

## HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM in the Czech Republic

Higher education is the highest level of the Czech education system. Czech higher education dates back six hundred years. In 1348 Emperor Charles IV founded a university in Prague which is the oldest academic institution in Central Europe. It is now called Charles University.

The central governing body for education is the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The quality of higher education is fostered by the Accreditation Commission. Since 2001 the three cycle structure has strictly been implemented in higher education (i.e. Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral study programmes).

The main tuition language is Czech, however the range of programmes delivered in foreign languages (mainly in English) is expanding in particular to cater for international students.

**1. Admission Requirements.** The principal requirement for entering a Bachelor's degree programme or a full Master's degree programme is the completion of a full secondary general education or vocational education with a "maturitní zkouška" school-leaving examination, for fine arts degrees, applicants who have gained their "absolutorium" from a conservatoire may be admitted. Admission to a follow-up Master's degree programme depends on the completion of the relevant Bachelor's degree programme or its equivalent. Admission to Doctoral studies depends on the successful completion of a Master's degree programme.

Students who want to study full-time should apply directly to the higher education institution of their choice. Students may apply for several study programmes at various institutions and faculties. The deadline for submitting applications is usually the end of February or March. Most higher education institutions offer the option of filing an application in electronic form. The date, content and form (oral or written examination, aptitude test) of the admission procedures are decided upon by the dean of the faculty or the rector of the higher education institution. At most higher education institutions the applicants take entrance examinations, which are usually held between June and September. Examinations at higher education institutions for the arts take place earlier, in January, and the deadline for filing applications is normally the end of November. Student administration departments at various faculties can provide information on applications, admission requirements and studies.

**2. Organization of Studies.** The academic year lasts 12 months; the start is fixed by the head of the higher education institution. Courses are divided into semesters, years or blocks, which are composed of a period of teaching, an examination period and holiday. The structure of the academic year is decided by each institution. It usually begins in October and is divided into two semesters: winter and summer, with approx. a five-week examination period after each semester. A semester normally consists of 15 weeks of teaching followed by an examination period, with a week's holiday after the winter semester and a two-month holiday (July, August) after the summer semester.

**3. Curriculum.** Deciding the content of studies and the design of study programmes is one of the academic freedoms of higher education institutions in the Czech Republic. However, all study programmes are subject to accreditation which is granted by the Ministry of Education on the basis of a decision by the Accreditation Commission.

**4. Student Assessment.** The frequency and methods of assessing students' achievements differ according to the field of study. In some cases, a system of partial examinations taken after each semester has been introduced, in other cases one comprehensive examination after each completed part of studies is prescribed, mostly at the end of a certain module. Study outcomes at higher education institutions are assessed mainly by a system of credits or points. The credit system (European Credit Transfer System) has been encouraged since it allows completed parts of studies to be recognised, thus contributing to transferability within the system.

**5. Degree structure.** Higher education institutions form the highest level of Czech education. They offer accredited degree programmes at three levels: Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral, as well as lifelong learning courses. Higher education institutions can be either university or non-university types. Traditional university-type institutions may offer all types of degree programmes while non-university institutions are characterised by providing mainly Bachelor's degree programmes. The documents confirming the completion of studies and right to the appropriate academic title are a higher education diploma and a supplement to the diploma.

Bachelor's degree programmes are 3 to 4 years in duration and constitute the first level of higher education. The study programme must be completed with a final state examination, which usually includes the presentation and defence of a thesis. Successful graduates may enter the labour market or continue their studies in follow-up master's programmes in related fields.

Master's degree programmes may either follow on from Bachelor programmes as follow-up Master's programmes (1 to 3 years), or they may be full programmes (4 to 6 years). Programmes focus on the acquisition and application of theoretical knowledge, and on the development of creativity and talent. Graduates in Master's programmes have to take a final state examination and publicly present and defend a thesis. Studies in medicine, veterinary medicine and hygiene are completed by a demanding state examination, including the presentation and defence of a rigorous thesis.

Doctoral programmes (which normally last 3 years) are intended for graduates from Master's programmes and focus on independent creative work in research, development or the arts. Doctoral studies are completed by way of a state doctoral examination and the public presentation and defence of a doctoral thesis (dissertation) based on original work, which must have been published or admitted for publishing.

Because of growing interest, some institutions provide also study programmes leading to the degree of Master of Business Administration (MBA). This study is oriented on solving real-life case studies and should enhance managerial knowledge and skills of students.

**6. Tuition fees.** By law, higher education at public and state institutions is free of charge for citizens of all nationalities, with the following exceptions: fees for administration of admission proceedings; fees for extending the duration of study beyond a set limit; fees for the study of an additional programme to the original studied; fees for study in a foreign language.

Private institutions of higher education can fix their own fees. The tuition fees differ from 2,000-15,000 USD per year and the amount depends on the relevant institution and study programme.

