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► To cite this version:

Josef Beneš, Věra Šťastná. Higher education in the Czech Republic. Structures and latest developments. Cahiers du CEFRES, 2010, L'enseignement supérieur en France et en République tchèque : perspectives européennes, 24, pp.9. halshs-01163388

HAL Id: halshs-01163388

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01163388v1>

Submitted on 12 Jun 2015

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Cahiers du CEFRES

N° 24, L'enseignement supérieur en France et en République tchèque : perspectives européennes = Vysoké školství v České republice a ve Francii: evropské perspektivy
Antoine Marès, Dominique Sotteau, Věra Šťastná (Ed.)

Josef BENEŠ, Věra ŠŤASTNÁ

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Référence électronique / electronic reference :

Josef Beneš, Věra Šťastná, « Higher education in the Czech Republic. Structures and latest developments », Cahiers du CEFRES. N° 24, L'enseignement supérieur en France et en République tchèque : perspectives européennes = Vysoké školství v České republice a ve Francii: evropské perspektivy (ed. Antoine Marès, Dominique Sotteau, Věra Šťastná).

Mis en ligne en / published on : mars 2010 / march 2010

URL : http://www.cefres.cz/pdf/c24/benes_stastna_2001_higher_education_cz.pdf

Editeur / publisher : CEFRES USR 3138 CNRS-MAEE

<http://www.cefres.cz>

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HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Structure and Latest Developments

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To understand better the situation in the Czech Republic it is necessary to see the higher education system in broader view of the whole tertiary sector.

TERTIARY SECTOR OF EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The term „*tertiary education*“ is often not understood identically in different countries of EU or OECD. In the Czech Republic it has not been used officially before and only recently it was agreed that „*Tertiary education is the education for which the students qualify upon the successful completion of secondary education with the leaving exam called „Maturita“. It involves higher education in institutions of university and non-university types, higher professional school studies and other types of study recognised by the state (where the necessary condition for meeting the admission requirements is „Maturita“ exam).*“

Beside the term „*tertiary education*“, the terms „*non-university*“ and „*university higher education*“ and „*professional higher education*“ are used. This is usually regarded both to study programmes and institutions which provide the relevant education. In the Czech Republic the terms „*non-university*“ and „*university*“, as well as „*professional*“ are defined only in connection with the institution type as showed in the following text.

Structure of the system

Higher education institutions create the biggest part of the tertiary sphere as far as the number of students is concerned (about 190 000 students). Higher education institutions must provide, besides study programmes, research, developmental, artistic or other creative activities.

- **Higher education institutions of the university type** provide all types of study programmes (bachelor, master, doctoral) and award relevant academic degrees. They deal with both basic research and development oriented on applications and collaboration with a wide spectrum of users.
- **Higher education institutions of the non-university type** provide bachelor study programmes (they can also provide master study programmes) and award relevant academic degrees. Higher education institutions of the non-university type are required to focus on applied creative activity in close contact with potential employers of graduates. The employers are expected to provide feedback that should influence most study programmes offered.

Both types of higher education institutions may provide courses in the framework of life-long learning leading to a certificate.

Higher professional schools

Higher professional schools provide higher professional programmes that lead to the Diploma in economics, in social science etc (it is not equivalent to the Bachelor degree). They can also provide shorter professional courses.

Programmes provided in tertiary education

Higher professional programmes

Length of higher professional programmes is 2,0 - 3,5 (usually 3) years.

The programmes lead to a Diploma in the respective field of study, e.g. economics, social science etc. Higher professional programmes lead to the degree of “diplomovaný specialista”. As mentioned above, this diploma is not academically equivalent to the bachelor degree.

Bachelor study programme

The length of bachelor study programmes is at least three and at most four years. The study must be completed by the final state examination which usually includes a defence of a bachelor thesis. Bachelor study programmes lead to the degree of “bakalar”.

Master study programme

The length of one-tier master study programme is at least four /primary school teacher/ and at most six years /medicine, veterinary medicine/.

“Consequent” master study programmes, subsequent to bachelor study programmes, last 2 to 3 years.

The final state examination and a defence of a diploma thesis complete both, the one-tier and „consequent“, programmes. Studies in the field of medicine, veterinary medicine and hygiene are completed in due form by passing a rigorous state examination. Master study programmes in both systems (one-tier, two-tier) lead to the degree of “magistr”. In our higher education institutions both exist side by side.

Doctoral study programme

The graduates of any master study programme have access to doctoral studies. The standard length of doctoral study programme is three years. The state doctoral examination and the defence of a dissertation complete the doctoral study programme.

The Czech higher education system as described and its connections to the whole of tertiary education are demonstrated in the following diagram:

HPS – higher professional studies

HE – higher education

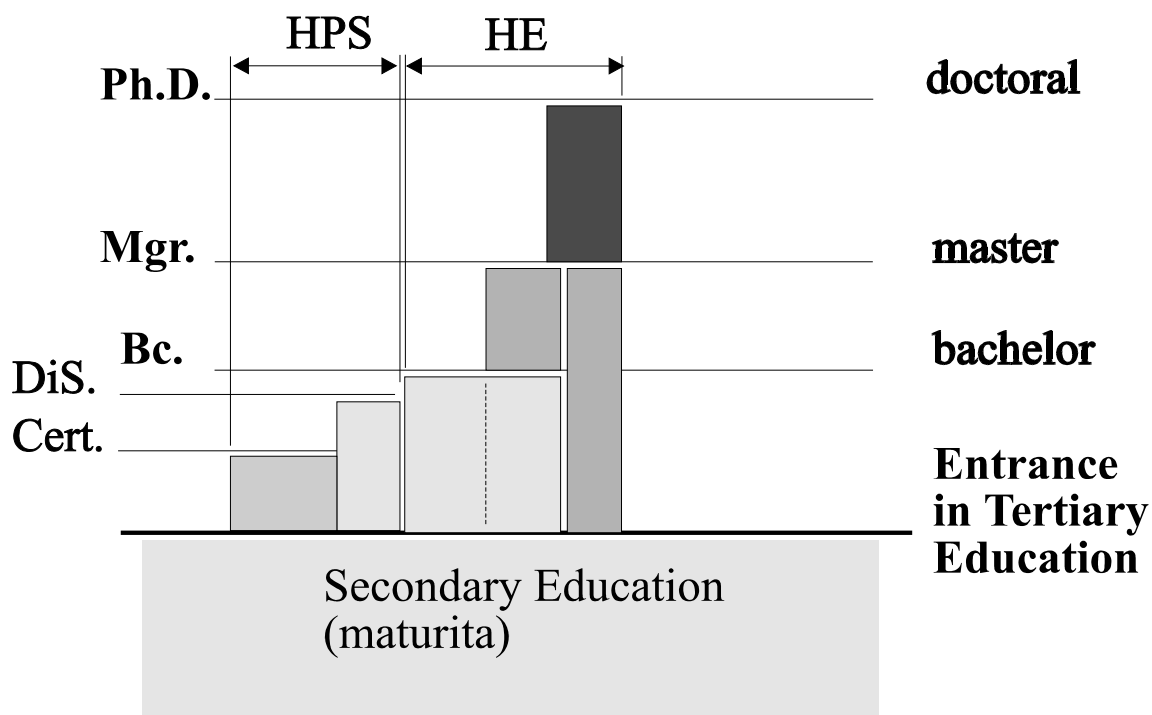
Ph.D. – doctor

Mgr. – magistr

Bc. - bachelor

DiS. – Diploma Specialist

Cert. – certificate



HIGHER EDUCATION

Legislation

The new act – Act no.111/1998 Col. On Higher Education Institutions (further Higher Education Act of 1998) was accepted by the Parliament in April 1998. It makes the best of the positive provisions of the previous Act No. 172/1990 while incorporating new and necessary changes to eliminate its shortcomings.

At present (January 2001), 42 higher education institutions belong to the Czech higher education system. There are 24 public institutions, 4 state higher education institutions (3 military higher education institutions, under the authority of the Ministry of Defence, and the Police Academy under the Ministry of the Interior) and 14 private higher education institutions. The public and military higher education institutions are university-type institutions. The Police Academy and all of the new private higher education institutions are non-university type institutions. The activities of the state schools are partly regulated by the legislation of the appropriate Ministry.

Charles University, Palacký University in Olomouc, and Masaryk University in Brno, are traditional multi-field universities, with a combination of humanities, natural science and medicine. There are now six newer multi-field universities in the Czech Republic, with a combination of social sciences, natural sciences and technical or agricultural sciences. The number of universities of the arts and specialised universities, i.e., agricultural, veterinary and economic, has remained unchanged.

Changes in the structure of higher education institutions

Type of higher education institution	1989	1999	2001
Universities (multi-field)	3	9	10
Technical universities (multi-field)	2	4	5
Technical universities (specialised)	5	1	1
Veterinary universities	1	1	1
Universities of economics	1	1	1
Agriculture and forestry universities	2	2	2
Universities of education	-	1	-
Universities of the arts	4	4	4
State higher education institutions	4	4	4
Private higher education institutions	-	9	14
Independent faculties of education	5	-	-
TOTAL	27	36	42

Private higher education institutions were established in 7 cities of the CR. Their study programmes are focused on economics (67%), law (5,5%), informatics and various types of computer sciences (5,5%), arts (16,5%) and applied ecology (5,5%).

Admission and access systems to higher education

Admission to bachelor or master one-tier (4 - 6 years) study programmes:

The basic requirement for access to higher education is comprehensive secondary education or comprehensive vocational secondary education.

There is no uniform admission procedure at higher education institutions in the Czech Republic, either for Czech students or for foreign students. Methods of examining and selection are in the competency of the faculty or of the higher education institution, when it is not divided into faculties. The academic senate of the higher education institution or faculty approves the conditions of acceptance. In practice, there is usually a written examination, an interview, or both. For art schools, faculties of architecture, faculties of education, sports studies and dentistry, one part of the examination is a test of talent or practical skills.

Restrictions on admissions (“numerus clausus”) are not stipulated at higher education institutions in the Czech Republic. Entrance examinations are administered due to the limited capacity of a higher education institution or faculty.

Admission to a “consequent” (2-3 years) master study programme

Graduation from a bachelor study programme, or equivalent, is the requirement for admission to a “consequent” master study programme (2 - 3 years).

Admission to a doctoral study programme

Admission to a doctoral study programme is conditioned by proper completion of studies in a master study programme; doctoral students in the field of arts must hold an academic degree. Applicants are required to take a special entrance examination or an interview.

Participation

There is a considerable increase of the number of students, which is the characteristic feature of the last ten years. At present (academic year 2000/2001) there are 199 000 students studying at public higher education institutions from which approx. 34 000 are students of bachelor study programmes. Besides, there are about 10 000 foreign students who pay for their studies. Private non-university higher education institutions enable studies for 2 000 students in bachelor study programmes. In addition there are 5 500 students at state higher education institutions from which 2 700 are students in bachelor study programmes.

The total increase of students comparing academic year 2000/2001 to the academic year 1989/1990 is about 80%, as regards new entrants comparing the same academic years the number was doubled. The total number of students enrolled (48 000) related to 19 years old cohort of population reaches 34%.

Study fees

No fees in public higher education institutions will be paid for studies in study programmes realised in the Czech language except in case students prolong their studies beyond the prescribed standard duration more than one year. Institutions can charge some administrative costs. A tuition fee is charged by public higher education institutions for study programmes for foreign students taught in a foreign language. For a private higher education institution the determination of the study fees is completely in the competence of the institution for both foreign and home students.

Bologna follow-up process and the Czech model of higher education

A discussion on restructuring the study programmes has also been opened in the Czech Republic. We believe that in the Czech Republic we have established conditions for implementing the principles of the Bologna Declaration.

The three level organisation of higher education fits quite well into the Sorbonna and Bologna Declarations (signed by ministers of higher education from a number of European countries). Higher education institutions have started changing. Broader diversification concerning study programmes starts being discussed and introduced. All institutions offer bachelor study programmes lasting three to four years.

Seeing the Czech model through the prism of the Bologna Declaration and lifelong learning perspective its strong points seem to be:

1) There is a legislative framework enabling to build a diversified tertiary sector. The Higher Education Act:

- identifies clearly three higher education levels - three types of study programmes - bachelor, master, doctoral;

- enables broad diversification of institutions and programmes (This seems to be the only way to widening the access to higher education without decreasing its quality.)

The state also recognises some other types of courses in the tertiary sector, e.g. different language courses finishing with the state language examination or international certificate (any of the Cambridge certificates, Goethe institute certificates, etc.), re-qualification courses etc.

2) Mechanism of evaluation of study programmes provided by higher education institutions, comparable with mechanisms used in developed countries is established.

Any higher education study programme has to be accredited. The Ministry of Education awards accreditation only if the expert opinion of the Accreditation Commission is positive. The Accreditation Commission is a body composed of academic and professional experts nominated by the Czech government. There are also foreign members of the Accreditation Commission.

The appointment of docents (associate professors) and professors is only possible on the basis of awarded accreditation as well.

Positive expert opinion of the Accreditation Commission is necessary in the case of the state licence enabling the establishment of private higher education institutions.

The Accreditation Commission is also concerned with the overall quality of higher education. Since 1992, the Accreditation Commission has conducted a peer review and a comparative evaluation of faculties in related fields of study and it is expected that it will continue this activity.

The Higher Education Act of 1998 determines that any higher education institution has to regularly provide its internal quality assessment and to specify details of the process in its internal regulations.

3) The information we obtained by comparing the results that our students gained abroad, e.g. in SOCRATES/ERASMUS programme, show that the knowledge of our students is not worse than the knowledge of foreign students. (However, it is necessary to point out that the percentage of Czech students involved in international mobility is low.)

There are also weak points:

1) There is still a lack of study offer. The demand is almost double that of supply.

2) There is a high dropout in the first years of higher education and higher professional studies. At technical institutions the dropout rate is high in the second and third years as well. If a student fails, he/she leaves an institution without the period of his/her studies being recognised by another institution. The situation is the same when he/she wants to study in the future. He/she is supposed to start again from the very beginning.

3) Examples of good practice exist but there is a very limited transferability in the tertiary sector in practice. This point is commented on in the next chapter.

4) The national and international mobility of students is low. About 3% of Czech students study for at least a period/semester abroad and the foreign students (including the Slovak ones) create about 2% of the student body at Czech universities. (If we want to implement the

Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations and enable each student to spend at least one semester abroad, the rate of outgoing students should be about 12-13% instead of 3%.)

5) There is practically no mobility of academic staff at national level; international mobility is only now starting to develop.

The main goal of our government in co-operation with the academic community is to build a system of tertiary education with the following characteristics:

- Broad diversification;
- Maximum of transferability;
- Transparent system which allows mobility at horizontal level - national and international;
- Open pathways which allow continuity in studies at any age and time (vertical level);
- Sufficient capacity of study places;
- Enabling the use of specific abilities and skills of all applicants;
- Greater success of graduates in the job markets by providing their profile to potential employers.

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