

Czech-Republic: Organisation of the Education System and of its Structure

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General Structure of the Education System

The education system consists of schools and school facilities.

Schools

Schools provide education according to educational programmes (study programmes in case of the higher education institutions); their prerequisites are defined in the Education Act (or the Act on Higher Education).

Schools are divided into the following types according to the level and nature of the education provided: mateřská škola, základní škola, střední škola (gymnázium, střední odborná škola, střední odborná učiliště), conservatoires, vyšší odborná škola, základní umělecká škola, language schools authorised to organise state language examinations (all these institutions are subject to the Education Act) and vysoká škola (subject to the Higher Education Act).

Mateřské školy, základní umělecké školy and language schools do not provide a defined level of education.

The [Organisation of the education system in the Czech Republic](#)

The mateřská škola (nursery school)

The mateřská škola (see chapter [Early Childhood Education and Care](#)) offers pre-primary education to children from 3 to 6 years of age. It is not compulsory, but most children do attend. In the last pre-school year, attendance has to be available to all children. It does not provide a defined level of education (ISCED level 0), but it creates pre-conditions for sustainable education and helps to compensate for developmental irregularities of children before entrance into primary education. It offers special educational care to children with special educational needs.

The základní škola (basic school)

Základní školy (see chapter [Single Structure Education \(Integrated Primary and Lower Secondary Education\)](#)) combines primary and lower secondary levels of education (ISCED 1+2) in one organisational unit. It is nine years in duration and corresponds to the length of compulsory schooling. It is divided into a five-year first stage and a four-year second stage. Upon completion of the first stage, pupils who show interest and succeed in the admission procedure may transfer to a multi-year gymnázium. They may continue in an eight-year gymnázium after the fifth year or a six-year gymnázium after the seventh year or after the fifth year to a dance conservatoire and complete their compulsory schooling there. After completing primary and lower secondary education the pupils attain základní vzdělání (ISCED 2A). Pupils completing the základní škola speciální (see [Separate Special Education Needs Provision](#)) targeted at pupils with moderate and severe mental disabilities attain základy vzdělání (ISCED 2C).

The střední školy (upper secondary schools)

The střední školy (see chapter [Upper Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education](#)) provide secondary education (upper secondary - ISCED 3), and post-secondary education (ISCED 4), which enables pupils to change or broaden their original educational pathway.

The attained education can be at three levels depending on the relevant educational programme. All střední školy can offer education at any of these levels, in case they have registered the education courses of respective education level in the School Register. Although in order to maintain continuity with the previous regulation, most schools keep names corresponding to the existing division of upper secondary schools:

a) Střední vzdělání attained after 1-2 years of study (ISCED 3C) is provided by those střední školy mainly named odborná škola (vocational school), odborné učiliště or praktická škola. They are targeted at pupils who ended their basic education without success or attained only základy vzdělání.

b) Střední vzdělání s výučním listem attained after 2-3 years of study (ISCED 3C), is usually provided by střední školy called střední odborné učiliště. They provide qualifications for manual and technical workers and similar professions.

c) Střední vzdělání s maturitní zkouškou (ISCED 3A) is general or vocational in nature. The maturitní zkouška certificate entitles pupils to seek admission to tertiary education. Vocational education at this level is usually offered by schools called střední odborné školy, or střední odborná učiliště and lasts four years. Pupils are qualified to enter certain technical, economic and other occupations or highly skilled technical and operative functions or to tertiary education. General education is provided by střední škola that are usually called gymnázium. The studies may last four years (only upper secondary level), or six or eight years (including lower and upper secondary education) and prepare pupils mainly for higher education, or tertiary professional education;

Post-secondary education is organised at a střední škola in three types of study:

a) Follow-up courses (ISCED 4A) are intended for applicants who completed three-year courses completed with an apprenticeship certificate (ISCED 3C) and want to supplement their secondary education with a school-leaving examination. It is a two-year course completed with a school-leaving examination. It is usually entered by students immediately after they complete their preceding education. Their educational track at a secondary school therefore takes five years (a three year apprenticeship course and a two-year follow-up course) and upon its completion, students have both a secondary education with an apprenticeship certificate and education with a school-leaving examination.

b) Shortened study courses aimed at acquiring secondary education completed with an apprenticeship certificate (ISCED 4C) provide education for school-leavers with a school-leaving examination (ISCED 3A) and courses with an apprenticeship certificate (ISCED 3C), who want to acquire further qualifications. The studies take one to two years and are completed with a final examination.

c) Shortened study courses aimed at acquiring secondary education with a school-leaving examination (ISCED 4A) are organised for school-leavers with a school-leaving examination (ISCED 3A), who want to acquire further qualifications. The studies take from one to two years and are completed with a school-leaving examination.

Legal and natural persons providing one-year courses of foreign languages with daily lessons

For upper secondary school graduates one-year post-secondary foreign language courses following in the day form are organized. These are run by legal and natural persons listed in the supplement to the Decree on Further Study. The courses have the character of post-secondary education (ISCED 4A). State support (e.g. cover of social and health insurance) for participants will end in 2014.

Conservatoires

Conservatoires (see [Organisation of Conservatoires \(Arts Education\)](#)) offer six or eight-year programmes of general and vocational education in music, dance, singing and drama and prepare pupils for artistic and combined artistic and pedagogical activities. The studies of dance last eight years (including levels ISCED 2A, 3B and 5B) and pupils enter it after the 5th year of základní škola, while all the other of the above mentioned studies last six years, and pupils enter after completing their compulsory school attendance, i.e. after attaining základní vzdělání. Studies in general conclude with the absolutorium examination in conservatoires, giving pupils vyšší odborné vzdělání in conservatoire (ISCED 5B). They can also complete their education with a maturitní zkouška (ISCED 3A), which is a prerequisite to be admitted to all courses of tertiary education.

The vyšší odborné školy (tertiary professional schools)

The vyšší odborné školy (see [Programmes outside the Bachelor and Master Structure](#)) prepare holders of střední vzdělání s maturitní zkouškou for professional execution of more demanding, skilled professions. They offer vyšší odborné vzdělání (ISCED 5B) ending with an absolutorium. The vyšší odborné školy are considered a tertiary education.

Any of the above mentioned schools can be established separately for pupils with health disabilities (see [Separate Special Education Needs Provision in Early Childhood and School Education](#)). In this case they provide the same level of education as the relevant mainstream school, with the exception of a základní škola speciální, which awards základy vzdělání (2C) but not základní vzdělání (2A).

Vysoké školy (higher education institutions)

The vysoké školy (see chapter [Higher Education](#)) provide education in three study programmes: Bachelor's, Master's (both ISCED 5A) and Doctoral (ISCED 6) following Master's.

Bachelor's programmes aim to prepare students for a profession or to continue to Master's programmes. The minimum requirement for entrance is střední vzdělání s maturitní zkouškou and the standard duration is three to four years.

Master's programmes are aimed at gaining theoretical knowledge based on current scientific findings, research and development and putting them into practice and developing skills for working creatively. In Arts they focus on advanced artistic training and talent development. Master's programmes follow on from Bachelor's courses, and last between one and three years. Where relevant, accreditation can be granted to Master's courses which do not follow on from a preceding Bachelor's course, in which case the minimum requirement for entrance is střední vzdělání s maturitní zkouškou and the course will last between four and six years (usually 5 years, or 6 years in the case of medicine, veterinary medicine, stomatology, pharmacy, art and architecture).

Doctoral programmes focus on scientific research and independent creativity in research and development and independent theoretical or creative activity in art. They follow a Master's programme and have a standard duration of three to four years.

All three types of programmes may be studied on a full-time, part-time or distance basis or in a combination of these.

The following two types of schools only offer education only in the field of the study specified in the name of the school. This type of education is usually offered to pupils outside of school hours and thus runs parallel to the education offered at the other types of schools. These schools can also provide adult education.

Základní umělecké školy (basic art schools)

Základní umělecké školy (see [Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures](#)) sit alongside ordinary schools and offer education in the areas of special interest. They teach the basics of various art and music fields and prepare pupils for the study of these disciplines at secondary schools, conservatoires or universities (completion of the former is not a condition for admission to the latter). They organise structured courses mainly for základní škola or střední škola pupils (preparatory, two levels of basic education, and extended), although courses for adults may also be offered.

Language schools authorised to organise state language examinations

Language schools authorised to organise state language examinations offer courses in foreign languages according to the Education Act, which can lead to the state language examination. These schools are also allowed to provide one-year post-secondary foreign language courses following a school-leaving examination.

Individual fields of study at basic, secondary and tertiary professional schools are listed in Government regulation on the system of fields of studies in basic, upper secondary and tertiary professional education. Accredited study programmes of higher education institutions are incorporated into the so-called Basic Study Fields according to the Classification of Basic Study Fields (CBSF) (translated also as the Classification of Basic Branches of Education (CBBE)). As of 2009, this classification (between 1998 and 2004 used also for statistical purposes at the education level of secondary and professional tertiary schools) remains in the purview of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports while the Czech Statistical Office in 2008 started to use ISCED 97 as a new state classification system.

It is typical of the Czech education system that practically all základní škola leavers (around 94,9%) continue their studies at post-compulsory educational institutions. In view of the predominance of vocational/technical schools over general education schools, a considerable proportion of pupils at the upper secondary level gain a vocational qualification recognised by the labour market.

School facilities

School facilities provide services and education, which support or complete the education offered by schools, or they assure institutional or protective care or preventive educational care.

School facilities are as follows:

- school facilities for further education of educational staff
- school guidance facilities
- school educational and boarding facilities
- school facilities for personal interests' education
- school canteens
- school facilities for special purposes
- school facilities for providing institutional education or protective education and preventative educational care.

The facilities for further education of educational staff provide in-service training, advisory services in methodical issues and management of schools and school facilities. They also disseminate information on directions and procedures in education and coordinate supporting activities for schools and school facilities, coordinate development programmes, and other events (for more details see [Continuing Professional Development for Teachers in Early Childhood and School Education](#)).

School guidance facilities provide information and diagnostic, guidance and methodological services for children, pupils, and students and their statutory representatives and for schools and school facilities, provide pedagogical and specialised pedagogical and psychological services and preventative educational care, and assist in selecting suitable future education and training. School guidance facilities cooperate with authorities in providing social and legal care for children, and also with bodies providing care for young people and families, providers of medical services, or other bodies and institutions. (For more information see [Guidance and Counselling in Early Childhood and School Education](#)).

School educational facilities and lodging and boarding facilities include the domov mládeže (for pupils of a střední škola and vyšší odborná škola) and internáty (for pupils of independent schools for persons with disabilities). Both institutions provide whole day education, accommodation and meals, and if necessary education, sport and other leisure activities. A third institution is the škola v přírodě, which provides breaks for children and pupils in a healthy environment without the need to interrupt their education.

School facilities for developing personal interests provide appropriate educational, training, interest or recreational services and events, as well as cultural activities for pupils, students and educational staff or other persons. They include the školní družina for pupils of the first stage of základní škola, the školní klub for pupils of the second stage of a základní škola (both working at základní škola) and the střediska volného času, usually in general organised outside of the school premises.

Facilities for school catering (school canteens) provide food for children, pupils and students while at school or a school facility. Founders are obliged to assure this service for children of a mateřská škola and pupils of the základní školy (and under-age pupils of střední školy) and mature pupils and students can also access the service voluntarily.

School facilities established for a special purpose assist schools and school facilities in their activities. They include the following: service centres for schools, school farms, střediska praktického vyučování, school libraries and swimming schools.

A service centre for schools provides schools and school facilities with technical and material services (supply of textbooks, servicing of teaching equipment, etc.), advisory, information and technical and organization support. A school farm provides for the vocational training of secondary school pupils of agriculture, horticulture, forestry and fishing, the střediska praktického vyučování offers training in other fields (if the school does not provide them itself). A school library provides professional services, services related to study and work, library and information services to children, pupils, students, or pedagogical staff of schools and school facilities. A swimming school provides swimming lessons to pupils of základní škola as part of the compulsory physical education.

School facilities for institutional education, protective education and preventive educational care are described in chapter [Educational Support and Guidance](#).

Compulsory Education

Compulsory school attendance (povinná školní docházka) applies to citizens of the Czech Republic, citizens of member states of the European Union, other foreigners who have permanent residence or permission to stay in the Czech Republic long-term, asylum seekers or persons who enjoy additional protection, and applicants for international protection on the territory of the Czech Republic.

The length of compulsory education is set by the Education Act and is for nine years starting at the beginning of the school year following the day on which the child reaches six years of age. Compulsory education takes place at a základní škola (or at a základní škola speciální or a základní škola praktická). Pupils who transfer to a multi-year gymnázium or to a multi-year conservatoire in the course of their compulsory education complete their compulsory education at these schools.

A child, who turns six in the period between September and June of a given school year, can be enrolled in compulsory school attendance early on the request of the legal guardian if the child is sufficiently physically and mentally mature. The precondition for admission is a recommendation of the school guidance facility. In case of children born in the period between January and the end of June also an expert opinion of a specialist (e.g. neurologist, paediatrician) is necessary.

If on reaching the age of six, the child is not physically or mentally ready and if the legal guardian so requests, the school head may **postpone the start of compulsory schooling** by one year provided that the request is supplemented by the recommendation of the school guidance facility and a specialist physician or a psychologist. Starting school can be postponed only twice, at most to the year when the child turns eight. A decision can also be made in the course of the first term of the first school year of compulsory schooling with consent of the child's legal guardian. Together with the decision on postponement the school head can recommend that a child be included in the preparatory class of a základní škola (see [Special education needs provision within mainstream education](#)) or in the last year of a mateřská škola if it can be assumed that such education shall balance the child's development.

A pupil completes their compulsory education after **nine years of schooling**. This also applies when the pupil does not complete the ninth year (e.g. he/she may have repeated a year) and thus does not complete their **basic education**, or in case he/she acquired basic education in a shorter period - the compulsory education is completed at upper secondary school then. Compulsory school attendance ends at the age of 17, but basic education may be completed either by remaining at school with the consent of a school head on the request of the legal guardian, at most to the end of the school year when the pupil turns 18 or, later on, by attending special courses for this purpose (see [General Education Programmes](#)). The school head may, in exceptional cases, permit a disabled pupil to continue basic education until the end of the school year in which the pupil concerned reaches 20 years of age, and in the case of pupils being educated in special schools with the consent of the founder until the end of the school year in which the pupil concerned reaches 26 years of age.

Pupils who cannot attend school, due to their state of health, are offered a form of education by the educational department of the regional authority to enable them to achieve the same level of education as in the normal period of schooling (an exemption from the obligation to attend school).

Special forms of compulsory education

The Education Act also allows for special forms of compulsory education for pupils living abroad. These include attendance at Czech schools attached to a Czech embassy, at a foreign school, attendance at European Schools for the children of personnel of EU, or

individual (home) schooling. In this case, the pupil is also considered to be a pupil of the school in the catchment area or of another chosen school in the Czech Republic.

A pupil can complete their compulsory school attendance in a school established on the territory of the Czech Republic by a foreign legal entity or a foreign citizen if the Minister of Education has approved the school as the compulsory school attendance provider.

For a child with a serious mental disability, who is not able to attend even *základní škola speciální*, the educational department of a regional authority can (on the basis of an expert assessment and with the agreement of the child's legal guardian) provide a substitute form of education that meets the child's needs.

Parents or legal guardians are obliged to register their **children** at a school and to **ensure their regular and punctual attendance**. Failure to do so is considered a misdemeanour, which is punishable by a fine of up to CZK 3000. More serious neglect of education may be classified as a criminal act of endangering the moral education of children and young people. The legal guardian is obliged to enrol a child for compulsory school attendance between 15 January and 15 February of the calendar year when the child has to start school. Regulations on the Offences Act and even the Criminal Act can be used if parents do not fulfil their duty to do so.

The **municipalities are obliged to ensure that compulsory schooling takes place** (see [Administration and Governance at Local Level](#)/[Administration and Governance at Local and/or Institutional Level](#)). The pupils complete their compulsory schooling in the relevant catchment area, unless their parents (or their legal guardians) choose another *základní škola*.

The responsibility for compulsory education provided at private and denominational schools lies with the Ministry of Education. This means, in practical terms, that the state guarantees education at these schools, provided that they are included in the Register of School and School Facilities (see [Administration and Governance at Central and/or Regional Level](#)). The state also recognises education gained at these schools and guarantees that if a private school has any difficulties, its pupils will be able to complete their compulsory schooling in a public *základní škola*.

Pupils and students and their parents have a right to information on the progress and results of their education. Consultation with parents is carried out in regular parent-teacher meetings, usually four times a year and individually if required. Parents are obliged to participate personally in discussing serious matters concerning the education of the child. Possibilities for pupils and their parents to participate on school life are described in [Administration and Governance at Institutional Level](#).

Defining moments in educational guidance

The transfer from a *základní škola* to a *střední škola* and the transfer from a *střední škola* to a *vyšší odborná škola* or *vysoká škola* may be seen as the decisive moments in an individual's choice of educational path.

Upon the admission to a *základní škola* or during attendance, it is possible if offered to take up studying of various subjects or subject groups more in depth. A pupil's admission to such classes is decided by the school head with the approval of parents on the basis of a recommendation from his/her teacher or after an assessment of the pupil's individual talent.

The transfer to an upper secondary school

The condition for entering an upper secondary school is the successful completion of compulsory school education, unless the pupil moves to an upper secondary school during his/her compulsory school attendance.

The transfer to *střední škola* can take place after the fifth or seventh year of the *základní škola*, when pupils can move to a multi-year *gymnázium*. This is the case for approximately 12.4 per cent of the age group of the second stage of a *základní škola* in 2011. A very small percentage of pupils are accepted into a dance conservatoire after the 5th year.

In order to be admitted to a *střední škola*, conservatoire, *vyšší odborná škola* or *vysoká škola*, a pupil must go through an admission procedure, which may (and usually does) include an entrance examination. To be admitted to specialized art studies, a pupil has to pass a talent test related to the field of study. This test precedes the general entrance examination.

After completing compulsory schooling, 97 % of the population (the age group of 15 to 18; students of technical shortened studies and technical follow-up studies excluded) continues studies in non-compulsory upper secondary education, either in secondary general schools that, apart from the eight-year, six-year schools mentioned above, have also four-year programmes (more than 21 % of population) or in vocational and other secondary schools (51 % in four-year courses completed with a school-leaving examination /*maturitní zkouška*/, 24 % in two or three-year courses completed with an apprenticeship certificate /*výuční list*/, and 0.4 % in upper secondary general and vocational education at secondary school) or in conservatoires. 94 % of population aged 25-34 years acquires at least upper secondary education (ISCED 3) (2009).

Transfers at the tertiary level

The condition for entering any form of tertiary education is střední vzdělání s maturitní zkouškou (in general or technical branches) or the absolutorium from a conservatoire. (The exception can be art courses at a vysoká škola; but passing the maturitní zkouška is a precondition for gaining a higher education diploma.)

Transfers at the tertiary level depend on the type of institution: study at a vyšší odborná škola; (ISCED 5B) was not formerly recognised for entrance to a vysoká škola. Since 2004 a vysoká škola can set specific admission requirements for students or graduates of accredited educational programmes at a vyšší odborná škola.

The result of the gradual implementation of a three degree structure of study at the vysoké školy is that the entrance examination is also carried out when advancing from Bachelor's to Master's study programmes. An entrance examination for admission to doctoral programmes is a general rule. Currently about 80% of graduates of Bachelor's study programme continue to Master's study programmes. However, the changes in methods of higher education funding imply that this trend will change and in the future more students will leave the tertiary education with a Bachelor's degree (see [Higher Education Funding](#)).

For those who did not achieve the required level of education during their initial education, the střední školy, vyšší odborné školy and vysoké školy also offer different forms of part-time study (see [Upper Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education](#) and [Higher Education](#) and [Adult Education and Training](#)). Even part-time students commonly study the full degree programme and that is why the acquired education is equal to the one acquired in the full-time programme. Even for admission to other forms of study it is necessary to fulfil the admission requirements, which are identical to those for entrance to full-time study.

Further education of school-leavers

The leavers of all types of schools who did not succeed in the labour market are offered retraining courses in various branches for individual occupation or the so-called non-specific retraining courses, preparing job applicants for employment thus increasing their employability. The courses focus on computer literacy, management, marketing, accounting, banking, labour relations and preparation for private enterprise in combination with intensive foreign language training.

Secondary school-leavers have a chance to take one-year post-secondary foreign language courses following a school-leaving examination in the day form. These are run by legal and natural persons listed in the supplement to the Decree on Further Study. The courses have the character of post-secondary education (ISCED 4A). The students who successfully passed the first school-leaving examination (maturitní zkouška) or graduated from a conservatoire (absolutorium) in the calendar year in which they start the language course continue to have official student status (i.e. they are entitled to tax benefits, student discounts etc). Students are offered foreign language courses at several levels of difficulty and they can take a state or internationally acknowledged exam. Apart from the chosen language, they are often enabled to study the second (subsidiary) language. The courses are paid. State support (social and health insurance paid by the Ministry of Social Affairs) for the students of such courses will have ended by the year 2014.

Within lifelong learning programmes (sometimes called "Year Zero"), some higher education institutions (e.g. Faculty of Arts or Law Faculty, Charles University) accept applicants who passed an entrance exam but were not admitted to regular courses due to a lack of capacity. These students can take subjects according to the study plan for Year 1 and if they satisfy all prescribed study requirements, they can be excused from the entrance exam for the following academic year and become students of regular courses. The studies have the character of post-secondary education (ISCED 4A). The students (before being admitted to regular courses) do not have official student status and thus are not entitled to student benefits. These programmes are paid.

Some higher education institutions and commercial education agencies offer preparatory courses for entrance exams for many fields of study and in a broad scope for those applicants who were not admitted to regular study programmes. Education agencies also organise courses whose content is similar to the first year of higher education (these are sometimes called "Year Zero"). Participants in these courses do not have official student status and cannot enjoy various student benefits. Some education agencies therefore offer courses combining one-year post-secondary foreign language courses and training for entrance exams for the chosen field of study with student status maintained. These courses are paid.