

# Education System in the Czech Republic

## 1. Introduction

- The Czech education system is based on a *long tradition* beginning in 1774, when compulsory school attendance was instituted. In the Enlightenment the Habsburg emperor Maria Theresa of Austria (1740–1788) passed the law that every child between ages 6 – 12 is required to attend school. However, the history of Czech education reaches even further back in time. It was in 1348 that the oldest university in Central Europe - now the Charles University - began teaching Czech scholars. However, there are many other highly prestigious public and private colleges and universities that prepare specialists in many fields.
- The current *literacy* rate in the country is above 99%. Ethnic Roma children attend school less regularly, and disproportionately attend “special schools” for mentally disabled or socially maladjusted individuals.
- School attendance is *compulsory* from the age of 6 till 15 (or 16). It is *free of charge* and all children have the same possibilities for their future education.
- The contemporary system of education in the Czech Republic has several levels and in fact it allows people to continue to increase the extent of their knowledge *for their whole life*. Children start with preschool, and continue on to elementary, secondary, university, and post-graduate education.
- *The classification system* used in the Czech school system consists of a scale from 1 (best) to 5 (worst) that is used to evaluate the students’ work. Report cards (summary classifications) are given for each subject halfway through and at the end of the school year.
- Children in our school system do not wear uniforms.
- All schools are coeducational.
- Handicapped children are educated separately or integrated (inclusive education).

## 2. Preschool education

- Pre-school education is not compulsory.
- Children may enter preschool before they begin compulsory elementary education. From the age of 3 to 6 children attend kindergarten.
- Preschool enrollment is guaranteed for children in their last year before entering elementary school, but they often attend as early as 4 years of age.
- Preschool institutions are intended to encourage early learning habits and facilitate social contact among peers, both of which are instrumental for a child’s smooth transition to elementary school.
- In cooperation with parents and teachers, children learn to think logically, training their memories and exercising their imaginations. Concurrently, these skills help to evaluate their intellectual and educational levels *before entering elementary school*.

## 3. Elementary education

- Czech elementary education takes 9 years, usually from the ages of 6 to 15.
- Most children attend state schools, but there are also newly established private and church schools.
- In contrast to the United States, children can obtain their elementary education at a variety of

- different schools that can also utilize different types of educational programs.
- Most commonly, children attend a regular 9 year elementary school, which is divided into two stages: a primary and lower secondary stage, where the primary stage encompasses grades 1-5 (children learn there: reading, writing, arithmetic.), while the lower secondary stage is grades 6-9 (They learn Czech language and literature, foreign language, Maths, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, History, Geography, Civics, P. E., Music and Art).
  - In towns and cities both stages are usually implemented into one school, however, some villages only offer first stage and the older children have to commute to nearest town. There is also an exception of grammar schools which are attended by children from the sixth to thirteenth grade. This type of school is usually meant as a route to universities.
  - In addition, children have the option to apply to **6 or 8-year gymnasium (grammar schools)** either after their 5th or 7th year of elementary education. Gymnasiums are schools targeted toward a specific area of study, but still provide pupils with their elementary education. Additionally, students may choose to attend a conservatory, for example an 8-year dance conservatory, and some students with disabilities will be placed in special schools to accommodate their needs.
  - All of these different types of schools provide students with an elementary education that allows them to continue on to pursue a higher education at the secondary and university level.

#### 4. Upper secondary education

- Upper secondary education can be either general or vocational, is generally four years in length (grades 10-13), and is not considered mandatory.
- At the age of 15 pupils can choose among a variety of secondary schools:
  - a) grammar schools* with general and rather academic education which prepare students for university study,
  - b) special schools* which include technical colleges specialised in building, chemistry, engineering etc., business academies, agricultural schools, nursing schools, music and art schools which offer professional education,
  - c) vocational schools* training would-be workers for practical jobs.
- At this level, vocational education is much more common than the general secondary education. Students who graduate with a vocational certificate often do not continue in the classical education system, and instead pursue a career in their chosen area of study right away.
- Students, who attend 8-year gymnasiums after 5th grade, which leads them all the way up to their 13th year of education.
- Secondary education usually lasts for 4 years and at grammar and specialised schools it is finished with a *school-leaving examination* which is required by all universities and colleges. This examination is taken in four subjects at grammar schools (Czech, a foreign language and two optional subjects chosen from foreign languages, science subjects or humanities) and in five or more subjects at specialised schools. The examination is held in May and is mostly oral except Czech language in which an essay is written about a month before. The oral part of the exam takes about two hours, half an hour for each subject. A student chooses one of 25 to 30 topics by drawing a number and after 15 minutes' preparation he/she speaks on the topic and solves given tasks. After the graduates have passed their school-leaving exam they receive the School-Leaving Certificate and they can apply for study at universities and colleges.

#### 5. University education

- Tertiary or university education.
- For those who do not want to enter the university there are various types of two-year training courses such as for managers, businessmen, social workers, specialised nurses or language experts.
- University education is available to all applicants with a completed secondary education (i.e. final exam) who successfully pass the entrance exam.
- Higher education of the Czech Republic consist of public, state (police and military) and private universities.
- Each secondary school graduate can apply for as many universities and colleges as he/she likes but before he/she is accepted they have to pass an entrance examination in the subjects in which the university specializes. The examination consists of a written test and sometimes an interview.
- Every large regional town in our country is a seat of a university or college now.
- Our oldest university is Charles University in Prague, other notable universities are Masaryk University in Brno, Palacký University in Olomouc etc. Prague has also one of the two technical universities in our country (ČTU), the other one is in Brno.
- The system of entrance exams is designed specifically by each individual college, and serves for testing the knowledge and skills of applicants.
- Most universities offer accredited bachelor's, master's/engineering degrees.
- A bachelor's degree is usually a three-year course of study in which students receive an elementary survey of highly specialized areas.
- Students can complete it by means of a final exam including the defense of a bachelor's thesis, or may continue on to the master's program, where they can achieve a narrower specialization.
- A master's degree consists of either a five or six-year study program (medicine), or as a two-year program following the completion of a bachelor's degree.
- In obtaining a master's degree, students gain both a basic survey of highly specialized subjects and a certain grade of specialization. The program culminates with students taking required state final exams and defending their thesis. Finally, an engineering degree can also be obtained, which pertains mainly to technical and economic fields.
- After students pass these types of university studies, some continue their specialization through doctoral programs. Passing this program is often conditioned with certain published work and sometimes also by training. Doctoral Degrees are awarded after other few years of study, which may be also individual, and completion of another thesis.
- The university or college study is finished with a state examination and every undergraduate also has to write a thesis in order to receive a diploma in a certain field of study.
- The diploma is handed over at a graduation ceremony.
- In college, students can study either in attendance form or a combined study.
- Besides standard types of study, colleges also offer other forms of education, including retraining study, university for seniors, studies oriented toward pedagogical qualification, and others.
- Study at public universities is free, provided that students qualify through entrance exams.
- However, after age 26 the attendant will no longer be eligible for student status under state social services and will not receive student benefits including health insurance while he/she studies.
- Undergraduates can study a variety of subjects such as economics, foreign trade, architecture, law, journalism, the humanities, foreign languages, medicine, science, music, art, drama, engineering or computer science at various schools e.g. School of Economics or Architecture, Law, Medical or Science Faculty, Faculty of Journalism, Teachers' Training College, Art School, College of Agriculture, technical universities or polytechnics.
- Among *the most attractive subjects* are philosophy, medicine, engineering and law, and also

language (including Bohemistics) and arts studies. The number of applicants who want to study these subjects is constantly exceeding the number of students able to be admitted, despite the fact that universities are continuously trying to increase their number of places available.

- Czech universities are also attractive for foreign students, who come to this country for short study visits or they have even decided to complete their undergraduate, postgraduate or PhD degree here.
- Prestige and qualities of education and research of public and state universities is much higher than private one. Private universities have undergone many scandals in last years (as well as public universities).

## **6. Paying fees**

- The Education in Czech Republic is free, but there are some exceptions.
- Like preschools which are paid by parents, though only the last year before entering elementary school is free.
- Most children attend state schools, but there are also newly established private and church schools. Private and church schools charge school fees.
- There exist private upper secondary schools, where parents pay for everything.
- There is also a long-standing talk about paying fees for attending university. However, as education is free, parents pay only textbooks, basic equipment and food if their child eats in a school cafeteria.
- In the Czech Republic you can find also private colleges.
- The state also pays health insurance for students up to 26 years of age.
- Study at public universities is unlimited and free, but after the age of 26, the attendant will not receive the student status from social services and state would not pay his health insurance if they continue studying.
- Only a limited number of students get a grant or a scholarship.
- For private Universities a fee falls between 2 000 - 3 000 euro and for BSBA & MBA (not accredited by Ministry of Education) study programs between 3 000 - 10 000 euro.

## **7. School year and holidays**

- The school year starts on the first weekday of September and ends on the last weekday of June.
- It is divided into two semesters with exams at the end of each. Usually, the first semester runs from 1.9. to 30.1. and the second from 1.2. to 30.6., separated by a one day break and summer holidays. The actual dates, along with holidays and breaks, are announced by each school individually and may vary slightly.
- Autumn holidays - two working days around Independence day (28.10.), which is a public holiday
- Christmas (winter) holidays - about 9 – 12 days. (usually 22.12. - 2.1.)
- Mid-term break - one day holiday (4.2.)
- Spring holidays - one week holidays, the date varies according to district (usually from beginning of February till end of March)
- Easter holidays - three days holiday (called Green Thursday, Big Friday and Easter Monday)
- Labour day - one day holiday (1.5.)
- Day of Liberation from Nazism - one day holiday (8.5.)

- Summer holidays - sixty two days holidays (1.7. - 31.8.)
- There is also Children's day on 1 June that is not considered as holiday, but children are usually taken on trips (one day or more, depending on teachers' courage and trust in their pupils) and other cultural activities.

### **A school day**

- A school day is different at different types of schools. The average number of lessons at a secondary school is around thirty a week, primary schools have fewer lessons, while specialized schools often have more.
- Classes begin between 8 and 8.15 and there are from 4 to 6 lessons in a row, followed by a lunch break, usually 45 minutes long, which is one period, and then afternoon classes. Afternoon classes end between 4 and 5 at the latest. Breaks between the lessons last from 5 to 15 minutes.
- See examples of timetables.