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Policy Challenges for Professional  
Higher Education in Central and  
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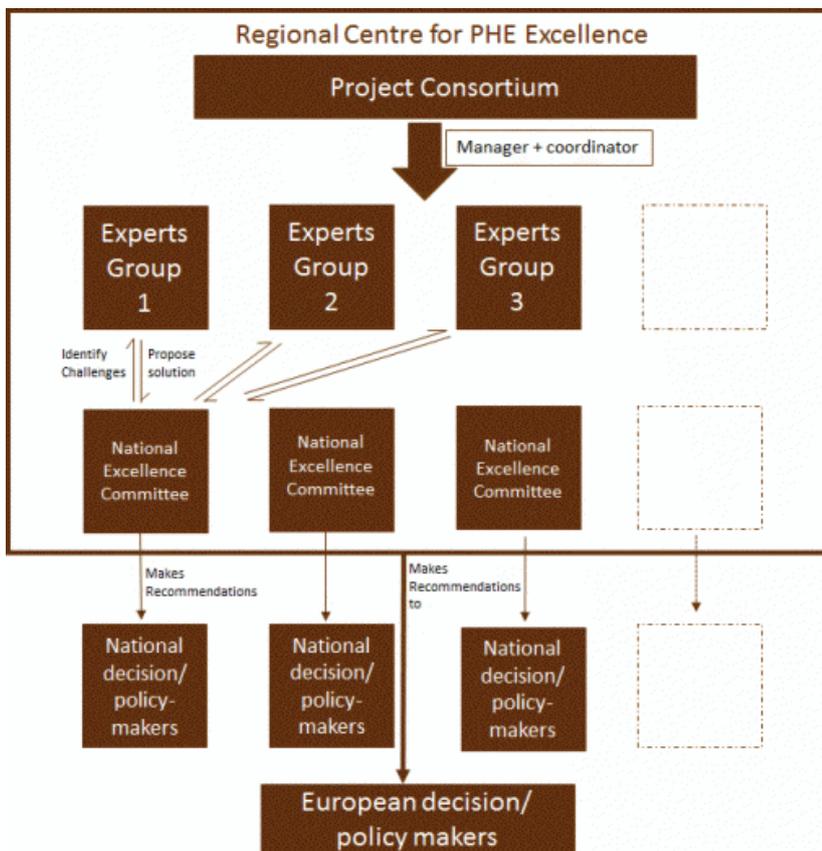
## 1 Introduction

The Professional Higher Education Excellence in Central and South-Eastern Europe (PROCSEE) project is a policy-oriented project, aimed at strengthening the provision of professional higher education, by strengthening the policy-work conducted by umbrella organizations representing professional higher education institutions in Central and South-Eastern in Europe (CSEE), specifically in Slovenia, Romania, Croatia, Czechia and Hungary. The PROCSEE project partners and experts will work together from 2015 to 2018 to provide specific policy inputs on how to address the following priorities in each participating country, as well as across the CSEE region:

- Identify the main challenges facing Professional Higher Education (PHE) in the region
- Propose policy solutions to address those challenges in the short-to-midterm, through a mixture of good-practice identification and stakeholder consultation
- Bring together the main actors in PHE in each participating country to build implementation roadmaps for the identified policy solutions

This report represents the first step of this process, and comprises a full analysis of challenges and problems faced by the PHE sector throughout Central and South-Eastern Europe.

PROCSEE is made up of a wide selection of experts (fully listed in Annexe A), all of whom have contributed to this report:



- **The project consortium** serves as a management board of the Centre for Excellence, which in turn hosts all policy analysis and recommendation activities.

- **Four thematic peer-learning groups**, which are made up of experts in each of the fields, are responsible for finding and analysing case studies, and for proposing a toolbox of policy solutions for addressing identified challenges.

- In each country, a **national excellence committee** consisting of representatives of business, institutions, students and policy-makers is formed. This “PHE excellence committee” is responsible for identifying local priorities and challenges, and feeding these to the expert groups for policy analysis. The national excellence committees are also responsible for selecting appropriate interventions from the

toolbox developed by the expert groups, and adapting these for their own institutional or regional/national contexts.

PROCSEE's four thematic areas are:

- Alignment of PHE with regional, local and economic development strategies
- Promotion of PHE in responding to skill shortages
- Organising and Monitoring Student Placements in the World of Work
- Personalised Learning Environments in PHE

## 2 Methodology

This report is the result of the activities of the PROCSEE project during 2016. In the project's first stage each country participating in the project organized a half-day seminar, assembling their respective excellence committees. Each committee was asked to:

- Perform a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the state of the PHE Sector in their respective country
- Build an 'ideal-type' scenario for PHE in their country for the coming years
- Identify barriers which may hold them back from achieving these scenarios.

The discussions were summarised into the National Priority Challenge Statements which can be found in the next chapter. A PHE Excellence Forum was held between 28<sup>th</sup> September and 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016 in Logarska Dolina, Slovenia as direct follow-up to the meetings of the PHE Excellence National Committees. The forum brought together around 40 European experts across all the four thematic areas of the project with the aim of identifying shared national, regional and European challenges.

Each expert group was asked to:

- Identify four problems / challenges linked to their thematic area
- Identify symptoms for each of those four problems
- Identify the causes of each of those four problems using root cause analysis
- Model the problems using Ishikawa Diagrams
- Bring together the overall problems/challenges and symptoms for the theme as a whole, also using an Ishikawa Diagram

Following this, moderators of the groups refined the problem definitions, prioritised the root causes, and summarised them in the final two chapters of this report. This report was then validated online with all experts who participated in its formulation.

This report will form the basis of a collection of good practices which respond to the challenges it sets out, which in turn will be used to make policy recommendations to address the same challenges.

Detailed Reports of each event can be found online at: <https://procsee.eu/events>

The Ishikawa Diagrams used in drawing up the report can also be downloaded from: <https://procsee.eu/outputs/pcs/>.

## 3 NATIONAL PRIORITY CHALLENGE STATEMENTS

### 3.1 Slovenia

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The Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges, as the coordinator of the PROCSEE project, organized the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the recently established National Committee for Professional Higher Education Excellence – NCPHEE in Ljubljana at the premises of The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, on July 5<sup>th</sup> 2016.

The participants of the NCPHEE were relevant national stakeholders in the area of Professional Higher Education (PHE), representing of students, employers (large companies and Small/Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)), PHE providers, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia, Employment service of Slovenia, regional development agencies, Associations of PHE providers, municipalities.

#### 3.1.1 Overview of the PHE Sector in Slovenia

The NCPHEE participants identified the current situation of the PHE sector in Slovenia through a SWOT analysis. Professional Higher Education in Slovenia is represented under two systems and two different laws – one for higher education (levels 6, 7, 8 EQF (European Qualifications Framework)) and one for higher vocational colleges (level 5 EQF). The well-established link between PHE and the world of work was acknowledged as a main advantage at level 5 but is not satisfactory at levels 6 and 7 EQF. As such, all involved stakeholders must take responsibility for the outcomes of the learning process. A stronger link between the world of work and PHE would enable the involvement of stakeholders to identify the necessary skills and competences. Furthermore, PHE encourages the responsibility of learners in their own development (searching for employers, developing a suitable profile of competences, ensuring employability prospects). Specifically, Short Cycle Higher Education is an advantage because of its substantial efforts towards and established practice of practical in-company training in combination with theoretical institutional education, enabling the integration of these educational situations within a modular and open curriculum.

Lack of developmental strategy and policy at national level is a well-known weakness in Slovenia. Divergent accreditation procedures (institutional, programme) do not provide equal opportunities for various forms of PHE while external accreditation affects the quality due to lack of autonomy and accountability of institutions. Despite the large number and diversity of programmes and disciplines, the educational system is rigid and does not provide sufficient quality and relevant employment competences. In certain areas, the following are seen as major weaknesses, in relation with the world of work: lack of transparency, inadequacy, shortcoming of professional competences of individuals for employment and inadequate definition of job related competences. The lack of jobs and in-company practical training opportunities are in some areas extreme. career guidance, which should be present at all levels (with different target groups as learners and parent guiding) and in all stages of life is insufficiently informative and inadequate. Tertiary Professional Education is not neatly segmented into

a policy area – colleges are predominantly within secondary school centres without an adequate autonomy – making a study on the state of the art of PHE difficult. This also leads to a lack of regulations for vertical permeability between some levels of PHE, lack of specific legislation and strategical directions for PHE, no systematic links with the world of work and no open system for graduates' transition to the labour market.

Existing links with the world of work to facilitate reskilling and upskilling of individuals (thanks to shorter duration of studies) were recognized as opportunities with most potential. PHE providers should develop blended approaches to education and training, and programmes in strong cooperation with practical training and theoretical lecturers, as the world of work should take care to develop their mentoring potential and staff. But PHE providers should also develop marketing activities, introduce and develop more project work activities and methods (for example e-learning is an opportunity to support practical education and training).

The real threats were identified in how resource optimization and rebalancing between PHE courses may affect quality. A focus on specialization and operational efficiency may lead to neglecting generic competences. The risk of fluctuation (replacements of generations – staff) and the associated availability of options for young people and the selection of appropriate staff are also possible threat. Furthermore, inadequate or deficient articulation of needs and expectations of the world of work and the risk of the system remaining too fragmented were all acknowledged as potential threats. Weaknesses: slow new-competency development, no external competency verification/programme evaluation, overestimated learning outcomes; PHE L6 and up are positioned within academic universities with no substantial difference in delivery of academic and professional studies Opportunities: European Higher Education Area (EHEA) → automatic recognition → opportunity for internationalisation of PHE on all levels; Threats: EHEA → automatic recognition → in Slovenia full progression from PHE L5 to PHE L6 is not possible as it is elsewhere.

### **3.1.2 Identification of Goals for the Ideal Future Development of PHE (Ideal Scenario)**

Stakeholders would like to see the development of a national strategy/policy on PHE which is socially relevant and takes into account regional/local specifics. For example, that PHE's engagement in regional/local development is supported at the national level to ensure labour market relevance and to facilitate responsiveness of educational programmes and institutions to the needs of the world of work. They'd like to ensure the promotion of vocational, educational and professional growth and educational opportunities are key parts of the individual learner's educational pathway, managed and strategically directed by national policy. For greater efficiency, the world of work, PHE providers of all levels and stakeholders in regional development are involved in the design, development and evaluation of a PHE system. Individual learners have the opportunity and access to upskilling and reskilling their professional expertise.

They would also like to establish and consolidate PHE as a social paradigm based on two pillars: professional and academic Higher Education (HE). The professional pillar combines different standardized levels of PHE regulated by the national accreditation and quality assurance system in order to allow an easy transition and diverse education pathways. The PHE sector is regulated though a single PHE legislation. The professional vertical is thus a strengthened and streamlined education system based on strategic guidelines.

Finally, they would like to see PHE positioned in an appropriate way so that it generates innovative graduates and graduates whose skills reflect the needs of the labour market. Each area of expertise also develops generic competencies such as critical thinking, initiative and proactive approach, employability and teamwork. Employers articulate their needs and expectations and proactively take part in the development of necessary competences and programmes. Each stakeholder assumes a responsibility for the mentoring network and clearly

articulates their expectations. Close cooperation within all the members of each stakeholder and all stakeholders among themselves has been developed.

### 3.1.3 Barriers Facing future PHE Development

A common, comprehensive strategy/strategic policy on PHE is crucial for its further development and should include regional specifics. Currently the development of the PHE is constrained by many barriers: there is a lack of collaboration and consensus among the key PHE stakeholders. The implementation of the PHE is also constrained by the lack of political support from the government. Current policies do not align the professional and scientific paradigms of PHE. PHE remains fragmented and incoherent, with a lack of cooperation and building on synergies between coherent PHE and academic HE. There is a lack of a tradition of shared learning, adoption of good experiences/practices of others and continuous development.

## 3.2 Romania

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Until recently, Professional Higher Education in Romania has not been organized as a distinct field. Recently, the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research in Romania significantly reformed the organization of PHE, with the aim of introducing quality standards. Universities across the country were allowed to organize courses, which were previously delivered by organizations like professional Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or educational institutes. Those educational centres and institutes were not coordinated and funded by the ministry of education, but by other national bodies such as Ministry of Culture, Labour Ministry, Foreign Affairs Ministry or by structures belonging to local administration. The legal framework in this regard includes two decisions of Romanian Government: *OUG no. 481/2015 – Government Decision Amending and Supplementing the Rules for Implementation of the provisions of the Government Ordinance no 129/2000 on Lifelong Learning, approved by the Government’s decision no. 522/2003*, and *OUG. No. 567/2015 – Government Decision Amending Government Decision no. 918 / 2013 approving the National Qualification Framework*.

The reactions of stakeholders to these changes are divergent. The representatives of the aforementioned educational centres and institutes suggest that this measure not only weakens the entire process of PHE, but is also damaging to the economic situation and the welfare of organizations involved in PHE. Others are suggesting that Universities might lack the manpower to ensure the coordination of such activities, but they do have the infrastructure required by a large-scale involvement in PHE. Overall, universities are interested in the PHE sector, but until recently there was no legal frame to clear the procedures in this sector.

In considering the overall Romanian context, one should consider is the societal view of professional education in general. For diverse historical and social reasons, Romanian society does not give sufficient credit to professional education. Due to the shortage of job places, Romanian people question the effectiveness of professional courses in terms of outcomes (employment) and follow an alternate path, seeking a job first and specializing (or looking for a diploma) after. On the other hand, there is a growing student demand for work-

based learning with a need to invest more time and resources into “internship”, “practical knowledge”, “practical skills” etc.

### 3.2.1 Overview of the PHE Sector in Romania

For the purposes of this document, the analysis of the current state of PHE sector in Romania is divided in four areas: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The main **strength** is the desire for cooperation of a great part of the actors and agents involved: PHE institutions, regulatory bodies, and business representatives. Romanian universities have high motivation to offer these kinds of courses in order to increase their income (in the context of the decreasing number of undergraduate students). Furthermore, fiscal incentives ensure a proper cooperation between PHE institutions and the world of work. Highly skilled personnel can act as formal and informal change drivers in the field. Still, in what concerns human resources policies in higher education new pathways are needed to be able to confront the needs of learners, business, civil society and local communities. Lastly, the continuous development of online learning environments makes it possible for students to achieve a balance between their studies and their professional life.

Current **weaknesses** are related to resistance to change. There is a slow adaptive response to change in this field. One reason for this situation is that professional NGOs offering educational services exert pressure on regulatory bodies, to maintain the previous status quo. In accreditation processes, only a few actors are involved: The Romanian Agency for Quality in HE/Secondary education Sector plus government bodies (ministries of Education/Labour) and lastly, the Parliament. On the other hand, professional standards are defined by sectorial committees named by professional associations and, while the management in professional associations have interests in these educational NGO’s, the progress and adaptation of standards to the market is very slow. Furthermore, many professions on the labour market define their occupational standards in an ad hoc manner, without creating a formal standard. Another weakness comes in the form of insufficient information (e.g. unclear methodologies, opaque relation between the PHE institutions and the normative bodies in the field, lack of information about the students’ expectations). Regarding rules, regulation, and methodologies, the PHE sector is weakened by: the lack of coherent strategies for PHE education at the national and regional level (as well as poor alignment to European strategies in the field), poorly defined PHE-related concepts and insufficient coherence of PHE-related regulations. Additionally, some soft issues related to communication between stakeholders need to be address with urgency (e.g. distant relations between PHE institutions and employers’ representatives, the difficulties in attracting students towards technical education). Lastly, there are some issues regarding monitoring & controlling (e.g. internships are not subjected to strict monitoring and controlling on behalf of the authorities).

Despite the drawbacks, Romania benefits from some significant **opportunities** that should be taken into consideration. These include funding opportunities, such as Erasmus+ and other EU funding. Erasmus+ has opportunities for people of all ages, helping them develop and share knowledge and experience at institutions and organizations in different countries. So, Erasmus+ helps students (recent graduates, as well as vocational education and training students, apprentices and recent graduates) gain valuable experience in the workplace by supporting traineeships abroad. Existing partnerships between PHE institutions and the business environment regarding internships and student placements can be further developed and made more consistent. In this respect, Romania can use good practice examples to create a coherent strategy at the national level. The pressure coming from the business environment towards PHE institutions to provide highly skilled professional workers can work as an incentive for creating a competence-driven model for PHE (with clearer requirements for new

PHE programs, and a stronger connection between the curricula and competencies). Finally, increasing competition among PHE institutions fosters high performance.

The most serious **threats** identified are: the decrease of trust in the quality of higher education in general, as well as the decrease of interest for learning in the young generation, poor social dialogue in general, and low levels of trust in online learning. In a competitive European setting, external actors can take advantage of the flawed system to push their own education offer to the detriment of Romanian PHE institutions. Since the role and image of HE institutions has changed, they are no longer seen as scholarly environments, but as mere service providers (providing a diploma). Consequently, the strong emphasis on the employers' requirements can place universities in a vulnerable position and may negatively affect the quality of the curricula.

### 3.2.2 Main Challenges faced by PHE in Romania

The main challenges are related to costs, to PHE institutions & the labour market, and to the regulatory bodies.

The main **cost-related challenge** is that institutions must invest time and money to achieve an ideal type of PHE in Romania, while education as a whole in general is under budgeted (only around 3% of the state budget is directed towards the education sector).

Challenges related to **the relationship between PHE institutions & the labour market** revolve around the slow adaptation of the curricula to the transformations and innovations on the constantly changing and evolving labour market. In turn, this situation leads to difficulties in integrating higher education with the world of work. There are noticeable imbalances between theory and practice, which often render unclear the utility of HE studies and increase alumni's difficulties in finding a job after graduation. Furthermore, there is a weak alignment of the educational/ vocational programs with the labour market requirements. Ideally, validation must be done in a system involving many actors (academics, institutional/ business sector representatives, professionals, stakeholders, employers). These aspects are important having in mind that the educational landscape has drastically changed and the paradigm shift from input-based to output-based education, competence-based, learning outcomes.

Lastly, **challenges related to PHE regulatory bodies** include the lack of standardized curricula for certain specializations at the national level. Although steps towards defining a "quality framework" for PHE have been taken, the support from HE institutions for the implementation of this framework is weak, and also the roles and the responsibilities of the stakeholders (from education, research and business sector) involved are unclear. The support is weak mainly because the HE institutions were subject to many changes in the last eight years, leading to an inconsistent application of PHE-related concepts. Furthermore, there is scarce representation of normative bodies in charge with the development, monitoring and evaluation of internships and their role in enhancing (professional) higher education programs. Also, procedural issues in evaluation of the PHE sector persist. Namely, the evaluation should comprise two steps: first, separate work of evaluation on sectors with the education representatives/quality agencies/professional associations representatives/business sector representatives; second, an integrated commission from education/ representatives from ministries and quality agencies. Before this, a list of evaluation criteria should be created (some of them already exist in the frame of evaluation of quality agencies).

### 3.2.3 Ideal Future Scenarios for PHE

Stakeholders imagined the following reforms as being desirable within Romanian PHE:

## **Institutionalizing/ enhanced formalization of fellowships, internship, traineeship and similar activities**

Although the University curriculum includes a compulsory internship of 2-3 weeks within an organization, during the first and / or the second year of study, these internships are not really co-monitored. The university has little interaction with the internship, and the organization where the internship takes place, has even less to do with the University. Therefore, internship must be redeveloped in re-tailored to enhance collaboration between students, working environment and universities.

### **University-driven PHE programs**

Universities need to get more involved in PHE, thus improving the quality of the educational programs and strengthening the ability of graduate students to adapt to and to respond to demands of the labour market. Regulation support is also needed, as well as funding, because new programs cannot develop on a simple offer-request basis. Also, universities can contribute to a more accurate definition and control of the educational process in terms of: what competences are required, how to validate the acquisition of those specific competences, how to update those competences as there are fields of activity where constant reshaping is required.

### **Addressing regional opportunities**

When developing both curricula and educational centres to address PHE, policymakers should use a regional frame of thinking; EU development regions are a huge opportunity for people residing in those regions. Academics as well as public administrators should be aware of funding opportunities, sustainable development within a given region and the specificity of regional economic conditions when implementing PHE programs.

## **3.3 Croatia**

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The Croatian NCPHEE meeting was attended by relevant national stakeholders - representatives of the world of work – Croatian Union of Employers, Higher education Institutions, Agency for science and higher education, students' Union as well as independent Institute for Development of Higher Education.

### **3.3.1 Overview of the PHE Sector in Croatia**

Croatia has a long history of “non-university” types of institutions known under name “Više škole”. They provided 2 years of education (after high school). Prior to the Bologna Process many of these schools upgraded their programs to three years of education. After Croatia accepted the Bologna related processes and after adjusting their programs to the Bologna requirements in 2005, these institutions were recognized as institutions in higher professional education, and were allowed, where appropriate, to deliver the two cycles of higher education characterized by (3+2) years and 180+120 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) respectively. It is important to mention that legislation also defined the Croatian higher education system as a binary one and specified that all professional education should be done by professional higher education institutions only and not by classic universities from 2010. onwards. Hence the separate system for professionally oriented Higher Education Institutions of the non-university type has been established. As a result of the decision

of Constitutional court of Republic of Croatia (U-I-1707/2006 of 20.12.2006.), protecting University autonomy, professional higher education can be organized also within Universities. The Community of institutions in higher professional education was first established in 2002. The goal of the Community was to promote common interests of Institutions, coordination of future development of professional studies in Croatia with the trends and standards of the development of similar studies in Europe and to ensure possibility of mutual mobility of students and the mutual recognition of professional status. When the Council was established it numbered 10 institutions. In October 2003, the new Law on Science and Higher Education, changed the name of the community to the Council of Universities and University Colleges of Applied Sciences. Today, the Council numbers 39 institutions both privately and publicly owned. Institutions deliver their study programs in line with the Bologna concept (3+2).

Professional Higher Education in Croatia is provided by Universities and University Colleges of Applied Sciences, and by classical Universities.

The NCPHEE participants reflected the current situation of the Professional Higher Education sector in Croatia through a SWOT analysis. As the main **strength of the PHE sector** the NCPHEE considered the well-established link between PHE and the world of work seen through the fact that programs are developed in cooperation with the world of work and that education process is connected with practical exercises. The NCPHEE agrees that perception of the world of work regarding PHE and Higher Vocational Education and Training (HVET) students' competences are positive.

### **3.3.2 Main challenges for PHE in Croatia**

The group sees the insufficient quality in some institutions as a key challenge of the PHE sector. Internal quality assurance systems vary from institution to institution. Also, the current legislation does not recognize changes in the qualification framework introduced by the Bologna process. This has meant that employers continue to articulate the demand for university graduates (3+2) whereas in reality, the PHE bachelors could meet their needs. A recent Constitutional Court decision which stated that PHE graduates could not achieve same level of qualification within the Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF) in contrast to the university graduates (as it is currently defined in CROQF) is considered the most imminent threat to the PHE sector and to the population of 55000 students currently studying in PHE sector. Given recent developments, it is clear that legislation regarding PHE/HVET is in flux and that changes are possible in all directions which makes the future of PHE sector unsecure and unpredictable. The fact that there are no equal opportunities on the market in comparison to classical universities and the resistance of classical Universities to accept and further improve the adaptation of system solving PHE/HVET issues is seen as an additional challenge.

### **3.3.3 Ideal Future Scenarios for PHE**

An ideal country strategy would recognize the importance of PHE sector within Higher Education and the need for further improvement of legislation and financing. One of the goals could be immediate action to improve the ratio of students in PHE vs. students on classic University from current 30:70 ratio to be close to 70:30 as in some developed EU countries. A legislative framework to support development of PHE and encourage classical Universities to focus on academic education only would be desirable in developing a strategy to reach that inverse ratio. A further positive step might be better recognition of the importance of Research, Development and Innovation in regional development through encouragement and improvement of financing of these activities at the PHE institutions. To attract best people into PHE sector there is a need to improve salaries and promotion level for lecturers in state funded PHE institutions from the current unattractive level and adjust them

to be closer to levels on University. Students coming out of PHE sector should have academic titles recognizable in other EU countries (i.e. instead of current professional specialist of computing, professional master of computing might be much better recognized). Finally, Croatian PHE but also its economy and educational sector might benefit from full implementation of the Common Quality Framework (CQF) in its current form which would create opportunities for institutions which are proactive to move and develop faster.

## 3.4 Czech Republic

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

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

### 3.4.1 Overview of the PHE Sector in Czech Republic

PHE has been a topic in the Czech Republic for more than 20 years, but during that time discussion has not significantly moved ahead. In terms of the role of PHE and its rationale within the higher education system, this has been the period most suitably described as the time of "missed opportunities."

The separate sector for professionally oriented higher education institutions of the non-university type has not been fully successfully implemented; There are only 2 public Professional Higher Education Institutes (PHEIs) and around 40 private Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), but they comprise less than 10% of student enrolments. Neither within this sector or in general have the specific objectives and mechanisms for PHE been set. Both funding mechanisms and quality assurance procedures are mainly oriented towards academic teaching and research.

Professionally oriented programs are also provided by "colleges" ("Higher Vocational Schools"). They are working with the same age group – high school graduates – but they must follow a completely different legal framework that is part of the law on secondary education. Consequently they are perceived rather as a part of secondary education system and their tertiary status is not fully accepted by both students and employers. Thus this sector has stagnated since 1990s.

In the 1990s when CASPHE (Czech Association of Professional Higher Education) and EURASHE (European Association of Institutes in Higher Education) were founded (as the political representation of the sector), the binary system was more pronounced and clearly defined – on one hand the universities, on the other hand the non-universities with professional profiling. Currently the PHE sector is undergoing dramatic changes,

as is the society as a whole. Even renowned universities (i.e. VŠCHT- University of Chemistry and Technology in Prague) are now considering expanding their profiles. While the professionally oriented bachelor's programs remain the core and basis of the Czech PHE, there are also a growing number of professionally oriented master's programs.

In some vocational sectors – e.g. health care, nursery – the interaction between world of work and HE is relatively close and all actors cooperate successfully. These sectors quite meet the needs and expectations offering work placements. They are involved in policy making, develop close links with employers, carrying out joint research and innovation projects, etc.

Another key issue is the governance of Tertiary professional schools (Higher Vocational Schools) within the regional education system. This might give an impression, that they are even a burden for regions. There is no dedicated legislation that would steer the development of TPS. From TPS's perspective there is an absence of a law specifically dedicated to them and their activities. Some of newly established policy instruments, such as tax relief for employers (if an employer takes on a graduate, he is exempted from paying taxes), have generated uneven effects. They are helping somewhere, but are not positively accepted everywhere, e.g. due to complex administrative procedures. Also, the world of private schools is underestimated and it is not really reflected in the considerations and debate. They often meet the definition of PHE schools. But due to their status as private institutions their focus on PHE is often not well developed or easily identified. In the end, we have to say there is no long-term concept for PHE. There is a lack of common understanding of the definition of PHE in the Czech Republic. And the separation between higher education (both university and non-university) and vocational sectors does not contribute to development of PHE.

### **3.4.2 Main Challenges faced by PHE**

While the link between the PHE and the world of work must be the key issue, this is not always clearly set and understood by all of the stakeholders - employers, schools and students. Most public HEIs in the Czech Republic are not interested to participate in PHE. There is also a lack of interest of employers in close cooperation with the TP schools. There are many factors why – management of companies is mostly just short-term (3-5 years), mostly they need only acute solutions, they are not planning that far ahead etc. etc.

The key is to change the negative and distorted perception of the word “qualification” in both academics' and employers' perspective. On one hand the higher education should be more oriented towards the idea of best qualified graduates. On the other hand, employers should accept that well qualified graduates are not just the ones that are precisely trained for the position they need to cover. In an approaching Industry 4.0 paradigm the room is mostly for graduates with good general education and best up-to-date qualification.

This trend means a need for diversified workforce that comprises both transferable and specific skills (e.g. in crafts). We must emphasize that not everyone will or can be a manager, director or an academic. This can be achieved only by diversification of criteria for quality standards in education. Good craftsmanship worthy of admiration, there is no reason to look down upon craft certificate holders. There is a lack of up-to-date teaching methods that would enable these diversified students' expectations and skills to be developed. The very students' life experience has change dramatically and the teaching and learning process has not followed well these changes. There are also problems with basic student literacy in basic live skills. Life is now much more complex (complicated) than before, but general education is not taking this into account. The provision lags behind with its teaching methods which are no longer functioning. The lectures might seem even too dull for the current students. Sometimes, 40-year-old teaching methods are used in school for teaching of the “current” generation. As result we face the problem of lack of students' motivation and inadequate learning

outcomes. Regarding the system of qualifications Czech Republic – which are the same as other central European countries – the system has high number of regulated professions (more than 360) which complicates and limits dynamics of development of new study programmes.

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

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

### **3.4.3 Ideal Future Scenarios for PHE**

The key debate is on the definition of standards that should take into consideration the employers’ needs. Everything in the world is rapidly changing, and communicative and adaptable graduates are needed. The only way forward is that the world of work and the schools will work together on everything that concerns the study programme. The mechanism that would help to achieve this ideal situation – future scenario - could be that the school has a designated staff/career adviser only to communicate with the world of work. The devoted person can listen and translate needs and challenges on every day basis.

It is also important to gain the maximum from European instruments (Examining Quality Culture in European Higher Education Institutions (EQC), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), etc). These instruments were initially perceived with scepticism, but in the meantime their benefit has been more and more accepted and acknowledged.

Employers and experts from the world of work should ideally be more present at schools; they should teach and be active in the development of curriculum and teaching methods. This is one of the main challenges in the Czech higher education system since the accreditation procedures actively prevent the involvement of external experts from outside the academia. If they don’t have academic publications in the field, they cannot officially guarantee quality of teaching. The right way forward could be strengthening the role of “professional regulators” who usually follow the dynamics of their own sector. Their views should be taken in account within accreditation procedures.

As the ideal solution, we see combination of pragmatic strategy under current legal and regulatory conditions and developing and promoting a long-term vision, where this sector should go forward. There is also a need to bridge the gap between private and public schools.

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

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

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

## 3.5 Hungary

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### 3.5.1 Overview of the PHE Sector in Hungary

The Hungarian Rectors Conference as the Hungarian partner in PROCSEE organized the 1st meeting of the National Committee for Professional Higher Education Excellence (the Hungarian NCPHEE) in Budapest on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The Committee – representing governmental bodies, educational experts, employers and students – has drafted the main challenges of the Hungarian professional higher education which can be found below.

The worldwide tendency to make a stronger link between higher education and the labour market with the aim to increase the employability of the youth is clearly reflected in the Hungarian governmental measurements lately. The Hungarian Higher Educational Strategy acknowledges that in order to raise the level and competitiveness of education the affected parties have to accept the concept that state higher education institutions can, and must, operate as a part of the market.

The HE Strategy - titled "A change of pace in higher education" - includes macro-level PHE-related goals and measurements, some of which have already been realized.

In 2016 a significant change was made when many colleges became “universities of applied sciences” which offer bachelor and master programs. The difference between universities and universities of applied sciences is in the focus of the programs: while universities keep their strong scientific focus and offer also doctoral programs, universities of applied sciences integrate practice into the programs.

Another important trend is the establishment of an increasing number of dual courses with intensive collaboration between HE institutions and relevant industry actors.

Also, there are specifically PHE-targeted development programs, such as the “Industry 4.0 Irinyi” program, and others aiming at the enhancement of the research-development and innovation performance of Hungary, like the “National Smart Specialization Strategy” (S3), or the Centre for the Cooperation of Higher Education and the Industry (responsible to coordinate PHE with Research-Development and Innovation activities).

### 3.5.2 Main challenges for PHE in Hungary

#### **“Harmony between the Professional Higher Education and the Regional Development Strategies”**

Local, economically useful knowledge is an important condition for regional growth, and PHEIs are not only important sources of knowledge but also key regional actors. PHEIs should act as knowledge organisations interacting with other institutions based on the different “helix models” of regional Smart Specialization Strategies which boost innovation through partnerships between the academia, academic – business, public sector, NGOs– NGO. PHEIs must contribute to regional development in many ways, ranging from creation of

knowledge and human capital, transfer of existing know-how and technological innovation, to active participation in regional leadership and investment in knowledge infrastructures. Institutions must find the most effective way to collaborate and to harmonize their strategies and tactics, to achieve the highest synergy in serving the regional development. Institutions are challenged with establishing and leading a complex knowledge and innovation network covering the whole region. It is a real management, communication and organisational challenge. There is also a similar task in harmonizing (consulting, subsidizing) among different (local – regional – national – European) levels of strategic activities and implementation. There is a need to elaborate a totally new methodology and practice in this field.

## **Promotion of PHE in Responding to Skill Shortages**

The main challenge is to promote PHE as an alternative route in tertiary education, in particular to promote it as a response to skill shortages and as means to increase employability of graduates. To ensure equivalence of “professional” and “academic” tracks of education in terms of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, Hungary needs to continue the challenging process of harmonisation and modernisation of education programmes. Hungary needs to improve the evidence base of PHE’s contribution to society/individuals, and therefore there is a need to enhance methodologies to map the influences of the educational development strategies. Once the effects of the PHE/HVET strategies are outlined, the next challenging task is to fine-tune these strategies in a way that strategies respond better and with flexibility to the real industrial requirements. To reach an acknowledged status of PHE within academia two critical changes need to be made: the legal environment must be modified at certain points, and the industry needs-based collaboration attitude of the lecturers must be developed.

## **Organising and Monitoring Student Placements in the World of Work**

The main challenges are in this aspect that the social perception of Hungarian university degrees has changed negatively which has adversely affected the education and development options and the competitive labour market position of the next generations. Programs must be revised and adjusted to the actual demand.

Quality assurance is paramount in respect of the professional practices in all areas of training; emphasis is on managerial motivation in terms of quality. Highly skilled and highly motivated trainees are required. Development of alumni systems would make possible to involve experts to train them.

Identifying clearly the essence of internship is important both for employers and students. Stakeholders must articulate the role of internships, and create the right conditions; ensuring the legal background of the opportunities for SMEs to accept interns. Relations with employers (corporations) should be strengthened on a national and institutional level.

Students should be monitored during internship, and later during their actual work (active use of graduate career tracking system), utilization of knowledge gained through the monitoring and existing knowledge of Career Offices.

Skills and professional expectations should be clearly specified. Students should have access to qualified work rather than simple photocopying and making coffee. Improve the employer’s awareness of the benefits of a student internship, and the importance of their role. It is necessary to extensively evaluate the diversified corporate world (e.g. seasonal nature of some occupations) in the dual-training system. A main challenge is to organize student placement into the labour market in a way that it doesn’t increase drop-outs simultaneously (IT specialists, engineers, etc). There should be a support to employees working without a diploma to acquire qualification.

## **Personal learning environments in PHE**

Personal learning environments are still in an early stage of development in the Hungarian higher education sphere.

The functioning and respective challenges of personal learning environments can be analysed according to material (hardware), intellectual (software), and human (orgware) criteria. In addition to the simultaneous availability and development of these three factors personal learning environments require the synchronisation of formal, non-formal and informal learning schemes.

As far as material resources are concerned the provision of devices required by personal learning environments poses a significant challenge. In case of personal learning environments, the arrangement of the educational process is a key concern too. Consequently, the elaboration of training management programs (Learning Management System, Learning Content Management System) can facilitate the promotion of the digital organisation efforts of the given institution.

Intellectual resources and the curriculum are closely connected to the above issues. While certain content development and learning management-related best practices are available at the institutional level, there are no generally applicable best practices and the adoption of the experiences obtained in various fields represents a substantial challenge on the national level as well.

Another problem is the elaboration of a formally compatible curriculum responding to labour market and educational needs while bearing relevance to the required equipment and the respective subject content. Challenges related to human resources include the development of instructor and student skills facilitating an effective elaboration and deployment of the respective learning environments during one's studies and later in the labour market.

### **3.5.3 Ideal Future Scenarios for PHE**

The ideal higher educational (HE) system reflects the needs of the labour market, and it is improving dynamically and constantly in response to the social-economical changes. In the ideal professional higher educational sector (PHE) that performs high quality teaching and learning, HE institutions are differentiated by their profiles, and students are provided with relevant professional opportunities in line with their qualities, skills and competencies. The ideal Hungarian PHE sector provides thus internationally competitive professionals.

#### **Specialized training fields in HE institutions – clear profiles**

HE institutions focus on given professional fields and they provide world standard education and training on the given fields. This implies also a performance-based competition both among the Hungarian institutions and internationally, and also the fact that the Hungarian PHE sector covers all the knowledge-fields and levels with collaborating institutions in a network.

#### **Differentiated professional opportunities in accordance with the different performance**

Ideally, differentiation based on the abilities of the student is an established practice. Interested, motivated, hardworking students have the opportunity to progress faster and further in their studies supporting each other. They are able to receive experience abroad, try themselves in the labour market, and they are able to join live business projects or basic research projects even during their studies.

## **Equal opportunities to gain knowledge throughout Hungary**

Equal chances are twofold: regions of Hungary provide equally high quality in higher education, and young people, potentially HE students, have equal chances to acquire competitive knowledge. PHE has a significant role in exploiting the previously hidden opportunities given in the region and thus in increasing competitiveness in the regions that historically would lag behind the others. In any aspects, disadvantaged students are supported to have access to HE, and mentored to be able to complete successfully their studies. As a result of all this, youth possesses competitive competencies to perform professionally at a high level, and circumstances are given in all the Hungarian regions to live a successful life in the knowledge-society.

## **Industry-driven researches**

The system of higher education is characterised by a clear work allocation in the ideal future: the central mission of universities is scientific “basic research”, while the “universities of applied sciences” focus on the application of knowledge, which implies practice oriented researches or industrial development. The two types of institutions work in close cooperation with each other and the economic environment to support prosperity and businesses.

## 4 Thematic Challenges facing Professional Higher Education

All the challenges listed in this section are accompanied by Ishikawa (root cause analysis) diagrams which are available online from: <https://procsee.eu/outputs/pcs/>.

### 4.1 Alignment of PHE with Regional Development Strategies

#### 4.1.1 What issues are felt by stakeholders in the sector?

Professional Higher Education is well placed to play an active role in local and regional development thanks to its practical orientation and sometimes close links with regional/local governance structures. In some cases, PHE institutions have also been specifically established to respond to the needs of the region's industry. Despite its mission, there is often insufficient alignment of PHEIs with local and regional development strategies, and more generally with the needs and opportunities arising from their immediate environment and region. This can lead to issues and challenges on multiple levels.

From a regional perspective, insufficient contribution of PHE to the world of work might lead to lost opportunities to enhance employment and entrepreneurship which in turn can contribute to a weak or declining economy.

Limited or lack of regional engagement will also have a negative impact on the PHE institutions. Lack of or low engagement implies that PHEIs engage in short-term reactive or transactional behaviour, rather than mobilising their full potential for the benefit of the region, fulfilling their missions and shaping their future through deliberate planning. Lack of local and regional engagement may also contribute to a limited understanding and legitimacy of regional (socio-economic) needs and future direction within the PHEI. This in turn leads to low incentives to create innovative RDI projects or study programmes for local utility and missed opportunities to engage students and staff in these fields. PHE's learning offer remains supply-driven focusing on courses based on the capacity and interests of the teaching staff rather than the needs of the region, its population and industry. The lack of regional involvement of PHE may further contribute to a perceived low status of PHE, as outlined below in the section on 'Promotion of PHE to respond to skill shortages'. As a result, the PHEI becomes less attractive to potential students, regional stakeholders and employers. Internal PHEI development will also suffer, since it would lead to lost opportunities for the institutions' staff to build and share knowledge in innovative areas of development, in turn decreasing attractiveness of the institution to top talent.

From a financial perspective, the lack of regional engagement leads to missed opportunities to raise external funding, in particular, that coming from regional development funds. This in turn leads to limited funding diversification. It may also lead institutions to incorrectly prioritise resources, and thus make inefficient use of them.

A PHE Institution will most likely feel the impact of low alignment with regional priorities in terms of decreased overall performance. This may cause low satisfaction from both the world of work and from students due to irrelevant or outdated courses which do not reflect regional circumstances. This would then negatively affect key indicators including attractiveness, student numbers and knowledge exchange activities.

## 4.1.2 What are the root causes of these issues?

PHE institutions can be constrained either by their ability or willingness to engage regionally. At policy-level, the regional role of PHE institutions can be unclear due to overly centralised national systems of education, unclear PHE legislation and a lack of autonomy for PHE Institutions. PHEIs may have little scope to manage their education offer, payroll, finances. Financing mechanisms may be connected to simplistic indicators such as student-numbers, rather than to regional development priorities more widely. PHE Institutions in CSEE can find difficulty in acquiring public funding for knowledge exchange activities since this funding is typically directed towards academic research rather than types of Research, Development and Innovation that PHEIs can contribute to. Where institutions are willing to engage regionally, the criteria for funding, evaluation, accrediting or ranking institutions do not necessarily take regional development activities into account, meaning that these activities become effectively irrelevant, due to improper measurement indicators.

At institutional level, many PHE institutions lack capacity in strategy-making from a regional perspective, due to leadership which does not fully understand the benefits of regional engagement, and partnerships. Regional engagement is not embedded in the PHEI's core tasks and not part of the overall mission, vision and strategy, or human resource policies, internal funding allocation, incentives or monitoring systems. As a result, regional actors, and hence their goals, are not integrated into PHEI's strategy development and implementation. Alternatively, broad statements in the mission and role may not necessarily be translated into clear action plans and specific tasks.

Within institutions several barriers can limit knowledge exchange activities. These include an excessive focus on teaching, rigid curricula and low student-centeredness of learning activities. A lack of internal incentives for staff can also limit regional focus in strategy, teaching, learning and RDI.

Externally, the perception of PHE Institutions either as more 'academic' actors or as 'schools' can limit the willingness of other actors to engage with them. Furthermore, limited capacity of public authorities from industry to engage in consultation or to participate in the design and delivery of training can also restrain joint regional development. These issues can be exacerbated through the lack of active knowledge networks to support these types of activities.

## 4.1.3 What challenges should be addressed to achieve progress in this sector?

To achieve the goal of aligning the activities of Professional Higher Education with regional development strategies, PHE institutions need to:

- be empowered not only to respond to regional strategies, but also to fully participate in their development
- map and mobilise their own capacity and potential to contribute to regional strategies and more generally to the needs and opportunities arising for the region (population, industry, society, environment), and then deeply embed this aspect throughout their institutional mission and strategies
- significantly develop their capacity for knowledge exchange in all its forms
- enhance the flexibility of all their activities, in particular those of programme design, development and teaching, curriculum, so as to respond to regional learning needs more effectively and more promptly

## 4.2 Promotion of PHE in Responding to Skill Shortages

### 4.2.1 What issues are felt by stakeholders in the sector?

Professional Higher Education is an important tool for addressing skill shortages in the world of work, due to its specific orientation towards the needs of employers as well as its flexibility in addressing those needs. Despite this bespoke function, the status and reputation of PHE in the overall educational ecosystem does not reflect its importance or its specific advantages, which in turn limit it from reaching its full potential due to what are primarily reputational reasons.

This failure to articulate the added value of PHE to employers, potential students and the public at large often leads to a perception that PHE programmes are 'second-class', i.e. inferior to programmes of similar level within academic higher education. This in turn leads to lower student enrolment, in particular of skilled students. It also creates barriers in a host of other sectors including problems regarding the transfer of professional qualifications or credits into academic higher education, and obtaining research funding for PHE.

### 4.2.2 What are the root causes of these issues?

According to our analysis, this situation is caused by a mixture of internal and external factors. Internally, many professional higher education institutions, instead of embracing the connection with the labour market and the specific learning and teaching methodologies which are associated with them, try to imitate academic programmes in a professional context. Thus, instead of having the 'self-confidence' to proceed down a fully professional track, the organizational style and the teaching focus within PHE institutions end up replicating the traditional academic format and not practice-oriented teaching and PHE-specific innovation. Institutional HR policies which value academic credentials over professional experience only serve to exacerbate this trend.

This reluctance to fully embrace professional higher education is due primarily to institutions' wish to be perceived as excellent within higher education – a moniker which is usually reserved for academic higher education institutions. Thus, in many countries, PHE institutions are legally defined as sub-universities, through restrictions such as banning PHEIs from doing certain kinds of research or offering qualifications at higher levels of the national qualification frameworks.

This negative perception is also bolstered by a lack of transparency tools which would allow PHE Institutions to promote their impact to the public, to employers and to the rest of the educational community. Tools for ranking or benchmarking PHE Institutions and/or their output are nearly completely absent in the region.

Aside from the excessive academic slant of some parts of PHE, institutions also fail to fully respond to skill shortages due to insufficiently strong connections between institutions and the world of work. While all PHE has connections with the world of work, these connections often do not have strong, uniform continuity and systematisation, leading to a vastly different quality of these connections between different stakeholders at different levels in different institutions, given the lack of legislation on this matter.

Institutions collect insufficient evidence on labour market needs and prospects, and on the specific skill needs of employers in different sectors. In particular, institutions are quite often behind the curve in learning about and responding to changes to the needs of the world of work. These factors lead to curricula with scarce to the world of work, and, consequently, the world of work feels less added value from being directly engaged in the delivery of training.

The overall inflexibility to labour market needs also arises from structural factors, in particular the time it takes to gain programme accreditation (which in many countries can take up to three years), leading to a 'legislated' minimum responsiveness gap to changes in the labour market. Additionally, institutions often fail to strategically integrate the communication with the world of work, as well as their requirements into their overall mission and profile, leading to trickle-down effects throughout the institution. In turn, quality assurance systems do not necessarily evaluate the 'professional' aspect of the educational experience, or the impact of such an experience on the labour market, preferring instead to limit themselves to traditional academic criteria. Finally, the policy decisions and management approaches of institutions are seldom policy-based, leading to issues around curricula.

#### **4.2.3 What challenges should be addressed to achieve progress in this sector?**

To achieve the goal of promoting Professional Higher Education as an important and relevant response to address skill shortages in the world of work we need to:

- Implement measures to increase the confidence of PHE Institutions to fully embrace and according to their professional profiles, rather than drift towards academic higher education
- Ensure strong recognition of the impact of PHE on society and the world of work, of the quality of programmes offered in PHE and of the qualifications issued by PHE institutions (in particular as it relates to transfer between academic and professional HE)
- Develop and strengthen cooperation between all educational actors and stakeholders, at every level of institutions
- Increase the flexibility of PHE in response to labour market needs, both in terms of the degree of changes to the overall offering and the curricula embedded within it, as well as to the speed of implementation of changes.

### *4.3 Organization and Monitoring of Student Placements in the World of Work*

#### **4.3.1 What issues are felt by stakeholders in the sector?**

The PROCSEE stakeholders have commented that, generally speaking, student placements suffer from issues of quality rather than regarding quantity of supply. The main issue with respect to the quality of placements is a mismatch between student needs and their work placements, which leads to an overall lack of motivation from students. Secondly, the organization of placements is often sub-optimal, with inappropriate management processes and curricula.

#### **4.3.2 What are the root causes of these issues?**

From a policy perspective, a lack of standards for work placements creates an environment which allows for low quality placements to occur. In particular, institutional and/or programme accreditations often do not explicitly regulate placements in their criteria, and there are few data collection mechanisms available to collect data on quality of placements or placement processes.

PHE institutions are often unable to manage and monitor student placements as closely as they would like, due to a lack of resources dedicated to this task. This issue is exacerbated by a lack of appropriately qualified staff at every level of placements. Thus, institutions often lack staff who know how to adequately develop learning outcomes for work placements, how to coordinate placements, collect feedback from students and analyse demographic and economic changes and feed these back into the curricula.

In particular, many institutions have poorly developed systems to collect feedback from students as to how they perceive the quality of their placements, or to follow up the impact of those placements in the long-term. On the other hand, when starting their placements, students also do not always have a clear view of their future career pathways, making it difficult for them to estimate impact.

PHE Institutions and the world of work do not always see each other as partners. Participants from the world of work do not always play their part in hosting placements due to poor prioritization of education vis-a-vis sales within companies, and the overall cost of hosting educational experiences, including due to the low productivity of apprentices. On the other hand, PHE Institutions don't always see themselves as service providers for the world of work.

### **4.3.3 What challenges should be addressed to achieve progress in this sector?**

To achieve the goal of better organizing and monitoring student placements in the world of work, the PHE sector will need to:

- Describe structures for collaboration which clearly define the specific roles and obligations of all stakeholders involved in the placements
- Integrate the voice of students, particularly in the evaluation of placements and in the analysis of their impact
- Ensure that all processes linked to placements (content, preparation, realization, feedback and impact) are adequately quality controlled
- Better understand the needs of employers, in order to have realistic expectations regarding the type of placements that can be provided

## ***4.4 Personalization of Learning Environments within Professional Higher Education***

### **4.4.1 What issues are felt by stakeholders in the sector?**

There is a misunderstanding as to the nature and needs of Personalised Learning Environments (PLEs). Often PLEs are confused with e-learning or with e-learning tools, while in fact PLEs cover all the systems that help learners take control of and manage their own learning activity. As such, Personalised Learning Environments describe the tools, communities and services that constitute the individual educational platforms that learners use to direct their own learning and pursue educational goals, as well as to manage the content and process of their own learning.

Currently, the use of effective learning technologies is not included into the policies or practices of professional higher education, which contributes to several deficiencies in the system, which include high drop-out rates, a skills-gap between the desired skills of the labour market and those actually provided by institutions, as well as an overall lack of student-centeredness in teaching and learning.

From a curricular viewpoint, it is felt that learners are not primarily responsible for planning their professional development. This is due to inflexible curricula, that are usually set within an overly strictly defined education system, characterized by overly prescriptive time-management, and a lack of incentives for learners to show creativity and innovation in their studies. Lack of flexibility also makes it difficult for disadvantaged students to take part in PHE, since the system does not always allow for sufficient flexibility to cater to their specific needs.

From a skills perspective, an enhanced emphasis on personalised learning would lead to a better acquisition of transversal competences or 'soft skills', in particular, study skills and communication/ expression skills. It is also believed that enhancing student centeredness would improve the quality and quantity of feedback coming from student evaluations since students would be more engaged with the outcomes of their learning.

#### **4.4.2 What are the root causes of these issues?**

From a policy perspective, the introduction of personalised learning environments is not considered as a priority within the sector. This is reflected by the fact that neither governmental nor institutional levels have instituted policies for the introduction and/or promotion of PLEs, and consequently one also finds a dearth of funding for the introduction of such systems.

This is partly due to conservative attitudes towards teaching as well as towards technology on the part of both teachers and students. This in turn means that there is a lack of understanding of the benefits of PLEs, and a lack of motivation for their introduction from stakeholders in the schools.

Personalised Learning Environments allow for students to chart their own path to professional employment, and to decide their own orientation to the world of work. This is somewhat hindered by institutions which are traditionally planned in a top-down way rather than based on demand from the labour market as well as by insufficient collaboration between the various stakeholders in PHE.

From a resources perspective, the lack of interoperability between supporting technologies and the absence of skills in institutions for using these technologies in the process of teaching means that the implementation costs of these systems are high, although eventually beneficial for all involved.

#### **4.4.3 What challenges should be addressed to achieve progress in this sector?**

To achieve the goal of personalising learning environments within professional higher education, the PHE sector will need to:

- Design personalised learning environments which are both learner-driven as well as oriented towards the requirements of the world of work,
- Modernise methodologies and teaching frameworks, and
- Develop new methods to assess learners' progress within a flexible, personalised and technology supported learning environment

## 5 Overarching Challenges Facing Professional Higher Education

In analysing the thematic challenges facing PHE, several transversal themes emerge, limiting the overall growth and development of the sector:

### PHE rarely meets its full potential

In the extensive discussion of challenges outlined in the previous chapters, there are few examples of active barriers which are blocking the development of PHE. Rather, barriers consist of under-developed policies, lack of incentives, unhelpful attitudes, etc. Despite this, all the stakeholders who contributed towards this report describe PHE as a sector full of latent potential which is not being realised.

### PHE is caught in a cycle of middling expectations

Throughout the themes, PHE stakeholders have highlighted that the role of PHE is not sufficiently recognised, and that PHE is often seen as being inferior to academic higher education, despite its acknowledged status as a distinct yet equivalent form of higher education. This lack of perceived status is often indicated as a cause for most of the problems faced by PHE, and it apparently limits PHE's interaction with stakeholders, participation in regional development, attractiveness to students and many other factors. This report outlines multiple activities which are not undertaken due to a lack of incentives for institutions or their staff to do so. This creates a cycle whereby institutions wait for incentives to improve the quality of their activities, while they are starved of funding due the fact that they are seen to be of middling quality.

### PHE is suffering from a lack of visionary leadership

Throughout this report, it has been stressed that PHE should act as a driver of regional development, be considered a key stakeholder in developing the economy, as well as an important contributor to societal goals. However, throughout it has been pointed out that most institutions have not fully integrated this vision into their strategies, and that leadership is hesitant to boldly embrace such a vision. This often means that the PHE sector in the region rather ends up resembling a set of higher vocational schools whose main aim is job-training for the local economy.



### PHE suffers from a multiplicity of aims

One of PHE's main strengths also manifests as a significant weakness. In serving the world of work, students, regional government and the public at large, PHE often finds itself in a situation where it has to achieve too many goals, which are poorly defined, precisely due to the difficulty resulting from trying to

accommodate the requirements of all these groups simultaneously. Since the PHEIs need to prioritise all these groups equally, none of them feel especially favoured. Consequently, while lobbying for more funding or elevated status, the institutions also find that none of these groups advocate strongly on their behalf.

### **PHE misses the tools for a narrative**

PHE describes its impact on society not in terms of academic output, but in terms of contribution to the economic development of a region, knowledge transferred, graduates adequately prepared for the world of work, and so on. However, there are few evaluation schemes or reporting modalities that allow institutions to quantify these concepts and describe them for interested stakeholders. Even where indicators (such as employment rates) do exist, they are rarely collected by institutions. Due to this, PHE often finds it difficult to specifically indicate the added value it is contributing to society and the world of work, especially when compared to academic higher education.

### **PHE lacks tools for efficient continual improvement**

Just as PHE-specific tools for impact measurement and evaluation are not yet widely available, the same goes for quality assurance. Most quality assurance tools in use within PHE are in fact better suited for use in academic contexts. Equally, quality assurance tools that control the connection with the world of work, or help assuring the quality of apprenticeships are often still under development or entirely absent.

## 6 Abbreviations

CASPHE: Czech Association of Professional Higher Education

CROQF: Croatian Qualification Framework

CSEE: Central and South-Eastern Europe

CQF: Common Quality Framework

ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ECVET: European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

EQC: Examining Quality Culture in European Higher Education Institutions

EQF: European Qualifications Framework

EURASHE: European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

HE: Higher Education

HEI: Higher Education Institute

HVET: Higher Vocational Education and Training

NCPHEE: The National Committee for Professional Higher Education Excellence

NGO: Non-governmental Organisation

PHE: Professional Higher Education

PHEI: Professional Higher Education Institution

PLE: Personalised Learning Environment

PROCSEE: Professional Higher Education Excellence in Central and South-Eastern Europe

SME: Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

TPS: Tertiary Professional Schools



# PROCSEE >

## Strengthening professional higher education

PROCSEE is a policy-oriented project, aimed at strengthening the provision of professional higher education, by strengthening the policy-work conducted by umbrella organizations representing professional higher education institutions in Central and South-Eastern in Europe. Working together over three years, the project intends to:

- identify the main challenges facing PHE in the region
- propose policy solutions to address those challenges in the short-to-midterm, through a mixture of good-practice identification and stakeholder consultation
- bring together the main actors in PHE in each participating country, so as to build implementation roadmaps for the identified policy solutions

The result of the first year of activities of the project, this document outlines the main challenges facing professional higher education in the CSEE region, with the aim of highlighting potential areas for reform in the next project phases.

[procsee.eu](http://procsee.eu)

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