

Current Structure of Education System in the Czech Republic

Katerina Vlckova, Department of Education, Faculty of Education, Masaryk-University Brno

This text introduces the structure of the education system in the Czech Republic. It will be discussed according to the ISCED¹ classification of educational stages. Teacher education you will find in another chapter. The charters of education system are in appendix. The text is without a proof reading.

1. Political and Economic Background

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the bases of the school system were established in the Constitution of the Federation. The Constitution was adopted by the newly created Czech Republic in 1992. All the basic rights of the people connected to education are guaranteed by a part of the Constitution, which is called Magna Charta Libertatum. Everybody has the right to primary and secondary education, and, depending on individual ability and the means available to society, also tertiary education. Other rights include the right to set up a school, the rights of the minorities (e. g. to be educated in one's own language), the right to free choice of occupational and professional career, the right to be taught of religion or the right to scientific freedom.

The law sets the compulsory education period for nine years. The compulsory education starts at the age of six and ends after completing nine years of school attendance. Ninety five per cent adolescents nevertheless continue to study after these nine years of compulsory education and ninety per cent of them finish their twelfth year. All nine years of the compulsory education is free, for children of immigrant families too. Immigrants are ensured free courses of the Czech language (upper secondary education is free in case of a valid residence permit). It is possible to fulfill the compulsory education abroad or at home (home schooling - in that case the child's progress is checked regularly by a school). The authorities must guarantee a place at a basic school in the relevant catchment's area, but the parents have the right to choose a different school.

Statistics (2001):

- In the Czech Republic live 10,2 Million people, about 12% are in the age of compulsory education, 13% between 16 – 24, 51% are between 25 – 59, 19% over 60.
- The life expectancy by man is 71,7 and 78,4 by woman, the population grow is –1,8.
- Higher school education have 11% of population, middle school education 93% in the age 25 – 34 and 86% in the age 25 – 64.
- The rate of unemployment is about 9%. The unemployment rates depend on education level and age. The worst situation have people with basic education – they make 21% of unemployed and 37,3% of unemployed are in the age 15 – 19, 13,8% in the age of 20 – 24. Most people works in services 54,8%, then in industry 40,4% and only 4,8% in the agriculture.
- GDP is 56,7 USD, GDP per inhabitant 209 753 CZK, 4,5% of GDP makes expenditure for education. The average month earning is 14 633 CZK (ca. 460 EURO, ca. 500 USD).
- Average annual expenditure per pupil in CZK thousands (2001): nursery schools 27,9; basic schools 25,6; gymnázia 29; middle schools and VOŠ 34,9, SOU 32,7, tertiary level 72,6, special schools 59,7.

¹ ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education), UNESCO 1997.

2. Structure of the Education System according to ISCED²

The educational system consists of:

- nursery school (mateřská škola)³
- elementary [primary + lower secondary] school (základní škola)
- upper secondary school (střední škola)
- special schools for the disabled (speciální školy)
- colleges [post-secondary education] (vyšší odborné školy)
- higher education institutions or universities [tertiary education] (vysoké školy, univerzity)
- education and special purpose facilities (školská výchovná a účelová zařízení)

The system includes institutions providing basic education in art (základní umělecká škola).

Statistics (2001):

- There are 306 660 people working in educational field, of which 76.4% are women.
- There are 5 558 nursery schools with 278 859 pupils, 3 961 elementary schools with 994 130 pupils, 1 718 middle schools with 551 474 pupils, 166 higher technical school (VOŠ) with 27 584, 49 tertiary education institutions with 236 678 students (some private non financed from the state are not included). There are 1 488 special schools with 69 321 pupils (includes 237 nursery schools).

2.1. Pre-school Education (ISCED 0)

Nursery schools (mateřská škola) are for children of three to six years of age. These institutions follow a general plan issued by the Ministry of Education. There are many nursery schools that follow various international programmes (Step by Step, Waldorf-type, and Montessori's principles) and other alternative (Christian) programmes.

Even though nursery schools are not compulsory, nearly all children (87.5%)⁴ attend their courses for at least one year. The Ministry of Education considers making one year of nursery school compulsory part of education. It is because the children of socially disadvantaging backgrounds tend not to attend nursery schools and then have difficulties in the first years of their compulsory education.

Some primary schools organize preparatory classes (přípravné třídy) for children of socially disadvantaging backgrounds and other children who are not adequately physically and mentally mature for school attendance. In 2002/03 there were 1 489 children in such classes.

The nursery schools are co-financed by the community, yet large amount is paid by the parents (unlike before 1989). The last year before compulsory education is free of charge. The number of nursery schools decreases each year as the number of children decreases in the population.

² ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education), UNESCO 1997.

³ Nursery schools are pre-school institutions; Crèches (jesle) are considered health-care institutions, and are not part of the educational system.

⁴ (2002/03)

Statistics (2002/03):

- There are 5 558 nursery schools with 12 304 classes with 278 859 children.
- 22 323 nursery school teachers, which means the average of 12.5 children for one teacher, 22.3 children in one class, 1.8 teachers in one class, 49 children in one school and 4 teachers in a school.
- 95.2 per cent of the nursery schools are organised by the community, 3.1 per cent are organised by the ministry of education, 1.4 per cent are in private hands and 0.3 are organised by churches (1998/99)
- There are 237 special nursery schools with 6 091 children.

2.2. Primary and Lower Secondary Education (ISCED 1 and 2)

The basic school (základní škola) is intended for children of 6 – 15 years of age and consists of units of primary (první stupeň) and lower secondary (druhý stupeň) education. The basic school offers nine years of education and covers the compulsory education. The primary stage is planned for five years and the lower secondary stage for four years.

The Czech official school system offers three different alternatives for the basic school courses; Basic School (Základní škola), General School (Obecná škola) and National School (národní škola). There are other minor alternatives; Living School (Živá škola), Health-promoting school (Zdravá škola), Waldorf school (Waldorfská škola), Dalton School (Daltonská škola), Montessori Programme (Montessorská škola), Jena Plan (Jenský plán).

A new alternative is open in the programme of home schooling, which was offered as a five-year experiment in 1998/99. In 2001/02, 302 children participated in the project.

Basic schools are free, co-educational, half-day institutions. As integrated united school offers the basic school from 5 year of the child differentiation according the performance and interests, which is important for choose of the further education at the upper secondary level and professional career. After 5th year (or after 7th year) a pupil can, if he/she is accepted (entrance exams), enter a multiyear gymnázium (grammar school) and continue the compulsory school attendance here, about 9% of pupils do it yearly. The education programmes in the time of compulsory education (9 year) are very similar with the of basic school.

Having passed the 9th year, a pupil achieves basic education that is not certified, but this is under discussion and they should (in most cases) pass entrance exams for an upper secondary school. The pupils can choose comprehensive (gymnázium), technical (odborná škola) or vocational school (učiliště).

Statistics (2002/03):

- There are 994 130 pupils on basic school (1st stage – 544 554 and the 2nd stage – 449 576 pupils. At more-year gymnasium (lower secondary level with comprehensive education) are 41 841 pupils and at music school (konzervatoř) are 408 pupils. The total number of pupils participating in compulsory education is 1.079.585.
- From a total of 3 961 of basic schools there are 1 504 (38%) of those with only some classes: in general they have the first stage only (1410 schools, but less then 10% of all children attend them), 5 schools have only the second stage.
- There are 306 gymnázium (grammar school) and 5 music schools (konzervatoř) providing

basic education.

- Normally there are 251 pupils in a school at an average, e.g. 20 per cent of schools have less than 100 pupils and 21,5 pupils for a class, e.g. 16,3 pupils for a teacher (including heads, educational counsellor); in the schools works too 219 teachers assistants (mostly of Roma origin for Roma's children) and another 157 assistants are in preparatory classes at special schools.
- 67.875 integrated children (56 455 in mainstream schools and 11 420 in special classes or in specialised classes).
- 94 260 pupils in schools with intensive education in some subjects (for examples mathematics – 11 724 pupils, languages – 43 906, sports – 24 618)
- School establisher: 83,6% community, 14,1% Ministry, 1,7% private, 0,6 church (1998/99).

2.3 Upper Secondary Education (ISCED 3)

In the upper secondary stage there are comprehensive school called *gymnázia* (grammar school) or different kinds of technical or vocational schools. In all four-year schools students gets a certificate (*maturita*) after passing school leaving exams. This allowed the students to go to post-secondary and tertiary education level.

Gymnázia (grammar schools) prepare students for university or college studies. They may last 4 (only upper secondary level), 6 or 8 years. The junior years of multi-year *gymnázium* (6 or 8-year) cover the end of compulsory education (reaching the educational level ISCED 2A).

Střední odborné školy (upper secondary technical schools, abbreviation: SOŠ) are divided (on the basis of their specialisation) into *průmyslové školy* (e. g. mechanical engineering, construction, chemistry, electrical engineering), business academies, secondary agricultural schools, secondary forestry schools, secondary medical schools, secondary pedagogical schools etc. One specific type of *střední odborná škola* is a *konzervatoř* (arts school) offering higher technical education in fine arts: either dance (eight years of study) or singing, music and drama (six years of study). Most of the schools offer education in more than one field only; they are offering various educational programmes. Schools can provide education of different levels and in one or more branches depending on their capacity, staff and equipment. Most of the school offers 4-year programmes (ISCED 3A) concluded with *maturita* (leaving exam) which enable them to study at the tertiary level. Small number of schools offers 2 or 3-year programmes too without a *maturita* (ISCED 3C).

Střední odborná učiliště (upper secondary vocational schools, abbreviation: SOU) offers two or three-year study programmes for workers professions (ISCED 3C). 12 per cent of their students enrolled in four-year study programmes get *maturita* exam (ISCED 3A) and are allowed to do more complicated professions or after passing entrance exams to study at the tertiary level.

Učiliště (practical vocational schools) are not considered not to be middle schools. They are only one or two-year preparatory learning (ISCED 2C) for pupils that ended the compulsory education or earlier than after the ninth year and didn't use their possibility to study at the middle school or didn't succeeded at the entrance exams.

Since 90th there is a new type of schools called *integrované střední školy* (integrated middle schools) with integrated general technical and vocational study programmes.

Statistics (2002/03):

- There are 479 404 pupils in the upper secondary education.
- 343 gymnázia with 141 280 students (99 439 at gymnázia – without lower secondary level), 10 869 teachers⁵, 27,7 students/ class and 12,6 students/teacher.
- 813 SOŠ with 198 318 pupils and 18 146 teachers⁶, 26,5 pupil / class, 10,9 pupils / teacher.
- 562 SOU with 182 055 pupils and 10 026 teachers and 11 843 instructor-teachers⁷, 24 pupils / class, 18,1 pupils / teacher.
- Establisher: regions, communities, private, church, very small part state etc.

2.4 Post-secondary Education (ISCED 4)

In the post-secondary level belong schools that don't belong to the tertiary level, the study doesn't lead to a tertiary level qualification. In the Czech republic there are technical preparatory courses, requalification courses that require middle school leaving exam (ISCED 4C), pre-university preparations courses; study programmes after the middle school leading to higher qualification, e.g. vocational preparatory schools after middle school leaving exam (ISCED 4C), *nástavbové studium* (extension studies, ISCED 4A), one-year language study programmes at the certificated language schools (ISCED 4C) etc.

2.5 Lower Tertiary Education (ISCED 5)

To this level belong schools that don't lead to scientist qualification; there are 3 types of institutions in general:

University (universities) are classic institution of tertiary education; they are divided into faculties and offer many different study programmes in different study fields. Most known are Karlova univerzita - Prague (1348) or Masaryk University - Brno (1919). The study programmes are normally now divided into bachelor study (3 – 4 years, degree Bc.) and master study (2 –3 years, obtained degree Mgr.).

Vysoké školy (colleges, abbreviation: VŠ) are mostly technical, some of them have university character (many study fields, divided into faculties) and belong to the university type of tertiary education (e.g. Vysoké učení technické - Brno, Vysoká škola ekonomická - Prague, Akademie múzických umění etc.). Some of them offer only a few study programmes in a few study fields and only at the bachelor level, these belongs them to the non-university sector in the Czech Republic.

Until 1998 all existing institutions had the status of university. All new private higher education institutions are of non-university type; this possibility is here since 1999.

⁵ full time equivalent

⁶ full time equivalent

⁷ full time equivalent

Vyšší odborné školy (abbreviation: VOŠ, higher education institutions of non-university type) deepen the job's qualification and prepare for qualified working in complicated professions. The absolvents of middle schools with *maturita* (leaving exam) can get a higher technical education (ISCED 5B) with a special leaving exam called *absolutorium*. This new type of school was established after 1992 and unlike bachelor studies at colleges (*vysoké školy*) is more practical oriented. In the Czech schooling system, these schools are not considered a part of tertiary education; they are a part of post-secondary education.

Statistics (2002/03):

- VOŠ: 22 858 pupils, 166 schools, 2 086 teachers⁸, 138 students /school, 11 students / teacher
- 24 public schools, 4 state, about 27 private schools (all without VŠO)
- without VŠO, but including doctoral studies there are 248 756 students, most of them on public schools (235 874)
- full-time study: 199 610 (190 61 Bc. and Mgr. studies, 9 000 doctoral studies)
- part-time form: 49 146 (37 054 Bc. and Mgr. – programmes, 12 092 doctoral)
- further education: 29 838 students
- 29 484 staff, thereof 13 846 teachers (1 415 professors, 3220 *docent* (junior professors), 1 428 science assistants)

2.6 Upper Tertiary Education (ISCED 6)

This stage represents in the Czech Republic the science-oriented study programmes (doctoral programmes), which only lower tertiary graduates can study. Graduates of these doctoral programmes obtain the degree *PhD*. The course in its full-time variant lasts for three years, while the part-time variant lasts for five years. The longest one can study the doctoral programme is seven years. The full time doctorate students receive a scholarship.

In the Czech education system belongs the doctoral study to higher education – before all to university studies. The statistics see in the previous chapter.

2.7 Special Education

Special schools (*speciální školy*) are established for students with physical, sensual or mental disadvantages, who cannot attend regular schools. Special schools correspond to regular schools; there are special nursery schools (*speciální mateřské školy*), special basic schools (*speciální základní školy*), special upper secondary comprehensive schools (*speciální gymnázia*), and special upper secondary technical school's (*speciální střední odborné školy*). These special schools provide equivalent education to that provided by regular schools (ISCED 2A), but the content and the methodology are adapted according to the nature of the handicaps.

Statistics (2002/03):

- 1 488 special schools with 69 321 pupils (237 nursery schools, 211 basic schools (*základní škola*), 29 067 remedial special basic schools (*zvláštní škola*), 19 grammar schools a upper secondary schools, 102 practical schools (*praktické školy*), 172 practical vocational

⁸ full time equivalent

schools and upper secondary vocational schools (SOU, OU), 376 auxiliary special basic schools (pomocná škola). Most of the pupil (41 170) have mental disorders.

- There are 56 455 pupils integrated into regular classes and 11 420 pupils integrated into special (speciální třídy) and specialised (specializované třídy) classes.

3 Table Review

ISCED Education level		Type of school	Type of examination	Length (years)	Age (years)
Pre-primary	ISCE D 0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursery school • Preparatory classes (organised by basic schools) 	<i>No</i>	3	3 – 6
Primary	ISCED 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary school (first stage of the basic school) 	<i>Entrance:</i> maturity assessment (test školní zralosti)	5	6 – 11
Lower Secondary	ISCED 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower secondary school (second stage of the basic school) • Lower classes of 6/8-year grammar schools (víceletá gymnázia) 	<i>Entrance:</i> grammar school entrance exams	4	11 – 15
Upper Secondary	ISCED 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar schools (gymnasium) • Upper secondary vocational schools (střední odborná učiliště) • Upper secondary technical schools (střední odborné školy) 	<i>Entrance:</i> entrance exams <i>School-leaving:</i> School-leaving exams (or „maturita“ exams)	2 – 5	15 – 19
Post-secondary	ISCED 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension studies (nástavbové studium) • Requalification courses • Short professional courses • etc. 	<i>Entrance:</i> not necessarily <i>An outcome:</i> a certificate	from several months up to two years	19 and more
Lower Tertiary	ISCED 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education institutions (vysoké školy) • Universities (Univerzity) • Higher technical schools (vyšší odborné školy) 	<i>Entrance:</i> Entrance exams <i>An outcome:</i> Bachelor thesis Master thesis	2 – 6	19 and more
Upper Tertiary	ISCED 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education institutions (vysoké školy) • Universities (Univerzity) • Research institutions (výzkumné ústavy) • Etc. 	<i>Entrance:</i> Entrance exams <i>An outcome:</i> Dissertation	3 and more	24 and more

4 Discussion Topics

- Try to describe what would your education (that you have obtained in your own country) look like if you had lived in the Czech Republic. Which schools would you study? How old would you be after finishing your studies?
- Do you think you would enjoy studying in the Czech Republic? Give reasons.
- Is there anything you find very different to the education system in your country?
- What do you find very similar or identical?

- The introduction of tuition fees (paying for university studies) is being discussed in the Czech Republic. What is your opinion on the subject? Are there tuition fees in your country?

5 Further reading

EURYBASE - a web page about education systems in the European Union and other European countries, in English, as well as in the national languages.

<http://www.eurydice.org/Eurybase/>