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Pol, M. & Lazarova, B. (2012). Czech Republic. In C. L. Glenn & J. De Groof (Eds.), *Balancing freedom, autonomy and accountability in education: Volume 2* (69-98). Tilburg, NL: Wolf Legal Publishers.

Overview

The Czech education system was strongly centralized for many years, starting back in the times of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Compulsory education of six years was enacted by law in 1774 and prolonged to eight years almost a century later (1869). The guarantor of school management, or rather the education of young people, was the state. Schools were established and financed by municipalities; under certain conditions the church could also become the establishing entity of a school. The basic type of school was the eight-year general school. Having completed five grades, pupils continued (especially in towns) at three-year burgher schools that provided lower secondary education, technically oriented secondary schools, or eight-year grammar schools.

This tradition is reflected in the development of the education system after the origination of the independent republic of Czechoslovakia (1918-1939), despite numerous efforts to modernize schools and education typical of the period. In 1922 the so-called Little School Act was adopted, unifying the structure of schooling all over Czechoslovakia, providing for the cancelling of concessions for some age groups of pupils, and preparing the way for the founding of nursery schools. Also, material

conditions in schools were improved, the numbers of pupils in classes were reduced, and religion ceased to be a compulsory subject.

After World War II and the communist seizure of power in 1948, schools were universally put under state control. A nine-year compulsory education for all was enacted and the influence of the church was fully eliminated.¹ The unified school (joint education for all aged 6 to 15) offered education at five-year national schools and four-year secondary schools. In 1953, a new school structure was launched, shortening the compulsory education to eight years, with the secondary school-leaving examination to be passed after 11 years and the number of secondary schools increased. Today's compulsory education (including its terminology, e.g. the term nine-year basic school), extended to 9 years again, was anchored in 1960. Pupils could continue in three different streams at secondary level: three-year grammar schools, secondary vocational schools (4 years), or apprentice schools.

Another reform followed in 1976, based on which compulsory education was temporarily extended to 10 years starting from 1978, with pupils attending the basic school for eight years and continuing their compulsory education at a secondary school for at least two more years. The duration of the first two levels of education therefore changed from 5+4 to 4+4 (1979 to 1989), then 4+5 (1990 to 1995), 4+4+1, and finally, after 1995, back to 5+4. Throughout the communist era, between 1948 and the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the system of education was heavily centralized, with just episodic efforts made at relaxation (around 1968).

Czech education after 1989

Along with political and social changes which affected the whole of Czech society, the form of education changed greatly after 1989. Questions of school decentralization, deregulation and autonomy, as well as of school administration, became prominent. In 1990, a vigorous act of state administration and self-administration in education was passed, removing school management from the agenda of general state administration and subordinating it to the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. As a result, sectoral school management came into existence. The Ministry established School Offices at district level in order to execute its administrative function. In line with the reforms and processes of the large-scale decentralization of state administration, the administration of schools was again transferred to local authorities in 2000. The Ministry of Education has retained the conceptual and financial competences in schooling to this day. It has been allowed to establish the right to educate of partially fee-paying church and private schools. The enactment of a compulsory ideological orientation in education was abolished after 1990, enabling schools to exercise a certain degree of pedagogical autonomy, especially in curricular matters.

The shaping of educational policy from 1990 to 1995 was closely related to the

development of the socio-economic circumstances. In 1994, the Ministry of Education published *Quality and Responsibility*, a document which determined the main directions and paths for the materialization of educational policy. An important role was played by the inflow of foreign experience. A nation-wide discussion followed, resulting in the publication of the *White Book*² This document gave reasons for the necessary changes in educational policy and stipulated the objectives of its development. Based on the White Book, long-term intentions for education and the development of the education system were formulated. Later, in 2007, a Strategy of Lifelong Learning in the Czech Republic was authorized, defining the main visions and strategic directions of lifelong learning.

While the changes in the 1990s were fast and largely “bottom-up”, instigated by teachers and the general public in education, later changes were “enforced” and rather formally introduced within the dialogues for admission to the EU (including changes in the education of minorities such as the Roma). Since this movement was rather rash and lacking in concept, there are now efforts and discussions seeking to bring about more changes in education, which should be gradual and more complex.³

Current trends and discussions

Some clear priorities can be seen in current efforts to shape educational policy. There is a continuous tendency to add a “European dimension” to Czech education, which means to prepare pupils for lifelong learning, adapt their education to the requirements of the labour market, and develop lifelong mobility (with projects such as Strategy of Lifelong Learning, European Qualification Network, and Expanding Learning Mobility). As the abrupt development of schools and education after 1989 brought a lot of inevitable consequences and instigated debates about the quantity and quality of schools, requirements for the improved quality of schools and education grew stronger throughout that period. The quantity of schools and the question of their specialization is another much-discussed topic among both the professional and the general public.

After 1989 there was a rapid and insufficiently controlled increase in the number of secondary schools (including church and private schools) – mainly offering a general education or specializing in the humanities – in order to increase the proportion of young people in these schools and bring the educational structure of the population in line with indicators pertaining to the culturally and economically advanced countries of the EU. In spite of this, for demographic reasons the overall number of basic and secondary schools has decreased since 2003. With today’s demographic and economic development, basic and secondary schools host reduced numbers of pupils, resulting in the optimization of schools (the merging of state schools) and, frequently, the resistance of teachers and the public.

Also, there are debates about the six-year and eight-year grammar schools, which

“steal” large numbers of (not only more gifted) pupils from basic schools. Because of the wide range of secondary schooling on offer, it is relatively simple even for students who had substandard results at basic school to pass the school-leaving examination. Fearful that the stature of the secondary school-leaving examination is being devalued and regarding the situation on the labour market, a section of the professional and general public is calling for more support for apprentice training⁴ and technical fields in general, urging a reduction in the number of state schools. With the introduction of the state secondary school-leaving examination and other comparative examinations, the Ministry intends to raise the quality of education.

At the level of nursery schools, the problem is rather the opposite. Due to a fall in the birth rate in the 1990s, a large number of nursery schools have been closed. Day nurseries for children under 3, for which the Ministry of Health had been responsible, disappeared almost entirely. As a consequence of the more favourable demographic development of the last few years, Czech education is now facing a shortage of nursery schools, with municipalities – their most frequent establishing entities – lacking the means to open new ones. The number of rejected applications for children to be admitted to nursery school increased almost ten times between 2002 and 2009 (from 4,000 rejections to nearly 30,000). Alternatively, but in rather modest numbers, parents’ employers are now establishing nursery schools (corporate schools). The founding of the so-called nursery groups, which do not have the character of fully organized nursery schools, has recently been provided for, too.

Other discussions among the professional public and trends in educational policy focus on the provision of equal opportunities in education, social cohesion, and active citizenship.⁵ One new trend is the effort to make schools inclusive, in other words to offer conditions and an environment suitable for pupils with special educational needs, including the disabled, those at risk of social exclusion, and those of extraordinary ability (for details see chapter Decisions about admitting pupils). Also, increased attention is paid to the support of creativity and innovations in education as well as to enterprise.

The structure of schooling

Part of the educational system of the Czech Republic is formed by school and educational facilities. The lowest level of schools is nursery school (ISCED 0), which provides optional education for children aged 3 to 6 years. Nursery schools are managed by municipalities (or municipal constitutions), and are often formally affiliated to primary schools. In the awarding of places priority is given to children who are due to start compulsory education in a year, and who are exempt from tuition fees. More than 90percent of children aged five and older attend a nursery school. Children under 3 years are cared for in other facilities outside the school system (so-called crèches, children’s centres), but in the nineties the number of these markedly decreased.

Optional preparatory classes for primary and special schools are also considered to be part of pre-school education. They care for children at risk – children with disabilities and in particular socially disadvantaged children who in terms of their cognitive and social development are not sufficiently prepared to start primary school – who are due to start compulsory education in a year's time.

Primary schools bring together in a single organizational unit primary and lower secondary levels (ISCED 1 and 2); the first level lasts five years, while the lower secondary level lasts four years. At present, compulsory education lasts 9 years; the age at which compulsory education begins is 6 years. If a child is mentally and reasonably physically mature, his/her parents can apply for early admission to school from 5 years, whereas if a child has not achieved the desired level of development, his/her parents can apply for the postponement of admission to school. These exceptions are subject to decisions made by head teachers of schools on the basis of recommendations made by the school counselling facilities or a physician, under conditions set by law. Applications by parents for the postponing of their child's school admission are relatively frequent: in some schools it concerns up to 30 percent of children who are required to participate in the so-called enrolment for the first year of primary school. The enrolment for primary school usually takes place in January in each primary school and is obligatory for all children who by August 31st of that year will reach the age of six.

Some smaller municipalities establish so-called incomplete primary schools, schools with only a primary level; from the 6th year, students commute to the nearest catchment school. The incomplete school can take the form of the so-called small school, where, for example, pupils of two school years are combined in a single class. Although these small schools have their importance for the local community, they usually receive strong (financial) support from the municipality, and because of unfavourable demographic development in recent years they have tended to fight for their existence. Municipalities may support a local nursery or primary school from their own means, even if these schools do not reach the statutory number of pupils.⁶

In the years of post-revolutionary change, a selective stream of education was implemented within compulsory education – eight and six-year grammar schools, where gifted pupils can transfer after the 5th or 7th year if they meet the admission requirements. In the fifth year students with a appropriate talent can be enrolled at a dance conservatory. About 11 percent of pupils thus transfer to secondary schools at this stage of their compulsory education.⁷

Pupils with a minor mental disability attend practical primary schools, while pupils with a moderate or severe mental disability or a severe physical or sensory handicap usually attend so-called special schools (ISCED 2C). In the long term there remains a strong trend towards integration of pupils with physical disabilities or minor mental disabilities into standard classes.

Virtually all graduates of primary schools (about 95percent) continue in post-obligatory attendance at other types of schools. A general or vocational secondary school diploma (ISCED 3A) can be obtained from grammar schools, secondary vocational schools, secondary vocational training institutions or artistic schools (so-called conservatories). Such a programme of study usually takes four years (in some conservatories 6 years) and graduates have the opportunity to apply to study in the tertiary sector – at higher vocational schools and universities.

Apprenticeships completed with a certificate of apprenticeship usually take 3 years (ISCED 3C), in which students get training in a particular craft and gain qualifications for blue-collar professions. A short one- or two-year post-obligatory education programme is provided at vocational schools, vocational training institutions and practical schools, which are designed for students who have already completed their primary-school education but not achieved a full basic education (e.g. due to the repetition of certain classes). Usually this concerns a simple apprenticeship in which students prepare to handle everyday duties (family schools) or auxiliary work (e.g. preparing meals ...) (ISCED 2C and 3C).

Part of the secondary education sector is a two-year extension study programme (ISCED 4A) or short study programme leading to the school-leaving examination or apprenticeship certificate for those who have already completed their secondary education in another field (ISCED 4A and 4C). Since the school year 1996/1997 two-year higher vocational schools have been part of the tertiary education sector (ISCED 5B), although they are usually affiliated organizationally to the secondary vocational schools.

Developments after 1989 also meant a change in the system of disciplines. The proportion of apprenticeships (which before 1989 were favored for ideological reasons) decreased and the demand for studies ending in the school-leaving examination increased. While in 1989, 45 percent of primary-school graduates were enrolled on programmes of study leading to the school-leaving examination, in 1995 the figure was 59 percent and in 2005 71 percent. The number of students in the metallurgical, mining, chemical and engineering fields has gradually decreased; conversely it has grown in the fields of economics, business, services, management, etc.⁸

Any of the above-mentioned type of schools may be established separately for students with disabilities.

In addition to schools *per se*, the school system includes other school facilities that provide services and education; some of these provide institutional and protective education or preventive/protective care. These include facilities for the further education of teaching staff, school counseling facilities, school educational and accommodation facilities, school facilities for hobby education, school boarding facilities, specialized school facilities, and school facilities for the performing of institutional or protective care.

School administration

Public administration of education is highly decentralized, and different levels of administration and individual schools have a high degree of autonomy. Responsibility for the administration of schools is divided among the central, regional and local (municipal) authorities. The state administration of education is carried out by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.⁹ In special cases the administration is carried out by other authorities of central government (e.g. the Ministry of Interior – police high schools; the Ministry of Health – nursing colleges; the Ministry of Defense – military high schools, etc.). Autonomy in education is carried out by Regions, municipalities and school councils in accordance with the Education Act. Institutions of higher education have a high level of autonomy and their activities are regulated by the Higher Education Act.

The Ministry of Education is primarily responsible for the conception and development of the educational system and its financing. It is entrusted with the care of the school system, its functionality, effectiveness and coherence. It sets requirements for the establishment of schools and school facilities and for decisions on their integration, division or dissolution. Every four years it prepares a long-term plan for education and development of the educational system of the Czech Republic and in consultation with relevant central trade unions, employers' organizations and regions submits this for government approval. For the various levels and fields of education the Ministry approves the so-called Framework Educational Programmes, which contain goals, forms, lengths and obligatory content of education, its organization, professional profile, course conditions and requirements for completion of education programmes, principles for developing school educational programmes and learning conditions for students with special educational needs. Framework Educational Programmes for schools in the jurisdiction of other ministries (Health, Defense, the Interior, Justice, etc.) are issued by the relevant ministries by consent with the Ministry of Education.

Regional governments are responsible for developing and implementing education on their territory, and they administer secondary schools and colleges. A region is obliged to ensure conditions for secondary and higher vocational education, education for disabled children and the handicapped, language schools, basic schools of art and hobby education and partly for institutional care. The regional authority processes and every four years specifies and publishes a long-term plan for education and development of the educational system on the territory based on the strategic plan of the MEYS CR, regional demographic development, specific regional economic developments, the labour market, and plans for further development of the region.

Municipalities are the establishing entities of nursery and primary schools and are responsible for pre-school and compulsory basic education on their territory.

Since 2002 Czech schools have had the status of legal entities. In 2003 smaller

schools were merged so that the size of the facilities enabled them to be more effective and economical (for example, nursery and primary schools came together in a single institution, as did their headships, so that the obligations arising from the legal status were not burdensome for smaller institutions). The head teacher is responsible for school management, decides on issues related to education in accordance with the Education Act, and carries out management duties. He is responsible for the quality of the educational process in his assigned school and for relations with the community and the public. Recruitment, remuneration and leadership of staff at the school, their career advancement or release, and the selection of senior management representatives of the school are also in the charge of the head teacher, but this must be in accordance with current legislation. The way in which a head teacher is appointed depends on the establishing entities, which may dismiss a head teacher only for reasons specified by law (the loss of prerequisites for performance of the work, a serious breach of legal obligations, attainment of the age of 65, organizational changes leading to cancellation of the function, etc). The establishing entity establishes the so-called school council, which enables parents, school staff, and others to participate in a school's administration.

School funding

Compulsory education and study at state-established secondary schools (including public universities) are free, while pre-school education (with the exception of the year immediately prior to compulsory education) is fee-paying. Education has traditionally faced a lack of funding: spending on education in relation to GDP in the Czech Republic is between 4 percent and 5 percent (4.4 percent in 2009). Schools are to a large extent financed from public budgets from two sources: the state budget and the budget of territorial administrative units - regions and municipalities. Schools get some of their funds from their own economic activities, from projects and from participation in international programmes. There is a tendency to increase financial contributions from families, even for compulsory education (for study aids, textbooks, school events, etc.). The financial contribution of business to the training of students is negligible.¹⁰

The amount of school funding is determined centrally according to the number of students of a given age in a region (there are four age groups: 3–5 years, 6–14 years, 15–18 years and 19–21 years). Regions then further allocate the funding to individual schools according to the per capita principle and the type of school (since 1992), determined on the basis of the previous year and according to expected performance (the number of students in each age group) and the financial impact of anticipated changes (e.g. an increase in salary schedules for teachers). A major proportion of non-investment expenditure is financed in this manner.

The financial resources that can be obtained from grant schemes play an increasingly important role in Czech schools. It is a notable and accessible source of additional

funds for schools. Increasing attention is paid to efforts in this direction since the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union. There are significant differences among schools in terms of their ability to draw on grant resources, and so there exist significant differences in the material equipping of schools and the implementing of a wide range of above-standard educational and other activities for both students and teachers, and even parents. Not all schools are able to apply successfully for grant funds, while other schools are repeatedly successful. However, this does not mean in general that implementation is really beneficial for the school and that outputs are used primarily to improve education.¹¹ In 2010 the European project Money for Schools, implemented by the Ministry of Education, was started. Its aim is to help schools to draw on funds from the operational programme Education for Competitiveness. Using the so-called rules, schools compile a list of key activities which can be financed from these funds. Not only the skills within schools for the drawing of grant funds are supported, however; the ability of schools to draw on funds in a meaningful way is also supported.

The legal framework

In the Czech Republic the right to education is laid down in the Constitution of the Czech Republic, specifically in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms, which is part of constitutional law. In Article 33 of that document it is stated:

Everyone has the right to education. School attendance shall be obligatory for the period specified by law.

Citizens have the right to free primary and secondary education, and, depending on the ability of the particular citizen and of society, also to a university-level education.

The change in political and social conditions after 1989 brought the requirement for a number of adjustments to the school system, which had to be laid down in laws and decrees. At the beginning of the 1990's there was a frenzy of legislative activity, which was characterized by many adverse factors: a generally low level of legal awareness, a nascent conception of government, rapidly changing economic relations, among others. Discussions on changes to the educational system were long, and therefore changes to the basic Education Act dragged on and it was not completed until 15 years after the revolution.¹² Until then, the old Education Act went through about 15 amendments.

The basic document, which has been in force since 2005, is the so-called *Education Act*.¹³ It regulates all education and training in schools and school facilities with the exception of education provided by universities and institutional care. Compared with the previous conception of the law and its orientation towards school institutions, in the current law the emphasis is put on the educational process. The

new Education Act contains a number of provisions providing for and deepening the democratization of education and strengthening the European dimension.

In addition to the Education Act, another important legislative document is the Act on Teaching Staff,¹⁴ which defines among other things requirements for teachers. It modifies the prerequisites for being a head teacher and the activities of teaching staff as well as requirements for their qualifications; it defines direct teaching activities and lays down the obligation for the further education of teaching staff.

Other laws which come under the Ministry of Education include an act on providing subsidies to private schools, pre-school and school facilities, an act on the verification and obtaining of further educational outcomes, an act on institutional education and protective care in school facilities, and the Higher Education Act. Other legislative directives are treated in the decrees – supplementary legal regulations and in various government orders and methodical instructions.

In the Czech Republic there is a compulsory nine-year basic (primary) education. A child's parents or guardian are responsible for the compulsory registration and they are obliged to ensure the child's regular and punctual school attendance. Dereliction of these duties is considered to be a misdemeanor, which can be fined; serious dereliction of education can then be classified as a criminal act endangering the moral upbringing of children and young people. Students attend compulsory education in their school district if their parents (guardians) do not choose another school. The Education Act states among other things that compulsory education applies to citizens of the Czech Republic, citizens of EU Member States, other foreigners who have permanent or long-term residence in the Czech Republic, and refugees, persons benefiting from subsidiary protection and parties involved in proceeding on granting the international protection in the Czech Republic.

Teaching is legally laid down in the range of 18 to 26 hours per week at the first level of primary schools, 28 to 32 hours per week at lower secondary level and 27 to 35 hours per week in secondary schools,¹⁵ and lessons take place mostly in the morning. The number of students in a class should be between 17 and 30; under certain conditions it can be reduced. The average number of students in a class is around 20; if the number of students in a class goes below the set number, the school must combine classes.

In connection with the need for rapid change, in the 1990s and early 2000s a large number of different documents originated. They overlapped in many ways; although addressing the same goals, they became confused. Attention was paid to quantity rather than quality of documents; the quality of various school decrees, laws and documents, and rapid and often non-conceptual changes to these are in some ways still a source of criticism today.

Freedom to establish non-state schools

Before 1989, pupils and students could only attend national, centrally managed schools. After this year the establishment of private and religious schools was allowed¹⁶ in order to extend educational options that fit the interests of pupils and students and the needs of the labor market and in order to create a competitive environment in the educational system. The foundation of private universities dates back to 1998.

For private and religious schools favorable conditions were created by the setting up of liberal regulations for their establishment and by the fact that the state is involved in their economic security at a level comparable with the economic security of public schools. Amendments from 1995 then brought stricter requirements for private and religious schools. As state schools they have a legal character and must apply for inclusion in the register of schools and school facilities. To be included in the register, they must also make other submissions, including descriptions of how they are staffed, managed and financed, information on potential numbers of students, and the opinion of the municipality or region.

The Education Act does not contain the term “private school” but talks about the possible establishing entity of schools. Private schools are defined as schools established by a juridical or physical person other than the state, region, municipality or a registered church. Church schools can be established by a church recognized by the state or a religious community which is registered by a body of state administration. The state recognizes education achieved in these schools and guarantees that in case of difficulties, a student of the school will be able to complete his/her compulsory education at a public school.

In the mid-1990s there was a sharp increase in the number of religious and private schools. In around 2002, the number of private schools showed a decline, since when it has stabilized. Most private schools are in the sector of secondary vocational schools.¹⁷ The following table shows the proportion of private and religious schools.¹⁸

Type of school	Private	Church
Nursery schools	2.0 percent	1.3 percent
Primary schools	1.6 percent	0.8 percent
Secondary schools (ISCED 3 and 4)	23.2 percent	2.5 percent
Conservatories	11.8 percent	11.8 percent
Higher vocational schools	26.1 percent	6.5 percent

The representation of private and church schools is uneven in terms of types of schools, geographical location and fields of education. Private and church schools tend to have a smaller number of pupils (primary private and church schools together are attended by only 1.3 percent of pupils, secondary schools by only 15.8 percent of

students). In recent years, the quality of secondary schools (and also universities) has been much discussed, because in the “fight for students” they often enrol candidates without having given them an entrance examination or merely on the basis of an interview. However, at the other end of the spectrum there are a few prestigious private schools, especially in Prague (with strong sponsor support), which demonstrate high quality.

Allocation of funds from public budgets (normatives) is determined by a school’s entry in the register of schools and school facilities. The basic normatives reach 50 percent - 80 percent of normatives for public schools; increased funding, however, may be up to 100 percent of normatives. Private schools usually have tuition fees, which are allowed on the basis of constitutional law. In Article 33 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms it is stated that:

...to establish schools other than state schools and to teach at them is possible only under conditions set by law. At such schools education may be fee-paying.

The level of tuition fees depends on the complexity of the field, the technical equipment of the school, and the economic situation of the area (for example, there is a significant difference between the level of tuition fees in Prague and other parts of the country).

Homeschooling

The Public Education Act, article 47, provides for fines for “parents or guardians who do According to the new Education Act, compulsory education may also be observed in the form of individual/home schooling, performed without the pupil’s regular attendance of classes. Based on a written application by a legal representative of the pupil, a permit for individual schooling is given by the head teacher of the school where the pupil was admitted to observe his/her compulsory education. Home schooling is only permitted for pupils at the primary level of education, but it has been pilot-tested at lower secondary level since the 2007-2008 school year. The child has the same rights to the use of teaching aids as other pupils, may participate in school events, while the course of his/her individual education depends on agreement with the leaders of the school, provided that legal conditions are observed. The school offers methodological assistance to parents (working out the curriculum and choosing textbooks), organizes meetings with parents, keeps records on the pupil and invites the pupil twice a year for testing.

Children may be educated individually by persons who have completed their secondary education, which usually means parents or, less commonly, grandparents. It is also possible to hire a teacher. Some families opt for traditional didactic

approaches while others make use of the opportunity to teach at home “in a different manner”, understanding education as a matter of lifestyle. An important influence on the form of home schooling is that of shared experience among families supported by the Association for Home Schooling.¹⁹

The reasons why families choose the home school are varied. There may be a problem with the accessibility of the school, bad experience of schools or groups of children on the part of the parents, lifestyle or religious belief, concern for the child, the child’s disability, efforts to protect the child from social or health risks, or distrust. Although parents who choose home schooling are usually satisfied with the experience, it is a rather marginal alternative in the Czech Republic.

School choice not limited by family income

Public schooling is free. Because of the under-funding of the educational system, schools are Basic (primary) education is free in the Czech Republic; pre-school education is fee-paying with the exception of the year immediately before primary school attendance. Health insurance for children, pupils and students is covered by the state. Families with low incomes may be granted a financial concession or they be released from service charges. The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms, which is part of constitutional law, includes not only the right to education but also under certain conditions expressed in the law the right to state help when studying.²⁰

The state thus creates support mechanisms for the provision of education to those who have financial difficulties. Financial aid for families is available from three sources: the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS), and from the schools themselves. The starting point for any financial aid from the budget of the MoLSA is the living wage level set for each family (depending on the number of children and their ages). Families receive child benefit from a child’s birth until he/she is 15 years of age and then up to 26 years of age if the child/young person is continuously preparing for his/her future career. Child allowances are not paid in a blanket manner, but on the basis of family income and in three levels in direct proportion to the age of the child. Since January 2008, child allowances have been paid where a family’s income does not exceed 2.4 times the living wage level and social allowance if its income does not exceed twice the living wage level. At the same time the family has the opportunity to apply for a concessionary rate of income tax.

Pupils at primary schools can be provided with daycare in school facilities for leisure education. These include an after-school care center, which is intended for pupils of the first level of primary schools and a school club, which provides leisure activities for all pupils. Leisure education is normally paid for, but it is regulated and head teachers can divide the payment into several installments, and under certain conditions the fee can be reduced or even cancelled. The payment for school boarding is determined by the amount of the financial normative, which is set by decree.

A school may, in accordance with its educational programme, organize trips for students without interrupting their education (e.g., skiing lessons, adaptation courses, schooling in countryside), trips abroad and other events related to the educational activities of the school. The cost of these activities is set by the head teacher, but in state schools it is significantly limited by decree. Families with financial difficulties can be supported in the form of concessions or exemptions from payment for these events.

Secondary education in the Czech Republic is also free except for private and religious schools, which can charge tuition fees. In many schools there exist as separate legal entities associations of parents. These associations can collect an agreed voluntary contribution from parents of students or other subjects and thus contribute to the school and its students for specific purposes. Head teachers of secondary schools set up funds for school textbooks and teaching materials for at least 10 percent of students; these textbooks are then lent free to socially- disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and students in material need.

Children from families with a low income usually attend state primary and secondary schools and can receive a full education and a number of exemptions from various fees. For families with an average income, the financing of their children's education in private secondary schools or colleges marks a major encroachment on the family budget. However, prestigious secondary schools (which are not common in the Czech Republic) can create a system of subsidies/ scholarships for significantly gifted students thanks to sponsorship and projects. There are also programmes initiated by the MEYS to promote education among ethnic minorities at risk of social exclusion (in the Czech Republic, Romani children in particular), making their access to education (scholarships, preferential admission to certain schools, etc.) significantly easier. The support of the education of Romani children in particular is the subject of much attention; non-profit organizations (e.g., DROM, IQ ROMA SERVIS) administer a number of projects to help these children, which focus on tutoring children, developing their interests, the education of their parents, etc.²¹

School distinctiveness

Contemporary Czech schools have considerable autonomy, even in terms of their specialization, focus, educational content, textbooks and methods of education. The curricular reform of Czech schools started in 2005 with the introduction of obligatory curriculum frameworks – the so-called Framework Educational Programmes for education at all types of schools. The main objective of education became the development of life skills that are crucial for today's world, are widely utilized, can be applied in a wide range of occupations, help to adapt to change, etc. At the same time, new objectives in education promote equal opportunities and an environment that motivates all pupils to learn. At the behest of the MEYS the Research Institute of Education (now the National Institute of Education, see <http://www.nuv.cz>)

continues to prepare and oversee their piloting. Framework Educational Programmes are binding but provide sufficient space for the creative input of schools and teachers. Based on this binding document, schools are required to create and continually to update the School Educational Programme, which is the responsibility of the head teacher, while all teachers should participate in its preparation. Education according to the Framework (or as the case may be School Educational Programmes) has been implemented by various types of schools gradually since 2007.

The Framework Educational Programme for pre-school education contains five educational areas:

- the child and his/her body (biology)
- the child and his/her mind: language and speech, cognitive abilities and functions, imagination (psychology)the child and others (inter-personal area)
- the child and society (socio-cultural area)
- the child and the world (environmental area)

Each of these areas includes educational objectives and offers expected outputs and the acquisition of competences. Spontaneous, situational, individualized learning is preferred. Nursery schools operate with considerable organizational freedom.

The purpose and objective of education at both primary and secondary schools is to equip all pupils and students with a set of key competencies at a level that is attainable for them, and thus prepare them for further education and their role in society. The Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education defines nine basic areas of education, cross-curricular issues and supplementary educational fields.

- language and language communication (fields: Czech language and literature, foreign language)
- mathematics and its application
- information and communication technologies
- humans and their world (only for primary level)
- humans and society (history, civil education); for lower secondary level only
- humans and nature (physics, chemistry, biology, geography); for lower secondary level only
- arts and culture (music, fine art)

- humans and health (health education, physical education)
- cross-curricular issues (humans and the world of work, personal and social education, drama education)

From the eighth year at the latest the school is obliged to offer students the chance to study a second foreign language. One of the foreign languages that schools offer must be English; other languages are usually German, French, Spanish, and in recent years there has been a slight upturn in interest in Russian.

The Framework Educational Programme also provides a recommended curriculum, an obligatory curriculum and expected outcomes. The Act sets the maximum number of lessons per week; the minimum number of lessons is set by the Framework Educational Programme. This creates a flexible number of hours, and perhaps a certain number of free periods, which can be used at schools' (teachers') discretion. Schools are thus partly responsible for the distribution of the curriculum for each year, which must be included in the School Educational Programme. The available time is used mainly to implement so-called cross-curricular issues, to increase time for individual subjects or to introduce supplementary educational fields (e.g. drama education), to take into account the focus and specific character of the school, etc.

At present teaching in accordance with the Framework Educational Programme is carried out at grammar schools, while the Framework Educational Programmes for various types of secondary vocational schools are being successively approved and piloted. Creating Framework Educational Programmes for secondary education is bound to the reform of the system of vocational education. The number of fields of education has been significantly reduced to 274 (including postgraduate studies). For example, where once there were 90 fields focusing on different aspects of economics, business and management there is now a single field of Economics and Business.

The Framework Educational Programme for Secondary General Education contains these education fields:

- language and language communication (plus 2 foreign languages, one of which must be English)
- mathematics and its application
- humans and nature (physics, chemistry, biology, geography, geology)
- humans and society (introduction to civics and the social sciences, history)
- humans and the world of work
- humans and health (health education, physical education)

- arts and culture (music, fine art)
- information science and information and communication technologies
- optional education activities
- cross-curricular subjects (personal and social education, education towards thinking in European and global contexts, multicultural education, environmental education, media education)

The programme again places free periods at the disposal of teachers (about 8 hours per week).

Nursery, primary and secondary schools are free to respond to the needs of their pupils and students, to increase their attractiveness and deepen the tradition of a specific orientation or alternative structure (sports schools, schools with extended language teaching, bilingual schools, schools which specialize in art, etc.). School educational programmes then reflect such schools' orientations in free periods.

School educational programmes provide equal access to basic education for all pupils, taking into account their educational needs and abilities. They make possible a differentiated and individualized education for pupils with special educational needs and for exceptionally gifted pupils. School educational programmes also enable teachers to develop a creative working style and do not limit them in the application of time and methodological differences that develop on the basis of their experience. The benefit of school educational programmes is seen in the need to think more about teaching content and in more intensive communication among teachers. Schools can thus realize their priorities and reach agreement on them.²²

Teachers have relative freedom in their choice of teaching methods, textbooks and other materials. They choose teaching methods on the basis of their own judgement, the overall strategy and abilities of their school and in accordance with the Framework Educational Programme. As to the choice of textbooks, every year the Ministry of Education publishes a list of textbooks and teaching materials that have been granted the so-called accreditation clause on the basis of their consistency with the aims of education as laid down by law, the Framework Educational Programme and legal regulations. The list is published in the Bulletin and on the websites of the MEYS. Schools may, however, use other materials and textbooks, but only if these do not conflict with the aims. A certain freedom is given to schools as well concerning the assessment of pupils and students. Most schools use the classic rating 1 (best) to 5 (worst), but the law allows a verbal assessment or a combined assessment. Verbal forms of assessment are primarily used by alternative schools.

Currently, the so-called curricular reform is ongoing, and naturally it provokes among teachers different feelings and attitudes: from enthusiastic innovative joint effort to sceptical implementation of formal administrative changes that do not have

much impact on the quality of teaching.²³ The authors of the curriculum are aware of the burden which they have loaded on the shoulders of teachers in recent years. The curriculum reform is therefore accompanied by a variety of educational and methodological support mechanisms for teachers. A large number of programmes and projects are arising (often with the support of European Union funds) with the aim of training so-called coordinators, who are able to support the school in creating a new curriculum or who can support the building of networks of schools as a platform for inspiration and the exchange of experience.

There has also been recent discussion on modifications to the Framework Educational Programmes, with the requirement for the clearer expression and unifying of outcomes, at least in terms of basic subjects. The reason for the specifying of requirements is that some students experience problems when transferring from one school to another or when doing entrance examinations to secondary schools if they have not reached the required level of knowledge because the school educational programme was implemented in a different setting.

Alternative schools

Alternative schools are also part of the Czech educational system. They are sometimes called “school by play” because their teaching methods and lesson organization approaches the curriculum through games, discussions, problem- solving tasks, etc. Nevertheless, as in ordinary schools the teaching content is bound to the Framework Educational Programme. Alternative schools generally believe in certain agreed basic principles:²⁴

- they try to lead children to education, develop their natural desire to learn new things
- they try to build a friendly relationship between teachers and children
- they work closely with families
- they strive for the most active child participation in education, encourage cooperation and communication development
- they strengthen children’s responsibility and their participation in decision-making
- they interface subjects for better understanding of connections and use of knowledge
- the environment adapts to the children; aids are easily accessible

- classes do not begin and end with the ringing of a bell; the interest of children and fatigue are taken-into-account, etc.

In the Czech Republic mainly the following “classic” alternative schools are available:

- Waldorf Schools (nursery, primary, secondary)
- Montessori Schools (mainly nursery schools, but also primary)
- Dalton Schools (nursery, primary and secondary)

Furthermore, in recent decades certain education programmes have been implemented that are modifications of foreign programmes, such as:

- Begin Together (a programme implemented in nursery schools and at the first level of primary school, based on the original programme Step by Step, inspired by the Freinet School)
- Healthy School (from nursery schools up to secondary schools, based on then project Health Promoting School)
- Integrated thematic teaching (implemented in nursery schools and at the first level of primary school, taught in mixed-age groups, the curriculum is integrated in a selected thematic whole)

Decisions about admitting pupils

Since independent schools must derive their income from tuition payments, they do not Primary school pupils must be accepted by their catchment school (the closest school to the pupil’s residence). The parents of pupils may also choose another school, but the school is not obliged to accept the pupil. There exists no claim for study at secondary school, higher vocational school and college (even for pupils who have completed all years of their compulsory education); schools have the right to set their own criteria for admission of students. Heads of secondary schools decide on the admission of applicants as well as setting criteria for admission to fields of study. The admission procedure to the first year may be applied in several rounds.

There are some private secondary schools and some fields of study at secondary (also state) vocational schools that attract little interest from students; for this reason secondary education is available to virtually the whole student population. With regard to demographic trends, the above-mentioned optimizing of the network of secondary and higher vocational schools is in progress. Even though the number of schools has been reduced, regional authorities try to secure access to good-quality secondary education for all students. To increase the availability of secondary

schools, some schools establish hostels, which in addition to accommodation and board also provide educational and leisure activities.

The Czech education system provides for the education of members of national minorities as well. The traditional national minorities in the Czech Republic are Slovaks, Poles, and Germans. The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms states in Article 25:

- *Citizens who constitute a national or ethnic minority are guaranteed all-round development, in particular the right to develop their own culture together with other members of the minority, the right to disseminate and receive information in their native language, and the right to associate in national associations. Detailed provisions shall be set down by law.*
- *Citizens belonging to national and ethnic minority groups are also guaranteed, under conditions set down by law: (a) the right to education in their own language; (b) the right to use their own language when dealing with officials; (c) the right to participate in the resolution of affairs that concern national and ethnic minorities.*

Members of national minorities are therefore guaranteed education in their own language, but at present only the Polish minority makes use of this law. In the academic year 2009/10 21 primary schools in the Czech Republic provided education in Polish.²⁵ The right to education in a minority language can be implemented by a private school. This is the case of the Jewish minority, which has one primary school and one grammar school, where pupils are taught Hebrew in addition to other languages. Children of foreign nationals are integrated into classes without any language training, or they attend English or French schools operating on the territory of the Czech Republic (mainly in Prague).

The activities of the MEYS include the setting-up of a so-called subsidy programme to support education in minority languages and multicultural education.²⁶ At the same time the National Action Plan for Inclusive Education is at the preparatory phase. Its aims are to act preventively against social exclusion and contribute to the successful integration of disadvantaged individuals.

A longstanding problem faced by the Czech school system – and one which is highly publicized and often misrepresented – concerns the education of the Romani ethnic minority (at an educated guess, this concerns about 220,000 people). The Czech school system has been accused by international organizations campaigning for human rights of the inappropriate placement of Romani pupils in so-called primary practical schools (formerly special schools), which are intended only for pupils with slight learning difficulties. However, the problem is more complex than it may appear – long-term attempts to find ways to support and fully integrate Romani families have met with no success; children with language difficulties and a low work ethic cannot succeed in regular state schools without the support of their parents, and in

many cases they are absent without leave from school. Projects to support Romani children, tutoring and exemption from nursery-school fees, the work of Romani assistants (or teachers' assistants) in schools and the introduction of pre-school preparation classes have had little effect. Unsuccessful Romani pupils then leave primary school without a full basic education, and usually they are not motivated to pursue further studies. Efforts by the state at "positive discrimination" then initiate social tension between the majority and minorities in high-risk locations. Currently this is one of the biggest challenges Czech education faces.

The Czech education system is characterized by a strong effort to integrate physically and socially-disadvantaged (disabled) pupils and students in standard schools; their treatment is regulated by special decree.²⁷ The MEYS formulates the principles and aims of education for children with special educational needs (SEN), defines the concept of pupils with SEN and clarifies their rights. Forms of special education include: individual integration, group integration, education in special schools. Disadvantaged and disabled pupils and students are provided with some free aids and textbooks. Schools get special bonuses in addition to the usual funding for these pupils and students, and some of them have the right to use an assistant's help. The so-called integration of pupils and students is based on recommendations from consultant educational institutions (especially education centers and educational and psychological counseling services), whose services are free. Schools have the right to establish special classes (group integration) for pupils with special educational needs. Integrated students are educated according to individual plans of education; special education is also reflected in the Framework Educational Programmes. Support measures include special methods, forms and procedures, special textbooks and teaching aids, compensation and rehabilitation aids, reduced numbers of pupils and students in the classroom, and teachers' assistants.

To help pupils and students with special educational needs, the new Education Act has reinforced the role of counseling in primary and secondary schools; this is described in a special decree.²⁸ According to the decree head teachers of primary, secondary and higher professional schools must guarantee the provision of counseling services in their schools. Each school has its own educational counselor (a teacher with a lighter teaching load who has completed training in educational counseling) and preventive methodologist (who plans prevention programmes, tries to minimize the socio-pathological phenomena in the school, etc.). After 2004 the first so-called school counseling offices were established in Czech schools; these might include, in addition to the educational counselor and preventive methodologist, a school psychologist, a special-school teacher, and recently even a social worker trained as a teacher. Counseling is aimed at preventing failure at school and socially pathological phenomena, and also at career counseling, integration of pupils with special educational needs and the care of gifted pupils and students, among other things. The posts of education professionals and assistants (school psychologist, special-school teacher, teacher's assistant) are usually funded only through grant projects and still represent an above-standard service. Hardly any school can afford to employ a counselor and fund his/her activities from its own

resources without special subsidies (although this option is permitted by law). Currently it is estimated that there are school psychologists at work in about 300 schools; in none of these cases, however, is this a full-time job. With regard to efforts to strengthen school inclusivity, the developing of school counseling centers is the one of the priorities of Czech education, but it still faces problems with funding for the creation of a truly effective school counseling system.²⁹

Decisions about staff

Along with the transformation and deideologization of education after 1989, important reforms had to be performed to bring teacher education in line with European standards. In this respect, the most important of the changes accomplished was the adoption of the Act on Teaching Staff in 2004. This law clarified the term teaching staff, set conditions for teaching practice, formulated requirements for the professional qualification of some specific categories of teachers, specified conditions for the position of head teacher, and defined the system of in-service teacher training.

Undergraduate teacher education at universities, usually of two levels (with bachelor's and master's degrees), is carried out at faculties of education or other institutes of higher education that provide programmes in teacher studies; there is one programme for basic school and another for secondary school. A full qualification for the basic- or secondary-school teacher requires a master's degree. For nursery schools, a specialized secondary education used to be sufficient, but today a bachelor's degree in primary teaching from a faculty of education is required. For supervisors of apprentice training, a secondary education and a certificate in basic pedagogy was the standard until recently, but now a bachelor's degree in education is required.

Prospective teachers at primary and lower secondary school are educated in separate study programmes. For the lower secondary level, students usually choose a combination of two teaching subjects. Some universities offer condensed (usually four-semester) study programmes for graduates in various fields, which authorize them to teach.

The employer of teachers and the head teacher is the school. Head teachers are entitled to appoint and remove their deputies and engage and dismiss teachers. The head teacher is chosen in an open competition and appointed by the establishing entity of the school. The extent of the head teacher's teaching duty and the procedure of his/her removal from office is specified by law.

Teacher salaries correspond roughly to the average salary in the Czech Republic (currently about CZK 24,000 a month). Nevertheless, they are traditionally considered inadequate and insufficient. All governments since 1989 have looked at ways to increase the teacher salaries, but it has proved possible to raise considerably

only starting salaries, in order to motivate young teachers, to change the unfavorable age and gender structure of teaching staffs at Czech schools and to increase their quality and flexibility. According to inspection reports, in 2007 there were still some 20 percent of teachers with insufficient qualifications working at Czech schools, while only about 70 percent of graduates from faculties of education in fact intended to work as teachers. These numbers are changing as older teachers leave and the unemployment rate increases, but a good salary is one of the prerequisites for teachers to adopt the new approach to teaching and the only way to attract high-quality students truly interested in the profession to schools of education. In this respect there are discussions about inevitable changes to undergraduate teacher training.³⁰

Based on regulations for in-service teacher training and career growth,³¹ the motivational above-tariff part of the salary has increased, but salaries within tariffs have remained relatively low. Also, career growth is rather slow and the formulation of criteria for advancement to higher categories is unclear and insufficient. So career order and teacher salaries remain a problem to be solved and a challenge for legislation.

Teachers have both the right and the duty to participate in in-service training. Annually they may take up to 12 days' leave for individual study. It is largely head teachers, who are obliged to produce plans of in-service training and responsible for their fulfillment and financing, who decide about the process. The financing runs "through the school", which means that head teachers decide about the distribution of finance and the form of training with regard to the individual needs of teachers, the needs of the school and applicable trends in educational policy. A large number of schools decide to compensate for the lack of finance with various projects aimed at the development of the school and school teams. In recent years, these projects have often been supported from European funds.

After 1989, special attention was paid to language training (there was, and to a certain extent still is a shortage of good language teachers) and computer literacy. An important action was Internet to Schools, a centrally supported extensive project for which teachers had to complete basic ICT training. Another priority in teacher training, apart from the development of didactic and professional knowledge and skills, is an increased ability to cooperate and self-reflect, which is fundamental for the solving of the variety of complicated tasks and problems that present themselves at today's school. Teachers have to be trained in a way that allows them to meet the requirements for a collaborating, open and learning school.³²

Programmes and courses of in-service teacher training are organized either by institutions governed by the Ministry of Education (National Institutes for In-Service Training, National Institute for Education) or subjects and schooling institutions run by regional authorities, universities, non-profit or other organizations, or even individuals. Although the system is not very transparent, only in-service training activities certified by the Ministry may be financed by state schools. There is a

growing preference for long-term comprehensive programmes or training for school teams aimed at the analysis of practice, rather than for one-off isolated seminars of no real continuity.

The education of head teachers must be addressed intensively, for school leaders carry much of the responsibility for successful solutions to new problems schools are facing. The importance of the work of school leaders, whose powers and responsibilities are relatively broad, is increasingly appreciated.³³ As their education is entrusted to universities, head teachers whose practice in leading positions is of less than 10 years are obliged to attend four-semester training sessions. The work of the head teacher has recently undergone substantial change, so a frequent objective of today's research is to identify and describe the prevailing activities of head teachers, together with their working problems, career paths and educational needs.³⁴

Accountability for school quality

Bulgaria has a required core curriculum for all grades of elementary and secondary. As elsewhere, schools in the Czech Republic are now supposed to develop in a relatively autonomous mode, encouraged from the inside, using their own forces. At the same time, the mechanisms of a certain regulation of school operation are more clearly applied under the current arrangement. The relatively great autonomy of schools and their decentralization have placed on schools a number of multilateral requirements. In general terms, it is expected that schools, which face both external and internal responsibilities, render accounts of their work (accountability). Soon after the transfer of powers and responsibilities to the local level, and with more space opened for school development, new mechanisms of accountability were sought and created in order to compensate effectively for the new adjustment.³⁵ Those involved use the term school quality³⁶ with greater frequency than accountability; this can be increased in various ways and with the use of a variety of tools.

External supervision of the state has been applied since 1991 within the agenda of the Czech School Inspectorate, an administrative authority that operates nation-wide. Inspections are carried out by school inspectors (responsible for the field of education), controllers (economics and other fields) and other authorized staff. Even if this supervision is primarily external, it is aimed at the strengthening and support of school self-evaluation. Inspection reports from schools are available at the website of the Czech School Inspectorate.

Measures upon which schools have to present information about their activities to individuals and various public groups were introduced in the 1990s. Schools are now obliged to publish Annual School Reports and make them available on their websites.

Another typical example of efforts to boost school accountability is the School Board,

a body which enables parents, adult students, employees of the school and other persons to participate in a school's administration. The establishing entity decides on the number of members and the election system and appoints one third of the members. Another third is elected by the teaching staff and the rest by pupils or their parents. The head teacher is not a member of the Board but has to participate in meetings if invited.

The new Education Act has introduced the duty of self-evaluation. The Ministry regularly invites schools to produce self-evaluation reports. Some schools consider these duties an additional administrative burden and fulfill them in a rather formal way. Other schools, however, accept self-evaluation as an opportunity to “learn more about themselves”, voluntarily developing more mechanisms and tools to obtain relevant feedback from various subjects so that effective steps towards better school development can be taken. Some projects that work to improve self-evaluation skills have been supported by European funds in recent years. Also, there are debates about the necessity for support of schools in their “work with data”.³⁷ Probably the strongest endeavor of this kind was The Way to Quality, a national project whose aims included the creation and pilot use of self-evaluation methods, training of self-evaluation coordinators, creation of school networks, and consultancy in self-evaluation.³⁸ The current leaders of the Ministry of Education have put efforts aimed at relieving schools from a number of compulsory administrative tasks (bottom-up pressure), including a possible transformation of some duties, such as self-evaluation and the establishment of School Boards, into voluntary activities.

Since the 1990s, pupils at Czech schools have participated in comparative testing and research at international level (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS and other schemes). The results these give shows a worsening throughout the period since 1989. For this reason there is an urgent call for increased quality in education. The central management supports and prepares blanket testing, a system of comparative tests, the state secondary school-leaving examination and the determination of standards. The new model for the state school-leaving examination was first implemented at secondary schools in 2011. To a certain extent, this action has allowed for internal and external comparison of the results of specific schools, but it has also provoked debate about the cost of the examination, its character, its procedure, the ethics of the announcement of results, a lack of connection with the process of admission to university, and so on. Comparative tests for 5th and 9th grade in some major subjects (mathematics, Czech, a foreign language) are proposed. Also, the determination of standards, i.e. basic or advanced knowledge to be demonstrated by pupils at the end of selected grades,³⁹ is under consideration. These standards should be used to prepare comparative tests.

Teaching of values

The Public Education Act, article 15.1, defines the purpose of the state education requirements as The Czech Republic is a democratic nation that carefully observes

freedom of speech and respects the value systems of individuals and groups provided they are not in contradiction of the law. As Article 2 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms says, “the State is based on democratic values and may not be bound to any exclusive ideology or religious faith”. At the level of values, the objectives of education are defined as follows:

- the basis is universal moral values within the European tradition
- values upon which the democratic society and the legal code are based
- values enabling the pupil to create a responsible relation to him/herself.⁴⁰

The foundations of curricular reform include the definition of key competences ensuing from generally accepted values in society. Such competences emerge from shared ideas about their importance for the satisfying and successful life of the individual, which leads simultaneously to a strengthening of the functions of a civil society. For education at basic and secondary schools, similar areas of key competence were defined as:

- competences for learning
- competences for problem solving
- communicative competences
- social and personal competences
- civic and occupational competences (for older pupils, competence for enterprise)

Society-wide values are then reflected in the formulation of Framework Education Programmes. Great autonomy can be applied by schools in their plans for the teaching of a cross section of topics. A wide platform is originating for the consolidation of the value system of young people, opening up a new space for discussion, experiential learning, reflective learning, and so forth. So at secondary school considerable attention may be given to topics such as citizenship, European citizenship, globalization, environmentalism and multiculturalism. Czech basic and secondary schools have been able to participate in a variety of international projects such as Comenius and other programmes focusing on value-oriented topics.

The fulfillment of values defined on a society-wide scale is obligatory and supported legislatively, or rather circularly, in schools. It is nevertheless evident that various values are shared within single schools or groups of alternative schools only. Moreover, church schools define their own specific values. In terms of confession, the state is neutral; there is no official religion, freedom of belief is guaranteed, and everybody has the right to express his/her religion or belief. The option to teach

religion has been reintroduced in schools and information about churches has returned to the curricula of history and civic education.

In many cases, alternative and church schools have thus become a solution for families who do not believe that the common school can fulfill social and supreme human values in a world full of risk factors such as violence and intolerance.

Endnotes

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- ¹ for an account in English of this process, see Glenn, chapter 6.
 - ² National Programme for Development of Education, Národní, 2001.
 - ³ Greger, 2011.
 - ⁴ Friedmann, 2011.
 - ⁵ National summary, 2010
 - ⁶ Knotová et al., 2010
 - ⁷ Organizace vzdělávací soustavy, 2010.
 - ⁸ Zpráva o vývoji, 2009; see also <http://www.msmt.cz>
 - ⁹ MEYS CR.
 - ¹⁰ National summary, 2010.
 - ¹¹ Pol, 2007.
 - ¹² Zpráva o vývoji, 2009.
 - ¹³ *Act 561/2004 on Pre-school, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education.*
 - ¹⁴ 563/2004 Coll.
 - ¹⁵ Organizace vzdělávací soustavy, 2010.
 - ¹⁶ on the basis of amendment No. 171/1990 Coll.
 - ¹⁷ Zpráva o vývoji, 2009.
 - ¹⁸ National summary, 2010.
 - ¹⁹ <http://www.domaciskola.cz>
 - ²⁰ Ústavní zákon, 1998.
 - ²¹ Rovné příležitosti ve školství, see <http://www.msmt.cz>

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- ²² Analýza naplnění, 2009.
- ²³ Janík et al., 2009.
- ²⁴ See <http://www.alternativniskoly.cz>
- ²⁵ National summary, 2010.
- ²⁶ Rovné příležitosti ve školství, see <http://www.msmt.cz>
- ²⁷ Vyhláška 73, 2005.
- ²⁸ Vyhláška 116, 2010.
- ²⁹ Lazarová, 2008.
- ³⁰ Analýza naplnění, 2009.
- ³¹ Vyhláška 317, 2005.
- ³² Pol, Lazarová, 1999.
- ³³ Pol, 2007
- ³⁴ Pol, 2008.
- ³⁵ Pol, 2007.
- ³⁶ Vašátková, 2010.
- ³⁷ Pol, 2007.
- ³⁸ Cesta ke kvalitě, see www.nuov.cz
- ³⁹ Zpráva o vývoji, 2009.
- ⁴⁰ National summary, 2009.