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The Education System of the Czech Republic

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ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL OF PUBLIC-SECTOR FUNDED EDUCATION

From 1st January 2005, the Czech education system has been operating according to new acts: the Education Act that regulates education from pre-primary to upper secondary and tertiary professional schools and its public administration, and the Educational Staff Act that regulates the teaching profession on the same levels. The Higher Education Act with 17 amendments regulating higher education has been in force since 1999.

Schools are administered as part of the general administration. The responsibility is distributed between the central government, the 14 regions and the communities. The regions have a high degree of autonomy.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) preserves the integrated state educational policy by formulating the long-term policy objectives of education and the development of the education system every four years, which are then submitted to the government. Long-term plans have now been formulated for higher education for 2006-2010 and will be updated annually.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) above all:

- is responsible for the concept, state and development of the education system;
- determines the content of education: approves framework educational programmes (developed until the ISCED level 3) that are the basis for developing school educational programmes; accredits educational programmes for tertiary professional schools and higher education institutions;
- is responsible for the state's education financing policy – for producing the education budget and determining the principles for allocating it;
- is in charge of the school register, which has a constitutional significance: only a registered institution has the right to provide recognized education and receive public resources;
- is an organizing body of in-service teacher training institutions and institutional care facilities.

The regions are responsible for education within their area. Every four years the regional authorities produce long-term policy objectives for their area in compliance with the national objectives. The regions are the organizing bodies for upper secondary and tertiary professional schools.

The communities are responsible for compulsory schooling. They establish and administer basic schools and nursery schools which are not compulsory.

Since 1st January 2003 all schools have had the status of legal entities. School heads were given full responsibility for the quality of the educational process, the financial management of the school, appointing and dismissing teachers and relations with the community and the public. By law, the school organizing body must establish a School Council so that parents, pupils, staff (not the school head), and the public can participate in the administration of the school.

Private schools have been established since 1990 (at university level since 1999). These schools are mostly non-confessional; the usual legal form is a for-profit or non-profit grant-aided organization.

The Czech School Inspectorate (*Česká školní inspekce*) is a central control body under the direct supervision of the MEYS. It is responsible for monitoring schools and school facilities: their educational conditions and results, the quality of management, the efficiency of using funds and compliance with binding regulations, at all levels except for higher education institutions.

Pre-Primary Education

Mateřská škola (nursery school) is a part of the education system with a long tradition. The education is based on the Framework Educational Programme, which was approved by the MEYS in 2004 and it has been obligatory for schools since 2007/08. Attendance is not compulsory; nevertheless it covers almost 86% of the total age group (3–5 years), 92.8% in the pre-primary school year.

Institution	ISCED level	Typical age
<i>Mateřská škola</i>	0	3-6

Compulsory Education

School attendance is compulsory for nine years, usually from the ages of 6 to 15. All pupils start in a comprehensive single structure institution called *základní škola*, during the second stage it is possible to proceed to a *gymnázium* – a secondary school providing general education. Preparatory classes for socially disadvantaged children may be established at compulsory education schools. The school head decides whether to include a child at the request of the legal guardian and on the written recommendation of a guidance centre.

Institution	ISCED level	Typical age
<i>Základní škola</i> (single structure; primary and lower secondary education)	1+2	first stage: 6 -10 second stage: 11-15
<i>Gymnázium</i> (general lower secondary education)	2	11/13-15

Pupils can leave a single structure *základní škola* at the end of the fifth year for the eight-year *gymnázium* or at the end of the seventh year for the six-year *gymnázium* after passing the entrance examination set by the school.

The school year begins on 1 September and ends on 31 August of the following year. Forty five minute lessons are spread over five days of the week. The timetable is 18-26 lessons at the first stage, 28-32 lessons at the second stage (gradually increased). The number of pupils per class is between a minimum of 17 and a maximum of 30. The co-educational classes are made up of pupils of the same age. Small communities can organize schools (primary stage only) with one or more classes of mixed age. At the first stage, the same teacher usually teaches all subjects. Apart from education, schools also provide their pupils with all-day care and interest activities in the school facilities.

Until the end of 2006/07, the objectives and the basic content of the curricula were set by the national teaching standards. In September 2007/08 all *základní školy* started teaching in the 1st year (the first year of ISCED 1) and the 6th year and in the 1st year of the eight-year *gymnázium* (the first year of ISCED 2) according to the school educational programmes (SEP) they prepared themselves based on the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (FEP BE). The FEP BE defines nine main educational areas consisting of one or more educational fields, cross-curricular topics and supplementary educational fields. It also specifies the compulsory content of the fields, i.e. the curriculum and the expected results at the end of every period. The educational areas are Language and language communication; Mathematics and its application; ICT; People and their world; People and society; People and nature; Art and culture; People and their health; People and the world of work. The cross-curricular topics comprise Personal and social education; Education for democratic citizenship; Education towards thinking in the European and global context; Multicultural education; Environmental education and Media studies. Teachers can choose their own teaching methods, within the scope of the proposals or recommendations set out in the educational programme and according to the general policy of the school. Each school is free to choose textbooks (from a list approved by the MEYS).

Pupils are assessed on a 5-point scale by teachers through written and oral work and homework. The results of this continuous assessment are summarized in a report at the end of each semester. Verbal assessment has been authorized at all educational levels since 2005.

Pupils with difficulties can be made to repeat a year once at every stage. Since 2005/06 schools have been issuing a final evaluation to leavers of compulsory schooling. Meetings with parents are organized to discuss their children's progress. Almost 96% of pupils successfully complete their basic education and continue on to higher level education.

Post-Compulsory General and Vocational Secondary Education

Institution	Type of education	ISCED level	Length (years)	Theoretical age
Gymnázium	Upper secondary general	3A	4	15-19
Střední odborná škola Střední odborné učiliště	Upper secondary technical or vocational	3A	4	15-19
		3C	3	15-18
		3C	2	15-17
		2C/3C	1-2	15-16/17
All upper secondary schools	Post-secondary non-tertiary	4A/4C	1-2	18-21

The prerequisites for being accepted for upper secondary education are the completion of the compulsory education and successfully meeting the entrance requirements. The content of the entrance examination (written and oral) is determined by the school.

The prerequisites for being accepted in a post-secondary programme is the completion of a secondary programme depending on the education pathway and successfully meeting the entrance requirements.

The MEYS has laid down educational standards determining the aims and content and approved curricula, which are very flexible. The Framework Educational Programmes for Upper secondary education have been developing gradually for all types of upper secondary education.

There are 33 lessons a week at a *gymnázium*. The number of hours prescribed for obligatory subjects has been decreasing (29–21) over the years. The school head determines the optional subjects according to the school profile and can add 2 supplementary hours.

For technical programmes (ISCED 3A), the total number of lessons is between 28 and 33; the proportion of general subjects and vocational ones is approximately 60:40. Some lessons are optional. There are also 33 lessons with vocational programmes (ISCED 3C); the proportion of general subjects, vocational subjects and practical training varies. In three-year courses (the prevailing type) practical training can make up 35% of the lessons.

Leavers of upper secondary education can enlarge or change their qualification by three types of post-secondary programmes: two-year *nástavbové studium* (follow-up study) providing leavers of three-year vocational programmes 3C with general and theoretical subjects of the studied area so that they can achieve level 4A, and two types of shortened studies providing leavers of general or technical programmes 3A either with knowledge of another field so that they can reach level 4A or with skills to reach level 4C.

All upper secondary schools organize their own final examination:

- the *maturitní zkouška* in general or technical four-year courses (ISCED level 3A), in two-year *nástavbové studium* or in shortened study (ISCED level 4A); leavers are awarded the *vysvědčení o maturitní zkoušce* which gives them the possibility of entering a higher level of education;
- the *závěrečná zkouška* in three-year (prevailing) or two-year courses (ISCED level 3C), where a part of the examination is practical; the leavers are awarded a *výuční list* – a certificate which proves their skills in a given field; 3A level leavers in shortened study (4C) can also obtain this certificate;
- the *závěrečná zkouška* in two- and one-year courses, which are only technical (ISCED level 3C), school leavers are awarded the *vysvědčení o závěrečné zkoušce*. (Leavers represent a very small part of all leavers. Nevertheless, this route is important for the unsuccessful leavers of basic education.)

Leavers with the *maturitní zkouška* (in general or technical fields) represent over 71% of all leavers of upper secondary education. Leavers of *gymnázium* (i.e. general education – almost half of them enrol during the second stage of the basic school to 6-year or 8-year *gymnázium*) represent 29% of holders of the *maturitní zkouška* and more than 20% of leavers of upper secondary education.

Leavers of the *nástavbové studium* represent some 9% of those who achieve the *maturitní zkouška* by the traditional route. A new type of study 'Shortened study' as has been operating since 2005/06.

Tertiary Education

Institution	ISCED level	Length (years)	Theoretical age
Vyšší odborná škola (tertiary professional school)	5B	3 (3.5)	19-21/22
Vysoká škola (higher education institution, university and non-university type)	5A	3/4/5/6	19-22/26
Vysoká škola (university type) – Doctoral studies	6	3-4	–

Tertiary professional schools provide students with advanced technical knowledge. Their curriculum is prepared by the school and accredited by the MEYS. Since 2005/06 accreditations have been awarded to 3-year programmes (3.5 in the health branches) only.

Higher education institutions are either of university (in 2009, 28 institutions – 26 public, 2 state) or non-university types (45 private institutions). The study programmes are prepared by individual institutions/faculties and approved by the MEYS provided they have an affirmative standpoint from the Accreditation Commission.

The *maturitní zkouška* certificate is the minimum entrance qualification for all tertiary education. Each institution determines its own admission criteria and the content of the entrance examination.

The final examination taken after completing tertiary professional schools is the *absolutorium*. The graduate is called a *diplomovaný specialista* – DiS. (specialist with a diploma).

After completing studies at higher education institutions students take a state examination and defend a thesis. Graduates of the first cycle courses (3–4 years) are awarded the degree of *bakalář* – Bc. (Bachelor). Graduates of the second cycle courses continuing after the Bachelor course (1–3 years) or long courses (5-6 years) are mostly awarded the degree of *magistr* – Mgr. (Master); some branches have their own specific degrees: *magistr umění* – MgA. (Master of Art), *inženýr* – Ing. (for technical and economic branches), *inženýr architekt* – Ing.Arch. (in architecture); in medicine and veterinary medicine (and after the *státní rigorózní zkouška* exam) the degree of *doktor* – MUDr., MDDr., MVDr. Holders of a Master's degree can be awarded the degree of JUDr., PhDr., RNDr., PharmDr., ThDr. after the *rigorózní zkouška* exam. After completing doctoral studies (3-4 years) students take a doctoral examination and are awarded the degree of *doktor* – Ph.D. (Th.D. in theology).

Continuing Education and Training for Adults

At present, continuing education is provided in the following areas:

- general education, for the small minority who have not reached the desired level of initial education, in preparatory courses for entrance examinations to secondary schools, to higher educational institutions, and in language education;
- further vocational education and training (acquiring, broadening or completing qualifications, retraining, obligatory periodical updating of knowledge and skills in specified professions);
- civic/special interest education, to satisfy people's political, historical, cultural and other similar interests.

Continuing (adult) education and training is provided by schools (basic, upper secondary, tertiary professional and higher education institutions); organisations (enterprises, institutions, state administration bodies) providing education primarily for their own employees through their own education institutions or trainers, or by hiring the services of other institutions; non-profit organisations: organisations from the education sector; professional organisations, foundations, churches, trade unions, political parties, cultural institutions (museums, galleries, libraries, houses of culture); commercial educational institutions.

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The MEYS is also responsible for other than full-time forms of study that lead to a specific level of education, including higher education study programmes. The MEYS outlines the general framework of continuing education and supports its development mainly by its effort to restructure educational programmes and through financing development programmes. Its specific sphere of responsibility includes retraining where the MEYS is an accreditation body for retraining programmes. In 2006 the responsibilities of the MEYS were extended: it continues to coordinate the activities of other ministries and other bodies in the recognition of qualifications system. It approves, amends and deletes entries from the list of entire and partial qualifications in the National Qualification Framework (NQF), which is managed and published by the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education.

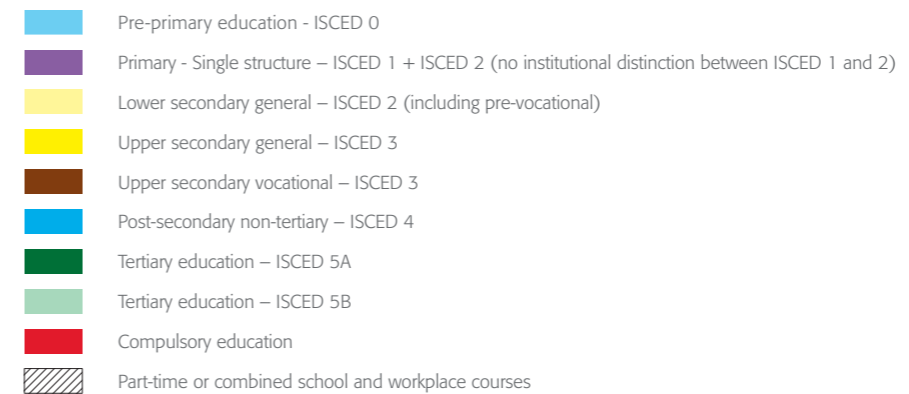
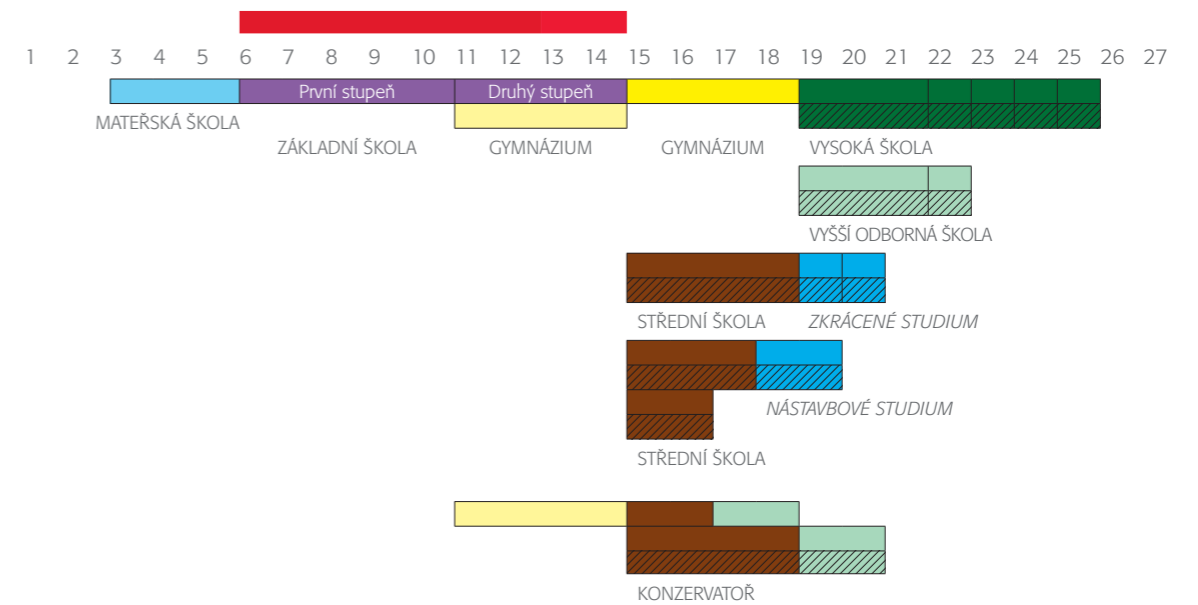
Adult education, through which a relevant education level is attained, may be organised at upper secondary and tertiary professional schools in other than full-time (daily) studies. It is financed by the MEYS through the regional authorities. Schools can also organize educational courses on a commercial basis.

Higher educational institutions provide adults with the opportunity to participate in many types of study programmes, either through distance learning or combined distance and full-time study. The attained education is equal. These study programmes are financed in the same way as normal programmes. Higher education institutions can provide lifelong learning courses in addition to their regular study programmes. Courses can be offered free or for fees, and can be career-related (e.g. continuing the education of educational staff) or for personal development (e.g. the University of the Third Age). Participants in lifelong education are not considered to be university students.

According to the Employment Act retraining courses can only be provided by institutions with an accredited educational programme, by schools providing education in a field incorporated in the register of schools and school facilities, by higher education institutions with an accredited study programme according to a special legal regulation or by an institution with an educational programme according to a special legal regulation. This type of education can also be provided by company training departments.

Retraining is financed from various sources. The unemployed registered as job seekers are entitled to attend courses fully funded by Labour Offices (from the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs). Other participants have to bear the costs themselves. Financing company level educational activities is the responsibility of the employer. Special interest education activities are fully funded by the participants. Prices are based on free market principles.

Organisation of the Education System in the Czech Republic 2009/2010



Source: Eurydice, National summary sheet on the education system in the Czech Republic, Structures of education, vocational training and adult education systems in Europe.