

Self-assessment report

Slovakia

Regional governance of VET in Slovakia and quality assurance

23 - 24 May 2024

1. Name and contact information of the host country institution

Host organization: Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania (State Vocational Education Institute)

Contact person: Ľubica Gállová, Lubica.gallova@siov.sk

National expert: Eva Žernovičová, zernovicova@gmail.com

Date and venue of the Peer Review meeting: 23 – 24 May 2024, Bratislava

1. General information on VET and quality assurance in VET in the host country

The Slovak economy is among the most open economies in the EU heavily depending on exporting industry products, automotive in particular. The country is a world leader in manufacturing of cars per capita. The Slovak economy depends heavily on the export of cars, machinery and electronics: sectors sensitive to business cycle ups and downs. According to OECD, Slovakia is on the top of the countries directly endangered by automation and other recent developments in the economy and society - approximately 60 % of jobs will be threatened by automation.¹

IVET is strongly state-regulated, predominantly school-based, combining provision of general education and developing key competences with vocational skills. A broad variety of upper secondary programmes contributes to high youth education attainment and, despite a negative trend, still low early leaving from education and training.

The Slovak education and training system is still based on the model aimed at providing all learners with at least upper-secondary education, mainly through school-based VET. In addition to work-based learning backed by school-company contracts, 'dual' VET providing work-based learning in companies based on contracts with individual learners was introduced in 2015².

VET at lower, upper and post-secondary levels is delivered by secondary VET schools. VET schools are highly regulated through legislation and detailed curricula. VET can be currently offered as:

¹ Based on Vantuch, J.; Jelinkova, D. (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe: Slovakia*. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports 2018.

http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/Vocational_Education_Training_Europe_Slovakia_2018_Cedefop_ReferNet.pdf

² <https://siov.sk/en/vzdelavanie/dualne-vzdelavanie/>

- school-based programmes with practical training (mainly) in school workshops;
- dual VET (DVET), where learners (or their parents) have contracts with enterprises for provision of in-company training, while companies and schools have agreements on provision of dual VET specifying in detail duties of both partners;
- mixed scheme, with school-based learning along with training provided by a company.

Most VET programmes are provided at upper secondary level. The strong majority of secondary VET graduates receive the maturita school leaving certificate allowing access to higher education. There are programmes with extended component of practice that offer the maturita school leaving certificate and a certificate of apprenticeship (e.g. so-called hotel academies).

Three-year VET programmes offer a VET qualification (certificate of apprenticeship). Graduates of these programmes can enter an additional two-year programme to receive a maturita school leaving certificate.

Participation in lower secondary VET and post-secondary programmes is low.

2.1 VET governance

VET in Slovakia is managed through these main acts³:

- Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (School Act) and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts
- Act No 596/2003 Coll. on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts
- Act No 138/2019 Coll. on pedagogical staff and professional staff and on amendments and supplements to certain acts
- Act No 597/2003 Coll. on the financing of primary schools, secondary schools and school establishments
- Act No 61/2015 Coll. on Vocational Education and Training (VET Act) and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts

VET governance is based on the following coordinating and advisory bodies:

- **Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth SR** (ministry of education) regulates programmes and numbers of students based on macroeconomic forecasting data and graduate tracking data (plus opinions of regional stakeholders)⁴. The education ministry supports schools by issuing national curricula and regulates conditions of provision of education, for example qualification and continuing professional development of staff. The national curricula are prepared and updated by the **State Vocational Education Institute** (ŠIOV).
- **National VET Council** (with 18 working groups) discusses VET policy, such as regional and sectoral strategies. A working group for the verification of labour market needs focuses on assessing self-governing regions activities related to secondary VET regulation;
- **Regional VET Councils** are composed of representatives of state, self-government, employers and employees and prepare regional VET policy documents, discuss number of places to be offered in respective schools and programmes, etc.;
- **Sectoral (skills) councils** are independent associations of employers' representatives, trade union representatives, education institutions, state administration and self-government authorities. Sectoral (skills) councils provide expertise to policy-makers concerning labour market needs;
- **Sectoral assignees** represent employers' interests in each VET study field as professional counterparts to education authorities and experts. Sectoral assignees should play a prominent role in adjusting VET

³ <https://www.minedu.sk/12272-sk/zakony/>

⁴ Decree of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic No. 202/2022 Coll., which establishes criteria for determining the highest number of pupils in the first year of secondary schools

to labour market needs and in assuring its quality. The Employer Council for VET encompassing sectoral assignees involved in dual VET, coordinates their activities;

- **Expert groups and ad hoc working groups** affiliated to the State Institute of Vocational Education covering respective fields of study focus on diverse curricula issues and conditions of provision of VET (material, spatial and equipment-related requirements).
- **Schools** are headed by directors appointed by school establishers for a five-year term, based on a tender organised by a school board). School board can also have impact on development plans of schools and can also suggest dismissing of the director.

In the school year 2023/2024 there are 421 VET schools, out of which 71 private and 20 church-affiliated. The majority of VET schools are established by self-governing regions (founding authority).

Since 2009, the influence of employers on VET policy has gradually increased also concerning school-based VET. VET schools must submit their school educational programmes (autonomously elaborated school curricula reflecting and adjusting national curricula to local/regional needs) to sectoral assignees unless they were elaborated in cooperation with companies participating in dual VET or discussed with companies offering practical training within the mixed scheme. There is also a strong engagement of sectoral assignees in dual VET in assessment and certification of companies offering practical training and in training of in-company trainers (instructors).

2.2 Quality assurance in VET

The main bodies involved in QA are:

- **The State School Inspectorate** - an independent state administration body headed by the chief school inspector appointed for a five-year period by the education minister; its evaluation work is based on annual plans and resulting in yearly reports presented to the parliament.
- **The National Institute of Education and Youth (NIVAM)**⁵ is responsible for developing national testing instruments and implementing national and international testing. It informs about results and suggests improvements.

However, both institutions predominantly focus on general education subjects. Due to the lack of staff, employer representatives are expected to help more to check the quality of VET. **Sectoral assignees** assist a) the State School Inspectorate in quality checking of practice-oriented training provided by companies within dual VET and b) schools in quality checking within final examinations.

- **The State Vocational Education Institute** is designated by the ministry of education the EQAVET NRP. ŠIOV actively promotes implementation of EQAVET and use of peer review as a tool for QA at the provider level.
- **Directors of schools** are responsible for the quality of their schools' performance.

2.3 Regional administration in Slovakia and regional VET governance

The system of regional and local government was introduced in Slovakia in 1990. The administrative structure is laid down in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (1992) - territorial self-administration is composed of a municipality and a higher territorial unit. According to the Act 221/1996 Coll. on Territorial and Administrative Division of the Slovak Republic, the territory is divided into eight Self-Governing Regions, 79 districts, and 2,890 Municipalities.

The self-government is organised within two dominant levels – the regional level represented by eight Self-Governing Regions (i.e. eight 'Higher Territorial Units'). The Self-governing Regions hold specific competences in several areas, such as social, economic, and cultural development of the Regions; regional

⁵ www.nivam.sk Originally this task was performed by the Institute for Certified Educational Measurements in Education, which was merged into NIVAM in 2021.

planning; social welfare, healthcare, transport, culture, etc. as well as **education, including secondary, professional, art and vocational schools, construction and maintenance of buildings, remuneration of teachers on behalf of the state. The regional administrations are the founders of VET schools.**

Self-governing regions are responsible for establishing and maintaining public secondary VET schools and for regulating inflow of learners into schools in their territory. VET programmes and numbers of students are strictly regulated to address regional labour market needs, based on macroeconomic forecasting data and opinion of regional stakeholders. The education ministry supports schools by providing regulations for content, pedagogy, qualification of staff, etc. Some VET schools are under the responsibility of the interior and health ministries.

The regional education system is currently managed from three levels:

- system level - the **Ministry of Education Science, Research and Sport SR**. The Ministry is in charge of:
 - funding VET (including dual system contributions for employers),
 - defining the fields of education, the content of VET (state curricula) and relating methodologies,
 - defines standards for material, technical and spatial provision in VET schools (in cooperation with employer organizations)
 - publishes a list of fields of study and apprenticeship with insufficient numbers of graduates for the needs of the labour market (every 3 years).
- regional level:
 - **Regional School Administration Offices** – established by the Ministry of Education, carry out second-level state administration in the matters of schools and school establishments of which it is the founder, compiles documents for the statistical purposes, information, provides methodological and advisory support to the school founders in its regions, etc.
 - **Self-governing region** (departments of education)
 - establishes and dissolves the network of school and school establishments, secondary schools, apprentice schools and the centres for practical teaching,
 - appoints the school directors,
 - issues organizational instructions for VET schools,
 - provides professional and advisory services to schools and school facilities,
 - provides legal advice to directors
 - discusses with the directors of VET schools the concept of development of the school, budget and material conditions for their activities, personal and social conditions of the employees, proposal to introduce the study branches and specialization, report on the results of educational process at schools,
 - prepares the plan of investments and breakdown of finances for regional schools
 - provides material and technical equipment for teaching process, didactic material and technology, financial resources for operation and maintenance, financial resources from State budget as well as from its own resources.
- provider level
 - **School director** is appointed by the school founder for a five-year period to directly manage the school and fulfil these tasks in relation to the founding authority:
 - submits to the founder for approval
 - members of the school board,
 - the draft budget,
 - the proposal for the number of enrolled children/pupils,
 - an annual report on educational activities, its results and conditions,
 - the report on the results of the school's management,

- decisions on non-admission and dismissal of pupils within the admission process,
 - reports about the school, e.g. plan of further education of the school staff,
 - documents for negotiation of the school budget,
 - informs about the pedagogical-organisational and material-technical provision of the educational process.
- **School board** are a part of school self-administration. School boards organize a tender for selection of a school director and can also suggest dismissing of the director. School board can also have impact on development plans of schools. School board members represent school staff, parents, school establisher, students, and, if requested, also sectoral assignee. School director is not a member of school board.

2.4 Assessment of the self-governing regions involved in peer review against the EQAVET indicators

The peer review will focus on 5 Higher Territorial Units/Self-governing Regions (green color).



The following section provides a description of the quality assurance measures in the 4 areas based on the EQAVET indicator provided by each region:

1. **Governance and organization of VET at regional level**
 1. The provision of VET
 2. Achievements and performance of pupils in VET
 3. Cooperation with stakeholders

Supporting questions were provided for each area in order to receive comparable responses. Below is the summary of responses from the 5 participating regions. The full version of their responses is attached in the ANNEX 1.

1. GOVERNANCE AND ORGANISATION OF VET AT REGIONAL LEVEL

Related EQAVET indicators

Indicator 1: Relevance of quality assurance systems for vocational education and training providers

- Percentage of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems as defined by law/initiative
 - share of accredited VET providers
-
- Does the Region have a defined approach/mechanism/quality assurance system for education? Is it embedded in the strategic documents of the Region? Does the Region formulate priorities towards improving VET provision, taking into account its mission and vision, the needs of providers, learners and other VET participants?
 - To what extent are the main partners/stakeholders involved in shaping the vision and direction of VET within the region?
 - How does the Region communicate its vision and strategic priorities to VET providers to ensure their engagement, i.e. what processes, communication channels are used?
 - How is the implementation of the quality assurance strategy monitored? How are the results and findings of the VET self-monitoring used?
 - Is the aim of VET management to lead providers to continuous improvement? Does the Region promote a culture of self-assessment and feedback? If so, how?
 - What strategies does the Region use to strengthen collaboration with stakeholders?
 - Are the roles and responsibilities of VET providers/schools in the quality assurance process clear and understandable?

Main documents in which the Self-governing regions set their priorities for VET include:

- **The Programme of Economic and Social Development** – a medium-term strategy of the region which serves as a tool for conceptual and target-oriented development of the region in cooperation with towns and municipalities as well as key stakeholders and actors.
- **Regional strategy for education and training in secondary schools** – a strategic document defines specific targets in the short and medium term; it contains strategic goals, key priority areas, specific objectives, measures and measurable indicators. The Strategy is updated and evaluated annually, with input from all stakeholders, in order to update an action plan for the next period; to specify fields of study needed for the labour market and the number of pupils in secondary schools.
- The main partners include: the Regional VET Council, Ministry of Education, State Vocational Education Institute, Ministry of Labour, employers, vocational schools, and other founders of schools.
- The measures identified by the Regions in order to implement quality assurance include:
 - Roundtables on innovation in education
 - Supporting development of the VET centres; modernization of schools, campus projects.
 - The school network reduction
 - Investments to the school infrastructure
 - A culture of self-evaluation and feedback is encouraged. Cooperation with the State Vocational Education Institute (EQAVET and peer review promotion and introduction for schools)

- In the Trenčín region - quality management system was introduced in secondary schools as part of the project "HOM - evaluation, remuneration, motivation" based on peer review method; school coordinators of quality were introduced in each school.
- Support to schools involved in the CAF assessment process, IES certificate holders, quality competitions
- Linking VET schools and companies to involve them in dual education or practical training, e.g. through Memoranda of Cooperation. Attracting new employers and SMEs for VET, improving the quality offer (adapting the fields of education to the requirements of regional employers), and intensifying career guidance at primary and secondary schools.

2. THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

<i>Related EQAVET indicators</i>		
Indicator 2: Investment in teacher and trainer training: • the proportion of teachers and trainers participating in further training • the amount of funds invested	Indicator 3: Participation rate in VET programmes: Number of participants in VET programmes	Indicator 8: Prevalence of vulnerable groups • percentage of VET participants classified in disadvantaged groups by age and gender;
• How is the setting of VET at regional level aligned with national, local and/or European VET policy? Are plans to improve the supply of VET formulated in line with the short-, medium- and long-term objectives of national/regional and European VET policies and in line with labour market developments? • How is the need for flexible and tailored VET provision, including for disadvantaged groups, being addressed? • Is professional development provided or planned for educators in relation to the performance of their students? • To what extent are opportunities for professional development of teachers to improve their competences in the context of changing labour market requirements, e.g. in cooperation with companies, provided? • Are links being observed, for example, between the number of pupils in VET programmes and pupil attainment or the attractiveness of these programmes? How are they evaluated?		
- The national VET policy is translated into regional VET policy through negotiations with employers, through published labour market needs, through meetings of the Regional Council for Vocational Education and Training, and employer representatives in school councils. All these factors also influence the Regional Education and Training Strategy document, which is prepared for several years and updated every year. Other stakeholders involved in the discussion on VET include: The Education Commission and the Regional Council, associations of vocational schools, actors on local, national, regional, European level, etc. - The Regions decide on the numbers of pupils entering the secondary school, thus they can directly influence the share of pupils in the types of schools as well as study branches. The forecast of the number of newly enrolled secondary school pupils for the relevant school year takes into account analyses and forecasts of labour market developments and the relevant regional strategy for the development of education and training. One of the criteria for		

determining the number of pupils in the first year is the interest of pupils in particular fields of study and the fill rate of the fields of study and apprenticeship.

- Demographic development and changes in economic sectors cause in some areas discrepancies between the network of secondary schools and their profiles and the real needs and possibilities of regional development. **Optimisation of the network of schools** should result in profiling of VET schools according to their focus and on the basis of the needs of employers in the region, while eliminating duplication of fields of study.
- The regions adapt the VET offer to the needs of practice; various supporting professions, special educators, assistants and psychologists work in schools. The technical condition and design of some school buildings do not allow for the debarring of premises, but several VET schools provide VET for pupils with physical or other disabilities.
- In the Košice region, piloting the concept of training centres is under development in order to improve integration of the marginalised Roma community. This goes hand in hand with another project plan aimed at NEETs. KSK is currently carrying out an analysis of the state of the ellocated workplaces in the Košice Region.
- In some Regions, the position of Project Manager or Coordinator of Quality was established at schools.
- According to the legislation, schools have to define **professional development plans for teachers**, the Regions provide full support to the schools.
- VET school face **shortage of teachers** of vocational subjects and vocational trainers - various mechanisms have been in place to attract people from business to schools, or improve the professional development of the current staff, e.g.:
 - financial support during adaptation training, additional pedagogical training, other courses to improve qualifications,
 - information on further training opportunities,
 - support to international exchanges under the ERASMUS programme.
 - strong support of the improvement of digital skills of teachers and school staff (e.g. internships of teaching staff in companies, international mobilities)
 - development of language competences (reimbursement of fees),
- No special monitoring is in place in order to analyse links between number of pupils and attractiveness of the study programme. Information can be extracted from annual Evaluation Report on educational activities, results and conditions of the school for a given school year.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE OF PUPILS IN VET

<i>Related EQAVET indicators</i>		
Indicator 4: Completion rate of VET programmes: • Number of people who have successfully completed/interrupted vocational education	Indicator 5: Placement rates in VET programmes: • placement of VET graduates after completion of VET (measured in time cycles)	Indicator 8: Prevalence of vulnerable groups

and training programmes according to the type of programme and individual criteria.	the proportion of employed learners in at a specified time after the completion of VET	percentage of VET participants classified in disadvantaged groups by age and gender
- What results do different groups of VET pupils achieve at the level of the region and in comparison (within the country/other Regions)? - Successful completion of programmes vs. drop-outs (including disadvantaged groups of students) - are there measures in place to prevent drop-outs? - How do pupils develop their skills/competences, including new skills that are in demand in the labour market? Are participants in VET programmes successful in gaining employment? Are there tools to monitor these parameters? If so, how is the information gathered used to improve the quality of VET provision? - Are employers satisfied with the skills/competences of learners? - How are VET programmes responding to changing labour market demands? - How is the participation of disadvantaged groups in VET programmes promoted?		
- The regions compare pupils' results on the basis of their results of external maturita (School-leaving examination), participation in competitions, olympiads, etc. – the Institute for Economic and Social Reforms (INEKO⁶) every year publishes ranking of schools based on the results of pupils in the maturita exams, competitions, graduate unemployment, and other parameters. - VET pupils develop their skills in vocational classrooms/workshops at schools, further on at places of practical training, directly with employers. Vocational school graduates are successful in finding employment, there are also quite high rates of VET pupils continuing in further studies at higher education institutions. Usually there is no data evidence on the level of the region, just publicly available information and statistics (e.g. on drop-out rates). The Regions don't track graduate trajectories; information is sometimes collected through ad hoc surveys and statistics based on annual reports from schools. Only in one region, graduate tracking procedures are supported on the level of schools. - This is also the case of employers' satisfaction with the skills and competences of our pupils acquired during their studies at secondary schools. Employers' satisfaction is measured individually by schools. Where shortcomings are identified, employers intervene in the curricula. - The system of dual education is widely supported and considered by the regions as the most effective tool for responding to the rapid changes in the labour market. Increase in the number of pupils in dual education has been recorded over the recent years. - Links of VET providers with companies and employers, exchanges of expertise and experience between school teachers and employers' staff in the form of innovative training and internships, as well as international mobility are supported as a tool for the development of vocational as well as soft skills. - Support measures for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are in place in all regions, they differ depending on the demographic structure of the population. Disadvantaged groups are supported on an individual basis, e.g. by providing boarding accommodation and meals in the school canteen at a heavily discounted price, we have this regulated in the regulations. Some schools provide pupils with free work clothes for vocational training. The		

⁶ <https://skoly.ineko.sk/rebricky/?ts=SO%C5%A0> – Institute for Economic and Social Reforms, Rankings do not comprehensively assess school quality, but inform on pupil

achievement.

regions with high percentages of pupils from marginalised Roma communities face high drop-out rates (esp. Prešov and Košice regions), where the support has a strong inclusion aspect, and also the VET provision is adapted to the local/regional needs (namely adaptations of study fields, allocating the number of pupils for the first year of secondary schools which takes into account the development in individual localities, drop-out prevention measures, etc.).

4. COOPERATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Related EQAVET indicators

Indicator 9: Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market:

- information on the mechanisms established to identify changing requirements
- evidence of their effectiveness

Indicator 10: Support system for improved access to vocational education and training:

- information on existing systems
- evidence of their effectiveness

- Mechanisms exist to identify the needs and requirements of different stakeholders in VET and the labour market? (employers, trade unions, parents, etc.)?
- How are the needs of stakeholders systematically identified and met?
- To what extent are stakeholder information/requirements/needs used in the management of VET at regional level?
- What measures are used to increase the attractiveness, accessibility and promotion of VET? How is their success measured?

- The most important platform for cooperation with the key stakeholders - **Regional Council for Vocational Education** – esp. employers, Labour Offices, the Regional office of school administration, trade unions, the Counselling and Prevention Centre. Regional VET Councils formulate the need of the labour market, influence changes in the network of schools or design and innovation of school curricula, etc.
- The Regions develop or participate in large-scale strategic projects establishing or supporting cooperation with stakeholders (Catching-Up Regions Initiatives, EU-funded national projects)
- The regions are directly involved in supporting new investors in the region (e.g. Volvo arrival to the Košice Region) – through adaptation of the VET provision to the upcoming needs of the company (new study branches, update of curricula, increase of pupils in the required branches, etc.)
- Among the tools and communication channels, the Regions mentioned mainly:
 - Communication with broader public, parents, pupils - **open days, fairs, exhibitions and competitions** are organised in order to promote secondary VET schools to pupils of primary schools,
 - Direct cooperation with companies in the regions, e.g. summer academies for primary school pupils
 - Brochures, on social networks, web-sites and media
 - Promotional videos for schools
- Other important stakeholders mentioned in the context of close cooperation links involve:
 - career counsellors, Centres for Educational and Psychological Counselling, educational counsellors in order to promote VET as a career pathway for young people
 - Universities, career counselling experts from practice, other state institutions, non-profit and interest organisations

2. Key evaluation questions for the peer reviewers

- How do you assess the recent quality assurance measures on the regional level of VET governance (feedback measures, indicators, quality assurance tools in place, etc.)?
- Based on the recent situation, which common features or elements of QA should be strengthened or developed on the regional level of VET governance?

3. Aims and purposes of the peer review for the host country

The main purpose of peer review is to explore the quality assurance methods implemented and tools used by the 5 Self-governing Regions and discuss the transversal features which could be defined as a model of quality assurance on the regional level of VET governance.

The feedback from peers based on their knowledge of the regional administration of VET in their countries will support further development of the cooperation between ŠIOV and Self-governing regions under the starting national project *Introduction of quality management in VET and adult learning* as well as inspiration for individual plans of the Regions.

4. Main results and outcomes expected by the host country

The system peer review is planned as the first step of the above mentioned ESF-funded national project *Introduction of quality management in VET and adult learning* starting in January 2024. The project includes the activity *Management of Quality on the regional level* which should lead to the common model and methodology of quality assurance (while fully respecting the independent nature of the regional self-governance). The peer review will be a useful basis for the initial discussion of the efficiency of the recently applied measures and for inspiration by new ideas and recommendations from the colleagues with similar models of VET governance.

5. Other national stakeholders to be involved in the peer review

- representatives of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic,
- representatives of schools from the regions involved,
- representatives of employers' organization/company involved in VET/VET governance.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

References:

CEDEFOP, VET in Slovakia, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/slovakia-2019>