commission questionnaire. Slovakia. 2003. Brussels, European Commission.

- Jakubová, G., Matúšová, S.: *Survey of Teacher/Trainer Training in VET*. 1998. Bratislava/Torino, ETF.
- Long-term Plan for the Development of Education and Training in the Slovak Republic for the Next 15-20 Years. Millenium Project*. 2001. Bratislava, Office of the Slovak Republic Government.
- (*Koncepcia rozvoja v_chovy a vzdelávania v Slovenskej republike na najbli_ích 15-20 rokov, projekt „Milénium”* 2001. Bratislava, Úrad vlády SR.)
<http://www.education.gov.sk>
- Long-term Plan for the Lifelong Learning in the Slovak Republic. Proposal*. 2004. Bratislava, Office of the Slovak Republic Government.
- (*Koncepcia celo_ivotného vzdelávania v Slovenskej republike. Návrh*. 2004. Bratislava, Úrad vlády SR.)
[http://www.rokovania.sk/appl/material.nsf/0/1717DB0CDB9ECC65C1256E3C003438D5/\\$FILE/Zdroj.html](http://www.rokovania.sk/appl/material.nsf/0/1717DB0CDB9ECC65C1256E3C003438D5/$FILE/Zdroj.html))
- Law No. 5/2004 on Public Employment Services*
- Law No. 596/2003 on State Administration and Self-government in Education*
- Law No. 599/2003, as amended, on Assistance to those in Material Need*
- Law No. 131/2002, as amended, on Higher Education Institution*
- Law No. 461/2003 on Social Insurance*
- Millennium Development Goals: Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion*. 2004. Bratislava, Center for Economic Development. ISBN: 92 – 95042 – 01 – 8
- http://mdgr.undp.sk/DOCUMENTS/MDG_Slovak_GB_1.pdf
- (*Miléniové rozvojové ciele: Cesta k zní_ovaniu chudoby a sociálneho vylú_enia*. 2004. Bratislava, Centrum pre hospodársk_ rozvoj. ISBN: 92 – 95042 – 01 – 8)
- http://mdgr.undp.sk/DOCUMENTS/MDG_Slovak_SK_1.pdf
- Monographs Candidate Countries. Vocational Education and Training and Employment Services in the Slovak Republic*. 2002. Luxembourg, European Commission, ETF.
- [http://www.etf.eu.int/WebSite.nsf/Pages/09DBB82743471735C1256E8600566FEB/\\$FILE/NMS_SK_dossier_04_EN.pdf](http://www.etf.eu.int/WebSite.nsf/Pages/09DBB82743471735C1256E8600566FEB/$FILE/NMS_SK_dossier_04_EN.pdf)
- National Programme for Education and Training in the Slovak Republic*. Bratislava, MoE
- (*Národn_ program v_chovy a vzdelávania v Slovenskej republike*, Bratislava, M_SR)
- <http://www.education.gov.sk/main/dokument/konproj/krvv/npvv.rtf>
- Review of Progress in Vocational Education and Training Reform. Slovak Republic*. 2002. ETF.
- The Role of Social Partners in VET in the Slovak Republic*. 2000. Bratislava, Slovak National Observatory of VET.

- (*Rola sociálnych partnerov v odbornom vzdelávaní a príprave v Slovenskej republike*. 2000. Bratislava, Slovenské národné observatórium OVP.)
- The Slovak Education System at the Cross of Millenium. Development in Years 1989-1999*. 2000. Bratislava, MoE
- (*Slovenské _kolstvo na kri_ovatke tisícro_í. V_voj v rokoch 1989-1999*. 2000. Bratislava, M_SR. http://www.uips.sk/sskt/obsah_knihy.html)
- Statistics in Focus. Theme 3. 6/2003*. Brussels, Eurostat.
- Target State of Education and Training and Proposals of Measures for the Transformation from Current State to Target State*. Bratislava, MoE
- (*Cie_ov_ stav v_chovy a vzdelávania a návrhy opatrení na transformáciu sú_asného stavu na stav cie_ov_*. Bratislava, M_SR.)
- Vantuch, J.: *Modernisation of VET in Slovakia. National Report 2000*. 2000. Turin/Bratislava, Slovak National Observatory of VET.
- <http://www.siov.sk/siov/dokhtm/7sno/snoen/archiv.htm>
- Vantuch, J.: *Situation of VET Teachers and Trainers in Candidate Countries – Slovakia. Short Report*. 2002. Bratislava, Slovak National Observatory of VET.
- <http://www.siov.sk/siov/dokhtm/7sno/snoen/archiv.htm>
- Vantuch, J.: *The Two Sides of Words and Numbers on Education in Slovakia*. 2003. Bratislava, State Vocational Education Institute.
- (Vantuch, J.: *Dve strany slov a _isel o vzdelávaní na Slovensku*. 2003. Bratislava, _IOV.)
- Vantuch, J.: *VET in Slovakia*. Presentation, Thessaloniki, June 11, 2004.
- Vantuch, J., Pauk, J., Jelinkova, D.: *Recent Developments in VET and Employment Policy in Slovakia. 2003 Short Country Report*. 2003.

Bibliography (General)

- Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices. Highlights 2003*. Paris, OECD.
- Common European Principles for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning*. 2004. Brussels, European Commission.
- Developments in the Field of VET in Member States and in Acceding and Candidate Countries. March to August 2003*. 2003. Torino, ETF.
- Education across Europe 2003*. 2003. Bruseels, European Commission-Eurostat.
- <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/datashop/print-product/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&product=KS-58-04-869--N-EN&mode=download>
- „*Education and Training 2010*“. *The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms*. COM(2003) 685 final. 2003. Brussels, Commission of the European Communities.
- Education at a Glance. OECD Indicators 2002*. 2002. Paris, OECD.

Education at a Glance. OECD Indicators 2003. 2003. Paris, OECD.

<http://www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/9603061E.PDF>

Education for Entrepreneurship. Final Report of the Expert Group. 2004. Brussels, European Commission.

Education Policy Analysis. 2003. Paris, OECD.

Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2003/04. National Trends in the Bologna Process. 2003. Brussels, Eurydice.

Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution on Lifelong Learning. Acceding and Candidate Countries. 2003. Brussels, European Commission.

Key Indicators on VET. Central and Eastern Europe. Report. October 2002. 2002. Torino, ETF.

Kok, W.: *Jobs, Jobs, Jobs. Creating More Employment in Europe.* 2003. Employment Taskforce.

Policy Benchmarks for Enhancing Human Capital and Realising Its Potential. Supplemental Analysis. 2004. Paris, OECD.

„*Progress in the Implementation of the Joint Assessment Papers on Employment Policies in Candidate Countries*“. 2003. Brussels, Commission of the European Communities.

Progress Towards the Common Objectives in Education and Training. Indicators and Benchmarks. SEC(2004) 73. 2004. Brussels, Commission of the European Communities.

Review and Lessons Learned of Phare VET Reform Programmes 1993-1998. Report. 2001. Torino, ETF.

Sultana, R. G.: *Guidance Policies in the Knowledge Society. Trends, challenges and responses across Europe. A Cedefop synthesis report.* 2004. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.