**Education System in the Czech Republic**

The Czech education system is based on a long tradition beginning in 1774, when *compulsory school attendance was instituted*. The *current literacy rate* in the country is above 99%.

Children start with preschool, and continue on to elementary, secondary, university, and post-graduate education. The *classification system* used in the Czech school system consists of a *scale from 1 (best) to 5 (worst) that is used to evaluate the students’ work*. *Report cards* (summary classifications) are given for each subject halfway through and at the end of the school year.

Children may enter **preschool** before they begin *compulsory elementary education*. **Preschool enrolment is guaranteed for children in their last year before entering elementary school**, but they often attend as early as 4 years of age. *Preschool institutions* are intended to encourage early learning habits and facilitate social contact among peers, both of which are instrumental for a child’s smooth *transition to elementary school*. In cooperation with parents and teachers, children learn to think logically, training their memories and exercising their imaginations. Concurrently, these skills help to evaluate their *intellectual and educational* levels before entering elementary school.

Czech **elementary education** takes nine years, usually from the ages of 6 to 15. In contrast to the United States, children can obtain their elementary education at a variety of different schools that can also utilize *different types of educational programs*. Most commonly, children attend a *regular 9 year elementary school,* which is divided into two stages: a *primary and lower secondary stage*, where the primary stage encompasses grades 1-5, while the lower secondary stage is grades 6-9.

In addition, children have the option to apply to *6 or 8-year gymnasiums* either after their 5th or 7th year of elementary education. *Gymnasiums are schools targeted toward a specific area of study*, but still provide pupils with their elementary education. Additionally, students may choose to attend a conservatory, for example an 8-year dance conservatory, and some students with disabilities will be placed in special schools to accommodate their needs. All of these different types of schools provide students with an elementary education that allows them to continue on to pursue a higher education at the secondary and university level.

**Upper secondary education** can be either *general or vocational*, is generally four years in length (grades 10-13), and is *not considered mandatory*. At this level, vocational education is much more common than the general secondary education. Students who *graduate with a vocational certificate* often do not continue in the classical education system, and instead pursue a career in their chosen area of study right away. The secondary level of education is not attended by a great number of students, since the majority attends 8-year gymnasiums after 5th grade, which leads them all the way up to their 13th year of education.

**Tertiary or university education**, includes all studies following the completion of primary and secondary education with a *successful final examination*. Final examinations consist of several smaller exams; an exam of the Czech language, several exams in the student’s area of specialization, as well as an exam on a topic of the student’s choice. After 2008, these exams consist of two parts: *a common (state) exam* and *a profiling (specific for individual schools) exam*. This measure was implemented in an effort to provide better comparability of the final examinations across different schools. University education is available to all applicants with a completed secondary education (i.e. final exam) who successfully *pass the entrance exam*. The system of entrance exams is designed specifically by each individual college, and serves for testing the knowledge and skills of applicants.

**Most universities offer accredited bachelor’s, master’s, and engineering degrees**. A *bachelor’s degree* is usually a three-year course of study in which students receive an elementary survey of highly specialized areas. Students can either leave their studies after these three years, or they can complete it by means of a final exam including *the defence of a bachelor’s thesis*, or may continue on to *the master’s program*, where they can achieve a narrower specialization.

A master’s degree consists of either a *five or six-year study program*, or as *a two-year program following the completion of a bachelor’s degree*. In obtaining a master’s degree, students gain both a basic survey of highly specialized subjects and a certain grade of specialization. The program culminates with students taking required *state final exams and defending their thesis*. Finally, *an engineering degree* can also be obtained, which pertains mainly to *technical and economic fields*.

After students pass these types of university studies, some continue their specialization through **doctoral programs**. Passing this program is often *conditioned with certain published work* and sometimes also *by training*. In college, students can study either in *attendance form* (formerly daily study), *distance form* (formerly extramural studies), or a *combination of both* (combined study).

Besides standard types of study, colleges also offer **other forms of education**, including *retraining study, university for seniors, studies oriented toward pedagogical qualification, and others*. Study at public universities is free, provided that students qualify through entrance exams. However, after age 26 the attendant will no longer be eligible for *student status* under state social services and will not receive student benefits including health insurance while he/she studies.