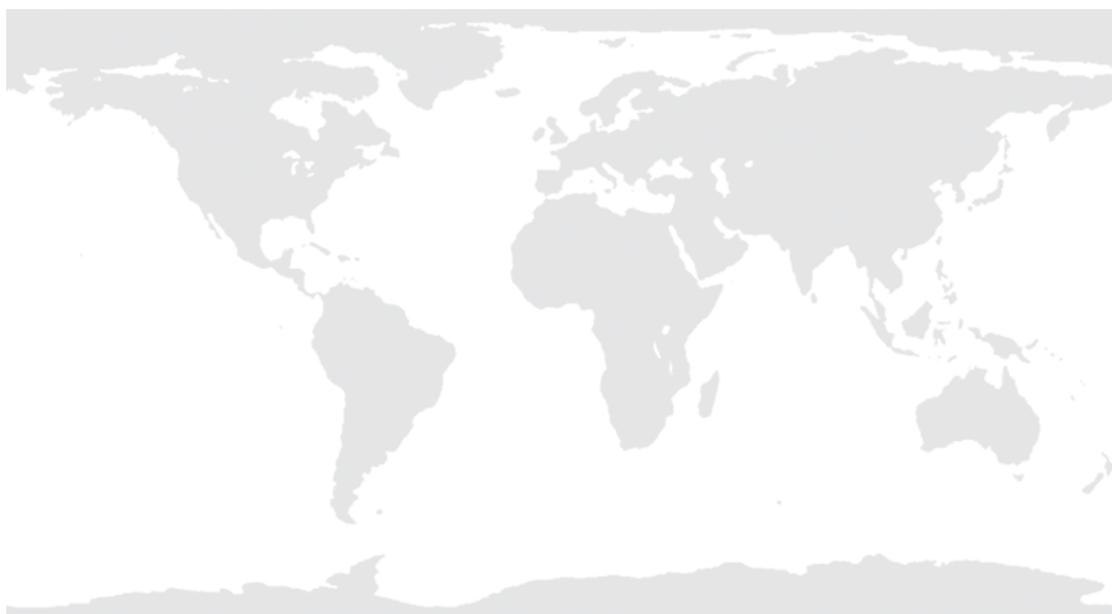




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Principles and general objectives of education

According to the Education Act of 2004, education shall be based on the following principles: equal access of all citizens of the Czech Republic or nationals of any other European Union member state to education without any discrimination based on any ground; due consideration to the educational needs of individuals; mutual respect, tolerance, and dignity; free basic and secondary education of citizens of the Czech Republic or nationals of any other European Union Member State at schools established by the state, a region, a municipality or a pool of municipalities; free dissemination of knowledge in compliance with the general goals of the education system; enhancement of the educational process on the basis of results achieved in the sciences, research and development and the widest possible application of effective up-to-date pedagogical approaches and methods; evaluation of the outcomes of education; and lifelong learning opportunities for everyone.

Section 2 of the Education Act specifies that the main general goals of education are the following:

- the personal development of the individual who shall possess knowledge and social competencies, ethical and spiritual values for his/her personal and civic life, for a profession or an occupation, and for lifelong learning;
- acquiring general education or general and vocational education;
- understanding and application of the principles of democracy and a legal state, fundamental human rights and freedoms along with responsibility and a sense of social cohesion;
- understanding and application of the principle of equality of women and men in society;
- the formation of national and state citizenship awareness and respect for the ethnic, national, cultural, language and religious identity of every person;
- knowledge of global and European cultural values and traditions, understanding and acquiring principles and rules arising from European integration as a basis for coexistence at national and international levels;
- acquisition and application of knowledge of the environment and its protection arising from the principles of sustainable growth and of safety and the protection of health.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The legislative framework for education is based on the Constitution of the Czech Republic and the Charter of Basic Rights and Freedoms, which became part of the constitutional order on 16 December 1992.



The adoption of the **Law No. 564/1990 on State Administration and Self-Government in the Education System** introduced significant changes in the school management system. The Act instituted the sectoral management of basic and upper secondary schools and also made the flow of funds from the schools budget to the local level more transparent. The Act conveyed the greater part of administrative authority over schools to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MEYS). The Ministry's management responsibilities were thus considerably increased, and the focus of its management activities shifted from determining curricula to managing the functioning of the education system (i.e. to administrative management). The Act also transferred the responsibility of establishing schools from the national to local authorities by establishing school boards as administrative authorities at the district level. Under the Act, school principals were the executive authorities of state administration in the school system. This arrangement, along with the constitution of schools as legal entities, gave schools considerable administrative as well as financial autonomy. The Act was substantially amended in June 1995. The Ministry's administrative functions in the regional school systems were reinforced, as were the responsibilities of its regional administrative bodies. The amendment also fulfilled the Ministry's commitments made in the government programme declaration and the paper *Quality and accountability*. It notably addressed questions regarding the state recognition of schools, the allocation of funds to individual schools, public information, participatory school management, and the responsibilities of the Czech School Inspectorate.

Additional important changes were introduced to Law No. 564 by **Law No. 132/2000** and **Law No. 284/2002** in relation to the public administration reform. School authorities as district bodies of state administration were abolished and their powers were transferred to regional and district authorities. Then the powers of district authorities, which were being abolished, were transferred to 'municipalities with extended powers' and to regional authorities.

Act No. 390/1991, on Preschool and School Establishments, is an amendment to Act No. 76/1991, published as Act No. 395/1991. This Act provided for the system of education and special education facilities, special-purpose facilities, counselling centres and school canteens. It codified the option of permitting children with sensory or physical handicaps or speech impediments to attend mainstream kindergartens which had formerly been restricted to children without disabilities. This Act was amended in June 1995. The primary and secondary school systems (or regional school systems) were governed by the Act No. 29/1984, the School Act. The first fundamental change was introduced by Amendment No. 171/1990, which made nine years of basic school education compulsory, provided diverse educational programmes in accordance with pupils' abilities and interests, established multi-year gymnasia, gave schools the status of legal entities, provided for the establishment of a non-state school system (i.e. church and private schools), transferred the function of establishing secondary vocational schools to central authorities, and established a state apprenticeship financing system. The Amendment to the School Act of 22 June 1995 (Act on the System of Basic, Upper Secondary and Higher Professional Schools) among others made the ninth year of basic school compulsory (with the sole exception of pupils leaving to attend multi-year gymnasia and dance conservatories), changed the duration of the two stages of the basic school (i.e. grades 1 to 5 and grades 6 to 9),



phased out state-financed post-*maturita* programmes, and also provided for the establishment of tertiary-level professional schools.

The new **Law No. 561/2004 on Preschool, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education (the Education Act)** of 24 September 2004 and subsequent amendments, came into force on 1 January 2005 replacing the three above-mentioned Acts, i.e. the Act on State Administration and Self-Government, the School Act, and the Act on Educational Establishments. The new Act stipulates the conditions under which education is provided in schools and school facilities, defines the basic aims and principles of education as well as the rights of individuals and legal entities, and sets out the responsibilities of bodies implementing state administration and self-administration in education. It also introduces a new approach to curriculum development, specifying that curricular documents are developed at two levels—national and school level. At the national level, the framework education programmes set out binding frameworks for the various educational stages (preschool, basic and secondary education). Each school then develops its own educational programme according to the principles set out in the relevant framework education programme. (MEYS, 2008).

The **Act No. 563/2004 on Pedagogical Staff** provides for a new definition of pedagogical staff, the requirements for performing pedagogical work, ways of achieving professional qualifications, the conditions for performing the function of director of a school and school facility, and the system for in-service training of pedagogical staff and their career development. This new law aimed, above all, to determine the statutory qualification requirements, strengthen the professional prestige of teachers in society, provide incentives for their personal development and, in this way, improve the quality of the educational process. This Act was amended after the passing of the new Labour Code in force since 1 January 2007. (*Ibid.*).

The **Act No. 172/1990, the Higher Education Act**, gave the universities back their academic freedom, self-administration and autonomy. At the school and faculty level, self-governing academic senates elected by the academic community were established to supplement academic councils. The Council of Higher Education Institutions, which under the Act represents institutions of higher education, especially in relation to the Ministry, became the universities' local administrative authority. By establishing an Accreditation Commission as an advisory body to the government, the Act set the stage for development of quality control in higher education. The Act was amended in July 1993 through the adoption of the Act No. 216/1993, which was intended to improve the quality of academic teaching staff. The **Act No. 111/1998 on Higher Education Institutions** was approved on 1 July 1998, and amended in 2001 (No. 147/2001), 2005 (No. 562/2004), and 2006 (No. 552/2005). The most recent amendments reflect the gradual implementation of the three-cycle pattern of the Bologna process.

The **Act on the Validation and Recognition of the Outcomes of Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET)**, adopted in 2006 and effective since August 2007, creates a legislative framework for the recognition of qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

According to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which is a part of the Constitution, everybody is entitled to education (Article 33). The Amendment No. 171/1990 to the School Act reduced compulsory school attendance from ten to nine years and simultaneously extended the eight-year basic education programme to nine years. The Amendment to the School Act of 22 June 1995 made the ninth year at basic school obligatory.

Administration and management of the education system

A comprehensive reform was initiated in 2000. New legislation on regions and communities enabled the devolution of state powers to establish upper secondary schools and higher professional schools, the transfer of property of these schools to newly established regions, and the phasing out of school authorities and district school boards which had been established in 1990. Starting in 2001, school funding in regions, decision-making regarding administrative matters, the management of human resources, and other powers were progressively transferred to regions and communities.

The system of school management and administration in place until 1990 was highly centralized and the role of the party/state bureaucracy was not offset by any autonomous governing mechanisms. The adoption of the Act on State and Local Administration in the School System (1990) and the Higher Education Act (1990) brought fundamental changes to the administration and management of the education system. The first systemic change was the concentration of administrative authority over the greater part of the education system in the hands of the Ministry of Education. The second major change created conditions for increased local administration in the regional school system and assigned to the municipalities and to the school boards autonomous district authority. The third significant step toward decentralization was the constitution of schools as independent legal entities. This greatly increased the responsibilities and redefined the role and position of the school principals. Another important step was the new status of the Czech School Inspectorate, which became an independent state administrative authority under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

The administration of the school system was further reformed in 1992, when the Ministry of Education's administrative jurisdiction over vocational schools (with some exceptions) was transferred to the Ministry of Economy. This measure led to the creation of a parallel governing structure at the Ministry of Economy and has thus resulted in some jurisdictional conflicts. The June 1995 amendment completed the system of local administrative authorities within the school system by establishing a legal basis for the existence of local administrative authorities at the school level (school councils) to counterbalance the responsibilities of the school principals.

Since the reform, the **Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS)** no longer holds powers to found upper secondary schools and higher professional schools. Changes have also been made in its financial powers, and new functions have been established for the Ministry to fulfill the task of drafting long-term educational policy plans. As the Ministry is responsible for the whole education system, its powers with regard to the network of schools and educational facilities, and appointment of school principals, heads of education units and regional education



authorities, have been enhanced. Thus, the state administration of schools is performed by the MEYS and other central authorities (i.e. the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Health, Interior, Justice and Defence), the regional authorities, communities/municipalities and school principals (in state or municipal schools), as well as the Czech School Inspectorate. The MEYS is in charge of the definition of national education policies, strategic development and financing, and administrative activity in the school system as well as the creation and operation of information and other systems that support school activities. The MEYS is responsible for general administration, which mainly involves the management of the network of schools and school facilities. The jurisdiction over the management and administration of preschools and basic schools, and much of the administrative jurisdiction over secondary schools, is mostly delegated to the school authorities.

There are several institutes and organizations operating under the supervision of the MEYS. The **Educational Research Institute** deals with content and didactic issues in general education from pre-primary to upper secondary education, including special schools. It develops and revises the framework education programmes for general education, monitors the development of the school education programmes, prepares teaching materials for educational practice, and offers guidance services. The **National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education** is a coordinating, consultative, expert and research institution in the field of vocational education and training (VET) and tertiary professional education. The Institute develops and revises the framework education programmes for all fields of secondary VET, offers advisory services through its Career Guidance Centre, manages the National Qualifications Framework and takes part in its development. The **Institute for Information on Education** is in charge of developing the education statistical information system and monitoring and analyzing educational trends. The **National Institute for Further Education**, established in 2004, consists of thirteen regional stations and coordinates and organizes in-service teacher training courses. The **National Institute of Children and Youth** participates in the implementation of governmental schemes for the support and protection of children and youth, and focuses mainly on leisure learning and non-formal education also providing support to those involved in this type of learning and education. The **Centre for Evaluation of Educational Achievement**, established in 2006 on the basis of the provisions of the Education Act 2004, is in charge of developing the new school-leaving examination (*maturita*) and designing instruments for the assessment of educational outcomes at the end of the basic school. The **Centre for Higher Education Studies** conducts studies on the policy, strategy and development of higher education and deals with the recognition of higher education qualifications.

The **Ministry of Agriculture** has authority over agricultural vocational schools, including the approval of programmes and study courses. The **Ministry of Health** has full administrative jurisdiction over all health care secondary schools and vocational schools, with the exception of general education. It also operates crèches providing early care and education for children aged less of 3 years.

As of 2001, district school boards no longer carry out their self-governing roles in education. In the new system, the governing body is a region or a municipality. During 2001, **Regions** took over the portfolios of the former school authorities and part of the Ministry's portfolio. Regions are primarily responsible for



establishing and closing down secondary schools, postsecondary technical schools, conservatoires, special schools, training centres and a number of school facilities. Regions may appoint or dismiss directors of schools and school facilities of which they are founders only upon approval of the Ministry. Regions also have to provide for financial operations of schools and school facilities from regional budgets, i.e. covering their operational and capital costs and contribute to the activities of civic associations.

Municipalities as self-governing bodies have traditionally held statutory powers to establish basic schools and supporting educational facilities. Municipalities now hold statutory powers to establish kindergartens, basic schools, basic schools of art, centres for leisure activities of young people and other school facilities. Municipalities therefore execute the powers of founding bodies, but may only appoint directors of schools and school facilities upon approval by the relevant regional authority. Municipalities are also obliged to establish conditions for implementation of compulsory schooling. They also cover the operational and capital costs for schools and school facilities over which they exercise the powers of the founding body.

Directors of schools and school facilities manage the relevant schools and facilities and are responsible for their professional and pedagogical standards. They take administrative decisions as stipulated by law, e.g. admission to studies, decisions concerning educational measures, postponement of compulsory schooling, interruption of studies, etc. **School Councils**, if they are set up, are composed of student representatives (students' legal guardians), teachers and representatives of the founding body, and they exercise public control. Moreover, their task is to approve school plans and annual reports, budget proposals and report on the school's financial performance. They also provide advice on the design of study and training programmes, development policies and suggestions for appointment or dismissal of the school director.

The administrative authority responsible for educational quality control in the regions is the **Czech School Inspectorate** (CSI), which was established in mid-1991 as part of the newly constituted sectoral education management system pursuant to Act No. 564/1990. The CSI is an independent organization governed directly by the MEYS and headed by the central school inspector appointed by the Minister. In addition to executing state control over adherence to generally binding legal regulations, the CSI is authorised by law to perform external evaluation, i.e. identification and evaluation of conditions, implementation and outcomes of the educational process, evaluation of the conditions in relation to human resources and material and technical facilities, and supervision over the efficiency of the use of public resources. The CSI publishes annual reports including the findings of inspection activities in schools, and providing basic data about the scope of inspection and conditions under which it is being performed. Data about the CSI information system and internal administration are also included in the report.

Under the Higher Education Act (1990), the task of the MEYS as state administrative authority for higher education is to create conditions for the development of universities and university education, coordinate activities, allocate financial resources and monitor their use, register universities' statutes, and establish institutions as independent legal entities to fulfill these tasks. Pursuant to a proposal



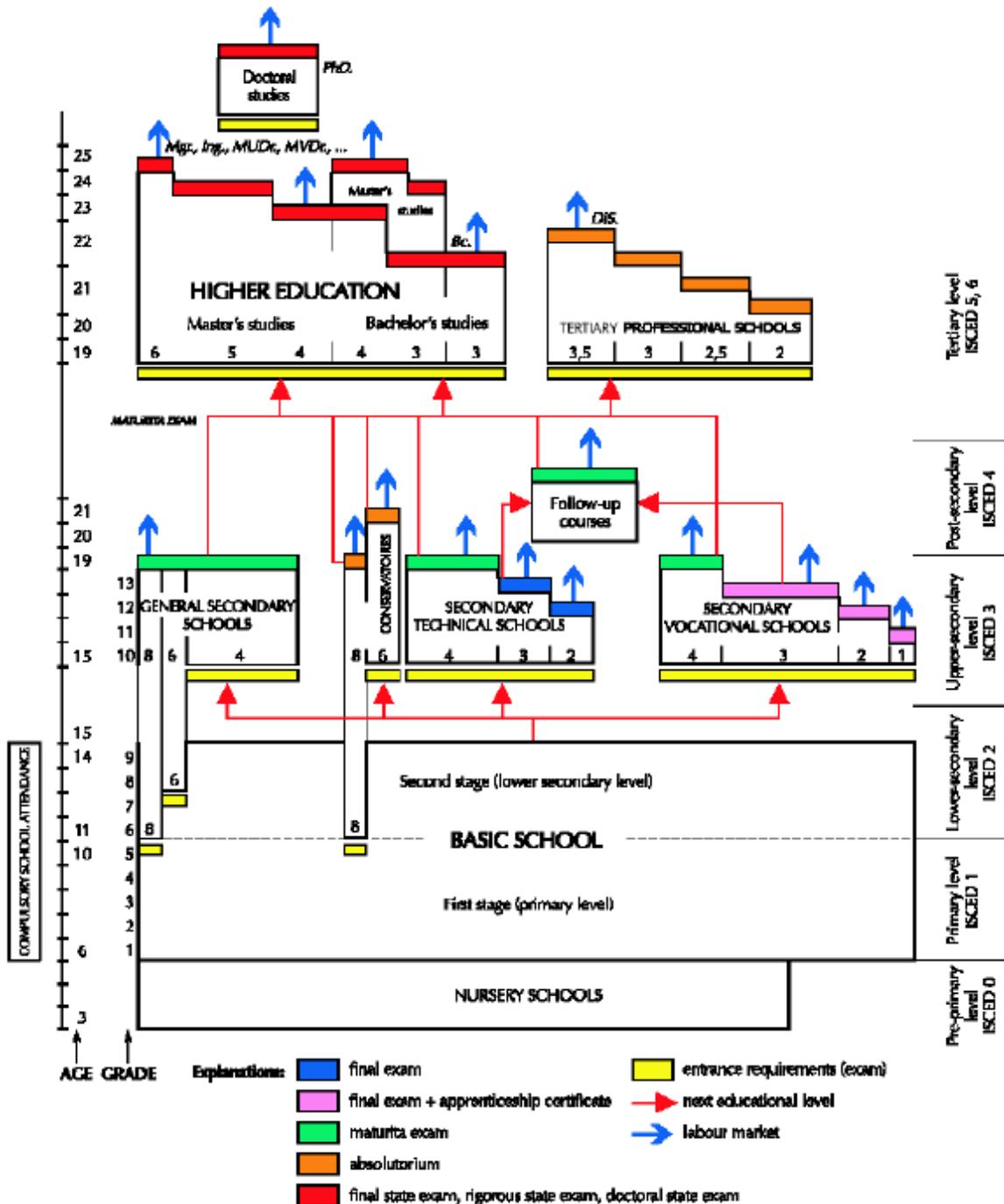
by the **Accreditation Commission**, established as an advisory body, the Ministry may decide to revoke or return a university or university faculty's right to administer state or rigorous examinations in a given field or fields or to instate or reinstate professors or senior lecturers. Another important mandate of the Commission is to gain an independent overview on the quality of higher education and provide assistance to each university in the form of a qualitative evaluation of its activities. The Commission therefore regulates the accreditation process of, and monitors the progress and results achieved by higher education institutions.

Universities may be established, merged, or dissolved by an Act of the Parliament. Universities and their faculties are legal persons. Their organization and activities are determined, in accordance with the law, by their autonomous academic administrative bodies, i.e. the **Academic Senates** and **Academic Councils** of the universities and faculties. Senate members are elected from among the academic community (teachers, researchers, students and, where applicable, professional employees). Academic Council members are appointed by rectors and deans from among teachers, researchers and other professionals with the consent of the academic senate. Each university is represented by its **Rector**, and each faculty by its **Dean**. These functionaries are legally entitled to manage, represent and take actions in the name of their respective universities and faculties. They are accountable for their activity to the academic senate of the university or faculty by which they were elected. Rectors are accountable for their universities to the MEYS.

The **Council of Higher Education Institutions** consists of representatives designated by university and faculty academic senates; it submits proposals concerning the composition of the Accreditation Commission, the distribution of financial resources among universities, as well as other measures affecting higher education. Universities enjoy a great deal of independence in making decisions. The Council of Higher Education Institutions plays a very important role in shaping the Ministry's higher education policy, including the funding policy. The situation is similar within the individual universities as well, where faculties (which are themselves independent legal entities) also enjoy a high degree of autonomy. The authority of rectors and deans is limited by the academic senates in that a large portion of their decision-making power is subject to the consent of the senates, of which they cannot be members. The **Czech Rectors' Conference** was established in 1993 as representative body of the academic community and the Ministry's advisory authority in all significant decisions pertaining to higher education.

Structure and organization of the education system

Czech Republic: structure of the education system (2008)



Source: MEYS, 2008.

Pre-school education

Preschool education is for children in the age group 3 to 6 years and is provided by kindergartens. Attendance is not compulsory. Early care and education of children aged less of 3 years is provided in crèches operated by the Ministry of Health.



Primary and lower secondary education

Basic schools provide nine years of basic, compulsory education, usually beginning when the child is 6 years old. In accordance with the 1995 amendment to the School Act, the first stage of basic school has been extended to five years and the second stage (lower secondary) shortened to four. Pupils can also enrol in basic schools providing specialized instruction in artistic fields (music, ballet, visual arts and drama). It is possible for gifted pupils to complete the compulsory nine-year basic school by transferring to an eight-year or six-year gymnasium (after grade 5 or 7) or an eight-year dance conservatory (after grade 5), which also offer complete secondary education.

Secondary education

Upper secondary education generally lasts three or four years, depending on the type of programme (excepting multi-year gymnasia and dance conservatories). Secondary schools include: four-, six-, and eight-year gymnasia offering complete secondary education culminating in the *maturita* exam and intended primarily as preparation for university-level studies; four-year secondary technical schools providing complete vocational secondary education leading to the *maturita* exam and preparing students primarily for professional activities or for technical university-level studies (shorter programmes in certain fields and not leading to the *maturita* are also offered); secondary vocational schools providing vocational qualifications through two- or three-year programmes, culminating in a final examination (students who obtain only theoretical preparation at a secondary vocational school receive practical training at special centres and workplaces for practical learning); conservatories providing six-year (in the case of music, singing and drama) and eight-year (in the case of dance) programmes culminating in the *absolutorium* diploma (i.e. certification of tertiary professional education), considered as a specific type of secondary technical school. Secondary schools also provide extension studies (generally lasting two years) leading to the *maturita* for students who have completed secondary vocational education.

Higher education

Tertiary-level professional schools (introduced in June 1995) offer a new type of postsecondary programmes lasting three to three and a half years preparing *maturita* holders for qualified performance in demanding technical vocations. Universities offer a variety of programmes leading to the award of an academic degree. Bachelor's degree programmes (generally lasting three years, in some cases four years) are intended to provide either education for a profession or the first stage of a longer higher education programme. Master's degree programmes normally last two years. Long-cycle master's degree programmes ('engineer' degree programmes in the case of technical and economic fields) generally last five years (six years in the case of general and veterinary medicine). All of these programmes are completed with a final state examination, which generally includes the defence of a dissertation. Universities also offer programmes leading to a doctoral degree, based on further study and a major research project. The duration of these programmes is three to five years culminating in a final examination and defence of a dissertation. Most programmes provided by higher education institutions have been restructured in line with the three-cycle scheme of the Bologna process.

The school year extends from September to August of the following year (normally classes end in June); it is divided into two terms. There are two months of holidays during the summer, two weeks for Christmas, spring holidays and some other free days. The length of the school year expressed in number of teaching days varies each year: in 1994/95 it was 196 teaching days, and in 1997/98 it was 193 teaching days. In 2010/11 the school year comprised 196 teaching days or about 39 (five-day) teaching weeks. (Eurydice, 2011).

The educational process

Up until 1990, curriculum documents were developed exclusively at the national level by specialists at the Ministry of Education and research institutes under the supervision of the Ministry. Teachers and their associations rarely participated in such activities, and centrally-drafted curricula were binding for all schools. The role of a teacher was narrowed down to transforming centrally-set standards to classroom teaching. Main curriculum documents used by schools up to 1990 included the following: teaching plans, curricula of individual subjects, teaching materials, and textbooks. After 1990, teaching materials and textbooks have been excluded from the list, because the concept of standardized teaching materials and textbooks was abandoned.

The new Education Act of 2004 aims at a curricular policy in which the central level sets the objectives and content of education through framework education programmes. More specifically, these framework programmes specify the competencies of graduates, the objectives of individual programme components, the time schedule for the content of framework plans, as well as basic material and human resources. Based on the framework education programmes, schools design their own programmes, specifying the profile of a graduate, the description of the programme, the teaching plan, the syllabi, and the modules. The school education programme is based on specific education plans of the school and takes into account the needs and potential of the pupils, the real conditions and possibilities of the school and the requirements on the part of the pupils' parents or legal guardians, as well as the school's position in the region and the social environment in which the educational process will take place. The school head is responsible for preparing the school programme in accordance with the framework education programme. He/She coordinates the work or may delegate the function of the coordinator to the vice principal or another member of the teaching staff. The actual preparation of the school programme reflects the school's pedagogical autonomy as well as its responsibility for teaching methods and outcomes. For this reason, the individual parts of the programme are prepared with the participation of all of the teachers of the school, who are also co-responsible for implementing the programme. The school programme is adopted by the school's principal after it has been discussed with the school council. As part of its inspection activities, the Czech School Inspectorate examines and evaluates the implementation of the school programme and its compliance with legal regulations and the framework education programme. (Educational Research Institute, 2007).

The Educational Research Institute defines the objectives and content of general education for preschool, basic school and gymnasium. In the process of developing such documents, experts from various pedagogical institutes are consulted,



as well as the teachers and the general public. The National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education develops vocational education curricula, consulting with university and college teachers, members of teaching associations, Ministry of Education staff, social partners, and groups of experts in specific fields. Thus, the needs of the labour market are reflected, with the intention to increase the employability of school graduates.

Hence, although all curriculum documents have to be approved by the Ministry of Education, a wide range of experts and institutions get involved in the curriculum development process. The Ministry then approves a relevant document and publishes it via usual legislative channels. At the end of this process, the document becomes binding for schools. All aspects of curricula have been changed. In particular, the objectives of education have been modified, greater emphasis placed on key competencies, and active methods of teaching introduced. The school culture also changed, as the interpersonal relations between students and the teacher has shifted towards partnership and mutual respect, more opportunities have been created for students to work independently, and school functions have been broadened, with an emphasis on the development of social relations, hobby activities and leisure time. (MEYS, 2004).

Framework education programmes are based on the new educational strategy that emphasizes key competencies, their links to the educational content and application of the knowledge and skills gained in practical life situations. They are based on the concept of lifelong learning and set out the expected level of education defined for all those who complete various stages of education. They also support the pedagogical autonomy of schools and the professional responsibility of teachers for learning outcomes. (MEYS, 2008).

According to the Framework Education Programme for Elementary (Basic) Education as amended in 2007, key competencies are a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and values which are important for the personal development of an individual and for the individual's participation in society. Their selection and conception are based on values generally accepted in society as well as commonly held ideas on which competencies of the individual contribute to his/her education and successful life as well as to strengthening the civil society. The main purpose of education is to equip all pupils with a set of key competencies on the level which is attainable for them and thus to prepare them for their further education and their participation in society. The acquisition of key competencies is a long-term and complex process, which begins with preschool education, continues during elementary and secondary education, and is gradually refined in subsequent life. Therefore, the whole educational content and all the activities taking place at school must be aimed at and contribute to forming and developing these competencies. The educational content of the framework programme for basic education conceives the subject matter as a means of mastering the expected activity-based outcomes, which gradually link and create preconditions for an effective and complex utilization of the acquired abilities and skills on the level of key competencies. At the basic education level, the following are considered as key competencies to be acquired by pupils completing the programme: learning competency, problem-solving competency, communication competency, social and personal competency, civic competency, and professional competency. (Educational Research Institute, 2007).



The educational content of basic education is organized into nine, broadly defined learning areas. Individual learning areas consist of one or more educational fields of similar educational content. The learning areas are: language and language communication (Czech language and literature, foreign language); mathematics and its application; information and communication technologies; man and the world; man and society (history, civics); man and nature (physics, chemistry, natural sciences, geography); arts and culture (music, fine arts); man and health (health education, physical education); and man and the world of work. For each learning area the characteristics, the objectives and its educational content are specified. In the first stage, the educational content is subdivided into cycle 1 (grades 1 to 3) and cycle 2 (grades 4 and 5). This division is supposed to help schools distribute the educational content among the individual grades. Expected outcomes are activity-based, practically focused, applicable in everyday life, and verifiable. They specify the expected capability of utilizing the acquired subject matter in practical situations and everyday life. The framework programme sets the expected outcomes at the end of grade 3 (cycle 1) as an orientation (tentative), and at the end of grade 5 (cycle 2) and grade 9 as binding.

The subject matter is structured into individual thematic areas (topics, activities) and is understood as a means for achieving the expected outcomes. Because of its informative and formative functions, it forms an integral part of the educational content. The subject matter is recommended to schools for distribution and further elaboration into the individual grades or longer time periods. At the level of the school education programme, the subject matter is binding. The educational content of the individual educational fields shall be divided by the school into subjects and elaborated, or also complemented, in syllabi on the basis of the needs, interests, and talents of the pupils in order to ensure the targeted development of the key competencies. The framework programme makes the integration of the educational content possible at the level of themes, thematic areas, or educational fields. The integration of the educational content must respect the logic of the structure of the individual educational fields; functional integration requires a qualified teacher. The intention is that the teachers cooperate when creating the school education programmes, interconnect suitable themes which are shared by the individual educational fields and reinforce the interdisciplinary approach to education. Complementary educational fields are not a compulsory part of basic education but they complement and augment its educational content. Complementary educational fields (such as second foreign language and drama) may be used for all or only certain pupils, as a compulsory or obligatory optional educational content. (*Ibid.*).

Cross-curricular subjects cover thematic areas of current problems of the contemporary world and have become a significant and indispensable part of basic education. They represent an important formative element, create the opportunities for individual engagement of the pupil as well as mutual cooperation, and contribute to the development of the pupil's character, primarily in the area of attitudes and values. Cross-curricular subjects can be implemented as a part of the educational content of the subjects, dedicated separate projects, seminars, courses, discussions, etc., or taught as independent subjects, or in a combined way. The content of the cross-curricular subjects is elaborated into thematic areas, each containing a selection of themes (activities, topics). The selection of themes and the manner in which they are included in syllabi are within the competence of the individual school. Cross-curricular



subjects include a compulsory part of basic education. All cross-curricular subjects must be incorporated by the school at both stages 1 and 2, although not all cross-curricular subjects need to be offered at each grade level. The following cross-curricular subjects have been defined for basic education: moral, character and social education; civic education for democracy; education towards thinking in European and global contexts; multicultural education; environmental education; and media education.

On the basis of the Framework Education Programme for Secondary General Education (Grammar Schools) of 2007, the educational process at four-year gymnasias and at the upper stage of six- or eight-year gymnasias aims at further developing the key competencies that pupils acquired during their basic education (the only difference is the entrepreneurial competency instead of the professional competency). The learning areas are almost the same with some changes in terms of the educational fields, i.e.: language and language communication (Czech language and literature, foreign language, and second foreign language); mathematics and its application; information and communication technologies (ICT and information science); man and nature (physics, chemistry, biology, geology, geography); man and society (history, geography, and basics of civics and social science); arts and culture (music, fine arts); man and health (health education, physical education); and man and the world of work. Cross-curricular subjects are the same as in basic education (excepting civic education for democracy). (*Ibid.*).

Pre-primary education

Preschool education is an integral part of the education system; it is for children in the age group 3 to 6 years and is provided by kindergartens. Attendance is not compulsory. Early care and education of children aged less than 3 years is provided in crèches operated by the Ministry of Health (in 2008 there were 46 crèches with a total of some 1,400 places). The state ensures the widest possible access to preschool education, sets its goal, and determines its curricula and quality. Access to preschool education was further enhanced by the possibility to integrate children with special educational needs into mainstream kindergartens, while special kindergartens still operate. There is a challenging trend to provide comprehensive care for children with special learning needs beginning with early care—both of the child and his/her family. The funding of kindergartens differs depending on the governing body. Most kindergartens are operated by municipalities or groups of municipalities which cover their running costs. Direct educational costs are financed from the state budget, and part of the finance is provided by parents (with the exception of the final year which is free of charge) up to 50% of non-capital costs, except the costs covered from the state budget. Some pupils older than 6 years also attend kindergarten. Most common in kindergarten are 5-year-olds, for whom pre-schooling is considered beneficial in preparing them for compulsory school attendance.

The main objective of preschool education is to complement upbringing in the family and, in a closely cooperative manner, help to ensure for the child an environment with enough multi-faceted and appropriate stimuli for his/her active development and learning. Preschool education should provide meaningful enrichment to the child's daily programme during preschool years, and provide him/her with professional care. Another important objective of preschool education is



to create a sound basis for systematic learning by means of providing maximum support for developing the child's potential in any circumstances, and, in this way, make it possible for each child to reach an optimal level of personal development and learning at the time of leaving the kindergarten (i.e. such a level that an individual child is able to achieve). Preschool education can also perform a diagnostic task, particularly as regards children with special educational needs. Preschool education should provide early special pedagogical care to children who need it on the basis of the knowledge of the actual level of the child's development and development potential. In this way their chances in life and in education should be increased. Preschool education takes account, to the maximum degree possible, of the developmental, physiological, cognitive, social and emotional needs of children. It makes sure that these developmental specificities are fully respected in their education. Education should be consequently linked to the various individual needs and capacities of children, including specific educational needs. Each child needs to be provided with assistance and support to an extent he/she needs and of the relevant standard. In this way the child can make optimal educational and developmental progress in view of his/her potential, and may feel successful and recognized and accepted by his/her environment. This concept allows for the inclusive education of children in one class regardless of their different capacities and study aptitudes. Preschool education institutions (or their teachers) should therefore observe the following framework objectives in their work: child development, his/her learning and cognition, acquisition of basic values on which our society is built, personal independence, and the capacity to act and express oneself as an independent personality interacting with his/her environment. (MEYS, 2008; Educational Research Institute, 2004).

The Framework Education Programme for Preschool Education of 2001, revised in 2004, requires kindergartens to develop their own education programmes that best suit the local conditions and possibilities. Hence, the education plan (curriculum) is almost completely a matter of the individual kindergarten. There is internal differentiation and individualization in the content of educational activities. Programmes in foreign languages, swimming, art and speech therapy are offered, as well as courses for gifted children. The framework programme abandons the traditional structuring of educational content, and rather stresses that the educational process always involves the whole personality of the child. Thus the content is structured in such a way to reflect the natural development of children. Individual areas of education are based on different relationships that a child gradually forms towards him/herself, other people, and the rest of the world. For each of these components partial learning objectives are defined, as well as expected competencies to be acquired, and activities and opportunities that should be offered.

The basis for the acquisition of competencies can start to be built at the preschool level. These are still elementary but important for preparing the child for systematic learning as well as for his/her next life periods including lifelong learning. The following key competencies are considered at the preschool education level: competency to learn, to solve problems, to communicate, social and personal competencies, and civic and functional competencies. The educational content is organized into five areas: biological (child and his/her body), psychological and cognitive (language and speech, cognitive abilities and functions, imagination and fantasy, thought operations and self-concept, emotions and will), interpersonal (child



and the others), socio-cultural (child and the society), and environmental (child and the world). (Educational Research Institute, 2004). The educational content in the preparatory class (i.e. last year of preschool education) is based on the framework programme for preschool education and the teaching time is set taking into consideration the number of lessons in the first year of basic education according to the framework programme for basic education, i.e. 18 to 22 (45-minute) lessons per week. (Eurydice, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

Most kindergartens are all-day but there are also half-day care centres (usually operating from Monday to Friday); they can also be established as boarding facilities. Kindergartens are usually open 10 to 11 hours a day, and parents can use their services as needed by mutual agreement with the school. Half-day kindergartens normally operate 6.5 hours per day. In addition to learning activities, kindergartens organize games, walks, rest (sleep), and provide meals; a garden with a playground is often found within the area of the kindergarten. (*Ibid.*).

In 1997 the enrolment ratio was estimated at 86%. In 1999, an estimated 92.2% of 5-year-olds were attending kindergartens. In 2003/04 there were 280,491 children enrolled in 5,622 kindergartens (of whom 22,661 children were younger than 3 years). There were 70,477 3-year-olds, 81,815 4-year-olds, 84,385 children aged 5, and 21,153 children in the age of 6. In percentage terms this represents 79.7% of the age group 3 years, 92.3% of the group of 4-year-olds, and 94.4% of 5-year-olds. There were approximately 88.8% of children aged 3-5 attending kindergartens. Special kindergartens were attended by 2.2% of children. These special kindergartens create conditions for preschool education of children with severe disabilities. In 2004 a total of 5,565 children with special educational needs and 208 children without a disability were enrolled in 221 special kindergartens. (MEYS, 2004).

The Czech Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 4,880 kindergartens (including special education kindergartens) with a total enrolment of 328,612 children, mostly attending all-day institutions run by municipalities. The number of (full-time equivalent) teachers was 25,736. (CSO, 2011).

Primary and lower secondary education (basic school)

As mentioned, basic schools provide nine years of basic, compulsory education (compulsory education was first introduced in 1774 as an obligatory six-year attendance), usually beginning when the child is 6 years old. Since 1995 the first stage of basic school covers grades 1 to 5 and the second stage (lower secondary), grades 6 to 9. Pupils can also enrol in basic schools providing specialized instruction in artistic fields (music, ballet, visual arts and drama). Gifted pupils can complete the compulsory nine-year programme by transferring to an eight-year or six-year gymnasium (after grade 5 or 7) or an eight-year dance conservatory (after grade 5), which also offer complete secondary education.

According to the Framework Education Programme for Elementary (Basic) Education as amended in 2007, basic education shall help pupils to acquire and gradually develop key competencies and provide them with the firm foundations of general education, focusing mainly on situations close to real life and on practical aspects. The main objectives of elementary education are to:



- make it possible for the pupils to acquire learning strategies and motivate them to lifelong learning;
- stimulate creative thinking, logical reasoning and problem solving;
- guide pupils towards engaging in effective and open communication on all possible issues;
- develop the pupils' ability to cooperate and to respect their own as well as others' work and achievements;
- prepare the pupils to become independent, free and responsible individuals who exercise their rights and meet their obligations;
- create in pupils the need to express positive feelings in their behaviour and conduct when undergoing various situations in life; to develop in them perceptiveness and sensitive relations towards other people, the environment and nature;
- teach the pupils to develop their physical, mental and social health actively, protect it and be responsible for it;
- guide the pupils towards tolerance of and consideration for other people, their cultures and spiritual values, and teach them to live together with others;
- help the pupils to become familiar with and develop their own abilities according to their possibilities and potential and to utilize these abilities along with their acquired knowledge and skills when making decisions on their own life.

In grades 1 to 5 (i.e. the first stage of basic school), the teaching and learning process shall facilitate the pupils' transition from preschool education and family care to compulsory, regular and systematic education. It is based on acquiring new knowledge, respecting and developing each pupil's individual needs, potential and interests (including pupils with special educational needs). With its activity-based and practical nature as well as the application of suitable methods, the educational process motivates pupils to further learning, guides them to active learning and to the realization that a suitable way of solving problems may be sought, discovered, created and found. In grades 6 to 9 (i.e. lower secondary) the educational process shall help pupils to acquire knowledge, skills and habits which will enable them to study independently and create such values and attitudes that lead to responsible decision making and to respecting the rights and obligations of a citizen of both their country and the European Union. The teaching and learning process builds on broad development of the pupils' interests, on the pupils' higher learning potential and on the interconnectedness between education and the school's activities on the one hand and life outside of school on the other hand. This makes it possible to use more demanding working methods along with new sources and methods of learning, assign more complex and long-term tasks or projects, and delegate greater responsibility for education as well as in organizing the school's activities to the pupils. (Educational Research Institute, 2007; MEYS, 2008).

The Framework Education Programme specifies the objectives of basic education, defines the content and core competencies that students must acquire, and also refers to the evaluation and assessment of educational outcomes (the latter in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 2004). The document provides sufficient room for schools' and teachers' creative pedagogical work as well as the

interests and needs of students. In the basic school students should acquire the necessary learning strategies on the basis of which they should be motivated for lifelong learning. In the basic school the teaching and learning process is organized for groups of pupils of the same age in common classrooms. The Framework Education Programme and the school education programme started to be implemented in 2007/08 in the first and sixth year of basic education.

In the first stage (grades 1-5), generally one classroom teacher teaches all subjects, and the second stage uses subject-certified teachers. In recent years a marked trend has been more frequent instruction in specialized classrooms and the division of classes into smaller groups for a growing number of subjects and instructional hours. It is not unusual to combine pupils from various classes in certain selected subjects. The number of pupils accepted into multi-year gymnasia has been increasing constantly since 1990/91. Most of these pupils have been entering six- to eight-year gymnasia after the fifth or sixth grade. Student and parent interest in these schools is high, because they represent an opportunity to get a head start on a prestigious and demanding education and increase the chances for university acceptance.

Some basic schools do not offer all the years or offer only the first or second stage. They can also offer extracurricular activities, educational guidance, meals, and establish preparatory classes for socially disadvantaged children during the year prior to their starting compulsory school. Basic schools are normally run by municipalities or a pool of municipalities, and they can also be combined with a kindergarten. Basic schools normally operate five days per week, Monday to Friday, and classes usually start at 8 a.m. Artistic education (music, dance, fine arts) is provided in basic schools of art. (Eurydice, 2009).

The weekly lesson timetables for the first and the second stage of basic school in 2001 are shown in the table below:

Basic education (first stage of basic school): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade				
	I	II	III	IV	V
Czech language	9	10	10	7	7
Foreign language	–	–	–	3	3
Local environment	2	2	3	–	–
Basis of natural sciences and elementary social studies	–	–	–	3	4
Mathematics	4	5	5	5	5
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2
Music	1	1	1	–	–
Art education	1	1	1	–	–
Work education	1	1	1	–	–
Music, art education and work education	–	–	–	4	4
Total weekly periods	20	22	23	24	25

Source: Ministry of Education, 2001. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Basic education (second stage of basic school): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Minimum number of lessons in Grades VI-IX			
	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Czech language				16
Foreign language				12
Mathematics				16
Chemistry				4
Physics				6
Biology				6
Geography				6
History				6
Civic education				4
Family education				4
Music				4
Art education				6
Work education				4
Physical education				8
Optional subjects				6
Total number of lessons in Grades VI-IX (min.)				108
Total prescribed number of weekly periods in each grade (min.)	27	28	30	30

Source: Ministry of Education, 2001. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Note: In Grades VI-IX the number of lessons and their organization is determined by the school head. The total minimum number of lessons per subject has to be respected, as well as the minimum number of lessons per week. Optional subjects are introduced in Grades VII-IX on the basis of a decision made by the school head.

The table below presents the framework timetable for grades 1-9 according to the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education as amended in September 2007:

Czech Republic. Basic education (grades 1-9): framework timetable

Learning area/Subject	Number of periods in each stage	
	First stage (grades 1-5)	Second stage (grades 6-9)
<i>Language and communication:</i>		
Czech language and literature	35	15
Foreign language	9	12
<i>Mathematics and its application</i>		
	20	15
<i>Information and communication technologies</i>		
	1	1
<i>Man and the world</i>		
	12	–
<i>Man and society:</i>		
History	–	11
Civics		
<i>Man and nature:</i>		
Physics	–	21
Chemistry		
Biology		
Geography		
<i>Arts and culture:</i>		
Music	12	10
Fine arts		
<i>Man and health:</i>		
Physical education	10	–
Physical and health education	–	10
<i>Man and the world of work</i>		
	5	3
Cross-curricular themes	(*)	(*)
Time to be decided by the school	14	24
Total compulsory periods in each stage (minimum)	118	122

Source: Educational Research Institute, 2007. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. The time allocation for the second stage is also applicable to the lower stage of six- and eight-year gymnasias; in the case of six-year gymnasias, the total compulsory time allocation at the lower stage is 64 periods. The minimum/maximum number of periods per week is 18/22 in grades 1 and 2; 22/26 in grades 3 to 5; 28/30 in grades 6 and 7; and 30/32 in grades 8 and 9. (*) To be implemented at each stage using the time available for the school.

Notes: In the second stage, and no later than grade 8, schools must allocate 6 periods to another foreign language using the time at their disposal. The first foreign language (preferably English) is compulsory starting from grade 3 (a minimum of 3 periods a week over grades 3–9). In the first stage, health education contents are included under the learning area ‘Man and the world’. Czech language and literature, Mathematics and its applications, Arts and culture, and Physical education (a minimum of 2 periods a week) must be offered every year over grades 1–9. Man and the world of work must be offered every year over grades 1–5.



Teachers can choose their teaching methods according to their own strategy and the general policy of the school, in agreement with the Framework Programme. They can use the textbooks and teaching aids included in the list approved by the MEYS or they may also use other textbooks and teaching aids provided that these comply with the educational objectives stipulated in the School Act, in the Framework Programme and other legal regulations. Pupils are provided with free textbooks and other learning materials included in the list of approved textbooks.

Pupils are assessed continuously by teachers in individual subjects as well as at the end of every term. The assessment is based on an evaluation of the extent to which a pupil has achieved the expected outcomes specified in the curricula of the individual subjects in the school educational programme. Assessment must be justifiable from the pedagogical point of view, technically correct, and verifiable. The assessment of a pupil included in a school report can be expressed by marks (1 to 5, where 1 stands for excellent), verbally, or by combination of both. Non-compulsory subjects are assessed in the same manner as compulsory ones but they are not included in the overall end-of-the-year evaluation. Repetition rates are negligible. (Eurydice, 2009).

Standards for Basic Education are being prepared, specifying the minimum level of knowledge and skills which pupils should achieve at the end of the first stage (grade 5) and the second stage (grade 9) of basic education. These standards will be used for designing the tests of the nationwide assessment of learning outcomes, expected to be launched in 2013. (Eurydice, 2011).

The gross enrolment ratio at the basic school level was estimated at 104% in 2000/01. The Czech Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 4,123 basic schools (including special education schools) with a total enrolment of 789,486 pupils (of whom 381,028 were girls); 465,380 pupils were in grades 1-5 and 324,106 in grades 6-9 (lower secondary). The majority of the pupils (754,212) were enrolled in schools run by municipalities. The number of (full-time equivalent) teachers was 58,023 (including school heads). In the 485 art basic schools the total enrolment was 234,565 pupils (of whom 163,426 were girls) and the number of (full-time equivalent) teachers was 7,616; a total of 151,520 pupils were enrolled in music schools and 46,175 in schools of fine arts. (CSO, 2011).

Secondary education

As mentioned, (upper) secondary education generally lasts three or four years, depending on the type of programme (excepting multi-year gymnasia and dance conservatories). Secondary schools include: four-, six-, and eight-year gymnasia offering complete secondary education culminating in the *maturita* exam and intended primarily as preparation for university-level studies; four-year secondary technical schools providing complete vocational secondary education leading to the *maturita* exam and preparing students primarily for professional activities or for technical university-level studies (shorter programmes in certain fields and not leading to the *maturita* are also offered); secondary vocational schools providing vocational qualification in two- or three-year programmes, culminating in a final examination (students who obtain only theoretical preparation at a secondary vocational school receive practical training at special centres and workplaces for practical learning);

conservatories providing six-year (in the case of music, singing and drama) and eight-year (in the case of dance) programmes culminating in the *absolutorium* diploma (i.e. certification of tertiary professional education), considered as a specific type of secondary technical school. Secondary schools also provide extension studies (generally lasting two years) leading to the *maturita* for students who have completed secondary vocational education. The programmes offered in multi-year gymnasia last six or eight years and they are divided into an upper level (i.e. the last four years, equivalent to upper secondary education) and a lower level (the first two years of a six-year or the first four years of an eight-year gymnasium). The last two years at the conservatoires normally correspond to tertiary education.

Upper secondary education has experienced the most rapid development in the 1990s. The main changes include: the rapid development of private schools; the introduction of eight-year gymnasia, in addition to the already existing four-year gymnasia; the diversification of previously rigid types of schools, with schools more often offering study programmes of various lengths, types, and fields; changes in the structure of study fields of vocational education; the development of post-apprentice education; the phasing out of post-*maturita* education and its replacement with postsecondary professional schools, constituting a separate level in the educational system. Secondary school developments have led to rapid increases in the number of pupils admitted to and studying in *maturita* courses (especially at secondary technical schools). The upper secondary school system has thus been undergoing a restructuring corresponding to developments in the labour market, and the number of vocational schools has dropped. The developments in the secondary school system and the demographic decline in the number of potential future upper secondary students has necessitated wide-scale structural changes. Gymnasia have addressed this issue with the development of six- and eight-year programmes, while secondary technical schools and vocational schools have expanded their post-*maturita* programmes and lengthened their regular courses.

Multi-year gymnasia were introduced in order to satisfy growing parental demands for more academically challenging programmes, as well as the pressure for selectivity and diversity in basic schools. Most gymnasium graduates continue on to university, higher professional studies or postsecondary courses at secondary technical schools. Roughly two thirds of all gymnasium graduates are admitted to the university the year they graduate. An important element of gymnasium programmes is the emphasis on the active role of the student, especially in choosing subjects and in supporting the independence of his/her study. Most applicants take entrance examinations and, in exceptional cases, some pupils are admitted based on excellent results in basic school or in activities connected with study (e.g. placement in the academic Olympics in some subject). The organization of the entrance exams is completely within the authority of the gymnasium principal. Gymnasia provide the only alternative to basic school for fulfilling compulsory school attendance. Instruction differs from that provided to basic school pupils of the same age in that it has greater depth and freedom in subject selection, and, in some cases, is the beginning of specialized study.

According to the Framework Education Programme for Secondary General Education (Grammar Schools) of 2007, the educational process at four-year grammar schools (gymnasia) and at the upper level of six- or eight-year gymnasia shall provide



the students with key competencies and prepare them especially for university education and other types of tertiary education, professional specialization as well as for civic life. The purpose is to create a demanding and motivating study environment in which the students must have a sufficient number of opportunities to acquire the set level of key competencies, i.e. to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and be able to use them in personal, civic as well as professional life. The aim is not to present the students with the greatest amount of knowledge, facts and data possible but rather to provide them with a systematic and well-balanced structure of knowledge, teach them to incorporate information into a meaningful context of everyday practice and instill in them the desire to develop their knowledge and skills further throughout their lives. This means that approaches and methods stimulating the students' creative thinking, resourcefulness and independence shall be employed, as well as differentiated instruction, new organizational forms, and integrated subjects. A gymnasium graduate should acquire a wide knowledge base and attain such a level of key competencies which is required by the framework programme and which will allow him/her to develop further his/her abilities and skills in the process of lifelong learning. (Educational Research Institute, 2007).

The table below shows the weekly lesson timetable of the eight-year gymnasium in 2001:

Lower and general upper secondary school (eight-year gymnasium): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each form							
	Lower secondary				Upper secondary			
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Czech language and literature	5	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
Foreign language I	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Foreign language II	–	R	R	R	3	3	3	3
Latin	–	–	–	R	R	R	R	R
Civic education	1	1	1	1	–	–	–	–
Basics of social sciences	–	–	–	–	1	1	2	2
History	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	R
Geography	2	2	2	2	2	2	R	R
Mathematics	5	5	4	3	3	3	3	3
Descriptive geometry	–	–	–	R	R	R	R	R
Physics	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	R
Chemistry	–	2	2	2	2	2	2	R
Biology/geology	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	R
Information and computer technology	R	R	2	1	R	R	R	R
Aesthetic education	3	3	2	2	2	2	R	R
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Optional subject 1	–	–	–	R	R	R	2	2
Optional subject 2	–	–	–	–	–	R	2	2
Optional subject 3	–	–	–	–	–	–	R	2
Optional subject 4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	R
Sub-total	28	28	28	25	27	27	28	22
Lessons added by the school head (R)	2	2	3	6	4	4	3	9
Total prescribed number of weekly periods in each grade (min.)	30	30	31	31	31	31	31	31

Source: Ministry of Education, 2001. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Note: The number of lessons represents a minimum which cannot be decreased, but it can be further increased due to reserved lessons. The letter 'R' (the reserved or unassigned lessons) indicates that the inclusion of this subject in a given year will be decided by the school head. Reserved lessons may be used both for the subjects indicated by the letter 'R' and to reinforce any subject in order to increase the number of lessons above the minimum set by the curriculum.

The framework timetable of the grammar school according to the Framework Education Programme for Secondary General Education of 2007 is presented in the table below:

Czech Republic. Grammar school/Gymnasium (years 1-4): framework timetable

Learning area/Subject	Number of periods over years 1-4	Notes
<i>Language and communication:</i>		
Czech language and literature	12	Compulsory in each year
First foreign language	12	Compulsory in each year
Second foreign language	12	Compulsory in each year
<i>Mathematics and its application</i>	10	Compulsory in each year
<i>Information and communication technologies and Information science</i>	4	During years 1 to 4
<i>Man and society</i> (Civics, introduction to social science, geography)	36	Compulsory in years 1 and 2
<i>Man and nature</i> (Physics, chemistry, biology, geology, geography)		
<i>Man and the world of work</i>	(*)	During years 1 to 4
<i>Arts and culture</i> (Music, fine arts)	4	Compulsory in years 1 and 2
<i>Man and health:</i>		
Physical education	8	Compulsory in each year
Health education	(*)	
<i>Electives</i>	8	Compulsory in years 3 and 4
Cross-curricular themes	(*)	During years 1 to 4
Time to be decided by the school	26	To be fully used
Total compulsory periods over years 1-4 (minimum)	132	

Source: Educational Research Institute, 2007. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. The time allocation is also applicable to the upper level of six- and eight-year gymnasia. The minimum and maximum number of periods per week in each year is 27 and 35, respectively. (*) The number of periods is decided by the school and the contents are specified in the school education programme.

Notes: One of the foreign languages must be English. Geography is included under both Man and society and Man and nature. The total number of periods over years 1–4 can be increased up to a maximum of 140, but the funding for additional periods is not covered by the state budget.

Upper secondary schools use both continuous assessment and final assessment of students in different subjects (included in the school report after the first semester and at the end of the school year). The results may be expressed by a mark, a verbal assessment, or by a combination of both. There are no examinations at the end of a year. Educational programmes at the upper secondary level end either with a final examination, leading to the award of apprentice certificates or diplomas, or with the *maturita* exam, leading to the award of general certificates of upper secondary education. Based on the new concept introduced by the 2004 Education Act, the *maturita* exam should consist of a common part (prepared and organized at the national level) and a profile (school) part. The preparatory work has been in progress

since 1999, but its implementation was postponed twice. All students are expected to take this new examination starting from 2010/11. Within the common part, students of general and vocational programmes should sit three compulsory exams in Czech language and literature, a chosen foreign language, and one optional subject (mathematics, basics of social sciences or ICT). The content of the school part (in case of vocational education, the whole vocational part of the examination), is decided by the school and consists of two or three compulsory exams (the number is defined by the framework education programme of the relevant course), as well as the possibility to take up to two optional tests. (Eurydice, 2009 and 2011). For the 2010/11 and 2011/12 school year the common part included a compulsory exam in the Czech language and literature and another either in foreign language or mathematics, as well as the possibility to take up to three optional tests. The implementation of the third compulsory common exam has been postponed to 2013.

Secondary technical schools offer four-year programmes completed by the *maturita* examination, which entitles graduates to apply for higher education and to perform mid-level technical, business and other similar jobs. Lyceum programmes have been developed at the secondary technical schools in addition to the usual vocational programmes. The proportion of general education in lyceum programmes accounts for approximately 70% of the curriculum contents. They include technology, business, natural sciences and teacher training. Graduates are prepared for studies at higher education institutions in similar disciplines. Secondary vocational schools offer two- or three-year programmes leading to a vocational qualification; a small number of four-year programmes leading to the *maturita* are also offered, providing a qualification to perform demanding manual work and technical occupations and opening up the path to higher education. Secondary vocational schools can also provide one- and two-year programmes for pupils who completed compulsory education but failed to complete all nine years of basic school, for young people with special learning needs, and pupils who completed special schools. Studies at conservatoires are either completed by the *maturita* (upper secondary education) or by the *absolutorium* (tertiary professional education). Tertiary professional schools (the first were set up in 1995) prepare secondary school graduates with a *maturita* certificate for a qualified performance of demanding professional tasks; the duration of programmes is normally 3 to 3.5 years. Vocational education at postsecondary (non-tertiary) level is also offered through ‘follow-up studies’ for pupils who have acquired a vocational certificate. Follow-up courses in the relevant field can be organized by secondary vocational and technical schools which provide *maturita* courses in the same field. The duration of follow-up programmes is two years, completed by the *maturita* examination. The numbers of graduates from vocational programmes who enter follow-up courses tend to grow. In 2006/07, about 39% of the total number of graduates of three-year vocational courses entered in follow-up courses. Follow-up courses can be attended either immediately after completion of the previous programme or after a period of work experience. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

Following the adoption of the Education Act 2004 and as in the case of general education, the vocational education and training system (VET) has been undergoing an extensive curricular reform. The curriculum is developed at two levels, i.e. the national level (framework education programme containing the minimum requirements and focusing on learning outcomes) and the school level. Framework programmes have been gradually approved and issued by the MEYS during 2007–



2010. They are designed for 270 fields (previously there was a total of 600 fields) of upper secondary VET of various categories (either fields of upper secondary education with *maturita* exams or fields leading to a vocational certificate). The objective is to allow for a more flexible shaping of graduate profiles in line with regional needs, the development of the relevant field, and the interests and capacities of students. Most students at the upper secondary level attend vocational programmes (74% of students). The proportion of students in vocational programmes decreased by 13% between 2002/03 and 2010/11. Since the mid-1990s, the number of graduates from vocational programmes had been decreasing. In 2009/10, for the first time in many years the overall proportion of students in vocational programmes has slightly increased. (*Ibid.*).

The Czech Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 372 grammar schools (gymnasias), 1,107 secondary (technical and vocational) schools, and 18 conservatories. The total enrolment was 139,066 students in grammar schools, 393,852 students in secondary schools, and 3,560 in conservatories. The number of (full-time equivalent) teachers was 45,385 in secondary schools (including gymnasias) and 1,030 in conservatories. (CSO, 2011).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The Czech School Inspectorate (CSI), as a state agency reporting directly to the MEYS, is responsible for external evaluation and for providing further information about the schooling system. Its tasks are specified in the Education Act 2004. The CSI publishes its evaluation criteria and makes them available to educational institutions. In addition to these criteria, which are checked annually, there are thematic inspections aimed at particular types of schools or particular issues. The Inspectorate publishes summary comments on the state of the education system in its annual reports. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

As mentioned, standards for basic education are being prepared. They specify the minimum level of knowledge and skills which pupils should achieve at the end of the first stage (grade 5) and the second stage (grade 9) of basic education. These standards will be used for designing the tests of the nationwide assessment of learning outcomes, expected to be launched in 2013. (Eurydice, 2011).

The country joined the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) launched in 1998. The first phase of the survey was carried out in April 2000. In terms of results, Czech pupils were slightly below the average in reading literacy, average in mathematics, and slightly above the average in science. Concerning PISA 2003, among the OECD countries the Czech pupils achieved average results in reading literacy and mathematics, and above-average results in science literacy and problem solving. With regard to PISA 2006, the results of Czech pupils in science and mathematics were above-average and in reading slightly below average. In comparison with other countries the differences between the results of different schools in the Czech Republic ranked among the biggest. The differences were especially great between the different types of schools. Research into the reading literacy of year 4 basic school pupils within the framework of PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) was carried out in 2001 following on from a project carried out in 1995. The results of the Czech pupils were in the middle of the



spectrum of those countries with above-average results. Czech pupils achieved approximately similar results in both fields studied (literacy and computer literacy), with the difference not statistically important. The Czech Republic did not take part in the 2006 study, but is a participant of the five-year 2011 PIRLS study. (Eurydice, 2009).

Concerning the 1995 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), aimed at assessing learning outcomes in mathematics and science at ages 9 and 13 and of students in their final year at secondary school, Czech basic school pupils scored among the best in both age groups, and the results of secondary school students differed significantly depending on the educational programme: students attending apprenticeship programmes were among the lowest scorers and as they represented a large proportion of the population tested, this had a negative effect on the overall result. In the TIMSS-R 1999 (focusing on grade 8 basic school pupils) the Czech pupils demonstrated very good knowledge in science, although their knowledge in mathematics had worsened compared to 1995. In the case of TIMSS 2007 (focusing on mathematics and science achievement of pupils in the fourth and eighth grades of basic school and the relevant years of multi-year gymnasias) the results of pupils in science were above the average; however, in mathematics the results were average for older pupils and below the average for the younger ones. Compared to 1995 and 1999, the knowledge in both tested areas changed for the worse (this being perceptible especially in mathematics). (*Ibid.*).

Teaching staff

Training for the teaching profession varies according to the level of qualification (i.e. according to the level of school for which the prospective teachers are considered to be qualified) and normally takes place at the higher education level. Kindergarten teachers are not required to attend the university and obtain their qualifications at the end of a four-year programme offered by secondary teacher training schools (leading to the *maturita* examination). They also have the opportunity to study at higher education schools and universities, where they can enrol in the short (i.e. three-year) bachelor's degree programmes.

Teachers in the first stage of basic school normally must have completed a five-year (long-cycle) programme at teacher training faculties. Graduates obtain a qualification to teach general subjects with a specialty in music, art or physical education, and occasionally a foreign language. Teachers of general education subjects in the second stage of basic school and at upper secondary schools usually specialize in two teaching subjects. The duration of the programmes leading to the award of a master's degree is normally five years (three-year bachelor's and two-year master's degree); programmes are offered by faculties of education, philosophy, natural science, mathematics and physics, physical education and sport. In some faculties a single-specialty course of study is taken, especially for foreign language teaching. Following the abolition of the compulsory teaching of Russian and the introduction of optional courses, teachers can obtain qualifications to teach a further foreign language in the form of extended study.

Teachers of specialized subjects at secondary technical schools are trained at all other types of higher education establishments (faculties at technical, economic,



agricultural, medical, and art schools). In some of these faculties a teaching qualification in a specialized subject can be obtained while studying a major specialist subject. Teaching qualifications can be obtained after having completed university programmes in the form of supplementary teaching courses, usually lasting four semesters. A university graduate who teaches without having completed the teaching specialization is considered as unqualified.

Teachers at special schools must be graduates of a bachelor's degree programme, or a five-year programme in the case of master's degree programmes at some faculties of education.

Each of the faculties of education providing teacher training determines the content and organization of studies, including study programmes, study and assessment regulations, entrance examination requirements, etc. In the case of the first stage of basic education, according to the individual faculties and fields of study for 2004/05, teaching practice lasts between six and 12 weeks during the period of study. Parallel teaching practice at individual schools lasts between 26 and 247 lessons per study time depending on the type of school. The curriculum generally consists of six basic modules: a subject module (the basics of all educational areas taught at the first stage of basic school); a pedagogical and psychological module (including practical training); a university basics module (philosophy, history, rhetoric, ecology, computer technology etc.); a didactic module (theory and practice of teaching individual educational areas at the first stage of basic school); an upgrading module; a specialization module (the systematic study of the chosen specialization, either one of the subjects focused only on educational care or language). In the case of the second stage of basic education and secondary education, uninterrupted teaching practice usually lasts four weeks per field of study during the period of study, and parallel teaching practice lasts between 13 and 182 lessons depending on the type of school. (Eurydice, 2009).

At the higher education level, teachers' professional promotion depends on their level of academic teaching qualifications. Schools (faculties) determine regulations according to statutes for the process of *habilitace* (being admitted to the title of *docent*, i.e. senior lecturer) and the procedure for appointing professors. These procedures take place before the academic councils of the faculties and schools in the form of an oral defence of the professor's work. Senior lecturers are appointed by the university rector on the recommendation of the faculty's academic council; the university's academic council discusses the recommendations of the faculty's academic council for the appointment of professors. Upon their recommendation, the rector submits a proposal for the appointment of a professor to the Ministry, which conveys it to the President of the Czech Republic. The President carries out the appointment which is countersigned by the Prime Minister.

A new system of continuing education for teachers at basic, upper secondary and higher professional schools was established in 1996, when the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) founded six teacher training centres. The National Institute for Further Education was established in 2004, having been transformed from the former pedagogical centres. It consists of thirteen regional stations and coordinates and organizes courses of in-service teacher training and school management.



In 2004, the MEYS established a committee to look at the reform of initial teacher training. This committee is looking at the proposed minimum standards for teacher training, proportions of individual components of the study programmes, their obligatory content, and the content of the study programmes or the required qualification of graduates. The development of the standard of teacher education is also associated with the preparation of the National Qualification Framework in tertiary education. In 2008 a public debate on the draft project by the Work Group for Standardization of Professional Activities of Teachers was being prepared. The Professional Standard of Teacher Quality is regarded as a framework of necessary competences and requirements for the activities of teachers. In 2009 the debate began to involve the wider teaching public, but at the end of the year the work on the standard was suspended.

The conditions of service for teachers, other educational and non-educational staff at schools and special purpose establishments and for academic staff and other staff are set out in the Labour Code and other generally binding national labour regulations. The new 2008 Labour Code brought the expansion of contractual freedom in the area of collective bargaining. Schools and school facilities are legal entities and are responsible for labour relations, as they are the teachers' employers. The school heads decide on labour law issues relating to their employees. The educational staff in schools run by municipalities, groups of municipalities, regions (public schools) or by the MEYS (state schools) are public service employees who are employed under an employment relationship (typically an employment contract, or in other cases an agreement on work performed outside the employment contract). School heads are responsible for the recruitment of teachers. The salary scales have 16 categories (according to the complexity of work) and 12 steps (according to the length of service). Since April 2009 salary scales are the same for all school staff (educational and non-educational). Compared with other employees in public services and administration (health care, state administration and local government), the scales remain lower. (Eurydice, 2009).

The 2004 Act on Pedagogical Staff stipulates that pedagogical staff shall have the duty of further education for renewing, improving, and supplementing their qualifications and that head teachers shall organize further education activities in accordance with a plan of further education. There are three types of in-service training, i.e. courses aimed at gaining required qualifications; courses aimed at meeting further qualification requirements; and courses aimed at perfecting professional qualifications. Educational institutions and programmes which are focused on in-service training are accredited by the MEYS on the basis of an application from an individual or a legal entity. Educational staff are obliged to attend in-service training while they perform educational activities. They are entitled to 12 working days off per academic year and to full compensation for lost earnings. (*Ibid.*).

Teachers' working hours are set by the Labour Code at 40 hours per week, as for all other employees. These include direct educational activity set by the number of working hours per week and other activities associated with this obligation and resulting from the organization of educational provision in schools. The weekly working load (direct educational activity) for kindergarten teachers is 31 hours. The prescribed teaching load for teachers at both stages of basic school is generally 22 lessons per week. The direct teaching load for teachers at the upper secondary level is



21 lessons per week for teacher of general and technical subjects, 21-25 lessons for teacher of practical training, and 25-35 lessons for teachers of vocational training. The direct educational activity of school heads and their deputies decreases according to school size. (*Ibid.*).

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Web resources

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Association of Higher Professional Education: <http://www.ssvs.cz/> [In Czech. Last checked: February 2012.]

Centre for Evaluation of Educational Achievement: <http://www.cermat.cz/> [In Czech. Last checked: February 2012.]

Centre for Higher Education Studies: <http://www.csvs.cz/> [In Czech. Last checked: February 2012.]

Council of Higher Education Institutions: <http://www.radavs.cz/> [Mainly in Czech. Last checked: February 2012.]

Czech Rectors Conference: <http://crc.muni.cz/> [In Czech and English. Last checked: February 2012.]

Czech School Inspectorate: <http://www.csicr.cz/> [In Czech. Last checked: February 2012.]

Educational Research Institute: <http://www.vuppraha.cz/> [In Czech; some materials in English. Last checked: February 2012.]

Institute for Information on Education: <http://www.uiv.cz/> [In Czech. Last checked: February 2012.]

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports: <http://www.msmt.cz/> [In Czech and English. Last checked: February 2012.]

National Institute of Children and Youth: <http://www.nidm.cz/> [In Czech. Last checked: February 2012.]

National Institute of Education: <http://www.nuov.cz/> [In Czech. Last checked: February 2012.]



National Training Fund: <http://www.nvf.cz/> [In Czech and English. Last checked: February 2012.]

For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>