

Contextualising Education and Training in the Czech Republic

The change of Czech political system in 1989 got reflected in the priorities of the country's educational policy. Removing the ideological drawbacks and introducing plurality into education became the primary objectives at that time. First private schools were founded, a "per capita" funding system has been introduced, the institute of free choice of education and training pathways was established, and, last, but not least, schools have become more autonomous since then. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) no longer defines the fields of study on the supply side the number of students at schools. New fields of study have been established and the distribution of students across these has changed in the wake of employment structure modifications.

The secondary school network optimisation process was initiated in the second half of the 1990s in order to make the structure more effective. In relation to the current demographic trends and some other factors, the network of schools needs further optimisation not only on the secondary but also the primary and higher education levels. Following the change in the right of establishment in education, the optimisation process management has shifted to regional authorities since 2001.

The year 2000 saw the culmination of the preparatory phase of public administration reform in the sector of education and training. In 2001, School Offices (administrative bodies) were dissolved and the rights to establish schools as well as some other competences in education were transferred from MoEYS and School Offices to regional authorities. Decentralised management through regional governments has thus been reinforced in initial education. As at this day, however, a new Schools Act has not been passed to provide for new legal conditions in education across the whole spectrum of schools to accommodate the changed environment.

A new Higher Education Act was adopted in 1998 (Act No. 111/1998 Coll.), introducing quite large administrative and management autonomy of Higher education institutions. The act further allowed for private universities development in the Czech Republic.

Competences in further education, however, have not been clearly defined so far. Throughout the last decade, the Czech Republic has drawn substantially upon and benefited from the Phare pre-accession assistance funding to develop the country's education and training.

Structure of the Czech Educational and Training System

Initial Education

The initial education system in the Czech Republic comprises several levels of education and types of schools.

Children from three years on may attend **kindergartens** where education is provided up until the time a child enters compulsory schooling.

Pupils start their compulsory nine-year schooling in **basic schools** (primary + lower secondary) and most of them complete the whole nine-year cycle there. Some pupils, however, take their final four years of compulsory education (lower secondary) in **multi-year general academic schools (Gymnasia)**.

Upper secondary education is **chiefly** provided in three core types of secondary schools: **general academic schools (Gymnasia)**, **secondary technical schools (STS)** and **secondary vocational schools (SVS)**. All of them offer four-year study programmes at the end of which students take a school leaving examination (Maturita – GSCE/A-level equivalent). Completion of these programmes is a prerequisite to university enrolment. General secondary education programmes in Gymnasia are designed to prepare students for university studies while vocational and technical (VOTEC) education programmes in STS and SVS are rather more focused on preparing pupils for their work career. SVS offer enterprise-based apprenticeships with the award of final examination certificate. These are three-year courses in most cases. In some cases, STS study programmes, too, award final examination certificates only, and not the Maturita. For this purpose, STS programmes include practical training and SVS programmes comprise vocational training. To enhance the quality of VOTEC education, pre-university, lyceum-type programmes have been developing within the framework of the current structure of comprehensive secondary VOTEC education. **Conservatories (CONS)** are a specific part of the upper secondary education system, teaching music, singing, dance or drama.

Also, **follow-up/extension studies** are an important and, usually, integral part of further VOTEC education, allowing apprentices to obtain the Maturita certificate.

Both on the primary and secondary level, **special schools** (e.g. **vocational schools (VS)**, **practical schools (PrS)**, **special primary school and remedial schools**) provide education to students with special educational needs. These are either stand-alone schools or parts of standard schooling facilities

Post-secondary technical schools, part of tertiary education, provide 2 to 3½-year programmes designed to prepare students for demanding professions. This is the newest type of schools, developing since 1995. Practical training in firms is an integral part of these programmes.

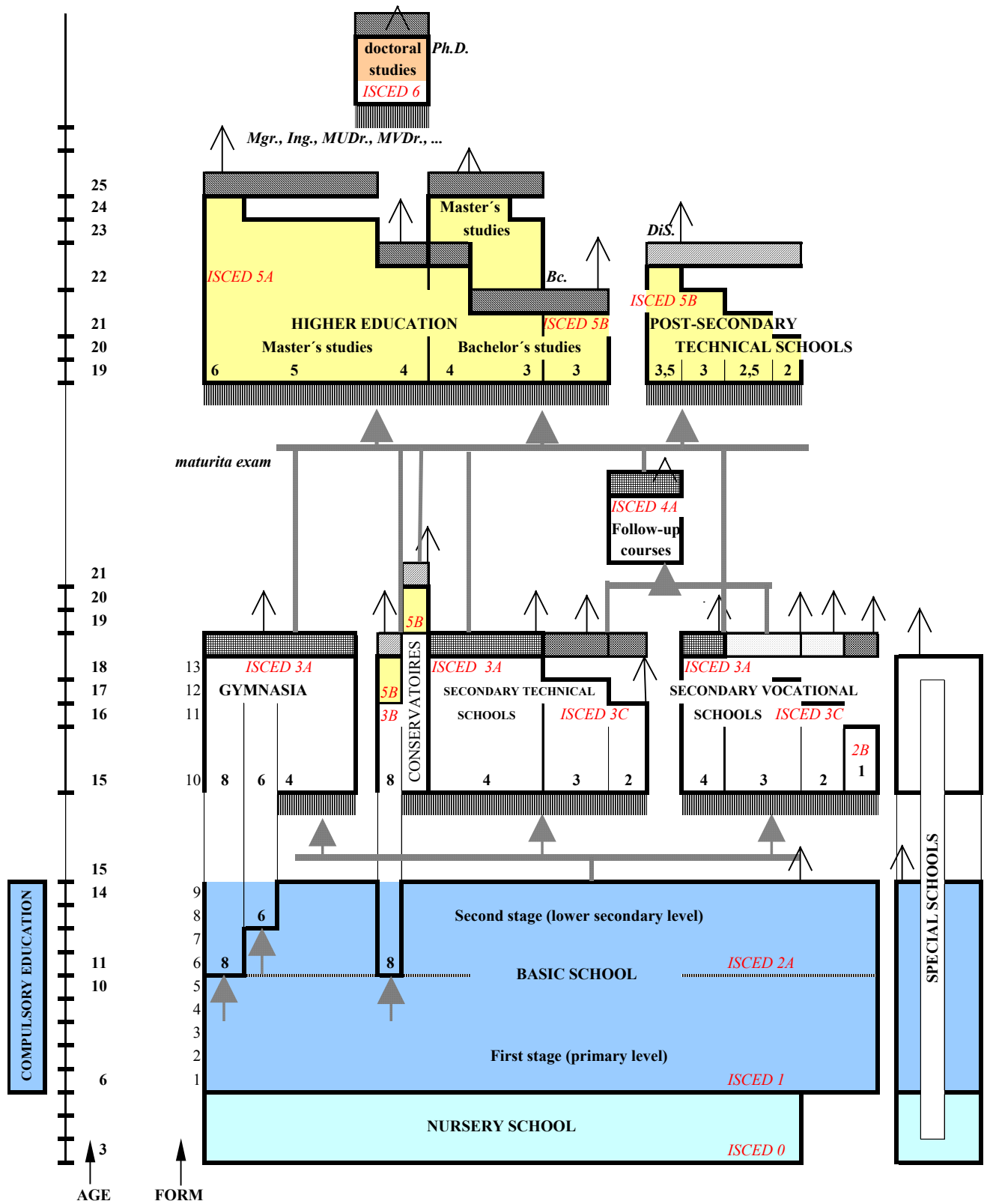
Higher education institutions (HEI) provide accredited Bachelor, Magister (Master's) and postgraduate (doctoral) courses. With these, students have a choice between regular (daily), distance or combined learning forms. Also, lifelong learning (LLL) programmes are provided by higher education institutions. Along with education, research and development (R&D), artistic, and other activities have a great significance for these institutions. Higher education institutions enjoy quite large independence and autonomy with the Government having only indirect tools of influencing them.

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is the central authority responsible for initial education administration. With regard to regional education, the right of establishment rests with territorial public administration units in chief: with **municipalities** (basic schools) and **regions** (upper secondary education and higher

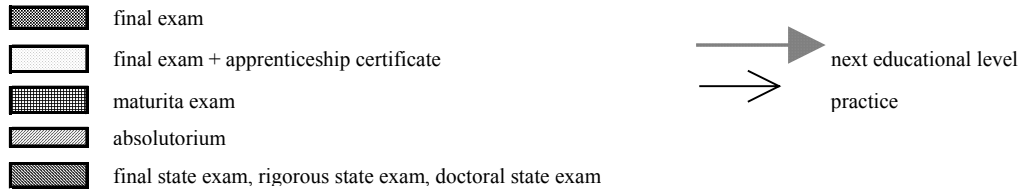
professional schools). Besides these, private, denominational or state schools may also be established. At the tertiary level, the process of private higher education schools foundation has begun, too, to complement public and state higher education schools.

MoEYS provides for the establishment of organisations that ensure specific education administration tasks. These **report directly to MoEYS**. To monitor the implementation of the legislation in force and the quality-of-education standards agreed in all schools (except for higher education institutions), **Czech School Inspectorate** has been established by MoEYS.

Education system of the Czech Republic in 2000



Explanations:



Source: MoEYS

Tables for Analysis

Table 1: Basic School Pupils (thousands)

	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
Total No. of Pupils	1 235,7	1 193,1	1 166,5	1 115,0	1 061,4	1 027,7	1 004,6	1 100,1	1 092,5	1 082,4	1 071,3	1 056,9
of which primary	566,8	545,8	537,8	528,8	521,3	522,7	522,8	637,0	635,6	626,8	618,0	605,0
lower secondary	669,0	647,3	628,7	586,3	540,1	505,0	481,7	463,1	456,8	455,6	453,3	451,9

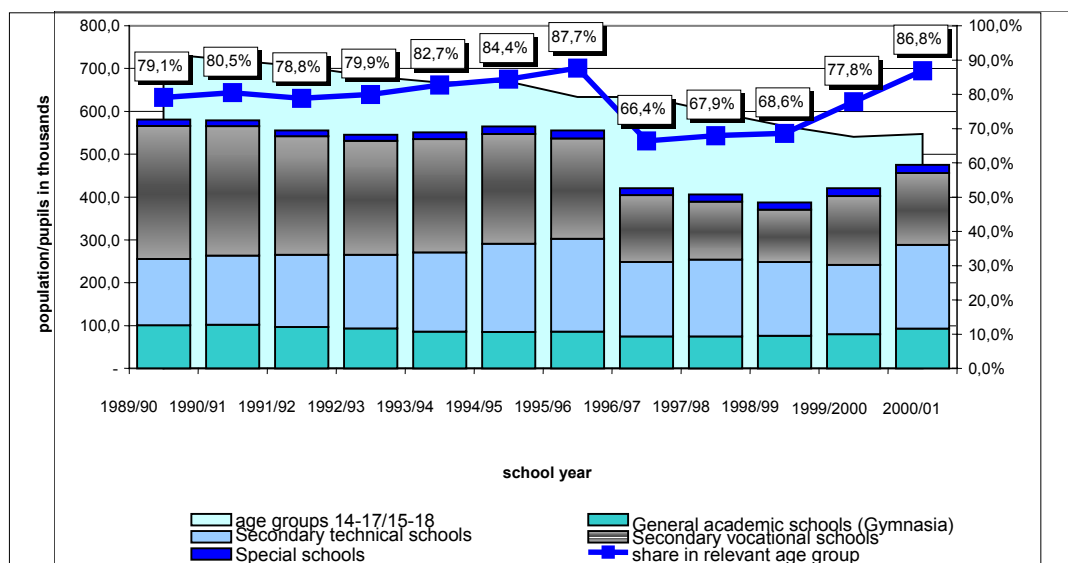
Source: UIV, 2002

Table 2: Secondary schools students (thousands)

	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
Student Numbers (thousands)	566,0	573,1	556,8	554,3	570,6	588,5	582,5	454,6	437,4	416,8	446,9	500,1
non-state schools	0	*	*	33,2	57,4	70,1	75,7	61,8	55,7	48,6	48,2	57,21
completing compulsory education	0	*	14,8	23,4	34,9	41,5	45,4	50,3	51,7	49,6	46,9	43,7

Source: UIV, 2002

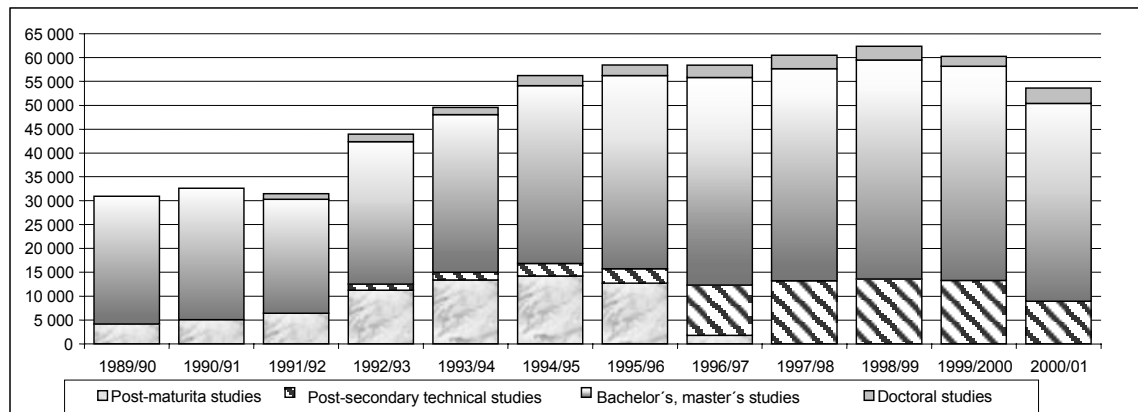
Scheme 1: Trends in school attendance in regular (daily) secondary schools with and without the award of the Maturita set against the trends in the relevant age groups (14 to 17, or 15 to 18)



Source: UIV, CSO, 2002

Note: Students of lower grades in multi-year Gymnasia completing their compulsory education not included.

Scheme 2: Students Admitted to Tertiary Education Facilities



Source: UIV, 2002