

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

OF THE CZECH
REPUBLIC



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STUDY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy. The head of state is the President, elected by direct suffrage. The President and the Government exercise executive powers, whilst the Parliament consisting of two Chambers is the supreme legislative body. The territorial administration has two levels: municipalities that are basic self-government units, and higher territorial self-government units – regions. The State is denominationally neutral, the freedom of religion is granted.

The basic principles governing the provision of education are contained in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which is a part of the Constitution. In agreement with the documents, everybody is entitled to education.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports preserves the integrated national educational policy by formulating the long-term policy objectives. Above all, it is responsible for the concept, state and development of the education system, including the area of science, youth and sports, and for the state's education financing policy – for producing the education budget and determining the principles for its allocation.

Three acts are fundamental for the Czech education system: the Education Act, which regulates pre-primary, basic (compulsory), upper secondary and tertiary professional education; the Act on Educational Staff dealing with the teaching profession on the mentioned levels; the Higher Education Act covering higher education.

The state administration of education governed by the Education Act is carried out by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Czech School Inspectorate, regional authorities, municipal authorities of municipalities with extended responsibilities and heads of schools and school facilities. Self-government in education is performed by School Councils, municipalities and regions.

The administration body in the area of higher education is the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Higher education institutions are self-governing institutions.

The education system consists of state, public, private and denominational schools/institutions. The attendance at public schools/institutions substantially prevails.



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PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Nursery schools (*mateřské školy*) providing pre-primary education for children over 3 years have a long tradition. They fall under the responsibility of the municipalities. Attendance is not compulsory; nevertheless it covers around 90% in the pre-school year.

The pre-school year is free of charge and a municipality must provide places for all children of this year. The education is based on the Framework Educational Programme for

Pre-primary Education – the legally binding document, according to which the schools prepare their school educational programmes.

| Institution | Ages |
|----------------|------|
| Nursery school | 3–6 |

COMPULSORY EDUCATION

The school attendance is compulsory for nine years, usually from the age of 6 to 15. All pupils start in the nine-year basic school (*základní škola*) consisting of two stages (the first stage: grade 1–5, the second stage: grade 6–9).

Around 12% pupils leave a basic school at the end of the fifth year or the seventh year to enter multi-year general secondary schools (*gymnázium*). Small number of pupils starts attending eight-year conservatoires (*konzervatoř*) after completing the fifth year of the basic school.

The compulsory school attendance starts at the beginning of the school year following the child's sixth birthday, unless he/she is granted a postponement. The school year begins on 1 September and ends on 31 August of the following year, the summer holidays are in July and August.

The schools teach according to their own school educational programmes, which are prepared on the basis of the legally binding document – the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education. The document defines nine main educational areas consisting of one or more educational fields, cross-curricular topics and supplementary educational fields.

The results of continuous assessment are summarised in a report at the end of each term. It can be expressed by marks (5-point scale), verbally or by combination of both.

| Institution | Ages |
|--|--|
| Basic school (primary and lower secondary education) | first stage: 6–10 second stage: 11–15 |
| Multi-year general secondary school | 11/13–15 |
| Eight-year conservatoire | 11–15 |

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Upper secondary schools (*střední školy*) provide mainly upper secondary education which may be general or vocational (with a higher or lower share of general component), while vocational courses prevail. The participation rate of the 15–19 year-old pupils is about 90%.

Pupils can acquire three levels of qualification. The most pupils (about 70 % pupils) complete a four-year general or a technical educational programme, or a multi-year general secondary programme, providing them with a level of upper secondary education with a school-leaving examination (*střední vzdělání s maturitní zkouškou*), which entitles graduates to enter a tertiary level of education. After completing a two-year or a three-year vocational programme, pupils obtain upper secondary education with an apprenticeship certificate (*střední vzdělání s výučním listem*). Very small part of pupils complete less demanding one-year or two-year programmes leading to secondary education (*střední vzdělání*).

The prerequisites for the acceptance for upper secondary education are the completion of the compulsory education and successfully meeting the entrance requirements. The admission procedure may include the entrance examination, which is determined by the school.

Leavers of upper secondary education can extend or change their qualification through the three types of programmes. In a two-year follow-up study (*nástavbové studium*) leavers of three-year vocational programmes can acquire upper secondary education with a school leaving examination. There are also two variants of shortened studies (*zkrácené studium*) in which leavers can extend their qualification.

The prerequisites for the acceptance into the programmes are the completion of an upper secondary programme depending on the education pathway and successfully meeting the entrance requirements.

Conservatoires (*konzervatoře*) provide art education in six-year programmes (upper secondary and tertiary level of education) or in eight-year programmes (from lower-secondary to tertiary level of education).

The school year begins on 1 September and ends on 31 August of the following year, the summer holidays are in July and August.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports lays down the legally binding documents – the Framework Educational Programmes for individual upper secondary fields, which are the basis for creation of school educational programmes.

The results of the continuous assessment are summarised in a report at the end of each term. It can be expressed by marks (5-point scale), verbally or by combination of both.

All upper secondary schools organise examinations at the end of the education:

- the school-leaving examination (*maturitní zkouška*) in general or technical four-year courses, in a two-year follow-up study or in a shortened study, the leavers are awarded the school-leaving examination certificate (*vysvědčení o maturitní zkoušce*);
- the final examination (*závěrečná zkouška*) in three-year (prevailing) or two-year courses or in a shortened study, the leavers are awarded the final examination certificate (*vysvědčení o závěrečné zkoušce*) and the apprenticeship certificate (*výuční list*);
- the final examination (*závěrečná zkouška*) in two- and one-year courses, the leavers are awarded the final examination certificate (*vysvědčení o závěrečné zkoušce*).

| Institution | Type of education | Length (years) | Ages |
|--------------------------|---|----------------|----------|
| Upper secondary school | General secondary education with a school-leaving examination | 4 | 15–19 |
| | Technical secondary education with a school-leaving examination | 4 | 15–19 |
| | Vocational secondary education with an apprenticeship certificate | 2–3 | 15–17/18 |
| | Secondary education | 1–2 | 15–16/17 |
| | Follow-up and shortened courses | 1–2 | – |
| Eight-year conservatoire | Lower and upper secondary and tertiary education | 8 | 11–19 |
| Six-year conservatoire | Upper secondary and tertiary education | 6 | 15–21 |

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TERTIARY EDUCATION

Tertiary education is provided by higher education institutions, tertiary professional schools and conservatoires. The minimum entrance requirement to enter this level of education is the school-leaving examination certificate (*vyšší odborné školy*). Each institution determines its own admission criteria and the content of the entrance examination.

Tertiary professional education

Tertiary professional education develops and promotes knowledge and skills that students acquire in secondary education and provides general education and vocational training for them to perform demanding professional activities. It is perceived as a professional training. Education at this level is provided mainly by tertiary professional schools (*vyšší odborné školy*). However, it can also be attained at conservatoires (*konzervatoře*). An educational programme is subject to the accreditation from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The accreditation is awarded on the basis of a recommendation of the Accreditation Commission for Tertiary Professional Education. Higher education can take forms of on-site programmes, distance-learning programmes or a combination of both. The school year starts on 1 September and ends on 31 August covering the period of instruction and summer holidays. The teaching activity is split into a winter term (1 September to 31 January) and a summer term (1 February to 31 August). Details on organisation of the school year are set by the school head in accordance with the accredited programme of study. The programme ends with a graduate examination (*absolutorium*), an examination consisting of a theoretical part in vocational subjects, an exam in a foreign language and a defence of a thesis. Graduates obtain graduate examination certificates (*vyšší odborné školy*), a diploma (*diplom absolventa vyšší odborné školy*) and the title specialist with a diploma (*diplomovaný specialista-DiS*).

Higher education

Higher education institutions (*vyšší školy*) are supreme centres of education, independent knowledge and creative activity. The general goal of higher education is to provide students with the adequate professional qualification, prepare them for engagement in research and participating in life-long learning, make them contribute to the development of civic society and international, particularly European cooperation. They attain this goal by linking instruction with scholarly, research, developmental, artistic and other creative activities.

Higher education consists of the three cycles:

- Bachelor's degree programmes, lasting 3–4 years,
- Master's degree programmes, lasting 1–3 years, or 4–6 years in case of programmes not following Bachelor's degree programmes (non-structured programmes),
- Doctoral degree programmes, lasting 3–4 years.

Higher education institutions are either of a university type, providing all three cycles of study, or a non-university type, providing mainly the Bachelor study. The study programmes of higher education institutions are prepared by individual institutions/faculties and approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports on condition they have an affirmative standpoint from the Accreditation Commission.

The academic year lasts 12 months; the beginning is set by the Rector (*rektor*) usually for September or October. Studies are split into semesters, years or teaching blocks which cover periods of teaching activity, examinations and holidays. Most commonly, the academic year is split into semesters which have 14 weeks of teaching activity followed by a period of examinations. The summer holidays are in July and August, usually followed by an extended period of examinations. Details are stipulated in internal regulations of a relevant institution. Study outcomes at higher education institutions are assessed mainly by a system of credits. All public higher education institutions and most private higher education institutions have implemented the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) or a system compatible with ECTS.

After completing studies in Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes, students take the final state examination (*státní závěrečná zkouška*), including a defence of a thesis. Graduates of the Bachelor's degree programmes are usually awarded the degree Bc. Graduates of the Master's degree programmes most commonly acquire the degree Mgr., or Ing. However, other types of examinations and academic titles exist in the Czech Republic. After completing doctoral studies students take a doctoral state examination (*státní doktorská zkouška*) and defend a thesis. They are awarded the degree Ph.D., or Th.D.

| Institution | Type of education | Length (years) | Ages |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Tertiary professional school * | Tertiary professional education | 3–3.5 | 19–21/22 |
| Higher education institution, university and non-university type | Bachelor | 3–4 | 19–22/23 |
| | Master | 1–3 | 22/23–23/26 |
| | Master (non-structured study) | 4–6 | 19–23/25 |
| Higher education institution, university type | Doctoral studies | 3–4 | – |

* For conservatoires, see the table above

ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The nature and scope of adult education and training is determined mainly by socio-cultural, economic and political factors. Substantial role is played by existing knowledge base of the population and the needs of the national economy and the labour market.

Legal regulation of this area is covered by a wide range of legal provisions (e.g. Education Act, Higher Education Act, Act on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results, etc.). Different aspects of adult education fall under the responsibility of a number of authorities (mainly Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Culture, and also regions and municipalities).

Adult education is provided in the following areas:

- General education for those who have not reached the desired level of basic education (about 5%), in preparatory courses for entrance examinations to secondary schools and to higher education institutions, and in language education.
- Continuing vocational education and training which offers the opportunity to acquire, broaden or complete qualifications or to retrain (used mostly in cases of unemployment). In specified professions (e.g. in medicine and several technical professions) employees are obliged to update their knowledge and skills and, in defined periods, pass exams set by special legal rules.
- Civic/special interest education which is not directly connected to the labour market but satisfies people's political, historical and cultural and other similar interests.

Adult education and training is provided by schools (basic, upper secondary, tertiary professional) and higher education institutions; organisations (enterprises, institutions, state administration bodies); non-profit organisations; organisations from the education sector; professional organisations, foundations, churches, trade unions, political parties, cultural institutions (museums, galleries, libraries, houses of culture); commercial educational institutions.

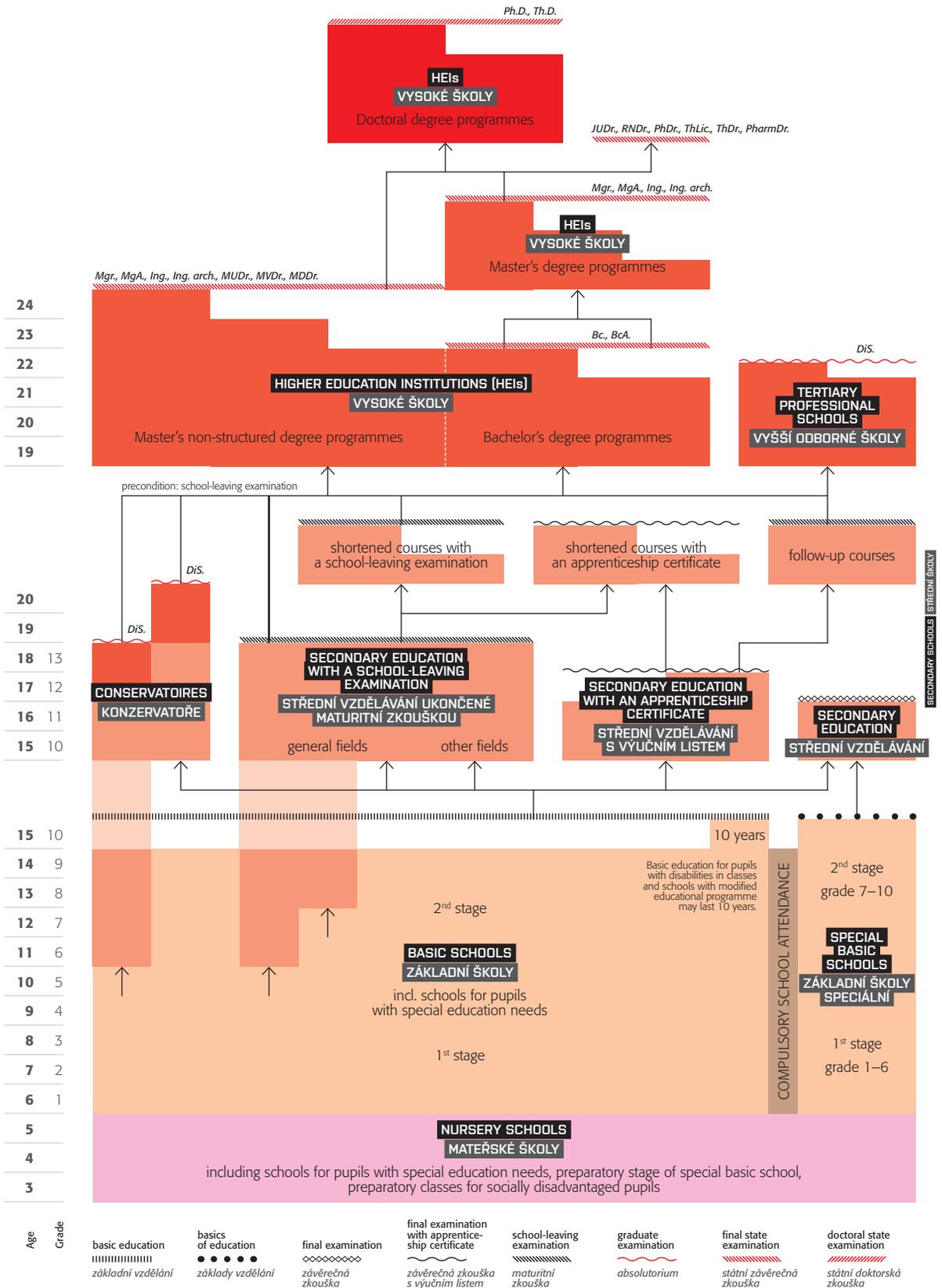
Retraining is one of the most important components of adult education. The unemployed registered as job seekers can – on certain conditions (e.g. retraining must be suitable and desirable, health condition of the job seeker is taken into account) – attend courses fully funded by Labour Office.

Adults also may take examinations according to the Act on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results. Thus they can attain partial and consequently complete qualifications which substitute previous education and enable them to pass the final examination in secondary education with an apprenticeship certificate and secondary education with a school-leaving examination. This is an alternative way of receiving qualifications of the same validity as those acquired in initial education.



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USEFUL LINKS

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
www.msmt.cz

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

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